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Institutional Definitions of Art

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Abstract:

This thesis provides a thorough examination of the institutional theories and definitions of Arthur C. Danto and George Dickie, and assesses the *pros* and *cons* of their respective approaches. This account of Danto's and Dickie's theories differs from previous ones, because it organises their ideas and works chronologically and by periods, rather than in terms of topics or of an analysis of a single work. In this way it is possible to follow the development and later modifications of their theories, as well as to assess whether the account they provide in retrospect of their own previous ideas is completely correct or not. It also identifies those received interpretations of Danto's and Dickie's theories that seem to be generally endorsed but that do not provide a correct or fair interpretation of their theories. As a result, this thesis presents an interpretation of Danto's and Dickie's theories that substantially differs from the received interpretations of these theories.

Although the received interpretations of Danto's and Dickie's theories have not yet undergone any programmatic process of standardisation, nevertheless many of the standard interpretations challenged in this thesis can be traced back to Stephen Davies's book *Definitions of Art*. Given the fact that this book specifically addresses this topic and because its title is so compelling, the ideas summarised in this book have been endorsed also by major figures such as Carroll, Levinson and Dickie. As a result, the last chapter of this thesis also challenges Davies's quasi-programmatic standardisation of these received interpretations, and his organisation of the debate about definitions of art in terms of a divide between functionalists and proceduralists, which reinforces these received misinterpretations.

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5th July 2011

Norwich

ON BOOK REFERENCES

In the following chapters I will quote the books and papers as follows:

(author, year of publication [if applicable year of first edition]:if applicable page or pages)

e.g., (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 204)

When shorter names are provided to refer to some of these works I will quote them as follows (books in italics, papers in inverted commas):

(abbreviated title: page/pages)

e.g., (*Introduction*: 104) ('End': 100 – 107)

List of abbreviations of frequently quoted works (in alphabetical order):

ABBREVIATION	TITLE	AUTHOR	YEAR
<i>After</i>	<i>After the End of Art</i>	Danto	1997
'Answer'	'An Answer or Two for Sparshott'	Danto	1976
'Approaching'	'Approaching the End of Art'	Danto	1987(1985)
'Consciousness'	'Art, Evolution and the Consciousness of History'	Danto	1986
<i>Circle</i>	<i>The Art Circle</i>	Dickie	1997(1984)
'Defining II'	'Defining art: II'	Dickie	1973
'Disenfranchisement'	'The Philosophical disenfranchisement of art'(paper)	Danto	1986(1984)
'End'	'The End of Art'	Danto	1986(1984)
'Institutional'	'The Institutional Conception of Art'	Dickie	1973
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>Aesthetics, an Introduction</i>	Dickie	1971
<i>Introduction1997</i>	<i>Introduction to Aesthetics: An Analytic Approach</i>	Dickie	1997
'Nature/Culture'	'Art: Function or Procedure: Nature or Culture?'	Dickie	1997
'New'	'The New Institutional Theory of Art'	Dickie	1995(1983)
'Reply'	'A reply to Professor Margolis'	Dickie	1975
'Response'	'A Response to Cohen: The Actuality of Art'	Dickie	1977
'Transfiguration'	'The Transfiguration of the commonplace' (paper)	Danto	1974
<i>Transfiguration</i>	<i>The Transfiguration of the commonplace</i> (book)	Danto	1981

1. TOWARDS INSTITUTIONAL DEFINITIONS OF ART

1.1 Underlying perspectives in the production and understanding of art

To speak about art today, is to speak not only about painting, sculpture, music, poetry, theatre and dance but also about such new disciplines as video art, audio art, site-specific art, happenings, land art, computer-generated art and conceptual art. Moreover, while previous attempts to explain art could neatly classify the different instances of art (e.g., this is a sculpture, that is a painting, etc.), nowadays the experimental and hybrid character of many works makes such a way of compartmentalizing artworks into separate or discrete disciplines almost impossible. Thus today it is possible to find in art galleries and museums, amongst the myriad of new forms, hybrids of painting and sculpture (e.g., Ron Mueck's hyperrealist sculpture) of performance and painting (e.g., Jackson Pollock's paintings) or of sculpture and audio art (e.g., Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's works).

Often, in front of an exhibit, it is easy to understand why some works (a Giotto, for example, or a Leonardo, a Dalí or a Lucian Freud) are to be considered works of art. At times, however, other pieces or performances (Davies calls them 'hard cases' – see Chapter 7) raise serious questions about whether they are really art or not. It is then the work of art historians, curators, artists, art critics and even philosophers to explain why these works ought to be regarded as works of art or not.

In fact, the diversity of art forms and art disciplines that can be found today – not only in museums and galleries but also in theatres, auditoriums or even in literature – obliges the theoreticians to elaborate a coherent synthesis of this huge *corpus* of practices and theories that constitutes art. However, at the same time, this diversified panorama of art often also pushes these same experts to favor accidentally, in their theories, some particular art forms rather than others. This arises from the difficulty of being a specialist in all the diverse types of existing art forms at once. As a result, any attempt to examine the current debate about definitions of art should be accompanied by a critical examination of the standpoints that different theoreticians may be taking when they reflect on their

subject (e.g., is an author X writing from the perspective of his knowledge of music? From his knowledge of literature and poetry? From his knowledge of Modern or Contemporary art?)

In part, this huge diversity of instances of art and art disciplines, led theorists to support the idea that works of art could be regarded as such, not owing to their intrinsic merits, but because of their mere institutional placement or by virtue of their dependency upon some normative factors that have become institutionalized – in order to see the different versions of the institutional theory, see Chapters 2, 5 and 7 respectively on Danto's, Dickie's and Davies's early formulations of their institutional theories.

Yet, even if it seemed plausible to accept that some instances, or 'hard cases' of art seemed to imply the existence of purely institutional decisions, this position soon became hotly disputed: the institutional theory not only seemed to counter many of the intuitions so far accepted concerning artmaking. It also seemed to render the explanation vacuous because a simple institutional decision could place any object whatsoever into the category 'work of art' without the need to provide any reason why such a decision was taken. As a result, the institutional theorists entered a second period of reformulation in order to avoid the main criticisms that they had received so far – see Chapters 3 and 6 on Danto's and Dickie's respective reformulations of their theories.

However, the current diversity of artworks that Danto celebrates in his papers on the end of the teleological narrative of art – see Chapter 4 on Danto's theory about the end of art – is something more characteristic of late 20th and early 21st century art than of the art of all periods. How is it then possible that the relatively unified set of practices of art that go from Phidias to Leonardo and even to Henry Moore, would one day lead to accepting, not without reluctance, the idea that a urinal (i.e., Duchamp's *Fountain*) could become a work of art? In order to explain this, the different theoreticians suggested different explanations which will be summarized and examined in the course of this thesis.

Even if the current diversity of art is a relatively recent phenomenon, however, a closer inspection will also bring to light the fact that the previous panorama of art was not so homogeneous, let us say, as to be subsumed by mimetic, expressionist or aesthetic theories of art. Neither is it completely true that there has been a teleological evolution in the art practices from an obsolete mimeticism to the current condition of ‘relational’ art.¹

In fact, much art today is still based on ideas of imitation, such as the above-mentioned hyperrealism in sculpture or painting, and many artworks have important elements coming from expressionist ideas (those of Jackson Pollock, for example, or of Francis Bacon). In fact M.H. Abrams, in his book *The Mirror and the Lamp* (Abrams, 1969 [1953]) often advises against endorsing the idea that the history of art suddenly shifted from mimeticism to expressionism in a single move: he is aware that expressionist ideas already existed in Roman times and that mimetic theories were still supported long after the image of the expressionist artist as a lamp or a well was conceived. He even acknowledges elements of a position mainly developed after the 18th century, which he names ‘objectivism’, in a work as early as Aristotle’s *Poetics*.

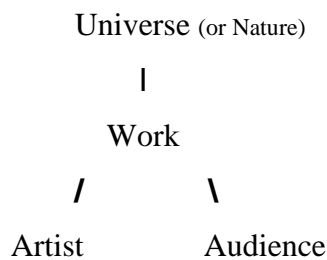
Furthermore, Abrams’s book reveals a more complex development of the history of art than that conceived by Danto and Dickie, for example, in their reflections on the development of aesthetic theories. Such an understanding of the development of art is particularly useful in searching for a more detailed explanation and critical assessment of the institutional theories of art. In order to do this, Abrams presents a simplified scheme of the main coordinates used in art theory and practice, to understand better the development of art production and art criticism. I will use (and slightly modify) such coordinates to locate also in them the different analytic theories of art that play a relevant role in the debate concerning the institutional definitions of art.

¹ By ‘relational art’ I mean both as understood by the institutional theory, highlighting the relational nature of artworks, and as understood by Bourriaud in his *Relational Aesthetics*, where he attempts to explain the current tendency of many artists to promote the interaction between their artworks and their publics.

1.2 Framing the debate: on Abrams's scheme

In *The Mirror and the Lamp*, Abrams attempts to provide a clear scheme to account for the different currents in art theory and art criticism. He is aware that such a scheme, though useful, is nevertheless just an introductory and simplified way to orient the reader towards the complex panorama that he is going to examine in a more detailed manner in the next chapters of his book.

He argues that, so far, in art theory and art criticism, the different theorists and artists have focused mainly on one of the following four elements when producing and/or attempting to understand art: the universe (or Nature), the artist, the audience and the work. He structures the scheme in the following way:



Abrams claims that while any given theory has usually taken into consideration several of these elements at the same time (e.g., work and universe, or audience and artist, etc.), each still tends to emphasize one of these aspects at the expense of the others. Thus, for example, mimetic theories emphasized the element 'Universe' (or Nature) because mimetic artists attempted to imitate or reproduce naturalistically different elements constituting external reality (note that Abrams uses the term 'Universe' to include all elements of external reality, not just Nature).

However, Abrahams tells us that later historical developments, and notably, the progressive influence of Roman rhetoricians in art theory, promoted a displacement of the interest in the production and understanding of art. This, in the first place, led from a conception emphasizing the central aspect of naturalistic representation in art, to the idea that works of art are produced mainly to be presented to an audience. Abrams calls this theory 'pragmatic' because it asserts that the main purpose of art is to influence this audience, morally or sentimentally. Pragmatists supported this

position, Abrams argues, even though most of them still claimed, in a pseudo-conservative manner, that the main aim of art was to promote and improve mimetic representation.

A later development of this position would displace the relevance of the audience in art, to emphasize the relevance of the artists' expressions of their feelings and emotions. This position, following Abrams, is also characterized by a shift from the metaphor of the mirror used by Plato and recovered by later mimetic theorists, to the metaphor, based on Plotinus's Neoplatonic theory, of the artist as a lamp or as a well, who, by means of an overflow of feelings, gives the reality represented a new (sentimental) aspect.

Finally, Abrams also identifies a position developed after Romanticism, even though this goes beyond his own interests, because his book is centered on Romantic theory and criticism. This further position, Abrams claims, no longer focuses on the role of the sentimental artist, but mainly upon the work itself and its intrinsic aspects. He calls this later current 'Objectivism'

Now, the idea of introducing this scheme suggested by Abrams is to locate the other theories that follow 18th century Romantic expressionism that play a major role in the current debate concerning definitions of art. Also, the aim is to show how institutional theorists went beyond the traditional *axis* suggested, or made explicit, by Abrams. This occurred because these theorists regarded the traditional criteria (i.e., universe, artist, audience, work) as insufficient to account for all artistic phenomena, and more specifically, to account for the phenomenon of Ready-Made art that appears in the first half of the 20th century.

