

THE DEFINITION OF 'ART'

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Morris Weitz introduced Wittgensteinian anti-essentialism into the philosophy of art when he argued that 'art' is indefinable in his famous article "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics."¹ Although combined with a quite reasonable re-evaluation of traditional theories of art, his argument for indefinability has been subjected to such heavy attack it is hard to determine how much if any still stands. One sure thing though is that it continues to provoke great interest.

In what follows I accede to the criticism that Weitz fails to offer any argument that a concept, open or closed, cannot apply to future items with novel properties. I also find that his reasoning contains a *petitio principii*. I argue further (1) that Weitz does state a necessary criterion for applying the term 'art,' (2) that this criterion requires that future items possess new properties in a way in which instances of closed concepts do not, so (3) 'art' is a porous concept.

In a way Weitz's thesis is not altogether clear, though the point of it is readily accessible to intuitive understanding. The thesis is that "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." In order to get clear about his reasoning I propose to explore, together with his arguments, a number of the objections that have been levelled against them.

¹ *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 1956; unless other indicated, quotes are from this paper. Weitz was not the first to advance this sort of reasoning in aesthetics, see e.g., P. Ziff "The Task of Defining a Work of Art," *The Philosophical Review* 1953; nor was he the only aesthetician to do so, see W. E. Kennick "Does Traditional Aesthetics rest on a Mistake?" *Mind* 1958. Historically, it was advanced as early as the eighteenth century by D. Stewart "On the Beautiful," *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart*, ed. Sir W. Hamilton, V, *Philosophical Essays*, Edinburgh 1855, pp. 189-274. And A. L. Guerard argued in a similar vein in 1936; see his "Introduction," *Art for Art's Sake* N.Y. 1963.

His mention of factual difficulties refers — a bit ironically perhaps — to the perpetual disagreement that characterizes the traditional art-theoreticians' debate on this subject. That debate forms the starting point of Weitz's argument. This historical part of his argument consists of the claim that all traditional theories fail for a variety of reasons. For instance, Croce's definition 'art is intuition' is irrefutable as has been elegantly shown by Beryl Lake;² besides it is incomplete since it obviously neglects the material character of artworks. Clive Bell's famous definition 'art is significant form' is circular, as 'significant form' is defined in terms of responses to significant form; and it, too, ignores important features, e.g., it does not admit of representational features in art. In short, similar objections can be produced against every proposed definition; that is, it can in each and every case be shown that the definition in question only agrees in part with the use of 'art.'³

As an aside, it should be noted that the accusation of incompleteness to some degree is tied up with the view that a definition shall be based on generalization. It only strikes, therefore, insofar as the condition of inclusion of any work recognized by anyone has to be satisfied. This fear of excluding even the *possibility* of counterinstances, which I shall call the 'inclusive phobia,' by no means endangers the establishment of honorific, persuasive, or other non-real definitions. The question is how reasonably it can be administered in attempting a real definition. In my view no good reason can be produced for total addiction to the phobia, since however wide a border is drawn the presence of borderline cases and the possibility of counterinstances cannot be eliminated. This is a conceptual truth about defining altogether. Besides there appears to be no uniform effect of counterinstances on our use of common terms. This historical step in the argument is vulnerable, but not seriously, to the objection that not all of the tradition's art-theoreticians have aimed at the same thing, nor therefore at a real definition of art.⁴ It is not serious if only Weitz is right about those cases where a real definition was attempted; and surely he is right that "each of the great theories of art — Formalism, Voluntarism, Emotionalism, Intellectualism, Intuitionism, Organicism — converges

²"The Irrefutability of Two Aesthetic Theories," *Philosophical Analysis*, ed. M. Black, Cornell University Press, 1950.

³Adapted from F. Waismann *The Principles of Linguistic Philosophy*, ed. R. Harré, New York; 1968, p. 180.

⁴L.B. Brown "Traditional Aesthetics Revisited," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1971, p. 343f.

on the attempt to state the defining properties of art." Nor is he, then, committed to the hasty generalization that all theories of the entire tradition are of that particular kind or, indeed, of any one single kind. I shall return to this point in due course (cf. p. 49).

Now it may be suggested, not entirely without warrant, that these initial considerations of Weitz's over his predecessors on the issue and their alleged failures, are inconclusive. But in the same breath it should be recognized that they are exterior to his main argument; his wording leaves it undecided whether he does in fact take them to be arguments, one way or the other. It seems, however, an indispensable step in preparing the ground for his subsequent reasoning.

