The Aesthetic Appreciation of Art.

Philosophical Reconsiderations of the Relationship Between Art and Beauty Supported by Case Studies.

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General Introduction

For many centuries now, philosophers have been concerned with artworks, i.e. with objects such as Michelangelo's *David* or James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Even though we readily associate these sorts of objects with the concept of art, it is important to notice that there are different concepts of art. I can for instance say: "Cooking is an art" or: "Your cake is an artwork." But cooking and cakes are not the sort of things philosophers have been concerned with. Philosophers have rather been concerned with what has been dubbed the *classificatory* (or *descriptive*) sense of "art." The classificatory sense of "art" is traditionally distinguished from the evaluative one (e.g. when I say that your cake is an artwork, meaning that it is an exceptionally well-done cake) and the derivative one (e.g. when I say that a piece of driftwood is an artwork because of its similarity to an artwork in the classificatory sense).[1] On a different level, all these senses ought to be distinguished from the *mechanical* sense of "art," where art is understood as a technique to be mastered, as in "Cooking is an art." In fact, the classificatory, derivative, and evaluative senses share an understanding of the concept of art that fundamentally distinguishes them from the mechanical sense of art. Such an understanding has been called an "aesthetic" one.[2]

What characterizes the classificatory sense of "art" and distinguishes it from the other aesthetic senses is that the term, so understood, is usually taken to refer to that particular activity that brings forth a *particular, ontologically distinct* class of objects. For an object to possess the property of being an artwork in the classificatory sense is for the object to *be* a member of a particular ontological category of objects, namely artworks. Such an object does not merely *gain* a property as when I say of a cake that it is an artwork, meaning that it is particularly well-done or particularly good: in this case, the cake remains a cake. No, when an object is an artwork in the classificatory sense, the object is taken to be *ontologically different* from the simple object it would have been had it lacked that property.[3] When I say of a carved piece of marble that it is an artwork, that carved piece of marble is no longer just a carved piece of marble, but turns into something ontologically distinct: an artwork in the classificatory sense.

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[1] Weitz has pointed out the distinction between classificatory and evaluative senses and Dickie, following Richard Sclafani, has acknowledged the derivative one (see: WEITZ 1956, p.33; DICKIE 1974b, pp.435-436.) Some philosophers have pointed out that such terms, particularly the terms "classificatory" and "evaluative" are misleading (see SHUSTERMAN 1987, p.120). However, in this work I will stick to them.

[2] For one of the few analyses of the aesthetic vs. mechanic senses of the concept of art see SCHMÜCKER 1998, pp.65-72.

[3] Not all agree with this assumption. Crispin Sartwell, for instance, argues that "to be an artwork" is just a property that some objects gain. See SARTWELL 1988.

But do artworks in such a classificatory sense really exist? Suppose you are in front of Michelangelo's *David*: what do you contemplate? A sculpture? A piece of marble? The question becomes even more pressing if instead of Michelangelo's *David* we consider Duchamp's *Fountain*: what do you contemplate when you look at it? A sculpture? A urinal? In the case of *David*, it seems natural to say that you contemplate the statue and not the piece of marble. Or, if you want to say that you contemplate the piece of marble, it seems natural to say that you do so *because* it is a statue. In the case of *Fountain*, it is harder to say what exactly you contemplate: a urinal or an artwork? The relationship of artworks to their material counterparts is indeed puzzling: are they the same thing? If not, how do they relate to one another?

The theories trying to account for the ontology of art are countless. Some try to push forth the idea that the artwork and its material counterpart are distinct entities.[4] Others claim that artworks are entities constituted by, but not reducible to their material counterparts.[5] And some other people hold that the artwork and its material counterpart are just one thing, namely the physical object with its intrinsic properties.[6] This looks like the worst-case scenario for those trying to develop a definition of art in the classificatory sense, for what this position boils down to is the denial that artworks *per se* build a class of existing objects, as only the physical objects actually exist. In other words, it is possible that, from an ontological point of view, artworks have the same status as fictional entities. They might be like the wooden stick, which in the eyes of a child turns into Fury, the horse: only the wooden stick exists, but the child insists that it is Fury, the horse. From an ontological point of view, *David* and *Fountain* could have the same status as Fury.

What should follow from this observation is not an indignant reaction, but an important lesson: the philosopher who wants to explain what art is must account for the reasons why art – contrarily to Fury – is entitled to play such an important role in our life. People often question the legitimacy of paying millions of dollars "for a piece of marble." The answer to such questions must point at the fact that some pieces of marble mean more to us than other pieces of marble, and are called "artworks" for this very reason. The problem the philosopher has to solve is why and in which way some pieces of marble mean more to us than other pieces of marble and are therefore entitled to play an important role in human life. And this, it

[4] Joseph Margolis has repeatedly argued in favor of this thesis (MARGOLIS 1974, MARGOLIS 1977, MARGOLIS 1999, MARGOLIS 2000b). Danto's talk of transfiguration seems to commit him to embrace this thesis too (see e.g. DANTO 1981).

[5] This view is most notably defended by Lynne Rudder Baker (BAKER 2000). See also PETRUS 2002. Schmücker's view seems to be a solution of compromise as well. He claims that artworks have the same ontological status as words, which not only need to be instantiated in some physical tokens but also need interpersonal understanding in order to be. Therefore he calls them "*intersubjektiv-instantiale Entitäten*." See SCHMÜCKER 1998, pp.238-269, particularly p.266. For another hybrid solution see also SCLAFANI 1974.

[6] See for instance Michael Burke's arguments in favor of this thesis (BURKE 1992 and BURKE 1994).

seems to me, must run through the explanation of the function of art: if art has a function and that function is important to us, then the important role that art plays in our life can be explained. Upon the fact that we need to justify the value of art depends not only the legitimacy of the search for a functional definition of art, but also its fundamental importance. In this work, I will not attempt to answer the question of the value of art: I will rather limit myself to develop a functional definition of art.

The philosopher who is after a definition of art must start out from the premise that there is a *concept* of art. Her task is to understand what it consists in. Her enquiry can be summarized in this question: "If I were to land on Twin Earth, how could I find out whether the people there have the concept of art?" Suppose I land on Twin New York and observe that Twin MOMA looks exactly like ours, that people go there to see the exhibited paintings and that they call them "artworks." I might be entitled to conclude that they produce objects *we* would also call "artworks," but I have no reason, yet, to conclude that the exhibited paintings have been conceived as artworks. To find this out I need to understand what they mean by "artwork." Suppose I find out that they understand by "artwork" a support for prayers: surprising as it might seem, all the people standing in front of Twin *Demoiselles d'Avignon* are actually praying, stimulated by the image, the colors, the lines, etc. In spite of all the evidence to the contrary, then, Twin *Demoiselles d'Avignon* is not an artwork, for it has been conceived for a use that is not the (primary) use of art.[7]

It might be useful to mention here an ongoing debate in aesthetics concerning the universality of art. The question is whether art is something that all human cultures at all times in our history (must) have known. Some argue that art is universal, while others think it is not. The debate seems to me completely wrong-headed because in order to know whether all cultures produced art, one first needs to know what "art" means. As a matter of fact, a quick look at the terms of the debate reveals that under "art" a lot of different things are subsumed, such as fine arts and artifacts for religious use.[8] Several confusions are hiding here. First of all, there is the question whether the defenders of the thesis of universality mean that artifacts for religious use were *conceived* as artworks or whether they mean that *we* can look at them as artworks. They probably mean the first since they hold that all cultures must have *known* art.

Second, if they indeed mean that artifacts for religious use were conceived as artworks, they ought to specify in which sense. For, one is certainly free to hold that medieval icons were conceived as art, but the concept of art according to which medieval icons are artworks

[7] Sartwell too defends the thesis that what singles out artworks is their use. See SARTWELL 1988.
[8] For a good introduction into the debate see DUTTON 2001. This article is also a good place to see the confusion about the concept of art haunting the debate. For a recent defence of the universality of the concept of art, see CROWTHER 2004.

has to be a different concept of art from the concept of art according to which Duchamp's *Fountain* is an artwork. Even though there is a historical link connecting medieval icons to *Fountain*, there has been a conceptual break at some point in history, such that whatever medieval icons are, they were not conceived as artworks in the way *Fountain* has been conceived as an artwork. I suspect that the debate about the universality of art is actually a debate about the universality of some activities such as painting, carving, or singing, which indeed seem to characterize all members of the species *Homo sapiens* at all times. But the concept of art in this broad sense is not the concept of art in the strict sense according to which it is possible for *Fountain* to be an artwork. I am interested in the latter concept, i.e. the concept of art in the classificatory sense, which is a concept that has a history and was not available to all cultures at all times. My goal is to give an account of it.

As I have said, I expect from a philosophical definition of art in the classificatory sense that it put us in the condition to explain why art is allowed to play an important role in human life in spite of its possibly fictional ontological status. Traditionally, the answer has been that art is important for the special sort of experience that it gives us. And the sort of experience at stake has been identified with an aesthetic one. Problematic, however, was the account given of such aesthetic experience. Some philosophers gave precise accounts of the properties an object must possess in order to elicit aesthetic experience. To cite but one famous example, Monroe Beardsley postulated unity, intensity, and complexity as necessary features of an object for eliciting aesthetic experience.[9] Other philosophers have instead tried to pin down the sort of attitude to approach objects in order for them to elicit aesthetic experience.[10] Jerome Stolnitz, for instance, characterized such aesthetic attitude in terms of disinterested and sympathetic attention.[11] Noël Carroll, while summarizing these two approaches, has spoken of content-oriented and affect-oriented theories of aesthetic experience.[12] As he skillfully shows, each theory presents internal problems and is not able to account for art.[13] Indeed, the most serious problem that philosophers have felt about the relationship of aesthetic experience to art is that aesthetic experience is irrelevant to explain why an object is an artwork. This problem became particularly evident when artworks such as Duchamp's readymades started being considered serious art.

The first perplexity concerning a readymade such as *Fountain* is the following: *Fountain* does not possess some special sort of aesthetic properties, as it is a simple urinal. Indeed, it is not in virtue of its perceptible properties that it is an artwork, but rather in virtue of some conceptual dimension. Looking at the urinal with an aesthetic attitude will not reveal such a

[9] BEARDSLEY 1958.
[10] For a famous criticism of the notion of aesthetic attitude see DICKIE 1964.
[11] STOLNITZ 1960.
[12] CARROLL 1999, pp.168-173.
[13] CARROLL 1999, pp.174-182.

conceptual dimension. As a matter of fact, providing aesthetic experience has not been Duchamp's intention and does not explain why *Fountain* is an artwork.[14] Thus, a definition of art that can account for *Fountain* must be independent of aesthetic considerations.[15]

The second perplexity derives from the observation that there are some aesthetic properties possessed by *Fountain* but not by the mere urinal: for instance, the property of being ironic.[16] However, such a property is possessed by *Fountain* because it is an artwork: we could not appreciate the irony of *Fountain* if we did not know that it is an artwork. But then, the aesthetic experience of *Fountain* (i.e. the experience of its ironical dimension) is dependent on *Fountain*'s art status. Thus, its being art cannot be explained in terms of aesthetic experience.[17] To summarize, the two sets of problems raised by *Fountain* and which led to the drastic abandonment of aesthetic considerations for the purpose of defining art were these:

1) The aesthetic properties of *Fountain* are possessed by any identical-looking urinal perceived under similar conditions. Thus, aesthetic properties are not what distinguishes an artwork from a non-artwork. A definition of art that aims at understanding why some objects turn into artworks, while identical-looking others do not, must be independent of aesthetic considerations.
2) *Fountain* might possess aesthetic properties that its material counterpart (the mere urinal) lacks. But possession of such properties is due to *Fountain* being an artwork in the first place. Thus, a definition of art must be prior to aesthetic considerations and independent of them.

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[14] CARROLL 1999, pp.180-181: "Some artworks, like Duchamp's *Fountain*, are idea based, rather than experience based. One can derive satisfaction from thinking about *Fountain* without even experiencing it, let alone experiencing it aesthetically. One can read about it and think about it without knowing what exactly it looked like in terms of its form and its perceptible properties. Arguably, Duchamp would have subverted his own intention to provoke thinking about the nature and future of art, if *Fountain* had the capacity to afford the disinterested contemplation of its form and perceptible properties."

[15] Consider what Arthur Danto, while explaining how he came to develop his own definition, has written *à propos* of *Fountain* and the other readymades: "It is (just) possible to appreciate his [Duchamp's, CG] acts as setting these unedifying objects at a certain aesthetic distance, rendering them as improbable candidates for aesthetic delectation: practical demonstrations that beauty of a sort can be found in the least likely places. […] But […] in any case such an interpretation leaves quite in darkness the question of how such objects get to be works of art, since all that would have been shown is that they have an unanticipated aesthetic dimension. So a fresh start was required, in which the transfigured objects were so sunk in banality that their potentiality for aesthetic contemplation remained beneath scrutiny even after metamorphosis. This way the question of what made them into artworks could be broached without bringing aesthetic considerations in at all." (DANTO 1981, p.vi).

[16] As I will argue in Part II, Chapter 2, I do not take the property of being ironic to be by itself an aesthetic property.

[17] CARROLL 1999, p.181: "An ordinary vial full of Parisian air, even one perceptually indiscernible from Duchamp's, would not afford, not is intended to afford, a comparable aesthetic experience. It is the fact that we know that Duchamp's vial is an artwork that enables us to appreciate its impishness; indeed, it wouldn't be impish if it weren't an artwork. But if aesthetic experience is sometimes dependent on art status, then art status cannot be defined noncircularly in terms of aesthetic experience." See also DANTO 1981, pp.106-107.

It is the aim of this work to show that this reasoning is flawed and that no exhaustive definition of art can be given outside aesthetics. In Part I, I will present two famous examples of anesthetic (an-aesthetic) approaches to art, namely the theories of Arthur C. Danto and of George Dickie. Both theories share the assumption that to explain why *Fountain* is an artwork the perceptible – and thus also aesthetic – properties of the urinal must be neglected.[18] I will discuss them in detail not only to show what such theories look like, but also and above all because they are crucial milestones on the path leading to my own account of art. The latter is meant as a contribution to the analytical art-philosophical debate, which has been carried out mainly and most notably in the Anglo-American world, where Danto's and Dickie's theories of art are indeed considered central. In Part II, then, I will offer a theory of aesthetic appreciation, which will allow me to formulate my own functional definition of art. The reader should be aware of the fact that my definition does not aim at defining all sorts of art, but only the visual arts. The aim of people like Danto and Dickie was instead that of providing a general definition of art, even though their analyses mainly revolved around the visual arts. I do not want to exclude the possibility of providing a general definition of art that accounts for such different things as the visual arts, music, and poetry. However, I do not aim at providing such a general definition here. Therefore, in this work the subject is the visual arts as traditionally understood, i.e. those arts including painting, sculpture, and installations. In Part III, I will discuss two concrete examples from the history of art. In the first, I will illustrate some of the important tenets of my account of art, while in the second I will come back to Duchamp's *Fountain* and show where the anti-aesthetic analysis has gone wrong.

[18] I have already quoted Danto, so here I limit myself to quote Dickie: "The general claim of the institutional theory is that if we stop looking for exhibited (easily noticed) characteristics of artworks such as representationality, emotional expressiveness, and the others that the traditional theorists focused on, and instead look for characteristics that artworks have as a result of their relation to their cultural context, then we can find defining properties." (DICKIE 2001, p.57).

Part I

Two Famous Examples of Anesthetic Approaches To Art

Part I, Chapter 1

Contextualizing Danto and Dickie (Introduction to Part I)

Before looking at Arthur Danto's and George Dickie's theories of art, it is important to understand the historical and philosophical context from which they emerged. On one hand, it is important to understand what made possible the break with aesthetics, which was traditionally considered the philosophical discipline where the fine arts had to be studied. On the other hand, it is important to understand the philosophical discussion into which those theories plug. Thus, in Section I.1.1, I will sketch the historical steps that have shaped the aesthetic field and that I consider relevant to understanding the break of philosophy of art with aesthetics, and also to understand how my own approach is, to some extent, a revival of older positions. In Section I.1.2, then, I will highlight the fundamental elements of the art philosophical discussion in the 1950s-1960s, when Danto and Dickie entered into the professional philosophical scene.

I.1.1. From Aesthetics To Philosophy of Art

Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762) is considered the father of aesthetics, as he was the first to introduce the term "aesthetic."[19] The central works in which he explains what aesthetics is about are his *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (1735) and his uncompleted *Aesthetica*, the first volume of which appeared in 1750, the second in 1758.[20] Baumgarten wanted to explore a sensitive form of cognition in opposition to the rational form of cognition.[21] He dubbed such sensitive knowledge "aesthetic." In fact, the word "aesthetic" is based upon a Greek adjective, "*aisthētós*," which means "sensitive," "perceptible."

Against the Cartesian philosophy of his time, Baumgarten claimed that the senses *do* play an important cognitive role: through the senses we do recognize some truth, although it is a sort of truth that does not have the same degree of clarity as rationally apprehended truths. Indeed, Baumgarten acknowledged the possibility of degrees of knowledge, the rational one being much clearer than the sensitive one. According to Baumgarten only the refined senses can grasp such sensitive form of knowledge, which he identified with beauty. And in this context he charged the fine arts with an important educational role: acquaintance with the fine

[19] GOLDMAN 2001, p.181.
[20] BAUMGARTEN 1735 and BAUMGARTEN 1750/58.
[21] In BAUMGARTEN 1735, § CXV, p.85 he says of aesthetics that it is "*eine Wissenschaft, wie etwas sensitiv zu erkennen ist*."

arts makes human beings able to grasp beauty because it is in the arts that beauty typically manifests itself. This view became rapidly commonplace within the cultural elite of the 18th century, as Schiller's *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* (1791-1795) makes plain.[22] Understanding why this view was so welcomed by the intellectuals of the 18th century and for a long time afterwards is extremely important in order to grasp the function that the concept of the aesthetic was supposed to fulfill.

From the Renaissance onwards, art had started to make itself independent from the socially acknowledged function it still performed during the Middle Age. In the case of painting, for instance, whereas in the Middle Age visual representation had mainly the function of representing religious scenes or scenes related to political power, with the Renaissance it started to detach itself from that function. The first still life appeared around the end of the 16th century and landscape painting in the course of the 17th. The enjoyment derived from such paintings was not questioned. The question rather concerned their legitimacy. Why is it legitimate to paint a still life, or a landscape? Even though such paintings did not seem to fulfill any function or pursue any higher end, people felt that they were nevertheless worthy, insofar as they gave human beings a sort of experience that they would otherwise miss. Baumgarten's theory was an attempt to explain what this unique experience is and thus to provide legitimacy to the arts.[23] The introduction of the term "aesthetic" was meant to provide a linguistic tool to talk about such an experience: the aesthetic experience, i.e. the sensitive recognition of a truth (beauty).

But Baumgarten's account of the aesthetic was not satisfactory. Indeed, that there can be a sort of knowledge that is merely sensitive, i.e. that there can be a form of non-rational knowledge is a very implausible thesis and one of the reasons why Baumgarten's theory has been dismissed. How is it possible to have knowledge if reason is not involved? Immanuel Kant set out to clarify matters in his Third Critique.[24] According to him, knowledge is not involved in aesthetic judgments. Rather, the latter are reports of the pleasing feelings of the subject.[25] However, more specific qualifications are needed. Kant introduced an important formal distinction into aesthetics, namely the distinction between "*angenehm*" ("pleasurable") and "*schön*" ("beautiful"). "*Angenehm*" is something that simply pleases my senses: a warm bath, for instance. Although the judgment: "The bath is pleasing" is an aesthetic judgment, Kant holds that it is not an aesthetic judgment *of taste* ("*Geschmacksurteile*") such as "This

[22] SCHILLER 1791/95.
[23] PAETZOLD 1983, p.XLV-XLVI.
[24] KANT 1790.
[25] KANT 1790, §1, p.115: "…ästhetisch, worunter man dasjenige versteht, dessen Bestimmungsgrund nicht anders als subjektiv sein kann."

rose is beautiful." Judgments of taste are aesthetic judgments too.[26] But as opposed to purely subjective judgments of the former type, which actually describe nothing else than my personal feelings about, say, the warm bath, aesthetic judgments of taste have a dimension that goes beyond the individual subject.[27] And this is due to the involvement of reason.

Kant's idea is that although knowledge is not involved in aesthetic judgments, reason might nevertheless be involved, namely in cases of aesthetic judgments of taste. This cannot be explained without reference to Kant's understanding of the way reason functions.[28] The possibility of knowledge is due, according to Kant, to the coordinated work of different cognitive faculties ("*Erkenntniskräfte*"), and in particular of the faculty of formally bringing an object before reason ("*Einbildungskraft*") and the faculty of subsuming such a formally presented object under a concept ("*Urteilskraft*"). Successful subsumption corresponds to knowledge of the object. Now, the peculiarity of beautiful objects is that on the one hand they engage reason in the way just described, but on the other hand they do not allow successful subsumption: the *Urteilskraft* looks for concepts under which to subsume the object formally brought before reason by the *Einbildungskraft*, but cannot find any suitable concept, for the beautiful object subtracts itself from any classificatory attempt. Thus, Kant speaks of the free play of the cognitive faculties.[29] Such a play can go on *ad infinitum* and although it does not produce knowledge (for no classificatory concept will ever be found) it does produce pleasure, which is due to the harmony that the *Erkenntniskräfte* reach as they freely play together.[30] For this reason, the object responsible for the free play and for the resulting pleasure is called "beautiful."

Thus, judgments of taste are, according to Kant, subjective, as they report something about one's own personal feelings towards an object: in this sense, they are like statements reporting likings, such as "The bath is pleasing." But differently from the latter sort of statements, which solely depend upon the individual disposition and therefore must remain subjective, judgments of taste result from rational engagement with the object. In other words, even though the predicate "beautiful" describes a pleasure I subjectively experience, it describes a pleasure caused by my rational engagement with the object. According to Kant, I have therefore a right to assume and expect that other beings endowed with reason will react

[26] KANT 1790, §1, p.115: "Das Geschmacksurteil ist also kein Erkenntnisurteil, mithin nicht logisch, sondern ästhetisch, worunter man dasjenige versteht, dessen Bestimmungsgrund nicht anders als subjektiv sein kann."
[27] There are of course other features that single out judgments of taste such as disinterestedness, but I am interested only in their subjective generality as it is this feature that explains the interpersonal dimension of aesthetic judgments through the involvement of reason.
[28] In other words, it cannot be explained without reference to Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. See KANT 1781.
[29] KANT 1790, §9, p.132: "Die Erkenntniskräfte, die durch diese Vorstellung ins Spiel gesetzt werden, sind hiebei in einem freien Spiele, weil kein bestimmter Begriff sie auf eine besondere Erkenntnisregel einschränkt."
[30] In KANT 1790, §9, p.132, Kant speaks of the "Lust an der Harmonie der Erkenntnisvermögen."

as I react to the object and feel the same sort of pleasure that I feel.[31] But this is not enough: to experience *pleasure* upon the harmonic free play of the cognitive faculties, it is necessary not only to be a rational being, but also a sensitive one. This is why Kant believes that aesthetic judgments of taste are peculiar to human beings: animals lack the rational dimension, while angels and divine beings lack the sensitive one.[32] So, what one is actually entitled to assume and expect whenever her reason is endlessly and pleasurably engaged by a beautiful object is that *all beings endowed with reason and sensibility* such as all human beings will feel the same as her and will agree with her on calling the object "beautiful." Because of this justified expectation, Kant calls judgments of taste "subjectively general": even though they depend upon subjectively felt pleasure, a general human agreement on them is to be expected.[33]

With respect to Baumgarten's theory, Kant's has represented a major step. Kant's account of aesthetic judgments in terms of subjective judgments reporting one's own pleasurable feelings rather than expressing knowledge is certainly more plausible than Baumgarten's account of them in terms of an obscure notion such as sensitive knowledge. On the other hand, Kant's attempt at explaining the involvement of reason in the case of aesthetic judgments of taste strikes one as problematic and speculative: in the first place, it is fully dependent upon Kant's understanding of the way reason functions, which can be questioned, and furthermore, it does not provide a satisfactory answer to the question of how such involvement of reason could engender pleasure rather than frustration, given that reason does not fulfill its task of reaching knowledge.[34] In spite of these difficulties, however, Kant's account has the merit of pointing at some sort of involvement of reason and at the interpersonal dimension of aesthetic judgments of taste: I consider these two points to be very important and in my own approach I try to account for them.

Another improvement of Kant's was to render aesthetic experience something not limited to the fine arts. The fine arts might well be the place to refine one's senses aesthetically, but they are not the *only* place to experience objects aesthetically. As a matter of fact, the Third Critique starts with an analysis of natural beauty, to which most of the book is dedicated. The

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[31] KANT 1790, §7, p.126: "wenn er [jemand] aber etwas für schön ausgibt, so mutet er andern eben dasselbe Wohlgefallen zu: er urteilt nicht bloss für sich, sondern für jedermann, und spricht alsdann von der Schönheit, als wäre sie eine Eigenschaft der Dinge. Er sagt daher, die Sache ist schön; und rechnet nicht etwa darum auf anderer Einstimmung in sein Urteil des Wohlgefallens, weil er sie mehrmalen mit den seinigen einstimmig befunden hat, sondern fordert es von ihnen."

[32] KANT 1790, §5, p.123: "Annehmlichkeit gilt auch für vernunftlose Tiere; Schönheit nur für Menschen, d.i. tierische, aber doch vernünftige Wesen, *aber auch nicht bloss als solche (z.B. Geister) sondern zugleich als tierische*; das Gute aber für jeder vernünftige Wesen überhaupt." (Italics in the original).

[33] KANT 1790, §7.

[34] This is a point raised by Gerhard Seel in SEEL 1988: If reason, he wonders, cannot fulfill the task that Kant had actually ascribed to it in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, namely identifying things, how can he plausibly hold that pleasure rather than frustration is the result of the free play of the cognitive faculties?

aesthetic experience of the fine arts is treated as a sub-chapter of the broader philosophical question of understanding aesthetic experience in its totality. The importance of this point of view has been lost in the time after Kant to the extent that some philosophers treat aesthetic experience of the fine arts as paradigmatic for general aesthetic experience.[35] My account of the fine arts follows Kant's path: I first try to explain what aesthetic appreciation is and then how it is relevant for understanding the fine arts.

While Kant treated natural beauty as the paradigm of aesthetic experience, and artistic beauty as a special case of aesthetic experience to be understood in relationship to the paradigm case, Hegel divided the two sorts of beauty and distinguished philosophy of art as a discipline of its own.[36] Thus, with Hegel the aesthetic experience of art became something to be studied in itself, without reference to aesthetic experience *tout court*. In the aftermath of Hegel, aesthetics was practically reduced to a philosophy of art – one just needs to think of a famous aesthetician such as Benedetto Croce, who was basically a philosopher of art. The elimination of aesthetic considerations from the business of defining art, which characterizes Arthur Danto's and George Dickie's philosophies of art, would not have been possible without this previously introduced separation of the aesthetic of natural beauty from the aesthetic of artistic beauty. But before turning to Danto's and Dickie's theories, let me point out the background from which they directly sprang.

I.1.2. Art-Philosophical Discourse in the 1950s-1960s

With the analytic turn at the beginning of the 20th century, aesthetics at first lost its attractiveness. William Elton, who in 1954 edited what can be considered the first book devoted to analytical aesthetics, pointed out the main reason for this situation: aesthetic discourse was considered meaningless and therefore was abhorred by analytical philosophers.[37] Carnap, who is not explicitly mentioned by Elton but implied by his reference to meaninglessness, had suggested at the end of his very influential article against metaphysics that what metaphysics tries to express is an attitude towards life that art can best express.[38] What Elton and a few other philosophers had come to realize was that even if art is not committed to meaningful discourse *à la* Carnap, aesthetics has to be meaningful if it wants to be a philosophical discipline. Thus, "an inspection of the linguistic foundations of

[35] See for instance Anthony Savile (SAVILE 1982), to whom I will come back in Part II.
[36] HEGEL 1832-45, p.13.
[37] ELTON 1954, pp.1-3.
[38] CARNAP 1932, pp.78-80.

the subject" became unavoidable and his book brought together many of the first attempts in that direction.[39]

As a matter of fact, in the 1950s analytical aesthetics began to flourish. Its aim was redefined as clarification of art critical discourse. In their effort to explain artworks, art critics were supposed to use concepts with a more or less clear meaning without realizing that such concepts are ambiguous or even meaningless in Carnap's sense. The aesthetician's job was to work out such problems and to provide the art critic with a more precise language. The clarification of aesthetic concepts should not follow, however, the logical-positivistic model proposed by Carnap: an analysis of the *use* of such concepts might be more useful.[40] Wittgenstein's model of language games became indeed the reference for analytical aesthetics.[41] Of major historical importance has been the work of the so-called Neo-Wittgensteinians, people such as Paul Ziff, William Kennick, and Morris Weitz, who analyzed a basic term in aesthetic discourse such as "artwork."[42]

The Neo-Wittgensteinians formulated a two-pronged objection against the possibility of defining art.[43] They pointed out that the concept of art is an *open concept* and that the possibility of classifying an object as an artwork relies on *family resemblances*. A concept is considered open when the objects to which it applies do not all share the same essential properties. The reason why the concept applies to all of them is therefore independent of essential properties. According to the Neo-Wittgensteinians, it is rather by virtue of family resemblances that it applies to all of them. And family resemblances are based on the presence of *similarities* between the objects in question.[44] So, the Neo-Wittgensteinians held that a concept like "artwork" is an open concept, for it applies to objects as different as a painting by Caravaggio, a symphony by Beethoven, and Giacometti's sculpture *The Cat*. That they are all artworks depends on the fact that they stand in a relationship of similarity to some other object already classified as an artwork. It is by virtue of such similarities and not because of an essential definition that we are able to identify artworks.[45] Hence, the Neo-

[39] ELTON 1954, p.3.
[40] See STRUBE 2002, pp.33-35 for a handy introduction into the relationship of analytic aesthetics to logical positivism.
[41] WITTGENSTEIN 1949.
[42] Neo-Wittgensteinians based mostly on WITTGENSTEIN 1949. For a summary of Wittgenstein's own aesthetics, see STRUBE 2002, pp.35-44.
[43] See: ZIFF 1953; WEITZ 1956; and KENNICK 1958. For an outstanding presentation and critical discussion of the Neo-Wittgensteinian argument see: CARROLL 1999, pp.206-224. A forerunner of the Neo-Wittgensteinians is Gallie in GALLIE 1948. Gallie however moved away from this position in GALLIE 1956.
[44] See for instance: ZIFF 1953, pp.62-67; WEITZ 1956, p.148.
[45] Kennick tries to demonstrate this with the example of the warehouse: a person is asked to go in a warehouse and bring out all of the artworks it contains: "He will be able to do this with reasonable success, despite the fact that, as even the aestheticians must admit, he possesses no satisfactory definition of Art in terms of some common denominator, because no such definition has yet been found." (KENNICK 1958, pp.321-322). About twenty years later, Danto re-discusses this example to

Wittgensteinian thesis holds that the objects classified as artworks *do not* share essential properties. Therefore, no essential definition of art can possibly be formulated. This is, according to the Neo-Wittgensteinians, the reason why all past attempts at defining art have failed and all future attempts will fail. It is not just *difficult* to find a definition of art: it is a *logical impossibility*.[46]

Such a strong argument at first made the philosophical search for definitions of art seem hopeless. But the confrontation with this same argument brought some of its internal problems to light. To begin with, it seems that the argument presents a fallacy of equivocation.[47] In fact, the concept of art is considered open insofar as it refers to the *practice* of art. But what Neo-Wittgensteinians criticize are the attempts to provide sufficient and necessary conditions for what counts as an *artwork*. The problem is that there is a gap between the notion of practice of art and the concept of artwork, which the Neo-Wittgensteinians fail to close. It is actually plausible to think that developing a theory of the sufficient and necessary conditions for art status does not preclude the possibility of evolving the practice of art. Moreover, as Snoeyenbos has argued, the openness of the concept does not have to follow from the variety of artworks. It is possible to think that what such a variety shows is rather the *ordinary vagueness* of the concept. And ordinary vagueness does not imply openness of the concept. On the contrary, vague concepts can be defined.[48] So, the open concept argument needs at least a revision.

But the most important criticism against the thesis of the non-definability of "art" has been developed by Maurice Mandelbaum and concerns the family resemblance argument.[49] His claim is that *family* resemblances, in order to be such, are not a function of similarities as the Neo-Wittgensteinians want us to believe. Rather, they depend upon genetics. In other words, a resemblance is a *family* resemblance if and only if there is a genetic link between the two things that resemble each other.[50] Mandelbaum suggests looking at relational attributes

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show how the emphasis on perceptual qualities of artworks leads to wrong conclusions. In short, his point is the following: in the light of pop art, any object can be an artwork. So, how can the person sent into the warehouse possibly know what to bring out? See DANTO 1981, p.61.

[46] WEITZ 1956, p.144: "Art, as the logic of the concept shows, has no set of necessary and sufficient properties; hence a theory of it is logically impossible and not merely factually difficult. Aesthetic theory tries to define what cannot be defined in its requisite sense."

[47] See CARROLL 1999, pp.218-219.

[48] SNOEYENBOS 1978, p.12: "In recent years a number of philosophers have argued that since 'art' is vague, a nonarbitrary definition of the term is unattainable. […] I argue that although the term is vague in the ordinary sense of 'vagueness', *i.e.* there are cases where it clearly applies, cases where it is clearly inapplicable and borderline cases of application, nevertheless it is not the case that 'art' is irreducibly vague. And since ordinary vagueness can be eliminated by a precising or theoretical definition, it is no barrier to the development of an adequate definition of 'art'."

[49] MANDELBAUM 1965.

[50] MANDELBAUM 1965, p.221: "what constitutes a *family* is not defined in terms of the manifest features of a random group of people; we must first characterize the *family* relationship in terms of genetic ties, and then observe to what extent those who are connected in this way *resemble* one another." It has to be pointed out that Gallie had already remarked the fact that talk of family

"rather than some characteristic at which one could directly point."[51] Instead of *looking* at artworks to find out questionable links among them, one should reflect on the non-perceptible (non-manifest) relational properties common to all artworks.

If the Neo-Wittgensteinians really thought of *family* resemblances, they should have implied sufficient and necessary conditions of membership, but this is exactly what they wanted to contest. Maybe they were not thinking of *family* resemblances but simply of similarities. However, this does not save the Neo-Wittgensteinian argument. The notion of similarity, namely, is too imprecise and presents a very unwelcome implication: since everything is similar to something else in some respects, everything is art. But this is an unacceptable conclusion. It is true, as Duchamp's readymades have shown, that everything *can* be art, but it is too much to imply that everything *is* art. In order to avoid this conclusion, the Neo-Wittgensteinians ought to specify in which sense the notion of similarity enables one to single out artworks. But this, again, implies formulating sufficient and necessary conditions, which is what the Neo-Wittgensteinians wanted to avoid.[52] So, the Neo-Wittgensteinians have been checkmated: a definition of art in terms of manifest properties may well be impossible, but that there must be a definition in terms of non-perceptible relational properties seems not only to be a plausible, but also an unavoidable conclusion.

This reasoning convinced many a philosopher of art, and in the 1960s the search for a real definition of art started again. But differently from the previous attempts, this time the search was directed towards the individuation of non-perceptible relational properties: an object is an artwork because of its non-perceptible relations to something else. It is in this sense that Arthur Danto and George Dickie started their own search. The rise of Pop Art in the 1960s confirmed them in their search for non-perceptible relational properties and pushed them to embrace a radical position with respect to aesthetic properties. As Danto has written: "In making their facsimiles, pop artists appropriated designs that had already passed an aesthetic test of some sort – which were selected because it was supposed they would catch the eye, or convey information about the product, or whatever. *But what made pop art high art rather than commercial art had only incidentally to do with the aesthetic qualities that caused it to succeed as commercial art.* The art criticism of pop art […] had nothing to do with what met

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resemblances makes sense if and only if criteria for family membership are worked out. See GALLIE 1956, p.101.

[51] MANDELBAUM 1965, p.222. And he continues: "A relational attribute of the required sort might, for example, only be apprehended if one were to consider specific art objects as having been created by someone for some actual or possible audience." (*ibid*.) This idea will greatly influence Dickie's Institutional Theory.

[52] CARROLL 1999, p.224: "The family resemblance model, then, is caught on the horns of a dilemma: either it employs the concept of resemblance without qualification, which results in the conclusion that everything is art; or, to avert this conclusion, it qualifies what kind of resemblances are relevant for art status, thereby reintroducing either necessary or sufficient conditions or both, with the consequence that we are now back to the definition business."

the eye, since what met the eye only explained its interest and value as commercial art. And the eye alone could not account for the difference."[53] The aesthetic properties of, say, one of Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* cannot explain why it is an artwork and it is actually irrelevant what aesthetic properties it possesses or whether it possesses any at all. Thus, if philosophy of art has to account for art, it can dispense with aesthetic considerations. Hegel's distinction between aesthetics and philosophy of art was suddenly invested with new force, to the extent that philosophy of art was no longer considered a subset of aesthetics – however independent –, but an altogether different field.[54]

Arthur Danto's and George Dickie's non-aesthetic (anesthetic) theories of art represent a point of no return in the history of aesthetics and a mandatory reading for whoever nowadays starts dealing with questions about the nature of art. My own account has been very much affected by them and this is the reason why I am going to analyze them in the next two chapters. In particular, I owe to Danto the idea that artworks are entities that require something (to be specified) from us and also the thought that art is related in an important way to art history and art theories. On the other hand, Dickie's accent on the institutional framework has been crucial for me to develop an understanding of the practice of art as a game.

The fact that my own account has been affected by Danto's and Dickie's theories is the first reason why in the next two chapters I am going to analyze them. The second reason is that through such an analysis the shortcomings of anesthetic theories of art will become apparent, inasmuch as neither Danto nor Dickie is able to explain what the point of having art is.

[53] DANTO 1997, p.92. My italics.
[54] CARROLL 1999, p.158: "Thus, at least in principle, "art" and "aesthetics" can be viewed as different theoretical domains of study: *art* is primarily the theoretical domain of certain objects (whose nature, for example, the representational theory of art attempts to define); whereas "aesthetics" is primarily the theoretical domain of a certain form of receptive experience, or perception, or of response-dependent properties which are not necessarily unique to artworks." See also CARROLL 1991.

Part I, Chapter 2

Arthur C. Danto and the Indiscernibles

Arthur C. Danto's writings in philosophy of art have had a tremendous impact on the whole field. Starting with his first article of 1964, "The Artworld," and up to the present days, Danto has analyzed and re-analyzed the fine arts in order to grasp their nature.[55] His activity as an art critic has provided him with precise knowledge of the contemporary artistic scene and his extended acquaintance with the fine arts makes of him an exceptional art connoisseur. Armed with such practical competence, Danto has not only been able to fill his writings with colorful art historical examples, but also to hit fundamental truths about the fine arts. In this chapter, I will present two aspects of his work that have been widely discussed. On one hand, I am going to discuss his real definition of art as he presented it in his seminal work, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*.[56] On the other hand, I am going to discuss his later developed and much talked-about thesis of the end of art history. I claim that this thesis relies on a wrong understanding of art history and takes Danto into insurmountable difficulties. I will also give an account of the way in which I am going to take advantage of Danto's analyses.

I.2.1. Looking For a Real Definition of Art

In *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Danto has relied on the now almost legendary method of indiscernibles to inquire into the nature of art.[57] Danto imagined situations in which an artwork is paired with an identical-looking object that is not an artwork. This situation obtains for instance in the case of Duchamp's *Fountain* or (and this is Danto's favorite example) in the case of Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*. In such cases, the artwork and the mere object share type-identical intrinsic properties and hence they appear identical if looked under the same perceptual conditions. Nevertheless, they are different, for the first is an artwork, while the second is not.[58] So, what makes the difference between the two objects?

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[55] See DANTO 1964 and, as an example of his recent works, DANTO 2003.
[56] DANTO 1981.
[57] Already in his first article on philosophy of art, Danto introduced this methodology; see DANTO 1964. In DANTO 1981 this method is used throughout the book, starting at the very beginning with the famous example of the imagined gallery of red canvasses; see DANTO 1981, pp.1-2.
[58] The idea of discerning indiscernibles presents some conceptual difficulties. Carrier, for instance, has claimed that indiscernibles are fictional entities constructed *a posteriori* from *different* things (see CARRIER 1993a, p.20). Wollheim thinks that if indiscernibles can be distinguished, they no longer are indiscernibles (see WOLLHEIM 1993, pp.34-37). See my own criticism in Part II, Chapter 3.

In *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Danto tries to work out the essential qualities that turn an object into an artwork. To begin with, he points out that artworks are necessarily *about* something.[59] Of course, this alleged essential feature of artworks heavily relies on Goodman's analyses of art as a language, but Danto arrives at it from a different way, namely through thought-experiments.[60] He imagines a gallery of red squares – several identical-looking artworks, which have, nevertheless, different contents. To prove that aboutness is necessary for artworks, Danto further imagines an artifact, which looks exactly like the other red squares but is not an artwork: "it is just a thing with paint upon it."[61] Moreover, he imagines that a young and polemic artist, called J, asks him to exhibit his artwork, which, he claims, is not about anything: the title is, in fact, *Untitled*. Danto maintains that even if apparently similar to the plain artifact (i.e. to the thing with paint on it) in not having a particular content, J's work is still fundamentally different from it, for it is about something, even though nothing specific. It is actually even possible to think of a painting that aims at representing nothingness: not nothing specific, but nothing at all. Well, even that painting would be about something, namely nothingness. However, representing nothingness turns out to be an impossible task: for, a painting that represents nothingness is about something (namely nothingness) and cannot be about nothing. Thus, we must be content with a painting that is not about anything (i.e. a painting that is about nothing specific) such as J's painting.[62]

In opposition to such a painting, the simple red square is neither about something nor not about anything: it simply *lacks* aboutness.[63] Simple objects do not admit the question: "what is it about?" To echo Strawson, for them the question does not even arise. So, aboutness turns out to be a quality necessarily possessed by artworks, which distinguishes them from mere things.[64] But, Danto goes on, artworks do not explicitly tell you what they are about. Rather, they require interpretation.[65] Danto conceives of artworks as *interpreted things*.[66] To see something as an artwork means to see that thing as something that *needs* interpretation, for

[59] DANTO 1964 and DANTO 1981.
[60] GOODMAN 1968/76.
[61] DANTO 1981, p.2.
[62] See DANTO 2000, p.133: "But there is the problem of distinguishing between not being about anything and being about nothing."
[63] DANTO 1981, p.3: "[…] things, as a class, lack aboutness just because they are things. "Untitled," by contrast, is an artwork and artworks are, as my exhibition shows, typically about something. So the absence of content appears to be rather willed in J's instance."
[64] Dickie does not accept this explanation and maintains that many artworks simply lack aboutness. See DICKIE 1984, pp.24-25. The latest reiteration of this criticism is to be found in DICKIE 2001, pp.36-37.
[65] DANTO 1981, p.113: "The question before us, accordingly, is what connection there is between the artwork in either case and the common material correlate, and this is what I wish to address myself to now. It obviously involves something I shall term 'interpretation' […]. Interpretation consists in determining the relationship between a work of art and its material counterpart."
[66] DANTO 1981, p.135: "So it is essential to our study that we understand the nature of an art theory, which is so powerful a thing as to detach objects from the real world and make them part of a different world, an *art* world, a world of *interpreted things*."

there is no artwork without interpretation.[67] Seeing something as art means recognizing that the physical elements of the work need to be interpreted in order to understand what the work is about.[68] Danto discusses the example of Pieter Breugel the Elder's painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, where a working man is shown in the foreground, while the fallen Icarus is nothing else than a small dab of white paint on the right side of the painting in the background of the representation.[69] Title aside, one has first to identify the white dab with Icarus in order to know that the painting is about the fall of Icarus.

Danto shows how interpretation and identification go together. He introduces the notion of "is of artistic identification" to distinguish it from the simple "is of identification." By artistically identifying something one gives an interpretative meaning to the thing, as when someone says of the little dab of white paint that it *is* Icarus.[70] The white dab is not Icarus, for Icarus is not identical with a dab. However, Icarus is the white dab in an artistic sense, namely insofar as the white dab stands for Icarus. Only by identifying the meaning of the material parts of which the artwork consists is it possible to understand what the artwork is about, and Danto shows how important such identifications are. The identification of *one* element as *x* excludes the identification of that element as *y* and also excludes the identification of another element as *x*. Therefore, the identification of the meaning of one element conditions the identification of the other elements, so that the whole is interconnected: to every combination of identifications corresponds exactly *one* interpretation of the work.[71] And to each interpretation of the work corresponds one meaning that the work embodies: for artworks not only are about something but also *make a point* about the way the content (better: that, which the work is about) is presented.[72] And that is the *embodied meaning* of each artwork.

Breugel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* is about the fall of Icarus, but this is not the point of the painting. The point of the painting has to be worked out on the basis of the way in which that which the painting is about is presented. In this painting, the fall of Icarus (which is what the painting is about) is presented as an event that goes unnoticed. Icarus is reduced to a small white dab of paint, represented in the background, not in central position. The

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[67] DANTO 1981, p.120: "*Not* to interpret the work is not to be able to speak of the structure of the work, which is what I meant by saying that to see it neutrally, say as what I have spoken of as the material counterpart of an artwork, is not to see it as art."
[68] DANTO 1981, p.101: "My claim throughout is that an artwork cannot be flattened onto its base and identified just with it, for then it would be what the mere thing itself is – a square of red canvas, a dirty set of ricepaper sheets, or whatever."
[69] DANTO 1981, pp.115 ff.
[70] See DANTO 1981, p.126.
[71] DANTO 1981, p.119: "In terms of the logic of artistic identification, simply to identify one element imposes a whole set of other identifications which stand or fall with it. *The whole thing moves at once*."
[72] DANTO 1981, pp.146-147: "Any representation not an artwork can be matched by one that is one, the difference lying in the fact that the artwork uses the way the nonartwork presents its content to make a point about how that content is presented.[…] if the way the content is presented in relationship to the content itself is something that must always be taken into consideration in analyzing a work of art, we may be on the threshold of having our definition."

working man, by contrast, occupies the foreground and the middle of the scene. So, the fundamental question is: why did Breugel represent the fall of Icarus *as* an event that almost goes unnoticed? To grasp this, says Danto, is "to grasp the metaphor that is, I think, always there."[73] The meaning of an artwork is given to the public not in a plain way, but in a metaphorical way. The artwork is a metaphor one has to grasp. But which metaphor is in the artwork depends upon the way one has interpreted it, and this in turn is intertwined with the identification of each element: different identifications give birth to different interpretations.

To exemplify, Danto imagines the case in which two artists are commissioned the task of representing Newton's first and third laws of motion. The two artists, archrivals, work separately and with the intention to realize the best work. "When all veils fall on the day of revelation," Danto writes, two identical-looking paintings appear.[74] They consist of a rectangular black frame and of a black horizontal line that perfectly cuts in two squares the white surface internal to the frame. According to the author charged with representing Newton's first law, the horizontal line represents "the path of an isolated particle" through space.[75] According to the author charged with representing Newton's third law, on the other hand, the same line represents the meeting plane of two masses pressing against each other with equal force, where the mass pressing down is represented by the upper square and the mass pressing up is represented by the lower square.[76] While the first author is trying to make a point about lightness and indeed succeeds in making it, the second author is trying to make a point about forces and seems to be less successful at that: critics would deem his representation as "[t]oo weak for the subject."[77]

As it is evident from this example, identifying the line with the path of the isolated particle gives rise to one interpretation and one meaning of the work, whereas identifying it with the meeting plan of two masses gives rise to a different interpretation and an altogether different meaning. Indeed, every new interpretation of the work constitutes a new work.[78] This seems to imply an infinite number of possible interpretations of the artwork, particularly in cases where the artist cannot be consulted. But Danto does not want to say that. In fact, he thinks that there are plausible and less plausible interpretations. Plausibility is based on the

[73] DANTO 1981, p.172.
[74] DANTO 1981, p.120.
[75] DANTO 1981, p.121.
[76] DANTO 1981, p.121.
[77] DANTO 1981, p.122.
[78] DANTO 1981, p.125: "In art, every new interpretation is a Copernican revolution, in the sense that each interpretation constitutes a new work, even if the object differently interpreted remains, as the skies, invariant under transformation. An object *o* is then an artwork only under an interpretation *I*, where *I* is a sort of function that transfigures *o into a work*: *I(o) = W*. Then even if *o* is a perceptual constant, variations in *I* constitute different works."

interpretation the artist *could have* intended.[79] As Danto puts it, the limits of the artist's knowledge are the limits of the artwork's interpretation.[80] When interpreting a work, one has to keep in mind that the artist was living within a certain context and that such context – which includes art theories as well – has shaped her vision. This vision is what is expressed by the artwork: it is the way the artist looked at the world that comes to light through the metaphor and determines her style.[81]

Indeed, to see a thing as something that needs interpretation, i.e. as an artwork, knowledge of theories and history of art is required. Confronted with Rauschenberg's *Bed*, Testadura, a simple person ignorant of art history and art theories, does not realize that that bed is an artwork: he only sees a bed.[82] But differently from the physicalist artist who has a theory according to which an artwork is just what it is (a canvas with paint on it, a bed, etc.), Testadura does not look at Rauschenberg's bed through the art-theoretical lenses of the physicalist artist: he is simply unable to see it as an artwork in the first place.[83] To see it as an artwork he needs to be acquainted with a framework of art theories and art history.[84] Danto has summed up this point in one of the phrases that have made him famous: "To see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld."[85]

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[79] DANTO 1981, p.130: "[T]he work-as-interpreted must be such that the artist believed to have made it *could* have intended the interpretation of it, in terms of the concepts available to him and the times in which he worked." It has to be pointed out that the artist's intentions play a very limited role in Danto's theory. For a theory in which intentions play a fundamental role, see FODOR 1993. Stephen Davies, on the other hand, holds that the author/artist's intentions do not have to play a role in the interpretation of the work: if an interpretation that disregards such intentions is "aesthetically superior" to one that takes them into account it should be preferred, see DAVIES 1982, p.66. Besides the fact that I do not understand the expression "aesthetically superior," I think that the artist's intentions must be taken into consideration in order to understand the artwork. Of course, I am free to look at Masaccio's Adam and Eva (*Cacciata dei progenitori*, Chiesa del Carmine, Cappella Brancacci, Florence) through the lenses of 20th century German expressionism, but this will not help me understanding *his* work.