Thus, during the 20th century, before institutional theories were first formulated by Danto and Dickie, other combinations or actualizations of the definitions summarized by Abrams were presented, such as those of Collingwood, Langer, Greenberg and others. Dickie in fact classifies Collingwood's and Langer's theories either in terms of expressionism (Collingwood) or mimeticism (Langer). He clarifies this latter controversial classification by claiming that *contra* the apparent expressionist character of Langer's theory, she is defending the idea that works of

art always arise in the attempt to provide a (mimetic) representation of human feelings (*Introduction*1997: 58 – 62).

Carroll's introductory book on aesthetics (Carroll, 1999b) also helps to classify, in terms of Abrams scheme, the aesthetic theories of Bullough, Vivas, Stolnitz, Aldrich and Beardsley, which also play an important role in the current debate concerning definitions of art. Carroll distinguishes between two types of theories of the aesthetic experience: the *content-oriented* and the *affect-oriented* theories. The content-oriented theorist, Carroll suggests, supports the idea that 'an aesthetic experience is an experience of the aesthetic properties of a work' (Carroll, 1999b: 168), while the affect-oriented theorist instead argues that 'an aesthetic experience is the disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object whatsoever for its own sake' (Carroll, 1999b: 172).

In this case, the direction of influence (or arrow) that goes, in Abrams's scheme, between the work and the subjects of the aesthetic experience (audience), thus also becomes an important way to distinguish between the different theories. Carroll's idea suggests that it is possible to argue then that the *content-oriented* theory explains the phenomenon of the aesthetic experience of artworks from the direction work-to-audience (work → audience). The *affect-oriented* theory, instead, explains the phenomenon of the aesthetic experience of artworks from the direction audience-to-work (audience → work).

As a result, on the one hand, theories of the aesthetic experience such as Bullough's, Aldrich's, Vivas's or Stolnitz's, that claim that a type of aesthetic perception is required to deal with the aesthetic objects, would be supporting the 'audience → work' (affect-oriented) direction of the theory. Beardsley's theory of Metacriticism, on the other hand, would be supporting a 'work → audience' (content-oriented) direction of the theory. This is because, as Dickie insists, Beardsley's theory of the aesthetic experience is in no way dependent upon the idea of a special type of aesthetic perception required for the proper appreciation of artworks. Instead, it is based upon the idea that the internal properties of the works are those that provoke the so-called aesthetic experience (see Chapter 6 where I quote Dickie's reflections on Beardsley's theory). So following Abrams, Beardsley

would support a sort of objectivist content-oriented theory of the aesthetic experience.

To complete this classification based on Abrams, and still following Carroll's distinction between content-oriented and affect-oriented theories, it is possible to distinguish between the formalist theories of Clive Bell and Greenberg: Bell stresses that the aesthetic experience of the audience is produced by the significant form of the work, and his theory thus takes the direction 'work → audience' (content-oriented theory). Greenberg's theory – although at first sight it seems to claim something along the lines of Bell's (i.e., in the sense that he considers the aesthetic experience of the audience to be provoked by the formal aspects of the work) – nevertheless differs from Bell's and approaches Beardsley's, in its insistence on characterizing explicitly the intrinsic properties of artworks, which results in making them more central than the fact of the phenomena of aesthetic experience.

Thus, Greenberg argues that the formal aspects that provoke the aesthetic experience are, in the case of painting, a representation consistent with the two-dimensionality of the surface, the limits of the frame and the properties of the pigment. In more general terms, he believes that the formal aspects of any works of art ought to arise from the different works being consistent with the conditions and limits of their respective mediums and materials used (e.g., three-dimensionality in the case of sculpture, two-dimensionality in the case of painting). Greenberg's theory, then, even if it is as content-oriented as Bell's, is nevertheless more of an 'objectivist' type than Bell's (although, as with Beardsley's, I am not claiming he is an 'objectivist' *in toto*).

However, the neo-Wittgensteinians, like Morris Weitz, sought to counter all the previous (and future) attempts to define art by claiming that the current diversity in art made the search for common necessary and sufficient conditions impossible. The only possible way, Weitz argued, to explain what a work of art is, would be by means of suggesting family resemblances between different types of works of art.

The institutional theories appeared, on the one hand, as a critical response to the neo-Wittgensteinian claim. These institutional theories, however, were also formulated as an attempt to contest certain other theories they regarded as altogether misleading in the attempt to understand the nature of the artistic process. Thus:

- Danto, in his *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (see Chapter 3), addressed part of his criticism against mimetic theories, and in less explicit manner, against formalist theories of art. His main concern, however, was to correct the misunderstandings of his theory that takes him to be claiming something along the lines of Dickie's type of institutional theory. Also, in many of his papers about the end of art (see Chapter 4), he critically responded, this time explicitly, to Greenberg's extremely formalist conception of art.
- Dickie's institutional theory was formulated as a consequence of his critical response to the theories of Bullough, Stolnitz, Vivas and Aldrich which attempted to explain the phenomena of art and the aesthetic properties of artworks, as resulting from a particular process of aesthetic perception. In fact Dickie, not only criticized these theories but also acknowledged, in the reformulations of his early attempts to define art (see Chapter 5), his debt to Beardsley's theory. This is because Beardsley's theory posited a Metacritical theory of art that lacked any reference to the aesthetic perception requirement defended by the above mentioned authors (Bullough, Stolnitz, etc.).

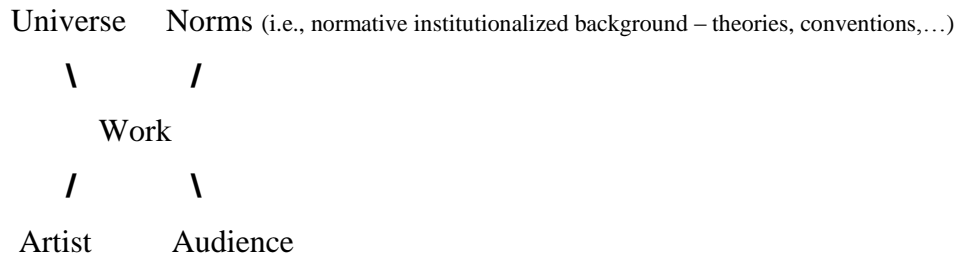
The institutional theorists, sought a new type of definition of art that, *contra* the opinions of Weitz and Kennick, could account for all instances of art. To do this, the institutional theorists argued that a definition of art was possible if certain ideas were left behind, such as the search (1) for common internal properties in works of art (in the objectivist fashion), and (2) the attempt to identify art only in terms of traditional and simple relations such as those between the artist and the work (expressionism), the work and nature (mimeticism) or the work and the audience (pragmatism). As a result, Danto and Dickie defended two different normative aspects in art that underlined the idea of its institutional character:

- Danto suggested that a relational aspect of art, so far ignored in aesthetics, ought to be taken into account: namely, the normative role of (institutionalized) artistic theories used for the production and understanding of artworks.
- Dickie revised Beardsley's theory of Metacriticism to defend the idea that, in order to examine the objects of criticism properly, it is first necessary to have a previous acquaintance with the institutionalized (relational) conventions that make possible the existence of the different art objects. Later on, Dickie would combine this approach with Danto's ideas about the artworld, to propose the first version of his institutional definition of art.

Much later, in the nineties, Davies developed his own institutional theory, based mainly on Dickie's earlier institutional definition of art. However, elements from Danto's theories and even from Diffey's short paper (Diffey, 1969) can be found in his own version of the institutional theory of art, in particular his use of the 'argument of indiscernibles' from Danto and of the notion of 'authority' from Diffey.

After these theories were presented, it became apparent that the institutional theories stressed, in one form or another, a new element beyond those traditionally endorsed (i.e., work, audience, universe and artist): the institutionalized norms and conventions that make possible the practice of artmaking and art appreciation and criticism. These later theorists would argue that *anything* could be an artwork (not just mimetic, expressionist or aesthetically pleasing works) provided it followed a number of institutionalized norms or conventions: theories of art, rules of display, the conventional behavior of the audience, and so on. I will use the term 'norms' to refer, in a more synthetic manner, to the normative background that, in becoming institutionalized – as art theories, social conventions or types of actions – becomes the precondition for the introduction of new instances of art. Thus, following these ideas, there is a fifth element to explain what art is. As a result, we can now slightly

modify the way Abrams represents the focus of attention of the different theories concerned with the nature of art, as follows:



The different institutional theories that stress the role of the normative background in art, however, can be conceived as supporting also the relevance of any of the other four elements presented by Abrams. This is a consequence of Abrams's suggestion that any criterion can be combined with any other, so as to produce substantial differences between the contending theories of art. Thus, for example, Danto's definition of art (see Chapter 3) stresses the normative role of art theories in producing art *together* with ideas reminiscent of the expressionist theories of art. This is because he argues that artists always attempt to express something by means of their artworks (i.e., Danto claims in this version of the institutional theory, that artworks are always *about* something).

1.3 *Rationale of the methodology used*

After the institutional theory had been much discussed and criticized, it lost part of its original charm and only a few theorists continued to defend it in one form or another. The perspective afforded to us by the passing of time, however, also provides us with a larger number of papers, summaries and critiques of these different institutional theories, allowing us to have a more detached and informed approach to them.

Stephen Davies has recently attempted to provide a summary of these theories in his book *Definitions of Art*, because he asserts that 'when much of the debate is confined to comparatively short pieces in scholarly journals, as is the case with this topic, I believe there is some value in the attempt to present an overview' (Davies,

1991: x).² Given his attempt to pioneer a synthesis of this debate, *Definitions of Art* is currently used as a textbook on institutional definitions of art. Although it is true that other books have also attempted to summarise the debate about definitions of art such as Hagberg in his *Art as Language*, Dickie in his *Introduction to Aesthetics* or even Tilghman in his book *But is it Art?*, nevertheless the title of Davies's book is so compelling and clear about its topic, (i.e., *Definitions of Art*) and it is so focused upon the claims of institutional theorists, that his work is taken as an essential introductory textbook to the debate.

However, as I will argue in this thesis, Davies's pioneer attempt at compiling, summarizing and examining the institutional theories of art in a systematic manner, long after their novelty had faded away, raises a problem: perhaps as a consequence of its being a pioneer work on this topic, it provides only a partial and confusing account of these theories. This is because in rushing to present his own institutional definition of art, he first provides only a very general and oversimplified explanation of Dickie's and Danto's theories. This is followed by a dissection of their different ideas thematically (i.e., separately by topics), prior to giving a careful and thorough account of Danto's and Dickie's theories in their own philosophical context (i.e., in relation to Danto's and Dickie's overall ideas). Thus, even though Davies attempts to make careful conceptual distinctions and clarifications in the different chapters on the ideas of these two philosophers – as well as those of Beardsley, Diffey, Levinson, and Carroll, amongst others –, he nevertheless lumps together, without making the required distinctions, reflections and ideas coming from very different periods and works of these same authors.

In this thesis, I will attempt to avoid Davies's misinterpretations of Danto and Dickie which result from an unsuitable methodology. I will take instead a more contextual approach, organizing the chapters by authors (Danto, Dickie, Davies) and each author by his different theoretical periods (Danto1, Danto2, Danto3, Dickie1, Dickie2 and early and later claims of Davies). Davies's early and later

² I am, of course, sympathetic with this claim, given that this idea is also part of the *rationale* of this research.

theories, however, will be developed only in a single chapter, because there is still an insufficient amount of secondary material to justify further treatment. While I acknowledge that dividing an author's work by periods is also something of an artificial distinction, I consider this to be a much better methodology to follow than the one used by Davies. I will thus divide the chapters in this way, before proceeding with the critical assessment and comparison of Danto's and Dickie's claims.