What is the logic of the concept of art, then? It is in answering this question that Weitz joins the Wittgensteinian crusade against essences. Precisely to what extent he actually does adopt and to what degree he is bound, by bringing it in, to its means there may be some doubt.⁵ Instead of having general terms governed by empirical generalization of the form 'Art is *a*, *b*, and *c*, where *a*, *b*, and *c*, refer to necessary and sufficient properties, the idea is to construe the conditions for the applicability of 'art' in the way Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* (§§ 66-77) found pertained to general terms such as 'game' and 'language.' Neatly summarized "we can say 'a game has properties *p*, *q*, *r*, or *r*, *s*, *t*, or *s*, *t*, *u*, or . . . and so on.' The point here is that you can't draw a boundary to the concept: it is not possible to produce a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for its application, and *a fortiori* not possible to produce a single necessary and sufficient condition."⁶ In Weitz's words, "'Game,' therefore, can be said to be governed by a disjunctive set of criteria that corresponds to a disjunctive set of properties, where no one of these criteria or properties is necessary or sufficient."⁷ Thus you can say that such concepts have no defining or, what this amounts to in traditional terms, essential property.

This kind of functioning depends on what Wittgenstein called 'family resemblance'; a notion which has given rise to various

⁵In a recent paper Weitz maps out several sources of his conception of 'open concept'; see "Open Concepts," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 1972.

⁶M. Tanner "Wittgenstein and Aesthetics," *The Oxford Review*, 1966.

⁷See his "Genre and Style," *Perspectives in Education, Religion, and the Arts*, ed. H. Keifer & M. Munitz, Albany 1970. Here quoted from his "Wittgenstein's Aesthetics," *Language and Aesthetics*, ed. B. R. Tilghman, Lawrence/Manhattan/Wichita, 1973.

criticisms, to which I shall return shortly. Weitz does not stop here, however. Not only is 'art' not governed by a definitive set of properties but by a family of related properties, additionally he wants to establish that this family cannot be exhaustively produced. 'Art' is, after Waismann, a *porous* or, as it was rendered in English, an *open* concept under the description "that definitions of open terms are always corrigible or emendable."⁸ With this addition, which he states in the contrapositive thus, "to render open concepts closed . . . misunderstands these concepts as well as forecloses on their historically assigned roles,"⁹ Weitz certainly makes art a complex concept indeed.

The part of Weitz's reasoning drawing on the 'family resemblance' analogy has in his, as well as in Wittgenstein's, employment been heavily attacked.¹⁰ Maurice Mandelbaum's "Family Resemblances and Generalizations concerning the Arts," a notable contribution,¹¹ finds that the employment of family concepts may be based on more kinds of properties than those discussed by Wittgenstein. Most interestingly, he contends that there is some definitive property which conditions the very notion of 'family resemblance' in its literal use, and so puts a spoke in all the accounts for which it has served as a model. Now, one might say that it is a somewhat crude demand that the family resemblance analogy should work equally well under the characterization given it originally as under that one which somebody might please to add; so much more if such addition renders 'family resemblance' concepts indistinguishable from other kinds of common terms, i.e., renders this model superfluous and, consequently, useless. Mandelbaum claims that Wittgenstein singlemindedly explored only "directly exhibited resemblances" and thus failed to provide an adequate account of the use of these common terms. In the case of 'family resemblance' itself Mandelbaum thus finds that "we must first characterize the *family* relationship in terms of genetic ties, and then observe to what extent

⁸"Verifiability," *Logic and Language*, First Series, ed. A. Flew, Oxford, 1951.

⁹*Ibid.*, Tilghman, p. 18.

¹⁰In (e.g.) "'Art,' Wittgenstein, and Open-textured Concepts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1971, R. J. Sclafani maintains that Weitz's use of this conception is misleading, since Wittgenstein rather than one has three slightly different 'family concepts.' A fact, however, Weitz himself explores somewhat differently in papers referred to, note 7. Cf. L. Aagaard-Mogensen "Fashion and Style," *International Congress of Aesthetics*, Bucharest, 1972.