[80] DANTO 1981, p.131: "You can call a painting anything you choose, but you cannot interpret it any way you choose, not if the argument holds that the limits of knowledge are the limits of interpretation." Danto, however, believes in the autonomy of the artwork from the artist's intentions. The artist's possible intentions have simply the function of orienting one's interpretation. Against the idea that the artist's intentions can be objectively grasped, Carrier argues that knowledge of the artist's intentions depends in turn upon historical interpretations (CARRIER 1993b). Carroll, on the other hand, argues against Danto's only limited commitment to intentionality as being incoherent with his theory (CARROLL 1995).

[81] DANTO 1981, pp.165-208. Carroll claims that Danto's theory is a disguised expression theory (see CARROLL 1993a, pp.86-87).

[82] DANTO 1964, p.575.

[83] DANTO 1964, p.579-80.

[84] As I will argue in Part II, Chapter 3, I do not think that such a framework is required to *see* the artwork, but rather to appreciate it. Testadura is probably ignorant of the conventions signalizing the presence of the artwork: this is what makes him unable to see the bed as an artwork.

[85] In DANTO 1964, p.580. In the original paper, "decry" stands instead of "descry" but it is obviously a typographical mistake. The quoted sentence enters almost unchanged into DANTO 1981, p.135: "To see something as art at all demands nothing less than this, an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art. Art is the kind of thing that depends on its existence upon theories; without theories of art, black paint *is* just black paint and nothing more. […] So, it is essential to our study that we

I.2.2. The End of Art History

Although art history and art theories are of fundamental importance to be able to see something as art, in *After the End of Art* Danto claims that only aboutness and embodiment of meaning are necessary conditions for something to be an artwork.[86] He does not deny the central importance of the art-historical and art-theoretical context, but he claims that the conditions of aboutness and embodiment of meaning belong to a different dimension than the condition of relating to history. The point, he claims, is that the essence of something can be talked about from two different perspectives: extensionally or intensionally.[87] To consider the essence of "philosopher" in the extensional sense is to show how this essence materializes by pointing at the class of objects the word applies to, a class containing Socrates, Plato, etc. To consider the essence intensionally, on the other hand, is to provide a definition of the qualities that the objects to which the name applies must possess, such as "lover of wisdom."[88] Now, "aboutness" and "embodiment of meaning" are supposed to belong to the intensional definition of artwork: they define what its essence *must* consist of. This is not true, according to Danto, of the idea of embeddedness in history, which is relative to the materialization of the essence: that idea tells something about how the essence contingently materializes.[89]

Why did Danto exclude one of his most celebrated ideas, namely that "to see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld," from his intensional definition of "art"?[90] One

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understand the nature of an art theory, which is so powerful a thing as to detach objects from the real world and make them part of a different world, an *art* world, a world of *interpreted things*."

[86] DANTO 1997, p.195: "*The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, in its effort to lay down a definition, hence chart the essence of art, did little better than come up with conditions (i) and (ii) as necessary for something having the status of art. To be a work of art is to be (i) *about* something and (ii) to *embody its meaning*." Previously, however, Danto had agreed with Carroll that the conditions were five, namely: aboutness, possession of style, metaphorical dimension, need for interpretation, and relationship to art-historical context (see CARROLL 1993, p.80). In fact, Danto calls Carroll's summary a "stunning reconstruction of my theory – which is really like a mirror for me, in which I could see a great deal more clearly than I ever could before the face and form of that theory. Carroll's is quite the best account I can imagine, for its lucidity, comprehensiveness, acuity, and sympathy; and it is to Carroll's text that I would send anyone who sought a statement of what I might have achieved." (See DANTO 1993, pp.205-206).

[87] DANTO 1997, p.194: "There are two ways to think of essence: with reference to the class of things denoted by a term, or to the set of attributes the term connotes: *extensionally* and *intensionally*, to use the old terms in which the meanings of terms was often given."

[88] DANTO 1997, p.218, footnote 2.

[89] DANTO 1997, p.196: "The concept of art, as essentialist, is timeless. But the extension of the term is historically indexed – it really is as if the essence reveals itself through history, which is part of what Wölfflin may be taken to have implied in saying, 'Not everything is possible at all times, and certain thoughts can only be thought at certain stages of the development.' History belongs to the extension rather than the intension of the concept of art."

[90] DANTO 1964, p.580. This decision has surprised many critics: "I must say that I was very surprised when I read this definition. Perhaps what surprised me most was what it did not contain. Specifically, it

reason has to do with the fact that Danto has realized that dependence upon art history and art theories was limited to art after the Renaissance and, at first, only to Western art. As Hans Belting has shown, medieval icons were not conceived in relation to art theories and art history, but rather in relation to religious practices.[91] Likewise, much art of other cultures has not been conceived on the basis of such theories. Therefore, Danto felt compelled to leave art theories and art history out of his definition to make it universally valid.[92] I think that he committed a mistake. Belting speaks of history of the image *before the age of art*, thus implying that medieval icons have *not* been conceived as artworks.[93] The fact that *we* consider medieval icons artworks does not mean that they were *conceived* as artworks. Indeed, as I have pointed out in the General Introduction, the concept of art in the classificatory sense has not been available to all cultures at all times. Instead, it has a history and a philosopher aiming at grasping the intension of the term "art" in that sense ought to take this fact into account.

Besides this first, questionable reason why Danto kept the embeddedness in the art-historical context out of his essential definition, there is, I think, a second and more important one: Danto was looking for a definition of art that would grasp the essence of *all* art including the future one. To counter the objection that it is not possible to succeed in the attempt to define the essence of art, for we do not know what the art of the future will be like, Danto came up with the thesis of the end of art history: there is no longer a history of art, for the history of art reached an end. Indeed, we live in a post-historical phase.[94] Before showing the relationship of the thesis of the end of art history to Danto's decision to leave relatedness to history and theories out of his definition, let me first illustrate the thesis itself.

Even though the idea of the end of art history is already contained in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Danto has developed it in his successive works.[95] He considers 1964, the year of the exhibition of Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* at Stable Gallery in New York, as the symbolic date of the end of art history. What that date singles out is – according to Danto – the moment in which art, after struggling to find its own nature, finally realized that it can be anything it wants.[96] The *Brillo Boxes* have proven that an artwork can take the form of a mere

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left out what I had always thought was one of Danto's greatest hypotheses, namely that art required an atmosphere of art theory." (CARROLL 1997, p.386).

[91] BELTING 1993; BELTING 1995.

[92] See in particular DANTO 1997.

[93] See the subtitle of BELTING 1993. DANTO 1997, p.4 shows that Danto is aware of Belting's thesis that there was no art before the Renaissance.

[94] DANTO 1986, p.209: "Having reached this point, where art can be anything at all, art has exhausted its conceptual mission. It has brought us to a stage of thought essentially *outside* history, where at last we can contemplate the possibility of a universal definition of art and vindicate therewith the philosophical aspiration of the ages, a definition which will not be threatened by historical overthrow."

[95] See particularly DANTO 1997.

[96] DANTO 1997, p.15: "What I know is that the paroxysms subsided in the seventies, as if it has been the internal intention of the history of art to arrive at a philosophical conception of itself, and that the last stages of that history were somehow the hardest to work through, as art sought to break through the

object and yet be an artwork. Danto follows Hegel's theory of the dialectical evolution of the *Geist*, which in the final step reaches self-knowledge: with the *Brillo Boxes* art has reached full conscience of what it is, namely anything it wants. Since anything can be art, master narratives positing what art should be no longer find a place within the context of such self-conscious contemporary art, Danto claims. Art history is no longer needed: it is over with it. The time has come for philosophers to wonder why some things are art and others are not. Art history has left the stage to philosophy of art.[97]

Although Danto has spoken of the thesis of the end of *art*, he has never claimed that there will no longer be art, but rather that there will no longer be *progress*, and thus no more revolutions. Indeed, he conceives of art history as the record of the progress towards a goal, namely self-knowledge, and therefore of the moment where progress is no longer possible as the end of art history.[98] At that moment, anything goes, because nothing can be seen as progress with respect to something else: as a matter of fact, art has reached the pure freedom to do and to be whatever it likes. Since there is no further stage (no more progress) beyond self-knowledge, if one is able to find a definition of art in the post-historical time she will have found a definition for all art. This provides the support for Danto's endeavor to search for essential qualities. *If* his theory of the end of art is right, no art of the future will show different essential qualities and thus threaten the definition.[99]

Notice that in the Sixties, Danto had defended the idea that history is relative to the perspective from which it is narrated.[100] But by the time he came to develop his thesis of the end of art history, he believed in the reality of historical structures.[101] Relativistic accounts of history consider history in terms of narratives that do not correspond to objective historical structures. Substantive philosophies of history, on the other hand, assume that history

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toughest outer membranes, and so itself became, in the process, paroxymal. But now that the integument was broken, now that at least the glimpse of self-consciousness had been attained, that history was finished. It had delivered itself of a burden it could now hand over to the philosophers to carry. And artists, liberated from the burden of history, were free to make art in whatever way they wished, for any purposes they wished, or for no purposes at all."

[97] See DANTO 1986, pp.15-16 & 110-111, and DANTO 1997, pp.4-5.

[98] As I will argue later on, I disagree with this understanding of history.

[99] DANTO 1981, p.vii: "My own view is that the inevitable emptiness of the traditional definitions of art lay in the fact that each of them rested on features the Warhol boxes render irrelevant to any such definition; so revolutions of the artworld would leave the well-intentioned definition without any purchase on the brave new artworks. Any definition that is going to stand up has accordingly to indemnify itself against such revolutions, and I should like to believe that with the Brillo boxes the possibilities are effectively closed and that the history has come, in a way, to an end."

[100] See DANTO 1965. See also: SCHIFFER 1980, p.1.

[101] Danto has discussed in many places this change, see for instance: DANTO 1997, p.43: "Well, I must say that I am likely today to take a more charitable view of substantive philosophies of history than I would have done in 1965, when my book was written in the late stages of high positivism. But that is because it has seemed more and more plausible to me that there are objective historical structures – objective in the sense that, to use the example just cited, there was no objective possibility that the works which Motherwell's Gauloises collages later resembled could have fit into the historical structure to which those works of Motherwell belonged, and no way in which the latter could have fit into the historical structures defined by pop."

possesses an inherent logic, which can be worked out. It is in the light of this assumption that Danto considers the end of art history to be a real event – and his definition not in danger of being rejected by future art.

Now, if the history of art has ended although there can be art in the post-historical time, art history cannot play an essential role for the possibility of art: this is the second-mentioned and more important reason why Danto removed the condition of relatedness to art history and theories from his definition of art. The alternative would have compelled him to say that there will no longer be art in the post-historical phase, an alternative that he seems sometimes to sympathize with but does not consequently develop.[102] But before considering which alternative is more plausible (a definition of art without relation to history and theory vs. the thesis that there is no art in the post-historical phase), one should enquire into the soundness of the reasoning that leads to this set of choices. It is indeed quite doubtful that such reasoning is sound, for the thesis of the end of art history relies on a particular and very questionable interpretation of art history.[103]

It is important to notice that Danto is proposing a story about art history. While, on the one hand, he claims that master narratives found their end in 1964, he is, on the other hand and against his own claim, developing a new master narrative according to which what we are now in is a post-historical phase. Indeed, Danto is interpreting art history as the record of progress towards a goal, namely self-knowledge. But was art really heading towards that goal? And even if it was, is this the way art history has to be interpreted? I do not think so.

To begin with, it is very questionable whether art history is the history of artistic progress towards a goal. That some artists have conceived of art history as the history of a progress does not mean that such a conception of art is the relevant one to understanding the concept of art.[104] And that at times art history is the record of a progress towards an ideal does not mean that the history of art has exclusively to be the narration of such a progress. As a matter of fact, the progressive narrative is correctly used to describe what has happened within one and the same style: it is for instance possible to show progress to reach a mimetic ideal. But no

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[102] DANTO 1997, p.4: "The era of art did not begin abruptly in 1400, nor did it end sharply either, sometime before the mid-1980s when Belting's and my texts appeared respectively in German and in English. Neither of us, perhaps, had as clear an idea as we now might have, ten years later, of what we were trying to say, but, now that Belting has come forward with the idea of art before the beginning of art, we might think about art *after* the end of art, as if we were emerging from the era of art into something else the exact shape and structure of which remains to be understood." As we have seen, Belting did not speak of *art* before the era of art, but of image before the era of art. See BELTING 1993.

[103] Many a criticism leveled against Danto's thesis of the end of art is, at least to some extent, about this point. See: CARRIER 1993b, p.309; CARRIER 1998, p.14; CARROLL 1993a, p.97; CARROLL 1997, p.389; DETELS 1993, pp.367; HERWITZ 1993, pp.142-158; KELLY 1998, pp.39-40; KUDIELKA 1998, pp.87-101; SHAPIRO 1993, pp.129-141; SHUSTERMAN 1993, p.170.

[104] The Futurists, e.g., thought of art in these terms. But Marcel Duchamp, for one, did not: "Art is produced by a succession of individuals expressing themselves; it is not a question of progress." (DUCHAMP, Marcel: "The Great Trouble with Art in This Country," in: DUCHAMP 1973, p.123).

serious art historian (at least among contemporaries) would hold that Impressionism has been a progress with respect to Realism, if by "progress" one understands an improvement, a coming closer to the final goal. It is a progress only in the etymological sense of being a step forwards, i.e. a moving away from the past and the present towards the new, which is neither better nor worse than the past or the present: it is simply something new. Indeed, art history is the chronological record of what has been done in the fine arts. And the bringing forth of new styles, which gets chronologically recorded, is, I claim, tantamount to taking part in a dialogue: there is a logic in it, but it is not the logic of progress.

In this sense, I fully agree with Gerhard Seel that there is real progress only within a stylistic paradigm although there is no progress from one paradigm to the next.[105] However, I disagree with Danto and with Seel in focusing upon the alleged progressive history of art, which Seel correctly calls the "history of a misunderstanding" since there really was no goal to progress towards.[106] Seel is right in claiming that such a history must be a misunderstanding and that art does not need it in order to be. But it would be a mistake to conclude that no history of art is required to understand art, as both Danto and Seel, who welcomes Danto's thesis of the end of art history, hold. As I will argue in Part II, Chapter 3, art history is fundamental to making sense of art. But the relevant history of art is not the record of an alleged progress: it is, as I just said, the record of a dialogue. The change from a style to another is neither a matter of progress, as Danto thought it was in the historical phase, nor an arbitrary matter, as Seel seems to be holding.[107] It is a logical development depending both on the reached state of the artistic dialogue and on the broader cultural framework, as I will concretely show in the first case study in Part III, Chapter 1.

My point, then, is that from the fact that art can now be anything, it does not follow that art history and art theories have become superfluous and that we live in a post-historical phase. *Fountain* and *Brillo Boxes* have shown that anything *can* be art, not that anything *is* art. What turns them into artworks is precisely their relatedness to art history. Sticking to an understanding (or, better, misunderstanding) of art history in terms of progress towards an ideal, and hence sticking to the thesis of the end of such an art history drives Danto into insurmountable difficulties, inasmuch as the necessary conditions of aboutness and embodiment of meaning are jointly insufficient to single out art.

In his recent paper "Art and Meaning," Danto repeats that in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* he had identified *two* necessary conditions for something to be an artwork, namely aboutness and embodiment of meaning, and declares himself perfectly aware that the

[105] SEEL *forth*., p.136 ff.
[106] SEEL *forth*., p.119: "Die Kunstgeschichte ist also die Geschichte eines Missverständnisses."
[107] Seel actually believes that the reason for changing style is due to the old style having exhausted its possibilities (SEEL *forth*., p.137). However, he does not seem to see any logical link connecting an old style to a new one.

two together are not sufficient for knowing whether something is an artwork or not.[108] In fact, this is his answer to a criticism leveled against him by Noël Carroll, who had pointed out that something can possess aboutness and embody its meaning without being an artwork.[109] Danto acknowledges that his definition of art compels him to consider the Brillo boxes of the supermarket, designed by Steve Harvey (ironically, himself an artist) as an artwork. But, he contends, this artwork is an example of *commercial* art, whereas Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* are an example of *fine* art.[110] And the distinction between commercial art and fine art is based, according to Danto, on the different sort of art criticism connected to the two objects.[111] In talking of Harvey's Brillo boxes the critic has to point out how well the representation serves the purpose of selling a cleaning product and the representation, *nota bene*, can very well be evaluated in the light of the art historical context to which it indeed seems to be referring.[112] In talking of Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*, on the other hand, the critic has to point out the relationship of the artwork to the commercial product and elaborate on its meaning. It is the fact that Warhol's work makes use of an existing object that makes its existence all the more intriguing.[113] Danto's conclusion is that to be an artwork an object – any object – simply needs a "suitable art criticism."[114]

Obviously, this distinction between commercial art and fine art makes the whole story start from the beginning, the question being now how to know when criticism makes something into *commercial* art and when it makes it into *fine* art. This entanglement is due to Danto's misunderstanding of art history as a progress towards an ideal and to the related fascination with the thesis of the end of art history, for which he gave up the condition of

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[108] DANTO 2000, p.132: "*The Transfiguration* […] arrived at a provisional formulation of part of the definition of art. I argued, first, that works of art are always about something, and hence have a content or meaning; and second that to be a work of art something had to embody its meaning. This cannot be the entire story, but if I could not get these conditions to hold, I am unclear what a definition of art without them would look like."

[109] CARROLL 1997.

[110] DANTO 2000, p.135: "But it has since come clear to me that the 'real' Brillo boxes might themselves indeed be considered art, and that what set them apart from what Warhol fabricated was the difference between fine and commercial art, comical as it might have sounded to anyone but myself to think of Warhol's boxes as fine art in 1964 when they were first made and shown. I was obliged to make this concession when it became undeniable that the cartons satisfied my two conditions, which would require me to find a third condition to get rid of the problem, or just accept that the distinction between fine and commercial art was no more and no less pressing than the parallel distinction between fine art and craft."

[111] DANTO 2000, p.136: "So the line between commercial art and fine art became a problem. In my early essay 'The Art World' I invoked a knowledge of the theory of art to solve the problem, and while this tactic worked, I now think we might talk as well about different structures of art criticism connected with the two objects."

[112] DANTO 2000, pp.136-137.

[113] DANTO 2000, pp.137-138.

[114] DANTO 2000, p.139: "What does it mean to live in a world in which anything could be a work of art? […] For me, it is to invent a suitable art criticism for an object, whether or not it is a work of art, though if it is not one – if, for instance, it is not about something – the criticism is void. It is to imagine what could be meant by the object if it were the vehicle of an artistic statement."

relatedness to art history and art theories as a necessary condition of art. As a matter of fact, however, I think that Danto made a fundamental point about art when he said that "to see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld." Indeed, it is for this contribution that his work has been most celebrated.

I.2.3. Assessing Danto's Definition of Art

Danto's analyses of art are very insightful and demonstrative of the informativeness of the author with regard to the fine arts. The method of indiscernibles, moreover, is revealing of Danto's knowledge of the art-philosophical discussion and in particular of the issue regarding the fundamental role of non-perceptible relational properties raised by Maurice Mandelbaum. By comparing identical-looking objects, one of which is an artwork and the other is not, Danto has forced himself to focus on the non-perceptible relational properties as the only ones able to explain the difference holding between such indiscernibles. As I will argue in Part II, Chapter 3, however, the talk of indiscernibles is misleading. Indiscernibles are things that cannot be taken apart, for it is not possible to discern that they belong to different types of objects. And, indeed, Danto explains the distinction between them in terms of *invisible* properties: one object (the artwork) is about something and embodies a meaning, while the other lacks aboutness and thus also meaning. But then, how could I ever discern artworks? How could I ever be sure that the glass I am drinking from is just a glass and not an artwork? Danto would answer that this is an epistemological problem, whereas he is interested in metaphysics. But the problem of indiscernibles is an epistemological problem, not a metaphysical one. From a metaphysical point of view, an artwork and a non-artwork are clearly different types of objects.

The talk of indiscernibles prevents us from taking a clear picture of the fine arts, where conventions and, as George Dickie says, institutional settings also play a role. When we enter into a museum, we know that we are supposed to do with the exhibited objects something other than what we would do with them had we found them on the street. We know that with the urinal exhibited on a pedestal we are supposed to do something else than what we would do with the urinal in the men's toilet, even though the two urinals look very much alike. Thus, a crucial question to understand the fine arts presupposes our ability to discern artworks and is: what are we supposed to do in front of an object that we discern to be an artwork?

According to Danto's definition of art in terms of aboutness and embodiment of meaning, what we are supposed to do is try to understand what the artwork is about and work out the embodied meaning. As we have seen, these conditions are not jointly sufficient to single out

artworks: billboards, newspaper articles, and so many other non-artworks fulfill them too. And, indeed, producers assume that we know that we are supposed to understand what the billboard is about and to work out its embodied meaning. If they were not justified in assuming this, they would not waste precious money on billboards and commercials. The conditions of aboutness and embodiment of meaning, however, associated with the condition of relatedness to art history and art theories offer an interesting definition of art, from which a lot can be learned. Moreover, they point at a crucial feature of artworks: they require something from us. Indeed, we have to do something with artworks.

Nevertheless, Danto's definition is insufficient to fully account for what we have to do with artworks inasmuch as it does not explain what is the purpose of objects that are about something, that embody some meaning, and that are related to art history and art theories; and it does not explain what is the motivation for me to understand what such objects are about, what meaning they embody, and how they relate to art history and art theories. In the billboard case, things are clear: the purpose of producing such billboards is to get me to buy the product. And the motivation for me is to discover a product that might better fulfill my expectations than the products I presently know. But what is the purpose of producing artworks? And what is the motivation for me to work out their meaning?

As I have remarked in the General Introduction, without knowing these things the definition of art remains unable to put me in a condition to check whether Twin Earthians have our concept of art and thus whether Twin *Demoiselles d'Avignon* is an artwork for them or not. Although my own account owes a lot to Arthur Danto's theory of art, I start exactly from these questions that he neglected to get a grip on the nature of art. But before turning to that, let me discuss another seminal theory of art, George Dickie's, which was inspired by Danto's early work and which has been able to point at some important conditions of the possibility of art.

Part I, Chapter 3

George Dickie and the Institutional Theory of Art

George Dickie's intuition has been that Duchamp's *Fountain* is an artwork because there is a context within which it is possible to confer on that urinal but on no other one the status of artwork. The problem is to understand how exactly this process of conferral is possible. The so-called Institutional Theory of Art (ITA) has been developed with this aim. According to Dickie himself, there have been four versions of the ITA.[115] The first dates from 1969, the second from 1971, the third from 1974, and the fourth from 1984.[116] The most popular version of the ITA is probably the one that appeared in Dickie's 1974 work *Art and the Aesthetics: An Institutional Analysis*.[117] The important tenets of that version are summarized in an article titled: "What Is Art? An Institutional Analysis" to which I will refer in this chapter.[118] Dickie claims that the first three versions together give expression to the earlier version of the ITA, while the 1984 version constitutes a different, later version.[119] He believes the later version to be the best account of the ITA.[120] He often complains, however, that important critics of the ITA such as Wollheim and Danto have not taken the later version into account and keep criticizing his theory on the basis of the 1974 version.[121] In the following, I will first present the earlier version based on the above-mentioned article, and then look at the later version.

I.3.1. The Earlier Version of the ITA

In his 1974 paper, Dickie points out that the aim of his theory of art is to show that, contrarily to the Neo-Wittgensteinian position, art *can* be defined.[122] The crucial point is that the properties one should look for while developing such a definition are non-exhibited (i.e. non-perceptible) properties.[123] Here, then, Dickie agrees with Danto. The non-exhibited properties that Dickie identifies, however, are very different from the properties Danto identifies. To begin with, according to Dickie, artworks in the classificatory sense necessarily possess artifactuality. In 1974, Dickie does not pay much attention to this condition, but in the

[115] DICKIE 2001, p.52 ff.
[116] DICKIE 1969, DICKIE 1971, DICKIE 1974a/b, DICKIE 1984.
[117] DICKIE 1974a.
[118] DICKIE 1974b.
[119] DICKIE 2001, p.52.
[120] DICKIE 2001, p.72, footnote 18.
[121] See DICKIE 2001, p.52 ff.
[122] DICKIE 1974b, p.434.
[123] DICKIE 1974b, p.436.

later version of the ITA artifactuality will play a central role.[124] Even though it is a necessary condition of art, artifactuality is still not a sufficient condition, so other conditions have to be defined. And the next condition Dickie has in mind refers to the artworld. Dickie acknowledges the importance of Danto's article "The Artworld," which has opened up a new way of analyzing art.[125] In fact, Danto will later on claim that Dickie misunderstood his position, so that the link between Danto's theory of art and the ITA is not so straightforward as Dickie originally thought.[126] By the time Dickie wrote this article, however, he was sure to interpret Danto in the right way.[127] Therefore, he adopted Danto's term "artworld" and used it in accordance with his institutional theory, namely "to refer to the broad social institution in which works of art have their place," which is not the way in which Danto had introduced the term, when he referred to "an atmosphere of artistic theories, a knowledge of the history of art."[128]

According to Dickie, the institutional dimension of the artworld is given by the fact that the artworld is an *established practice* within society.[129] Actually, the artworld does not consist of a single practice: within the artworld there are many systems (theater, painting, literature, etc.) and each system "is a framework for the presenting of particular works of art."[130] What such frameworks make possible is the *conferral of the status of candidate for appreciation* by members of the artworld.[131] So, the definition of artwork that Dickie formulates in 1974 is this:

> "A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2) a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld)."[132]

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[124] DICKIE 1984, pp.29-46.
[125] DANTO 1964.
[126] See "The Art World Revised: Comedies of Similarities," in: DANTO 1992, p.38: "Now, I thought of the art world as the historically ordered world of artworks, enfranchised by theories which themselves are historically ordered. As such, I suppose, mine was a kind of institutional theory, in that the art world is itself institutionalized. But it was not the Institutional Theory of Art, which was bred of a creative misunderstanding of my work by George Dickie, who was less concerned with what makes a work of art like Warhol's possible than what makes it actual."
[127] DICKIE 1974b, p.437: "Danto writes, 'To see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of history of art: an artworld.' Admittedly, this stimulating comment is in need of elucidation, but it is clear that in speaking of 'something the eye cannot descry' Danto is agreeing with Mandelbaum that nonexhibited properties are of great importance in constituting something as art. In speaking of atmosphere and history, however, Danto's remark carries us a step further than Mandelbaum's analysis. Danto points to the rich structure in which particular works of art are embedded: he indicates *the institutional nature of art*."
[128] DICKIE 1974b, p.437, DANTO 1964, p.580.
[129] DICKIE 1974b, p.437.
[130] DICKIE 1974b, p.437.
[131] DICKIE 1974b, pp.437-38.
[132] DICKIE 1974b, p.438.

That the artworld is a sort of social institution, the members of which are able to confer art status to artifacts, should not be considered strange, claims Dickie. After all, there are many such "institutions." For instance, there are political institutions that make possible the conferral of status of President of the United States of America; there are legal institutions that make possible the conferral of the status of husband and wife; there are religious institutions that make possible the conferral of status of relic upon an object; there are academic institutions that make possible the conferral of the PhD degree upon a student; and, finally, there are social institutions that make possible the conferral of status of wise man.[133] Some of these institutions are formal, others are informal; sometimes the conferral of a status requires a ceremony, sometimes not. The artworld is an informal institution and the conferral of status of candidate for appreciation does not involve ceremonies.[134]

Many people are members of the artworld: artists, producers, museum directors, critics, etc. But Dickie identifies the minimum core – "the presentation group" – with artists (presenters) and goers (i.e. people capable of appreciating or criticizing the works).[135] It is the artist that confers the status of candidate for appreciation upon her work, but this implies the existence of a public to which the work is presented and which is asked to appreciate or to criticize it. Moreover, for a work to be appreciated or criticized, the artist must be acknowledged as such by the artworld.[136] This is why a plumber placing before us a urinal is not presenting us with an artwork, while Duchamp is.[137]

It is important to remark that Dickie's definition does not require *actual* appreciation for a thing to be an artwork, but only the status of *candidate* for appreciation. It is of course possible that an artwork is not appreciated but rather criticized: in this case, the artwork is a bad artwork. This, however, does not imply that it is not an artwork: insofar as it is acknowledged as a candidate for appreciation, it *is* an artwork.[138] Furthermore, according to Dickie, appreciation does not have to be understood as *aesthetic* appreciation. It simply refers to the fact that "in experiencing the qualities of a thing one finds them worthy or valuable."[139] However, it is hard to understand how this sort of appreciation is not aesthetic. As a matter of fact, Dickie has contradicted himself. When Ted Cohen[140] claimed that there are things that cannot be aesthetically appreciated, like plastic forks or Duchamp's *Fountain*, and that what

[133] DICKIE 1974b, p.438.
[134] DICKIE 1974b, p.438. Against Dickie's concept of the artworld, both Wollheim and Danto have leveled their criticisms. According to Dickie, Wollheim ridiculed it by asking who elects the representatives of such a system, while Danto simply followed Wollheim. Dickie acknowledges that he used excessively formal language, but affirms that Wollheim grossly misunderstood him. See DICKIE 2001, pp.53-55.
[135] DICKIE 1974b, p.439.
[136] DICKIE 1974b, p.439.
[137] DICKIE 1974b, p.439.
[138] DICKIE 1974b, p.440.
[139] DICKIE 1974b, p.440.
[140] COHEN 1973a.

has to be appreciated about *Fountain* is rather the gesture behind it, Dickie agreed on the significance of *Fountain* lying in the gesture, but insisted that it can be appreciated as an aesthetic object. Thus, instead of being content with some other sort of appreciation, Dickie pushed forth the idea that it is the aesthetic dimension that counts for the appreciation of the object.[141] Consider his reply to Cohen:

> "But why cannot the ordinary qualities of *Fountain* – its gleaming white surface, the depth revealed when it reflects images of surrounding objects, its pleasing oval shape – be appreciated. […] Similarly, thumbtacks, envelopes, and plastic forks have qualities that can be appreciated if one makes the effort to focus attention on them. […] In short, it seems unlikely to me that any object would not have some quality which is appreciatable and thus likely that the constraint Cohen suggests may well be vacuous."[142]

Danto promptly remarked that, in spite of what Dickie had previously claimed, this passage makes the notion of appreciation mean *aesthetic* appreciation.[143] And since Dickie claims that everything can be appreciated aesthetically "if one makes the effort to focus attention" on the right qualities, aesthetic appreciation cannot be crucial for being an artwork. Thus, Dickie's definition of art in terms of artifactuality and candidacy for appreciation becomes useless: so many non-artworks are artifacts that can be appreciated aesthetically, that it is indeed hard to see how Dickie's definition can discriminate artworks from non-artworks. Although Dickie's answer to Cohen is clearly self-defeating and reveals his superficial reflections on the notion of appreciation, I consider his intuition that artworks are candidates for (aesthetic) appreciation not fundamentally wrong. Of course, to see the relevance of aesthetic appreciation for the fine arts, an accurate account of what aesthetic appreciation is must be given. In Part II, I will come back to this issue.

Instead of worrying that his reply to Cohen might be self-defeating, Dickie worries that his definition of appreciation may let the classificatory and the evaluative sense of "artwork" collapse. When I call a piece of driftwood "artwork" (in the evaluative sense), I must be appreciating it. But Dickie has now defined artworks in the classificatory sense as artifacts aiming at appreciation. So, what distinguishes the latter from the former? Dickie holds that the use of the evaluative sense of artwork implies that the object *actually* possesses valuable qualities. And, *nota bene*, that object needs not be an artifact. In the case of the classificatory sense, on the other hand, the object *has* to be an artifact and its value is only *potential* – it could turn out that nobody ever appreciates it.[144] I am not sure that this distinction between actually possessing and potentially possessing valuable qualities is very helpful, but I do not

[141] DICKIE 1974b, p.440.
[142] DICKIE 1974b, p.440.
[143] DANTO 1981, pp.91-94.
[144] DICKIE 1974b, pp.440-441.

discuss this question here since in his later version Dickie has dropped the notion of appreciation altogether.

Another problem Dickie raises is that of the circularity of his definition of "art." His definition includes reference to the artworld and thus presupposes the term "art" which needed to be defined in the first place. He claims that given the space he dedicated to the explanation of the artworld and its activity, his definition is circular but not vicious. In fact, a viciously circular definition would be short and, above all, uninformative. His definition is neither the first nor the second.[145] We will come back later on to this point. Let us now turn to the later version of the ITA, i.e. the version published for the first time in 1984.[146]

I.3.2. The Later Version of the ITA

The first change to be noticed is the different attitude towards Danto's theory of art.[147] Dickie had always thought that the ITA was a direct development of Danto's conception of the artworld as described in 1964, but the publication of Danto's subsequent works made it clear to him that Danto had a different concept in mind than that which provided the basis for the ITA. While Dickie thought of it in institutional terms, Danto conceived it in relationship to the semantic of the artwork: the artworld is for Danto the system of art theories and art history that makes interpretation of artworks possible.[148] Thus, even if Danto's 1964 article inspired the ITA, Dickie acknowledges now that it is no longer correct to see his and Danto's theories in association.[149]

The second and fundamental change to be noticed is the new centrality of the notion of artifact. While in 1974 Dickie simply postulated artifactuality as a necessary condition for art, in 1984 he is concerned with supporting his claim with evidence. To this end, he reconsiders the Neo-Wittgensteinian thesis that what turns an object into an artwork is not its being an artifact but its being similar in some respect to already acknowledged artworks – an account that would explain why, say, a piece of driftwood might be turned into art. Dickie remarks that even if the Neo-Wittgensteinians were right, a beginning of the story would still be necessary, otherwise there would be the danger of infinite regress.[150] And the beginning of the story must consist of a sort of art that is such without the virtue of similarity relations. What can this first art be? Dickie claims – but does not provide any argument in support of this

[145] DICKIE 1974b, p.441.
[146] DICKIE 1984.
[147] DICKIE 1984, pp.17-27.
[148] DICKIE 1984, pp.10-11 and 27.
[149] DICKIE 1984, p.27.
[150] DICKIE 1984, pp.29-34.

thesis – that such art should be identified with artifactual art.[151] But Dickie is not content with the claim that Neo-Wittgensteinians should consider first art artifactual: he wants to show that they too must conclude that *all* art is artifactual. His point is that art relying on similarities is not really art in the classificatory sense: rather, it is art in the derivative sense. In other words, nonartifacts that are called artworks by virtue of similarity to acknowledged artworks are artworks only in a derivative, not in a classificatory sense.[152] For instance, a sunset that is called "artwork" by virtue of its similarity to some painting is an artwork in a derivative sense. So, Dickie's conclusion is that being an artifact is a necessary condition for being an artwork in the classificatory sense.

But if this conclusion is true, how can Dickie account for found art? Or even for *Fountain*, which, *qua* urinal, is an artifact but has not been created as an artwork? In the earlier version of the ITA, Dickie had spoken of the possibility of *conferring* artifactuality.[153] He had claimed that artworks necessarily involve *human* intentionality, so that anything can be turned into an artwork, provided that someone of the artworld confers the status of candidacy for appreciation on the selected object, and provided that, if needed, this person also confers artifactuality on it.[154] In his 1984 version, Dickie thinks that he has been mistaken about artifactuality. Artifactuality cannot be *conferred*: "an artifact must be made in some way."[155] So, how is it possible to *make* a sculpture out of a urinal or a piece of driftwood? Dickie's answer is that they have to be transformed from *simple* objects into *complex* objects, i.e. objects that "have undergone a change at the hands of an agent."[156] This change happens by putting the object into the artworld context according to the rules that govern it.[157] Frankly speaking, it seems to me that the concept of artifact gets quite strained and I actually do not see why one has to stick to it. But instead of discussing this issue, I would like to focus upon the artworld context, which is the *conditio sine qua non* for a simple object to be turned into a complex one. Dickie is indeed convinced that without such a context, art would not be possible.

Dickie reports a criticism by Monroe Beardsley, according to which there could be an artist working in complete isolation, far away from society, the so-called Romantic artist.[158]

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[151] DICKIE 1984, pp.34-35.
[152] DICKIE 1984, pp.36-42.
[153] DICKIE 1974b, p.441.
[154] DICKIE 1974b, p.441.
[155] DICKIE 1984, p.44.
[156] DICKIE 1984, p.45.
[157] Dickie does not speak of rules, but when he talks of Dali's pointing and calling the rocks artworks as of a gesture that did not turn the rocks into artworks I assume he is trying to say that within the artworld there is no rule according to which it is enough to point and to call something an artwork to turn it into one. (See DICKIE 1984, pp.45-46). Moreover, later on he explicitly speaks of rules: "Put in a formal way, the art enterprise can be seen to be a complex of interrelated roles governed by conventional and nonconventional rules." (DICKIE 1984, p.74).
[158] DICKIE 1984, p.49. See also CARROLL 1999, pp.235-37 for a discussion of this criticism.

Dickie does not believe such an artist possible at all. First, he claims, an artist is always influenced by thoughts about art common to her time and culture.[159] Second, even if the Romantic artist, as Beardsley thinks of her, were possible, her work would not be art unless it was put into a cultural context in which art already existed.[160] Such a cultural context is a necessary condition for art.[161] According to Dickie, the same conclusion can actually be drawn from Danto's idea of comparing visually indistinguishable objects: what turns one thing but not the other, identical-looking, into an artwork is the fact that the first but not the second has a place within the artistic framework.[162] And the artistic framework consists of artists presenting their work to a public.[163]

As Dickie had already claimed in 1974, the minimal presentation group – or minimum framework, as he calls it now[164] – consists of artist and public.[165] The relationship between artist and public is therefore central to the ITA. Dickie claims that the relationship of the artist to the public involves, on the one hand, the artist's awareness that what she creates for presentation is art, and, on the other hand, her ability to use some technique to create art.[166] The relationship of the public to the artist involves, conversely, on the one hand, the public's awareness that what is presented to them is art, and, on the other hand, the capability to perceive and understand the sort of artworks they are confronted with.[167] These mutual roles are possible only insofar as there are *conventions* to appeal to. For instance, in classical Chinese theater the property man that is on scene is not part of the show and therefore he is not something to be appreciated or criticized. But this is a matter of convention, and we can easily imagine a development of classical Chinese theater in which the property man becomes part of the work.[168]

Thus, even though the concept of appreciation has been dropped in Dickie's new version of the ITA, it still plays an underground role.[169] For, Dickie now maintains that artworks are objects that show properties meant to be appreciated or criticized.[170] In fact, in his most recent

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[159] DICKIE 1984, pp.52-53.
[160] DICKIE 1984, p.55.
[161] DICKIE 1984, p.55: "Art cannot exist in the contextless vacuum that Beardsley's view requires; it must exist in a cultural matrix, as the product of someone fulfilling a cultural role."
[162] DICKIE 1984, pp.62-63.
[163] DICKIE 1984, pp.64-68.
[164] DICKIE 1984, p.72.
[165] Dickie notices that an artist has always a public in mind, even in cases in which she wants to keep her work secret: in such cases, namely, she must think of a public in order to be able to withdraw her work from it (DICKIE 1984, p.60).
[166] DICKIE 1984, p.60.
[167] DICKIE 1984, p.60.
[168] DICKIE 1984, pp.105-106.
[169] Dickie has acknowledged that the concept of appreciation was a misleading concept and that his answer regarding Cohen's criticism was even more so. In that occasion, Dickie now concedes, he should have said that things such as the gesture behind Duchamp's work can be appreciated. See DICKIE 1984, p.93.
[170] DICKIE 1984, p.105.

book Dickie specifies that the sort of artifact we are talking about is an "*evaluable* artifact," i.e. an artifact meant to be appreciated or criticized.[171] However, he claims that it is impossible for a theory to establish what features of the artifact are to be evaluated, the reason being that they depend upon conventions. But, one might ask, how was it at the beginning, when these conventions were not available? Dickie has a holistic answer: the whole business of art-making and art-consuming, with all of its roles, conventions, relationships, etc., developed together at some point in the history of humankind.[172] There is no way to define one element of this whole without recurring to the other elements: the circularity of the definition of art cannot be avoided.[173]

According to Dickie, philosophers think that circular definitions are unacceptable: their ideal definition is one that leads back to unanalyzable and therefore undefinable, primitive terms.[174] But Dickie does not believe such a definition possible: terms are primitive relative to a context, but not in an absolute manner.[175] To give a definition of an unfamiliar word one has to recur to words the ignorant person already knows. In this case, the known words serve as primitives, even though in an absolute way they are not. According to Dickie, the point with terms like "art" or "artwork" is that everybody somehow knows their meaning. Even small children do know it.[176] What a definition of "artwork" is supposed to do, then, is not to provide an explanation of the meaning of the word, but rather to make explicit what we already somehow know about art and artworks: "What philosophical definitions of 'work of art' are really attempting to do is then to make clear to us in a self-conscious and explicit way what we already in some sense know."[177]

Dickie makes explicit what he takes to be "what we already in some sense know" about art through a system of five interrelated definitions, namely:

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[171] DICKIE 2001, p.107.
[172] Dickie quotes Kendall Walton's proposal of assuming the existence of proto-systems, from which the artworld systems would have developed. Dickie, however, points at a very deep problem with this solution: the proto-systems cannot be part of the artworld, whose development they have to explain. But if they are not part of the artworld, how is the relationship between them and the artworld to be explained? See DICKIE 1984, pp.75-76.
[173] DICKIE 1984, p.77.
[174] DICKIE 1984, p.77.
[175] DICKIE 1984, p.78.
[176] DICKIE 1984, p.79: "Virtually everyone, including even quite small children, has at least a partial understanding of the expression 'work of art.' Virtually everyone can recognize some things as works of art, knows how some works of art are made, and the like. Thus, virtually no one is in need of a definition of 'work of art' in the way that many would be in need of a definition if they came upon an unfamiliar word such as, say, 'penultimate.' So a philosopher's definition of 'work of art' does not and cannot function in the way a definition is supposed to function according to the ideal mentioned earlier – to inform someone of the meaning of an expression one is ignorant of by means of words one already knows. The reason it cannot so function is that anyone who has gotten to the point of reading documents on the philosophy of art will already know what the expression 'work of art' means."
[177] DICKIE 1984, p.79.

1. An artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of art.[178]
2. A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.[179]
3. A public is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them.[180]
4. The artworld is the totality of all artworld systems.[181]
5. An artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public.[182]

Dickie claims that his system of definitions reveals the "intricate, co-relative structure" of art-making.[183] The basic terms that the definitions try to explain (artist, work of art, public, artworld, artworld system) are "inflected" concepts, i.e. concepts supporting each other mutually.[184] Dickie claims that we are taught from childhood about the functioning of such a circular mechanism and that it has never been the goal of the ITA to explain why an activity such as art has been developed within human societies – a criticism that Beardsley had leveled against it.[185] According to Dickie, the ITA is not concerned with the explanation of what art *does*, but of what art *is*.[186] But is it really about what art is? Danto has claimed that the ITA provides an epistemological, not an ontological account of art.[187] It gives us an explanation of how we can discern artworks rather than of what they are. Indeed, the ITA seems to entail that whatever is exhibited in an art museum according to some conventions must be an artwork. But this seems to be an invalid conclusion: it might be that we mistakenly take what is exhibited as art, although it is not. Or it might be that we fail to discern an exhibited artwork (for instance, because it has been exhibited in unconventional manners): would this entail the implausible conclusion that that object is not an artwork? No, it is an artwork that has not been discerned as such. Such mistakes happen and the only way to account for them is to acknowledge an ontological definition of art independent of epistemology.

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[178] DICKIE 1984, p.80.
[179] DICKIE 1984, p.80.
[180] DICKIE 1984, p.81.
[181] DICKIE 1984, p.81.
[182] DICKIE 1984, p.82.
[183] DICKIE 1984, p.82.
[184] DICKIE 1984, p.84.
[185] DICKIE 1984, p.83-85. The idea that we learn from childhood onwards how the system works, however, leads to the question of whether children can produce art. Dickie claims that children do indeed create works of art, even if of a primitive sort (DICKIE 1984, p.27). I think that Dickie should not be talking of artworks in relation to children's artifacts. In so doing he faces a double difficulty: on the one hand, he ought to defend the idea that being an artwork is a matter of degree: children produce primitive artworks, artists real artworks, and amateurs almost-artworks. On the other hand, he ought to demonstrate the existence of a system within which children's works *are* artworks. And it is hard to see how this could be shown.
[186] DICKIE 1984, pp.85-86.
[187] DANTO 1993, pp.204: "I don't believe any institutional theory gives us a definition of art, simply a certain account of how something gets to be received as art."

Furthermore, without knowing what ontologically singles out an artwork from a non-artwork, we also do not know what the artworld public is supposed to do with the object presented to them, so that the structure described by Dickie loses specificity, as the following example should make clear. Suppose that an artist presents to an artworld public an invitation card that is just an invitation card and no artwork. According to Dickie's definition, however, the invitation card must be an artwork, for it is "an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public." This is obviously unacceptable. The problem is that even if it were true that all artworks are artifacts of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public, not all artifacts of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public are artworks. Dickie is actually conscious of this fact, for he says of the ITA that it points out the necessary conditions for the practice of art – he does not speak of sufficient conditions:

> "What the institutional theory does try to do is to describe the human practice of creating and consuming art. In giving the description of the art enterprise that I have, I spoke of the *essential* framework of art. In so speaking, I do not intend to make any claim about a timeless essence of art but mean to describe the conditions necessary for a particular activity or practice. The institutional theory conceives of this practice as one which has emerged in and through time, as a historical development. This conception contrasts with the view of the earlier philosophers of art who conceived of their theories as ahistorical reflections of the timeless essence of art."[188]

What indeed seems to me an important insight of the ITA is that the possibility of art in the classificatory sense depends upon there being an institutionalized conventional framework, whose development can be explained holistically and thus implies a history: the framework had to be developed; it was not always there. As Dickie has recently said, "art is a collective *invention* of human beings."[189] And 'art' as a concept is therefore a *cultural* concept, not a concept of natural kind.[190] As such it has to be analyzed by "cultural anthropologists," i.e. people who look at the cultural structure within which such a concept makes sense.[191] I agree with Dickie that art is a concept that needs a cultural context to be developed and that therefore the cultural-historical constraints must be taken into account. And I also tend to agree with Dickie that the description of the framework offered by the ITA is a description of the conditions necessary for art. I think that art needs a producer, an object to be received, a receiver, and some rules as to how to discern and to receive the object. But the way in which I understand this system does not rule out the possibility of the Romantic artist. First, I think that one and the same person can play the role of producer and of receiver. Second, I believe that a person who did not have contacts with a cultural framework in which there is a concept of art might nevertheless be able to come up with a system of rules and

[188] DICKIE 1984, p.111.
[189] DICKIE 2001, p.10.
[190] DICKIE 2001, pp.22-31.
[191] DICKIE 2001, p.25.

conventions that puts her in the condition to discern and critically judge the objects presented (by herself and to herself) as art. In a word, I think that other cultures, even cultures consisting of a single unit, can come up with the concept of art.