Yet, even if this study is critical of Davies's attempt to summarize the institutional theories of art and of his attempt to give his own definition in the way he does, I nevertheless invite any researcher interested in this topic to read, together with this work, also Davies's *Definitions of Art*. This is not only for the heuristic usefulness of contrasting both types of interpretations of the different institutional theories of Danto and Dickie. It is also an acknowledgement that Davies's book contains interesting distinctions and useful clarifications that I will be unable to introduce in the chapters to come, given the compressed nature of the thesis I am about to present.

As a result of the particular methodology I have taken to conduct this work, each chapter of the present work will be structured as follows:

- 1) Presentation: I will provide a general introduction of the author's theory during this period. This will be followed by a brief contextualization of the different works (papers and books) that ought to be taken into consideration in order to understand the ideas developed by this author during this particular period. I will do this in order to make clearer the relation that these works bear with each other within this period and within the overall philosophical literature by this author.
- 2) Exposition: I will then proceed with a thorough examination of the theories of this author during this particular period. I will organize the exposition of the author's thesis with some subsections dealing more specifically with the major topics of the works of this period. In these subsections I will focus on those works I regard as most relevant for understanding each of these

periods. In doing this, however, I do not mean to imply that other works within these periods are not worth reading.

- 3) Criticism: I will finally divide this section under headings A, B,... to deal with those aspects of the theory that I reckon are most vulnerable to criticism. These critical subsections, will attempt, not only to point out the flaws of these theories, but also to provide the reader with a better awareness of what the author sometimes seems to be attempting to claim and yet fails to defend or put forward appropriately.

1.4 Objective of the thesis: main point and subpoints

The main point of this thesis is *to provide a critical overview of the institutional theories of art that substantially differs from the received views of Danto's and Dickie's theories*. I claim that these received views (in plural) are today best exemplified by the summary of these theories presented in Davies's *Definitions of Art*. Other theorists, however, especially Carroll and Sclafani, seem to provide an account of Danto and Dickie more in accordance with the one given here. However, Davies's title of his work is so compelling and its content is so focused upon the debate about definitions of art, that even Carroll, in his recent introductory book on aesthetics (Carroll, 1999b), follows Davies in his attempt to explain the debate about definitions of art in terms of a divide between functionalists and proceduralists. I oppose this attempt here because in my view it leads to a significant misinterpretation of Danto's and Dickie's theories (see Chapter 7).

The received views of Danto's and Dickie's theories (and also of Davies's), that I am going to introduce in each chapter, defend all or some of the following ideas:

- 1) Danto's 1964 notion of the 'artworld' is understood in terms similar to Dickie's notion of the 'artworld' presented later in 1969.

- 2) Danto's theory of *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (henceforth *Transfiguration*) supports the idea that an artwork (a) is always about something and (b) incarnates its meaning.
- 3) Danto's theory of the end of art:
 - A) Is a logical consequence of his definition of art in *Transfiguration*.
 - B) Reveals the similarities between his ideas and Hegel's, concerning the nature and development of art until a final stage of a philosophical self-understanding of art.
- 4) Dickie's theory derives basically from Danto's paper 'The Artworld', because:
 - A) Dickie uses this same concept of 'artworld' from Danto's 1964 paper in his 1969 paper where he first attempted to define art and he makes mention of it also in his successive definitions of art.
 - B) He shares, in his 1969 paper, the idea that artworks, in order to exist, require a special relational 'atmosphere' as Danto proposes in his 1964 paper.
- 5) Dickie's overall claims are best understood in terms of the final reformulation of his earlier definition of art in *Art and the Aesthetic* (henceforth referred to as 'DK1c').
- 6) Davies's summary of the current debate about definitions of art in terms of a divide between functionalism *versus* proceduralism is useful for clarifying what the different contending institutional and non-institutional theories are claiming.

Contrary to these claims, I will oppose, chapter by chapter, these received views of the different institutional definitions of art by arguing, respectively, that:

1) **Danto doesn't conceive the artworld as an institution *à-la-Dickie*.** Danto has argued in several places that his theory is not an institutional theory understood in terms similar to Dickie's. However, even if Danto's point has been more or less acknowledged, nevertheless Danto's notion of 'artworld' is often referred to in terms similar to Dickie's notion (for example by Davies, Tilghman, Dickie or others such as Young). Contrary to this, Danto, in 'The Artworld' (hereinafter identified with his D1 period), understands this notion in terms of the world-of-artworks. In *Transfiguration* the notion of 'artworld' is also generally acknowledged in these terms, although it is true (as I will show in Chapter 3 – especially Section 3.6-C) that there are a few brief references to this notion closer to Dickie's, that may, nevertheless, induce the readers on the idea that Danto had always understood this notion in these terms. I will argue that this is not the case at all and that interpreters should *at least* (A) distinguish between Danto's references to the notion of 'artworld' in his early 1964 paper 'The Artworld' and in his later work *Transfiguration* and (B) distinguish in *Transfiguration*, between those references to the notion of 'artworld' that use the term in ways similar to his early 1964 paper (most of the time), and those very few occasions where it is understood in terms closer to Dickie.

2) **In *Transfiguration*, Danto doesn't claim that all artworks (a) are always about something and (b) incarnate their meaning.** This is a critical response to Danto's later 1997 claim – and also to those that, like Goehr, Kelly and Margolis, seem to have taken Danto's claim at face value (Goehr, 2007; Kelly, 2007; Margolis, 2010) – that in *Transfiguration* (1981) he defines art in those terms. A thorough examination of *Transfiguration* shows that he doesn't define art in this way. He provides a much more complex definition of art, which will be summarized in the chapter dedicated to this book (see Chapter 3 – in particular in Section 3.5). The definition I will provide, in a way, shares similar conclusions, though not identical, with Carroll's and Rollins's about what Danto's implicit definition of art in *Transfiguration* actually seems to be (Carroll, 1993; Rollins's definition can

be found in: Murray, 2003). In fact I will show that Danto's claim that artworks (a) are about something and (b) incarnate their meaning, correspond to a definition of his late period I will call henceforth D3, rather than his period that lasts until *Transfiguration* (hereafter this period will be named D2). As a result, it is possible to argue that Danto provides two different types of definitions: his D2 implicit definition in *Transfiguration* summarized in different ways by myself, Carroll and Rollins, and his D3 explicit definition of art. As I will argue, the latter is an oversimplification and radical alteration of his early D2 terminology, based on his new conception about language and cognition and, above all, on his interpretation of Hegel. This is because he uses notions similar to Hegel's, in order to strengthen his D3 ideas and language also and essentially based on his interpretation of Hegel and on his rejection of the philosophy of language he had endorsed earlier in D2. In doing so, however Danto, and those who follow him on this, provide a false and biased account of his own ideas about the nature of art in his 1981 book. As a result, I will argue that anyone interested in understanding Danto's D2 and D3 theories should acknowledge the different versions of his definition of art and the reasons that led him to present them in such a varied manner.

- 3) **Danto's theory of the end of art (A) is not at all a logical consequence of his definition of art in *Transfiguration*. Additionally, (B) is different from that of Hegel.** Having demonstrated that Danto later modifies his 1981 implicit definition of art in order to make it appear closer to his Hegelian ideas, it is possible to observe better (A) how his definition is not a logical consequence of his previous D2 theory. In D3 he fully endorses a whole new set of ideas about language and perception, and philosophical theories such as Hegel's theory of art, and when retrospectively revising his earlier theories, he presents them as if he also fully held them in D2. Presumably he does this in an attempt to obscure the discontinuities between his D2 and his D3 theories. This reveals that Danto's theory of art is not only interesting for its reflections about the history of art, but also for its different ideas about language and perception as well as about the definition

of art itself. This aspect has remained unacknowledged by Danto's interpreters with the possible exception of Carroll (Carroll, 1997). Thus, for example, Davies fails to see the importance that Danto's theory of the end of art has for his definition of art. Rollins and Goehr explain Danto's D2 and D3 ideas as if *ab initio* they formed part of the same unitary theory. Also other authors such as Margolis, Bacharach, etc. consider Danto's late D3 period only in terms of how it contributes to re-introduce Hegel's idea of the end of art (Margolis, 1997, Bacharach, 2002), rather than for its introduction of a radical modification of his 1981 definition of art and for his new ideas about language and perception. Additionally, (B) I will criticize Solomon and Higgins and, in this different aspect, also Carroll, because they believe that Danto's theory of the end of art (Solomon & Higgins) and his new 1997 definition (Carroll) are similar to Hegel's. *Contra* this opinion, I will argue that Danto provides a biased misinterpretation of Hegel's theory and definition so to better justify the idea that art reaches a final process of self-understanding.

- 4) **Dickie's theory does not derive essentially from Danto's 'The Artworld'.** This results in part from showing in (1), what, Tilghman, Young or Davies amongst others, failed to see (i.e., that Danto's and Dickie's notions of 'artworld' are different). It is also a result of demonstrating that the basic and most important claims of Dickie's early institutional definition of art began to be configured before Danto's 1964 papers, with his arguments against the theories of aesthetic perception (Bullough, Vivas, etc.) that can be found in most of his early (pre-1964) papers. More specifically, in his 1962 paper 'Is Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics?' Dickie already provides the first serious sketch of an early institutional explanation of art (see Chapter 5 – especially Section 5.3). As a result, I now think it is more useful, after developing this new perspective on Dickie's theories, to examine Dickie before Danto's theory is taken into consideration, in case both theories are examined together. This is because Dickie's seems now to be *the precedent*, rather than Danto. However, in case only Dickie is to be considered, then I would rather recommend examining Dickie's theory on its own without any reference to Danto. This

is because presenting Dickie in relation to Danto's theory can run the risk of misinterpreting Dickie's theories by emphasizing excessively his sharing certain ideas with him (e.g., the term 'artworld', the relational condition of artworks, etc.).

- 5) **Dickie's theory cannot be explained only in terms of the final reformulation of his early definition of art in *Art and the Aesthetic* (i.e., DK1c).** This is because in his later attempt to define art (i.e., in *The Art Circle*), he rejects most of his earlier 'strong' claims and, in particular, the claim that works of art are the product of an action of 'status conferral'. Now he asserts that artworks have to be 'made' and thus explicitly claims that not everything, contrary to what his early definition seemed to imply, can be a work of art. Thus, assuming that the best way to understand Dickie's theory is by examining the later version of his early definition of art (DK1c), as for example Davies, Danto or Carroll do, is to make the error of absolutely ignoring the important turn that Dickie's institutional theory takes after his later reformulation in *The Art Circle* (see Chapter 6).
- 6) **Davies's summary of the debate on definitions of art in terms of a debate between functionalism and proceduralism is not only confusing, but also leads to important misinterpretations of Danto's and Dickie's claims:** This point is a criticism of those who endorse in one way or another Davies's distinction between functional and procedural definitions of art, such as Scholz, Graves, Österman, Matravers, Corse, Stock or Brand amongst others, as well as other relevant figures in this debate such as Dickie, Carroll or Levinson seem to endorse (although it is true that they do this with certain *provisos* or objections). This is because a thorough analysis of Danto's *Transfiguration* reveals, *contra* Davies (and also against those who endorse Davies's ideas), that Danto supports a definition of art with both functionalist and proceduralist elements. Also, Davies understands functionalisms basically in terms of aesthetic functionalism and leaves aside many other types of functionalism. As a result, he fails to provide a full exposition of the current debate about definitions of art, because there are

other types of functionalisms (e.g., cognitive or semantic functionalisms) that he never takes into account, so that he concludes that the only alternative to aesthetic functionalism is proceduralism. Additionally, if Davies's way of understanding the current debate about definitions of art is followed, then (A) Dickie's later definition of art, in *The Art Circle*, cannot be considered, *contra* Davies's criteria, as institutionalist. This is because Davies understands institutionalists as supporting the idea of works of art as the products of an act of 'status conferral', while, as stated above in (5), Dickie no longer supports this idea in his later definition, in *The Art Circle*. (B) It leads to the obscuring, rather than the clarification, of what proceduralists and institutionalists are actually claiming. The problem here is that Davies doesn't provide any justification of why we are required to substitute the notion of 'institutional theories of art' for that of 'procedural theories of art'. As a result of this and of his way of understanding institutionalists in terms of their supporting this idea of 'status conferral', it leaves unclear whether Dickie's later theory is a proceduralist theory but not an institutionalist one, or if it is both at the same time or if he (probably) had simply misunderstood Dickie's later DK2 theory presented in *The Art Circle*, in terms of its DK1c version (see Chapter 7 on Davies's theories).