¹¹*American Philosophical Quarterly*, II, 1965; pp. 219-28.

those who are connected in this way resemble one another." In the absence of a biological kinship of a certain proximity we would withhold 'family resemblance' and merely talk of 'resemblance.' The point is, that if we follow Wittgenstein's *dictum*: "Look and see" (*op. cit.* § 66) we shall, as he did, fail to notice shared properties of other kinds than those "directly exhibited."¹² Wittgenstein, however, as Mandelbaum realized, does not require that the resemblances be of one single kind; on the contrary he does point out, which Mandelbaum fails to notice, in the case of 'games' a number of properties which in no obvious sense are "directly exhibited," such as having rules. Actually, for 'open concepts' Waismann explicitly denies such an assumption: "Moreover, what we here call a 'resemblance' is not fixed" (*PLP.* p. 181). Nevertheless, Weitz's thesis may be open to this sort of criticism; that is, if the family resemblance idea is central to his application of 'open concept' in his argument pertaining to 'art.'

The objection does not, however, stand up against closer examination. It seems, viz., rather obvious that 'family' itself is a common name the use of which is governed by 'a family of resemblances.' Consider what type of relation a genetic tie is; surely in some cases, e.g., the mother-child kinship, we have both a relational and a causal condition of two individuals being of the same family. But from this it certainly does not follow that Mr. N's genetic background is the reason of Mr. NN's being his cousin; nor is N's genetic history the same as NN's. Rather the reason for their being relatives is that their genetic histories are sufficiently similar. Again, the genetic background of N's brother, Mr. M, resembles N's differently from the way in which it resembles NN's; because N and M 'descend directly' (which in itself is a closed biological concept) from P and Q, while NN is connected to P and/or Q *via* R and/or S, one pair of which (maybe each) is related in a way similar to N and M's. Or take R's brother, Mr. T, NN's uncle and Q's sister, N's (maternal) aunt; they may or may not be genetic relatives, but surely their relations are sufficiently resembling for them to count as family members.¹³ And you can go on and on; nothing in the concept of 'family' prevents new connections from being invented.

¹² A "blindness" which has a fellow in Hume's search for necessary connections, cf. *Treatise*, I, xiv.

¹³ If we really look and see, we should find, e.g., in Polynesia, families which are families merely in terms of this type of resemblance (just a bit more complex) and entirely irrespective of genetic ties. That even Weitz to some degree fails to utilize fully the full-fledged notion of the variety of purposes in

What I am driving at is this: the concept of 'family' functions in the way sketched (and genetic ties may be among the resemblances that govern the application of the concept), which, of course, is challengeable; but my point is that if it is challenged, such challenge can only be based on a (stipulative) definition of relations allowed as 'family relations,' i.e., by closing the concept of 'family.' This, of course, is legitimate for certain purposes (for example in Biology and Physiology); Wittgenstein's valuable observation was that among the various purposes a word may be made to serve, none is any better than the others in terms of their rules of application. By conflating such services or honoring only one of them, we are likely to be led astray. To illustrate this just one more bit: in economics a 'family' may consist of a couple and (say) three children, that is of five members; while — in genetics — the parents do not count as *family* members since they are not supposed to be, and normally are not biologically kindred.

If my argument is correct, Mandelbaum's point is quite harmless to the notion of 'family resemblance' as developed by Wittgenstein. We can grant that 'family resemblance' concepts are governed also by non-"directly exhibited" resemblances.¹⁴ What had to be demonstrated to disqualify the model is not that a genetic connection or the like is a non-directly exhibited resemblance, but that what those who have employed the model have overlooked is a *shared property* (apart from special purposes). This was an objection, but no more than that, because the alleged property only paraded necessity, and was covered by Weitz's "Unless we arbitrarily close (the concepts) by stipulating the ranges of their use."¹⁵

Turning to the concept of art, it must be admitted — considering also the hesitation expressed above (p. 42) — that my argument as yet has not excluded the possibility that Mandelbaum's criticism gets a toehold in this particular case: porosity or openness is no wholesale account of empirical concepts, and there is certainly no *a priori* reason why 'family,' 'game,' and 'art' should have exactly the same

ordinary language usage is cogently argued by B. R. Tilghman in "Wittgenstein Games, and Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1973.

¹⁴ Wittgenstein said: "Suppose there was a super-mechanism in the sense that there was a mechanism inside the string. Even if there was such mechanism, it would do no good." *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. C. Barrett, Oxford, 1966, p. 16.

¹⁵ At this point of my argument I want to make the reservation though, that I am not altogether happy with the expression 'arbitrarily'; because i) it certainly does not follow from the argument, and ii) 'special purposes' hardly all can be deemed arbitrary.

logical features. What has been gained then by dealing with 'family'? There seems to me to have been gained exactly as much in undermining the objection, as Mandelbaum gained in undermining 'family' with it antecedent to applying it to the family resemblance-account of the concept of art. Yet I want to reiterate the caution: Weitz actually says that the problem of 'art' "is like" that of 'game,' at least in *some* respects; and again 'the basic *resemblance* between those concepts is their open texture" (italics mine). That is, he is suggesting (as we shall see actually is the case) *analogous* features among these concepts, features which moreover consist therein that both are open, which need not, let me repeat, be the same thing in all cases. And it is quite clear that an analogy, *eo ipso*, is bound to break down at some point or other — or it ceases to be an analogy.