Besides this, I think that the conventional framework is necessary for art, but only to explain how art can be discerned. This is clearly an important thing in the light of alleged indiscernibles such as *Fountain*. However, describing the conventional framework as the ITA does is relevant only in connection with a definition of the non-perceptible relational properties that ontologically single out an artwork from a non-artwork. A description of the conventional framework alone does not get a grip on the nature of art, as the example of the invitation card has shown. Moreover, Dickie's description is unsatisfactory inasmuch as it is unable to explain what the purpose of the practice of art is. Clearly, answering that the purpose is to produce artworks does not do, unless the purpose of artworks has been clarified too…

I.3.3. Assessing the ITA

I think that in spite of its problems, the ITA pointed out several important elements. First, it highlighted the epistemological role of the institutionalized conventions in making artworks discernible as such. Of course, we might be mistaken in taking an object put on a pedestal in a museum as an artwork. But Dickie is right in pointing out that without institutionalized conventions, we would not be able to individuate artworks at all. Second, I welcome Dickie's claim that art is a cultural concept and that the beginnings of the practice instantiating that concept must be conceived of as holistic, i.e. as having developed at a certain time in history as a consequence of interactions between human beings. What strikes me as important is not so much the historical question of when the concept of art appeared in our culture, but rather the fact that the concept of art has a history. As I said in the General Introduction, this is an important insight for whoever wishes to grasp the concept. For, if the concept has a history, not all objects that we in 2004 consider artworks must be thought of as having been conceived as artworks. Therefore, they need not count as counterexamples to a definition of the concept of art.

There are, however, two main aspects that strike me as self-defeating limitations of the ITA. I have mentioned them already in the previous section: the definition is insufficient and unsatisfactory. It is insufficient because it provides only the description of the necessary conditions for the practice of art, but it does not say what makes such conditions sufficient. In particular, the ITA simply points out that artist and public stand in a relationship (expressed in terms of presentation) to artworks, but does not say what this relationship consists in. It says

that the artist presents the artworks to the public, but it does not say what the artist expects the public to do with them. The public is simply said to be presented with the artworks. In order to understand what the public is supposed to do with artworks, an account of the function of art is required. It is precisely because it lacks such an account that Dickie's definition is unsatisfactory: it describes a whole system of interconnected roles and rules without worrying in the least that this system might be senseless. My attempt at defining art is an attempt at making sense of it: why do we have it? What do we expect to get back from the fine arts? These questions will be central to my approach, which I am going to present in Part II.

Part II

Regaining the Aesthetic Dimension of Art

Part II, Chapter 1

The Fine Arts and the Goal of Aesthetic Appreciation (Introduction To Part II)

Artworks are objects we wrestle with: we try to understand them, we try to offer the best interpretation of them, we spend hours looking at them, etc. As Arthur Danto has famously pointed out, to do so we need to know quite a lot of things; in particular, we need to be acquainted with the history of art and with art theories.[192] Otherwise we might end up like Testadura, who mistook Rauschenberg's *Bed* for a real bed and was about to sleep on it.[193] Danto found it puzzling that a bed can be both a bed and an artwork, but I find even more puzzling a question that Danto never raises: why do we take the pains to learn art theories and art history in order to see a bed as an artwork?

It is certainly not for the sake of practical knowledge. A scientist too has to learn a great deal of stuff and spends years studying, say, a green leaf. But her goal is evident: she wants to enhance her knowledge of the natural world and, in particular, she wants to understand why leaves are green. This might, in the end, be useful for agricultural purposes, for instance. But we do not spend hours analyzing Rauschenberg's bed in order to improve our practical knowledge. Of course, we do learn something upon analysis of his bed: we understand its meaning as an artwork. But where does the value of understanding this lie? It might be that understanding the meaning of an artwork is practically useful – for instance, it might help me make a good monetary investment. But it might as well be that it is practically useless. Nevertheless, even in this case it remains valuable. Why?

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle claimed that tragedies must have a cathartic effect: by watching a tragedy, we go through the misery of the characters and this should free us from our fears and relieve the tensions we accumulate in daily life – it has a therapeutic effect. Thus, art might have a psychological function. Another common view, derived from Plato's warning against the obscure forces of the arts, is that art ought to have an ethical function: artworks ought to be guides for our moral conduct. However, neither the psychological nor the ethical explanations are able to account for the reason why we spend hours with Rauschenberg's bed, inasmuch as we do expect neither a therapy nor moral guidance from it. And even if that bed had these consequences, it is not for their sake that we value the artwork as such. Thus, the question is still unanswered: why do we wrestle with Rauschenberg's bed? Why do we

[192] DANTO 1964, p.580: "To see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld."
[193] DANTO 1964, p.575. I actually doubt that the reason why Testadura mistook Rauschenberg's bed for a real bed is his ignorance of art history and art theories; it is rather his ignorance of the institutionalized conventions for exhibiting art. I am going to address this topic in Part II, Chapter 3.

wrestle with artworks in general? Suppose the answer was: for the pleasure of aesthetic appreciation. Would that be a good answer?

My claim is not only that this is a *good* answer, but also that it is the *correct* answer. In Part II, then, I am going to defend the thesis that *the concept of fine art (or, as the analytical philosophers of art have called it, the concept of art in the classificatory sense) is the concept of an activity primarily pursuing the goal of aesthetic appreciation.*[194] I will start by analyzing the notion of aesthetic appreciation in Part II, Chapter 2. Once this notion has been clarified, I will be in a position to apply it to the fine arts, which is what I will do in Part II, Chapter 3. My theory of art is therefore a revival of the aesthetic approaches to art dismissed, as we have seen, by leading analytical philosophers of art such as Danto and Dickie. In Part I, I have presented their theories of art – theories attempting at defining art without taking into account aesthetic considerations. Both theories have pointed at important aspects of art and should not be dismissed in spite of their own difficulties. Quite to the contrary, in Part II, Chapter 3, I will show how I integrate them within my own account.

[194] As I said in the General Introduction, I focus on the visual arts but I do not want to preclude my definition from working for other sorts of art. At any rate, I am not going to address this topic here.

Part II, Chapter 2

A Theory of Aesthetic Appreciation

My thesis is that the final goal of the fine arts is to give us *the pleasure of aesthetic appreciation*: I claim that it is for the sake of this pleasure that we seek confrontation with artworks. The pleasure of aesthetic appreciation is the pleasure accompanying the appreciation of the aesthetic properties possessed by an object. Therefore, in my account of art aesthetic properties play a key role. But what does it mean to appreciate an object for its aesthetic properties? In this chapter, I am going to give an answer to this question. Neither aesthetic properties nor aesthetic appreciation are peculiar to the fine arts. For this reason, in this chapter I will develop a *general* theory of aesthetic appreciation. In the next chapter, I will show how aesthetic appreciation in the fine arts builds a special subset within the general theory of aesthetic appreciation. But in this chapter, the fine arts are not taken into consideration. Alleged counterexamples to what I am going to say that rely on the fine arts should be kept on hold until the reader has read Part II, Chapter 3.

What are aesthetic properties? It is not easy to give an answer to this question, though it is less difficult to provide examples of aesthetic properties: being pleasing, elegant, awkward, unified, garish, beautiful, etc. The difficulty in answering the question of what aesthetic properties are is due to the variety of types of properties contained in the list just mentioned. Some properties, like the property of being elegant, are considered properties of the object the perceiving subject is looking at (hence external to the perceiving subject). But a property like the property of being pleasing cannot be taken to be a property of the object in the same way as the property of being elegant is taken to belong to the object, inasmuch as pleasure is something the perceiving subject experiences as internal to herself. Moreover, some properties taken to be of the object (hence external to the perceiving subject) seem to be simply describing one of the object's features, while others presuppose evaluation of the object's properties. Take for instance the property of being unified as opposed to the property of being beautiful.

Given this variety of aesthetic properties, there is a question as to what is the common denominator to all of them. In other words, there is a question as to what makes a property an *aesthetic* property. To express my answer in a lapidary way, a property is aesthetic whenever it is related to pleasure upon perception. An object *O* is aesthetically pleasing inasmuch as one feels pleasure at perceiving it. *O*'s elegance and unity are aesthetic properties inasmuch as they are pointed out to explain the subject's taking pleasure upon perception of it. The fact that *O* is red, by contrast, is by itself irrelevant as to why the subject enjoys looking at it – hence the property of being red is no aesthetic property (as opposed to the property of being

so warmly red, which might indeed be pointed out as an explanation of why the subject enjoys looking at *O*). Finally, *O* is beautiful inasmuch as one *ought* to feel pleasure at perceiving it.

In this chapter I am not going to offer an argument in favor of the thesis that aesthetic properties stand in relation to pleasure upon perception. This thesis I take for granted, not last because it relies on classical assumptions to the effect that pleasure and perception are indeed commonly taken to be involved in the aesthetic. What I rather aim at here is making sense of the sketched tripartition of aesthetic properties into what I call "internal" (e.g. being pleasing), "external" (e.g. being elegant or unified), and "meta-aesthetic" ones (e.g. being beautiful).[195] Once this tripartition is been made plausible, it is on the one hand easier to understand the mentioned relationship to pleasure upon perception that characterizes aesthetic properties. On the other hand, it will be possible to explain what aesthetic appreciation is – and this is the final goal of this chapter.

II.2.1. Internal Aesthetic Properties

Internal aesthetic properties are properties such as being pleasing or unpleasing. They depend upon what I feel upon perceiving an object *O*: I might feel pleasure, displeasure, or something in between. If I feel pleasure upon looking at *O*, the *sight* of *O* will be pleasing to me. Since my own perception and my own feelings are at stake, I call these aesthetic properties *internal*: they are *not* properties of objects external to the perceiving subject, but rather properties of the perceptions themselves, which are internal to the perceiving subject. It is important not to be misled by ordinary language here. We often say things like: "I enjoyed the concert" or "The concert was pleasing," which give the impression that it is the object that possesses the property of being pleasing. Strictly speaking, however, these sentences are incomplete: it is not the concert, but *listening* to it that I enjoyed. If a deaf person uttered the sentence: "I enjoyed the concert," I would be puzzled: what did she actually enjoy? She might have enjoyed the *sight* of the musicians, but certainly not *listening* to the concert. If she claims that she enjoyed listening to the concert, I am bound to conclude that the sentence she

[195] Notice that a distinction between internal and external aesthetic properties has been introduced by Göran Hermerén as well. His criterion to establish whether an aesthetic quality is internal or external is to check "whether the aesthetic qualities from a phenomenological point of view are experienced as being located outside the experiencing subject (internal to the object) or inside the subject (and external to the object)." (HERMERÉN 1988, p.81). What is curious and, in my opinion, misleading about the distinction as introduced by Hermerén is that, although the definitions of the terms "internal" and "external" are given from the point of view of the perceiving subject, the terms refer to positions relative to the perceived object. To avoid such confusion, I stick to the position relative to the perceiving subject. Hence, what Hermerén calls internal aesthetic properties are in my terminology external aesthetic properties and *vice versa*.

uttered must be false: since she cannot listen, she cannot have enjoyed listening to the concert. There is an essential link between enjoyment and perception: the only way to "enjoy an object" is to enjoy perceiving it. The expression "to enjoy an object" is actually a synecdoche, where a part (the perceived object) substitutes for the whole (the perception of the object).

Internal aesthetic properties, then, correspond to one's personal enjoyment (or non-enjoyment) upon perception of an object. And such personal enjoyment is dependent both upon what one perceives and upon the *sensibility* of the subject. What is sensibility? Assume that two persons, Betty and Patty are not only in front of the same object *O* but have exactly the same perceptual experience (suppose that we have a device to find that out). This is no guarantee that they will enjoy *O* in the same way. It is even possible to think that Betty likes the sight of *O*, while Patty dislikes it. Such differences are to be explained in terms of different sensibilities. In everyday life we use the notion of sensibility quite often and we seem to know what we are talking about. But when it comes to offer a definition of sensibility, the situation looks less clear. In this work, I use "sensibility" to mean that disposition upon which our feelings depend. I am not interested in the disposition as a neurological fact, but rather as metaphysical postulation: if we want to make sense of different feelings upon one and the same perceptual experience, we have to assume a difference in the way of transforming such perceptual experience into feelings, and I call whatever is responsible for such a transformation "sensibility."

I claim that, if we can ascertain that Betty and Patty are having the same perceptual experience, the only way to explain their different feelings about it is due to differences of sensibility. Now, such differences of sensibility cannot be "hardware" differences, to use Computer Science terminology: if there was a difference in the hardware, the *perceptual* experience would not be the same and this would be the reason why Betty and Patty feel differently upon the sight of one and the same object. For instance, a person with perfect pitch will feel pain at listening to a concert that causes great pleasure to 99% of the listeners. In this case there is nothing that can be done: nobody can teach to the person with perfect pitch how to enjoy listening to that concert. It will be impossible for her to learn, because she cannot change the ears she has. The point is that given the ears she has, this person will have an altogether different perceptual experience than the standard listener with normal ears. Her finding the concert unpleasing is not due to a different sensibility, but rather to a different perceptual system.

One can object that no two human beings (besides, perhaps, identical twins) share the same type of hardware. Therefore, it might be impossible for Betty and Patty to have the same perceptual experience. I agree that in real life sameness of perceptual experience cannot be granted. Yet, we assume perceptual experiences to be similar enough to be considered equivalent: I cannot be sure that you perceive the yellow car as I do, but I assume that your

perceptual experience is equivalent to mine. On the other hand, if you do not see the car in front of the window that I am pointing at, I have a strong reason to believe that your perceptual system is different from mine. (Notice that glasses are ways to repair the hardware and to bring it back to the *norm*: if we did not start out from the assumption that the perceptual experiences of people endowed with standard hardware are pretty much the same, i.e. that there is a *normal* visual experience, we would not have developed glasses and devices to find out how badly one sees). Moreover, not only are we justified to assume that *de facto* our perceptual experiences are similar enough to be considered equivalent: we are also justified to assume the possibility (maybe in another possible world) of type-identity of perceptual experiences – and this is the philosophically interesting situation to make sense of the notion of sensibility.

Indeed, the notion of sensibility becomes intelligible only if we grant that it is possible for Betty and Patty to have the same sort of perceptual experience, while at the same time feeling differently about it. In that case, the only way to explain their different feelings is by appealing to sensibility, i.e. a sort of different software – to use Computer Science terminology one more time – to transform the type-identical perceptual stimuli into feelings. That there must be such software is supported by evidence, inasmuch as we can *learn* to appreciate things that we disliked or towards which we were indifferent. Unlike the lady with perfect pitch who cannot learn to like a concert that sounds painful to her, a person who did not like the concert because she did not know how to listen to it might learn to like it. Similarly, she can learn to like Indian food or the pointed shoes she utterly disliked at the beginning of the season (it is actually upon such a learning mechanism that fashion relies). As we will see below, sensibility is shaped by educational and cultural standards and can evolve if it is taught.

As a matter of fact, in this chapter I am going to offer an account of changes in sensibility, or, as people also use to say, changes of taste. I have begun with internal aesthetic properties such as the property of being pleasing: i.e. properties that we experience as *immediate* aesthetic responses to objects. After examining external aesthetic properties and meta-aesthetic properties in the next sections, I will come back to the internal aesthetic properties and show how much learning is involved in what at first we considered as our immediate aesthetic responses to objects. Thus, my account builds up a circle, starting with the internal aesthetic properties and coming back to them. In order to understand how internal aesthetic properties are related to external aesthetic properties and through them to meta-aesthetic properties, we need to focus again on the situation we are considering, in which Betty and Patty are looking at *O* and know immediately whether they like looking at *O* or not. But before coming back to that situation, let me open up an important parenthesis.

Suppose that I am the perceiving subject looking at *O* and suppose that I like looking at *O*. It would be unusual for me to say: "To me, the sight of *O* is pleasing." What we usually say is rather: "How beautiful!" Now, if "being beautiful" just meant "being pleasing to *X* upon perception," we would be left with the most extreme subjectivism: *de gustibus non disputandum est*. Upon my claim that *O* is beautiful you would not be entitled to argue that you do not think so: to me, *O* is beautiful because I like the sight of it and there is nothing you can do but accept this state of affairs. Yet, we know that it is possible to argue for or against the beauty of an object and that it is possible to make a person change her mind about that beauty. Although nobody could convince me that the sight of *O* cannot be pleasing to me, people could try to convince me that, *in spite of* my liking the sight of it, *O* is not beautiful. Thus, there must be more hiding behind beauty than just the pleasantness of a perception. Since it is crucial for the correctness of the analysis of aesthetic properties to draw clear-cut distinctions and to avoid confusion, in this work the properties of being beautiful/ugly and of being pleasing/unpleasing (upon perception) not only are different properties but also belong to different categories of aesthetic properties: while being pleasing/unpleasing is an internal aesthetic property available only to the perceiving subject, being beautiful/ugly is a meta-aesthetic property belonging to the object.

This analytical distinction, although crucially useful for getting a clear picture of aesthetic properties and an exhaustive account of aesthetic appreciation, should not lead us into thinking that the two properties are not factually linked. As a matter of fact, there is an intimate relationship between them, which I will be able to fully explain only in Section II.2.4. For the time being, keep in mind that internal aesthetic properties are properties of perceptions, not of objects external to the perceiving subject (as instead is the case for the property of being beautiful). Paradigmatic internal aesthetic properties are, as we said, "being pleasing" and "being unpleasing." Keep in mind that they are not to be confused with the properties "being beautiful" and "being ugly," which I will analyze later on and which belong to the category of meta-aesthetic properties.

This said, let me come back to the situation that we have been considering. There is an object *O*, and there are two perceiving subjects Betty and Patty, who – we know – are having the same perceptual experience. Suppose that Betty says that she likes looking at *O*. And suppose that Patty does not feel pleasure upon looking at *O*. Indeed, Patty thinks that the sight of *O* is quite unpleasing. What can they do about that? On the one hand, nothing: if this is the way they feel, they have to accept that they have different sensibilities. But, on the other hand, they might wonder why it is that they have such different aesthetic responses. Betty might ask Patty what features of *O* are responsible for her disliking its sight. At this precise moment, Betty and Patty are leaving the internal sphere to step into the external one.

II.2.2. External Aesthetic Properties

So, Betty asks Patty what features of the objects are responsible, in her opinion, for her disliking the sight of *O*. Suppose that Patty answers: "The colors are garish, the shape is irregular, and overall it looks chaotic." Patty is enumerating a set of aesthetic properties belonging *to the object*. I call such aesthetic properties *external* because they are properties supposed to belong to an object external to the perceiving subject, and as such they ought to be recognizable by all perceiving subjects. Whereas internal aesthetic properties were taken to be internal to the perceiving subject and in this sense subjective, external aesthetic properties are taken to be objective. However, they do not seem to be as objective as primary properties such as the property of having a surface of 25 cm^2 are.

Whether *O* has a surface of 25 cm^2 or not does not depend upon someone looking at it. Even in a world where there was just *O* and nothing else, *O* would have a surface of 25 cm^2. However, whether *O* has a chaotic look or not seems to depend upon someone looking at it and judging its look chaotic. In a world where there was just *O* and nothing else, *O* would have just the look it has, which is neither chaotic nor ordered. Only if a being endowed with perceptual skills, sensibility, and analytical skills were to land on that world (i.e. an intelligent sensitive being), could the property of being chaotic become a property of *O*.[196] For, what is necessary is, first, that someone be affected by the sight of *O* in a certain way and, second, that this someone starts looking for an explanation of what it is about the object that causes her to feel what she feels upon perception of *O*. Only once this analytical process has been started can the external aesthetic properties of objects become apparent.

But given this dependency upon the perceiving subject, how can there be aesthetic properties belonging to *objects*? How can there be *external* aesthetic properties? In this section, I am going to answer to these questions. First, I will give an account of external aesthetic properties as emergent properties; second, I will inquire into the types of external aesthetic properties; and third, I will account for disagreements about external aesthetic properties. A remark before starting with the analysis: what I have called "external aesthetic properties" are the aesthetic properties that philosophers have mainly dealt with. Indeed, they constitute the bulk of aesthetic properties. This explains the length of this section compared to the other sections.

[196] My requirement that there be an intelligent sensitive being in order for aesthetic properties to emerge is of course reminiscent of Kant, who said that aesthetic properties are peculiar to beings endowed both with reason and with sensibility such as human beings: "Annehmlichkeit gilt auch für vernunftlose Tiere; Schönheit nur für Menschen, d.i. tierische, aber doch vernünftige Wesen, *aber auch nicht bloss als solche (z.B. Geister) sondern zugleich als tierische*; das Gute aber für jeder vernünftige Wesen überhaupt." (KANT 1790, §5, p.123, italics in the original).

II.2.2.1. Emerging External Aesthetic Properties

As Frank Sibley has famously argued, it is not possible to tell *a priori* upon which perceivable non-aesthetic properties of an object depend its aesthetic properties.[197] The fact that the stem of the vase bends of such-and-such degree does not entitle one to conclude that it bends gracefully. The external aesthetic properties of *O*, then, are not determinable on the basis of the set of its perceivable non-aesthetic properties. However, the former do depend upon the latter: indeed, changing even a single non-aesthetic property of *O* might result in important changes at the level of its external aesthetic properties. The relationship between external aesthetic properties and perceivable non-aesthetic ones is, then, a relationship of dependence of the former upon the latter. External aesthetic properties depend on the perceivable non-aesthetic properties inasmuch as *O* would possess no external aesthetic property if it did not possess perceivable non-aesthetic properties. At the same time, external aesthetic properties cannot be reduced to the object's perceivable non-aesthetic properties inasmuch as the former have a dimension that the latter lack: they are conditioned by the perceiver's emotional response. Indeed, there must be an intelligent sensitive being that perceives *O* and processes both *O*'s non-aesthetic properties and her own feelings upon perception of *O*, in order for *O*'s aesthetic properties to show up, to become apparent. In more technical terms, aesthetic properties are said to *emerge* from or to *supervene* on an object's non-aesthetic properties.[198]

My point is that no external aesthetic property would emerge from *O*'s non-aesthetic properties if no intelligent sensitive being were ever to perceive *O*: external aesthetic properties are response-dependent. I am not prepared to accept metaphysical realism for external aesthetic properties if by "real" one understands an existence independent of any sort of mind. While I hold that there could be a possible world without any sort of mind but with lots of flowers, I deny that there could be a possible world without intelligent sensitive beings and with *delicate* flowers.[199] However, if by "real" we understand properties of *O* that an intelligent sensitive being would *necessarily* recognize if she had the possibility to be acquainted with *O*, then I would agree on the reality of external aesthetic properties. External aesthetic properties are real insofar as *one or the other* aesthetic property of *O* would

[197] SIBLEY 1959. See also SIBLEY 1963 and SIBLEY 1965. For a good summary of Sibley's theory, see LYAS 2001.
[198] I take emergentism and supervenience to be equivalent explanations of the dependence of aesthetic properties upon non-aesthetic ones. Hermerén's account of emergent properties seems to me appropriate: "I shall say that a quality Q is emergent from a quality Q* (or from a set of such qualities), if and only if the following conditions are satisfied: (a) Q and Q* are on different levels, (b) Q depends on Q*, but not conversely, (c) Q represents something novel in comparison with Q*." See HERMERÉN 1988, p.179. For a more refined account, see LEVINSON 1990. Let me remark that Levinson uses the expression "emerge on," which seems to me incorrect given the etymological sense of "emerge" (see e.g. *ibid*., p.137).
[199] I therefore disagree with Eddy Zemach on this point. See ZEMACH 1997, pp.69-70.

necessarily be perceived by an intelligent sensitive being who became acquainted with *O*. In other words, given an object *O* and an intelligent sensitive being *P*, *O* necessarily possesses some external aesthetic properties for *P*. This is why talking of aesthetic matters is not meaningless: we talk of matters that are real *for us*, that do really characterize our interaction with the world, and that we do not make up as we make up unicorns and chimeras. Indeed, we are talking of properties that emerge from the non-aesthetic features of the world.

A necessary condition for the emergence of external aesthetic properties is, then, the interaction with an intelligent sensitive being, which can perceive the object, have feelings about such perceptions, and be able to analyze the object to find out which of its features are responsible for such feelings.[200] And of course, different intelligent sensitive beings might see different external aesthetic properties emerge from the same object *O*. The thesis that external aesthetic properties are emergent from non-aesthetic properties of the object does indeed not commit one to conclude that everybody ought to discern the same external aesthetic properties in one and the same object. In other words, it does not force one into holding that *O* must possess the same external aesthetic properties for Betty and Patty. It only compels one to hold that *for one and the same* perceiving subject two identical-looking objects seen under type-identical perceptual and sensibility conditions must possess the same external aesthetic properties. What does this mean?

Imagine that I am considering two vases, *V1* and *V2*. The thesis that external aesthetic properties emerge from the non-aesthetic properties only requires that I cannot hold that *V1* is elegant and *V2* is not elegant if the two vases have type-identical non-aesthetic properties. Let me add first that I must be looking at the vases under type-identical perceptual conditions, for if I looked at *V2* in a very dark room, while I was in a bright room as I was looking at *V1*, the difference in external aesthetic properties could be due just to a difference in perceptions. The clause "under type-identical perceptual conditions" is meant to guarantee that the perception of the vase be type-identical. But this is not enough. It ought also to be guaranteed that my sensibility has not changed. If my sensibility had changed, the way I would process the perceived non-aesthetic properties of the object *might* indeed be different, to the effect that what I previously called "elegant" turns now into "excessively sophisticated," or that elements I previously neglected become suddenly central (see Section II.2.2.3 for a better explanation).

Notice finally that the identical look of *V1* and *V2* is determined both by the intrinsic *and* the extrinsic non-aesthetic properties. Indeed, the external aesthetic properties do not emerge

[200] Some might object that for external aesthetic properties – at least for many of them – to emerge from an object's non-aesthetic properties more than an intelligent sensitive being is needed: it has to be a *cultural* intelligent sensitive being. But, as I have mentioned in Section II.2.1, my notion of sensibility already implies cultural standards. Unfortunately, I will be able to clarify this issue only in Sections II.2.3 and II.2.4. At any rate, I wish to thank Professor Gerhard Seel for raising this objection.

only from the *intrinsic* perceivable non-aesthetic properties of the object, but also from its *extrinsic* ones. Suppose that *V1* and *V2* are white objects, that the room where *V1* is exhibited, *R1*, is painted in black while the room where *V2* is exhibited, *R2*, is painted in white. Suppose further that the table on which *V1* stands, *T1*, is black while *T2* is white. In *R1* we have a situation of strong contrast: the white object contrasts with the black walls and the black table. This might enhance the sense of elegance, to the effect that one perceives *V1* as being sublimely threatening. But this same property could hardly be a property of *V2* in *R2*. There, whiteness triumphs, and with it a sense of extreme harmony and incredible lightness. Yes, one might be pushed to discern in *V2* the property of being light, or even the property of being fragile, which she would not discern in *V1*, given the latter's so physical presence in contrast with the black environment. Now, being in a black environment and being in a white environment are two *extrinsic* perceivable non-aesthetic properties possessed respectively by *V1* and by *V2*. The external aesthetic properties also emerge from them, as I have just tried to show with this example. Thus, the emergence of external aesthetic properties cannot be limited to the *intrinsic* perceivable non-aesthetic properties of objects, but must be extended to its *extrinsic* perceivable non-aesthetic properties as well.

To sum up, then, external aesthetic properties are properties of the perceived object, inasmuch as they are emergent from its perceivable non-aesthetic properties. At the same time, however, they are relational (phenomenal) properties, inasmuch as they depend on the perceiving subject in order to emerge from the perceivable non-aesthetic properties of the object. Let me add that they are *tertiary* properties, inasmuch as both primary (shape, material, etc.) and secondary (color) properties serve as the base from which they emerge. It is now time to look at such external aesthetic properties in detail.

II.2.2.2. Typology of External Aesthetic Properties

Göran Hermerén has proposed to distinguish five types of (external) aesthetic properties: "1) *emotion properties*; 2) *behavior properties*; 3) *gestalt properties*; 4) *taste properties*; 5) *affective properties*."[201] In this Section, I am going to rely on this proposal of classification and to analyze each category. Gestalt properties, i.e. properties like being balanced, unified, harmonious, chaotic, disorganized, etc., are clearly emergent from the perceivable non-aesthetic properties of an object. They are clearly properties of the object, although they are not reducible to its non-aesthetic properties, either primary or secondary. Insofar as the

[201] HERMERÉN 1988, p.106.

objectivity of external aesthetic properties is concerned, gestalt properties are considered the least problematic of the external aesthetic properties.[202]

Terms for behavior properties become aesthetic when used metaphorically. For, literally they describe the behavior of human beings, which might be brave, bold, vehement, etc. A bold coloration is a coloration that is metaphorically bold. The property of being (metaphorically) bold is a property of the object (the coloration), which emerges from its perceivable non-aesthetic properties. Emotion and affective properties are divided by a subtle line. Emotion properties are properties like being merry, sad, sentimental, etc. As in the case of behavior properties, the terms denoting emotion properties become aesthetic only when used metaphorically: a picture, as Goodman has shown, cannot be literally sad, but can be sad in a metaphorical way.[203] Now, the peculiarity of emotion properties is that they do not require the participation of the perceiving subject: I notice that the picture is a sad picture without becoming sad myself. Being metaphorically sad is a property of the object, not of my own mood. It emerges from the perceivable non-aesthetic properties of the object.

The case of affective properties is different. At first sight, these look like emotion properties. They comprehend properties like being moving, being funny, or being shocking. The main difference is that they imply the participation of the perceiving subject. To be plain: the movie could not be funny if nobody laughed when watching it. In a recent paper, Alfonso Ottobre has highlighted the strong subjective component of these properties and has cast some doubts on them.[204] I claim outright that they are not external aesthetic properties. When I utter the sentence: "This movie is funny" it looks as if the object, i.e. the movie, possessed an external aesthetic property. But what this sentence actually says is that *I* have fun while watching the movie. Thus, to be precise I should say: "Watching this movie makes me have fun." Now, having fun is a complex psychological property, not an aesthetic property. In order to have fun, I need to grasp the *meaning* of words, actions, or representations and to understand their implications. The property of being funny does not describe the way an object *appears* to me: semantic analysis rather than perception of appearances is namely presupposed.[205]

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[202] See OTTOBRE 2003, p.93.

[203] GOODMAN 1968/76, pp.50-51: "A picture literally possesses a gray color, really belongs to the class of gray things; but only metaphorically does it possess sadness or belong to the class of things that feel sad."

[204] OTTOBRE 2003, pp.93-95.

[205] It is noteworthy to remark that Hermerén himself treats affective properties differently from all other aesthetic properties. While the latter are defined in terms of the way an object *looks* to the perceiving observer, aesthetic affective qualities are defined in terms of the reaction the object is supposed to elicit in the perceiving subject: "X has A (e.g. is moving), only if X has such properties that anyone with a certain background contemplating X under standard conditions and notices [sic] these qualities will have or experience *a* (be moved), or would be disposed to experience *a*." (HERMERÉN 1988, p.121). Correspondingly, the meaning of "X is funny" is "Someone is (or would be) amused by X." (See

To illustrate this point, notice the difference between the non-aesthetic affective property of being funny and the external aesthetic emotion property of looking funny: a face might look funny without implying that I have fun while looking at it. The predicate "is funny-looking" denotes the way in which the object (the face in our example) *appears* to me. Indeed, the property of being funny-looking emerges from the perceivable non-aesthetic properties of the object. As such, it is a property of the object, not of my mood – it is an external aesthetic property of the object. Instead, the predicate 'is funny' denotes the fact that some people have fun upon engaging with the object in question. The property of being funny does not emerge from the perceptible non-aesthetic properties of the object, but – if it is possible to speak of emergence in this case – from its semantic properties. Therefore, it is not an external aesthetic property.

There remain taste properties such as being elegant, picturesque, kitschy, or refined.[206] The problem felt by many philosophers with taste properties is that they presuppose cultural standards (including artistic ones) and seem thus to be subjective rather than objective.[207] I think that this worry is misplaced, as it is not a feature unique to taste properties to presuppose such cultural standards. With the exception (maybe) of gestalt properties, which seem to emerge from the non-aesthetic properties of an object in virtue of our anthropological set-up, all other external aesthetic properties presuppose cultural standards.[208] Consider a behavior property such as being bold. It is already culture-dependent which behavior is bold, and even more so when a color is to be metaphorically bold. Orange at a Christian funeral is felt to be a bold color, but this is due to the Christian understanding of funeral contexts and of what is allowed within such contexts. The same can be said of emotion properties. Although our discernment of a sad man is anthropologically determined, it is culture-dependent what color is felt to be metaphorically sad. In this respect, the property of being a sad or a bold color is not much different from the property of being an elegant color: they all presuppose cultural standards.

The worry concerning taste properties is very likely due to the fact that they cannot be defined in non-aesthetic terms. Whereas I can explain what a bold color is by referring to a bold behavior, I cannot explain what an elegant color is in non-aesthetic terms. Instead, I will have to make use of other external aesthetic properties, including other taste properties such

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HERMERÉN 1988, pp.119-120). It seems to me that, if at all, the object possesses a *disposition* to make the perceiving subject experience some quality, but does not itself possess that quality.

[206] Traditionally, the property of being beautiful/ugly is also put into this category. There is, however, an important difference between taste properties and the property of being beautiful/ugly: while the first emerge from non-aesthetic properties of an object, the property of being beautiful/ugly is norm-dependent and of a higher order with respect to external aesthetic properties. See Section II.2.3.

[207] See OTTOBRE 2003, pp.99-103 for a description of the problem.

[208] But even the exception of gestalt properties could be doubted, as culture seems to be responsible for developing the capability to discern, say, the unity of a musical piece.

as gracefulness. The semantic relationships of taste properties to other external aesthetic properties dim the fact that they too emerge from the perceptible non-aesthetic properties of the object, and this is what makes people suspicious about them. Let me illustrate this point.

Frank Sibley has offered an example according to which the gracefulness of a vase depended on the way the stem bended.[209] Schwyzer has replied that when I want you to see the gracefulness of the vase I do not simply mention the non-aesthetic features of the vase, for these you have seen as well, so there is no point in repeating them.[210] What is relevant is rather to show *how* they bring about gracefulness: "Roughly, you did see that the stem curved downwards and outwards gradually; you did not see how gradually it curved."[211] Schwyzer claims that when I explain to you how gradually the vase's stem curves I am already engaging in aesthetic discourse: it is because of the *very gradual* way the stem curves that the vase is so graceful.[212] In other words, we could say that it is because of the *gentle* way the stem curves that the vase is so graceful, by so emphasizing that I am *already* engaging in aesthetic discourse. It would then seem that the gracefulness of the vase depends on the gentleness of the stem's bending rather than on the vase's perceivable non-aesthetic properties. However, I think that this conclusion is mistaken. That gentleness might bring about gracefulness is due to the semantic relationship between these two properties. Indeed, I cannot explain the meaning of "gracefulness" without recourse to other aesthetic properties. The property of being graceful is a property possessed by an object showing grace, and grace is a harmonic mixture of elegance, simplicity, charm, gentleness, etc. Thus, a stem that bends gently is certainly a strong reason to believe that the vase possessing it is graceful, but this is due to the semantic link between gentleness and gracefulness. On the other hand, a stem that bends in a violent way can hardly be a reason to believe that the vase possessing it is graceful, and this is due to the fact that gracefulness excludes violence from its semantic domain. As Sibley has pointed out, there are negative conditions for the application of aesthetic concepts.[213]

Jerrold Levinson has tried to argue for the emergence of some aesthetic properties from other aesthetic properties and against the thesis that there might be conceptual (and thus

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[209] SIBLEY 1959.
[210] SCHWYZER 1963. Cohen criticizes Schwyzer for sharing Sibley's assumption that there are aesthetic and non-aesthetic concepts (see COHEN 1973b). Although I agree with much of what Cohen says in his article, I do not share his suggestion that this distinction is superfluous. There are aesthetic concepts and they have to be distinguished from non-aesthetic ones: this is not the problem. The problem is rather to characterize them in the right way, which Sibley's theory does not. This is also Goldman's criticism of Cohen's article (see GOLDMAN 2001, pp.182-184).
[211] SCHWYZER 1963, p.75.
[212] SCHWYZER 1963, p.75.
[213] SIBLEY 1959, p.427: "If I am told that a painting in the next room consists solely of one or two bars of very pale blue and very pale grey set at right angles on a pale fawn ground, I can be sure that it cannot be fiery or gaudy or flamboyant." Casebier has pointed out that if there are negative conditions, then there are conditions and therefore Sibley's talk of aesthetic properties being non-condition governed is wrong. See CASEBIER 1973.

semantic) links between them. I strongly disagree with him. Consider the example he discusses, Mondrian's *Composition with Blue 1933*. He writes: "the light gray-blue background carries with it a certain airiness, the deep blue square a decided coolness. Further, the structural relationship of the two colors yields a sense of harmony. Finally, the configuration of four lines and square, in its particular proportions and positionings, makes for a notable degree of stability and balance. All these effects – the local airiness and coolness, the regional harmony, stability, and balance – somehow interact and coalesce, together perhaps with other structural features I have not explicitly singled out, to give the overarching impression of tranquility and strength noted initially."[214] Now, it seems to me that this example rather than supporting the thesis of the emergence of some external aesthetic properties from other external aesthetic properties supports the thesis that there are conceptual relationships among them. For, if the colors were heavy, somber, and disharmonious, I doubt that the general impression could have been described as one of tranquility. And if instead of the studied stability of the lines and balance of the painting's elements the structure had been loose and improvised, I doubt that Levinson could have spoken of the impression of strength.

Levinson is right in remarking how the aesthetic properties of the whole are determined by the aesthetic properties of the parts. This we could have observed in the previous example as well: the gracefulness of the *vase* is (at least partially) determined by the gentleness of the *stem*'s bending. What I criticize is that Levinson wants the gracefulness of the whole to *emerge* from the regional external *aesthetic* properties. I claim instead that there is a conceptual relationship between the external aesthetic properties of the whole and the external aesthetic properties of the parts. I think that Schwyzer is right in this respect: to make you see the gracefulness of the vase I have to point at the *gentle* way its stem bends. Had I pointed at the violent way the stem bended, you would have been lost: how could that possibly be determinant for the gracefulness of the vase? On the other hand, however, the gentleness of the stem's bending *emerges* from the non-aesthetic properties of the stem, namely on its gradual way of bending. There is indeed no necessary link between the perceptible non-aesthetic and the external aesthetic properties of the vase, but given our cultural standards and given the perceptible non-aesthetic properties of the vase, gentleness emerges from it.

The fact that cultural standards play a role not only in taste properties but, as I have claimed, in the emergence of most external aesthetic properties has led some philosophers into assuming that there are correct and incorrect cultural standards in looking at one and the same object. For instance, a dress that looked elegant in 1800 might look clumsy today, but the right standard to be adopted is the one that was valid in 1800.[215] But why should it not rather be that the dress is both elegant and clumsy, dependently on the standard chosen? It is

[214] LEVINSON 1990, pp.149-150.
[215] This is Zemach's position. See ZEMACH 1997.

certainly true that most artifacts were produced with the standards valid at the time and the place of their production in mind. But the injunction of historical and cultural accuracy seems to me too strong. There are areas of human activity, such as the fine arts, where it can be made plausible. But why should I embrace the cultural standards of 17th century fishermen in order to see their village as the cheap village they thought it resembled? Why should I give up my cultural standards that make of it a picturesque village? I think that both properties have to be accepted as external aesthetic properties of the village.

II.2.2.3. Disagreement About External Aesthetic Properties

I would like to conclude this section on external aesthetic properties by looking closely at why it is that different perceiving subjects can attribute different predicates for external aesthetic properties to one and the same object. This will lead us to the topic of the next section. Suppose that Betty and Patty are at the top of a mountain dominating the valleys, the city, and, far away, the sea. Betty claims to find the sight pleasing, while Patty does not. Patty has no reason to doubt that Betty is sincere and *vice versa*. It could be that they have different perceptions and sensibilities and therefore it could be that they are having altogether different experiences. But these things they can assume only after inquiring into the ways each of them considers the object at stake, i.e. the landscape, to be responsible for whatever they are feeling. And this they can do thanks to language. Specifically, Patty might ask Betty why she finds the sight pleasing. Betty might answer that it is the dramatic immensity and the dynamical structure of the landscape they are dominating that makes her enjoy the sight. Betty is now appealing to aesthetic terms ("dramatically immense" and "dynamic"), i.e. concepts that she shares with Patty. If Betty and Patty attached completely different meanings to aesthetic terms, discussion about aesthetic matters would be impossible. But this does not seem to be the case: if Betty claims that *O* is dynamic and Patty too claims that *O* is dynamic, then we take them to be in agreement upon *O*'s dynamism. We do not think that they are talking about different things they happen to call by the same term.

Some philosophers have held that in aesthetics radical disagreement is possible, i.e. that it is possible for Betty and Patty never to agree about aesthetic concepts. According to them, this is so because it is possible for Betty and Patty always to have different experiences, as their perception and their sensibility might be different. But how could they be in radical disagreement if they were not entitled to assume that they are using aesthetic terms in the same way? Betty and Patty can disagree upon *O*'s dynamicity if and only if they agree upon the meaning of "dynamic" and this they can verify if and only if they find at least one object

X that they both agree is dynamic. Thus, radical disagreement is impossible.[216] But limited disagreement is possible, and this is what we are looking at now.

Let us suppose that Patty grants to Betty that the landscape is dramatically immense, but she contests whether "dynamic" is the right word to describe its structure. Such disagreement might be due to: 1) the vagueness of the word, 2) a difference in processing the landscape's perceivable non-aesthetic properties. In other words, it might be, first, that the landscape constitutes a borderline case of dynamism: for Betty it is still a case of dynamism, while it is no longer one according to Patty. This first type of disagreement is hard to remove. In the second case, on the other hand, arguing is required. For what happens here is that Patty takes some perceivable non-aesthetic properties of the landscape to override the perceivable non-aesthetic properties that allow for calling it "dynamic." Thus, she will see other aesthetic properties emerge from the perceivable non-aesthetic properties of the landscape. Although Patty recognizes some elements of the landscape that would make it possible to call it dynamic, she judges that dynamism cannot be attributed to the landscape because other aesthetic properties prevail. For instance, she might acknowledge that the shape of the hills is dynamic, but she might also point out that the irregular urban development introduces such a fragmentation into the landscape that the dynamism of the hills is disrupted. This feature prevents her from attributing dynamism to the landscape.

Suppose that Patty's argument is convincing and that Betty agrees that lack of continuity makes it inappropriate to attribute dynamism to the landscape. Thus, Betty agrees with Patty that the landscape is fragmented and not united, but she still claims that she likes its sight. Patty then tries to formulate why it is that she does not like the landscape's sight and she points out that the landscape lacks a vital look, since the pine trees are mostly dead because of the pollution. Maybe Betty had not noticed the dead pine trees and therefore she was really talking about something else when she said that the sight was pleasing. But suppose that she had noticed them and that she finds something dramatically fascinating about the dead pine trees, which she likes very much. Whereas for Betty dramatic immensity, fragmentation, and desolation of the landscape are reasons for enjoying its sight, for Patty these are reasons for disliking it. At this point it is plain that they must have a different sensibility and what remains puzzling is the reason why this is so. In the next sections, I am going to enquire into this puzzle.

[216] I completely agree with Eddy Zemach on this point. See ZEMACH 1997, pp.47-48. See also CARROLL 1999, pp.194-195.

II.2.3. Meta-Aesthetic Properties

If for Betty dramatic immensity, fragmentation, and desolation of the landscape are reasons for enjoying its sight, it means that she is attaching to them a positive value: they contribute, according to Betty, to make the landscape aesthetically valuable. Patty, on the other hand, is evaluating two of those same aesthetic properties, namely fragmentation and desolation, in the opposite way: they are for her reasons to dislike the landscape and what makes the landscape aesthetically non-valuable. Now, in order to determine the aesthetic value of an object, one needs criteria for evaluating the external aesthetic properties it possesses. And the criteria are dictated by the *aesthetic norm* one is following, i.e. the norm that tells one how to evaluate an object's external aesthetic properties. Whereas for Patty landscapes ought to look vital, this norm is not binding for Betty, who is judging according to another aesthetic norm. Given Patty's aesthetic norm, a desolate landscape cannot be evaluated positively, inasmuch as its look does not fulfill her norm. Instead, the look of a luxuriant landscape fulfills her aesthetic norm and Patty ought to evaluate it positively. Now, if the object's look fulfills the aesthetic norm, it *ought* to be appreciated aesthetically. And an object that ought to be appreciated aesthetically is a *beautiful* object. Thus, a beautiful landscape according to Patty is a landscape that looks vital. It is for this reason that she claims that the landscape she and Betty are looking at is not a beautiful one.

As I have anticipated in Section II.2.2, the properties of being beautiful and of being ugly are meta-aesthetic properties: they depend on the evaluation of external aesthetic properties against an aesthetic norm. Thus, they are of higher order than external aesthetic properties. We can define the term "beautiful" as follows: *Something is beautiful iff it ought to be appreciated for its external aesthetic properties according to a given aesthetic norm*. On the other hand, *something is ugly iff its external aesthetic properties do not allow for appreciation according to a given aesthetic norm*. In the example discussed above, Betty and Patty had different norms for judging the external aesthetic properties of natural landscapes. For this reason they discerned different meta-aesthetic properties in the landscape. Notice that in front of a dress the norms they used for evaluating the landscape's external aesthetic properties will not help them evaluating whether the dress is a beautiful one or not.[217] Indeed, only objects that can be judged according to the same aesthetic norm can be compared as to their beauty.[218]

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[217] Indeed, I consider "beautiful" a logically attributive adjective *à la* Geach. See GEACH 1957.

[218] This presupposes, of course, the capacity to subsume an object under a type correctly, i.e. the capacity to recognize that this object is, say, *a urinal*, whereas this other object is *an artwork*. Some, like Kendall Walton, hold that depending upon the category that an object belongs to, the object possesses different external aesthetic properties (see WALTON 1970). If I mistakenly think that the cup on the table is a small vase, I will see the handle as a disturbing irregularity, whereas if I correctly recognize the object as being a cup, I will see the handle as a nice handle. I agree with all that inasmuch as this changes what the perceiving subject takes to be the perceivable non-aesthetic properties of the

We can, e.g., compare two mountains and judge which one is more beautiful than the other. Suppose that the normative framework adopted is one according to which a mountain ought to be sublime in order to be a beautiful mountain.[219] Suppose further that one mountain is very huge and powerful, while the other is huge and powerful to a lesser degree. Then, the first mountain will be more beautiful than the second one. The possibility of comparing objects according to one and the same aesthetic norm also makes it possible to revise aesthetic judgments: a mountain (*M1*) that seemed to me very beautiful at first, turns out to be only moderately beautiful upon comparison with another mountain (*M2*).

In Section II.2.1, I claimed that there is a factual link between meta-aesthetic properties and internal aesthetic properties but I did not have the means, yet, to explain it. In the next Section, I will finally explain it. Here, I would like to introduce the topic. The intimate relationship of the meta-aesthetic properties to the internal aesthetic ones comes to the surface in the ambiguity of the terms "beautiful" and "ugly" – an ambiguity that I have avoided by clearly stating that I was going to use these terms to denote meta-aesthetic properties. The ambiguity is due to two different uses of each term. Take the term "beautiful." According to one use, my liking the object aesthetically is a necessary condition for it to be beautiful, whereas according to the second use, the object's beauty is a necessary condition for my liking it aesthetically. As a matter of fact, when aesthetically judging objects we often assume we are following an allegedly private norm: "Whatever I like the sight of, is beautiful." If Betty and Patty were following this norm alone, they would not be able to talk about the beauty of the landscape. Betty would judge that the landscape is beautiful, Patty would be surprised and ask why, at which Betty would give a lapidary answer: "I like the sight of it." All Patty would be able to answer would be: "I find this landscape ugly. I do not like the sight of it." *De gustibus non disputandum est*, the dialogue is finished.