This concludes the preliminaries. I will now begin my detailed examination of Danto's and Dickie's theories.

2. DANTO'S EARLY THEORY OF ART: 'THE ARTWORLD'

Danto's 'The Artworld' (1964) is already the *locus classicus* of the debates in contemporary aesthetics concerning definitions of art. It was central in shifting the criteria for defining artworks from internal, manifest properties to relational non-manifest ones. Danto's particular reflections, mainly developed around the idea of how to distinguish between pairs of similar objects (an artwork and a non-artistic object or two different yet indiscernible artworks), have been central in analytic aesthetics since the 60's in re-orienting the focus of attention on the relational aspects of works of art.

Given the attention that Danto's early paper 'The Artworld' received in analytic aesthetics, and the debates it promoted concerning the institutional or non-institutional nature of artworks, in this chapter I will briefly summarise and clarify Danto's principal ideas presented in that paper. In order to proceed with this examination, I will first take into consideration Danto's account of the role of theories that he claims are central to understanding adequately what art is. I will then proceed to examine Danto's conception of the notion of 'artworld', a notion that was coined in this paper and later used also by Dickie in his attempt to provide his own institutional definitions of art (see Chapter 5). In the second part of this section I will briefly present some of the problems in Danto's early paper before I proceed to examine, *in extenso*, in Chapter 3, mainly Danto's work *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, where he develops further his previous ideas of 'The Artworld'.

2.1 Danto on the role of theories in art

Danto points out, at the beginning of 'The Artworld', that the philosophical discussion concerning definitions, ever since Socrates, has always presupposed a prior knowledge of the concept being examined and of the instances of such a concept. This is relevant because it establishes, in the case we are dealing with, a limit to definitions of art: Danto claims that definitions of X are not intended to *identify* X's but to *understand why* they are X's. He also argues against Kennick's

idea that definitions of art are useless. Kennick argues that anyone with good language skills would be able to identify artworks in a warehouse full of artworks and non-artworks. Danto rejects this on the grounds that many modern and contemporary artworks may be indistinguishable from everyday objects. Thus he argues that linguistic competence is no longer enough to identify instances of art, and that knowledge of artistic theories will also be required to identify artworks:

It is of course, indispensable in Socratic discussions that all participants be masters of the concept up for analysis, since the aim is to match a real defining expression to a term in active use, and the test for adequacy presumably consists in showing that the former analyzes and applies to all and only those things of which the latter is true [...] a theory of art, regarded here as a real definition of 'Art', is accordingly not to be of great use in helping men to recognize instances of its application. Their antecedent ability to do this is precisely what the adequacy of the theory is to be tested against [...]. But telling artworks from other things is not so simple a matter, even for native speakers, and these days one might not be aware he was on artistic terrain without an artistic theory to tell him so (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 202 – 203).

In 'The Artworld', in order to understand better the ontological condition of artworks, Danto compares art with science. He argues that often in science new facts can be explained by means of older theories together with new auxiliary hypotheses, without the need of making any conceptual revolution. However, he also claims that often such facts can only be accepted after promoting important theoretical changes within such a discipline. That is to say, Danto argues that often new facts can only be explained in science once the previous theory is rejected and a new one is introduced (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 203).

Danto argues that something similar occurred in art. The imitation theory of art (IT), he explains, was initially very useful to explain most types of art satisfactorily, and whenever the work of particular artists didn't fit this theory, they could be accused of ineptitude or madness. At some point, however, the IT theory and the auxiliary hypotheses that were used to explain all artistic facts became – in a way similar to what occurred in certain periods of the history of science – no longer useful to explain all instances of art. Danto argues that this became especially acute with post-impressionism. Hence, to accept these new types of entities as artworks, it

was necessary to introduce a new theory different from the IT, capable of explaining why these objects were actual instances of the concept of art. He calls this new theory the ‘reality theory of art’ (or RT). Thus he argues:

Suppose then, tests reveal that these hypotheses fail to hold, that the theory, now beyond repair must be replaced. And a new theory is worked out, capturing what it can of the old theory’s competence, together with the heretofore recalcitrant facts. One might, thinking along these lines, represent certain episodes in the history of art as not dissimilar to certain episodes in the history of science, where a conceptual revolution is being effected and where refusal to countenance certain facts [...] is due also to the fact that a well established, or at least, widely credited theory is being threatened in such a way that all coherence goes. Some such episode transpired with the advent of post-impressionist paintings. In terms of the prevailing artistic theory (IT), it was impossible to accept these as art unless inept art [...]. So to get them accepted as art [...] required not so much a revolution in taste as a theoretical revision of rather considerable proportions (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 203).

Actually, Danto is perfectly aware of his oversimplification of the historical development of art in terms of one theory (i.e., IT) as being replaced by another one (RT): ‘[to] be sure, I distort by speaking of a theory: historically there were several, all, interestingly enough, more or less defined in terms of the IT [...] and I shall speak as though there were one replacing theory, partially compensating for historical falsity by choosing one that was actually enunciated’ (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 204).

In fact, in reflecting on the replacement of the IT in response to the new phenomenon of post-impressionist artworks, Danto wants to explain that while previous artists expected more or less to *imitate* real forms, later artists left such an aim aside to *create* new real forms independently of whether their artworks resembled other real entities or not. He also claims that the RT is still valid for the current art. As he says: ‘[by] means of this theory (RT), artworks re-entered the thick of things from which Socratic theory (IT) had sought to evict them: if no *more* real than what carpenters wrought, they were at least no *less* real [...]. It is in terms of RT that we must understand the artworks around us today’ (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 204).

Thus, by means of this RT, an artist may introduce a bed as an artwork, as Claes Oldenburg or Robert Rauschenberg did, the difference being only that these beds may have some paintstreaks as part of the work or may have a different shape from normal ones (e.g., a rhomboid shape). Such new instances of art, nevertheless, may pose a problem to particular individuals incapable, with reason, of distinguishing artworks from non-artworks. Namely, there could be somebody, Danto calls him Testadura, incapable of understanding that a particular exhibited object is to be seen as a work of art rather than simply as the real object he sees in front of him.

To be able to make such types of distinction, Danto says, Testadura or anyone else has to master what he names as ‘the *is* of artistic identification’. He can do this by means of acquiring the knowledge of a certain theory or theories that allow the identification of artworks. Thus by means of ‘the *is* of artistic identification’, somebody may be able to identify some artistic objects constituted in part by real objects (e.g., a bed) or alternatively of certain artworks physically indiscernible, yet different, from other artworks:

Testadura [...] protests that all he sees [in a particular pair of indiscernible frescoes previously considered by Danto] is paint: a white painted oblong with a black line painted across it [...]. We cannot help him until he has mastered the *is of artistic identification* and so *constitutes* it a work of art. If he cannot achieve this, he will never look upon artworks: he will be like a child who sees sticks as sticks [...]. To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 208 – 209).

Thus Danto stresses that what distinguishes an artwork from a similar object, such as Claes Oldenburg’s bed from a non-artistic bed, or an artwork A from an indiscernible artwork B, is something that ‘the eye cannot decry’: a certain ‘atmosphere’ of theory that surrounds the real physical object as part of the artwork. Hence, following Danto, somebody like Testadura might be capable of discovering that the object he has in front of him is an artwork once he is given a number of reasons by means of a theory that justifies it as such.

In fact, he says in the beginning of ‘The Artworld’ that ‘one use of theories, in addition to helping us discriminate art from the rest, consists in making art possible’

(Danto, 1995 [1964]: 203). In claiming this, Danto stresses the idea that theories are the condition of possibility for the creation and understanding of artworks. This suggests that his enquiry fits better with the Kantian aim of searching for the conditions of possibility of an object of enquiry (i.e., in this case, art) rather than with his claim that it resembles scientific procedures, in which also the submitting of hypothesis and the role of experimentation become central. Actually, Danto states a few years later that '[my] own essay of 1964, which was an immediate philosophical response to *Brillo Box*, was explicitly titled "The Art World", but it was less concerned with the question of what made *Brillo Box* a work of art than with the somewhat Kantian question of how it was *possible* for it to be one' (Danto, 1992: 37).

Now, Danto attempted to explain what the artworld is by arguing that 'to see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld' (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 209). However it is not very clear in this statement, what he means by 'artworld'. To understand it better, it is necessary to examine the notion in more detail.

2.2 Danto's notion of 'artworld'

Towards the end of this essay Danto states:

What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo Box is a certain theory of art. It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is (in a sense of *is* other than that of artistic identification). Of course, without the theory, one is unlikely to see it as art, and in order to see it as part of the artworld, one must have mastered a good deal of artistic theory as well as a considerable amount of the history of recent New York painting [...]. The world has to be ready for certain things, the artworld no less than the real one. It is the role of artistic theories, these days as always, to make the artworld, and art, possible (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 210).

This paragraph, suggests, contrary to Tilghman's idea, that Danto distinguishes between the notion of 'artworld' and the 'theories of art' (see: Tilghman, 1984: 47).

It is a particular theory of art that makes possible artworks and takes them up into the art world (or ‘world of art’ as he alternatively says). Hence, the art world is basically to be understood as the world of artworks that are organised by means of the historical succession in which they have been created with the help of theories. Following Beardsley’s suggestion, Danto understands the artworld in terms of a class of objects (i.e., paintings or more generically speaking, artworks) rather than as a class of people (Beardsley, 1976: 203). If such an understanding of the ‘artworld’ as the-world-of-artworks is correct, this differs radically from Davies’s understanding of the notion of ‘artworld’ in Danto’s earlier paper:

The notion of the Artworld was presented by Danto in 1964 [...]. To recognize and understand a work of art as such one must be able to locate it within a historical and social context. That context or atmosphere, is generated by the changing practices and conventions of art, the heritage of works, the intentions of artists, the writings of critics, and so forth. *Taken together, these constitute an Artworld* (Davies, 1991: 81; italics mine).

In fact *contra* Davies, Danto *never* mentions that, in ‘The Artworld’, he understands the social context (i.e., a set of persons) or the changing practices and conventions as forming part of the definition of the artworld. Danto does mention the new artistic styles based on abstract or pop art theories, amongst others, and he also talks about certain figures, such as Cezanne, Van Gogh or Lichtenstein, introducing new objects into the artworld. Davies’s claim that ‘conventions’, ‘practices’ and the ‘social context’ constitute the ‘artworld’ in Danto’s 1964 paper, however, is a misreading of Danto’s early theorisation. It is legitimate to claim that Danto’s ‘The Artworld’ *implies* the existence of intersubjective relations, practices and conventions that *influence* the artworld – i.e., the world of artworks. But this is clearly different from what Davies treats as Danto’s early formulation.