As to the "hidden" properties Weitz has allegedly overlooked in the use of the concept of art, Mandelbaum suggests that reference to the artist's intentions¹⁶ and to relations between artist, artwork, and "contemplator" fill the bill. Rather than giving these detailed attention — a huge project — let me proceed to the argument he offers as justification for such a project. Interestingly enough, both he and Wittgenstein/Weitz start at the same place, viz., in a paradigm-case. "If one asks what a game is, we pick out sample games, describe them, and add "This *and similar things* are called 'games.' " But whereas the latter conclude that since descriptions of samples is all we can provide, that is *all* we know, Mandelbaum argues that the description of the sample implies a theory which "must be assumed to be . . . general in import" or else it "would not have helped to establish a clear-cut case."

Notice, first, that both the suggested defining properties and this kind of reasoning belong to the type of definition covered in the historical step of Weitz's argument. For the sake of the argument let us, however, grant that *some* connection holds between a (correct) description and a clear-cut case, but why must we necessarily assume it to be of general validity? On the contrary, it must be said to be an analytical truth that criteria derived from paradigm-cases are not of any help in the controversial case.¹⁷ Indeed, the paradigm-case is the

¹⁶Mandelbaum raises in his footnote (16), *op. cit.*, the suggestive point that the famous 'intentional fallacy' does not enter the discussion, since the questions (1) of distinguishing between art and non-art, and (2) interpreting and evaluating artworks, are entirely different. He does not offer any argument (but see G. Dickie, *Aesthetics*, Bobbs-Merrill, 1971, pp. 98ff.): the following paragraphs make it clear that I need not argue it in this connection either.

¹⁷Cf. G. Maxwell & H. Feigl "Why Ordinary Language Needs Reforming," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 58 (1961), p. 491.

one where we do not need any theory. Obviously, from the fact that my description of a 'living organism' (e.g., a human being) is a (correct) description of a clear-cut case, it does not follow that my (or anybody else's) biological theory has general impact irrespective of (e.g.,) any discovery whatsoever, or a million years' evolution. It follows, at best, that it covers paradigm-cases. Hence, that inference is simply a *non sequitur*, and so is Mandelbaum's.

It is now time to bring in Weitz's main argument, which contains *the* reason teaching us the open-texture of 'art' — but at the same time the weakest point as well. Why is it illegitimate to close the concept of art? He says "for the all-important reason that unforeseeable or novel conditions are always forthcoming or envisageable." Rather than arbitrarily close it by stipulating its range of application "we enlarge our set of conditions for applying the concept" (which, by the way, can be made out as a seizure of the inclusive phobia). Or in a full quote:

With 'art' its conditions of application can never be exhaustively enumerated since new cases can always be envisaged or created by artists, or even nature, which would call for a decision on someone's part to close the old or to invent a new concept.

Now there are various ways in which a concept may be extended or revised; and, as mentioned, both Mandelbaum and Joseph Margolis¹⁸ object, rightly I think, that Weitz supplies no argument to show that a definition excludes — in logic — the defined term's application to future items. Can this be resolved?

First, we should remind ourselves of the Austinian point that we sometimes have to stretch our ordinary usage to accommodate quite exceptional cases; I take it that this may be the case quite often with the sub-concepts, such as 'novel,' 'ballet,' 'drama,' etc., without establishing new concepts, radical extensions or revisions.¹⁹ But such decisions clearly serve to avoid the invention of new terms, which case is included by Weitz's theses. Besides, the thesis gives us to

¹⁸ *The Language of Art and Art Criticism*, Detroit, 1965, p. 38. For a challenge of his argument, see C. Butler, "What Is a Literary Work?", *New Literary History*, V (1973) 18.

¹⁹ I shall here desist from commenting on Weitz's parallel reasoning pertaining to the subconcepts. Even though this often is a notoriously dubious move, I shall say that I presently see no obstacle to applying my argument, *mutatis mutandis*, to these. See Weitz's *Hamlet and the Philosophy of Literary Criticism*, Cleveland, 1966; and his "Tragedy," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. P. Edwards, New York, 1967.

understand that what Weitz has in mind is a constant flow of, if not exceptional, then at least new cases. The openness he is pleading is therefore of a different sort.