For some intriguing reason, however, human beings *can* talk about beauty. Maybe out of a desire to be able to feel a pleasure they cannot yet feel, or just in order to better understand why they feel what they feel, or maybe because they know that there is no really private

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object: in the first case, I perceive the object as possessing an excrescence, while in the second case I perceive it as possessing a handle (the same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for Walton's famous thought-experiment about Picasso's *Guernica* and the guernicas: if I mistakenly see the first as a guernica, I perceive it as being three-dimensional; seeing it as a painting, on the other hand, makes me perceive it as possessing a bi-dimensional surface with paint on it). However, recognizing that the object is an artwork does not mean seeing its perceivable non-aesthetic properties differently: as I will argue in Part II, Chapter 3, an object becomes an artwork by virtue of its relationships to art history and art theory. Such relationships do not affect the external aesthetic properties of the object, but only the way we evaluate them. In other words, if the cup on my table is an artwork, it will still have its nice handle, but whether this aesthetic feature contributes to the beauty of the artwork will have to be established according to a different aesthetic norm than the one valid for cups.

[219] I completely agree with Mary Mothersill that the sublime is not another aesthetic category next to beauty (see MOTHERSILL 1984, pp.241 ff.). I take the property of being sublime to be an external aesthetic property like the property of being elegant.

norm, they readily leave the sterile internal and private domain to step into the external and public one. All it takes is Patty asking Betty why it is that she likes the sight of the landscape, and Betty being willing to explore the reasons of her feeling what she feels. If Betty is able to clarify the external aesthetic properties she is seeing in the object, the normative framework can be worked out – it can be made public. As we have just seen in discussing the example of the landscape's sight, Betty finds out that dramatic immensity, fragmentation, and desolation of the landscape are reasons for her to enjoy its sight: they contribute, according to Betty, to make the landscape aesthetically valuable. Whereas for Patty landscapes ought to look vital (this is her aesthetic norm), for Betty this is not the norm establishing the criteria for a landscape to be beautiful. According to Betty (a French existentialist), landscapes' looks ought to enhance the feeling of alienation and senselessness of our terrestrial life. Thus, Betty's and Patty's criteria for judging the beauty of landscapes can be made *public*: they can be formulated and they can be adopted by all discussion partners, who are then in a position to judge whether it is justified to consider beauty or ugliness a meta-aesthetic property of the object. As Margaret Macdonald has claimed, aesthetic judgments are neither true nor false, but only justified or unjustified.[220]

So, for instance, Betty will agree with Patty that, looked from within her normative framework, the landscape they are looking at is ugly; in other words, she will recognize that it is justified to consider the meta-aesthetic property of being ugly a property of the landscape, given the normative framework of her friend and given the external aesthetic properties distinguished in the landscape. Conversely, Patty can agree with Betty that within her darkly existentialist normative framework, the landscape at stake is a beautiful one; in other words, she can recognize that given such a normative framework and given the external aesthetic properties distinguished in the landscape it is justified to judge the landscape beautiful.

At this point two things may happen which will enable me to give an account of the relationship of meta-aesthetic properties and internal aesthetic ones. First, Patty might recognize the beauty of the object according to Betty's norm but not enjoy the object's sight: "I agree that the landscape is beautiful according to your norm, but I still do not like the landscape's sight." Her not-enjoying the sight of the landscape is due to her not embracing the normative framework of Betty. She cannot accept that lifelessness and desolation be taken as positive aesthetic features of natural landscapes. Were she looking at a fictional natural landscape (as, for instance, in a movie), she might be more at ease with that framework.[221] But she cannot accept looking at a real natural landscape as if it were a fictional one. For Patty, a real natural landscape ought to show the signs of health and prosperity to be beautiful – this is her conviction.

[220] MACDONALD 1954, pp.120-122.
[221] In Part II, Chapter 3, I will explain why this is so.

However, Patty might on second thought start enjoying the sight of the desolate natural landscape. In this case, she has not only taken up her friend's normative framework for the sake of seeing through her friend's aesthetic lenses the landscape's beauty, but she has *accepted* that framework altogether. Thus, she not only *recognizes* that the landscape at stake fulfills the criteria set up by Betty's normative framework, but she also *enjoys* the landscape's sight: she appreciates it and thus takes pleasure in it. The next time she sees a desolate natural landscape, she will not claim that she does not like its sight: she will be pleased by it. Her sensibility has been changed.[222] Notice that in spite of her now different aesthetic response to the desolate landscape, her analysis of the landscape might remain unaltered: Patty can indeed point at exactly the same external aesthetic properties that previously supported her disliking, namely dramatic immensity, fragmentation, and desolation, as properties that now support her liking.

II.2.4. Changing One's Own Sensibility

There is, then, a relationship between accepting a new normative framework and changing one's own sensibility, between recognizing the beauty of an object and enjoying the object's sight; in short: between meta-aesthetic properties and internal aesthetic properties. It is thanks to such a relationship that we can *learn* to appreciate things: at first we really do not like those pointed shoes, but then we learn how to appreciate them, and we end up buying a pair. Learning how to aesthetically appreciate an object affects one's own sensibility, and the story comes full circle. We started out by the internal aesthetic properties, which belong to the perception of an object: "The sight of *O* is pleasing to me," or: "I like the sight of *O*." We remarked that from a private point of view I (the perceiving subject) can make of my likings the norm for judging an object beautiful: "Since I like the sight of *O*, *O* is beautiful." In this case, the beautiful object has value only for me: I cannot argue for its value because I do not have the means to make others see *O*'s beauty. But we also found that we can try (and that we do try, otherwise we would never discuss aesthetic matters) to understand why it is that I like the sight of *O*, and we came up with external aesthetic properties: "It is because of *O*'s elegance that I like the sight of *O*." Soon we realized that if it is because of *O*'s elegance that I like the sight of *O*, I must be holding a norm of this sort: "If *O* is elegant, then *O* is beautiful." The alleged private norm was actually hiding a public one, and it is through using this public

[222] Together with an evolution of one's sensibility there goes also a modification of the extension of the term "beautiful": from now on, Patty will count the desolate landscape as a beautiful landscape. This does not imply a modification of the intension of the term: "being beautiful" still means being something that ought to be appreciated for the aesthetic properties possessed.

aesthetic norm that I can make others recognize the beauty of an object and, hopefully, enjoy its sight.

As a matter of fact, when I first notice to like the object and then claim that the object must be beautiful, what I am forgetting is that I have *been taught* (or I have taught myself) how to recognize the object's beauty, i.e. to appreciate its external aesthetic properties. Indeed, by working out the normative framework that you use to evaluate *O*'s external aesthetic properties and by presenting it to me, you can teach me to see *O*'s beauty and, eventually, enjoy its sight. Aesthetic discourse is a discourse that opens us up to confrontation with other points of view, with new ways of looking at the world and of enjoying it. Language is, in other words, what opens up the internal dimension to the external world and *vice versa*.

Suppose that Betty tells to Patty that *O* is beautiful because it is elegant. Patty could, of course, disagree with Betty about *O* being elegant. This disagreement is, as we have seen in Paragraph II.2.2.3 either a disagreement about borderline cases, as aesthetic terms are vague, or a disagreement due to a different way of processing the perceptible non-aesthetic properties of the object: for Patty the elements that Betty lists as being responsible for *O*'s elegance are overridden by other elements. Let us now suppose that Patty indeed agrees that *O* is elegant. She could still disagree with Betty on the norm to judge *O*'s beauty. Although she recognizes that, were she to accept Betty's norm, it would be right to consider *O* beautiful and hence to appreciate its sight, she cannot accept that norm: according to her, from *O*'s elegance its beauty does not follow.[223]

Disagreement about the norm for judging the external aesthetic properties of *O* digs deep into one's own sensibility, which is shaped, among other things, by our beliefs: Patty's sensibility, e.g., is shaped by beliefs about natural landscapes according to which a natural landscape ought to be and to look healthy. Notice that the aesthetic norm: "Landscapes ought to look healthy" is supported by a moral belief: "Landscapes ought to *be* healthy, for we have the duty towards future generations to preserve the planet." These beliefs make Patty unable to appreciate the landscape for the "dramatic fascination" of the dead pines, as her friend had put it. The most Patty can do is recognize that, if she accepted Betty's normative framework, she would enjoy the sight of the landscape. However, she cannot accept that framework. Therefore, she can only recognize the landscape's beauty according to Betty's framework without enjoying the landscape's sight: beauty and likings do not need to overlap.

In order to remove a disagreement about norms, it is crucial to have not only the willingness to put on different aesthetic lenses to look at the world from a new point of view,

[223] I think that these two forms of disagreement, namely disagreement on the external aesthetic properties, and disagreement on the normative framework chosen, might provide an account of why it is that testimony often fails in aesthetics. I wish to thank Robert Hopkins for pointing out to me this problem (see his analysis in HOPKINS 2000).

but also the *possibility* to do so: if some beliefs are too strong, one will not be able to override them. My account is able to explain why in real life (as we will see in Part II, Chapter 3, the fine arts are different in this respect) we do not manage to embrace some aesthetic norms. At the same time, my account guarantees value-neutrality of external aesthetic properties. This seems to me an advantage of this account over others, where preconceptions about what brings about beauty and what brings about ugliness play an important role.

According to Guy Sircello, for instance, properties of qualitative degree (PQD) such as "vivid" are the key to understanding beauty.[224] Sircello claims that an object is beautiful if it possesses PQDs in high degree. Thus, the more vivid a meadow's greenness is, the more beautiful the meadow is. The puzzling thing about this theory is: who decides that the meadow has to be very vividly green in order to be beautiful? Sircello is clearly playing with commonplaces. Most of us will agree that a very vividly green meadow is a beautiful meadow, but this is because we share the same normative framework for judging a meadow's beauty: it is not because a meadow's beauty could not be differently determined. Suppose that a person utterly dislikes green for reasons a psychiatrist ought to work out: to that person, the more vividly green the meadow is, the more ugly it is. Sircello is *a priori* deciding what brings about beauty and what not, relying on commonsensical ways to judge objects' beauty. For that reason he excludes from the PQDs relevant for beauty properties of deficiencies and defects. "Desolate" is one such property; according to Sircello, a landscape possessing it to a very high degree must necessarily be ugly. But this seems to me preposterous: a desolate landscape can be aesthetically appreciated, e.g. by adopting Betty's normative framework. My account, then, does not attach a value to an external aesthetic property: the property of being desolate can both bring about beauty and ugliness – it all depends on the normative framework chosen.

On the other hand, my account is also able to explain why in real life the property of being desolate usually brings about ugliness, namely by pointing at the fact that the aesthetic norms are conditioned by other non-aesthetic beliefs, such as moral ones. Since a desolate landscape is a dying landscape, i.e. something that we had better avoid, we *ought not* to appreciate it aesthetically. And, indeed, most of us judge it ugly and dislike it. But this is so not by virtue of the external aesthetic property itself, but rather because of the fact that the aesthetic norm is conditioned by other beliefs. As a matter of fact, as soon as we move in the fictional reality of art, where, as I will argue, practical concerns no longer condition the acceptance of an aesthetic norm, we are entitled to appreciate – and we do appreciate – a represented desolate landscape. Thus, being desolate must not imply being ugly. Indeed, Sircello remarks that in some cases it is hard to tell whether an (external) aesthetic property

[224] SIRCELLO 1975, pp.39-43.

counts as a virtue or as a defect. For instance, he notices that regularity in French gardens is a virtue, while it is a defect in English gardens.[225] This is indeed an interesting remark. Unfortunately, Sircello does not draw from it the conclusion that must follow: namely, that what has to be regarded as "virtue" and "defect" is not encoded in the property itself, but depends on the normative framework chosen.[226] The most that can be said is that there are *typical* associations of external aesthetic properties to meta-aesthetic properties, but this is simply due to the diffused acceptance of similar aesthetic norms.[227]

Accounting for beauty in normative terms and linking the acceptance of such norms to the *corpus* of norms and beliefs one entertains and which shapes one's sensibility not only explains why liking and beauty are so intimately connected in spite of their being clearly distinct, but also how it is possible to learn to like things one did not like before. If I can enjoy the sight of an object, it means that I have accepted the aesthetic norm required for appreciating its external aesthetic properties. But in order to accept a new normative framework, I have to change my sensibility and therefore my likings. The willingness to explore new aesthetic norms opens up a door for enjoying objects whose beauty I would otherwise have dismissed. This is a key intuition that underlies the development of the fine arts, as I will show in Part II, Chapter 3.

II.2.5. Final Considerations

In this chapter, I have developed a theory of aesthetic appreciation that relies on a careful distinction of the aesthetic properties and on the analysis of their relationships. We have seen how internal aesthetic properties lead to the process of aesthetically analyzing an object. The fact that I like (or dislike) the object's sight is what pushes me into investigating what external aesthetic properties of the object I think are responsible for my spontaneous positive (or negative) aesthetic response to it. By further reflecting about the reasons why those external aesthetic properties are considered responsible for my liking (or disliking) the object's sight, we discovered the aesthetic norm hidden within our sensibility that determines the positive (or negative) aesthetic response to the object's sight. We have seen that these aesthetic norms can be made public and accessible to others, and that it is because of this

[225] SIRCELLO 1975, pp.57-58.
[226] Sircello is of course not alone in associating positive or negative aesthetic values to (external) aesthetic properties. Marcia Freedman, for instance, has characterized aesthetic properties as value-tending to the effect that possession, say, of the property of being garish constitutes a reason to call a painting "bad" (FREEDMAN 1968). Again, I do not see why this has to be so: if the painting at stake is an Analytical-Cubist painting the property of being garish might constitute a reason to call it "bad," but if it is a Fauvist painting it will rather count towards its beauty.
[227] There also are typical associations of non-aesthetic properties to external aesthetic ones, which Sibley has pointed out. See SIBLEY 1959, pp.427-429.

mechanism that it is possible for our sensibility to evolve and for each of us to learn to aesthetically appreciate objects towards which we felt aesthetic dislike or indifference. In the next chapter, I am going to analyze the fine arts as a special domain of aesthetic appreciation. My intuition is that the fine arts are a sort of game with aesthetic norms, a laboratory for developing new aesthetic lenses through which to look at the world.

Part II, Chapter 3

The Aesthetic Game of Art

As I have anticipated in Part II, Chapter 1, my thesis is that art is an activity pursuing the goal of aesthetic appreciation. In Part II, Chapter 2, I have clarified what I mean by "aesthetic appreciation." In this chapter, I will provide evidence for the thesis that aesthetic appreciation is the goal of art. Since according to my account of aesthetic appreciation there is no restriction as to the aesthetic properties that can be aesthetically appreciated (both a desolate and a luxuriant landscape can be appreciated aesthetically), my account of art is not limited to objects possessing specific external aesthetic properties. As I have mentioned in the General Introduction, other definitions of art in which aesthetic appreciation played a key role suffered such a defect. Monroe Beardsley's seminal work in aesthetics, for instance, had that drawback, inasmuch as Beardsley characterized aesthetic experience as a function of the unity, intensity, and complexity of the object, to the effect that "noises, bird songs, and orchestra's tuning up" cannot be musical artworks, as they lack those properties.[228] As a matter of fact, noises, bird songs, and orchestra's tuning up have been turned into musical artworks and there is no reason why they cannot be appreciated aesthetically. My account of art in terms of aesthetic appreciation is able to deal with such cases.

I will show, first, how the possibility of art depends on creating a peculiar distance from real life and its concerns. Second, I will show how, given such a distance, aesthetic norms can and do play a key role in the fine arts. Third, I will argue for the superiority of a functional definition of art, which I build up around the goal of aesthetic appreciation. Fourth, I will provide support for the necessity to seek the link to art history, which, as we will see, is also an essential part of my definition. Fifth, I will look into the history of the concept of art in order to defend the claim that a philosopher of art trying to define the concept of art in the classificatory sense does not need to worry about, say, medieval icons. Final considerations will close up this chapter.

II.3.1. The Safety Area

As we have seen in Part II, Chapter 2, the possibility of aesthetic appreciation relies upon two fundamental ingredients: there being an intelligent sensitive being *P* (a person, for instance), and an object *O* to be perceived. The possibility of aesthetic appreciation relies on

[228] BEARDSLEY 1958, p.64.

the interaction between *P* and *O*: *P* must feel something upon perception of *O*, on the basis of which she can then qualify the perception as "pleasing" or "unpleasing." Challenged as to understanding why it is that she feels what she feels, she might try to qualify the features of *O* that she thinks are responsible for her feeling pleasure upon perceiving the object. In doing so, she realizes that she is following an aesthetic norm *A*, which makes, say, of *O*'s elegance a point in favor of its beauty and therefore a reason for her liking *O*'s sight. If challenged further, *P* will have to acknowledge that she follows *A* because of related beliefs she entertains.

Consider again this case: Patty accepts as valid the aesthetic norm *A1*: "Landscapes ought to look healthy." If asked why, she might reply: "Because landscapes that look healthy are probably *de facto* healthy and being a healthy mountain is a good thing as it is our responsibility to preserve the planet for future generations." Thus, *A1* is justified by a moral belief *M1*, namely that it is a good thing for landscapes to be healthy. Acceptance of *A1* depends on belief in *M1* and the latter is a matter of morals. Because of *M1*, Patty will not accept *–A1*: "Landscapes ought to look sick" and therefore she will not enjoy the sight of a sick-looking, desolate landscape. Consider another example: Betty accepts as valid the aesthetic norm *A2*: "This year, shoes ought to look pointed." If asked why, she might answer: "Well, for a change. Monotony ought to be avoided; it is bad for people's mood." Betty is offering a hedonistic justification *Y* for accepting *A2* as a valid aesthetic norm. Acceptance of *A2* depends upon believing in the necessity of *Y*. Again, moral considerations might question the legitimacy of the specific way such hedonistic needs are taken care of: it could be conceded that monotony is a bad thing for people's moods, but it could also be questioned whether this fact justifies throwing away entire wardrobes every year just for a change.

In Part II, Chapter 2, we noticed a split dividing *recognition* of beauty, and factual *appreciation* of the external aesthetic properties of an object due to the possibility that one does not accept an aesthetic normative framework because it collides with other beliefs that she entertains. In the two examples just discussed, I have tried to resume that point again. Because Patty believes in *M1*, she accepts *A1* and she is unable to accept *–A1*; on the other hand, acceptance of *A2* depends upon believing in the necessity of *Y* and this in turn depends on disregarding moral considerations of the sort imagined. In real life, acceptance of aesthetic norms is in the end conditioned by what we believe are our moral responsibilities.

Now, suppose that we decided to create a "safety area" in which acceptance of an aesthetic norm is no longer conditioned by practical concerns. Suppose, in other words, that we create a dimension in which Patty does not have to feel bad for appreciating sick-looking landscapes, because she has the guarantee that appreciation of sick-looking landscapes does not imply betraying *M1*. It is as if someone told her: "Just do not worry about that. Put on these aesthetic glasses and look at the world through them." This would be an interesting area

for aesthetic experimentation… But what would convince Patty that she does not have to worry? I think that the key point is knowledge that the landscape at stake is not a real one. Upon knowing that she is confronting a fictional landscape, Patty no longer feels an obstacle to appreciating it for its desolately sick look. The attempt at creating such a "safety area," i.e. an area detached from real life in an important way, is, I claim, a necessary condition for the invention of the fine arts.

The fine arts are a sort of game, in which one party (the artists) presents objects that the other party (the public) is asked to judge aesthetically, on condition that the objects presented are not invading real life – which is not to say that they cannot make us reflect *about* real life, but this is another story.[229] Whatever the means chosen to make art, the presented artwork has to remain within the "safety area." Even if real human beings constitute the object to be aesthetically evaluated, conventions must signalize that what they do is not real: for instance, they have to signalize that the staged killing is not real. There is a silent agreement between artists and public: what the first do and the second are asked to evaluate aesthetically is not going to leave the "safety area." Thus, when an artist invites the public to assist at her performance and kills herself there, she betrays the silent agreement. Moral considerations questioning the limits of art are therefore perfectly justified in such cases.[230] The "safety area" is certainly signalized by conventions, or, as Dickie has put it, by the Institutional settings. But the limits of its extension are more subtly determined, particularly in terms of suspension of moral responsibility.

Within the "safety area" Patty ought to be free to judge aesthetically the work according to the normative framework proposed by the artist. This does not mean that she has to forget all her other beliefs, but rather that she needs to subordinate them to the goal of aesthetic appreciation. In other words, Patty has to recognize that the represented landscape is desolate and that in real life this would be a reason for her to find it horrible. But this recognition has to be subordinated under aesthetic concerns: art historical considerations aside (which we will consider later on), the question she has to answer is namely how well the external aesthetic properties of the artwork manage to create the impression of desolation and maybe even to provoke the spectator's active desire to fight against such landscapes becoming reality. As a matter of fact, a political artist might want the spectator to end up agreeing with her political views, but this is not the reason why her artwork is to be appreciated: rather, it is in virtue of the external aesthetic properties and of their facility in fulfilling the artist's set goal. Consider this passage written by Arthur Danto, which illustrates very well this issue:

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[229] An artwork might very well have a moral or political meaning that makes us reflect and that will affect our life. But, as I explain below, as an artwork it is not valued because of its moral value.

[230] In recent times, Jean Clair has revived the problem of the modern and contemporary artist's dismissal of her moral responsibilities. See CLAIR 1997.

> "We may cry at a representation of a mother's despair at the death of a child, but it would be hardhearted who just wept at the correspondent reality; the thing is to comfort and console. What I wish to say, then, is that there are *two orders of aesthetic response*, depending upon whether the response is to an artwork or to a mere real thing that cannot be told apart from it."[231]

I take the expression "aesthetic response" to mean the response to external aesthetic properties. Now, as a matter of fact, the external aesthetic properties of the fictional and of the real mother, assuming that they "cannot be told apart" and that therefore are type-identical as to their perceptible non-aesthetic properties, are just the same: in both cases the woman will look desperate, her cries will sound terrifying, her look will be anguished. Certainly Danto is right in saying that I ought to respond differently to such aesthetic properties: but in the case of the real scene this is not a matter of *aesthetic* response. It is rather due to my knowing that the woman does not only look desperate, but *really is* desperate. Knowing this, I am not allowed to give up my moral responsibility: as a matter of fact, I ought to *disregard* the aesthetic properties and move to action, i.e. try to comfort this mother. This is not an aesthetic response, but a *moral* one. In the case of the artwork, on the other hand, I am entitled not to respond morally. This does not mean that I am not supposed to recognize the sadness and tragedy of the situation, or even, suppose, its unfairness. Rather, recognizing the sadness, tragedy, and unfairness of the situation is relevant in order to evaluate how well the aesthetic properties of the representation manage to create the impression of sadness, tragedy, and unfairness. For what I am required to do with artworks is to evaluate them *aesthetically*.

II.3.2. Ontologically Constitutive Aesthetic Norms

Suppose that Patty stands in front of a Fauvist landscape painting *F*. She does not like it. The colors are too garish. The landscape is not realistic. The paint is grossly applied. According to her own aesthetic norm, landscape paintings ought to represent the landscape realistically, with the colors just as they are in nature, and the paint ought to be put on the canvas in regular, perfectly smooth and uniform layers. *F* is an ugly painting, Patty concludes. Shall we let her go with this belief? Shall we not inform her that she has not gotten the point of *F*? That she has evaluated it according to the wrong aesthetic norm? Shall we not tell her that art does not make sense if one is not prepared to accept the aesthetic norms set by the

[231] DANTO 1981, pp.94-95. My italics.

artist? That art is like a laboratory for experiencing new aesthetic lenses and the fun lies in trying them out?[232]

As Helen Knight already pointed out half a century ago, one needs to know what the artist was aiming at in order to aesthetically evaluate her work.[233] Of course, we cannot penetrate into the head of the artist to understand her intentions. And this is not even necessary. For what counts is what we, on the basis of the evidence we have (the artwork *in primis*), reconstruct as being the aesthetic norm that guided the artist: this is what art-critics and art-historians do. Art theories are reconstructions of aesthetic normative frameworks that supposedly guided the artist in the production of her art. Knowledge of such theories is therefore required for putting on the *right* lenses to look at the artwork.[234] In the fine arts there are indeed right and wrong ways to look at an artwork, and there are attributions of meta-aesthetic properties that are simply wrong.[235] For instance, Patty's judgment of *F* as ugly was wrong, as she did not put on the right lenses to look at it.

As a matter of fact, Patty ought to learn more about Fauvism to be able to aesthetically evaluate *F*. She ought to know, among other things, that the Fauves were aiming at reproducing the violent way in which the (mainly Southern) landscape affected them, and that they did not care for the way it looked. The garishness of the colors, the strong gesture in applying the paint, and the neglect of realism are all means used to reach that goal. Only once Patty knows this is she in a position to aesthetically evaluate and to appreciate *F* – because only then she is in a position to answer to the right question, namely: "Does *F* successfully express the violence of the impression that the Southern landscape made upon the artist?" If it does not, Patty will not be able to recognize *F* as a beautiful Fauvist painting. If it does, then she will be able to recognize *F*'s beauty.

To stick to the Fauvist example, then, the normative framework the Fauves have been following was something like this: "Fauvist art (painting) ought to be figurative but not mimetic: it ought to represent the world not as we see it but in the violent way we experience it." This is certainly an aesthetic norm: it gives instructions as to how the aesthetic properties of a Fauvist painting have to be evaluated. A Fauvist painting in which the colors are pale and in which the paint is put on the canvas in smooth, uniform layers that confer to the representation calm and peacefulness has to be judged a bad one, for according to the normative framework it is the *violence* of the world experience that ought to be represented.

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[232] In the paper he delivered at the 2004 SIFA conference in Genoa, Stefano Velotti spoke of art as a "workshop of norms" ("*officina di norme*"), although he did not mean only *aesthetic* norms. Thus, Velotti and I agree on the normative dimension of art, but we disagree on the sort of norms involved.

[233] KNIGHT 1954.

[234] KNIGHT 1954, p.157: "Without historical and technical training we do not know what artists are aiming at, and accordingly are ignorant of a great many criteria."

[235] Thus, in the arts, Zemach's talk of standard observation conditions makes more sense. See ZEMACH 1997, pp.49-53.

But the Fauvist normative framework not only prescribes how Fauvist art ought to look, as in the case of the landscape discussed above, where the aesthetic norm: "Landscapes ought to look healthy" did prescribe how landscapes ought to *look*. The Fauvist normative framework also prescribes what Fauvist art ought to *be*: it ontologically constitutes Fauvist art.

In the art, aesthetic norms are constantly turned into norms ontologically constituting art. Such ontologically constituting aesthetic norms are *art norms*. There can be no art unrelated to art norms, because the game consists exactly in setting the aesthetic task and trying to achieve it with the final goal to be successful at that, and having the public exclaim: "How marvelous!"[236] Art is nothing else than what is produced within the safety area for the sake of aesthetic appreciation along the lines artificially established by art norms.[237] And acceptance of art norms is determined by art historical considerations.

Indeed, the art game is entrenched in history and both the proposal and the acceptance of an art norm depend upon art-historical considerations. One cannot propose an art norm out of the blue otherwise her art norm will not be recognized as such. If one cannot find reasons for accepting an art norm at time *t*, she will reject it. This is why *Fountain* could not have been an artwork in 1800. And this also explains why, when in 1905 the paintings of the Fauves were first exhibited at the *Salon d'Automne* in Paris, the reaction was very hostile.[238] As a matter of fact, the name "Fauves" has been given by Vauxcelles, an art critic who dubbed the room where the paintings of the Fauves were hanging the "*cage aux fauves*," i.e. the wild beasts' cage. Vauxcelles categorically refused the new art norm proposed by the Fauves and he kept

[236] This is a reference to Walton's paper: "How Marvelous! Toward a Theory of Aesthetic Value" (WALTON 1993). As I will show below, Walton's views about aesthetic appreciation are very much like mine. It ought to be remarked that Gallie had already pointed out that "the word 'art' is most usefully employed, not as a descriptive term standing for certain indictable properties, but as an appraisive term accrediting a certain kind of achievement" (GALLIE 1956, p.111), where such achievements depend on the theoretical view applied (*ibid*. p.113).

[237] Daniel Scheidegger defends a view in many respects similar to mine (SCHEIDEGGER 2000). He claims that artworks would not exist if there were no theory of art (*ibid.*, p.23), by which he understands a normative theory (a manifest in a broad sense) that among other things tells the artist what is the task she has to fulfill (*ibid*., p.35). I agree with him that artworks could not exist without such art theories (or art norms), but I think that this fact has to be explained. As I will argue below, artworks could not exist without art theories because, in the first place, they could not be *conceived* as artworks without them. In order to conceive an artwork, one must possess a concept of art. Grasping the concept of art implies, among other things, making sense of why art theories play such fundamental role in the making of art. My account of the concept of art is able to explain such fundamental role of art theories.

[238] Notice that the two cases are different. If an artist proposes an art norm that cannot be recognized as such, her work will be discounted as non-art. This is why *Fountain* could not have been art in 1800. On the other hand, if an artist proposes an art norm that is recognized as such but is disapproved of, her work will be regarded as bad art. This is what happened to the Fauves. I believe that the first sort of cases cannot happen *de facto*, inasmuch as no art norm can be proposed as such that cannot be recognized as an art norm. In other words, *Fountain* could not have been proposed as an artwork in 1800 just because nobody (including the artist) could have proposed as an art norm the art norm required for proposing *Fountain* as an artwork: it was an art-historical impossibility.

looking at their paintings as he looked at previous paintings.[239] The crucial role of art history is not only to record the art norms accepted by the artistic community over time, but also and foremost to reconstruct the discursive logic underlying their succession and reflecting their entrenchment in the general historical framework. It is because of this discursive development of art norms that it is possible to propose new art norms and to justify the acceptance of a new art norm.

As we have seen in Part I, Chapter 2, Arthur Danto dismissed the role of art history for a definition of art. And Gerhard Seel took up Danto's thesis of the end of art history inasmuch as he believes that art history is the history of a misunderstanding and that art does not need it in order to be. We remarked that both philosophers mistakenly understood art history as the history of progress, whereas art history is not such a history. It is rather the chronicle of the art theoretical discourse taking place over and in the centuries – a discourse that has a logic, which, indeed, makes it possible to propose and to justify the acceptance of a new art norm. Since he neglects the logical dimension of art history, Seel is bound to attribute the switch from one style to the next to arbitrariness.[240] In this respect his position is very akin to that of Kendall Walton, but there are important differences too.

I am on Walton's side inasmuch as he sees the fine arts as a game in which the tasks or goals determined by the art norms are those which enable us to evaluate whether the artwork is aesthetically successful and ought to be appreciated for what the artist has been able to achieve.[241] Seel too has an understanding of art as a game the goal of which is the pleasure of aesthetic appreciation.[242] However, he seems to understand something else by "aesthetic appreciation." To begin with, he claims that "art, or better, *the way of engaging in art* is a sort of game."[243] But art and the way of engaging in art are two different things: so, two sorts of

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[239] Actually, Vauxcelles must have been a quite dull critic, as not only the Fauves got their name from him: the Cubists did as well. When he saw the paintings exhibited by Braque in 1908, he disdainfully said that they were nothing but representations of cubes. From then on, the movement whose leaders were Braque and Picasso was known as "Cubism."

[240] Seel actually recognizes a limitation to proposing new styles: they have to be interesting enough in order not to become boring right away (SEEL 2003, p.390). And a style is interesting enough if it proposes "an interesting task, if it sets an interesting problem for which there can be many interesting and original solutions" (*ibid*, my translation). This seems to me at most an explanation of why some styles last longer than others, but not a limitation to proposing them. The first monochrome painting did not open up lots of possible solutions. Nevertheless, it was not only historically justified to propose monochrome painting, but also highly significant from an art historical point of view.

[241] WALTON 1993, p.504: "Aesthetic value arguably consists in a capacity to elicit in appreciators pleasure of a certain kind, pleasurable experiences (or experiences of enjoyment, satisfaction, gratification?). But unlike some pleasures produced by hot showers and walks around the block, "aesthetic" pleasures include the pleasure of finding something valuable, of admiring it. One *appreciates* the work."

[242] Seel has repeatedly argued for the thesis that pleasure is the goal of art; see SEEL 1984, SEEL, 2003, SEEL *forth*. In the following, I will mostly rely on SEEL 2003, which is not the last published but the last written paper by Seel.

[243] SEEL 2003, p.388: "die Kunst oder besser der Umgang mit Kunst [ist] eine Art von Spielen." My translation and my italics.

games must be at stake. Indeed, on the one hand, Seel holds that the production of art is like a game, since within a style there are rules to follow and goals to be achieved.[244] On the other hand, he claims that artworks serve as toys for the spectator, who plays games with them.[245] I could agree with that if the spectator's game would consist in analyzing, say, a painting, in order to be able to appreciate the *artist*'s achievement. But Seel does not seem to be saying this. In an ambiguous sentence, he writes: "what *we* enjoy in the arts is, like in games, the experience of *our* faculty to overcome self-set difficulties, to master self-set tasks."[246] Whose faculty is he speaking of? Since he later speaks of those enjoying art as spectators playing games with artworks, he must be speaking of the faculty of those engaging in the fine arts (i.e. the spectators), inasmuch as the "we" at the beginning of the sentence must be referring to the spectators.[247] But what difficulties does the spectator have to overcome? What self-set tasks does she have to master?

It seems to me that mine and Walton's positions, according to which it is the *artist's* achievements that the spectator is asked to appreciate, is more plausible in this respect than Seel's. However, I disagree with Walton that the goals set by the artists are arbitrary. Like Seel, Walton does not recognize the importance of the art historical logic.[248] For instance, the fact that artists have had to produce mimetic representations has been, according to Walton, an arbitrarily set goal. Thus, he writes: "We might admire an artist's skill in painting bubbles convincingly, and take pleasure in admiring it, whether or not we think convincingly painted bubbles are themselves a good thing (aesthetically good or good in some other way)."[249] Here is where I think that Walton has completely overlooked the art historical relevance of art theories and the crucial role of art history for the art game.

When I aesthetically appreciate an artwork for the artist's ability to realistically paint bubbles, I am not only appreciating the artist's capability to fulfill any goal whatsoever, but also the fact that her ability is serving an art-historically relevant goal. And such relevance is not arbitrary, but intimately connected to culture. In the Renaissance, the value of mimetic representation was to be understood in relationship to the value that the whole ancient world had gained in the eyes of the cultivated people. In the Seventies of the last century, on the other hand, hyper-realistic representation had a value because it reflected on the relationship of illusion and reality, two spheres that in the mass-culture of television and of omnipresent images had dangerously begun to merge. The immediate goals set within the art game are not

[244] SEEL 2003, p.388.
[245] SEEL 2003, p.392.
[246] SEEL 2003, pp.389-390: "Was wir in der Kunst geniessen, ist, wie beim Spiel, die Erfahrung unseres Vermögens, selbstgesetzte Schwierigkeiten zu überwinden, selbstgesetzte Aufgaben zu meistern." My translation and my italics.
[247] SEEL 2003, p.392.
[248] WALTON 1993, pp.506-508.
[249] WALTON 1993, p.507.

arbitrary, as Walton claims. They have a bearing on the actual world, for the artworld is intrinsically connected to the general cultural background (which includes, *nota bene*, also the past and present fine arts). The goals set by the art norms must be historically relevant, and so must be the proposed way to reach them. As Noël Carroll has shown, we try to make sense of new art in terms of repetition, amplification, or repudiation of previous art.[250] If it is not possible to set new art in a discursive relationship to what we already know as art and partially constitutes our cultural background, there is no way to evaluate it. Why this is so is something that I will explain in the next Section.

Developing an art norm that is art historically relevant is what makes the game intellectually challenging. The quarrel that took place around a painting by Caspar David Friedrich is revealing of the dimension of such a challenge, as we will see in Part III, Chapter 1. Art theories, which are nothing other than reconstructions and explicit formulations of art norms followed by artists, and art history are necessary to determine what can be accepted as art. As Danto has said: "To see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld."[251] But it is not merely to see art that we have developed art history and art theories: what Danto has overlooked is that we need them (and we have developed them in the first place) so we can be in a position to accept the aesthetic norm proposed by an artist through her work, so that we can evaluate it aesthetically and, if successful, enjoy it. Without them, we would not have the possibility of *enjoying* art. Without them, we would not be able to exclaim: "How marvelous!"

II.3.3. Towards a Functional Definition of Art

As I have already suggested in the General Introduction and in Part II, Chapter 1, a definition of art that aims at being exhaustive cannot refrain from taking into account aesthetic considerations, for they explain what the goal of art is. In order to argue for this thesis, let me come back to the criticism moved against aesthetic definitions of art discussed in the General Introduction. I summarized it in two points:

1) The aesthetic properties of *Fountain* are possessed by any identical-looking urinal perceived under similar conditions. Thus, aesthetic properties are not what

[250] The idea that in front of new art we try to develop narratives that show the link to past art in terms of repetition, amplification, or reputation was first presented in CARROLL 1988. Carroll further developed and defined the notion of historical narratives in CARROLL 1990, CARROLL 1992, CARROLL 1993a, and CARROLL 1993b. Carroll's theory seems to me deficient insofar as he does not explain why it is that we try to link new art to past art in the way he describes so convincingly. My account of art, according to which an artwork must be intended as a contribution to art history, provides such an explanation (see Section II.3.3).
[251] DANTO 1964, p.580.

distinguishes an artwork from a non-artwork. A definition of art that aims at understanding why some objects turn into artworks, while identical-looking others do not, must be independent of aesthetic considerations.

2) *Fountain* might possess aesthetic properties that its material counterpart (the mere urinal) lacks. But possession of such properties is due to *Fountain* being an artwork in the first place. Thus, a definition of art must be prior to aesthetic considerations and independent of them.

In reply to point 1), let me say that *Fountain* might indeed possess the same external aesthetic properties as the urinal, especially as they are presented as indiscernibles. Indeed, as I have argued in Part II, Chapter 2, external aesthetic properties emerge from the intrinsic and extrinsic perceivable non-aesthetic properties of an object. Thus, if two objects share the same type of perceivable non-aesthetic properties, the same external aesthetic properties must emerge from them. With that I also reply to point 2), inasmuch as I do not believe that an artwork possesses different external aesthetic properties with respect to its identical-looking counterpart. As a matter of fact, the alleged external aesthetic properties that *Fountain* possesses and the indiscernible urinal lacks are affective properties such as being funny. As I have argued in Part II, Chapter 2, affective properties are not external aesthetic properties. That *Fountain* makes me laugh is not due to its appearance, but rather to my grasping the meaning of the gesture of putting forth an object with that appearance as an artwork.[252] Of course, *Fountain* also possesses non-aesthetic artistic properties that the indiscernible urinal lacks, such as the property of being readymade art. But at stake are now the external aesthetic properties of *Fountain* and of any indiscernible urinal, which, given the alleged indiscernibility, must be the same.

Even in that case, the crucial point is what one is asked to do with such external aesthetic properties. What one is asked to do with the external aesthetic properties of an artwork seems indeed to be very different than what one is asked to do with them in a non-artistic context, as Danto's example of the mother crying at the death of her child has shown.[253] A definition of art explaining what we are supposed to do with the aesthetic properties of an artwork better grasps the concept of art. Indeed, the question is what a philosophical definition of art must

[252] Carroll has pointed out the impishness of Duchamp's vial full of Parisian air (CARROLL 1999, p.181). What is impish, however, is Duchamp's gesture, not the vial itself.

[253] Some philosophers find cases of indiscernibles *à la* Danto somehow problematic for the emergence (or supervenience) thesis. Klaus Petrus, for instance, seems to be bothered by the fact that according to the supervenience thesis an artwork and an identical-looking non-artwork must share the same aesthetic properties (PETRUS 2003, pp.329-330). I think that there is nothing wrong with that. The crucial point is that the artwork asks us to evaluate its aesthetic properties differently from the non-artwork, namely in accordance with the artistic theory it instantiates. Notice that Petrus considers the property of being an artwork an aesthetic property (PETRUS 2003, p.327). I think that this is wrong: the property of being an artwork is a type-property, telling us what sort of object the object at stake is. It is like the property of being a chair or the property of being a horse.

provide. In my opinion, it must offer an exhaustive account of a concept and this might very well comprehend an understanding of the function that an object must fulfill in order to be subsumed under that concept. Remember the thought experiment carried out in the General Introduction: we supposed that a philosopher of art was to land on Twin New York and to observe that Twin MOMA looks exactly like ours, that people go there to see the exhibited paintings and that they call them "artworks." We noticed that she might be entitled to conclude that they produce objects *we* would also call "artworks," but that she has no reason, yet, to conclude that *they* have the concept of art. We further supposed that the philosopher would find out that Twin people understand by "artwork" a support for prayers and that, surprisingly, all those people standing in front of Twin *Demoiselles d'Avignon* were actually praying, stimulated by the image, the colors, the lines, etc. In spite of all the evidence to the contrary, we concluded, Twin *Demoiselles d'Avignon* is not an artwork, for it has been conceived for a use (praying) that is not the primary use of art. Thus, knowing what the function of art is, is not an option but rather a necessity to fully account for the concept of art. What could a functional definition of art look like?

Art, I have claimed, is like a game where the final goal is aesthetic appreciation: the whole background of art theories and art history has been set up to make aesthetic appreciation possible. Each artist enters the game with the intention of contributing to art history through the fulfillment of historically significant art norms. Being successful at that is her aim: she aims at the masterpiece. This aim is not vain because excellence in art is not a matter of personal taste, but something that can be interpersonally recognized and argued for. Differently from general aesthetic judgments, where more than one aesthetic norm is allowed for judging one and the same object, in the case of art the theory sets the normative framework required to evaluate the artwork. This has an important consequence: in the case of the desolate landscape we discussed in the previous chapter, Betty and Patty were allowed to believe respectively that the landscape was beautiful and that it was ugly. But in the case of art this is no longer possible: since the normative framework allowed is one and the same for both, if Betty and Patty discern the same external aesthetic properties, disagreement concerning meta-aesthetic properties is not admitted.[254] Recognition that the artwork is, for theoretical and historical reasons, a great artwork is recognition of something that all people informed about art theories and art history ought to recognize.[255] A masterpiece is an artwork that has succeeded in fulfilling the art norm and this is something that all art experts ought to

[254] As I remarked in Section II.3.2, there are indeed right and wrong ways of looking at an artwork. This is why Zemach's talk of standard observation conditions makes more sense in the fine arts. See ZEMACH 1997, pp.49-53.
[255] On this point, I agree with Seel, see SEEL 2003, p.393.

agree upon. A masterpiece is nothing else than a (very) *beautiful artwork*; it is an artwork whose aesthetic properties are *just right* to realize the normative goal set.[256]

Remember the analysis of beauty in Part II, Chapter 2: something is beautiful if and only if it ought to be appreciated for its external aesthetic properties according to a given aesthetic norm. Thus, an artwork is beautiful if and only if it ought to be appreciated for its external aesthetic properties according to the aesthetic norm chosen. And the aesthetic norm that enables us to appreciate the artwork for its external aesthetic properties is the specific art norm that the artwork is supposed to fulfill. It is the artwork that imposes the norm according to which its external aesthetic properties have to be evaluated. Suppose that the artwork is a painting representing an ugly scene, in which a gangster perversely tortures an innocent man. Suppose that it is really hard to look at the scene and that upon looking at it a sense of disgust for human evil arises in us, the spectators. Suppose further that the artist believes that her art ought to make us sensitive to human evil in order to make us react against it, and that in the light of this moral end she tries to realize a violent sort of realism. Suppose finally that this art norm is art historically significant. I claim that if the aesthetic properties of the represented scene manage, as it seems, to successfully fulfill such an art norm, the artwork is a beautiful one. As much as we dislike the represented ugliness, we aesthetically appreciate the artwork for its external aesthetic qualities. It is the aim of all artists to produce artworks that elicit such aesthetic appreciation.

To sum up, we can say that artworks are, on the one hand, contributions to the history of art, inasmuch as they try to fulfill art historically relevant art norms, i.e. art norms that contribute to the art theoretical discourse recorded by art history. On the other hand, artworks are objects meant to be appreciated for their capability to fulfill the proposed art norm and aiming at being aesthetically successful. In a short formula, we can define artworks as *would-be aesthetically successful (beautiful) contributions to art history*. Although only great artworks fulfill the goal of aesthetic appreciation, all artworks pursue it. Artworks essentially aim at being appreciated aesthetically through their relatedness to art history and art theories. The so-called "artworks in the classificatory sense" are nothing else than artworks as just defined. They alone build a category of objects determined by their pursuing a peculiar goal: the goal, namely, of making us feel the pleasure of aesthetic appreciation. Indeed, the pleasure

[256] I borrow the expression "just right" from Anthony Savile (SAVILE 1982, p.169). Savile's account of beauty in the fine arts is in many ways close to mine, as this quotation shows: "The idea is that a work of art is beautiful if and only if, when seen as answering to its problem in its style, it evokes the appropriate response." (SAVILE 1982, p.168). However, I find less convincing his account of beauty in general (and, in particular, his account of natural beauty, see SAVILE 1982, p.178) and his explanation of why we care about beautiful things (SAVILE 1982, p.182 ff.).

of aesthetic appreciation that great artworks give us when we look at them is what makes us seek confrontation with them over and over again.[257]

II.3.4. Seeking the Link To the Art Historical Discourse

Since artworks are *contributions* to art history, it is necessary to *intend* to contribute to the art-historical discourse in order to produce art.[258] What I want to point out in this section is the relevance of recognizing the intention to connect to the art historical discourse in order to do with artworks what we are supposed to do with them, namely to evaluate them aesthetically. Borrowing from Dickie the idea of an institutional framework, I define "institutionalized conventions" in terms of conventions that are there to make the artist's intention intelligible to others and therefore her work discernible as a work of art.[259] What makes our artist's work a work conceived as art, is namely the fact that it is *meant* to stand in relation to the art historical and thus art theoretical discourse of her time. The institutionalized conventions make it possible for the spectator to recognize the intention to connect to the art historical discourse, which is essential to attend to the artwork in the right way.[260] It is of course possible to attribute intentions were there had been none. As I will claim in Section II.3.5, the concept of art was not available before the Renaissance. Thus, I contend, medieval

[257] This seems to me a very simple answer to the question of why we care about beautiful art. Compare it with Anthony Savile's answer: he claims that we care about beautiful *representational* art because through it we experience a "coherent" world, whose coherence is "benign and non-alienating" (SAVILE 1982, p.185) and that we care about beautiful *abstract* art because of its "benign expressiveness" (SAVILE 1982, p.186). I must confess that these explanations seem to me very obscure.

[258] Jerry Fodor developed an account of art according to which a work is a work of art in virtue of somebody's intention to produce one (see FODOR 1993). The problem, as Fodor himself recognizes and Danto points out (see DANTO 1993), is that you need to know what art is in order to intend to produce art. Daniel Scheidegger tries to explain why it is nevertheless justified to speak of intentions by pointing out that art norms, inasmuch as they contain a goal to be achieved, must presuppose the intention of the artist to achieve that goal (see SCHEIDEGGER 2000, p.45). This is certainly true but does not explain why it is rational for the artist to intend to achieve the normatively set goal. My point is that if and only if the artist has a concept of art, according to which it is necessary to contribute to art history in order to produce art, it is perfectly rational for her to intend to fulfill an art norm.

[259] Daniel Scheidegger distinguishes three aspects of art norms: syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic rules. The first decide upon the signs that will be used as symbols, the second upon the interpretation of such symbols, and the third prescribe the task that the artist by means of her symbols is supposed to achieve (see SCHEIDEGGER 2000, 35-38). Although I do not enquire into these aspects in this work, I agree that they are essential and my first case study (Part III, Chapter 1) will show how they, indeed, play a fundamental role. I would like to point out, however, that the syntactic dimension implied by an art norm is not to be confused with the institutionalized conventions that make it possible to recognize the artwork in the first place, and thus to recognize that *that* thing is made out of signs that need to be identified and interpreted.

[260] Notice that recognizing the intention to relate to art history and art theories is different from recognizing the intention to express a particular meaning through the artwork. If one fails to recognize the first sort of intentions, she fails to recognize the artwork. Failure to recognize the second sort of intentions does not have such consequences: another meaning will be attributed to the artwork.

icons were not conceived as artworks. Nevertheless, we can look at them *as if* they were artworks.

As we have seen in Part I, Chapter 3, Danto has criticized Dickie for mixing up an epistemic with a metaphysical problem. What the art institution does, is indeed to make an object *recognizable* as an artwork. But according to Danto the object is already an artwork *before* being made recognizable as such. And the reason why it is already an artwork is that it possesses (relational) properties that the non-artwork lacks. I perfectly agree with Danto, but I also think that the institutionalized conventions are essential to the arts, for they make it possible to discern otherwise indiscernible artworks from non-artworks. They make evident to us that we are supposed to do with the object something different than what we would do with an otherwise identical-looking object. A funny accident recently happened at the Tate Gallery in London, where a cleaner threw away a bag of rubbish thinking that it was a bag of rubbish, whereas it actually was part of an installation by German artist Gustav Metzger for the exhibition *Art and the 60s*.[261] What is interesting in this case is that the cleaner only saw the bag of rubbish: the conventions had been too much challenged for her to see the artwork. So, there was no artwork to discern, no object to appreciate aesthetically: she only discerned a bag of rubbish and therefore something to throw away.