However, Davies’s misinterpretation of the notion of the ‘artworld’ is useful for him, because ultimately it allows him to claim that Danto’s theory prefigures Dickie’s institutional theory, which also uses the notion of ‘artworld’ and which stresses the role of conventions, practices and social contexts. Davies’s interpretation of Danto’s ‘The Artworld’, however, is wrong in crediting Danto with such a ‘pre-Dickiean’ conception of the artworld when it asserts that Danto

‘prepared the ground for an institutional account [of Dickie’s type] of the definition of art’ (Davies, 1991: 81). This overlooks the fact that Dickie’s institutional conception of art began to take shape before Danto presented his early paper ‘The Artworld’ (see Chapter 5 on Dickie, Section 5.3).

In fact, it seems to be the case that Tilghman and Davies (as well as many others) conflate Danto’s different notions of the ‘artworld’ developed in different periods after 1964 (as can be observed, for example, in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* – see Chapter 3, especially Section 3.6-C). Furthermore, in the case of the early Dickie and Davies, they also seem to confuse Danto’s notion of artworld with their own. They also seem to conflate Danto’s theory with other later institutionalist theories, in which conventions and groups of people such as artists, art critics and the publics of art become central (see, for example: Diffey, 1969).

This, however, is perhaps in part also due to Danto’s vagueness in explaining what the ‘artworld’ is. Also it may have been due to some other reflections contained in ‘The Artworld’ that are similar in appearance to the later institutional ones, such as when he says that ‘a stockroom is not an art gallery, and we cannot readily separate the Brillo cartons from the gallery they are in, any more than we can separate the Rauschenberg bed from the paint upon it. Outside the gallery, they are pasteboard cartons’ (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 210).

Yet this reflection, rather than necessarily pointing towards the idea that Danto is here supporting an understanding of the artworld *à-la-Dickie*, as Dickie himself might have thought when first reading Danto, may be considered to be claiming something else. It seems rather to indicate that the relational condition of artworks may make *some* of them, due to their structural form, dependent upon particular sites, as in site-specific art, land art or public art. In other words, some artworks, in Danto’s opinion, such as the *Brillo Box* cartons made by Andy Warhol, can be valued as the artworks that they are, *only* when located within the framework of a particular institutional or institutionalised site. But this idea doesn’t lead necessarily to the conclusion that *all* art, to exist, must thus be intrinsically linked to these types of institutional sites. Note, additionally, that Danto doesn’t mention here the notion

of 'artworld', which reinforces the idea that Danto is not supporting in this passage a notion of 'artworld' similar to Dickie's.

Also, in the last part of 'The Artworld', after reflecting on the conditions of possibility for artworks to exist and be appreciated, Danto goes on to consider how new styles might affect the critical appreciation of past and later art. To do so, he introduces the method of the 'style matrix' and discusses how this matrix might change as a result of how *connoisseurs* and other social actors might favour one style or another. These ideas are presented in such a way as can wrongly lead us to understand the artworld as a sort of social institution and as a set of institutional individuals rather than as a class of objects. As Danto says: 'Fashion, as it happens, favors certain rows of the style matrix: museums, connoisseurs, and others are makeweights in the Artworld' (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 212). However, a more detailed examination of Danto's claim shows that he thinks that these persons act as *makeweights*: he believes that they have an *influence* upon the configuration of the world of artworks, not that the art world is *constituted* by them, as Dickie and Davies sometimes seem to think.

Even if Danto's notion of 'artworld' is thus different from Dickie's later usage of this notion, nevertheless it is true that it is still possible to claim that both support an institutional theory of art: Danto's 'The Artworld' indicates that some artistic styles and theories vital for artmaking and art appreciation might become institutionalised guidelines or norms for artmaking. This can happen once these theories are favoured by some institutionally recognised social actors, such as art critics, *connoisseurs* or by certain kinds of social institutions related to art, such as museums or art galleries acting as makeweights (not as artworld members). Additionally, some years later Danto remarks that if his theory were in fact institutional, it would be because the art world itself has already become institutionalised (Danto, 1992: 38) – an idea that Danto may have already held in 1964, although he didn't explicitly claim this in 'The Artworld'.

2.3 Some problems with Danto's earlier theory

A) Ambiguity about artistic theories in art in 'The Artworld'

Danto says at the beginning of 'The Artworld' that: 'telling artworks from other things is not so simple a matter, even for native speakers, and these days one might not be aware he was on artistic terrain without an artistic theory to tell him so' (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 203). Later on he says: '[to] see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld' (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 209).

These claims point towards the idea that artworks depend upon artistic theories to exist and to be identified and understood as artworks. Danto presents different types of theories (presumably corresponding to the 'atmosphere of artistic theory' he mentions – Danto, 1995 [1964]: 209) to identify and understand the different artworks. For example:

- 1) He talks about the pair of theories that allowed mimetic art and non-mimetic art after post-impressionism (i.e., IT and RT).
- 2) He takes recourse to scientific theories in order to explain the differences between two indiscernible artworks, referring to Newton's First and Third Laws.
- 3) He talks about the implausibility of Neolithic cave-painters producing art, unless there were Neolithic aestheticians. So presumably, he believes that theories of the type considered in aesthetics, are also relevant in making artworks.
- 4) As an introduction to his reflections on the 'style matrix' he tells the reader that he is going to talk more about the role of theories in art, and then goes on talking about the different artistic styles in art. So presumably he also believes artistic styles (i.e., fauvism, abstract expressionism, etc.) to be different theories which make artworks possible.

The problem here is that Danto insists explicitly on the idea that artistic theories are necessary to make art, and then he lumps together scientific theories, aesthetic theories, styles and so on by implying that all of them can make up the theoretical atmosphere that surrounds artworks and that ‘the eye cannot descry’. These, then, are presumably to be understood as the ‘artistic theories’ he refers to as the necessary precondition for artmaking and for the identification of artworks – that is, so as to allow a proper understanding of these objects as works of art.

However, if by ‘artistic theories’ Danto means any theory that makes possible the creation and understanding of artworks, then this would be deeply problematic: in such a view, almost *any* theory used to produce artworks should count as an artistic theory, merely by virtue of the fact that artists use them in their making. Thus certain psychoanalytical theories, such as Freud’s, which inspired Surrealists to make artworks ought to be regarded as artistic; the scientific theories of vision used by Impressionists ought to be treated as artistic for this same reason. This seems deeply implausible and it rather points towards the idea that Danto was too careless, in his early 1964 paper, in trying to specify what kinds of theories are *necessary* for making art.

Another problematic aspect of the notion of ‘artistic theories’ in Danto’s early paper is his assertion that one might not be aware of being in an artistic terrain unless one is provided with some theories or explanations that allow him to realise this.

The problem here is that Danto claims that artistic theories are required *to distinguish* between artworks and non-artworks, yet the examples he presents are cases in which the only thing that could be observed is either a physical object similar to another non-artistic object, or an artwork physically indiscernible from a different one. The problem with Danto’s *Gedankenexperiment* of pairs of indistinguishable objects, is that it actually shows that theories *per se* cannot be used to *distinguish* between an artwork and its non-artistic indiscernible counterpart or between two indiscernible, yet distinct artworks, precisely because they are *physically indistinguishable* – i.e., there is no distinctive physical mark telling us which one is the artwork and which isn’t (or which one is the artwork A and which

one the artwork B). Thus, when an artwork is put next to its similar non-artistic counterpart, it is first necessary to *know already* which one is the artwork and which one is not. Otherwise it might be possible to talk about the theory that makes a particular object an artwork, and yet be unable to tell which one is the artwork and which isn't, or even, to use the theory to explain the artwork while mistakenly pointing at its non-artistic identical counterpart which is next to it³ (or, which is wrongly placed in an exhibit instead of the artwork). So in this case the theory is not useful in *identifying* artworks from their identical counterparts but only in allowing us to understand why an *already identified* artwork is an artwork, and one *previously identified* object is not.

Thus, in this case, theories, whatever they might constitute for Danto (e.g., styles? different types of knowledge?, etc.) might be necessary to make artworks and to understand them. However, contrary to what he claims in 'The Artworld', they are useless in identifying particular instances of art when, following his *Gedankenexperiment*, they are considered together with their indiscernible counterparts.

Further, if in order to create artworks it is necessary to master a certain theory, then Danto's observation that it would 'never have occurred to the painters of Lascaux that they were producing art on those walls. Not unless there were Neolithic aestheticians' (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 210) is irrelevant in clarifying whether the painters of Lascaux were making art. This is because, following his ideas about the role of theories in artmaking, these painters were unlikely to have absorbed any aesthetic theory or to have consciously thought that they were making artworks, but they may well have mastered a number of theories concerning the techniques (the use of chalk or coal) and styles (more or less realistic) required to make these paintings.

³ Actually Danto, in his paper 'Answer', imagines a similar situation in which two critics could disagree because one of them would be explaining an artwork A and wrongly be pointing at another indiscernible artwork B while the other one would be talking about B and pointing at its indiscernible counterpart A ('Answer': 82).

Of course, Danto could answer that, in the first place, mastering a particular theory about how to paint (such as how to use chalk or coal for cavepainting) is not exactly the same as mastering artistic theories required to make art. In the second place, he could argue that the Lascaux painters were not producing art because, even though they might have mastered the rudimentary theories needed for painting, he also claims that ‘it never had occurred to the painters of Lascaux that they were producing art’. In ‘The Artworld’, however, he doesn’t insist on the idea that an artist, in order to *make* art, ought to be *aware* of anything (for example of an artistic theory). Nor does he provide any criteria for distinguishing between non-artistic theories and artistic theories used for artmaking. So in this case it remains unclear if the example he provides, about the Neolithic aestheticians, is a proof that they were not producing art. Contrary to Danto’s apparent intentions, it may have been the case that it ‘never have occurred to the painters of Lascaux that they were producing art’ and yet they might have produced it accidentally: this is because being aware of making art, and being aware of using artistic theories, is not a condition for making it, at least not in Danto’s ‘The Artworld’ (see Chapter 3 for Danto’s later change of opinion in this respect in *Transfiguration*).

However, Danto could respond that knowledge of the history of art is nevertheless essential for making artworks (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 209). In this case, then, Danto could defend the idea that artworks are made only by those having sufficient knowledge of art in the broader sense. But in that case, it could be still possible to argue that maybe the Lascaux painters had some knowledge about other works made by their predecessors, and thus mastered a type of (rudimentary) art history, without consciously knowing they were also making art.

B) The *is* of artistic identification: distinguishing artworks from non-artworks

An idea related to the role of artistic theories in art is that of ‘the *is* of artistic identification’. The problem with this theory is not only that it is very difficult to understand (I agree here with Davies’s criticism of Danto – See: Davies, 1991: 162). The problem also is that Danto, in distinguishing ‘the *is* of artistic

identification' from 'the *is* of existence or identification' and 'the *is* of identity or predication' confuses different claims concerning artworks.

Thus Danto stresses the idea that, with the emergence of the Reality Theory (RT), artworks 're-entered the thick of things' from which the Imitation Theory (IT) had attempted to remove them. In arguing this, he seems to favour the idea that both 'the *is* of identity or predication' and 'the *is* of existence or identification' might apply as well to artworks *qua* members of this 'thick of things' he mentions (as in 'there is a table', 'there is a painting', 'this strange object is a radio', 'this is a sculpture made with a bed' etc.). This is because Danto argues that the RT, repositions artworks in the realm of things from which they had been segregated in the past.

However, Danto later goes on to claim that even though artworks might look like non-artistic objects (e.g., like a bed) they nevertheless are not these former objects but artworks. Thus, the RT notwithstanding, Danto opposes 'real' objects to artworks without clarifying what artworks are. Are they illusions? Are they something more than real (i.e., owing to their being constituted by something real *plus* an 'atmosphere' of theories of art)?