Wittgenstein did not consider the family concepts a homogeneous group. If we distinguish between cases in which we meet with properties we could anticipate, and cases in which we could not,²⁰ the former group obviously can be eliminated because they would require no radical extension of the range of application. Together with that group goes the sting of the objection referred to; allowing in a definition for cases which (in principle) could be anticipated occasions no serious trouble. If Weitz merely had such cases in mind, only "half-open" concepts were required; that is, we should merely have to patch up our definition when it appeared our imagination had come short.²¹ If, on the other hand, the cases in question are of a kind that cannot possibly be anticipated — and these are, *ex hypothesi*, the only remaining — then it is hard, if not altogether impossible, to see how definitively determined concepts can be guaranteed applicability at all (except, perhaps, as misuses). An instance of such an applicatory crisis would be supplied, I suppose, for Medieval conceptual repertory if we imagine it confronted with films. Finally we have some patent fields of application for an open concept in Weitz's sense; the question remains, however, whether any of our actual concepts are of this kind or not. It should be noted that although the thought that openness is a sort of vagueness readily suggests itself, this is hardly what Weitz wishes to confer upon 'art'; actually we can definitely say that it is not, since we have seen him forced to specify the family of resemblances, e.g., into 'novel, unknown, unforeseeable properties, in order to preserve the coherency of the concept of art.'²² The question can, therefore, only be answered by showing that 'art' or, subsidiarily, that some other concept, meet these conditions; and here it is Weitz fails to give an argument.

Put slightly differently, we might say that Weitz's thesis is vindicated, granted that items of the required sort are likely to occur; or else he should merely just have voiced a sceptic's typical move of

²⁰Cf. Sclafani, *op. cit.*

²¹A third group — obviously interesting for other reasons — is the class of familiar qualities not *now* regarded as artistic merits, as pointed out by F. N. Sibley "Is Art an Open Concept? An Unsettled Question," *International Congress of Aesthetics*, Vol. 4, 1960. This group, I think is included in the class of (in principle) anticipatable properties.

²²Cf. "Wittgenstein's Aesthetics," in Tilghman, *op. cit.*

insisting that even if something is utterly inconceivable, it is still reasonable to count on its occurrence. That means that we have to re-examine his reasons, as what he is left with is that 'art' belongs to a type of concept which is applicable to a huge class of items, the class of artworks, and which is open to continual extension under the described circumstances — he is, of course, still claiming it to be a workable concept. On such re-examination we shall find an essentialism that is indeed peculiar.

Weitz is somewhat repetitious in this matter, so let me be excused for following suit; this time, though, it is his last and, he seems to think, decisive formulation. It will be remembered the question is: Why is it illegitimate to close the concept of art? The reason is not only "that novel creations are envisageable," but that "*the very expansive, adventurous character of art, [i.e.,] its ever-present changes and novel creations, makes it logically impossible to ensure defining properties*" as such insurance "*forecloses on the very conditions of creativity in the arts*" (my italics). If this is not ascertaining an essential feature nothing is. One and only one conclusion is possible, viz., that art would not (and could not) be art if it had not the characteristic of 'creativity,' which consequently *must be essential* to 'art.'

This does not yet constitute, of course, the wanted argument — I grant that. Weitz insists, on the one hand, that 'art' is open, and on the other, that this is so because art has the property of 'creativity.' On a closer inspection, this *petitio* appears a peculiar one. What can Weitz possibly mean: that art essentially has creativity?

To make sense of this claim I think two further precisions are required. First, the notion of art has a variety of uses; one way to bring that out is to stress that 'art' may refer to art in general or to the particular arts, such as painting, ballet, etc. But what is 'art in general'? Well, as one reference it has the class of artworks, but it is important to note that we already have an adequate term for this class, viz., 'artworks' or 'works of art.' Again, when we use an expression like "He is in the arts" we surely don't mean to say that he is represented or depicted in some artworks, nor that he is located someplace in a ballet (say); rather we mean that he partakes in what has been referred to — with a somewhat misleading expression — as the institution of art²³ or perhaps better, the 'artworld.'²⁴ We can

²³ G. Dickie, *op. cit.* Ch. 11.