Danto's method of indiscernibles is important insofar as it helps framing the question of how to account for the ontology of art in its relationship to non-art. Indiscernibles, however, are *per se* neither a metaphysical problem, as an artwork and a non-artwork are clearly ontologically distinct entities, nor an epistemological problem, as the institutionalized conventions are there to enable discernment. If they fail, the talk of indiscernible artworks does not make sense, for there is no artwork at all.[262] The institutionalized conventions ought

[261] Reported in the British newspaper *The Times* of August 27, 2004, on p.9 in an article titled: "Cleaner thought Tate exhibit was a load of rubbish." The bag was found again, but was too strongly damaged, according to the artist, who produced a new one – and this time the cleaners were instructed. I wish to thank Reto Givel for pointing out this piece of news to me.

[262] This is also Margolis' criticism of Danto's indiscernibles: "*He* [Danto, CG] says that artworks and real things may be, and often are, perceptually 'indiscernible' from one another; *now*, it turns out, there is nothing to discern. It is not that the perceptual properties *of* artworks and 'real' things are (may be) indiscernibly the same; it is rather that we are *never* perceptually confronted with more than the properties of real things. Of course. But if that is so, then *all* of Danto's famous puzzle cases evaporate. His indiscernibility charge *never rightly arises*!" (MARGOLIS 1998, p.368). I do not agree that all of Danto's puzzles evaporate: those in which pairs of artworks are involved remain, inasmuch as two identical-looking artworks are truly perceptually indiscernible. Margolis does not think so, but I do not want to discuss this issue here. Let me just point out that in his reply to Margolis' attacks, Danto has claimed that he takes perception separately from interpretation, so that two things can be perceptually identical but interpretatively different (see DANTO 1999). But Margolis has insisted that Danto's indiscernibility cases are possible only if one equivocates about the term 'perceptual': only if one presupposes that artworks and other things are different can she claim that they are indiscernible (see MARGOLIS 2000a). To perceive an object does not simply mean to passively receive some impulses from the world: it also means to elaborate those impulses in order to categorize the object. Danto has become aware of the limitedness of his account on perception and on a more recent occasion – namely

to make clear to us that *Fountain* is *not* a urinal: if they fail, we do not see an artwork that is indiscernible from a mere urinal, but simply no artwork at all. As a matter of fact, institutionalized conventions are there to make us discern the artwork: indeed, we right away recognize that we are supposed to do something different with the exhibited urinal than what we (or at least men) would do if confronted with a mere urinal in a public toilet.[263] In this sense, the institutionalized conventions are *conditio sine qua non* for the possibility of experiencing art. And to that extent, Dickie's intuition concerning the institutional framework was not completely off track.

But Dickie's account, as we have seen in Part I, Chapter 3, is deficient, since it does not explain what we are supposed to do with art. Dickie had spoken of appreciation, but he was not clear about what exactly such an appreciation consisted in. Moreover, he limited himself to describe the institutional framework responsible for discerning art; but such a description alone does not tell one what the function of art is. According to my account, what we are supposed to do with *Fountain* is, like for all other artworks, to evaluate it aesthetically against a background of art history and art theories. I am aware that saying of *Fountain* that we are supposed to evaluate it *aesthetically* is a very controversial claim. However, I think that the controversy is due to misunderstandings rather than to a reactionary reading of *Fountain*. I will clarify those misunderstandings in Part III, Chapter 2. For the moment, let me illustrate the importance of having and of discerning the intention to connect to art history with a less controversial example.

My neighbor, let us suppose, is a hobby painter. He paints more or less in a Realistic style, as an epigone of Millet could have done. He ignores the history of art, although he loves Millet and those painting like him. His representations are very well done. They are about the life in mountain villages and they aim at pushing forth the nostalgic thought that there is something authentic about those lives, something we ought to come back to. The meaning of my neighbor's paintings is well expressed in his representations; to echo Danto, it is clear what they are about and what is the meaning they embody. As representations, these paintings are successful. But as artworks they are not. Why? Because Realism cannot be accepted as art norm in contemporary art. Art has moved away from the Realistic approach, and all attempts at resuming it in 2005 must be motivated. One cannot just ignore the history of art of the last

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during a symposium titled *The Historicity of the Eye* – he has rectified his views. See DANTO 2001a and DANTO 2001b.

[263] Different is the case of two type-identical artworks: since they have the same function (namely aesthetic appreciation) to fulfill, they are truly indiscernible. Thus, to discover whether there is a difference between them, perception and conventions will no longer help. As we have seen in Part I, Chapter 2, this is the case of the two Representations of Newton's Laws discussed by Arthur Danto, who has convincingly shown that completely different interpretations have to be assigned to each artwork. Given the different interpretations, the artworks are different, in spite of their being indiscernible. See DANTO 1981, pp.120-122.

150 years. Thus, a painting that wants to resume Realism in 2005 must instantiate a theory of art that motivates a return to Realism if it wants to be artistically valuable: it must instantiate an art norm (say, Neo-Realism) that is about another art norm (Realism). My neighbor, however, simply uses the latter art norm without feeling in the least the need to justify it.[264]

Because of his complete ignorance of art history and art theories, my neighbor neither conceives of his paintings as artworks, nor is able to do with artworks what ought to be done with them. First, he is not conceiving of his paintings as artworks, as he does not or cannot intend to connect to the art historical discourse. Second he is not able to do with artworks what ought to be done with them because he does not see the artworks: what my neighbor sees when he looks at a painting by Millet is the representation, not the artwork. He sees the farmers working the earth, not the contribution to art history. And therefore, strictly speaking, he is able only to assess the goodness of the representation, not the goodness of the artwork. I say "strictly speaking" because these two types of assessment might overlap. A Realistic painting that does not represent realistically what it aims at representing, say, a country scene is neither a good Realistic representation nor a good Realistic artwork. Thus, my neighbor might fully agree with the art expert that the representation at stake is a bad Realistic representation, but he will equally fully misunderstand the art expert's judgment that it is not only a bad Realistic representation but also a bad artwork. My neighbor will think that it is a bad artwork because it is a bad representation, which is true but only if one has first shown that being Realistic for the painting at stake is artistically meaningful. To put the point the other way around: my neighbor will infer from the fact that his paintings are good Realistic representations that they are therefore good artworks. But the art expert will not make that inference. In the best case, she will tell my neighbor that his paintings are bad art, or in the worst case, that they are not art at all. For my neighbor to understand the art expert's point, he needs to know art history and art theories.

To sum up: institutionalized conventions are necessary to *discern* that the object at stake is an artwork. Art history is necessary to see that something *makes sense* as an artwork inasmuch the art theory it instantiates follows the logic of the art historical discourse. And the art theory (i.e. the reconstructed art norm) is necessary to evaluate the aesthetic value (beauty) of an artwork. My neighbor's paintings cannot be evaluated as artworks because they do not make sense as artworks in the first place. The bad Realistic representation of Millet's contemporary epigone can, on the other hand, be judged a bad artwork because it makes sense as an artwork in the first place. By refraining from inserting his works into the art historical context, my neighbor is just *not* producing art. Maybe one day someone will discover his works and claim that they are artworks. Fine. But he, my neighbor, did not *conceive* them as

[264] This is the distinction between mention and use that Danto has discussed in DANTO 1997, pp.193-219.

artworks. In order to conceive an object as an artwork, one needs to possess a concept of art. Not to everybody and not at any time such a concept has been available.[265] In the next Section, I am going to explore the historical constraints of the concept of art.

II.3.5. The Invention of Art[266]

The art game is something that has been invented in the course of history.[267] I focus on the history of the Western culture because according to historical evidence the concept of fine art emerged in that history. This, of course, does not exclude the possibility that other cultures might have brought up the same concept, but as far as I am aware, this has not been the case. At any rate, it is a matter of historical enquiry to look into other cultures to find out whether they too possess (or possessed) a concept of art such that "art" refers to a game relying on history, art norms, and pursuing the final goal of aesthetic appreciation as defined above.

As far as Western history is concerned, the art game seems to have emerged together with the Renaissance. Until the late Middle Ages the concept of art was still the concept of *mechanical* arts, the Latin *ars* meaning at first very much the same as the Greek *téchnē*. But during the late Middle Ages, some arts began to be thought of as *liberal*, i.e. freed from the primary task of fulfilling a specific practical purpose. Such liberal arts were the arts of the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics) and of the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy). During the Renaissance the idea that the visual arts too were liberal began to emerge. Even though the visual arts still fulfilled non-aesthetic purposes such as representing religious scenes to support prayers, such purposes were becoming – at least for a small elite of intellectuals – more and more pretexts to create works whose primary task was to allow aesthetic appreciation.[268]

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[265] As I will argue in the next section, it is possible for us, who possess a concept of art in the classificatory sense, to turn non-art into art: this is why we were able to turn tribal carvings into artworks. Larry Shiner makes an interesting remark *à propos* of such tribal carvings that, in its formulation, looks like a conundrum but that my account can perfectly explain: "[tribal] carvings not intended to be 'art' in our sense but made as functional objects are considered 'authentic tribal art,' whereas carvings intended to be 'art' in our sense – that is, made to be appreciated and acquired primarily for their appearance – are reduced to the status of craft." (SHINER 2001, p.272). The point is that the second sort of carvings are actually *not* intended to be art in our sense, inasmuch as they are not intended as contributions to art history: like my neighbor, these tribal people use a style that is outdated for art and they do not care about art-historically justifying such a use. Such carvings are intended as aesthetic objects – and this is certainly not how the first sort of carvings, i.e. the authentic tribal art, were originally intended – but not as artworks.

[266] I borrow this expression from Larry Shiner's book with the same title. See SHINER 2001.

[267] I agree with Carroll that the beginning of art was not clear-cut, but rather emerged over a period of time. See CARROLL 1988, p.153.

[268] William Tolhurst, who also defends the thesis that art has primarily an aesthetic function, offers an account of what distinguishes a primary function from non-primary functions (see TOLHURST 1984). Without entering into complex analyses, my point is simply that medieval producers of icons did not produce them with the intention to have their products evaluated against a background of art theories

It seems that the rediscovery of the treasures of the ancient world, which the cultivated citizens of the Italian communes started appreciating for their naturalism, played a central role in this process. It is specifically in this context that the *belle arti* were conceived. The ancient objects were taken to be the paradigms to imitate. Around them, the first art theories could develop, which postulated these objects as the ideals, and imitation of nature as the task to be fulfilled. From then onwards, it was possible to look at representations from this point of view and to compare them with one another in order to evaluate them. When Giorgio Vasari wrote his remarkable work, he explicitly showed the progression towards this ideal.[269] Each master discussed in his work had been able to enrich the narrative, to bring it a step forwards. Those artists were masters because their work had been successful from within the art-historical relevant art theory and had therefore been aesthetically appreciated.

Larry Shiner has recently published an intriguing book on the invention of art.[270] He provides a lot of historical evidence in support of the claim that art in the aesthetic sense is an invention and not something that has always existed. He claims that the invention of art is to be situated within the "long eighteenth century (1680-1830)."[271] Although I very much welcome Shiner's work and in particular the historical evidence he collected, I think that he confused the *invention* of art with the *institutionalization* of art. What happens during the long 18th century, namely, is that the art game gets acknowledged both at the theoretical level (Baumgarten and Kant, to mention only two names, were writing during this time) and at the practical level (museums opened everywhere in Europe, the role of the art critic emerged, etc.).[272] This acknowledgement is accompanied at the linguistic level by the fact that "artisan" and "artist" become two distinct words expressing altogether different concepts.[273] What happens in the 18th century, then, is that art gets institutionalized. But its invention, I contend, dates from a previous period, namely the Italian Renaissance.

Shiner is aware of the crucial role played by this period, for he writes: "the period between roughly 1350 and 1600 that we call the Renaissance also saw the beginnings of a long and gradual transition from the old art/craft system toward our modern fine art system. But the beginning of a transition is not an establishment; the assumptions of the old art system continued to regulate most practices despite the appearance of new ideas and attitudes among

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and art history – and this not only because such theories and history did not yet exist, but also because they clearly intended something else: they wanted the scene to be recognized as such-and-such a scene from the Holy Books, they wanted it to express whatever religious sentiment they thought was relevant, etc. They did not expect the spectator to, say, judge whether – to resume Carroll's terminology – their work was a repetition, amplification, or repudiation of previous art.

[269] VASARI 1550.

[270] SHINER 2001.

[271] SHINER 2001, p.128. The idea had been introduced already in the introduction, *ibid*., p.11.

[272] SHINER 2001, Part II, pp.75-151.

[273] Shiner offers a very useful table that summarizes the different properties referred to by each term after the split to contrast with the properties involved by the concept of artisan/artist that was used up to that moment. See SHINER 2001, p.115.

a small elite."[274] I actually agree with most Shiner says, but I think that if the task is to date the *invention* of art, then its beginning, however shy and tentative, is what counts. I am less interested in when everybody realized that there was art, than in when the new conception of art first appeared. And this is something that, according to the evidence we have and that Shiner himself provides, happened in the Renaissance as Vasari's work testifies among other things.

In the humanistic climate of the Renaissance, a cultural background, a system of values and beliefs was available, which made it possible to introduce the first paradigms of a new sort of objects. *Those* ancient statues, *those* ancient texts, *those* ancient pictures: *they* were taken to build a class of artifacts of their own, namely artifacts embodying beauty and being worthy for that reason alone. They thus served to postulate the first art norm: "Art ought to be mimetic; artworks ought to represent the world in a natural-looking way, as those ancient statues, pictures, etc. did." Whereas the medieval painter of icons produced icons primarily for the sake of prayer, the newborn sort of painter had primarily an aesthetic concern: "How can I realize images that look natural and can compete with the ancient paradigms?" Hans Belting's impressive research on the role of image in the Middle Ages serve, of course, as support for this claim: Belting has spoken of the era of image and the era of art, and has shown that until the Renaissance there was no art, but only – however important – images.[275]

That the first art norm contained a reference to the ancient statues, pictures, etc. is a matter of fact, but not a theoretical necessity for art to have gotten started. As I have mentioned above, the renewed relevance of ancient culture in the Renaissance provided the justification to accept a mimetic art norm, but that the ancient statues and pictures served as paradigms rather than simple inspiration should be considered a historical accident. What I want to emphasize is that the art game merely needs a first art norm in order to get started. In other words, it merely needs people who accept an aesthetic norm that ontologically constitutes a new sort of object, namely artworks, and who start competing for best fulfilling the norm. Actually, from a theoretical point of view it merely needs an intelligent sensitive being, who one day decides to create a new sort of objects: "From now on, I will create a new sort of objects, which I will call 'artworks.' Artworks will be all and only objects intended to fulfill an aesthetic norm that determines what art ought to be. The first norm is this: 'Art ought to be mimetic and re-present the real world as it looks when I perceive it.'" The art game has started by *fiat* and in a non-circular way, inasmuch as aesthetic norms are definable with no reference to the fine arts, as we have seen in Part II, Chapter 2.

Besides such theoretical speculations, it is certainly intriguing to ask why at some point in the actual history people came up with the game of art. I think that the best way to make sense

[274] SHINER 2001, p.35.
[275] BELTING 1993.

of this fact is to follow Dickie's suggestion that its origins are holistic: the art game developed holistically out of historical-cultural premises. Indeed, the practice of art is a *cultural* phenomenon. It is neither a natural thing nor a divine gift brought to Earth by some angel. Human beings had to *come up* with it. Thus, the availability of the concept of art – the precondition for producing art – is culture-dependent. In this sense, the concept of art is cultural, as Dickie claimed.[276]

Now, overlooking the fact that the concept of art has a history can lead into serious difficulties, as in the case of the theory of art by Jerrold Levinson. According to his theory, what enables one to identify an object with an artwork is the fact that the work has been intended for being regarded as past artworks have been regarded: "*a work of art is a thing intended for regard-as-a-work-of-art*: regard in any of the ways *works of art existing prior to it have been correctly regarded*."[277] Levinson's definition has many a problem, concerning among other things its dependence upon intentions and the notion of *correct* regard.[278] But this shall not be our topic here. What interests us here is the indexical dimension involved in Levinson's definition: according to it, namely, each new artwork *indexically* refers to a past way of looking at artworks. As Levinson puts it, the artist must intend to relate "to other things that are merely indexically or demonstratively invoked (e.g., 'as artworks *before now* were correctly regarded, 'as *those things* were appropriately taken')."[279]

But if Levinson's theory is correct, how was it possible for art to begin? If something must be connected to something previously acknowledged as art in order to be art, an infinite regress cannot be avoided.[280] To solve the issue, Levinson develops a theory of ur-art.[281] Levinson's idea is that we have to reach back as far as our art-historical knowledge enables us, namely to the first Paleolithic images, and consider that farthest artistic activity as the beginning of the intentional activity of art.[282] Such a beginning is not to be understood as an arbitrary stipulation, but rather as a decision that relies on a "double historical justification": "as both the immediate model for later activity whose art status is not in question, and as

[276] See DICKIE 2001, pp.22-31. This does not mean that the intension of the concept changes in time, but only that the concept as such was not always available.
[277] LEVINSON 1979, p.234. Italics in the original.
[278] I will have to come back to the intentionality problem, for, as we have seen, in my own theory intentions play a role.
[279] LEVINSON 1989, p.22. Italics in the original.
[280] Notice that Carroll's theory, according to which we identify new art by virtue of its historical relationship to past art, suffers the same problem, which he, however, solves with appeal to a holistic beginning (see e.g. CARROLL 1988). To the extent that art-historical considerations are essential to conceiving art, my own account seems to run into similar problems. However, as I have argued, my account allows for a beginning by *fiat*.
[281] LEVINSON 1979, pp.242-244 and LEVINSON 1993, pp.421-423.
[282] LEVINSON 1979, p.243.

apparently aimed, judged on fineness of execution or expression achieved, at some of the same kinds of reception or experiencing normative for later art."[283]

Nevertheless, Levinson himself remarks that such ur-arts cannot be, strictly speaking, art. For, according to his definition, art is something that intends to relate to previous art: and ur-art does not relate to anything else. But if so, the first-art, i.e. those activities that immediately follow and intend to refer to ur-art, cannot be art either, since ur-art is not strictly speaking art… Levinson has a problem.[284] To get rid of it, he makes two concessions. The first is that the ur-arts "are art not because modeled on *earlier* art, but rather because *later*, unquestioned, art has sprung from them" and the second "that the products of the *first* arts, those following the *ur*-arts, are art in a sense close to but not identical to that applying to all else subsequently accountable as art."[285] It does not look like these concessions solve the problem: if first-art is art in a sense close but not identical to contemporary art, second art will also be art in a sense close but not identical to contemporary art, and so on *ad infinitum*. Even though Levinson's theory starts out from the premise that we have contemporary art, it is paradoxically unable to ever approach contemporary art: it only comes infinitely close to it.

I have presented at such length Levinson's account of ur- and first-arts because I wanted to highlight at what point philosophers of art have misunderstood their task and mixed up the history of art with the history of the *concept* of art. The Paleolithic images are artworks insofar as *we*, i.e. the possessors of a concept of art in the aesthetic sense, look at them *as if* they were artworks. Thus, we make the history of art start in the caves of Lascaux. But those images were not *conceived* as artworks. Differently from Levinson, who really made art dependent upon the actual presence of the right sort of intentions, my approach does not require that the intentions be actual, but rather that they can be *attributed* to the producer of the object *we* call "artwork." And such a possibility depends upon institutionalized conventions. On the one hand, the institutionalized conventions enable one to recognize the actual intentions of someone who is presenting an object as an artwork. There are for instance conventions that enable us to infer that a person that has wished and authorized the exhibition of her canvasses in an art gallery must have had the intention of presenting them as artworks and thus with the primary aim of having her work judged aesthetically. On the other hand, such conventions also enable one to attribute intentions to someone whose work is presented *as if* it was an artwork, i.e. *as if* the producer had had the intention to make us aesthetically appreciate it by reason of its fulfilling art-historically significant art-theoretical desiderata. That she did not actually have such intentions is not vital for her works to be considered artworks.

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[283] LEVINSON 1993, p.421.
[284] LEVINSON 1993, p.422.
[285] LEVINSON 1993, p.422. Italics in the original.

It is not so much the actual intentions as rather the attributed intentions that play a role, and these we can attribute because – thanks to the institutionalized conventions – we recognize that we are asked to assume a certain attitude towards the object, namely an aesthetic attitude. Dickie had criticized the idea of an aesthetic attitude, which, as we have seen in the General Introduction, was traditionally characterized as a peculiar, disinterested way of attending to objects.[286] I actually agree with Dickie's criticism of this characterization of the aesthetic attitude, but I do not think that this is the only or the best way to characterize it. Taking an aesthetic attitude towards an object just means approaching that object with the goal of evaluating its external aesthetic properties according to an aesthetic norm. In the fine arts this implies relating the object to a particular background of art theories and art history. The institutionalized conventions have the primary function of making us look at the objects presented with the right attitude, independently of whether they have been actually intended as artworks or not. We discern the artwork inasmuch as we discern that we are asked to assume an aesthetic attitude, i.e. to evaluate it aesthetically on the basis of the art norm it tries to fulfill.

Thus, the reason why the Paleolithic images are artworks is quickly explained without recourse to ur-art and first-art theories: they are artworks because *we* look at them *as if* they had been conceived as artworks. *We* have developed a conceptual apparatus such that we can look at whatever object as if it was an artwork, i.e. against the background of art history and art theories. The art game relies upon the idea of *engineering* the parameters for aesthetically judging objects, so that everybody can appeal to them and everybody can recognize and enjoy an object fulfilling the parameters.[287] As I have argued, the invention of art relies upon the idea of engineering such parameters, while at the same time creating a safety area where they can be tried out.

The crucial point, then, is that we possess a *concept* that enables us to look at objects from an *aesthetic* perspective. And such a concept has a history that does not start in the caves of Lascaux. According to the actual historical evidence, such a concept has emerged holistically

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[286] DICKIE 1964.

[287] Notice that not only Paleolithic images, but also nature itself can be looked at as an artwork. As a matter of fact, *during the history of art*, landscapes have been turned into artworks. For instance, the Romantic traveler was looking for landscapes instantiating the sublime and through this lense the Alps became a good example of the sought-for landscape: a beautiful landscape-artwork, fulfilling the art-historically significant art theoretical desideratum. But the ways of looking at nature as art *en vogue* in the Romantic period do not stop here: people used to travel around with a "Claude Lorrain Mirror," a slightly convex mirror made of black glass that turned the admired landscape into something like a painting by Claude Lorrain; pavilions were built everywhere in Europe, in which each window was conceived as the frame of a painting whose content was the respective portion of the external landscape (see PIATTI 2001). But not only has nature been looked at as if it were an artwork: it has also been modeled to produce artworks. The typical example for the 18th-19th century is gardening: gardens became a sort of living sculpture (like today's land art) and were arranged according to theory-laden views, from the Classicist love for order and sense expressed in the geometrically organized French gardens, to the Romantic irregularities of the English gardens.

in the course of the Italian Renaissance. Whatever the history of the concept has been, the relevant point for a philosopher aiming at defining art is the fact that such a concept *has* a history. And according to the actual historical evidence, we do not need to worry about medieval icons if we want to define the intension of "art." On the other hand, once we have defined the intension of "art" it is very possible for an art historian to show that, say, medieval icons were indeed conceived as art. This will not affect the intension of the term, but only its extension, and it will make necessary a revision of the *history* of the concept of art. At any rate, to show this sort of things is no longer the philosopher's job.

II.3.6. Final Considerations

In this chapter, I developed my functional definition of art according to which artworks are would-be aesthetically successful contributions to art history. I explained what it means for an artwork to be beautiful and defended the thesis that artists aim at producing beautiful artworks (and this no matter how ugly the scene represented is). In accordance with the theory of aesthetic appreciation presented in Part II, Chapter 2, I claimed that we aesthetically appreciate artworks whose external aesthetic properties are just perfect to fulfill the art norm at stake. This appreciation gives us pleasure – the pleasure, namely, of aesthetic appreciation. I have claimed that it is for the sake of this pleasure that we seek the confrontation with the fine arts. I have also shown how seeking the link to the art historical discourse is fundamental for conceiving artworks and how art norms (reconstructed in terms of art theories) are necessary to aesthetically evaluate the artwork. By giving art history and art theories a key role to play, I show my indebtedness to Arthur C. Danto's philosophy of art.

In Part I, Chapter 2, we saw that Danto had at first highlighted the relevance of art history and art theories, but then denied the relatedness to them as a condition for art. Indeed, he had pointed out two necessary conditions of art, namely aboutness and embodiment of meaning, which, however, are not sufficient to characterize art: billboards, for instance, would also count as artworks under Danto's conditions. As we have seen, Danto's reasons for excluding relatedness to art history and art theories were twofold. First, he had universalistic aims, as he wanted to include all arts from all times into his definition. But we have now seen that this reason is wrongheaded: the concept of art has a history and if one is concerned with the definition of that concept she should not worry about times or regions where that concept was not available. That objects from those times or regions enter nevertheless (*a posteriori*) into the extension of the term "art" does not mean that they are necessary for grasping its intension.

Danto's second reason why he excluded relatedness to art history and art theories from his definition of art was his concern with the end of art history. I have already argued in Part I, Chapter 2, that this thesis is problematic. I would like here just to recall that it stems from a questionable view of art history, according to which the history of art is a history of progress. But this must certainly not be so, and as a matter of fact it is not so. As a consequence, the history of art continues to be written in Danto's alleged post-historical phase. Indeed, contemporary artists still aim at contributing to the art historical discourse inasmuch as they still aim at producing art. It is still a challenge both for the artist and the spectator to understand why a contribution is relevant at a given historical moment, given the actual situation and given the past history of art. This is still what makes the game of art intellectually challenging.

My theory of art also shows its indebtedness to George Dickie, whose theory we discussed in Part I, Chapter 3. First of all, his original (and later tentatively abandoned) idea that artworks are candidates for appreciation has formally entered into my account. As we have seen, Dickie did not intend to refer to aesthetic appreciation, and it was indeed unclear what he meant by the term "appreciation." Nevertheless, the idea that artworks are candidates for appreciation had something right about it, which I tried to work out in my account. Furthermore, Dickie's emphasis on the institutional framework has found an echo in my theory, as I acknowledge an important role for institutionalized conventions to make us discern what sort of object we have in front of us and therefore to make us adopt the right attitude towards it.

Dickie did not refrain from developing a circular definition of art and to some extent it looks as if my definition of artworks as would-be successful aesthetic contributions to art history was circular as well. Indeed, the term "art" appears both in the *definiendum* and in the *definiens*. The point, however, is that in my definition the *definiens* hides an ontologically constitutive norm, which in Dickie's definition of art is absent. In other words, according to my definition, art is whatever is intended to fulfill an aesthetic norm that determines what (new) art ought to be. As we have seen, my definition allows for an invention of art by *fiat*, inasmuch as an intelligent sensitive being could in principle decide to create *ex novo* a new sort of objects that she baptizes "artworks." The possibility of such creation *ex novo* shows the non-circularity of my account. It also explains why, in spite of the central relevance of the art-historical discourse, my account does not run into the danger of infinite regress.

I think, then, that my definition of art is able to take advantage of Danto's and Dickie's important results concerning the nature of art, while avoiding the difficulties haunting their own theories. In Part III, I will provide empirical evidence for it. In Part III, Chapter 1, I will discuss the case of Caspar David Friedrich to illustrate the claim that artists aim at relating to art history. Friedrich carefully reflected upon the art historical and art theoretical situation in

order to come up with a new art norm that he proposed to his contemporaries and that would guide his artistic production until the end of his life, determining what we usually would call his "style." In Part III, Chapter 2, I will instead look at *Fountain*, the artwork that more than any other one seems to contradict my theory, inasmuch as aesthetic appreciation seems to be completely at odds with it and with Marcel Duchamp's intentions.

Part III

Case Studies

Part III, Chapter 1

On the Artist's Dialogue with Art History: Caspar David Friedrich and the Ramdohr Quarrel

In the last chapter, I argued that art is a sort of game in which one party, the artists, present their products, the artworks, to the public, i.e. the other party in the game. Relying on an institutionalized framework of conventions, the artist can make her intention understood: to have her products considered as contributions to art history, which ought to be aesthetically evaluated according to the art norm that the artist herself has developed and is putting forth. The public has to evaluate both the art historical significance of the proposed art norm and the success of the work at fulfilling it. In this chapter, I am going to look into a concrete case of such evaluation process. A single case study on such an evaluation process does not aim, of course, at providing an empirical proof of the correctness of my thesis. Rather, it is meant as an illustration of it.

In 1808, Caspar David Friedrich exhibited a painting known as the *Tetschen Altarpiece*.[288] Soon after the exhibition of this painting, a violent quarrel took place in the pages of a fashionable newspaper, the *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*. The quarrel reveals not only the gap dividing the Classicist period from the Romantic one, but also the issue at stake when an artist tries to contribute to the art-historical discourse. I will start by presenting the painting and the debate. Then, I will shed light on the figure of Caspar David Friedrich and explain what he was pursuing through his work and how. Thus, I will be able to point out how Friedrich's work aimed at contributing to art history. Final considerations will conclude the chapter.

III.1.1. The Case

In 1807-08, Caspar David Friedrich produced a work whose title was *Kreuz im Gebirge* (i.e. *Cross in the Mountains*) – the biggest oil painting that he had realized up to that moment and that opened up a new phase of his work, characterized by oil paintings of such formats.[289] Two sepia works preceded the production of the *Kreuz im Gebirge*.[290] According to a handed down story first told by Rühle von Lilienstern in 1809, the countess of Thun and Hohenstein had seen one of the sepia works in Dresden and liked it so much that she asked her husband to purchase it. The count, however, wanted an oil painting for the chapel in his Tetschen castle.

[288] *Kreuz im Gebirge (Tetschen Altar)*, 1807-08, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlung, Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister.
[289] KELLEIN 1998, p.27. For a reconstruction of the origins pf the motive of the cross in the mountains, see BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.80 and BUSCH 2003, p.38.
[290] FIEGE 1977, p.30, KELLEIN 1998, p.27.

He therefore commissioned Friedrich to reproduce the sepia motive in an oil painting.[291] The resulting *Kreuz im Gebirge* is therefore known as *Tetschen Altarpiece*. This story, however, is not reliable. First, the Tetschen castle did not possess a chapel and as a matter of fact the painting hung in the bedroom of the countess.[292] Moreover, scholars have shown that the painting had not been commissioned; it was actually originally dedicated to the Swedish king, who governed over Friedrich's native land, Neuvorpommern.[293]

At any rate, Friedrich presented the painting to the public during the Christmas of 1808 in his atelier. According to Rühle von Lilienstern, he thus fulfilled a wish expressed by his friends, who were eager to see the finished product. Rühle remarks that to show the painting properly and enhance its transcendental dimension theatrically, Friedrich obscured one of the windows of his atelier and put a black cover on the table where the painting stood.[294] The effect must have been powerful. But even more so was the enflamed journalistic debate, which followed the exhibition of the painting and was mostly carried out on the pages of the *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*.[295] The debate had been ignited by the writings of the Chamberlain Ramdohr, who criticized Friedrich's work.[296] As we will see, in defense of Friedrich, several exponents of the Romantic circles replied to Ramdohr. Friedrich himself provided an explanation of his painting, which, in April 1809, was printed by Christian August Semler (under Semler's name) in the *Journal des Luxus und der Mode*.[297] In the following, I rely on this description for the presentation of the painting.[298]

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[291] FIEGE 1977, pp.30-31. See also BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.80, and BUSCH 2003, p.34.
[292] SCHMIED 1992, p.58, BUSCH 2003, p.35.
[293] BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.80, SCHMIED 1992, p.58, SPITZER 1996, p.8, BUSCH 2003, p.35.
[294] FIEGE 1977, p.33, BUSCH 2003, pp.34-35.
[295] See note 131 in HINZ 1974, p.243. Busch complains that scholars always focus on Ramdohr's observations instead of analyzing the structure of the painting (BUSCH 2003, p.39). I agree with him that a serious art-critical analysis has to look at the painting itself and for this reason I devote Section III.1.4. to Friedrich's way of conceiving his works. Nevertheless, I think that Ramdohr's observations and the debate following them is of extreme interest and importance; not only does it enable us to see how the painting was received, but also how Friedrich himself reacted against the criticisms. For this reason, I begin with the presentation of the debate, which takes us back to a time in which Classicist and Romantic ideals were in conflict.
[296] Ramdohr's long article ("*Über ein zum Altarbild bestimmtes Landschaftsgemälde von Herrn Friedrich in Dresden, und über Landschaftsmalerei, Allegorie und Mystizismus überhaupt*") is reprinted in HINZ 1974, pp.134-151.
[297] "Der Tetschener Altar," *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*, Weimar, April 1809, III, p.239. It is reprinted in HINZ 1974, p.133. See also FIEGE 1977, pp.33-34.
[298] Busch points out that scholars often dismiss this description in favor of the letter to Professor Schulz that I am going to discuss later on. The reason for this dismissal is, in Busch's opinion, its charged religious character, which counteracts political and Romantic-mystical interpretations of Friedrich's art (BUSCH 2003, p.40). Against this dismissal, he argues that this description has to be taken seriously into account and not just as an interpretation of the work, but also and more importantly as an explanation of how it has to be used (*ibid.*, pp.40-41), namely as a means to religious sentiment (*ibid*., pp.41-45). I agree with Busch and for this reason I rely on Friedrich's description.

The painting represents a religious scene, namely Christ on the cross.[299] The cross stands at the top of a rocky, triangular tip of a mountain, which occupies the lower half of the painting. It is presented from a three-quarters perspective and the spectator gets to see part of its back. Evergreen pine trees surround the cross, while evergreen ivy wraps itself round it. The sky is loaded with dark clouds and reddish reflections, but gets brighter in the lower half of the painting. Jesus is looking down behind the mountain to the point from where the light rays come, that is from the setting sun.[300]

The painting is inserted in a golden frame, which is integral part of the whole artwork and was conceived by Friedrich himself.[301] The frame takes up a Gothic form with the characteristic pointed arc. It represents several religious elements. Two Gothic pillars support palm branches from which five angel-heads appear and, above the middle one, the evening star emerges. On the altar-step, God's Eye, put into the triangle, symbol of the Trinity, and surrounded by rays, is represented together with ears of corn (symbol of Christ's body) and a branch from the vineyard (symbol of Christ's blood). Friedrich points out that the ears of corn and the vine bend towards God's Eye – a representational device to underline the relationship between them. In his interpretation of the work, Friedrich writes that the setting sun is the symbol of God the Father, who until the death of Christ had been "strolling" on Earth ("*wandelte auf Erden*") but was now leaving it together with his Son. Fortunately for us, the cross reflects God's light and stands there, on the rocks, steady "as our belief in Jesus Christ" ("*unerschütterlich fest wie unser Glaube an Jesum Christum*"). Evergreen are the pine trees around the cross, symbols of our everlasting hope in the Crucified.[302]

The Chamberlain Friedrich Wilhelm Basilius von Ramdohr occupied himself in his spare time with aesthetic questions. He was what we could call a "conservative intellectual": his artistic taste was obsolete and his writings did not contribute in any way to make art and art history progress. Nevertheless, his article about Friedrich's *Tetschen Altarpiece* offers a sharp analysis of the latter and reveals very neatly the profound changes that the arts were

[299] According to Wieland Schmied, the painting was originally meant politically rather than religiously (SCHMIED 1992, p.58). This interpretation seems to me at odds both with the representation and with Friedrich's own explanation of the meaning of his work.

[300] In spite of Friedrich's explicit description of the sun as "setting" some interpreters keep talking of the sun as "raising." See for instance KELLEIN 1998, p.27.

[301] As reported in Friedrich's own description of the *Tetschen Altarpiece*, the frame was designed by Friedrich and realized by his friend Gottlieb Christian Kühn. See HINZ 1974, p.133: "Der Rahmen ist nach Herrn Friedrichs Angabe von Bildhauer Kühn gefertigt worden." See also BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.80.

[302] The German text reads like this: "Jesus Christus, an das Holz geheftet, ist hier der sinkenden Sonne zugekehrt, als das Bild des ewigen allbelebenden Vaters. Es starb mit Jesu Lehre eine alte Welt, die Zeit, wo Gott der Vater unmittelbar wandelte auf Erden. Diese Sonne sank, und die Erde vermochte nicht mehr zu fassen das scheidende Licht. Da leuchtet vom reinsten edelsten Metall der Heiland am Kreuz im Golde des Abendrots und widerstrahlt so im gemilderten Glanz auf Erden. Auf einem Felsen steht aufgerichtet das Kreuz, unerschütterlich fest wie unser Glaube an Jesum Christum. Immergrün, durch alle Zeiten während, stehen die Tannen um das Kreuz, wie die Hoffnung der Menschen auf ihn, den Gekreuzigten." (HINZ 1974, p.133).

undergoing at that time. As a matter of fact, Ramdohr had exactly understood what Friedrich was doing and how he wanted to reach his goal.[303] However, he disapproved of his use of landscapes to express religious contents.[304] Ramdohr's article and the articles that appeared afterwards in defense of Friedrich, written by leading figures of the Romantic period, reveal the gap that divides the Classicism of the 18th century, to which Ramdohr still belongs, from the new era of Romanticism.

In the extremely interesting introduction to his article, Ramdohr makes clear that he would not trouble his quiet life by writing this article, did he not feel that being silent would be a sign of pusillanimity; for Friedrich's *Tetschen Altarpiece* is the sign that talented painters are threatening good taste and giving way to barbarism.[305] Ramdohr confesses that if Friedrich's painting had been realized according to the rules ("*Grundsätze*") that experience has confirmed and that the example of the great masters has "sanctified" ("*geheiligt*"), he would have refrained from writing, no matter how bad Friedrich's painting might have been. But it is exactly the fact that Friedrich is *not* painting according to such rules that compels him to publicly express his opinions, in an effort to save art from taking wrong ways.[306]

After such an emphatic introduction, Ramdohr confesses his bias: the examples of Claude Lorrain, Nicolas Poussin, and Jacob von Ruisdael give him the standard.[307] Then, he addresses the problems with Friedrich's painting.[308] First, Ramdohr is extremely precise in listing the rules for landscape painting that Friedrich has been breaking.[309] For, in spite of the religious content, Friedrich has been painting a landscape, so he should have respected the rules for landscape paintings. According to Ramdohr, the fundamental rule for landscape painting is that of constructing a diversified whole.[310] Moreover, landscape paintings must obey rules concerning the choice of colors and lighting.[311] Friedrich bypassed all these rules.[312]

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[303] SCHMIED 1992, p.40.
[304] Börsch-Supan claims that Ramdohr misunderstood Friedrich's intentions, as he identified them with the stirring of "pathological emotion" ("*pathologische Rührung*"); see BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.10. I disagree with Börsch-Supan's interpretation. Ramdohr did not misunderstand Friedrich's intentions, but had a very stubborn understanding of what can be done with landscape paintings. As I will show below, according to Ramdohr pathological emotion is needed for one to be religiously moved. But paintings, he held, are by nature incapable of producing strong pathological emotions, for they move us first and foremost aesthetically. This is why landscape paintings are not apt for moving us religiously, whereas paintings representing religious scenes can do so: in that case, Ramdohr claimed, the aesthetic emotions supports and enhances the religiosity of the scene (see HINZ 1974, p.149).
[305] HINZ 1974, p.132.
[306] HINZ 1974, p.132.
[307] HINZ 1974, p.135.
[308] HINZ 1974, pp.136-151.
[309] HINZ 1974, pp.138-145.
[310] HINZ 1974, p.139.
[311] HINZ 1974, pp.139-140.
[312] HINZ 1974, p.141: "Herr Friedrich hat nun allen jenen Grundsätzen in seinem Altarblatt geradezu und recht absichtlich entgegengehandelt."

It is easy to see what Ramdohr criticizes. First, Friedrich did not realize a diversified whole. Landscape paintings *à la* Claude catch the eye with a full menu of different elements: here a tree, there a river, then a house, a couple of animals, and the eye goes up and down the hills to rest for a while on a quiet meadow and start its journey again, following a nice little path that leads into a forest…[313] Nothing like that can be found in Friedrich's painting, which just represents the tip of a rocky mountain with some pine trees on it. There is no adventure for the eye, nothing to discover, no interest in wandering through the fictional reality of the painting. For there is only one thing to see and it is there, in the dark foreground.[314]

Indeed, Friedrich's painting does not have depth. There is only a foreground, and a poor one at that! Ramdohr was particularly irritated by the fact that Friedrich had put the rocks in the foreground and in the middle of the painting, so that no sight of what is behind the rocks is possible. But to make such a sight possible is, according to Ramdohr, exactly what a landscape painting is supposed to do: landscape paintings must present an opening and must invite the eye to go into the fictional reality of the painting, to proceed from the foreground all the way down until the far background. But look at what Friedrich has done! No way to enter into the fictional reality of the painting: indeed, the rocks *prevent* the eye from entering it. What is even worse is that the foreground is so dark that even the few details in it can barely be distinguished.

According to Ramdohr, the light is actually another problem of Friedrich's painting, which goes together with the fact that there is no steady point from which perspective is constructed.[315] Ramdohr points out that to represent the mountain and the sky as Friedrich has done, the painter should have been "many thousands of steps away and at the same height of the mountain, so that the horizontal line would have run through the tip of the mountain."[316] But then he could not have distinguished the details as Friedrich does. As a matter of fact, Friedrich is not representing the scene as if he were at the same height of the mountain, for the rocks are seen from below. Neglect of perspective has led Friedrich to wrong illumination,

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[313] The examples are countless. Let me just mention some paintings by Lorrain that might serve as illustrations to what I have been writing: *Landscape with the Finding of Moses* (1637-39, Madrid, El Prado), *Landscape with Cephalus and Procris Reunited by Diana* (1645, London, National Gallery), *Landscape with Shepherds* (1645-46, Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts), *Landscape with Apollo and Mercury* (1660, London, Wallace Collection), *Landscape with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (1666, St. Petersburg, Hermitage).

[314] HINZ 1974, p.141: "Er [Friedrich, CG] hat den ganzen Grund seines Bildes mit einer einzigen Felsenspitze, ohne merkliche Andeutung von verschiedenen Flächen, wie mit einem Kegel ausgefüllt. Er hat alle Luftperspektive verbannt, ja, was das Schlimmste ist, er hat sogar eine Finsternis auf der Erde verbreitet und sich dadurch alle die günstigen Wirkungen entzogen, welche der Zufluss des Lichtes darbieten kann."

[315] HINZ 1974, pp.141-143.

[316] HINZ 1974, p.142: "Um den Berg zugleich mit dem Himmel in dieser Ausdehnung zu sehen, hätte Herr Friedrich um mehrere tausend Schritte in gleicher Höhe mit dem Berge und so stehen müssen, dass die Horizontallinie mit dem Berge gleichlief. Aus dieser Distanz konnte er gerade gar kein Detail innerhalb der Umrisse des Berges sehen." My translation.

says Ramdohr. Assuming e.g. that Friedrich was standing at the bottom of the mountain and was looking up, he would not have been able to see the sun's rays.[317]

But that Friedrich did not care about correctness of representation is evident also in relation to the colors. Ramdohr points out that the time of the day is not clearly identifiable, that the contrasts between the dark side and the light one are too abrupt, and that the colors of the sky are just wrongly represented; the real sky is by far more pearly and the evolution from violet to red and yellow is by far more smooth and delicate than the "rough" ("*schroff*") representation by Friedrich.[318]

Poor Ramdohr! He really got nothing decent to see: he was looking for diversified scenery and found just a bunch of rocks and pine trees; he was looking for distance and found only a foreground; he was looking for perspective and found a mess of standpoints; he was looking for naturalistic representation and found impossible colors. But Ramdohr was not a stupid observer. He understood that Friedrich had done all these syntactic changes (or mistakes, as Ramdohr put it) on purpose: he did not want to paint a normal landscape but rather an *allegoric* landscape. But here is where Ramdohr sees another problem with Friedrich's painting: the meaning of the latter cannot be precisely determined.[319]

The reason for such semantic confusion relies on the fact that Friedrich is representing a religious scene, Christ on the cross, as a landscape painting. According to Ramdohr, the landscape itself cannot be turned into an allegory. The point he makes is the following. To turn a landscape into an allegory it should be clear to the spectator that what is represented is not a normal landscape but an uncommon one. To make this evident, the painter has, according to Ramdohr, two choices: she can either produce a bad imitation of nature or represent an exotic landscape.[320] But in both cases the spectator will still doubt, wondering if she is in front of a literal landscape painting. Allegorical figures and symbols must therefore be introduced to make clear that the painting is not to be taken literally as a landscape painting. But then, again, Ramdohr sees two problems: if the figures play a secondary role, the meaning of the landscape will still be underdetermined; but if the figures play the main role, the landscape is reduced to a stage setting and the painting is no longer a landscape painting but a historical one.[321]

As a matter of fact, Ramdohr believes that religious scenes ought to be represented by historical paintings and not by landscape paintings.[322] According to Ramdohr, the point of representing religious scenes is to move us piously: by looking at a holy scene the believer is

[317] HINZ 1974, p.143.
[318] HINZ 1974, p.143.
[319] HINZ 1974, pp.145-150.
[320] HINZ 1974, p.148.
[321] HINZ 1974, p.148.
[322] HINZ 1974, p.149.

reminded of the goodness and piety of an act and it is this act that must move us. A landscape painting, on the other hand, just moves our senses. Ramdohr opposes "pathological moving" to "aesthetic moving" ("*pathologische Rührung*" to "*ästhetische Rührung*").[323] Ramdohr claims that paintings are only able of moving one aesthetically, whereas it is pathological moving that is needed for affecting one religiously.[324] He holds that the most a painting can do, is represent a pious act and use the aesthetic emotion to enhance the exemplary force of the represented act. But this is something that landscape paintings cannot do: it is a task for historical paintings. While landscape paintings affect us sensitively, historical paintings also fulfill the task of making us acquainted with an exemplary act. Ramdohr believes that they are therefore more appropriate to represent religious scenes.[325]

Ramdohr, thus, criticizes Friedrich not only for his syntactic "mistakes," but also for choosing a medium, i.e. landscape painting, which is not apt to convey the religious meaning he had been actually looking for. And the proof of this claim is, according to Ramdohr, that the painting is not self-sustained: one needs to look outside of it, namely at the frame, to reconstruct what the painting must be about.[326] In other words, according to Ramdohr the allegorical meaning of Friedrich's painting is underdetermined.

Ramdohr's writings unleashed the quick reaction of Friedrich's supporters. Ferdinand Hartmann published in 1809 a long reply to Ramdohr in *Phoebus, ein Journal für die Kunst*, an intellectual journal that was edited by Heinrich von Kleist and Adam Müller.[327] In the same journal where Ramdohr some months before had published his text, the *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*, the artist Gerhard von Kügelgen offered his support to his close friend by providing an article arguing in favor of Friedrich's art.[328] Ramdohr was forced to answer to these attacks with another article in the *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*.[329] But the debate ignited by Ramdohr was not only a topic of public discussion: other friends of Friedrich argued in his favor in their private correspondence, as two letters by Rühle von Lilienstern testify.[330] Friedrich himself replied to the criticisms of Ramdohr in a text written in the third person and included in a letter to academy professor Johannes Schulz.[331] In the letter, Friedrich asked professor Schulz to advise him as to whether to publish the text. A shortened

[323] HINZ 1974, p.149.
[324] Hofmann reminds the reader that this is a distinction discussed by Hegel, who pointed at the greater power of relics over paintings to move one religiously and therefore held that religion cannot find satisfaction in beauty and thus in art. See HOFMANN 2000, pp.46-47.
[325] HINZ 1974, p.149.
[326] HINZ 1974, p.148 & 150. Hofmann remarks that the same year of the *Tetschen Altarpiece* the other leading painter of the Romantic, Philipp Otto Runge, had realized a pianting that included the frame (*Der kleine Morgen*, 1808, Hamburg, Kunsthalle). See HOFMANN 2000, p.46.
[327] Reprinted in HINZ 1974, pp.154-168.
[328] Reprinted in HINZ 1974, pp.169-171.
[329] Reprinted in HINZ 1974, pp.172-176.
[330] Reprinted in HINZ 1974, pp.177-188.
[331] Reprinted in HINZ 1974, pp.151-153.

version did indeed appear.[332] Friedrich's text is extremely interesting because it reveals how he understood the role and task of the artist. I will therefore discuss it briefly.