Thus, he argues that artworks such as Oldenburg's bed are complex objects constituted in part, following his terminology, by 'real' objects (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 206). Because they are surrounded by an atmosphere of art theory, he argues, they contrast now with these real objects and are elevated to the world of artworks. This is thus an invitation for us to consider the idea that artworks are *more* than, or above, what he names as 'real objects' yet still 'real' in the sense of *really existing*.

But then, when Danto goes on to reflect how objects resembling 'real' ones can be identified as works of art, he introduces the idea of 'the *is* of artistic identification' and compares this type of identification with how children can *imaginatively* identify themselves with geometrical figures (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 206) or how they also *imaginatively* identify sticks as something other than sticks (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 208), for example as horses.

So in this case it seems that for Danto, ‘the *is* of artistic identification’ invites us to consider the idea that artworks are not ‘real’ but some sort of playful illusion or imaginary product provoked by the imagination of the artist and the publics of art (the playful imagination of children, Danto argues, would be an analogy here). This, however, goes against his previous analogy between art and science. It also goes against the idea that artworks are now to be considered in terms of the Reality Theory thus re-entering ‘the thick of things from which Socratic theory (IT) sought to evict them’ (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 204). As a result, we are left to question whether Danto has dropped the analogies between scientific facts and artworks and between artworks and ‘real’ objects, because now he seems to stress the idea that artworks are not facts in the full sense of the term, but products of the imagination, pure and simple.

Furthermore let us concede that the theory about ‘the *is* of artistic identification’ can account for artworks such as those he presents here – i.e., Claes Oldenburg’s bed and Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes*. Nevertheless it is not at all clear that ‘the *is* of artistic identification’ would be necessary in order to also see as artworks, the less controversial cases of Leonardo’s paintings, Mozart’s piano sonatas or Shakespeare’s works (Hagberg argues something similar when criticising Danto’s generalisation of his theory as applicable to all types of artworks; see: Hagberg, 2002: 499 – 500). It seems rather that these cases, and probably also all artworks, are identified as artworks just by means of ‘the *is* of identity or predication’ and ‘the *is* of existence or identification’, without the need of postulating any fantastic or imaginative way (akin to the playful imagination of children) to ‘see’ things *as if they were* artworks.

Besides this, Danto invites us to understand ‘the *is* of artistic identification’, in order to identify artworks. But now, if we examine in more detail his reflections concerning ‘the *is* of artistic identification’, we find that most of the examples he introduces to support his theory, are those concerning the *elements* of an artwork – i.e., not the artwork *in toto*. Thus, he introduces the examples of ‘that one is Lear’ and ‘that white dab is Icarus’. He also gives the examples of two indiscernible frescoes entitled *Newton’s First Law* and *Newton’s Third Law* in which each of the

constituting elements of these two abstract paintings ought to be interpreted as exemplifying these two theories respectively.

In providing these few examples, he is rather focusing upon the idea that some material *properties or elements* of an object ought to be interpreted imaginatively as if they were other things, by means of using artistic and non-artistic theories: Thus an artistic theory is used to see the *properties* of Rauschenberg's work, scientific theories are used to identify *the elements* within the works based on Newton's First and Third Laws, or a mythological theory is used in the case of identifying *a white dab* in the work with the main character of the myth of the fall of Icarus.

The problem here is that 'the *is* of artistic identification' is not so much used to distinguish artworks from non-artworks (and thus to identify artworks), but *to identify the elements or parts of these things we already know to be artworks*. Thus, by using the different theories (mythical, scientific, etc.) it is possible to identify the elements present in these works previously acknowledged as artworks. In other words, we might be unable to identify a particular dab in a painting as Icarus unless we know the myth and recognise the portrait of Icarus. *Yet, we might already know that we are in front of an artwork* before using 'the *is* of artistic identification' to identify the white dab as Icarus. Likewise, in the example of the pair of indiscernible frescoes, we might not see the painted line as the exemplification of Newton's First or Third Law unless we know what these laws are about, and imagine then (through 'the *is* of artistic identification', akin to the playful imagination of children, as Danto suggests), that these lines exemplify Newton's First and Third Law. But again, in doing so, we *might be already aware we are looking at some artistic frescoes*.

As a result, Danto's theory about 'the *is* of artistic identification' confuses more than clarifies because it introduces and conflates several ideas that he never explains further: Is 'the *is* of artistic identification' used to identify artworks or to identify imaginatively the elements in artworks? Are artworks unreal because they are akin to the horses imagined by children when playing with sticks? Furthermore, is he correct in establishing an analogy between the children's playful use of imagination and the understanding and identification of artworks and their properties? etc.

Besides, Danto also distinguishes between ‘the *is* of artistic identification’, ‘the *is* of identity or predication’ and ‘the *is* of existence or identification’ without ever taking into consideration what we could call ‘soft’ cases of art – in opposition to what Davies calls ‘hard’ cases, when talking about Duchamp’s *Fountain* or Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* (Davies, 1990; 1991 – see also Chapter 7).

In these ‘soft’ cases, maybe ‘the *is* of artistic identification’ is useless because we might be already able to identify these artworks by other means such as, for example, by means of ‘the *is* of identity or predication’ or ‘the *is* of existence or identification’. In other words, it seems we can identify Kabalevsky’s Cello Concerto no. 1 in G minor Opus 49, or Leonardo’s painting ‘The Last Supper’, as instances of art, without any need of using a type of ‘is’ (of artistic identification) which for Danto is required to engage us to playfully *imagine* these works *as if* they were artworks – as he suggests, in a way similar to when a child *playfully imagines* a stick to be a horse or a geometrical figure to represent himself; or alternatively, as he also suggests, in a way similar to when we *imagine* a white dab to be a portrait of Icarus or to when we *imagine* an horizontal line drawn in a pair of frescoes, to be an exemplification of Newton’s First and Third Law.

3. DANTO'S THEORY OF *THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE COMMONPLACE*

After 'The Artworld', Danto reformulated his own theory about art. The main theory of this second period (I will call it D2 to distinguish it from his earlier reflections in 'The Artworld', hereafter called D1) is to be found in his book *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (from now on *Transfiguration*). Note first that *Transfiguration* is a synthesis of several ideas that were developed in his 1974 paper, also entitled 'The Transfiguration of the Commonplace', ('Transfiguration', as distinct from his book *Transfiguration* – in italics) and of other previous and later papers such as 'Artworks and Real Things'(1973) and 'An Answer or Two for Sparshott' ('Answer' – 1976). In this section I will mainly focus on analysing his book *Transfiguration*, because it is a synthesis of the main *corpus* of ideas developed after D1 (and before he formulated his theory of the end of art – see Chapter 4). However, where necessary for the purpose of clarification, I will comment on some of the ideas contained in the other early and later works.

In part, Danto attempted in *Transfiguration* to clarify and improve upon some of his earlier ideas. He attempted as well to respond to some misinterpretations of 'The Artworld' (1964) which thought of that paper as supporting an institutional theory similar to the theory that Dickie would later present in 1969. As a result, he not only introduced substantial modifications to his previous D1 theory but, in doing so, altered as well the notion of 'artworld' itself.

3.1 Towards the *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*

As previously mentioned, Danto's aim in 'The Artworld' was to understand in a Kantian fashion the conditions of possibility for art-making and art identification, rather than to explain, in definitional terms, what art is. In *Transfiguration*, however, he is more interested in defining what art is, and thus in discovering the necessary and sufficient features that constitute each and every instance of art. For this reason, to distinguish the different aims of 'The Artworld' and *Transfiguration*,

it is necessary to distinguish between Danto's ideas about the search for the conditions (of possibility) for the making and identification of art (in both 'The Artworld' and *Transfiguration*) and the search for the defining features of artworks (in *Transfiguration* but not in 'The Artworld').⁴

In 'The Artworld', Danto introduced the idea of artworks that are indistinguishable from 'real' objects. As I argued earlier, he explored this possibility in order to explain not only how artworks could be possible, but also to explain how it could be possible to distinguish artworks, partially constituted by 'real' objects, from 'real' objects themselves or from other distinct but indiscernible artworks. In this case, the criterion for understanding that something is an artwork, he argued in 'The Artworld', is the use of a certain 'artistic theory' as well as certain knowledge of the history of art. However, I pointed out earlier the ambiguity of the notion of 'artistic theory', as well as that concerning 'the *is* of artistic identification', in Danto's early paper.

In *Transfiguration*, Danto attempts to correct this ambiguity, by distinguishing between the artistic theory used to explain a determinate *set of artworks*, for example the theory used to support and understand art movements such as Impressionism, Abstract Expressionist Art or Pop Art, and the types of theories used to respectively *make* and *understand* individual artworks. To do so he first introduces the idea of the 'aboutness' of the artwork, by suggesting that individual artworks are always *made* with the purpose of being about something, having a meaning, or content or a subject.⁵ Such 'aboutness' following Danto, could be achieved by means of particular extra-artistic theories (e.g., an artwork may be *about* Newton's theories). He also introduces the notion of 'interpretation', that

⁴ Even though sometimes in 'The Artworld' he seems to endorse the RT (reality theory) as appropriate to define current art.

⁵ Henceforth, to make the reading easier, I will most of the times, refer to the artwork being about something, having a meaning, or a content or a subject, in terms of the 'aboutness' of the artwork (he also uses this notion in some passages – see for example in: *Transfiguration*: 3, 52, 69, 81, 85). I will, however, discuss Danto's attempt to present all these notions (being about something, having a meaning or a content or a subject) as if they were synonyms in Section 3.6-A.

refers to the theoretical *understanding* of what particular artworks are meant to be about.

To explain what art is, Danto poses at the beginning of *Transfiguration* the case of a number of artworks and non-artworks with their surfaces completely painted red, and reflects on the possibility that each of these artworks would be indiscernible from one another, as well as from the other non-artistic objects. Yet, he argues, each of these objects would have a different set of properties, either because of their particular 'aboutness' (an idea that wasn't considered in 'The Artworld'), or because of their complete lack of 'aboutness', which would prevent their being artworks.

In fact, this particular set of red indiscernibles was first introduced by Danto in his 1976 paper 'Answer' in order to clarify some questions formulated by Sparshott, concerning Danto's paper 'Transfiguration' (1974). In 'Transfiguration', Danto first argued that even if a canvas were empty, nevertheless if such a canvas were an artwork, it would be the sort of thing entitled to have a title, while non-artistic things are not entitled to have a title. In stressing the role of titles in artworks as he had already done in 'Answer', he aims to show that the emptiness of representational content in artworks doesn't necessarily lead to the emptiness of explanatory content.

Actually Danto had already proposed by 1973 (in 'Artworks and Real Things') that by means of their artworks, artists are attempting to make statements about things and that this is so because, he claims, art is a language of sorts. In this sense, he argues later in his reply to Sparshott that 'only with reference to the statements [that the different artists are making by means of their respective artworks] can we say what the work is about, if it is about anything at all' ('Answer': 81). So in his 1976 reply, he seems to imply that artworks are the right sorts of thing to be about something although not all artworks are necessarily about something (i.e., some may not be about anything at all).⁶ In *Transfiguration* (1981), he finally claims that

⁶ Although some paragraphs later he also tries to show that even empty artworks that attempt to demonstrate that not all art is about something 'in meaning to refute that theory [that all artworks are

all artworks are representational in the sense of being semantic vehicles of representation as words are (*Transfiguration*: 79 – 82), and as a result they are about something – as he most of the times says – or have content or a subject or a meaning (*Transfiguration*: 139).

3.2 Danto's theory of *Transfiguration* (I): artistic theories, 'aboutness', history and intention.

Now, in *Transfiguration*, Danto examines other theories or definitions of art in order to formulate his own. One of the theories he examines thoroughly is the mimetic theory of art that he had presented as IT (imitation theory) and only superficially examined in 'The Artworld'. By examining the idea of mimetic representations and mimetic theories of art, he attempts to clarify some of the differences between artworks and their indiscernible non-artistic counterparts that no mimetic theory can account for. He also attempts to show the differences between mimetic theories of art and his own theoretical approach. This is because both theories strongly rely on the idea of reflecting about artworks that aim at faithful representations of 'real' objects or events.