²⁴ A. Danto "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1964; pp. 571-584.

also use 'art' to refer in a general way to the stream of artworks through history. Here it certainly makes sense to talk of "expansive character" and "ever-present changes"; but rather than this stream as such, it is the inertia maintaining the stream and hence responsible for its ever-present changes to which creativity can be attributed. Although this gives us a promising pointer, at least two more distinctions should be given consideration. The one, pertinent to this discussion, is that art may also be used to refer to the "process" by which the product, the artwork, is produced. As Monroe Beardsley says in the *Aesthetics*, the name "work of art" itself expressly tells us that "it is a work; it is a product of art."²⁵ The other, allegedly pertinent, is that art may be used to refer evaluatively or classificatorily. All in all, I think this adds up to making 'art' open ambiguous under Roland Hall's description that such a term "is not only ambiguous between different types of cases, but often also within the class of comparison."²⁶ Now Weitz may mean any number of these and he may mean all of these; nowhere does he state which he does in fact mean.

Dickie suggests²⁷ that while 'art' in the "evaluative sense" may not be definable, 'art' in the "classificatory sense" surely is (thus artifactuality is a criterion of the latter), and further that Weitz's argument is inconclusive, because of confusion on this distinction. In his terms the evaluative sense of 'art' is used to praise, while the classificatory sense is a basic concept which structures and guides our thinking about our world. I don't want to discuss this theme or Dickie's argument in detail, but want merely to indicate why I will find it permissible to pass it by so cursorily. The reason is that, though age-old, this is a bogus dichotomy, and quite incapable of catching Weitz.

Several things should be considered. First of all, at this date we should have learned to be on guard when a philosopher introduces "two senses of . . ." In the next place, it should be admitted, with Frank Sibley, that we are only interested in finding a definition — if there is such one — of artworks of merit, because "this is what the traditional theorists sought to define, by specifying properties which artistic achievements possess but which failures lack."²⁸ Surely this

²⁵New York, 1958, p. 59.

²⁶"Excluders," *Analysis*, 1959, pp. 1-7.

²⁷*Loc. cit.*

²⁸*Op. cit.*, and, again, this ties up with the question of real definition, cf. p. 2 above.

is the problem Weitz is addressing — since his argument is supposed to remedy the deficiencies of traditional theories.

Against this, we need to consider what seems to be Dickie's sole counterargument, one which unfortunately has a good deal of appeal to me. He says that an aesthetic theory, if worth anything, has to facilitate our ordinary talk of artworks. The point is that the ordinary talk, admittedly, also contains talk about bad art. In some circumstances, I suppose, we do speak of both 'bad art' and 'non-art.' But, then I want to ask, is bad art a special kind of art (how interesting!) or is it a kind of non-art in which case it cannot excite us in this context? Whatever we decide thereon, I shall want to say that we by no means can have any interest in defining 'art' to learn the essence of failures. That is why this argument glances off the target.

Consider the two distinct uses Dickie alleges to find further. It seems quite a stipulation to say that our evaluation of things in the world should not influence our classifications, or, *vice versa*, that our evaluations should not be basic concepts in structuring our thinking about the world. It appears quite absurd to hold that we possess — even in logic— two independent systems, so to speak, one neutral as to value, the other neutral as to classification. For my part, I must confess, I cannot detect such systems in ordinary language. Again, what concern would we have with the classificatory use of 'art,' if there is such, apart from considerations of evaluative uses? The only alternative would presumably be concern for classificatory purposes. But that concern could not even get started, since were 'artworks' not 'given,' there would be nothing distinguishable to define or attempt to define.²⁹ That is why the dichotomy is bogus.

Returning to the main theme, the reference of 'art' needs to be sorted out. In this part of his argument Weitz obviously cannot, as in the earlier parts, use 'art' to refer to the class of artworks. To be sure, creativity is not to be found as a property of artworks; rather it seems to characterize a process or an activity. The creativity of El Greco (say) does refer to something El Greco did, which is not the works he made (those we call paintings, pictures, masterpieces, wonders, or what not), but the fact that he showed creativeness. In other words creativity singles out features of El Greco's performance, or rather it categorizes his performances in painting differently from his performances in (say) cooking or writing. However, had his paintings not been masterpieces, but undistinguished products by the

²⁹ See my "On the Alleged Ambiguity of 'Work of Art,'" forthcoming.

dozen, he would hardly be attributed creativeness. In short, a performance, as a little detailed attention shows, is not creative in virtue of a special feature of creativity, but because of its result. That this particular relation holds between activity and result indicates that 'create' is an 'achievement verb.'³⁰ Here is, I want to propose, the reason why Weitz's definition — in logic — leaves 'art' an open concept.³¹