In the text, Friedrich ironically points out that "had he followed the smoothed way where each easel carries its bag," i.e. had he blindly remade what the great masters of the past had done, the Chamberlain would not have felt compelled to write his article.[333] But, he continues, it is not the great masters of the past who have decided that their example ought to be eternalized by continuous repetition. Rather, it is "the arrogant judges of art" that have imposed the old masters' example as "the only infallible directive."[334] The masters, on the other hand, knew perfectly well that to realize art there are plenty of ways, even contradictory ones: for art is "the center of the highest intellectual tension" and one can make a point about art in many a way.[335] Friedrich is well aware that he has not fulfilled the rules that Ramdohr has pointed out in his article, but he offers a reason why: he has been after something different from the contrasting diversity of moods that Ramdohr and the Classicists wanted to have in a single painting. As Friedrich says, he wants to express a single, precise feeling and the whole artwork must contribute towards it.[336]

In this text, Friedrich expresses his views of the fine arts: art is an intellectual activity, where artists have to emerge with an original new voice from the history of past art. It is indeed because he was after something different from what the old masters were after that he broke with the tradition, and not because he was unable to do as the old masters had done. As a matter of fact, Friedrich's early works show the link with the tradition that Ramdohr was

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[332] BUSCH 2003, p.162.

[333] HINZ 1974, p.152: "Wäre Friedrich auf der einmal gebahnten Strasse einhergegangen, wo jeder Esel seinen Sack trägt, wo Hund und Katz der Sicherheit wegen wandelt, weil die berühmten Künstler der Vorzeit als Muster und Vorbilder für Jahrtausande da aufgestellt worden, wahrlich der Kammerherr von Ramdohr hätte geschwiegen." My translation.

[334] HINZ 1974, p.152: "Nicht aber haben sie [die berühmten Künstler der Vorzeit, CG] sich selbst als solche [Muster und Vorbilder, CG] da aufgestellt, sondern anmassende Kunstrichter haben sie uns als einzige untrügliche Richtschnur gegeben." My translation.

[335] HINZ 1974, p.152: "Denn sehr wohl wussten jene achtungswerten Meister, dass die Wege, so zur Kunst führen, unendlich verschieden sind, dass die Kunst eigentlich der Mittelpunkt der Welt, der Mittelpunkt des höchsten geistigen Strebens ist und die Künstler im Kreise um diesen Punkt stehen. Und so kann es sich leicht zutragen, dass zwei Künstler sich gerade entgegenkommen, während sie beide nach einem Punkte streben. Denn die Verschiedenheit des Standpunktes ist die Verschiedenheit der Gemüter, und sie können auf entgegengesetztem Wege beide ein Ziel erreichen. Nur die Beschränktheit herzloser Kunstrichter, durch deren Schriften schon so manches zarte Gemüt verdorben und erkaltet, könnten wähnen, dass nur ein einziger Weg zur Kunst führe, und zwar der vorgeschlagene." My translation.

[336] HINZ 1974, p.153: "Kurz, Friedrich ist ein abgesagter Feind des sogenannten Kontrastes. […] Jedes wahrhafte Kunstwerk muss nach seiner Meinung einen bestimmten Sinn aussprechen, das Gemüt des Beschauers entweder zur Freude oder zur Trauer, zur Schwermut oder zum Frohsinn bewegen, aber nicht alle Empfindungen, wie mit einem Quirl durcheinandergerührt, in sich vereinigen wollen. Eines muss das Kunstwerk nur sein wollen, und dieser eine Wille muss sich durchs Ganze führen, und jeder einzelne Teil desselben muss das Gepräge des Ganzen haben, und nicht wie viele Menschen sich hinter schmeichelnden Worten und heimtückischer Bosheit verstecken."

missing in the case of the *Tetschen Altarpiece*.[337] What we ought to do, then, is try to understand more exactly what his artistic goal was, how he has attempted to reach it, and where the need for it came from. We need to get acquainted with Caspar David Friedrich, his time, and his paintings.

III.1.2. Caspar David Friedrich

Caspar David Friedrich was born 1774 in Greifswald in Neuvorpommern, which from 1648 to 1815 belonged to Sweden and 1815 came to Prussia.[338] His large middle-class family was devoted to small commerce. Although the household was never rich, a certain comfort must be assumed, as the children were privately instructed by a house teacher.[339] Friedrich's mother passed away in 1781, when he was still a child. After the mother's death, a nurse called "Mutter Heiden" ran the household.[340] Of the ten siblings, two died in tender age and a sister at the age of twenty. Another brother, Johann Christoffer, died in the effort to save Caspar David from drowning; the two boys were apparently playing on a boat on a December day, when the boat turned over.[341] According to another story, they were ice-skating on the frozen river.[342] At any rate, this was a traumatic experience that somehow marked Friedrich's life.[343]

Friedrich was the only one of the family to become an artist: his brothers followed the father on the path of craftsmanship and commerce.[344] In 1790, Friedrich became student of

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[337] KELLEIN 1998, pp.23-26.
[338] BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.13, SCHMIED 1992, p.38.
[339] See FIEGE 1977, p.8, BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.13.
[340] FIEGE 1977, p.10, BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.13.
[341] SCHMIED 1992, p.38.
[342] This is the story that Carl Gustav Carus reports in his *Lebenserinnerungen und Denkwürdigkeiten* (1865-66), reprinted in HINZ 1974, p.193. Börsch-Supan seems to follow this version for he writes that Friedrich's brother drowned in the effort to save Caspar David who had fallen into water because the ice had broken. See BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.13.
[343] A friend, Wilhelmine Bardua, reports this accident as the alleged cause of Friedrich's melancholic character – a cause that she dismisses in favor of natural disposition: "Man erzählt, Friedrich habe in früher Jugend das Unglück gehabt, einen sehr geliebten Bruder beim Baden ertrinken zu sehen, ohne ihm zu Hülfe kommen zu können, nachdem er selbst früher durch denselben Bruder aus ähnlicher Gefahr gerettet worden war. Dieses traurige Geschick habe ihm unauslöschlich den Stempel der Schwermut aufgedrückt. Doch ist wohl zu glauben, dass der besondere Ausdruck seines Wesens ihm unmittelbar von der Natur gegeben war." (HINZ 1974, p.191). Friedrich's close friend, doctor Carl Gustav Carus, on the other hand, is convinced that the traumatic experience had long-term consequences for Friedrich, culminating with Friedrich's allegedly attempted suicide: "Friedrich erfuhr als Jünglich das Schreckliche, dass beim Schlittschuhlaufen ein besonders geliebter Bruder, mit dem er sich bei Greifswald auf dem Eise befand, vor seinen Augen einbrach, und von der Tiefe verschlungen wurde. Kam nun hinzu ein sehr hoher Begriff der Kunst, ein an sich düsteres Naturell und eine aus beiden hervorgehende Unzufriedenheit mit seinen eigenen Leistungen, so begriff man leicht, wie er einst wirklich zu einem Versuche des Selbstmordes sich verleitet finden konnte." (HINZ 1974, p.193).
[344] FIEGE 1977, pp.9-10.

Johann Gottfried Quistorp, a drawing teacher at the University of Greifswald.[345] In addition to the strongly Lutheran religious climate of Greifswald and of his family, Quistorp played an important educational role in Friedrich's development.[346] First, he possessed a large collection of drawings, paintings, and etchings that the young Friedrich could study and copy. Furthermore, he pointed out to Friedrich the significance of his home landscape and culture. Finally, he brought him in contact with the theologian and poet Gotthard Ludwig Kosegarten, a long time friend of his.[347] The pantheism and Ossianism of Kosegarten crucially shaped Friedrich's own thinking.[348]

Probably following Quistorp's suggestion, 1794 Friedrich moved to Copenhagen to take classes at one of the most liberal and progressive Academies of Europe.[349] The intellectual life of Copenhagen was permeated by early Romantic ideas, with an emphasis on the role of the senses and on the cult of Ossian.[350] It does not seem that the four years spent in Copenhagen brought many new insights to Friedrich.[351] In 1798, he finally settled down in Dresden, then a center of early Romanticism, where Novalis, Schelling, Fichte, and the Schlegel brothers lived.[352] Friedrich spent the rest of his life in Dresden, where he died in 1840, leaving behind his wife and three children.[353]

Friedrich's artistic career knew ups and downs. It had been first boosted in 1805, when he won half of the prize offered by the *Weimarer Kunstfreunde* under Goethe's leadership.[354] The curious fact about this success is that the two works by Friedrich for which he was acknowledged did not respect the terms of the concourse.[355] In fact, the topic of the 1805 edition was "*Aus dem Leben Hercules*" ("From Hercules' Life") and an execution of the topic according to Classicist standards was expected.[356] Friedrich's sepia works had no relation to the topic; one represented a funeral procession in a wide landscape, the other two people under a dead tree also in a wide landscape. Friedrich was extremely surprised to be the half winner, but also very happy about that.[357] The acknowledgment of his art by Goethe must

[345] FIEGE 1977, p.10, BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, pp.13-14, SCHMIED 1992, p.38, KELLEIN 1998, p.17.
[346] The role of the Lutheran climate in which Friedrich grew up is highlighted by FIEGE 1977, p.8 and BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.14.
[347] SCHMIED 1992, p.38, FIEGE 1977, pp.11-12.
[348] SCHMIED 1992, p.27. See also BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.14
[349] FIEGE 1977, pp.12-17, SCHMIED 1992, p.38, KELLEIN 1998, p.17.
[350] FIEGE 1977, p.12.
[351] BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.14.
[352] SCHMIED 1992, p.40.
[353] FIEGE 1977, p.129, BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.63, SCHMIED 1992, pp.38-42.
[354] FIEGE 1977, pp.28-30, BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.27, SCHMIED 1992, p.9, HOFMANN 2000, pp.28-29.
[355] Hofmann points out the symptomatic historical relevance of this fact, HOFMANN 2000, pp.28-29.
[356] SCHMIED 1992, p.9.
[357] FIEGE 1977, p.29, HOFMANN 2000, p.28.

have meant a lot to an artist who was still searching for his own style.[358] However, Goethe's positive attitude towards Friedrich did not last forever. In 1815, Goethe said of Friedrich's work that it ought "to be shattered against the table's edge": the reason for this indignant reaction was that Friedrich had broken so much with the Classicist standards that, according to Goethe, "his work could be as well looked at upside-down."[359]

Actually, it was a misunderstanding of the early sepia works that had led to their recognition. What had been praised were the fineness of their execution and their sentimentalist flavor rather than Friedrich's own Romantic thrust.[360] With the *Tetschen Altarpiece*, however, Friedrich's intentions had become plain. What the two early works contained *in nuce*, was now brought to full development; it became apparent that Friedrich intended to break entirely with Classicism and that he was no longer representing landscapes for the sake of landscapes. It became plain that he used landscapes to express a spiritual message, charged with pantheism and a willingness to rediscover the Nordic roots of his culture. In 1808, he was not alone in being taken up by this *Weltanschauung* and this is the reason why many an intellectual spoke in his favor against Ramdohr's criticism.[361] As we have seen, artists such as Hartmann or Kügelgen and intellectuals from the Phoebus-circle around Kleist, Adam Müller, and Rühle von Lilienstern did not hesitate to support Friedrich.

As a matter of fact, the Ramdohr's quarrel helped Friedrich reach the peak of his fame around 1810 and during a decade afterwards.[362] The 1810 exhibition of *Mönch am Meer* and *Abtei im Eichwald* at the *Jahresausstellung der Königlichen Akademie* in Berlin, followed by the acquisition of both paintings by the future king of Prussia and by the famous essay "*Verschiedene Empfindungen vor einer Seelandschaft von Friedrich, worauf ein Kapuziner*" written by the Romantic leaders Kleist, Brentano, and Arnim sanctioned Friedrich's fame.[363] 1816 he obtained the membership into the Academy of Dresden, which involved an annual share of 150 Talers.[364] The acknowledgment of the Academy culminated in 1824 with his

[358] Börsch-Supan remarks that Friedrich, as he left Copenhagen, had not found his language yet (see BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.15). He attributes to Friedrich uncertainty and intense search in the years around 1802-04 (*ibid*, p.23).
[359] SCHMIED 1992, pp.9-10. The translation of Goethe's quotations are mine. Fiege mentions Friedrich's refutation to illustrate Goethe's studies of the clouds as the reason of the break between the two; see FIEGE 1977, p.66.
[360] BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.27, SCHMIED 1992, p.10. The fineness of the execution is to be explained by the fact that Friedrich had at first specialized as a sepia-painter and moved on later on to oil paintings; see KELLEIN 1998, pp.26-27.
[361] SCHMIED 1992, p.10.
[362] SCHMIED 1992, pp.10-11 & 40, FIEGE 1977, p.92.
[363] HOFMANN 2000, pp.53-57. Kleist, Brentano, and Arnim's article appeared in *Berliner Abendblätter*, 12. Blatt, 13.10.1810, pp.47-48 and is reprinted in HINZ 1974, pp.213-217.
[364] FIEGE 1977, p.92, SCHMIED 1992, p.41.

nomination as associate professor. However, Friedrich was never appointed full professor.[365] In the 1820s, a change in taste hastened the decline of Friedrich's popularity.[366] Moreover, from 1826 onwards Friedrich's health became precarious and his state definitely worsened after he had an apoplectic fit in 1835.[367] When he died in 1840 he was a forgotten artist.[368] Friedrich did not have successors.[369] His work too was forgotten for half a century until it happened to be rediscovered by a Norwegian historian, Andreas Aubert.[370]

With the rediscovery of his work by Aubert, at the turn of the 20th century Friedrich gained enormous posthumous fame; the public wanted to see his paintings, the critics to study them, and the art dealers to buy them.[371] The interpretations of his work were quite wild, though, and it is no surprise to find it celebrated as truly German by the Nazis.[372] As a consequence of such Nazi-sympathies, after World War II Friedrich's work was once again neglected.[373] Fortunately, in the 1970s – and particularly in relationship with the exhibitions organized in 1974 for the celebration of Friedrich's 200th birthday – it began to be seriously reconsidered.[374] This time, wild interpretations were replaced by a scientific, historically accurate study that has secured the art historical significance of Caspar David Friedrich's work. It is thus time to look into the goal that Friedrich was pursuing.

III.1.3. Friedrich's Goal

As he wrote in his letter to academy professor Schultz in 1809, Friedrich wanted to express through his paintings a single, precise feeling.[375] What Friedrich did not specify in his letter, is what sort of feeling he was interested in. His paintings reveal that he was interested in a particular sort of feeling, a sort we could call "Romantic." But a better specification of the sense in which it was Romantic is necessary. Although the topics of his paintings range from more political to more religious or mystic ones, they all express and reflect a specifically

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[365] FIEGE 1977, p.107, BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.49, SCHMIED 1992, p.41. Friedrich's political views, to which I will come back below, might have been the reason why he never got the full professorship at the Academy of Dresden; see FIEGE 1977, p.107 and SCHMIED 1992, p.41.
[366] SCHMIED 1992, pp.11-12, BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.56. Fiege remarks the anachronism of Friedrich's last works, which were still imbued of Romantic sensibility in a time that was stepping towards Realism, see FIEGE 1977, p.124.
[367] FIEGE 1977, pp. 125-130, BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.50 & 60-63, SCHMIED 1992, p.42.
[368] BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, pp.63-64, SCHMIED 1992, p.12.
[369] Nevertheless, his art has been considered the forerunner of many a modern movements, from symbolism to impressionism. Usually, however, such associations are not supported by historical facts. See SCHMIED 1992, p.35.
[370] SCHMIED 1992, pp.13-14, KELLEIN 1998, pp.10-11.
[371] SCHMIED 1992, pp.15-16.
[372] RAUTMANN 1990, SCHMIED 1992, pp.16-17.
[373] SCHMIED 1992, pp.7-8.
[374] SCHMIED 1992, p.8, KELLEIN 1998, p.9.
[375] HINZ 1974, p.153.

Romantic sensibility that can be observed in his time. Getting a grip on the general Romantic sensibility is crucial to understanding Friedrich's own concerns.[376]

Several aspects flow into the Romantic sensibility. First of all, Romanticism has involved a reevaluation of the senses in opposition to the almost exclusive interest in rationality typical of the Age of Enlightenment. Such a reevaluation went on parallel to the reevaluation of nature, for the senses were conceived of as the natural, animal part of human beings, as opposed to the rational one.[377] Jean-Jacques Rousseau's myth of the noble savage, developed in his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), is of course the forerunner of this general trend. A good visualization of the change that took place in the way people related to nature can be observed at the level of garden-conception. Against the ordered gardens of Versailles, whose geometric patterns could be admired from the windows of the palace, the Romantic English gardens offered pleasing sceneries to be enjoyed with one's senses rather than with one's mind: the landscape had to elicit sensations and people had to let them arise by discovering the landscape with their own bodies rather than with the eye alone.

Not only gardens, but also nature in general was now looked at from the point of view of the feelings it was able to stir. Through this lense, wild nature with its enormous, uncontrollable power became the point of connection with the Transcendent. The concept of the sublime, which Edmund Burke had first introduced in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), and which Kant and Schiller had made popular in the German-speaking world, has played here a fundamental role.[378] According to Kant, a human being experiences the sublime when she is confronted, in her finiteness, with the infinity of the universe: in that very moment, she is able to overcome herself and feel the almightiness of God, which her reason is by itself unable to conceive.[379] From the idea of the sublime, it was but a small step to develop a pantheistic view *à la* Kosegarten: God does not manifest Himself exclusively in extreme landscapes, but *everywhere* in nature – you only need to discover His presence through your feelings. The natural world is an open door to another world: the transcendental, next world.[380]

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[376] HOFMANN 2000, pp.15-39.
[377] Nature became the place where human beings would recognize themselves. See SCHMIED 1992, p.20.
[378] HOFMANN 2000, pp.58-60.
[379] KANT 1790, § 29, p.192: "Das Erhabene besteht bloss in der Relation, worin das Sinnliche in der Vorstellung der Natur für einen möglichen übersinnlichen Gebrauch desselben als tauglich beurteilt wird." Kant distinguishes the mathematical sublime from the dynamic one. The second is the one at stake here.
[380] FIEGE 1977, pp.23-24.

As we have seen, Friedrich has been affected by Kosegarten's views in his years in Greifswald.[381] One of his famous aphorisms goes: "The Divine is everywhere, even in a grain of sand."[382] But Friedrich was not affected by a pagan sort of pantheism. Like other Romantic intellectuals, he combined pantheism with protestant religion, in particular with the idea of a personal relationship to the Christian God.[383] The way such a personal relationship is to be established is by following Jesus' compassionate example. It is not reason that leads us nearer God, but rather our human feelings, which Jesus, *qua* human being, shared with us. Jesus is the *exemplum* that the religious man must follow. And, as we have seen in his description of the *Tetschen Altarpiece*, Friedrich says indeed of his Christ on the cross that He is our hope, i.e. our only way to come back to the communion with God, the setting sun.

The reevaluation of the sensitive sphere, then, becomes tantamount to re-approaching God, to discern the Divine that is everywhere. It is important to remark that Friedrich, contrarily to the Romantic understanding of the sublime and contrarily to the way his art was to some extent interpreted by his contemporaries, was not interested in the idea of the subject overcoming herself to get dissolved in the absolute, which is part of the concept of the sublime.[384] Friedrich does not represent dramatic scenes with self-forgetting individuals. Rather, he represents highly controlled and still scenes with individuals in respectful contemplation of the Infinite, the Divine, as if reminded of who is the Lord. For instance, Friedrich often represents people seen from behind, doing nothing else than looking far away, towards the horizon of the sea, the infinity of the sky, or the silhouette of a cathedral.[385] As opposed to people represented as looking towards the spectator and thus inviting her to establish with them a relationship, people represented from behind subtract themselves from a mutual relationship with the spectator and force her to identify with them and look at what they are looking at.[386] The spectator ends up looking with them at the infinite, feeling both the distance that separates man from the Divine, which is so far away from them, and the

[381] Fiege mentions next to Kosegarten a Swedish poet and philosopher, namely Thomas Thorild. Thorild taught at the University of Greiswald from 1796. Since Friedrich attended that university from 1794 to 1798, it is possible that the pantheist views of the Swede also influenced him. See FIEGE 1977, p.24.
[382] HINZ 1974, p.211: "Das Göttliche ist überall, sagte Friedrich, auch im Sandkorn." This aphorism is reported by Karl Förster. My translation.
[383] FIEGE 1977, p.42.
[384] BUSCH 2003, pp.146-148. Busch shows for instance how a painting such as *Das Eismeer* (1823/24, Hamburg, Kunsthalle) could be mistakenly interpreted by Friedrich's contemporaries and the subsequent critics as a representation of the sublime. See BUSCH 2003, pp.116-118.
[385] See for instance: *Der Mönch am Meer* (1809-10, Berlin, Nationalgalerie), *Neubrandenburg* (1817, Kiel, Stiftung Pommern), *Kreidefelsen auf Rügen* (1818, Winterthur, Stiftung Oskar Reinhart), *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (1818, Hamburg, Kunsthalle), *Auf dem Segler* (1818/19, St. Petersburg, Hermitage), *Zwei Männer in Betrachtung des Mondes* (1819, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister), *Mondaufgang am Meer* (1822, Berlin, Nationalgalerie).
[386] SCHMIED 1992, p.22.

possibility of recovering a certain sort of humble communion with it, inasmuch as we belong to a whole that surpasses and directs our finite, mortal lives.[387]

Often Friedrich makes use of antithetic pendants to oppose a situation of hopeless loss and solitude to a situation of recovered communion with God, as the pairs *Der Mönch am Meer* vs. *Abtei im Eichwald* and *Winterlandschaft* vs. *Winterlandschaf mit Kirche* show.[388] Also, he often represents the transient dimension of human life in terms of cycles, the importance of which in Friedrich's work has been often highlighted.[389] Typical are the evocative associations of day time, season, and period of life: a morning spring scene, where two children play, is succeeded by a scene in which it is already noon, summer, and two young people discover themselves to be in love; an afternoon scene follows, where the vegetation is autumnal and the two people are definitely adults; in the last scene, it is evening, winter, and the couple is now old.[390] Friedrich produced such groups of works more than once.[391] He also represented the cycle in one single painting, as *Die Lebensstufen* shows.[392] But it is not mere existentialist reasoning that supports Friedrich's representations of the cycle of life: it is rather the very religious thought that we cannot escape death and that our consolation and salvation is in God and with God.

The theological philosophy of Schleiermacher is held responsible for these views.[393] Friedrich had indeed personally met Schleiermacher and a friendship between the two had developed, in consequence of which many ideas of the philosopher were absorbed by the artist.[394] Werner Busch has recently worked out the way in which Schleiermacher's

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[387] SCHMIED 1992, pp.22-24.

[388] *Der Mönch am Meer* (1809-10) and *Abtei im Eichwald* (1809-10) are both in Berlin (Nationalgalerie); the *Winterlandschaft* (1811) is in Schwerin (Staatliches Museum), while the *Winterlandschaft mit Kirche* (1811) is in London (National Gallery). Busch discusses these pairs in BUSCH 2003, pp.76-79 and BUSCH 2003, pp.156-158 respectively. He also offers a historical sketch of the tradition of pendants in BUSCH 2003, pp.142-146. As a peculiar example of such pendants see *Gebirgige Flusslandschaft (Elblandschaft bei Dresden)* of 1830-35 (Staatliche Museen Kassel, Neue Galerie), where Friedrich made use of a particular method (the transparent painting) to show on the one side a day scene and on the backside an evening scene. For a discussion of the pendants and of the cycles, see also HOFMANN 2000, pp.208-209.

[389] FIEGE 1977, pp.79-86, SCHMIED 1992, pp.29-31, SCHMIED 1999. Hofmann points out the relevance of Philipp Otto Runge's 1803 drawings *Zeiten* (Hamburg, Kunsthalle) as an example for Friedrich. See HOFMANN 2000, p.209.

[390] Already in 1803, Friedrich must have realized a cycle like the one described, but the four sepias are now lost. Still available are the 1826 realized sepias now in the Kunsthalle in Hamburg, upon which my description relies.

[391] Another cycle with a different setting but similar meaning consists of the 1820 realized oil paintings now in Hannover, Niedersächsische Landesgalerie.

[392] 1835, Leipzig, Museum der Bildenden Künste.

[393] BUSCH 2003, pp.74-76. Busch claims that Friedrich's thinking has been mostly influenced by Schleiermacher: "Ich möchte behaupten, dass Schleiermacher für Friedrichs gedankliche Prägung den bedeutendsten Einfluss überhaupt darstellt." (*ibid.*, p.74). Hofmann also points out the close resemblance of Schleiermacher's thinking to Friedrich's; see HOFMANN 2000, pp.50-52, p.245.

[394] FIEGE 1977, p.111, BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.69, SCHMIED 1992, pp.22-29, SCHMIED 1999, p.98, BUSCH 2003, pp.74-76.

philosophy influenced Friedrich's art.[395] According to him, Friedrich owes the conceptual background that supports his art entirely to Schleiermacher and in particular to his discourses *On Religion* of 1799.[396] Schleiermacher considered art as a means to develop religious sentiment, which results from the contemplation of the Infinite.[397] As we have just seen, this contemplation is exactly what characterizes the individuals in Friedrich's paintings. Friedrich, like Schleiermacher, understood painting as a religious practice: not as a practice of representation of religious dogmas, but as a practice of representation of the truly religious sentiment, i.e. that sentiment which would affect the spectator religiously.[398] Indeed, Friedrich opposed his art to that of the Nazarenes, whose art he considered mannered in two respects: first, because of the mimicking and thus non-sincere language and, second, because of the dogmatic distance and coldness of the contents.[399] Against this art, he proposed his own language and the sincerity of sentiment, which the painting ought to elicit.[400] To that purpose, Friedrich developed a painterly language that needs to be analyzed. I postpone such an analysis to the next section, for I would like first to complete the description of the particular sort of sentiment that Friedrich was concerned with in his art.

Busch insists on the religiosity of Friedrich's art and I think that he is right. But I also think that Friedrich's religiosity is imbued with a very protestant concern with the present life and how to use it in the best way. Friedrich's political engagement, which pops up in so many of his paintings, is almost entirely and unfairly disregarded by Busch, as is the more generally Romantic sensibility, which, in spite of all the specificity of Friedrich's religiosity, also plays an important role in his sensibility.[401] As we have just seen, death, which repeatedly marked Friedrich's private life (remember the many deaths in his family), is an important key to understanding his work. Next to the representation of the cycle of human life, Friedrich often evokes death by means of symbols, such as dead trees, funerary elements or cemeteries.[402] Of

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[395] BUSCH 2003, in particular pp.161-171.

[396] BUSCH 2003, p.161: "Ich bin davon überzeugt, dass allein die Theologie Schleiermachers oder genauer seine Reden 'Über die Religion' von 1799 Friedrich eine gedankliche Anleitung bieten konnten, Kunst und Religion zu verbinden, ja Kunst religiös zu betreiben."

[397] BUSCH 2003, pp.162-165.

[398] BUSCH 2003, pp.159-163. Busch summarizes the proximity of Friedrich's and Schleiermacher's positions by opposing "Friedrich's protestant aesthetics" to "Schleiermacher's aesthetic Protestantism" in BUSCH 2003, p.186: "Im Zentrum unserer Überlegungen stand zweierlei: Friedrichs protestantische Ästhetik und Schleiermachers ästhetischer Protestantismus." My translation.

[399] BUSCH 2003, pp.148-149.

[400] For this reason, I think it is wrong to characterize Friedrich's language as "dogmatic-symbolic" as Hofmann does when he opposes Friedrich to Raffael, see HOFMANN 2000, p.48. It is certainly true that Raffael was aiming at natural-looking representations whereas Friedrich was not, but the latter's representations are certainly not dogmatic.

[401] As Hofmann has shown, several of Friedrich's ideas were in the air in Germany. See HOFMANN 2000, pp.15-39, p.245.

[402] See for instance *Hünengrab im Schnee*, (1807, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister), *Grabmale alter Helden*, (1812, Hamburg, Kunsthalle), *Kügelgens Grab*

course, the relevance of death can be explained from within Friedrich's Lutheran position. But, as Wieland Schmied has said, death is also "the obsession of Romanticism."[403] And some aspects of the way in which Friedrich represents the presence of death are certainly very Romantic.

The general fascination with death parallels the spread of Ossianism and the development of a New-Gothic sensibility that reevaluates the night, the mysterious and sinister – a sensibility that the poetry of Edward Young (1683-1765) had also helped develop.[404] It is, in a word, the fascination with the dark side of human existence, the one not enlightened by reason, which Goya had already illustrated in his famous etching *El sueño de la razon produces monstruos*.[405] Friedrich often represents darkly dressed people in contemplation of the moon, sinister crows, and Gothic ruins.[406] The reevaluation of Gothic forms has on the one hand to do with a reevaluation of the Middle Age, interpreted as a dark period of high spirituality simultaneous with belief in mysterious forces. On the other hand, the reevaluation of Gothic architecture serves political ends.[407] After Goethe's *Von Deutscher Baukunst*, written in 1772 and published in 1773, which claimed that Strasbourg's cathedral was *the* example of German (and not French!) style, Gothic was felt to be the truly German style.

In a time when Germany was divided into a myriad of small kingdoms and counties, and occupied by French troops, the desire to free the land from the invaders, to return to German roots, and build up a German nation became very strong.[408] Particularly in the North of Germany, in Dresden, where Friedrich was living, opposition against the invader was very strong; the city had been reduced to a miserable state, destroyed by sicknesses, hunger, poverty, and terror.[409] The patriotism that pervades Friedrich's paintings, particularly those from 1808 till 1815, so heavily laden with symbols of the German tradition, must be read

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(1821/22, private collection), *Friedhofseingang* (1825, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister), *Eichenbaum im Schnee* (1829, Berlin, Nationalgalerie).

[403] SCHMIED 1992, p.30.

[404] HOFMANN 2000, p.58.

[405] Plate realized around 1797, 1st edition 1799.

[406] See for instance: *Abtei im Eichwald* (1809-10, Berlin, Nationalgalerie), *Zwei Männer in Betrachtung des Mondes* (1819, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister), *Rabenbaum* (1822, Paris, Louvre).

[407] FIEGE 1977, pp.98-101.

[408] FIEGE 1977, pp.50-51. Such desire consisted also of the desire to come back to religion. After the desacralization of churches by the French, a process of resacralization began (HOFMANN 2000, p.77). Friedrich himself took part in this process as he designed the interior decoration of the *Marienkirche* of Stralsund, which, however, never got realized (HOFMANN 2000, pp.77-82).

[409] FIEGE 1977, pp.44-47.

within such a context.[410] Friedrich was close to the movements for national freedom, leading members of which were his friends Kleist, Arndt, and Körner.[411]

To express his patriotic views, Friedrich makes use not only of the Gothic forms, which we have already encountered in the frame of the *Tetschen Altarpiece* and we find in many of the ruins represented in his paintings, but also of the dolmens, which were taken to be cultic monoliths of the German forefathers.[412] Moreover, he often represents people dressed with the old German costume (*altdeutsche Tracht*). The old German costume had become the symbol of adherence to patriotic ideals and, after a suggestion by Arndt in 1814, it was worn by those young people who had battled for the freedom from the French and, more generally, by those who identified with the patriotic ideals, in particular university and academy students.[413] The Restoration of 1815 had not brought the hoped-for freedom, but repression: wearing the *altdeutsche Tracht* was tantamount to proclaiming one's disapproval and opposition to the regime.[414] As a matter of fact, the costume was forbidden in 1819.[415] In the same year, Friedrich painted *Zwei Männer in Betrachtung des Mondes*, in which the two men wear the forbidden *altdeutsche Tracht*.[416] It was not the first painting in which that costume appears.[417] But what is surprising is that it was not the last: Friedrich continued to paint people wearing the forbidden costume until the 1830s.[418]

For instance, in one of his late paintings, *Die Lebensstufen*, the old man (Friedrich himself) wears the typical hat of the *altdeutsche Tracht*.[419] But the political hopes of the painter emerge here also from another fact: the Swedish flag that the represented children are

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[410] Friedrich expressed his political views not only in paintings but also in poems (see HOFMANN 2000, p.85). Unfortunately, it is because of his patriotism that his work has been victim of Nazi-misinterpretations.

[411] FIEGE 1977, pp.47-52, HOFMANN 2000, pp.85-87. Hofmann calls Arndt, Kleist, and Körner "fanatical patriots" (*ibid.* p.87).

[412] See for instance *Hünengrab im Schnee* (1807, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister).

[413] FIEGE 1977, p.102.

[414] FIEGE 1977, pp.102-103. Hofmann reminds us of the declaration of intention that the king of Prussia and the Russian czar had expressed in Kalisch (March 25, 1813): they promised to create a free and independent Germany once the invader had been beaten. But the words were not followed by facts: the German league (*Deutscher Bund*) was a phantom nation, where each member was as independent and self-governed as before. See HOFMANN 2000, p.87.

[415] 1819 is the year of August von Kotzebue's murder, which promted the government to persecute intellectuals and members of university movements accused of consipiring against the state. See HOFMANN 2000, p.87.

[416] *Zwei Männer in Betrachtung des Mondes*, 1819, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister.

[417] It seems that the costume appears for the first time in 1815, in a no longer existing painting, see FIEGE 1977, p.103.

[418] In *Abendlandschaft mit zwei Männer* (1830-35, St. Petersburg, Hermitage) and *Mann und Frau den Mond betrachtend* (1830-35, Berlin, Nationalgalerie), for instance. The latter painting, however, is a variation of an older painting, the mentioned *Zwei Männer in Betrachtung des Mondes* (1819, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister) and there are doubts that it was really painted by Friedrich. See BUSCH 2003, pp.180-182.

[419] *Die Lebensstufen*, 1835, Leipzig, Museum der bildenden Künste.

playing with. People such as Arndt considered Sweden a free country and hoped that Prussia would develop in that direction too.[420] Friedrich shared this enthusiasm for Sweden, as is shown not only by this painting but also by the fact that he named his son after the Swedish king. The dedication of the *Tetschen Altarpiece* to 'his' king, i.e. Gustav Adolph IV, is a further proof in support of this claim.[421] These liberal hopes were destroyed and at the same time made even more dear by historical developments: the 1830 Paris Revolution brought one more violent turn of the screw in favor of Restoration. Friedrich's 1835 painting can thus be given a political interpretation: the old man with his liberal hopes is told by the younger man dressed according to the restorative standards that a future of freedom is in the hands of the next generation (i.e. of the two children playing with the flag).[422]

Friedrich's art is charged with his concerns for the political future of his country. He hopes in a unified liberal Germany, able to rediscover and appreciate what that country has to offer. His patriotism can be tracked not only by considering what he represents, but also what he does *not* represent: Friedrich deliberately avoids Italian landscapes, which were typical of Classicist landscape paintings. Friedrich actually never went to Italy, unlike most intellectuals and artists of his generation who went off for the *Grand Tour*.[423] Instead of the swift Italian hills, Friedrich paints his Nordic landscapes, where rocks and pine trees, but also oaks and the Northern Sea have a key role to play. (Notice that during the French Revolution and inspired by it, Friedrich's friend Körner had turned the oak tree into the symbol of a free Germany: Friedrich's frequent representation of the oak tree is probably to be seen from this perspective).[424] In Friedrich's eyes, the German landscape is not less worthy than the Italian one. As a matter of fact, it too offers the possibility to feel the Divine, to be reminded of God' almighty, and to understand the preciousness of His gift to us, i.e. our life. I think that Friedrich has been concerned throughout his career both with religiously existential questions and with the concern for his country, and that these two dimensions have to be seen together as the two sides of his religious *Weltanschauung*: it is precisely because of it that Friedrich was, on the one hand, very much conscious of the transient nature of human life and, on the

[420] FIEGE 1977, pp.105-106.
[421] Busch points out that it is not only for political reasons that Friedrich looked hopefully to the Swedish king: a strong religious motivation also played a role, as Friedrich and the king shared the same protestant views. See BUSCH 2003, pp.36-37.
[422] FIEGE 1977, p.122. Wieland Schmied also points out that Friedrich often associates evening scenes (as it is the case in *Die Lebensstufen*) with the present: the future is in the morning. See SCHMIED 1999, pp.71-76.
[423] FIEGE 1977, p.66. Börsch-Supan points out Friedrich's interest in Northern landscapes in opposition to Southern ones, which he neglected (see BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.36). There is, however, a painting representing a temple in Sicily, *Der Tempel der Juno in Agrigent* (1830, Dortmund, Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte). On that painting, see SCHMIED 1992, pp.112-114.
[424] FIEGE 1977, p.120.

other hand, concerned to make the best out of it – a concern that understandably leads to political engagement.[425]

It is this complex feeling that Friedrich's paintings are trying to make available for the spectator. As he wrote around 1830: "I for myself require of an artwork that it elevate the spirit and – even though not only and exclusively – the religious impulse."[426] The *Tetschen Altarpiece* is in this sense a programmatic work: it invites us to reflect on our short existence and suggests that we follow the Christian example in our practical, everyday life. A form of pantheism, Protestantism, and the desire to reevaluate the own German culture and to battle for its freedom: all these elements shape Friedrich's views and are expressed in the *Tetschen Altarpiece* which is, indeed, not *just* a landscape painting. The representation of the landscape in the *Tetschen Altarpiece* is not the result of mistakes or of the inability of the painter, but is rather carefully studied, so that all the elements concur in bringing forth the spiritual meaning of the painting. Friedrich's aphorism is famous: "Close your bodily eye, so that you may see your picture first with the spiritual eye. Then bring to the light of day that which you have seen in the darkness so that it may react upon others from the outside inwards."[427] It is not what you see that counts, but what you feel. The aphorism indeed goes on: "Painters train themselves in inventing or, as they call it, composing. Does not that mean perhaps, in other words that they train themselves in patching and mending? A picture must not be invented but felt."[428] Trying to reconstruct on the canvas what you have seen is just "patching and mending." Trying to represent what you feel and to make the spectator experience that same feeling: this is what Friedrich was after.[429]

III.1.4. Friedrich's Abstractions

That Friedrich was not interested in reproducing a natural landscape but rather in expressing something else, can also be observed by looking at the way he realized his

[425] For this reason I disagree both with those who try to isolate particular phases in Friedrich's work (Kellein e.g. claims that the religious and political phase of Friedrich's work goes from 1808 to 1814; KELLEIN 1998, p.30) and with those like Börsch-Supan and Hofmann who consider Friedrich's more political paintings as an adaptation of the previous religious ones (BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.36, HOFMANN 2000, p.88). I think that the religious approach is a minimal interpretation of the whole production of Friedrich and that his political works are *also* religious. I agree with Wieland Schmied that the political-historical interpretation is often and unfairly overlooked (SCHMIED 1999, pp.57-65), but I think that it is important to put it into the more general picture of Friedrich's *Weltanschauung*.

[426] HINZ 1974, p.124: "Ich meinesteils fordere von einem Kunstwerk Erhebung des Geistes und – wenn auch nicht allein und ausschliesslich – religiösen Aufschwung." (in: "*Äusserungen bei Betrachtung einer Sammlung von Gemälden*"). My translation.

[427] HINZ 1974, p.92.

[428] HINZ 1974, p.92.

[429] Hofmann talks of the "dark 'total idea'" ("*dunkle 'Totalidee'* ") as the goal pursued by Friedrich in each of his paintings, meaning that he was not replicating nature but using it to represent such an idea (HOFMANN 2000, p.177). I hope to have clarified what the "dark total idea" consisted of!

paintings.[430] His works are organized around an abstract composition of lines and geometrical figures. The Romantic doctrine of mystic geometry that Novalis had announced plays in the background: according to it, a mathematical fundament is necessary to create (or re-create) a world.[431] Although there are no direct statements by Friedrich, his way of painting and a literary text show that he shared these views. In the novel *Erwin von Steinbach oder Geist der deutschen Baukunst* written in 1834 by Friedrich's close friend Theodor Schwarz, there is a character, the painter Kaspar, who is by all evidence a literary portrait of Friedrich himself.[432] In the novel, the painter Kaspar explains that he must first organize his thoughts in mathematical forms before he can start painting, and that without such a mathematical foundation there is no art.[433] But what does this mean concretely?

Werner Busch has convincingly shown how, in order to draw attention to the key elements, Friedrich organized his paintings around mathematically based devices such as the Golden Section.[434] This can clearly be observed in the *Tetschen Altarpiece*.[435] Busch observes that the right vertical of the Golden Section goes exactly through the cross, while the left vertical goes through the central sunbeam and the highest pine tree to the point, at the bottom of the painting, where the setting sun would be represented if there were no rock preventing the sight of it. Thus, the Christ, God the Father (i.e. the setting sun), and our Hope (symbolized by the pine tree) are brought into a geometrical relationship as they are organized around the two vertical lines of the Golden Section. But the two horizontals also play a role. The bottom one intersects the right vertical of the Golden Section at the exact point where the cross ends and meets the rock. Now, Busch observes that the canvas would have been square if there were no frame. Thus, the right side of the rocky triangle that constitutes the mountain's tip corresponds exactly to the diagonal going from the right bottom angle to the left upper angle (under the frame), which passes exactly through the point of intersection I

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[430] SCHMIED 1992, pp.31-37.
[431] SCHMIED 1992, pp.27-29, BUSCH 2003, pp.138-141.
[432] See HINZ 1974, p.225, SCHMIED 1992, p.28, and particularly BUSCH 2003, pp.128-138.
[433] The relevant passages of the novel such as the one quoted here are reprinted in HINZ 1974, p.225: "Alles drängt und treibt mich, wenn ich ein Bild mache, erst in einer gewissen geometrischen Figur meine Gedanken zu fassen und rein, wie der Mathematiker, sie zu construieren. Ich habe nicht früher Ruhe, bis ich eine solche rhythmische Form gefunden habe, die freilich oft sehr versteckt liegt und nur dem Kunstsinn offenbar wird, doch kühl und klar abgewogen werden muss, wie der Rhombus und das Polygon, bevor man an Ausschmückungen Denken darf. Fehlt diese Grundform im Bilde, so fehlt die Kunst, und es ist bei allen sonstigen Verdiensten nichts als ein naturalisirender Versuch, ein üppiges Convolut, ohne Haltung und Wahrheit."
[434] BUSCH 2003, pp.101-122. Busch remarks how highly ordered paintings, such as those following the structure of the Golden Section, represent situations of spiritual peace. This is particularly evident in the case of pendants where to one ordered painting corresponds an unstructured one representing a situation of spiritual loss and chaos, as the pair *Winterlandschaft mit Kirche* (1811, London, National Gallery) vs. *Winterlandschaft* (1811, Schwerin, Staatliches Museum) shows. See BUSCH 2003, pp.76-79.
[435] For the following analysis I entirely rely on BUSCH 2003, pp.43-45. Hofmann has pointed out the relevance of the Golden Section for *Mönch am Meer*. See HOFMANN 2000, p.57.

described of the right vertical and the bottom horizontal of the Golden Section – something possible only within a square. In other words, the meeting point of cross and rock is reinforced by the diagonal followed by the rock's right side, so that the relationship of the Christ and the rock is geometrically emphasized – a relationship to which Friedrich referred in his description of the painting, and which is famously expressed by the religious metaphor: "*petra erat Christus*."

It remains to observe the role of the upper horizontal of the Golden Section. This does not seem to play any role *within* the painting. But it plays a fundamental role in relating the painting to the frame, for it runs from the top of one capital to the other, where the palm branches begin. Thus, the upper horizontal of the Golden Section binds the palm branches geometrically and connects them to the Christ, God, and our Hope, as the upper horizontal crosses on the one hand the right vertical of the Golden Section at the height of Christ's body, and on the other hand the left vertical at the top of the pine tree, where the sunbeam has clearly emerged from behind the tree. Busch remarks that the upper horizontal of the Golden Section marks the line where the terrestrial becomes celestial.[436] But I think that it is rather the foundation of Christian religion that is geometrically summarized: the palm branch is an Easter sign and Easter is the most important Christian event, for it marks Christ's triumph over death – a triumph that Christians celebrate in the Eucharist, symbolized on the altar step by the ears of corn and the grapevine.[437] Christ's triumph is also the triumph of Christ's teaching over the Old Testament, which, it seems to me in the light of Friedrich's descriptions, the setting sun symbolizes. It is for this reason that our hope has to turn towards Christ: if we want to triumph over death, we need to follow His example.

As I have already mentioned, I strongly agree with Busch's thesis about the fundamentally religious dimension of Friedrich's art, even though I think that the political engagement ought to be taken into account as well, insofar as it is a consequence of Friedrich's protestant attitude towards life. I also very much welcome Busch's analysis of the structure of Friedrich's paintings, which, as we have just seen, offers a sound basis upon which to reconstruct the intended meaning. To be sure, Busch does not limit himself to the Golden Section. In his analysis, he also looks at the important role that geometrical figures such as hyperboles play in Friedrich's art.[438] In relation to hyperboles, which come infinitely

[436] BUSCH 2003, p.44: "[Die obere Waagerechte des Goldenen Schnitts] ist auch, wenn man so will, die Linie, die den Übergang von der irdischen zur überirdischen Sphäre in dialektischer Hinsicht bezeichnet, ausgehend vom Corpus Christi."

[437] The relationships between paintings and frame are not only semantic, but also syntactic. As Hofmann remarks, the triangle of God's eye, represented on the altar step, is repeated by the rock, and the rays surrounding God's eye are echoed in the painting by the sunrays. See HOFMANN 2000, p.46.

[438] BUSCH 2003, pp.123-128. Hofmann too points at the hyperbole in *Das Grosse Gehege* (1832, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlung, Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister), but claims that it is one of the last

near but never reach the asymptotes, Busch reminds us of Schleiermacher's interpretation of them as equivalent to what happens with the idea of God: we can only approach it, but never reach it.[439] Again, given the strict relationship between Schleiermacher and Friedrich, it is quite possible to think of an influence of the former upon the latter. Other interpreters besides Busch have pointed out mathematical-geometrical structures that underlie Friedrich's paintings. Hofmann, for instance, finds particularly important the recurrent general structuring around horizontal layers and/or vertical axes.[440] Moreover, he sees in many works by Friedrich "hidden triptychs" ("*verborgene Tryptychen*").[441]

At any rate, the mathematical structure in Friedrich's paintings only initiates the transformation of representations of nature into spiritual representations, but this transformation is not due to it alone. Consideration of the subsequent steps of Friedrich's painterly procedure will reveal other devices used by the painter to reach his end. First of all, once the abstract composition was achieved, Friedrich covered it with natural motifs he had copied in his notebooks.[442] Friedrich namely used to go into nature to sketch trees and rocks *en plein air*, as some decades later the Impressionists would say, and the final representation of single natural elements obtained on the basis of such sketches is therefore extremely faithful to nature and testifies to detailed observation, as e.g. the pine trees in the *Tetschen Altarpiece* show.[443] On the basis of the sketches, then, Friedrich added natural elements to his original composition of lines and geometrical figures. Again, the choice of the natural elements must follow one's feelings while respecting the basic abstract composition.[444] In other words, in his paintings Friedrich combined natural elements he had indeed copied from nature, but the combination was not faithful to the natural settings. As a matter of fact, geographically and/or temporally distant elements end up as neighbors in the painting and the absolute dimension of the objects is changed according to need: a little tree in nature can become an imposing one in the painting.[445] What obtains in the end is a "studied

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tricks Friedrich had developed to organize his paintings (HOFMANN 2000, pp.236-237). I think that Busch has convincingly shown that Friedrich has used this figure before.

[439] BUSCH 2003, pp.167-169.

[440] HOFMANN 2000, pp.66 ff, 154-166. He applies Delacroix' expression: "sanctified casting forms" ("*geheiligte Gussformen*") to Friedrich's structure around verticals and horizontals (HOFMANN 2000, p.219).

[441] HOFMANN 2000, p.137.

[442] FIEGE 1977, pp.68-79, SUMOWSKY 1990, p.42, SCHMIED 1992, pp.32-33, BUSCH 2003, pp.92-101.

[443] According to Werner Busch, for his drawings Friedrich made use of Valenciennes' treatise *Elements de perspective pratique* (1799). See BUSCH 2003, pp.82-92.

[444] SUMOWSKY 1990, p.43.

[445] BUSCH 2003, p.186: "Friedrich kann in einem Bild durchaus Studien nutzen, die zu verschiedenen Zeiten und an verschiedenen Orten entstanden sind. […] Dieses synthetische Verfahren stellt die einzelnen sorgfältig studierten Gegenstände tendenziell auch für eine Grössensteigerung oder Grössenverringerung zur Verfügung." See also HOFMANN 2000, p.186.

composition."[446] More importantly, due to this assembly procedure natural truth yields to a different, spiritual truth.[447] In other words, it is not imitation of natural landscape that Friedrich was concerned with, but rather *use* of natural elements to express his own feelings.