But in critically examining the mimetic theory of art in order to propose his own approach, based upon the problem of indiscernibles, Danto ends up supporting another pre-existing theory of art. As Dickie and Carroll point out, Danto's emphasis on the 'aboutness' of artworks in *Transfiguration* leads him to endorse a theory of art that, in Dickie's opinion, is reminiscent of the expressionist theories of Langer (Dickie, 1993: 76) and in Carroll's opinion, of Tolstoy (Carroll, 1993: 87). In fact, in *Transfiguration* Danto at times openly plays with the idea of his own theory being close to expressionist theories of art (*Transfiguration*: 165 – 208). Later on, he fully endorses this idea when responding to Dickie and Carroll (Danto, 1993: 204 – 206). The problem with this, however, as both Dickie and Carroll point

about something], it proves to be about the theory it rejects' ('Answer': 81). Nevertheless this doesn't lead him to assert that *hence* all artworks are always about something (at least not in 'Answer').

out, is that expressionist theories of art, in one form or another, were already rejected as appropriate theories to explain all instances of art and their unifying function. However, Danto doesn't think of this as a problem for his theory, (although he acknowledges some of the criticisms made against expressionist theories of art – see: *Transfiguration*: 6), and he develops this idea in several places, particularly in chapter 7 of *Transfiguration*, to explain why an expressionist theory of art, such as his, is fundamentally correct.

Danto's aim in *Transfiguration* is not only to examine and reject the mimetic theories of art, aesthetic theories of the Beardsley type or as Deveraux points out, formalist theories of art of Bell's type (Deveraux, 1984). He also attempts to reject the institutional theory of art *à-la-Dickie*. This is because, as explained in Chapter 2, some interpreters of Dickie's theories (as well as Danto himself), conceive of Dickie's theory as being inspired by 'The Artworld' (Davies, 1991: 81; see also: *Transfiguration*: viii).⁷

Thus, in *Transfiguration*, Danto attempts to undermine such a conception by arguing that the institutional theory, and by this he means Dickie's theory, is unable to explain satisfactorily what art is (*Transfiguration*: 31 – 32). He argues that:

- 1) Institutional theories (i.e., of Dickie's type) cannot explain why a particular object is elevated as an artwork.
- 2) Such an approach cannot account for the different features between artworks and their indiscernible non-artistic counterparts.
- 3) Even if being an 'artwork' is an honorific title, as institutionalists seem to claim, the honorific predicates, he argues, must always be

⁷ Even Dickie himself in his early attempt to define art considers this, although he later on rejects such an idea by acknowledging the central influence of Beardsley in his theories (see Chapter 5, Section 5.3).

supported by certain criteria. That is to say, honorific predicates must always be earned.

- 4) Institutionalists cannot account in their theories for the defeating of the conditions of something being an artwork. In other words, he argues that even if they may be able to explain why something is an artwork, because of the institutional framework in which the artwork is presented, they nevertheless cannot explain why other identical objects (e.g., other objects located in museums together with actual artworks) are not artworks at all.

In fact, Danto argues that, unlike himself, institutional theorists of art of Dickie's type, stress the role of context for reasons analogous to those of earlier Wittgensteinian theorists of human action, in their rejection of any theoretical explanation that would lend support to any sort of mentalism of the dualist type. To avoid any intentionalist explanation of art, when distinguishing between two indiscernible actions (my raising my arm and my arm going up) and between indiscernible artworks, these theoreticians stress the notion of the normative context in which the action occurs or in which the object is created and exhibited. As Danto says:

Now in the field of action theory, it has proved instructive to ask, in the manner of Wittgenstein, what it is that is left over when, from the fact that you raise your arm, you subtract the fact that your arm goes up [...]. An early Wittgensteinian solution was this: an action is a bodily movement that is covered by a rule [...] in the parallel theory of art [...] a material object (or artifact) is said to be an artwork when so regarded from the institutional framework of the *artworld* [...]. Decriers of the Internal World, conflationists of mentalism with dualism, the Wittgensteinians fled to the externalities of institutional life rather than admit the compromising internalities of mental life (*Transfiguration*: 4 – 6).

Yet, Danto is well aware that Aristotle's theory of *mimesis* also justifies some of these normative-contextual ideas later supported by institutional theorists of art: Aristotle's mimetic theory, as opposed to Plato's, stressed the idea that an imitation

per se is not what gives pleasure to its public. He argued that in fact it is the knowledge that such an event or object is an imitation, that ultimately gives us pleasure. Actually, Danto endorses Aristotle's claim that an artwork cannot be successful if it cannot be distinguished from deceptive illusion or from reality and that the pleasure we have in watching a tragedy is due to the knowledge that what we are watching is not a real event but the product of an artistic *praxis* – for example, the staged killing of Oedipus' father. For this reason Danto, following Aristotle and to a certain extent institutional theorists too, accepts that what makes possible the arousal of pleasure in art is the knowledge that such artistic practices are a result of a normative context that puts such types of objects of experience at an ontological distance from real life (*Transfiguration*: 23 – 24).

Danto, however, also asserts that even if the implicit knowledge of the normative context in which artworks are created and exhibited is relevant, this is not enough to explain what art is. In order to demonstrate this, he introduces other sets of indiscernibles which clarify the ontological differences between artworks and their non-artistic counterparts that no institutional theory can account for.

Thus Danto argues that in fact there are irreducible differences between the features of a non-artistic object, such as one resembling Rembrandt's *The Polish Rider*, and the actual artwork *The Polish Rider*. These differences, he argues, are the reason for placing them in two different ontological categories; it is not just a matter of the institutional consequences of such a classification, as certain institutionalists would argue. In this respect Davies's argument is a result of completely misinterpreting Danto's theory (see: Davies, 1991: 82). Danto believes that it is necessary to take into account, against Wittgensteinian theorists of action and against institutional theorists, that artworks are always the product of an intention by the artist seeking to produce a work with a particular 'aboutness'. In contrast, he argues, their non-artistic counterparts are not about anything. This is because there is no artistic intention behind non-artistic objects or events, willing to give them a particular 'aboutness'; such is the case of the splattered surface that resembles *The Polish Rider* (*Transfiguration*: 48).

To clarify the notion of the ‘aboutness’ of artworks and the intentionality of the artist, Danto offers several other sets of indiscernibles: one is Borges’s example of Menard’s version of *Don Quixote*, indiscernible but different from that of Cervantes; the other is the pair of indiscernible neckties respectively painted in blue by Picasso and a child.

In dealing with Borges’s proposal about the two indiscernible versions of *Don Quixote*, Danto attempts to show that the ‘aboutness’ of the artwork is necessarily shaped by the historical and cultural context in which the work is created. The works by Cervantes and Menard are intrinsically different because:

Borges tells us that the Quixote of Menard is infinitely more subtle than that of Cervantes, while that of Cervantes is immeasurably more coarse than its counterpart even though every word contained in the Menard version can be found in Cervantes’ and in the corresponding position. Cervantes “opposes the fiction of Chivalry the tawdry provincial reality of his country”. Menard on the other hand (*on the other hand!*) selects for its reality “the land of Carmen during the century of Lepanto and Lope de Vega”. These are of course descriptions of the same place and time, but the mode of referring to them belongs to different times (*Transfiguration*: 35).

In the case of the two different neckties, Danto insists that Picasso’s intention in painting the necktie, as an artistic act, is based upon his deep knowledge of the history of art (and thus of theories of art throughout history). The child, on the other hand, would lack this kind of internalised deep knowledge; thus his act of painting the necktie blue would be a response to his own personal intentions, rather than an intentional response to produce a statement related to the historical development of art up until then by creating an artwork (*Transfiguration*: 39 – 51). The child’s necktie wouldn’t be an artwork at all because it would lack any kind of artistic statement; it would be a mere non-artistic necktie painted in blue and for this reason it wouldn’t be about anything at all. Picasso’s necktie, Danto argues in both ‘Artworks and Real Things’ and *Transfiguration*, would be an artwork because it would contain a kind of statement about art and the history of art, and hence it would be about something.

3.3 Danto's theory of *Transfiguration* (II): the analogy between art and language

In stressing the notion of the 'aboutness' of artworks in *Transfiguration*, Danto establishes as well an analogy between art and language – particularly in the chapter 'Philosophy and Art'. This analogy wasn't taken into consideration at all in 'The Artworld' and was first introduced in his paper 'Artworks and Real Things' (Danto, 1973: 561). He argues later, in *Transfiguration*, that artworks have a similar function to words, in representing and producing statements about the world from a certain ontological distance. To defend this thesis about artworks as vehicles of meaning analogous to words, he refers to Wittgenstein's theory of language in the *Tractatus*.

Furthermore, besides establishing an analogy between art and language, particularly in terms of his own interpretation of the *Tractatus*,⁸ Danto also argues that, in fact, Wittgenstein's ideas contained in this work exemplify perfectly the origins of philosophical thinking since ancient Greece: he argues that philosophical thought began when a distinction between reality and appearance (or representation) was established, in order to distinguish between true descriptive claims about reality and false or misleading ones. To defend this thesis, he also refers to, and develops further, Nietzsche's ideas in *The Birth of Tragedy* (*Transfiguration*: 18 – 29; 76 – 77).⁹

Danto argues that both philosophy and (mimetic) art arose with the establishment of a distinction between reality and appearance (or representation). Once this division was established, he argues, it became possible to do philosophy and to understand

⁸ Actually Danto seems to be supporting a standard interpretation about the early Wittgenstein's theory. To see some responses to the standard interpretations, see Cora Diamond's and James Conant's works (Diamond, 2000; Conant, 2000. Both in: Crary & Read, 2000). Other opposing positions to this standard interpretation can be found in this same volume. See also Section 3.6-A of this Thesis for some criticisms of Danto when holding this line of interpretation of the *Tractatus*.

⁹ In fact Danto had, in his 1974 paper 'Transfiguration', already used Nietzsche's theory to support his own claims, about the distance between art and reality (see: 'Transfiguration': 146).

words and linguistic statements of fact as attempting to describe correctly the real world. In a similar fashion, Danto argues, artworks, as semantic vehicles of representation, would also differ from 'real' objects. This is, he argues, because artworks would either make statements about these 'real' objects (i.e., they would be about something) or because they would mirror them *qua* indiscernible objects representing or appearing as if they were the 'real' ones. Thus Danto says:

My thought is that philosophy begins to arise only when the society within which it arises achieves a concept of reality [...] that can happen only when a contrast is available between reality and something else – appearance, illusion, representation, art – which sets reality off in a total way and puts it at a distance. For me, in many ways the paradigm of a philosophical theory is what we find in the *Tractatus* where a contrast is drawn between the world, on the one side, and its mirror image in discourse on the other [...]. What I want to propose on the basis of these immensely schematic and vulnerable remarks, is that works of art are of the right sort to be bracketed with words, even though they have counterparts that are mere real things, in the respect that the former are about something (or the question of what they are about may legitimately arise). Artworks as a class contrast with real things in just the same way in which words do, even if they are in "every other sense" real (*Transfiguration*: 78 – 82).

Now, this analogy that Danto establishes in D2 between language and art, helps solve in part, the question that arose in the previous Chapter, about how to distinguish artworks from mere 'real' things: artworks are now to be considered as semantic vehicles of representation that, like words, refer to 'real' things.