With the exception of a few esoteric phrases, and despite its grammatical category, 'create' does not refer to an activity or process at all. If I am copying or making something I have not yet copied or made it, I am at work or in the process of copying or making; but if I win a race or find (say) the celebrated needle in the haystack, then I have won the race or have found the needle already. As in the latter cases, if C is creating (or rather is creative) then C has created because we cannot know whether C was creating (nor can he) until we have seen the completed product, which is our reason for calling C creative. That is to say, that the verb 'to create' does not designate some ongoing specific process. Again, just as I cannot win a race without running, C cannot create an artwork without painting, writing, composing, etc. Conversely, not every instance of running is winning, nor is every instance of composing also creating. One cannot just create pure and simple; the result of the process has to be an achievement (of some sort). To count as an achievement, the product must be a new, original, unique, and valuable thing.

Nor does 'create' refer to a particular way of performing certain activities. I may copy or make something wrong, but I cannot create wrong; either I create or I do not. And, certainly, what I make, paint or compose may well turn out differently from what I intended; but if I did not paint it follows that I did not do anything, whereas the fact that I did not create anything does not exclude that I tried hard for years in painting, construction, etc. That I did not create anything does not mean that I painted in a wrong or in an appropriate way, but means merely that what I actually produced was lacking originality and value.

A third feature of 'create' is, interestingly enough, that it does not allow that one creates at will. If 'creating' did belong to the same

³⁰As argued, indeed convincingly, by J. Glickman in a symposium with W. E. Kennick who — following A. Kenny — held 'create' to be a 'performance verb.' See "On Creating" and "Creative Acts," respectively in *op. cit.* ed. Kiefer & Munitz; J. Glickman "Creativity in the Arts," forthcoming.

³¹The reader, who still doubts that these are distinguishable, is referred to R. S. Richman "Something Common," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1962.

type as (e.g.) 'making' and 'copying' do, it would make sense to say that one had decided to create a masterpiece. You can decide to copy something and you can decide to make something, decide to paint, compose, etc. Just as you can decide to walk a mile, but not to do so in a record time. you can decide to compose, but not to compose a masterpiece. In fact no one can decide to succeed any more than one can decide to fail (unless he only pretends to try). At best, you can decide to try to perform an achievement, such as set a record or create a masterpiece.

From this a worthwhile fourth feature follows. It is a plain fact, I believe, that 'achievement' is set to various tasks in accordance to context and/or attribution to first or other persons. In connection with art we seldom take into consideration whether some achievement represented hard physical work or capability, despite the fact that a lot of artists put a great deal of effort into their production. It goes without saying, now, that any determination on their part does not guarantee against artistic failure. Likewise, since it follows from what has been said, that the first person use of 'create' (in continuous tense) hardly makes sense, the judgment whether an artwork which is a candidate for achievementhood really does deserve it is not left in the "creator's" care. Indeed, many persons do not withhold the attribution of achievementhood from their own production, but from that it merely follows that they consider these products achievement. We can admit that such products may be 'personal achievements' on the analogy with the personal record score of an athlete — but even therein the producer himself may be wrong. It is more important, however, that other-person attribution of 'achievement' is a public thing, so to speak. This explains why artists can grant only candidacy, not success, to their productions. Weitz's mentioning of "a call for a decision on someone's part" I take to be textual evidence that what he has in mind throughout conforms well enough to my analysis.³² Of course, it is necessary to specify who is in fact entitled to fill in the 'someone' in this sentence — a task which, however interesting, falls outside the scope of this paper.³³

³²The reader may satisfy himself that the same is true on a number of my other points. When Weitz in one of the passages quoted nevertheless speaks of 'novel creations' — which on my analysis is a pleonasm — I have no other explanation than that it must be either sloppy grammar, part of the rhetoric of his argument, or lack of depth in acute detail. The second of these, I believe, is the most plausible.

³³In passing it could be mentioned that Dickie's "Every person who sees

More ought perhaps to be said about the achievement nature of the verb 'creating,' but this much suffices for present purposes. In summary, that 'create' is not a specifiable activity, cannot be done on purpose, and requires publicly recognizable new and original works does exclude that an exhaustive list of properties can be given for the applicability of 'art.' And what is more, this fact guarantees that 'art' is applicable to future items; in fact it requires that future items possess new properties — and 'new' cannot *eo ipso* be specified; this is how "logical impossibility" enters Weitz's thesis over and above the factual difficulties. That artworks, therefore, cannot be made on purpose and by necessity possess new properties, has the effect that 'art' is open in a different way from that in which 'game' is (cf. p. 45 above). Whether this perpetual extension of 'art' in each case is based upon considerations of family resemblances remains as yet an open question, the answering of which requires a positive employment of this idea — that is, it has to be mapped out that family resemblances do in fact exist among the arts³⁴ or among the members of the class of artworks. It is clear, though, that nothing in the concept of 'create,' the condition of 'art,' requires this to be the case, but it may well be a differentiating principle in sorting out new creations into art and creations of other sorts.³⁵