A further device that Friedrich used to make clear that he does not paint for the sake of mimetically reproducing natural landscapes, is disconnecting grounds and standpoints, as our discussion of the *Tetschen Altarpiece* has already shown. Friedrich had indeed moved away from the idea of a fictional space constructed in perspective, where the eye is swiftly led from the foreground towards the background.[448] Friedrich's modernity has less to do with the fact that he abstractly composed his landscapes (the ideal landscapes of the 17th and 18th centuries are similar in this respect), but rather with the fact that he did not disguise the composition: he did not aim at hiding it under natural and harmonic appearances, but rather *showed* the composition as such.[449] This attitude parallels not only Friedrich's giving up a steady standpoint and directly contrasting foreground and background as in the *Tetschen Altarpiece*, but also his privileging fragmental scenes and limiting the representation to a few strongly evocative elements.[450] In the *Tetschen Altarpiece*, the fragmental character of the scene is evident, as only the rocky tip of a mountain and nothing else is represented. It is exactly by forcing us to focus on such a fragment that Friedrich manages to charge the landscape with symbolic or allegoric meaning.[451] That one cannot see behind the rock, as Ramdohr complained, is exactly what Friedrich wanted; the point is not to look at a landscape, but to look at a particular element that otherwise would be irrelevant and understand what makes it relevant. The same device is at stake when isolated elements such as trees, boats, or stones are represented as subjects of the scene, as if Friedrich were portraying them.

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[446] SCHMIED 1992, p.34, reports Börsch-Supan's remarks on the role of composition in Friedrich's paintings (in Börsch-Supan's 1960 dissertation "*Die Bildgestaltung bei Caspar David Friedrich*", München).

[447] BUSCH 2003, p.97: "Die naturwahren Partikel warden im Bilde durch eine abstrakte, auf die Bildfläche bezogene Ordnung von grosser ästhetischer Wirksamkeit in eine höhere, die Naturwahrheit transzendierende Wahrheit überführt."

[448] SCHMIED 1992, pp.31-32. Hofmann claims that after Börsch-Supan's dissertation the relationship of near to far grounds has become a key to understand Friedrich's organization of space (HOFMANN 2000, p.135). Moreover, he points out that Friedrich's abrupt approaching of near and far planes opened up new ways of organizing landscape paintings (HOFMANN 2000, p.20). On the other hand, he remarks that Friedrich's giving up a representation according to the rules of central perspective represents an *innovative revival* ("*innovativen Rückgriff*") of a pre-Renaissance situation (HOFMANN 1982, p.158).

[449] SCHMIED 1992, p.34.

[450] Kellein holds that the *Tetschen Altarpiece* with the direct contrast of foreground and background represents an isolated case until 1818 and contradicts Friedrich's quoted passage, according to which a painting should not express contrasts (KELLEIN 1998, p.28). I have to object to both claims. First, the *Tetschen Altarpiece* is not an isolated case: *Hünengrab im Schnee* of 1807 (Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister) is another example of such a contrast. Second, Friedrich's aversion is against paintings that stir contrasting *feelings*, not against *formal contrasts* in the way a painting is realized.

[451] On the role of fragments in Friedrich's work see GRÜTTER 1990.

Once the drawing was completed, Friedrich began to paint.[452] The drawing itself was actually executed on the grounded canvas. Friedrich grounded his canvasses twice: first with a white chalky ground, then with a colored ground correspondent to the lightest tonality of the painting.[453] Upon the so grounded canvas, Friedrich drew the scene. Then, he started putting on layers of colors. According to Busch, Friedrich developed his painterly technique on the basis of the sepia technique, in which he had first become an acknowledged master.[454] There, the darker an object is the more layers of sepia are put on it. Thus, to create effects of light and shade one cannot but play with the numbers of layers. In his oil paintings, Friedrich proceeded in the same way: by adding light layers of colors and playing with the resulting different grades of intensity.[455] Often the color layers are so light that the underlying drawing is still visible. It is because of this procedure that the basic color he used for grounding the canvas can perform its function of unifying the painting; as a matter of fact, it shines through all the light layers of colors.[456]

As for the choice of the colors, it seems that Romantic speculations about the meaning of colors have played their role. In particular, it is the *Farbenlehre* by the other leading Romantic painter, Philipp Otto Runge, that probably influenced Friedrich.[457] Friedrich knew Runge personally, although it is unclear to what degree a friendship between the two really developed.[458] At any rate, Runge's considerations about colors were familiar to him. Friedrich insisted that the color must follow one's own feelings rather than just imitate nature. Indeed, he did not refrain from exaggerating colors and accentuating contrasts. So, the clouds in the *Tetschen Altarpiece* are too red, as Ramdohr had pointed out, and the waters of *Das Grosse Gehege* are just of unbelievable colors.[459] Similarly, the contrast between dark colors in the foreground and bright colors in the background in *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* has clearly been accentuated.[460] But, as we have seen, it is not realism that Friedrich was aiming at. He was instead concerned with his deep religious feelings about human life and with the way a landscape painting could make these feelings transmittable: a truly revolutionary concern.[461]

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[452] Fiege observes how the colors changed throughout Friedrich's career. See FIEGE 1977, pp.113-114.
[453] BUSCH 2003, p.184.
[454] BUSCH 2003, p.86.
[455] BUSCH 2003, p.86, pp.184-185.
[456] BUSCH 2003, p.185.
[457] SUMOWSKY 1990, p.43. Runge's writings developing his theory of colors are published in RUNGE 1797-1810, pp.245-263. For comments on Runge's theory of colors, its relationship to other theories of colors, and its historical relevance, see MATILE 1979. In particular, for the relationship of Runge's theory to Goethe's, see MATILE 1979, pp.219-249.
[458] Friedrich had met Runge around 1801-02. See FIEGE 1977, pp.25-27, and HOFMANN 2000, p.209.
[459] *Das Grosse Gehege*, 1832, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlung, Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister.
[460] *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*, 1818, Hamburg, Kunsthalle.
[461] Fiege points at the artists that laid the foundations for Friedrich's work and in relationship to whom his work is not as revolutionary as it seems (FIEGE 1977, pp.34-35). Hofmann too puts Friedrich in a

III.1.5. Friedrich Seeking the Link to Art History

In the previous sections, I have tried to show what Friedrich was aiming at through his art. There is one more question left, namely the question of why he did what he did. I hold that Friedrich, like all other artists, was pursuing the final goal of aesthetic appreciation: he wanted the spectator to recognize that his art was successfully fulfilling an art-historically relevant art norm. As we have seen, not only was he conscious of breaking with the tradition, but he also *aimed* at doing so: he wanted to contribute to the history of art.[462] And he did, as some of his contemporaries understood.[463] Friedrich first works of art show their link with the past. At the academy, he had been taught to paint like the old masters. But he knew that to be a great artist this was not enough. As he wrote to academy professor Schulz, art is not about following "the smoothed way where each easel carries its bag," but is rather "the center of the highest intellectual tension."[464] Being an artist involves an intellectual activity, in which the search for one's own original language is an essential part. Friedrich looked for his own sort of contribution to art history. In the years after Copenhagen, he was still looking. The *Tetschen Altarpiece* was the first product where his position was finally and unequivocally expressed.

The syntactic changes introduced by Friedrich are fully legitimate and clearly explainable by reason of the new contents he wanted to express. And such new contents reflect both his personal *Weltanschauung* and the Romantic atmosphere of his time.[465] Classicism was over,

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larger context, by highlighting among other things the role of the Protestant artistic tradition (HOFMANN 2000, pp.150-151, pp.260-261), the influence of Friedrich's teacher Jens Juel (HOFMANN 2000, pp.254-255), and the tradition of representing figures from behind (HOFMANN 2000, pp.256-257).

[462] Friedrich's own words testify this. In the "*Äusserungen bei Betrachtung einer Sammlung von Gemälden von grössenteils noch lebenden und unlängst verstorbenen Künstlern*" (reprinted in HINZ 1974, pp.85-130), Friedrich reveals his view of history as a progress in the sense of a stepping forwards towards the new (which is not necessarily the better). He asks himself whether his new way of conceiving landscape is a progress (in this sense) in the history of art: "Mit dem Fortschreiten der Zeit besteht ein ewiger Krieg, denn wo in der Welt sich etwas Neues gestalten will, und wäre es auch noch so entschieden wahr und schön, wird es dennoch vom Alten, Bestehenden bekriegt, und nur durch Kampf und Streit kann sich das Neue Platz machen und behaupten, bis es wieder verdrängt dem Neueren weichen muss. Aber nicht alles Verdrängen des Bestandenen vom Bestehenden ist allemal als Fortschritt der Zeit in der Erkenntnis anzunehmen. Und dies in gegenwärtiger Zeit auf bildende Kunst angewendet, fragte sich's wohl noch, ob di neuere Landschaftsmalerei als Fortschritt der Zeit in der Kunst betrachtet werden könne." (HINZ 1974, p.105).

[463] Kleist, Brentano, and Arnim, for instance, wrote in their article on the *Mönch am Meer* that "the painter has certainly opened up a brand new field in his art." See HINZ 1974, p.213: "Gleichwohl hat der Maler zweifelsohne eine ganz neue Bahn im Felde seiner Kunst gebrochen," my translation.

[464] HINZ 1974, p.152.

[465] I disagree with Börsch-Supan's claim that Friedrich's art reflects less his time than the existential concerns that each human being has, which, according to him, is what secures the extra-temporal value of Friedrich's art (BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1987, p.64). I think that Friedrich's art very much reflects his time and that exactly this is what makes it so valuable.

thought had progressed, and a new sensibility had replaced the old one; it was high time for art to reflect those changes and to look for new formal solutions. Friedrich was able to reflect his own existential concerns and those of his time, and turn them into a new artistic goal, by proposing a new theoretical approach to art springing from his study of the (mimetic) art that constituted his cultural background and so revolutionary at the same time. It is interesting to remark how Friedrich, in his writings, insists on the role of feelings against rules.[466] He wanted his art to be the product of his religiously imbued feelings and not the result of following some pre-established rules. By saying so, he did not seem to be aware that he was introducing a new theoretical approach to art, a new art norm against the rules that the past generation had been following. He was indeed opposing an art relying on expression of feelings to an art relying on classical parameters, but in so doing he was giving art a new norm, whose art historical significance the public was asked to assess.

Notice that Friedrich used the institutionalized conventions to make his intention to have his work measured against the background of theories and history of art intelligible. As a matter of fact, in spite of the revolutionary dimension of the *Tetschen Altarpiece*, Ramdohr was able to recognize Friedrich's work *as an artwork* – an artwork whose existence he found disgraceful but, still, an artwork. How was it possible for Ramdohr to succeed in recognizing the artwork? One could say that he succeeded because it was a painting, and paintings usually are artworks. But this is no sufficient answer, for Friedrich painted many a painting with no intention to produce artworks. In the years 1824-25, for instance, Friedrich painted a series of watercolors, neatly bound in an album and titled *A Picturesque Journey through Rügen*.[467] This album was meant to serve as an example of reproductions to be sold to tourists and was neither the first nor the last work of this sort that Friedrich realized.[468] He called such works "*Brotarbeiten*," i.e. works done to get some bread; they were, in a word, commercial paintings with no aim to be artworks.[469]

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[466] Compare e.g. the following remarks: "Die einzig wahre Quelle der Kunst ist unser Herz, die Sprache eines reinen kindlichen Gemütes. Ein Gebilde, so nicht aus diesem Borne entsprungen, kann nur Künstelei sein. Jedes echte Kunstwerk wird in geweihter Stunde empfangen und in glücklicher geboren, oft dem Künstler unbewusst aus innerem Drange des Herzens. […] Die Kunstrichter haben aus Bildern Regeln gezogen, woran die Künstler wohl nicht gedacht, und [sie] glauben, aus diesem Schaume lassen sich auch Bilder schaffen. Die Toren!" From "*Äusserung bei Betrachtung einer Sammlung von Gemälden von grössenteils noch lebenden und unlängst verstorbenen Künstlern*," HINZ 1974, p.92.

[467] SUMOWSKY 1990, p.45.

[468] Sumowsky remarks that the watercolor series *Malerische Wanderungen durch die Insel Rügen* (*A Picturesque Journey through Rügen*) never came to be published: "Die Folge wurde nicht reproduziert, wahrscheinlich aus verlegerischen Gründen." SUMOWSKY 1970, p.216.

[469] SUMOWSKY 1990, p.45: "Umso erstaunlicher sind die Widersprüche zwischen Denken und Praxis. So hält Friedrich, 'getreue Nachäfferei der Körper' ablehnend, abbildliche Malerei für überflüssig; dementsprechend verwirft er die Vedute. Trotzdem hat er, und nicht nur in der Frühzeit, Ortsansichten, beim reisenden Publikum zur Erinnerung beliebt und gefragt, angefertigt. Das wichtigste Werk dieser Kategorie war ein Album mit siebenunddreissig Aquarellen um 1824/25, für eine 'Malerische Reise durch Rügen', als Vorlage für Reproduzenten gedacht. Friedrich hat solche Produkte als 'Brotarbeiten'

What enabled Ramdohr to identify the *Tetschen Altarpiece* as an artwork was exactly the fact that Friedrich did not challenge the institutionalized conventions so that the public knew that it was asked to judge his work against the art historical and art theoretical background. It was this implicit request that prompted Ramdohr's reaction to Friedrich's work. Ramdohr did not approve of Friedrich's contribution to art history, but recognized that the work *was meant* as a contribution to the history of art. On the other hand, the public who would buy the watercolor were not expected to judge his work on the background of art history and art theory; they were simply expected to like it and to buy it accordingly. The primary aim of commercial paintings is that people end up buying them. Thus, an artist might refrain from introducing her own views in them or exploring ways to express such views if this implies a diminution of the likelihood to sell the commercial paintings.

Differently from commercial paintings, Friedrich's artworks were done with the intention to contribute to art history in order to be aesthetically appreciated.[470] The value of his art lies in the fact that he succeeded in the double challenge of putting forwards a new art norm and fulfilling it successfully. Knowing art history and art theories, we are able to acknowledge the fact that Friedrich's work is a valid and aesthetically successful contribution to art history. And we appreciate it for this reason: we feel the pleasure of aesthetic appreciation in front of it. The *Tetschen Altarpiece* is a valid contribution to art history, inasmuch as the art norm it fulfills offered a solution for moving away from Classicism and substantially helped to open up new possibilities for landscape paintings, culminating in the celebration of landscape by many a modern artistic movement.[471] Given the art historical significance of the art norm, and given Friedrich's ability in fulfilling such a norm, the *Tetschen Altarpiece* is certainly a beautiful artwork: an artwork to be aesthetically appreciated.

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ausgegeben und damit als nebensächlich bewertet." The same expression, "Brotarbeiten," had been used by Börsch-Supan in BÖRSCH-SUPAN 1973, p.37: "Eher ist anzunehmen, dass die Aquarelle als leicht verkäufliche Brotarbeiten entstanden."

[470] In this respect, the case of copies is interesting. This phenomenon particularly concerned Friedrich's sepia drawings, because Friedrich was quick with this technique. But there are also copies of the more complex oils. Werner Sumowsky has analyzed the different sorts of copies and has tried to understand what pushed Friedrich into this business (see SUMOWSKY 1990). The question is really intriguing: if each work must be, according to Friedrich's account, an expression of one's own feelings, how could Friedrich justify reproductions of his already realized works? Sumowsky has shown that in the case of the sepia works, the fact that cardboard was available made copies possible. But even then, Friedrich often took up old motives to improve them with little changes (SUMOWSKY 1990, p.47). In the case of paintings the situation is trickier. Friedrich did repeat his paintings in order to try out little variations, not to copy them. But there are more or less accurate copies as well. Often, they are not by Friedrich, but in some cases it is very difficult to establish the paternity (SUMOWSKY 1990, pp.49-53).

[471] Landscape painting was gaining value in the time around 1800 and Friedrich was promoting this trend, which would lead to modern artistic movements, from realism to impressionism and postimpressionism. See SCHMIED 1992, p.18.

III.1.6. Final Considerations

In this chapter, I analyzed in detail Caspar David Friedrich's painting known as the *Tetschen Altarpiece*. My goal was to show Friedrich's intention to relate to art history and to contribute to it by proposing a new art norm that would take the art-historical discourse a step forwards. Indeed, his work opened up new possibilities within landscape painting and helped the latter gain autonomy and freedom in a measure unknown up to that moment. By reporting the quarrel with Chamberlain Ramdohr, I tried to make palpable the art historical entrenchment of art. Since art stands in relationship to culture, the artist feels the need to make an art that reflects the background to which she belongs. But making an art that reflects her time and, more precisely, what she thinks is important about her time compels her to look for new aesthetic norms, for it is impossible to use past artistic solutions as they are to express completely new insights. Thus, new art stands in a complex relationship to past art, inasmuch as each artist presenting a new art norm has been reflecting upon the past art to come up with a new solution. New art is both the child and the gravedigger of past art: it derives from it but it also sanctions its historical end.

I hope that my analysis of Friedrich's *Tetschen Altarpiece* has illustrated such a complex relationship and that my presentation of Ramdohr's point of view showed how difficult it might be for an art-lover to accept a new art norm. On the other hand, the enthusiastic support of the Romantic leaders should have made concrete how deeply reflective of the time Friedrich's art was felt to be. While Ramdohr criticized Friedrich's art as barbaric, the Romantic leaders recognized its beauty and appreciated it for the pleasure it gave to them. Friedrich's *Tetschen Altarpiece* (like many others of his works) was an aesthetically successful contribution to art history. But does art really always aim at being aesthetically appreciated? How can it be seriously claimed that Duchamp's *Fountain* makes us feel the pleasure of aesthetic appreciation without distorting the aim of *Fountain*? In the next and final chapter, I will address this vital question for my account of art.

Part III, Chapter 2

On Aesthetic Properties, Indiscernibles, and Conceptual Art: The Richard Mutt Case

As we have seen in the General Introduction, *Fountain* has been used to demonstrate the thesis that a definition of art has to be prior to aesthetic considerations and independent of them. The reason why *Fountain* was used for such a demonstration is that it consists of a urinal and as such is indiscernible from thousands of urinals coming from the same mould. However, in Part II, Chapter 3, I have argued that if I cannot discern that the object in front of me is an artwork, I am bound to see it as a simple object. On the other hand, if I can discern that the object in front of me is an artwork, then there is no indiscernible artwork in front of me. Given the historical importance of *Fountain*, I will look into this example to show how *Fountain* is indeed different from a mere urinal and I will argue that its external aesthetic properties not only are relevant, but also are what is to be appreciated.

By defending this thesis, I will also be rejecting a commonly held opinion about *Fountain* and its fellows, namely that direct acquaintance with such artworks is superfluous: if I know what a urinal is, the argument goes, then I know what *Fountain* is and I do not need to check it out. The point of such artworks, it is said, lies in the conceptual dimension rather than in the aesthetic one.[472] By contrast, if I tell a complete art layman that in 1503-05 Leonardo da Vinci presented to the artworld an intriguing portrait of a lady, called *Mona Lisa*, I will have to show her the painting itself or she will not know what I am talking about: she might know what a portrait is and (hopefully!) she knows what a woman is, but she will not imagine what this portrait called *Mona Lisa* looks like. Of course, if in cases such as *Fountain* descriptions were enough and perception did not need to be involved, the claim that aesthetic properties are relevant would be completely off track. I will show that for *Fountain* and its fellows descriptions are not enough: indeed, visual art, i.e. the art we have been dealing with in this work, requires perceptual apprehension.

This chapter is structured as follows: first, I will look into the so-called "Richard Mutt Case," i.e. the case that involves *Fountain*. Philosophers have often speculated about the latter in ways that cannot be accepted by the art historian. I think it is time to reconsider the whole story from an art-historical point of view. Thus, second, I will analyze Duchamp's view of the fine arts and, third, on the basis of such results, I will argue that the external aesthetic properties of *Fountain* and of each of its variations are extremely relevant and what is to be appreciated. In a final step, I will meet the objection that some visual art such as Conceptual

[472] See e.g. CARROLL 1999, pp.180-81: "The capacity to afford aesthetic experience is not a necessary condition for art. Some artworks, like Duchamp's *Fountain*, are idea based rather than experience based. One can derive satisfaction from thinking about *Fountain* without even experiencing it, let alone experiencing it aesthetically."

Art does not require perception and that therefore in art aesthetic properties are not always at stake.

III.2.1. The Richard Mutt Case

Marcel Duchamp was born 1887 in a provincial Norman village in France, not far away from Rouen.[473] He was the fourth child of a bourgeois family that was to have three more children. Though he was the fourth born, he never knew his older sister, as she passed away in tender age. But he did know another sister, a younger one, Suzanne, who became his best playmate and to whom he was very attached throughout his life.[474] With the two elder brothers, Gaston and Raymond, he also established a tight relationship in spite of the difference in age: Gaston was 12, Raymond 11 years old when Marcel came into the world. Gaston and Raymond were to become two famous artists under the names of Jacques Villon and Raymond Duchamp-Villon. To Marcel they were models to follow, whose art influenced his own.[475]

Following his brothers' footsteps, Marcel approached the Cubist movement. In 1912, he sent a painting, *Nude Descending the Staircase (nr.2)*, to be hung in the Cubist room of the exhibition of the Paris *Société des Artists Indépendants*. Although the society followed the principle "*ni récompense ni jury*," the hanging committee of the Cubist room, which included Jacques Villon and Raymond Duchamp-Villon, refused *Nude*, mainly by reason of the topic itself, which Cubism abhorred.[476] By refusing Marcel's work, the *Société des Artists Indépendants* betrayed its own principle, i.e. not to judge.[477] Duchamp withdrew his painting, but this episode made him realize how much preconception governs art.[478] Shortly after its rejection, an American bought the *Nude* and sent it to the legendary 1913 Armory Show in New York, where "it was mocked and caricatured by the press; it was hailed and stigmatized

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[473] For a biography of Duchamp see GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981.
[474] GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.16.
[475] GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.21. Duchamp's maternal grandfather, Emile Nicolle, a successful shipping agent who was also a well-known etcher in Rouen, ought to be mentioned too as one who influenced the young Marcel. See GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, pp.7-9.
[476] Goldfarb Marquis points out that, given his constant frequenting of the Cubist circle around his brothers, Duchamp must have known in 1912 that both nudes and motion were abhorred by orthodox Cubism (GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.85). Thus, the submission of the *Nude* to the Paris show looks like a test of the flexibility of Cubist standards.
[477] DE DUVE 1996, p.130.
[478] Judovitz quotes an answer Duchamp gave to his interviewer Pierre Cabanne: "There was an incident, in 1912, which "gave me a turn," so to speak; when I brought the *Nude Descending a Staircase* to the Indépendants, and they asked me to withdraw it before the opening. In the most advanced group of the period, certain people had extraordinary qualms, a sort of fear! People like Gleizes, who were, nevertheless, extremely intelligent, found this *Nude* wasn't in the line that they had predicted. Cubism had lasted two or three years, and they already had an absolutely clear, dogmatic line on it, foreseeing everything that might happen." (JUDOVITZ 1995, p.19).

as the last word in cubism and futurism combined; and it became the emblem of extravagances of modern art as a whole."[479] As Duchamp himself years later explained, the reaction was due to the way he had treated the nude, a traditional subject of Western art: "What contributed to the interest provoked by the canvas was its title. One just doesn't do a nude woman coming down the stairs, that's ridiculous. It doesn't seem ridiculous now, because it's been talked about so much, but when it was new, it seemed scandalous. *A nude should be respected*."[480]

Due to the scandal it gave rise to, Marcel's *Nude* was on everybody's lips and *the* attraction of the show: "the crowd was pouring to see his *Nude*. An even larger crowd knew the painting only from the press, from hearsay, from gossip."[481] So, when Duchamp arrived in New York in 1915, he was preceded by his fame: "he was already, even for the general public ignorant of his name, 'the man who painted the *Nude Descending a Staircase*.'"[482] It was because of this fame that Marcel was asked to become a member of the board of directors of the 1916 grounded New York Society of Independent Artists, modeled on the example of the Paris *Société des Artists Indépendents* and following, like the latter, the principle: "no jury, no prize" – a principle that, as we have seen, the Paris society had already betrayed precisely by rejecting Marcel's *Nude*.[483]

The New York society was organizing its first exhibition in 1917 and all members were invited to show a piece: indeed, to get an artwork exhibited, one only needed to become a member of the society by paying the membership fees.[484] In Article II, section 3 of the bylaws it is stated: "Any artist, whether a citizen of the United States or of any foreign country, may become member of the Society upon filing an application therefor [sic], paying the initiation fee and the annual dues of a member, and exhibiting at the exhibition in the year that he joins."[485] When the exhibition opened, on April 10, 1917, one could find *Nice Animals*, a painting by Kent Rockwell Jr., the eight-year-old son of Kent Rockwell, one of the founders

[479] DE DUVE 1996, p.125.
[480] Duchamp in an interview with Pierre Cabanne, quoted in JUDOVITZ 1995, p.28. The emphasis is by Judovitz herself.
[481] DE DUVE 1996, p.130. Goldfarb Marquis writes: "All contemporary observers agree that the *Nude Descending a Staircase* was the high point of the show. From the 4000 invited guests who milled among the 18 octagonal rooms on opening day, to the more than 10000 who jostled through on the last day, March 15, the *Nude* evoked puzzlement, laughter, quizzical looks, outrage – but, above all, rapt attention." (GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.93).
[482] DE DUVE 1996, p.124.
[483] CAMFIELD 1987, p.19, DE DUVE 1996, p.128.
[484] The exhibition received a lot of attention by the press and this, as Francis Naumann remarks, in spite of "America's coincident entrance in the First World War": "columns of print were devoted to reviews of the exhibition, and almost every major art magazine ran articles debating the principles of the society." See NAUMANN 1979, p.34. Naumann also points out that the show was a success in terms of public (more than 20'000 visitors), but a financial failure. See NAUMANN 1979, p.38.
[485] Quoted from DE DUVE 1996, p.97.

of the Society of Independent Artists and a member of the board of directors.[486] Among several insignificant paintings by amateurs, which "embarrassed more than one critic,"[487] one could also find *Supplication* and *Gossips*, two paintings by poor Eilshemius, a mad man self-proclaimed genius and whose painting *Supplication* Marcel Duchamp, with cynical irony mixed with human sensibility, proclaimed the *chef d'oeuvre* of the exhibition.[488] Due to Duchamp's reputation, Eilshemius works were suddenly praised by art-critics and the poor man lived through a moment of glory before dying in poverty and solitude.[489]

When Marcel proclaimed *Supplication* the best painting at the Independents' show, he had already resigned from the board of directors of the society: something had happened in the meantime. An unknown artist, a certain Richard Mutt from Philadelphia, had duly filed his application to the society and sent in his work *Fountain*: a plain urinal, mounted upside down on a pedestal, and provided with a signature that read: "R. Mutt 1917."[490] Within the members of the board of directors a violent debate raged. Beatrice Wood, one of the members, recalls a heated dialogue between Kent Rockwell and Walter Arensberg, the latter being probably one of the few persons at that time knowing that Duchamp was hiding behind Richard Mutt:[491]

> "This is indecent!" went on Kent flatly, with red face.
> "That depends upon the point of view," said Walter gently.
> "We cannot show it," went on Kent flatly, with red face.
> "The entrance fee has been paid, we cannot refuse it," blandly added Walter.
> "But it is gross, offensive."
> "Only in the eye of the beholder."
> "There is such a thing as decency, an end to how far a person can go."
> Walter said mildly, "But the purpose of this project is to accept anything an artist chooses. It is in our bylaws."
> There was an ominous silence, then Kent exploded, "Do you mean that if a man chose to exhibit horse manure we would have to accept it!"
> "I am afraid we would," answered Walter, with mock sorrow, slowly shaking his head suggesting that all was not as simple as it seemed…
> "Someone has sent it as a joke," continued Kent in anger.
> "Or a test," finished Walter patiently.

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[486] DE DUVE 1996, p.101
[487] DE DUVE 1996, p.98.
[488] The other *chef d'oeuvre* proclaimed by Duchamp was a painting by Dorothy Rice called *Claire Twins*. See e.g. NAUMANN 1979, p.37.
[489] DE DUVE 1996, pp.109-115.
[490] For an overview on the possible reasons for the choice of the name "Richard Mutt," see CAMFIELD 1987, pp.22-23. See also CLAIR 2000, pp.52-53.
[491] CAMFIELD 1987, p.21: "In conversation with Arturo Schwarz almost fifty years later, Duchamp recalled that the idea of *Fountain* arose in a conversation with Arensberg and Joseph Stella, shortly before the opening of the Independents. They went out immediately to buy the item, a commercial urinal, selected by Duchamp from the showroom of the J.L. Mott Iron Works." Other people who probably knew from the start that *Fountain* was Duchamp's idea were Louise Norton, Henri-Pierre Roché, and Beatrice Wood (see SEIGEL 1995, p.137). In spite of these facts, there still are doubts as to who really sent the work to the Independents, particularly as Duchamp spoke of "a female friend" (see CAMFIELD 1987, pp.28-30).

> The pristine oval white object on a black pedestal gleamed triumphantly. It was a man's urinal upside down.[492]

The members of the board of directors had to decide whether to exhibit such an "indecent" work; they censured it. In a press release issued by the board of directors on the day after the exhibition opening, one can read: "The *Fountain* may be a very useful object in its place, but its place is not an art exhibition and it is, by no definition, a work of art."[493] Marcel Duchamp immediately resigned from the board of directors. For the second time, one of his works had been refused by a society that had proclaimed it would accept every artwork and that rejected the idea of having a jury. For the second time, the main principle that such societies were following was betrayed because of one of his works. But as *Nude* had had its revenge, so was Duchamp preparing to vindicate *Fountain*…

Together with Beatrice Wood and Henri-Pierre Roché, Duchamp was editing an art magazine, *The Blind Man* – a curious title for an art magazine to which I will return later on.[494] The magazine was "conceived as a forum for opinions and commentary on the Independents' exhibition."[495] In the second number, which appeared in May 1917, Duchamp's vindication of *Fountain* was to take place. The infamous urinal had disappeared for a while during the first days of the exhibition, just to reappear in Duchamp's own hands a bit later. Marcel wanted it to be photographed and the picture to appear on *The Blind Man*. Notice that before *The Blind Man* published the picture, the public knew very little about *Fountain*, in spite of the fact that several newspapers had commented on the board of directors' decision not to exhibit the "indecent" piece.[496] Therefore, the printed image of *Fountain* was necessary to testify how the artwork had looked, and this, as we will see in Section II.2.2, was crucial in the light of Duchamp's plans.

De Duve has pointed out that Duchamp could have called on his friend Man Ray to take the picture, but he did not: Marcel called on Alfred Stieglitz. De Duve thinks that he did not call on Man Ray because the latter probably knew that Marcel was the author of *Fountain* and suggests that the other existing picture of the urinal, in which it hangs from the ceiling of Duchamp's studio, might be by Man Ray.[497] It is indeed not implausible to think that Duchamp did not want to offer a clue as to the real author of *Fountain*. But there are other

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[492] Quotation reprinted in DE DUVE 1996, pp.90-91, originally appeared in NAUMANN, Francis (ed.): "I Shock Myself: Excerpts from the Autobiography of Beatrice Wood," *Art Magazine* 51:9 (1977), pp.135-36. In her autobiography, however, Wood substitutes Kent Rockwell with George Bellows (WOOD, Beatrice: *I Shock Myself*, Ojai (CA): Dillingham Press, 1985, pp.29-30). The relevant passage is reprinted in CAMFIELD 1987, p.25.
[493] Quoted by DE DUVE 1996, p.99.
[494] The title of the magazine is sometimes written as: *The Blindman*, "depending on how one reads the graphic design on the cover." (DE DUVE 1996, p.106, footnote 27).
[495] CAMFIELD 1987, p.19.
[496] CAMFIELD 1987, pp.26-27.
[497] DE DUVE 1996, p.118.

reasons why he called on Stieglitz. Alfred Stieglitz was not only a highly reputed photographer, but also the owner of an important gallery named *The Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession*, actually known as *Gallery 291* because of its location at 291 Fifth Avenue.[498] Through *Gallery 291*, which had opened in 1905, Stieglitz had done a great deal for the recognition of photography as an art form, had introduced America to the European *avant-gardes*, and had discovered "the new, modernist, Europeanized and 'post-Armory Show' generation of American artists: Alfred Maurer, Marsden Hartley, Max Weber, and his favorites, the 'Big Three': John Marin, Arthur Dove, and his future wife, Georgia O'Keeffe."[499] Getting Stieglitz to photograph *Fountain* meant getting the consecration of the urinal by the artworld.

Stieglitz not only agreed to take the picture, but also contributed a letter to *The Blind Man*.[500] He defended Richard Mutt and "was sincerely shocked that the Independents were betraying the principles they had set for themselves."[501] As De Duve points out, Stieglitz' "complicity in the Richard Mutt case is all the more startling when we remember that, at the time, he tended to consider Duchamp as a charlatan. But according to Beatrice Wood, again, he 'was greatly amused' and 'felt it was very important to fight bigotry in America. He took great pain with the lighting, and did it with such skills that a shadow fell across the urinal suggesting a veil.'"[502] His photograph of *Fountain* is, indeed, an artwork in itself. William Camfield has shown that *Fountain* was photographed in front of a painting by Marsden Hartley, *The Warriors*, and staged so as to evoke the statue of a Buddha or of a Madonna.[503] And, as a matter of fact, together with the publication of Stieglitz' photograph on *The Blind Man*, Louise Norton published an article about *Fountain* with the title: "The Buddha of the Bathroom."[504] The main article on that number of the art magazine, however, was actually the one accompanying Stieglitz' photograph: an unsigned article with the title "The Richard Mutt Case." Probably, Beatrice Wood brought the ideas on paper, but Marcel Duchamp was, one more time, the hidden author of the text, which it is worth reprinting in full:[505]

> **The Richard Mutt Case**
> They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit.

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[498] DE DUVE 1996, p.118.
[499] DE DUVE 1996, p.118.
[500] DE DUVE 1996, p.116.
[501] DE DUVE 1996, p.119.
[502] DE DUVE 1996, p.117. Wood's text is also reprinted in CAMFIELD 1987, p.33.
[503] CAMFIELD 1987, pp.33-37.
[504] CAMFIELD 1987, p.37. According to Beatrice Wood, after Stieglitz' photograph *Fountain* was renamed "Madonna of the Bathroom" by the people hanging around it (see CAMFIELD 1987, p.33). Moreover, "Carl Van Vechten, a journalist and critic tied to the Arensberg circle […] wrote to Gertrud Stein that 'the photographs make it look like anything from a Madonna to a Buddha.'" (SEIGEL 1995, p.135; see also CAMFIELD 1987, p.32).
[505] DE DUVE 1996, pp.107-108.

> Mr. Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited.
>
> What were the grounds for refusing Mr. Mutt's fountain: –
>
> 1. Some contented it was immoral, vulgar.
> 2. Others, it was plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing.
>
> Now, Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bath tub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumber's show windows.
>
> Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object.
>
> As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.[506]

In Section II.2.3, I will come back to the central point of this article, namely that Mr. Mutt chose the urinal and thereby turned it into an artwork. At this stage of the inquiry, however, let me simply point out that, in the end, almost nobody ever saw *Fountain*. At some point it was destroyed or lost, at any rate physically eliminated. It entered art history only through a photograph, after being rejected from an art exhibition. Several later reproductions have been made, none of which identical with the original urinal. Even miniatures have been realized. All this seems to suggest that the external aesthetic properties of *Fountain* really do not matter: this is why the original urinal could be substituted by other ones and why one does not need to have seen *Fountain* in order to know what the artwork consists of. What matters is the gesture of choosing; the visual artwork no longer needs to be seen. But is this true? In order to answer this question, we need, first, to get a better grip on Marcel Duchamp's view of the fine arts. Then, we will be in a position to judge whether *Fountain* does not need to be seen and whether its external aesthetic properties are really irrelevant.

III.2.2. Duchamp's Ironical Look at the Fine Arts

According to William Camfield, Duchamp was very much interested in the external aesthetic properties of the urinal. To begin with, he did not pick up the first urinal available, but searched carefully for one that had certain features, namely those that would make it apt to evoke the Buddha or Madonna analogy.[507] Moreover, Duchamp did not simply exhibit the urinal as it was exhibited in the shop, but turned it of 90º in order to highlight the Buddha-statue-like profile, and mounted it on a pedestal. In polemical opposition to the frequent interpretations of *Fountain* as anti-art and anti-aesthetics, Camfield holds that it is indeed the aesthetic properties of the urinal that Duchamp wanted the spectator to notice: "My own preoccupation with *Fountain* dates from the late 1960s when, as a young teacher, I became convinced that it was not the amusing or offensive anti-art object portrayed at the time but a

[506] Quoted from CAMFIELD 1987, pp.37-38.
[507] CAMFIELD 1987, p.50f.

masterpiece – an object of intrinsic visual or aesthetic significance that was expressive of Duchamp and its cultural context."[508] I think that Camfield is right about the relevance of the aesthetic dimension of *Fountain*, but is wrong in attributing to Duchamp the willingness to highlight the aesthetic significance of the urinal; *Fountain* is strictly speaking not Duchamp's work, but Richard Mutt's – and this is not a little detail, as we will see.

De Duve has vividly reminded us of the context in which Duchamp started with the readymades. Around 1912, painting was going through a crisis; not only had photography deprived it of its legitimating function, but the industrial production of colors had also deprived the painter of her role of producer of colors. Painting was reduced to buying readymade colors and putting them on a canvas for no representational purposes.[509] One way out of this *empasse* was to completely give up representation in favor of a purely abstract language of colors, as Kandinsky did.[510] But to do so, one had to believe in the power of colors and in the value of painting. Duchamp did not, partly because he was not a "born painter."[511] And partly because he was no longer under the illusion that to paint was an activity of a higher, almost divine order. He believed that since colors are manufactured, paintings are no longer creations, but only "readymades aided."[512] Duchamp admired Seurat for having acknowledged the readymade nature of colors and for having reduced the role of the painter to an almost mechanical act of putting such readymade colors on a canvas by following a scientific method, "like a carpenter."[513] According to De Duve, this disillusion about painting is the reason why Duchamp took the other, more radical way out of the *empasse*: to record the end of painting.[514] De Duve indeed claims that the readymades do not belong to the history of sculpture, but to the history of painting.[515]

This is certainly an interesting remark. But the claim that Duchamp decided to record the end of painting needs more clarifications. Duchamp had believed in painting. He had believed

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[508] CAMFIELD 1987, p.14.
[509] DE DUVE 1996, pp.147-154.
[510] DE DUVE 1996, pp.154-159. Molderings speaks of Kandinsky's as "metaphysical reaction" (see MOLDERINGS 2002, p.16).
[511] DE DUVE 1996, p.148. Indeed, Duchamp's paintings up to 1911 do not show any special gift: "As an artist, this young man strikes us as definitely amateurish, both in the quality of his work and in its quantity." (GOLDFARB MARQUIS1981, p.64).
[512] See DE DUVE 1996, pp.162-164. Duchamp writes: "Since the tubes of paint used by the artist are manufactured and ready made products we must conclude that all the paintings in the world are "readymades aided" and also works of assemblage." (DUCHAMP, Marcel: "Apropos of 'Readymades,'" in: DUCHAMP 1973, p.142).
[513] DE DUVE 1996, pp.175-184. It was Duchamp who said of Seurat that he painted like a carpenter. Quotation in DE DUVE 1996, p.184.
[514] DE DUVE 1996, p.149. See also CLAIR 2000, pp.12-13.
[515] DE DUVE 1996, p.150: "Obviously the readymades are, among other things, Duchamp's way of registering his abandonment of painting, of getting it on the record. If only for this reason, they belong to the history of painting and not, for example, despite their three-dimensional appearance and qualities, to that of sculpture."

in his *Nude*.[516] And maybe he had even believed – at first – that its rejection from the *Salon des Artists Indépendents* was justified. What made him lose the illusion not only about painting, but also about art in general, was the success of that same painting in New York a year later. If his painting had been rejected a year before, how could it become a great painting a year later? What Duchamp came to realize, was that being good art had become a matter of finding a good story for a piece. He lost the illusion that there is something superior intrinsic to great art that justifies its value: it is all a matter of talking people into seeing something as artistically worthy.[517] In the summer of 1952 he wrote to his brother-in-law, Jean Crotti: "Artists throughout history are like gamblers in Monte Carlo and in the blind lottery some are picked out while others are ruined. …It all happens according to random chance. Artists who during their lifetime manage to get their stuff noticed are excellent traveling salesmen, but that does not guarantee a thing as far as the immortality of their work is concerned."[518] And he continues: "I don't believe in painting itself. Painting is made not by the painter but by those who look at it and accord it their favors; in other words, there is no painter who knows himself or is aware of what he is doing."[519]

These remarks contain the core ideas upon which Duchamp's views regarding the fine arts and his own artistic production were going to rely after the *Nude*-episode. To begin with, they make understandable the frustration that must accompany the artist who knows such a truth about art; her artistic activity can no longer fulfill her, for she knows that what she does,

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[516] GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.309: "Talking about *Nude Descending a Staircase* with a *Newsweek* reporter in 1959, Duchamp sipped at a dry vermouth, ruminating on why that painting continued to interest the public. 'It's a mystery still, forty-six years later,' he said. Discounting the notion of a joke, Duchamp insisted he was serious when he painted it, but 'had no idea that in 1959 we would still speak of it.'"

[517] The role of Francis Picabia in this process ought to be pointed out. As Goldfarb Marquis remarks, Picabia and Duchamp would often make fun of the serious approach of the hardcore Cubists reunited at Puteaux: "Later, Duchamp credited Picabia with 'detaching him from the somewhat solemn world of Puteaux, where the problems of modern painting were discussed in serious, often highly theoretical terms.' By contrast, get-togethers between Marcel and Francis were 'forays of witticism and clowning…. They emulated each other in their extraordinary adherence to paradoxical, destructive principles,' Picabia's wife Gabrielle recalled later. The goal? 'The disintegration of the concept of art.'" (GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.82).

[518] JUDOVITZ 1995, p.182. According to another report of this letter, which includes other passages and excludes others, the last sentence was followed by: "And even posterity is a real bitch who cheats some, reinstates others (El Greco), and is also free to change its mind every 50 years." (SEIGEL 1995, p.223). Seigel's version translates differently the originally French text with respect to Judovitz'.

[519] JUDOVITZ 1995, p.83. It has to be remarked that Duchamp was not only an artist, but also an excellent businessman who counseled many people on how to invest their money in art. Seigel suggests that this fact reveals Duchamp's belief "in the existence of genuine critical judgment of aesthetic standards" (SEIGEL 1995, p.180), but I rather think it shows Duchamp's good intuition at foreseeing the direction of the art market as this episode reported by Goldfarb Marquis illustrates: "One day in 1964 […] Duchamp brought a *Box in a Valise* to David Mann at the Bodley Gallery on Madison Avenue. The owner, the writer Kay Boyle, needed cash, Duchamp told Mann. 'Give him $500,' the artist told the dealer, 'and hold onto the box until I tell you to sell it.' A few months later, when the Cordier and Ekstrom show opened, Duchamp reappeared at the Bodley Gallery and told Mann, 'Now sell the box to Mary Sisler.' Mann refused to disclose the profit, but smiled contentedly when he told the story." (GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.328).

does not *per se* have value. It is the others, the artworld in Dickie's sense, who will decide upon the value of her work, but it might be that they do not find any so that what she has been doing will be forever valueless. The sexual metaphor so dear to Duchamp illustrates exactly this frustration;[520] the artist desires artistic fulfillment, like the bachelor of the *Large Glass* desires the bride, but the two are now divided and condemned to the eternal frustration of living with a desire that cannot be fulfilled. What options are left to the artist who has lost the illusion to possess the means to satisfy her desire? Either giving up being an artist or becoming ironic. Duchamp has done both things. His whole art is a bitterly ironic comment on art, but so is his alleged abandonment of art for chess once the *Large Glass* was declared "finally unfinished" in 1923.[521] Just as the artist does something whose value is not (or no longer) intelligible, so is the "maniac" chess player engaged in an activity deprived of social purpose.[522] As he said to Pierre Cabanne *à propos* chess: "there is no social purpose. That alone is important." And he added that he liked living among chess players because they "are completely cloudy, completely blind, wearing blinkers. Madmen of a certain quality, the way the artist is supposed to be, and isn't in general."[523]

Indeed, together with the myth of art as a superior form of human activity, there went also the myth of the artist-genius, living in his art and for his art alone: artists are supposed to be madmen of a certain quality. But differently from chess players, artists think that they are fulfilling some higher calls, and therefore cannot be the madmen they are supposed to be, inasmuch as they are perfectly rational in passionately trying to achieve goals that are supposed to be highly valuable. Instead, the chess player is fully aware of spending a life for a mere game with no social purpose: imbued with self-irony, they truly are "madmen of a certain quality, the way the artist is supposed to be." This is why Duchamp has claimed: "While all artists are not chess players, all chess players are artists."[524] Thus, although turning to chess implied stopping the production of artworks, it allowed him to keep being an artist in the sense artists were supposed to be.[525]

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[520] Notice that Duchamp believed in "eroticism" as the only still possible "-ism" in art, see JUDOVITZ 1995, pp.32-33. Goldfarb Marquis reports Duchamp's answer to one of Cabanne's questions: "I believe in eroticism a lot because it's truly a rather widespread thing around the world…. It replaces, if you wish, what other schools call Symbolism, Romanticism. It could be another 'ism,' so to speak." (GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.317). One should not forget that "between 1905 and 1918," i.e. during the time in which Duchamp came to his own views on art, "more than twenty distinct art 'isms' sprang up." (GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, pp.103-104).

[521] JUDOVITZ 1995, p.52.

[522] Duchamp wrote to the Arensbergs in 1919: "I feel altogether ready to become the chess maniac – everything around me takes the form of the knight or the queen, and the outside world has no other interest for me than its transposition into winning or losing positions." Quoted in SEIGEL 1995, p.208.

[523] SEIGEL 1995, p.209.

[524] JUDOVITZ 1995, p.35.

[525] As a matter of fact, Duchamp saw parallels between making art and playing chess: "I found some common points between chess and painting. Actually when you play a game of chess it is like designing something or constructing a mechanism of some kind by which you win or lose. The

But turning to chess was not the only way to comment ironically on art. Before that turn – but actually during and afterwards as well – Duchamp did produce artworks. It has been observed that at the same time in which Duchamp became skeptical about the value of art, other artists too felt that something was dividing them from the traditional art done until that moment. But those artists (think of the Futurists) reacted in a destructive way; they wished to make *tabula rasa*, break with the past and start anew.[526] Duchamp was not like them. He wanted to keep the link with the history of art but in the only way left open: ironically.[527] As Seigel puts it, Duchamp developed a peculiar "version of the ancient truth that art is a form of play: the only way to be serious about art is by not being serious about it, the only way to keep it alive is to keep it always under attack."[528]

Indeed, the art norm that Duchamp was to follow during his career, the one that shaped his style, is an art norm according to which art had to be ironic. This art norm does not seem to involve an aesthetic norm, inasmuch as the property of being ironic – like the property of being funny (see Part II, Chapter 2) – does not belong to the realm of external aesthetic properties. In fact, irony relies on semantic analysis. It is that phenomenon that results from saying something which has a literal meaning, while the intended and contextually intelligible meaning is the opposite one. If you just broke the vase because you did not pay attention as to whether you had really put it on the table or only on its edge, I might claim: "How careful you are!" Of course, I do not mean what these words literally mean, but rather the opposite. Now, Duchamp wanted to be ironical, but at the same time he wanted to contribute to the history of the visual arts. Indeed, he wanted to be ironical about the visual arts by producing visual art. So, the irony had to spring from the visual and thus aesthetic dimension of an object. Duchamp was, so to say, after an aesthetic sort of irony.

Aesthetic irony, to stick to this term, results from using the aesthetic dimension of the artwork to convey an ironic thought. In the next section, we will see how Duchamp manages to bring about such aesthetic irony. What I want to underline here, is rather how Duchamp's

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competitive side of it has no importance, but the thing itself is very, very plastic, and that is probably what attracted me in the game." (DUCHAMP, Marcel: "Regions which are not ruled by time and space…," in: DUCHAMP 1973, p.136).

[526] CLAIR 2000, pp.10-11.