Since my result pretty much coincides with Weitz's, and I still believe my argument to be worthwhile on its own, I should perhaps indicate whereon this belief is grounded. As I see it, the difference between us amounts to this: while Weitz states his task as "elucidation of the actual employment of art, to give a logical description of the actual functioning of the concept, including a description of the conditions under which we correctly use it and its correlatives," he two pages later says that he is arguing that "a theory of [art] is logically impossible and not merely factually difficult." I am not insisting on an opposition between arguing and describing, but I think he is not describing 'the actual logical functioning' of 'art' either, which I, however incompletely, have tried to do, i.e., as governed by the condition of creativity and, then, a description of this condition. Or, better perhaps, we can say that while I try to concentrate on

himself as a member of the artworld is an "officer" of it and is thereby capable of conferring status in its name" is ruled out; *op. cit.* p. 104.

³⁴Cf. "Genre and Style," in Kiefer & Munitz, *op. cit.*

³⁵D. W. Gotschalk: *Art and the Social Order*, Chicago, 1947, p. 160: "Disciplined aesthetic experience begins by taking a work of art not as a natural object momentarily viewed aesthetically, but as a work of art, a special type of creation."

the inherent characteristics of 'art,' Weitz is heaping up external evidence of that same characterization.

In conclusion, then, it is presupposed that creativity, as an *achievement-governed* predicate of some non-specifiable activity, is a (minimum) condition of 'art'; and, correspondingly, that 'artworks are creations' is an analytical truth. In short, art is essentially creative.

A feature of this requirement should be emphasized. The (parenthesized) 'minimum' seems to suggest that some further criterion, which might be both necessary and sufficient, is likely to be discovered. To see that this is not even a possibility we only have to remind ourselves that no anticipatable feature will satisfy the creativity requirement, i.e., any restriction violates the essence of art. Hence, in the required sense nothing can both be specific and a criterion of art.

It may be urged, on the one hand, that this kind of 'criterion' is no criterion at all nor, consequently, is the definition ascribed to Weitz a definition. If this objection is supposed to affect the issue one way or the other beyond mere terminological considerations, I have no other answer than that the view it represents adheres to an indeed singleminded conception of 'criterion' and 'definition,' not to mention the way in which concepts function. The cases of Mandelbaum's salvage operation for traditional essentialism and of the interrelationship between 'art' and 'creativity' serve as well as any to demonstrate this point. All the same, I shall admit that perhaps 'necessary' is not quite the characterization that suits a criterion like the creativity requirement.³⁶

On the other hand, someone might urge that the determination of openness involving necessary extension really amounts to no more than evacuating 'art' of all content. Again, if this transcends mere terminological uneasiness, we can call attention to the following points. I have not made the absurd claim that some term covers all art.³⁷ Nor is vagueness equivalent to vacuity — for obvious reasons; although some may choose to say that openness is a form of vagueness (cf. p. 47f above), I hope to have made it sufficiently clear in which ways 'art' is not vague.³⁸ I.e., achievements and their

³⁶ Cf. his "Wittgenstein's Aesthetics," in Tilghman, *op. cit.*

³⁷ Contrary to Sibley's "There is a case also for saying that each has the same quality. Each, after all, is graceful," *op. cit.*

³⁸ In "Verifiability," *op. cit.* Waismann disassociates himself from vagueness thus: "Open texture, then, is something like possibility of vagueness."

establishment does not leave 'art' a "wide open" concept.³⁹ And, fourthly, the inevitable intentionality of 'art' in its classificatory-evaluative employment, as touched upon, is indeed non-negligible.⁴⁰

On my terms, then, we can readily admit that Wittgenstein may not have proved of any general term that it is open-textured;⁴¹ and that Mandelbaum and Margolis (among others) were right that Weitz did not prove it logically impossible that a concept might apply to future items. But Weitz did indicate, what has here been shown, that it is built into one of our concepts, 'art,' that it does and has to apply to future instances — i.e., art is, in the required sense, a porous concept.

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³⁹Cf. Richman, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰"The Alleged Ambiguity of 'Work of Art,' ", *op. cit.*

⁴¹Richman, *op. cit.*