[527] Molderings speaks indeed of Duchamp's answer to the crisis of painting as "*ironisch-historistische*" (see MOLDERINGS 2002, p.16). As it is not the topic of this chapter (indeed, it was the topic of the previous one), I will not try to show that Duchamp was concerned with contributing to the art historical discourse. Quoting him here might nevertheless make this concern evident: "The great trouble with art in this country at present, and apparently in France also, is that there is no spirit of revolt – no new ideas appearing among younger artists. They are following along the paths beaten out by their predecessors, trying to do better what their predecessors have already done. In art there is no such thing as perfection. And a creative lull occurs when artists of a period are satisfied to pick up a predecessor's work where he dropped it and attempt to continue what he was doing. When, on the other hand, you pick up something from an earlier period and adapt it to your own work an approach can be creative. The result is not new; but it is new insomuch as it is a different approach." (DUCHAMP, Marcel: "The Great Trouble with Art in This Country," in: DUCHAMP 1973, p.123).

[528] SEIGEL 1995, p.146.

insistence on the idea of painting as "*cosa mentale*" supports the thesis that *aesthetic* irony is what he was after. It was Leonardo who spoke of painting as "*cosa mentale*," i.e. mental thing, and Duchamp resumed that idea.[529] It is well known that Duchamp inveighed against an art addressed to the retina.[530] However, he did not mean to give up the retinal dimension altogether. In spite of what the idea of painting as a mental thing seems to suggest, Duchamp did not understand painting as something that had to be reduced to the mental: indeed, if painting were a mental thing, the visual support would become superfluous.[531] What Duchamp wanted instead to emphasize is that painting ought to be a way to express ideas: it ought to "serve" the mental, as he said.[532] Indeed, Duchamp says that "painting should not be *exclusively* retinal or visual; it should have to do with the gray matter, with our urge for understanding."[533] The "exclusively" reveals that painting is bound to be at least in part retinal or visual. The artist, even the most cerebral one, is bound to produce objects to be apprehended with the senses. The point is simply that the aesthetic dimension is not an end in itself, but a means to express a thought – in Duchamp's case, an ironical thought.[534]

Duchamp's art is the ironic laugh at those who believe in the fine arts as an activity with metaphysical origins, requiring divinely inspired geniuses ("madmen of a certain quality") to

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[529] MOLDERINGS 2002, p.17. Goldfarb Marquis claims that "there are numerous strong indications that Duchamp, the most cerebral artist of the twentieth century, saw himself as a spiritual heir of Leonardo da Vinci, the most cerebral artist of the Renaissance. Like Duchamp, Leonardo built his reputation on a shockingly meager *oeuvre*; only seventeen of his paintings survive. Like Duchamp, he left many of his works unfinished – the *Mona Lisa* is just one example – and others, like the *Last Supper*, quickly deteriorated because of his persistent technical experiments. Duchamp's masterpiece, the *Large Glass*, was left definitely incompleted in 1923 and broken almost beyond repair four years later." But she adds: "However, where da Vinci's inquiries are relentless, direct and earnest, Duchamp skims over the surface of his queries and twists them into a mockery of themselves." (GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.133).

[530] Duchamp has said: "Since Courbet, it's believed that painting is addressed to the retina. That was everyone's error. The retinal shudder! Before, painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophical, moral. If I had the chance to take an antiretinal attitude, it unfortunately hasn't changed much; our whole century is completely retinal, except for the Surrealists, who tried to go outside it somewhat. And still, they didn't go so far!" (Quotation reprinted in JUDOVITZ 1995, p.26). Judovitz also points out the fact that Duchamp had started his career executing cartoons for two newspapers (*ibid*, pp.17-18) and claims that Duchamp's works function like cartoons insofar as the intellect is involved in solving the rebus (*ibid*, p.34). Indeed, the readymades' titles seem to function like captions in cartoons: Judovitz points out that they are ways to "manipulate the literal object-ness of the ready-made" (*ibid*, p.93) and quotes Duchamp's remark that they are "a means of adding color, or shall we say, as a means of adding to the number of colors in a work." (*ibid*, p.92).

[531] Seigel remarks that Duchamp's "later notion that the ideas a painter puts into his work already exist full-blown in the mind, so that giving them painted form amounts to 'muddying' them, takes away from art whatever special powers it possesses to grasp experience in ways different from some kind of inner and immediate intuition. Assigning ideas wholly to an enclosed, immaterial space implies that human thought gains nothing from the forms into which it is cast by the various material means – words, images, sounds – that give to each art form its particular way of encountering the world." (SEIGEL 1995, p.203). And, yet, Duchamp did not refrain from "muddying" his ideas…

[532] "I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind." (DUCHAMP, Marcel: "The Great Trouble with Art in This Country," in: DUCHAMP 1973, p.125).

[533] DUCHAMP, Marcel: "Regions which are not ruled by time and space…," in: DUCHAMP 1973, p.136. My italics.

[534] I think that Duchamp's claims against the aesthetic ought to be understood in this sense.

be carried out. The destiny of his *Nude* had made him understand that there is nothing intrinsic to the work that justifies its being a good artwork: it is all a matter of being a good salesman.[535] Think of it: salesmen are in a way like chess players: they too have to develop the best strategy to checkmate the adversary, i.e. to convince the client to buy the merchandise. After the *Nude* affair, Duchamp decided to start his chess game with the artworld.[536] *Fountain* was to be the first move.[537]

III.2.3. Richard Mutt's *Fountain* and Marcel Duchamp's *Fountains*

Duchamp's plan was pretty much this: "I will confront you, the artworld, with something that you cannot accept as an artwork. But I will force you into accepting it as an artwork – and a great one at that."[538] As the good chess player he was, he checkmated us. First, Duchamp put on the mask of Richard Mutt, a bright artist of his time who seriously believed that any object whatsoever could be great art, provided that the right attitude to adopt towards it was found, and he seriously believed in the eminent role of the artist in choosing the object and in pointing at the way it had to be looked at.[539] As the article on *The Blind Man* reported in Section III.2.1 affirmed, Mr. Mutt chose the urinal and thereby turned it into an artwork –

[535] "In the last analysis, the artist may shout from all the rooftops that he is a genius; he will have to wait for the verdict of the spectator in order that his declarations take a social value and that, finally, posterity includes him in the primers of Art History." (DUCHAMP, Marcel: "The Creative Act," in: DUCHAMP 1973, p.138).

[536] GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.285: "Arensberg, some two years later [i.e. in 1951, CG], thought he discerned a pattern in Duchamp's work. 'I get the impression,' he wrote, 'when I look at our paintings of yours from the point of view of their chronological sequence, of the successive moves in a game of chess.' Duchamp readily agreed to the analogy and wondered, 'But when will I administer checkmate or will I be mated?'"

[537] Duchamp had started collecting readymade objects in his atelier even before the urinal. Two of them were allegedly exhibited at the Bourgeois Gallery in New York in 1916, but went unnoticed both by the public and by the press. Thus, with *Fountain* the public attention was for the first time conveyed on a readymade. See DANIELS 2002, pp.27-28.

[538] Indeed, Duchamp always thinks of the future public: "The danger is in pleasing an immediate public; the immediate public that comes around you and takes you in and accepts you and gives you success and everything. Instead of that, you should wait for fifty years or a hundred years for your true public. That is the only public that interests me." (DUCHAMP, Marcel: "Regions which are not ruled by time and space…," in: DUCHAMP 1973, p.133).

[539] Notice that *Fountain* is the only readymade not accompanied by a punning sentence, which is "an important characteristic" of the readymade, as Duchamp claims (DUCHAMP, Marcel: "Apropos of 'Readymades,'" in: DUCHAMP 1973, p.141), but being signed instead. I think that this is an important detail that signalizes the exceptional role of *Fountain*. Seigel quotes a passage written by three artists apropos of Duchamp's alleged belief in the artist as the one who chooses and elects the object by signing it: "If one wants art to cease being an individual matter, it is better to work without signing than to sign without working. How can people not have understood that to prefer the personality that chooses over the personality that makes things is just to take another step in the exaltation of the omnipotence and ideality of the creative act? It is the final arrival at a magical liberty, at absolute subjectivism: whatever the thing, its meaning is only what man gives to it." (SEIGEL 1995, p.206). What these artists criticize is exactly what Duchamp denounced too. Their confusion is due to a failure to seize the ironic dimension of Duchamp's art and to a failure to identify the exact artwork by Duchamp, which in the specific case is not *Fountain* itself, as I will show.

Duchamp could not have been more sincere: it was *Mr. Mutt*, not him, the one who chose. Indeed, Duchamp neither believed in an artwork possessing features (such as the feature of allowing a specific aesthetic experience) that would justify its being great art, nor in the power of the artist to turn a thing into a valuable artwork; as we have seen, he had lost such illusions. Therefore, he could not have believed in *Fountain* – but he could *use* it to produce aesthetic irony, which is what he did, as we will see.

So, it was Richard Mutt who had realized that anything can be turned into an artwork, for everything can be admired aesthetically: even a urinal.[540] Only the dull observer, the blind man to whom Duchamp will – with subtle irony – devote an art magazine, fails to see the artwork in front of him; even if forced to look at it, he refuses to see it because he (still) only sees its indecency. Fortunately, Richard Mutt can count on progressive people such as Alfred Stieglitz – notice the cynicism of our chess player, who literally uses Stieglitz to his own purposes.[541] The aesthetic (and open, i.e. not blind) eye of the renowned photographer will not miss the *rendezvous*[542] with the readymade: he will see the artwork in it. Indeed, Stieglitz saw the statue of Buddha that *Fountain* was hiding.[543]

Stieglitz was actually not alone. Camfield has been very preoccupied with showing that in the inner circle around Duchamp several people were seeing and praising the pleasing aesthetic qualities of *Fountain*, like for instance Louise Norton, who in her article for *The Blind Man* exclaims: "to any 'innocent' eye how pleasant is its chaste simplicity of line and color!"[544] And yet, in spite of its pleasing aesthetic qualities, *Fountain* got lost – or, alternatively, Duchamp made it disappear. I suggest that this was indeed the next move in the chess game: *Fountain had* to be lost or destroyed. The public, all those blind men (and

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[540] What our artist, Richard Mutt, had understood was a great deal indeed and several attempts at making sense of Duchamp's art are actually attempts at grasping Mutt's art. Camfield, for instance, suggests that Duchamp has anticipated many future ideas: from the Machine Aesthetic of the 1920s that made people admire industrial forms, to Breton's thesis that the artist has the power to turn everything into art (CAMFIELD 1987, pp.64-66). But I think that these merits are – strictly speaking – Mutt's merits.

[541] DE DUVE 1996, p.116-120.

[542] DE DUVE 1996, p.96: "the readymade, Duchamp said elsewhere, is *a kind of rendezvous*." See Duchamp's quotation in GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, pp.158-159.

[543] Stieglitz was indeed the first prey in Duchamp's chess game with the artworld. Camfield reports of a letter written by him, "in which he remarked that *Fountain* had fine lines, that he had photographed it in front of a Marsden Hartley painting, and that his photograph suggested a buddha [sic] form." CAMFIELD 1987, p.35. Let me add that Camfield is one of the numerous preys that Duchamp is still making, as if he was continuing the game from the other world. Goldfarb Marquis seems to be another one, when she writes: "What Duchamp contributed to art with the Ready-mades was not the *suppression* of taste, as he claimed, but the *extension* of taste to include the ordinary objects of everyday life." (GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.156).

[544] CAMFIELD 1987, p.40. Camfield quotes several other people from the Duchamp-circle, all praising the pleasing aesthetic properties of *Fountain*, and concludes: "The pressing question at this point is whether these perceptions of a beautiful form, of madonnas and buddhas, were products of Duchamp's mind and eye or the response of his associates. In my opinion, they were Duchamp's perceptions, shared by his friends and reflected in their comments." (CAMFIELD 1987, p.41). I think that Camfield is wrong.

women), had missed the *rendezvous* with the readymade. It was too late, now. Foreseeing that they will ask for it once they will have realized that they missed an artwork, Duchamp, with the usual cynic irony, made it disappear. But he was kind enough (what a kindness!) to get Stieglitz to photograph it. The picture will be there to show to the artworld what they missed in 1917 – as a consolation for the irremediably lost readymade produced by Richard Mutt.

And, of course, the great chess player had seen correctly. In 1950, people started realizing what they had missed and wanted to catch up. In 1945, the first significant publication on Duchamp – a special issue of *View* with a major article by Harriet and Sidney Janis – appeared. In 1951, a very influential work, Motherwell's anthology *The Dada Painters and Poets*, did a great deal to reevaluate the work of Duchamp. Together with the rediscovery of Duchamp came also the desire to see his pieces – but some were no longer available: most notably the readymades. Therefore, Duchamp started providing replicas.[545] Our infamous urinal went back in the limelight in 1950, when Sidney Janis was organizing an exhibition entitled *Challenge and Defy*. Duchamp agreed to provide for it a new version of *Fountain*.[546] The artworld had recognized as art what it had previously condemned. Duchamp, the great chess player, had won the game: he had checkmated the artworld. His own artwork, *The Richard Mutt Case*, in which *Fountain* was the aesthetic interface to produce irony, was coming to a close. Duchamp had demonstrated that his thesis about art was right: there is nothing intrinsic to an object that makes it a valuable artwork. Indeed, even a plain urinal can become a valuable artwork! Duchamp had shown that value in art is all a matter of satisfying the expectations of the spectators.

In 1917, the artworld expected the unique, the painstakingly handcrafted that would bring about a specific and otherwise inaccessible aesthetic experience that singles out the artwork over the non-artwork. Richard Mutt, that bright artist, had understood that such exceptional aesthetic experience needs not the unique and painstakingly handcrafted to be made accessible and therefore had turned a common urinal into an artwork. As we have seen in connection with the art philosophical discussion, in the 1950s the artworld started thinking that aesthetic experience is not what singles out art. So, they no longer expected the unique, the painstakingly handcrafted that would bring about a specific and otherwise inaccessible aesthetic experience. They rather expected objects to stand, symbolically, for ideas. The readymades, those objects standing for the idea that anything can be art (for, as they thought, art is just a matter of relating to art theories and not a matter of appearance), became all of a sudden paradigmatic. Richard Mutt might have had the wrong reasons for believing that a urinal could be turned into a urinal, but was nevertheless right in believing that a urinal could be an artwork. Thus, Richard Mutt had triumphed. And, through him, Duchamp had

[545] CAMFIELD 1987, p.77.
[546] CAMFIELD 1987, p.77.

triumphed as well; he had gotten the proof that value in art is just a matter of getting the artworld accord its favor to an artwork. More than ever, he was convinced that the only way left to do art was ironically: by using the aesthetic dimension of an object to bring about an ironical thought about art and the artworld.

When, then, in the 1950s, Janis asked Duchamp permission to replicate *Fountain*, Duchamp seized the first occasion to be aesthetically ironic about art by relying on what the Richard Mutt Case had confirmed. Thus, he gave Janis instructions for the urinal he had to buy, which had to resemble as much as possible to the original one; he eventually approved Janis' choice and signed the new urinal "R. Mutt 1917."[547] In the exhibition, *Fountain* was not mounted on a pedestal, but hung low on the wall, like in a toilet for little boys.[548] Janis organized another exhibition in 1953, *Dada 1916-1923*, in which the second version of *Fountain* was shown again, this time suspended, above a door, in the doorway that linked the two rooms of the gallery.[549] In both cases, *Fountain* is an altogether different artwork than the one produced by Richard Mutt. As Duchamp said, "a copy remains a copy;" it cannot substitute for the original, although it is necessarily linked to it.[550] And because of the link between the original and the copy, the copy can serve to make a commentary on the original. This is indeed how Duchamp used it. In the 1950s people knew a great deal about the 1917 *Fountain*; they were – as Duchamp had predicted – prepared to see it as valuable artwork. No need to put it on a pedestal upside-down: one could hang it as it normally is hung. Even at the height of a child, for even the child will not use it as a urinal but respectfully contemplate it. The irony is that back in 1917 the blind men missed the *rendezvous* with the readymade, although the urinal was clearly presented as an artwork, whereas in 1950 they had gotten to the point where they could no longer miss it: they had to pass in the doorway and look up at it.[551]

There is a crucial difference between the original *Fountain* and all subsequent versions: the first was *not* conceived from within the same art-theoretical framework as the other ones. As we have seen, in 1917 *Fountain* by Richard Mutt was about the aesthetic experience

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[547] CAMFIELD 1987, pp.77-78.
[548] CAMFIELD 1987, p.78: "Duchamp remarked, "little boys could use it"."
[549] CAMFIELD 1987, p.80.
[550] CAMFIELD 1987, p.95. Camfield also reports a very interesting passage written by Robert Lebel, who had interviewed Duchamp. It goes: "Duchamp… is persuaded that there is no possible way of reproducing a work or an object such as they "really" are. He therefore knows that the replicas of his objects, although mathematically true, have but an approximate relationship to the originals. It is a fact that everybody can check by looking at them with sufficient attention, as nothing can ever be fully identical to the unique – even if it is a 'Readymade.'" (CAMFIELD 1987, p.96, footnote 130). I think that Lebel misunderstood Duchamp's talk of the unique. The difference subsisting between two works (even two readymades) is not a matter of "looking with sufficient attention," but a conceptual matter.
[551] Goldfarb Marquis quotes Hans Richter as he remembers *Fountain* at the Janis' exhibition of 1953: "'Everyone had to pass under it,' wrote Hans Richter, shocked, perhaps, by the realization that 'no trace of the initial shock remained.'" (GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.306).

afforded by a urinal and an instantiation of the theory that anything can be turned into high art. In 1950 and in 1953, on the other hand, the urinal was part of two installations – each called *Fountain* – both by Marcel Duchamp, both expressing an ironic comment on the Richard Mutt Case, and both instantiating the only norm Duchamp was still prepared to follow: "Art must be aesthetically ironic about itself." For the installations to work, it was necessary that the urinal be similar enough to the original one to guarantee reference to it, but also that it *be shown* in a completely different way, to guarantee recognition that it was *not* the same artwork. Notice that the urinal might have been the same as in 1917: the point is that it was *shown differently*, and thus constituted a different artwork. Unfortunately, this has not been correctly understood, and people keep speaking of reproductions of *Fountain*, as if Duchamp aimed at exhibiting again the 1917 artwork (which is a different thing than the 1917 *urinal*). No, that artwork was gone – and, as we have seen, it was not even *his* artwork. The 1950 reproduced urinal looked very much like the previous one, but was conceived with different intentions, namely to constitute installations by Marcel Duchamp.

Indeed, it would be more accurate to talk of the 1950 *Fountain* and of the 1953 *Fountain*, inasmuch as they are two different artworks (namely two installations) that in turn are distinct from the original 1917 *Fountain*. As a matter of fact, these three artworks possess different perceivable non-aesthetic properties and thus different external aesthetic properties. The 1917 original version is an artwork consisting of a urinal of a specific type mounted upside-down on a pedestal: the artwork is the whole thing, not only the urinal. That the urinal is put on a pedestal is not a contingent matter, but rather a necessary and very relevant feature of the artwork. It is because of the way it is mounted on the pedestal, so reminiscent of the Buddha and the Madonna, that one is prepared to discern a sort of superior dignity in *this* urinal. The 1917 *Fountain*, then, is not indiscernible from a common urinal; it is very different indeed. The Janis 1950 "reproduction" is actually, and again, *just* a urinal. But, again, *Fountain* does not merely consist of a urinal, for in the two exhibitions of this second version, it corresponds to *installations* whose perceivable non-aesthetic properties are different from those of a urinal. That the urinal has been hung as a common urinal is usually hung, but at a very low level, is an important feature of the 1950 installation. And so is the somehow banal, innocuous, and childish look of the urinal. That it has been suspended in the doorway, on the other hand, is an important feature of the 1953 installation. And so is the slightly threatening appearance of the urinal. Each installation is a different artwork, not only with respect to the other one, but also with respect to the 1917 *Fountain*.

In the 1960s, Duchamp and his art became extremely influential. Camfield remarks: "In a few years the image of Duchamp and Dada was transformed from that of a minor, aberrant phenomenon in the history of the modern art to the most dynamic force in contemporary

art."[552] No wonder, then, that in 1963 Ulf Linde, who was responsible for an exhibition about Duchamp in Stockholm, asked Duchamp permission to realize a third version of *Fountain*, which accompanied replicas of many others of his works.[553] Duchamp agreed on condition that the replicas be "exact replicas."[554] Linde charged a Swedish sculptor, Peter Olof Ultvedt, with the task of producing the copies of Duchamp's works, including the readymades. The urinal, however, was not produced by the sculptor, but really purchased as a readymade. It is not at all similar to the original one: the first and the third version look very different indeed. Moreover, instead of the signature by Duchamp's hand there originally was an inscription in block letters "R. MUTT 1917," later removed when Duchamp eventually saw the urinal in Pasadena and could sign it by his hand.[555] Now, this third version of *Fountain* is less a copy of the 1917 urinal than of another artwork, namely a miniature artwork.

Starting in 1936, Duchamp had been producing miniatures of his works. With *The Box in a Valise* Duchamp realized a series of boxes containing reproductions of his works and miniaturized versions of selected works all ordered so as to suggest precise relationships holding between them. In particular, the *Large Glass* was put on the right, whereas on the left, in vertical succession, were put *50 cc air de Paris* (at the top), *Traveler's Folding Item* (in the middle), and *Fountain* (at the bottom). Judovitz has highlighted that Duchamp did not make use of the current speedy techniques of reproduction for realizing the miniatures, but rather "opted for technically obsolete and time-consuming methods."[556] By literally re-producing each of his works on a miniaturized scale, Duchamp was thus blurring the borders dividing the unique from the multiple.[557] And he was jokingly reintroducing the idea of mimetic art, no longer as the idea of imitating what is in nature, but as the idea of faithfully reproducing what the artist has done[558] – and, more importantly, what the artworld had consecrated.

Judovitz has underlined the crucial importance of the boxes, particularly in the light of Duchamp's comment that "Everything important that I have done can be put into a little suitcase" and his characterization of *The Box in a Valise* as a "portable museum" of his principal works.[559] She writes: "This work restages the viewer's experience of Duchamp's works, no longer as singular or autonomous objects isolated in the museum but as an organic

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[552] CAMFIELD 1987, p.88.
[553] CAMFIELD 1987, p.88.
[554] CAMFIELD 1987, p.91.
[555] CAMFIELD 1987, p.91.
[556] JUDOVITZ 1995, p.3.
[557] JUDOVITZ 1995, p.3.
[558] JUDOVITZ 1995, p.6.
[559] JUDOVITZ 1995, p.2. Interviewed years after its production, Duchamp claims apropos of *Box in a Valise*: "It was a new form of expression for me. Instead of painting something the idea was to reproduce the paintings that I loved so much in miniature. I didn't know how to do it. I thought of a book, but I didn't like that idea. Then I thought of the idea of the box in which all my works would be mounted like in a small museum, a portable museum, so to speak, and here it is in this valise." (DUCHAMP, Marcel: "Regions which are not ruled by time and space…," in: DUCHAMP 1973, p.136).

corpus. This portable museum of works in miniaturized facsimile suggests that the meaning of represented objects can only be addressed as a context of embedded gestures. By packing his most significant works in a suitcase, Duchamp withdraws the artwork from the confines of the museum. In doing so he reveals its embedded nature in the institutional frameworks that determine its meaning as art."[560] But, it seems to me, *The Box in a Valise* is not a serious acknowledgment of the art institution. It is rather an ironic comment on the role of the artworld, the only instance endowed with the right to sanctify objects with the seal of arthood – objects that become then so precious to deserve being painstakingly copied and carried everywhere with oneself. The aesthetic irony is due to the aesthetic impression given by the reproduced objects, which contrasts with the interpretation according to which they have been reproduced for their intrinsic value. When looking at them, namely, the spectator has the impression of looking at children's toys, at those cute imitations of objects from the adults' world, which lose their seriousness along with their original dimensions. Thus, the artworld's sanctification of objects is mockingly reduced to the act of producing little cute witty-looking toys.

In Stockholm and later in Pasadena, what was shown was a full size reproduction of the box's compound artwork: there was a full size reproduction of the *Large Glass*, a full size reproduction of *50 cc air de Paris*, a full size reproduction of *Traveler's Folding Item*, and a full size reproduction of *Fountain*, which were shown as they were shown in the box. In other words, what got reproduced or, better, enlarged was the miniature compound artwork; Linde's reproduction of *Fountain* was a full-size reproduction of the box's *Fountain*. Of course, like the other elements of the miniature compound artwork, Linde's *Fountain* could have been shown by itself too. But as a matter of fact this did not happen, so we cannot analyze its presentation as we could do for the 1950 and 1953 installations. *Fountain* was reproduced for the exhibition at the Moderna Museet, where it appeared in conjunction with the other items as it was presented in *The Box in a Valise*. And in this form it traveled to Pasadena, where Duchamp saw it and signed it. The aesthetic irony of this full-size version of the box is due to the false impression given by the full-size compound artwork that the viewer is in front of truly important art, as the compound work looks somehow imposing in its total dimension, but at the same time delicate, elegant, sober: in a word, a precious artwork. This impression is of course contrasted by the fact that this same artwork has been conceived as a toy, deprived both of imposing dimensions and of preciousness. In other words, while the artworld is under the illusion that it produces important and extremely valuable objects by "sanctifying" artworks, *de facto* it just produces toys.

[560] JUDOVITZ 1995, p.4.

In 1964, finally, Arturo Schwarz took up Duchamp's desire to reestablish the *corpus* of his work and have it in a single place, and in particular his lament "that an essential part of the 'corpus,' namely, the readymades, was missing."[561] I suspect that Duchamp was only acting his lament, whereas in fact he was planning one of the last big ironic artworks of his career. Schwarz accepted the task of bringing back to life those long gone readymades. But it was impossible to find them on the market: in 1964 nobody industrially produced items that one could find in the 1910s. Thus, ironically, the readymades turned into handicraft. Duchamp sent very precise plans for the urinal.[562] And the resulting *Fountain* is indeed very similar to the original one; it looks almost identical. But with one exception: it is not a readymade. It is a sculpture, a work of handicraft. It is a work of art, as one would say, thinking of the etymological sense of "art." So, again, the fourth version of *Fountain* is not a copy of the 1917 artwork, but a different artwork; it is an artwork about the readymade necessarily becoming fine art. History has come full circle; the readymade has been physically remade into a painstakingly crafted and thus precious work of art. And Duchamp can laugh hard at us.[563]

The aesthetic irony of this last piece is due to the fact that looking at it the spectator has the impression that she is looking at the 1917 *Fountain*. It is true that Camfield reminds us of "its slight but perceptible modulations of surface, which suggest its origin as a handcrafted sculpture rather than an American assembly-line production."[564] But the general impression is still that of looking at the 1917 original; it has the same elegance, the same Buddha-like appearance, the same sinuous forms. We think we are appreciating the external aesthetic properties of a readymade, as Richard Mutt wanted us to. But we are not. We are looking at a handcrafted sculpture! The external aesthetic properties of the 1964 version help create the illusion that there was something worthy in itself in the 1917 artwork, which justifies having

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[561] CAMFIELD 1987, pp.91-92.
[562] See reproductions in CAMFIELD 1987, pp.92-93.
[563] Notice that the idea of physically making the readymade into high art, upon which relies the Schwarz' version of *Fountain*, is the basis of Pop Art, as Dieter Daniels also remarks (DANIELS 2002, p.30). Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*, Arthur Danto's favorite example of indiscernibles, are *not* the Brillo boxes of the supermarket – they are not indiscernibles at all. They are crafted boxes made out of wood, not cardboard, and the industrially reproduced design of the commercial boxes is painted on them with exact precision. In spite of all speculations about them, the *Brillo Boxes* require the observer to notice the physical difference but also the necessary reference to the supermarket boxes. Only thus is it possible to grasp Warhol's aim at elevating commercial art to the rank of high or fine art. Warhol wanted us to look at industrial design as we look at art, to notice its (external) aesthetic properties and evaluate them. By considering his *Brillo Boxes* indiscernibles, one misses their point and also the fundamental difference between the intentions of the Pop artists and those of Duchamp. Goldfarb Marquis writes: "It infuriated Duchamp that he was seen as the benign forebear of the art of the 1960's. 'This Neo-Dada, which they call New Realism, Pop Art, Assemblage, etc., is an easy way out,' he fumed. 'When I discovered Ready-mades, I thought to discourage aesthetics. In Neo-Dada, they have taken my ready-mades and found aesthetic beauty in them. I threw the bottle rack and the urinal into their faces as a challenge and now they admire them for their… beauty." (GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.324). I will return later to this remark.
[564] CAMFIELD 1987, p.94.

brought it back to life. But Duchamp knows that in the 1917 *Fountain* there was nothing worthy in itself. Simply, the artworld has believed it to be worthy and has sanctified the readymade by turning it into a sculpture.

To sum up, then, we have seen that no two *Fountains* share the same perceivable non-aesthetic properties, and thus the same external aesthetic properties, inasmuch as each *Fountain* consists not only of the urinal, but of the urinal shown in a specific and different way each time. This is no negligible fact: as I have tried to show, each time the different aesthetic appearance of the urinal is crucial to understanding the aesthetic irony that the artwork intends to create. With this, I believe I have successfully defended the applicability of my definition of art to the critical example of *Fountain*, although talking of *Fountain* in the singular should now reveal the inaccuracy of the art-philosophical discourse about Duchamp's real work. Like all other artworks, Duchamp's artworks (whether *The Richard Mutt Case* or each new version of *Fountain*) attempt to fulfill an art-historically significant art norm, namely Duchamp's art norm according to which art has to be aesthetically ironical about itself (an art norm that at the historical moment in which Duchamp was working was certainly significant). And the final aim of such attempts is that of achieving aesthetic appreciation. Indeed, inasmuch as the external aesthetic properties of, say, the 1950 *Fountain* are crucial to bring about aesthetic irony, they have to be appreciated. By virtue of this appreciation, the 1950 *Fountain* must be considered a beautiful artwork.

Again, this is not due to the urinal having a pleasant appearance – this is something against which Duchamp inveighed: "I threw the bottle rack and the urinal into their faces as a challenge and now they admire them for their… beauty"[565] – but to the external aesthetic properties *of the artwork*, inasmuch as they are successful at bringing about the fulfillment of the art norm. Now, some philosophers of art claim that there is visual art such as Conceptual Art that does not require perception. If this is true, then the external aesthetic properties of the artwork – or, at least, of some artworks – must be irrelevant, inasmuch as without perception they cannot be discerned. In the next section, I will inquire into the soundness of this thesis.

III.2.4. On Visual Art That Does Not Need to Be Perceived

Timothy Binkley has argued that some visual art is not primarily about the aesthetic and his prime examples were two pieces by Duchamp, namely *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919) and *L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved* (1965).[566] The first is a representation of the *Mona Lisa* with a moustache and a goatee, while the second is the latter shaved, which turns into a reproduction of the

[565] Quoted by GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.324.
[566] BINKLEY 1977.

Mona Lisa although it is conceptually very much different from it. Binkley points out that differently from Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, to know what *L.H.O.O.Q.* (or *L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved*) is you do not need to perceive it: a description of it is enough. He writes: "Some art (a great deal of what is considered traditional art) creates primarily with appearances. To know the art is to know the look of it; and to know that is to *experience* the look, to perceive the appearance. On the other hand, some art creates primarily with ideas. To know the art is to know the idea; and to know an idea is not necessarily to experience a particular sensation, or even to have some particular experience. This is why you can know *L.H.O.O.Q.* either by looking at it or by having it described to you. (In fact, the piece might be better or more easily known by description than by perception.)"[567]

If Binkley were right, this sort of conceptual art would imply the end of visual art. For, artworks would become completely superfluous. What strikes me of Binkley's discussion is that he never raises the question of why Duchamp *did* produce *L.H.O.O.Q.* and *L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved*.[568] The reason is that he *needed* the visual representation. Binkley actually misses a great deal of the meaning of these two pieces by Duchamp, and probably the reason is that he did not enquire enough into their look. Duchamp did not only want the *Mona Lisa* to have a pair of moustaches and a goatee: he wanted her to have a *specific* pair of moustaches and a *specific* goatee. What moustache and what goatee he provided the *Mona Lisa* with is not unimportant. Looking at *L.H.O.O.Q.* there are several things to notice. First, as Duchamp himself pointed out, with these attributes the *Mona Lisa* does not look like a woman playing at being a man, but becomes a man dressing like a woman.[569] If the moustache did not have the two ends curving upwards, the smooth traits of the lady's face would have overridden the masculine dimension of the moustache, and the final effect would have been that of a lady playing to be a man. But those endings harden the face, which is why the lady disappears to make a man appear.

If this is a first reason why you need to look at the work, there is a second one: it is to notice the external aesthetic properties of *L.H.O.O.Q.* What is striking is that the representation is very discrete and sober. Duchamp could have painted a big pair of moustaches and a long, thick beard; he could have exaggerated and the representation could

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[567] BINKLEY 1977, p.266. Binkley's argument has been so convincing that some people defending an aesthetic account of art have ended up denying that *L.H.O.O.Q.* and *L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved* are artworks. See for instance TOLHURST 1984, pp.267-68.

[568] See the quotation above in: DUCHAMP, Marcel: "The Great Trouble with Art in This Country," in: DUCHAMP 1973, p.125. See also the other already mentioned quotation in which Duchamp claims that "painting should not be exclusively retinal or visual" (DUCHAMP, Marcel: "Regions which are not ruled by time and space…," in: DUCHAMP 1973, p.136).

[569] Duchamp made this remark in an interview with Herbert Crehan. The passage is reprinted in DUCHAMP 2002, p.100 (German translation) and in GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.176: "Much later, in 1961, Duchamp explained to an interviewer that 'the curious thing about that moustache and goatee is that when you look at it, the Mona Lisa becomes a man. It is not a woman disguised as a man,' he emphasized, 'it is a real man.'"

have been gross. But he chose a very discrete, minimal intervention, which nevertheless had the maximal effect of turning the famous lady into a man. This is why the transformed Mona Lisa's face looks so subtly funny. The general aesthetic impression of discretion, soberness, and her subtly funny look stands in sharp contrast with the meaning of the title, which, as it is well-known, is given by pronouncing the letters in French: "*Elle a chaud au cul*," i.e. "She has a hot ass." The discretion of the written title, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, which borders to a sort of scientific coldness, together with the just mentioned general aesthetic impression are violently contrasted by the plebeian sense of the title. Duchamp prevented the spectator from recognizing right away what she was dealing with, only to make her blush harder once the meaning was understood.

Now, this sort of discovery trumps Duchamp's own discovery of the nature of value in (contemporary) art. Indeed, it certainly was not mere chance that Duchamp chose the *Mona Lisa* to disillusion the spectator, inasmuch as this painting is one of the masterpieces in the history of painting, which must have meant much to as fond an admirer of Leonardo as Duchamp was. He chose that painting as a representative for valuable painting in general. And given the relevance of painting in the history of art, maybe even as a representative for great art in general. The lady's complete and (through the play with the title) vulgarized change of sex is then a metaphor for what, as we have seen, Duchamp took as an irremediable fact: the fact, namely, that we have been wrong about the nature of masterpieces (and of great art in general).[570] What looked like an almost divine, mystical enterprise has revealed its real, plain essence: art does not possess intrinsic value – it is all a matter of finding the right story for a piece. There is nothing intrinsically superior about great art (or, at least, there can *no longer* be anything superior about it); art is actually an ordinary thing (as the fact that *L.H.O.O.Q.* consists of a simple postcard reminds us) that contingent factors such as the art market turn into a value.[571]

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[570] GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.209: "Duchamp's moustache on the Mona Lisa and its flippant title, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, was a profound commentary on the bankruptcy of the art which originated in the Renaissance as well as on the increasingly futile efforts of artists to slake the avant-garde's thirst for novelty. Of all Duchamp's works, it most directly poses the question: 'What is art?' and its corollary, 'By what criteria does one evaluate it?'"

[571] Jean Clair has offered another interpretation of *L.H.O.O.Q.*, which is worth mentioning (CLAIR 2000, pp.38-39). He has (finally) pointed at a persistent scholarly mistake in the way of calling Leonardo's masterpiece – which I had to conform on pain of being deemed ignorant. In Italian, the title of Leonardo's work is *Monna Lisa*, with two "n." "Monna" is the shortened version of "Madonna" in the sense of "my lady". For some weird reasons, one "n" dropped in the French, German, and English appropriations of the title (and maybe also in those of other languages). The resulting "Mona," however, is a vulgar word in Northern Italy: it is namely the slang name for the vagina. What is worse is that "Lisa" is both a proper name and an adjective in Italian. As an adjective it means "worn, threadbare." So the whole thing would turn into a vulgar way of referring to a worn vagina, one that has even lost her hairs from being used too much (*alas*, the lady has a hot ass…). Jean Clair maintains that given the situation Duchamp thought well to discretely bring back some hair to the poor lady, hence the moustache and the goatee… Relying on such an interpretation, it is then possible to further develop another, metaphorical interpretation, which points at the fact that Leonardo's masterpiece is

Binkley might agree with me that in the case of *L.H.O.O.Q.* direct acquaintance is needed. But what about *L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved*? To begin with, *L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved* does not only consist of the *Mona Lisa*. It consists of a white sheet on which a postcard of the *Mona Lisa* is taped, under which Duchamp has written by his own hand "*rasée*" ("shaved") and, on another line, *L.H.O.O.Q.* His signature is at the bottom of the sheet, on the right side. Thus, the whole thing is the artwork, not simply the postcard, as is commonly assumed. Indeed, there are external aesthetic properties that pertain to that artwork that the simple postcard does not by itself possess. What is striking, for instance, is the extreme elegance of the disposition: very simple, very ordered, very clean. Given the interpretation of *L.H.O.O.Q.* this is an important sign. How shall we read it? First of all, let us look at the title. What does it tell us? It tells us that what we see is not the *Mona Lisa*, but a man shaved. A man who has shaved himself, or who has been shaved – both possibilities are open. The second, however, is the most tempting. For relying upon it, we can construct an interesting interpretation around the idea that the artworld tries to save appearances. The masterpiece is not going to regain its previous nature; the *Mona Lisa* is gone forever – we are left with the man. Now that its true nature has been revealed, we can no longer produce the *Mona Lisa*. But we can pretend that we are producing *per se* valuable things – we can eliminate the external signs that make us aware of the real nature of great art: the goatee and the moustache. We can create an atmosphere of devotion and respect – by presenting the vulgar as if it were valuable, with the elegance of Duchamp's presentation in *L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved*. However, the elevating appearances will not change the reality of the facts: the lady will still be a man.

The aesthetic irony of the piece is due to the contrast of the aesthetic dimension – its elegant appearance – which makes one think of the intrinsic value of the object, with the actual meaning of the artwork, which is the thesis that art *per se* is valueless. Moreover, irony is added to the whole thing by the fact that *L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved* is in fact used as an invitation card for a dinner given at the preview of an exhibition of Duchamp's works: thus, it is not even presented as an artwork ought to be, i.e. with the required respect. Rather, it is treated as something as valueless as an invitation card. Ironically, the people receiving it will confirm

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literally abused: like the lady with the *mona lisa*, the *Mona Lisa* (I stick to the official although mistaken version of writing it in English) has to offer herself to her lovers without rest. Like a prostitute, it has become commercial ware, worth reproducing everywhere, like on the postcard that Duchamp used for his work. Duchamp's gesture would be, on a metaphorical level, a way to bring back honor to a masterpiece of the history of painting that deserves a different, more reverential treatment. But in accordance with Duchamp's normative approach to art, the only way to do so is with subtle, but deep irony. Although this interpretation is somehow tempting, I doubt that Duchamp could have thought of it. It should at least be shown that he knew of the Northern Italian meaning of "mona."

the thesis hidden in *L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved*: they will take something without worth and will treat it as if it were extremely worthy – they will make an artwork out of it.[572]

Binkley might accept my point but suggest that Duchamp could have decided to send just the postcard. What would I reply then? I would reply that the artwork in that case would not be the postcard, but something else, a performance probably. Like On Kawara's postcards, this one too would be an artwork by virtue of its being embedded in a broader context. Maybe our Duchamp would be an artist thinking that there is no art nowadays other than reproductions of artworks from the past, and his artwork consists in collecting, exhibiting, and sending postcards reproducing great artworks of the past. Of course, the way he does these things, the postcards he will choose, etc. will become all very crucial to assess the artwork, i.e. his performance. But Binkley could insist that all he does could be described accurately enough, so that direct acquaintance with the postcards or the artist's performance would become superfluous. But, I would wish to ask at this point, why would the artist then need the performance? Why send the postcards? Indeed, the performance and the postcards become superfluous if an accurate description of the artwork can substitute for them. If Conceptual Art wants to remain visual art, it has to pay attention to the borderline…

Conceptual Art is a form of art lying in between visual arts and literature. It makes use of a visual support in the first place, but it often allows for sufficiently accurate descriptions that enable listeners to evaluate the truth of aesthetic judgments reported to them. This hybrid dimension is actually problematic, for if reports are sufficient, the visual support becomes superfluous. And this is indeed the reason why we feel so frustrated when visiting some exhibitions. Indeed, there is no point in visiting an exhibition of our imaginary artist if all one gets to see is something she could have known from reading a description of his work. Conceptual Art has a thin – but for this same reason very challenging – space in which maneuver, inasmuch as it must aim at being visual in order not to dissolve in story telling. But the borderline is very narrow, and more often than not people fall on the other side of the line without realizing that they are no longer doing *visual* art.[573] The complexity of Conceptual art is due to its being both conceptual and visual. It can remain visual art as long as it does not

[572] To be sure, this happened more than once with Duchamp's work. As Goldfarb Marquis remarks with irony, "by some marvel of aesthetic prestidigitation (or was it levitation?) the number of works credited to Duchamp began to increase in a way that might remind one of the Biblical miracle of loaves and fishes. When Lebel, in 1959, had finished combing through every cranny of Duchamp's artistic past, and assigned a number to even a three-word spoonerism and a postcard in which every 'the' was replaced by a star, he came up with 208 items. Less than ten years later, from the same ground, Schwarz managed to mine 421 items – all from the oeuvre of an artist who had ostensibly abandoned art in 1923; whose greatest masterpiece, indeed, was hailed again and again as being not any of his works, but his life." (GOLDFARB MARQUIS 1981, p.320).

[573] According to Jean Clair, those who followed Duchamp's path were "energumens," lacking both "the taste and the intelligence of the master." See CLAIR 2000, pp.9-10.

become entirely conceptual. If Conceptual Art were truly conceptual, there would no longer be Conceptual Art as a form of visual art.

It was a great achievement of Duchamp, and a sign of his geniality, to be able to keep the conceptual and the visual in perfect equilibrium. His "*nominalism picturale*" has indeed a lot to do with names and concepts, but remains very much painterly, in the sense that his works require visual apprehension. I can describe *L.H.O.O.Q.* and *L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved* to you. But in spite of your knowing the *Mona Lisa*, you will have to look at both of them to get a grip on their external aesthetic properties and be able to judge how well they manage to create the aesthetic irony that Duchamp was after. This is why after all they are great *visual* artworks, like each of the different *Fountains*, as we have seen.

III.2.5. Final Considerations

In this chapter, I tried to defend the applicability of my definition of art to the alleged critical case of Duchamp's *Fountain*, an alleged single artwork whose external aesthetic properties have been considered irrelevant to its being an artwork. First, I presented the context in which the original 1917 exemplar of *Fountain* was presented to the artworld, namely within the so-called Richard Mutt Case. Then, I tried to understand Duchamp's view of the fine arts, upon which he constructed his art norm. In a third step, I analyzed both the original 1917 *Fountain* and the subsequent artworks called by the same name. I showed that, in spite of their consisting of urinals, which, with the exception of the 1964 version, could have very well been type-identical with the 1917 one, each new *Fountain* was in fact a different artwork. I argued that each time the external aesthetic properties are crucial to the artwork, inasmuch as they are fundamental to creating the aesthetic sort of irony that Duchamp was after. Thus, they are essential in assessing the artwork; they are essential for us to appreciate it aesthetically.

In the last section of this chapter, I looked into the possibility of visual art for which perception would be superfluous. I argued that such an art form would not only make perception superfluous, but also the artwork itself. Thus, perception is essential to visual art as long as visual art wants to remain what it is: namely, both art and visual. As I have claimed in the General Introduction, the aim of this work was to define visual art, rather than art in general. Having thus shown that the perceptible dimension – and thus the aesthetic dimension – of a visual artwork is essential to the visual artwork, I am justified in considering my definition of the concept of (visual) art, according to which an artwork is a serious attempt at a successful aesthetic contribution to art history, a valid and exhaustive way of accounting for that concept, despite the claims of Danto, Dickie, Binkley, *et. al*.

Conclusion

The goal of this work was to provide an exhaustive, comprehensive definition of art in the classificatory sense. For the sake of exhaustiveness, confrontation with the question of art's function turned out to be unavoidable. The defended thesis is that no exhaustive definition of art – at least insofar as the visual arts are concerned – is possible without aesthetics, inasmuch as the function of art has been shown to be an aesthetic one: artworks ought to make us feel the pleasure of aesthetic appreciation. After having shown, in Part I, how aesthetics and philosophy of art had parted company in the 1950-60s, and having presented two seminal and influential theories of art, Arthur Danto's and George Dickie's, in which aesthetic considerations do not play a role in defining art, in Part II, I developed a theory of aesthetic appreciation thanks to which I was then in a position to define artworks as would-be aesthetically successful contributions to the history of art. In so doing, I have shown my indebtedness to Danto's and Dickie's theories, but also my clear departure from them.

In Part III, I analyzed two concrete cases: in the first, the confrontation with Caspar David Friedrich's *Tetschen Altarpiece* provided an example of the artist's concern to contribute to the history of art. The analysis of this first case aimed at illustrating the claim that both the proposal of a new art norm by the artist and the acceptance of that same norm by the public is intrinsically embedded in art historical considerations. In the second case study, I looked closely at Marcel Duchamp's art and in particular at *Fountain*, a much-discussed artwork in the philosophy of art. I have not only shown how inaccurate the art-philosophical discourse around that artwork is, but also how incorrect it is to say that the external aesthetic properties of *Fountain* are irrelevant. On the contrary, I have shown that the aesthetic dimension of Duchamp's artworks is essential to bringing about the ironic thought they embody. More generally, I have argued for the necessity of visual art to be perceived by a viewer, and for the fundamental role of an artwork's – even a conceptual one's – external aesthetic properties. Thus, I concluded that my definition of the concept of art is not jeopardized by alleged counterexamples, such as Conceptual artworks.

The motivation behind this work was to revive the relationship of the fine arts to the aesthetic – a motivation that lately seems to have affected other philosophers as well.[574] As I have shown in Part I, Chapter 1, the philosophy of art is an offspring of aesthetics, but is nowadays considered an independent domain of theoretical research. My concern has been to

[574] To cite but one example, in July 2004 the Departments of Philosophy and of Art History of the University College Cork (Ireland) jointly organized an international conference with the title: *(Re)Discovering Aesthetics*, at which leading figures such as Arthur Danto and Thierry De Duve actively took part. Indeed, even a hard-core non-aesthetician like Danto has started writing on beauty (see for instance DANTO 2003).

show that no understanding of art can be reached without the help of aesthetics, inasmuch as art (or, at least, visual art) is an aesthetic phenomenon. At the same time, my concern has been to re-analyze key elements in aesthetics, such as aesthetic properties and the concept of aesthetic appreciation. These reconsiderations were necessary in light of the problems encountered by previous aesthetic definitions of art. I have shown that my aesthetic account of art does not run into such problems, inasmuch as I made aesthetic appreciation depend not upon a limited and pre-determined set of aesthetic properties, but rather upon norms that allow maximal flexibility as to what external aesthetic properties justify aesthetic appreciation of an object. In this way, my account does not rule out that a desolate landscape might be judged beautiful – inasmuch as its external aesthetic properties fulfill the aesthetic norm at stake. Indeed, my account acknowledges the possibility of aesthetic appreciation and enjoyment of such a landscape.

The distinction of internal, external, and meta-aesthetic properties, and the dependence upon aesthetic norms make my account of aesthetic appreciation extremely flexible. This is, of course, a clear advantage in applying such an account to the fine arts, as no artwork (like no object) is excluded *a priori* from the possibility of being aesthetically appreciated. As we have seen, in the fine arts no moral concerns can make one reject an art norm: only art historical considerations play a role for the acceptance of a new art norm. Thus, each artwork can pursue the goal of aesthetic appreciation, inasmuch as the way it looks does not preclude its being appreciated for its external aesthetic properties. In fact, what is relevant for the sake of aesthetic appreciation is only that the artwork's appearance be such as to make it an aesthetically successful fulfillment of an art historically significant art norm. I have claimed that each artist's aim is to produce an aesthetically successful fulfillment of an art-historically significant art norm: in other words, each artist's aim is to produce *beautiful* art. In so doing, I have opened up a way for art and beauty to become, after quite a long separation, intimate once again.

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