3.4 Danto's theory of *Transfiguration* (III): rhetoric, metaphor and transfiguration.

To further clarify the semantic condition of artworks, Danto reflects upon the use of rhetoric, as a linguistic form of expressing facts, fashioned in such a way as to persuade the audience. With this he attempts to show that artworks are the products of some sorts of rhetorical devices (i.e., style and manner), used to point the audience towards the correct interpretation expressed by the artwork in question. In

developing this view of rhetoric, he also introduces the idea that artworks are similar to metaphors, *qua* rhetorical tropes of sorts.

Thus Danto proposes that artworks and their non-artistic indiscernible counterparts with the same extensional properties cannot be exchanged, because, he argues, artworks have an ontological condition analogous to metaphors: Danto argues that metaphors cannot be replaced by synonymous words because this would modify the whole of the originally intended phrase (e.g., ‘my dreams are dark fields’ may not have the same meaning as ‘my dreams are black meadows’). Analogously, artworks cannot be exchanged, and this is because, Danto argues, what is relevant in art is not only the content of the artwork but also the singular form by which this content is represented or takes place. Thus Danto says:

[If] the structure of artworks is, or is very close to the structure of metaphors, then no paraphrase or summary of an artwork can engage the participatory mind in at all the ways that it can [...] the structure of the metaphor has to do with some features of the representation other than content. It is this that would explain why the difference between artworks and mere representations is not a simple matter of differences of content [...] metaphors have an intensional structure, it being one of the marks of such structures that they resist substitutions of equivalent expressions [...]. From my perspective it will have sufficed to have shown that metaphors embody some of the structures I have supposed artworks to have: they do not merely represent subjects but properties of the mode of representation itself must be a constituent in understanding them (*Transfiguration*: 173 – 189).

It follows, then, that in an exhibit about Warhol, exchanging Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* for the Brillo Boxes entitled *Not Andy Warhol* made by the appropriationist artist Mike Bidlo would alter the whole idea of the exhibit. The exhibit would not now refer only to Warhol’s works but rather (or in addition) to the works of artists that Warhol inspired.

Thus, Danto’s reflections lead him also to examine the relations between form and content in art. On the one hand, the ‘aboutness’ of artworks seems to point to the idea that it is the representational and the semantic content that plays a major role in

art, and that the form is irrelevant in distinguishing between artworks and their artistic and non-artistic counterparts. Also the idea of indiscernibility in art seems to reproduce the mimetic project of turning invisible (or, as Danto says, transparent) the medium of the indiscernible object (*Transfiguration*: 151). On the other hand, he also introduces some examples of artworks, such as Menard's and Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and *The Polish Rider*, as actual instances of artworks possessing the same content than their indiscernible counterparts, yet ontologically distinct to them. Additionally, the fact that some artistic predicates (e.g., 'is a powerful drawings of flowers') may apply to artworks but not to their non-artistic denoted objects (i.e., the mentioned flowers might not be particularly powerful in any sense – *Transfiguration*: 157) seems to point to the idea that the represented object *qua* content of the artwork alone cannot *per se* establish the difference but that the form or medium or representation also seems to play a central role:

If illusion is to occur, the viewer cannot be conscious of any property that really belongs to the medium [...] and this requirement is perfectly symbolised by the pane of glass which is presumed transparent [...]. But imitation evidently did not entail illusion in Aristotle's scheme. In Plato it evidently did [...]. Taken as a theory of art, what the imitation theory [as understood by Plato] amounts to is a reduction of the artwork to its content, everything else being supposedly invisible [...]. My aim is to show that this is part of the reason the imitation theory cannot serve to differentiate artworks from the pertinent class of representations which are just like them in the sense of having the same content. As I have shown, content alone cannot do the trick (*Transfiguration*: 151).

The latter ideas support Danto's conclusion, inspired by Aristotle's, that the medium of the represented object also plays a major role in artistic representations (Danto, 1981: 151 – 160). This, Danto argues, makes it possible to see the object as an artwork and ultimately to see the world through the artist's eyes by means of the formal projection of the artist's own style onto the physical medium of the artwork. As a result, the artist provides the denoted object with a certain style or *coloration*, as Danto says, following Frege's notion of *Farbung* (*Transfiguration*: 163).

For Danto, the content of the artwork is intrinsically configured by the relation between the object denoted and the properties of the form or medium of representation. In fact, he argues, a work acquires an objectively interpretable meaning, intended by the artist, who is historically and culturally located and who is using a number of artistic theories. This meaning, he claims, is embedded in the formal properties of the artwork by means of the artist's own style. As a consequence, he thinks that such a work is transfigured into an artwork possessing now, not just the properties of the represented content, but also the properties of the medium of presentation as well as a semantic content or 'aboutness', given by the artist, to be *appropriately interpreted* by the audience. Thus Danto stresses the idea, already hinted in 'Answer', that every artwork allows one and only one possible interpretation of the statement that the artist intends to provide to his artwork (see: 'Answer': 81). As he asserts in *Transfiguration*: '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 [of art]: $I(o)=W$. Then even if *O* is a perceptual constant, variations in *I* constitute different works' (*Transfiguration*: 125).

Later on, Danto reflects again on the process of transfiguration and its relation with the form of presentation of the artwork, as well as with its analogical relation to metaphors. He does this when discussing the example of Lichtenstein's painting, based on Loran's diagram of Cezanne's portrait of his wife:

In the one case [Loran's diagram of *Madamme Cezanne*] the diagram maps the eye's trajectory, more or less. In the other [i.e., Lichtenstein's artwork], as we saw, the intention is wholly different. We may interpret it as a metaphor in this sense: it is as it were the *Portrait of Madame Cezanne* as a diagram [...] to see that portrait as a diagram is to see that artist as seeing the world as a schematized structure. In order for the viewer to collaborate in the transfiguration, he must of course know the portrait, know the diagram of Loran and accept certain connotations of the concept of the diagram, and then he must infuse that portrait with those connotations. So the artwork is constituted as a transfigurative representation rather than a representation *tout court*, and I think this is true of artworks [...]. To understand the artwork is to grasp the metaphor that is, I think, always there (*Transfiguration*: 172).

3.5 Danto's theory of *Transfiguration* (IV): defining art

In brief, Danto, in *Transfiguration*, argues that an artwork:

- 1) Is a semantic vehicle of representation: Danto argues that an artwork is always representational in the semantic sense of the term (like words are *par excellence*) and as a result, always is about something, or has a particular meaning, expressive content or a subject.
- 2) Is the product of the artist's intentions: Danto is against those supporting an anti-mentalistic explanation of art, such as, he thinks, Dickie does. Thus he is able to support the idea that intentionality is essential in creating works of art.
- 3) Is to be interpreted correctly by the public: an artwork has a univocally correct interpretation owing to its being an expressive-semantic vehicle of representation with a particular meaning intended by the artist.
- 4) Is intrinsically related to the historical and cultural context in which it is created: to interpret correctly an artwork, one must understand the context in which the artwork is created.
- 5) Is dependent upon an artistic theory or theories: artistic theories allow us to interpret an artwork's 'aboutness' correctly.
- 6) Is created in relation to an internalised knowledge of the history of art: a specific knowledge about the history of art is necessary to make artworks. This is the reason why Danto believes that children cannot succeed in making art.
- 7) Is characterized by the relations between its physical medium and its semantic content (its 'aboutness'): an artwork cannot be substituted by its indiscernible counterpart because it is valued for the interplay of its extensional and intensional properties.

However, even if these ideas seem to be *implicitly* endorsed by Danto, he doesn't *explicitly* summarise this definition in *Transfiguration*. In fact, Carroll and Rollins have also attempted to summarise what Carroll refers to as Danto's 'implicit definition' in *Transfiguration*.¹⁰ Further, Carroll argues that, as far as he is aware, Danto doesn't provide any explicit summary of his definition of *Transfiguration* until much later, with the publication of his book *After the End of Art* (Carroll, 1997: 386). In this later book, Danto claims that his theory of *Transfiguration* asserts that '[to] be a work of art is to be (i) about something and (ii) to embody its meaning' (*After*: 195).

Carroll is, however, surprised that Danto's explicit definition doesn't include any other conditions that he believed to be central to the theory of *Transfiguration*. Thus he is astonished not to find in Danto's new definition, any reference to the importance of theories in art, which he felt it was necessary (as I also do) to mention in order to reconstruct Danto's 1981 'implicit' definition.

In order to understand why Danto summarises his D2 definition as he does, in what I call his D3 period (basically the period that begins in 1984 and that is focused around the idea of the end of art – for a detailed account of Danto's theories in this period see Chapter 4), it is necessary to understand that Danto's D3 period is largely inspired by (his interpretation of) Hegel's theories. It is, therefore, not surprising

¹⁰ Carroll's implicit definition of *Transfiguration* runs as follows: 'Something *X* is a work of art if and only if: (a) *X* has a subject (i.e., *X* is about something), (b) about which *X* projects some attitude or point-of-view (this may also be described as a matter of *X* having a style), (c) by means of rhetorical ellipsis (generally, metaphorical ellipsis), (d) which ellipsis, in turn, engages audience participation in filling-in what is missing (an operation which can also be called interpretation), (e) where the works in question and the interpretations thereof require an art-historical context (which context is generally specified as a background of historically situated theory)' (Carroll, 1993: 80). Rollins also presents Danto's implicit definition of art in the following terms: '[1] Art is always about something. [2] It also expresses the attitude or point of view of the artist with respect to whatever is about. [3] It does this by means of metaphor [4] Metaphorical representation and expression always depend on a historical context [5] The contents of artistic representation and expression are largely constituted by interpretation' (in the section on Danto in: Murray, 2003: 90).

that Danto's summary of his D2 definition, presented in D3, is strikingly similar to Hegel's (see for example: Danto, 1997: 194 – 195). This is because it appears that Danto's explicit definition is an oversimplified version of the ideas found in *Transfiguration*, which is presented now as similar to Hegel's ideas in order to strengthen his D3 claims about the end of art (based also on Hegel).

Thus, after a careful examination, it is possible to observe that Danto's later explicit version of his earlier implicit definition is actually a *biased* version designed to conceal the discontinuities between the ideas he held in D2 and D3. If this is correct, Danto's late period based around the theory of the end of art is not only important for its philosophical significance and for the debates it provoked, but also for understanding why he reformulates the implicit definition of *Transfiguration*. Thus, Carroll's and Rollins's summaries (and mine presented above) allow us to challenge Danto's later account – although Danto does later accept that there might be more conditions than just the two that he explicitly recalled (for example, as he argues in his paper 'Art and Meaning' – Danto, 2000: 132; also in *The Madonna of the Future*)

Yet, Carroll, is not completely correct in claiming that it is in *After the End of Art* that Danto first explicitly summarises his definition of art in a way (suspiciously) similar to Hegel – and different from his account in *Transfiguration*: other attempts can be found in some of his post-*Transfiguration* papers, that led him to (re-) formulate his 1981 definition as he finally does in 1997. It is important to trace the evolution of Danto's later claims regarding his 1981 work, in order to avoid, when examining Danto's definition and theory of *Transfiguration*, his post-1981 'coloration' of these claims. Once this clarification is done, it will be possible to return to Danto's theory of *Transfiguration* and proceed towards the criticisms of this theory.

In his 1989 introduction to his book *Encounters and Reflections – Art in the Historical Present* (which is a compilation of some of his works as an art critic), Danto had already quoted Hegel's ideas in which he later bases his own definition of art. It seems, however, that he did this here, mainly in order to reflect about the role of art criticism that, for him (Danto), is concerned with understanding the

meaning of the artworks he examines. Thus he says that criticism should take into account Hegel's claim that 'beautiful art' is 'the idea given sensuous embodiment' and this idea, Danto argues, is what the critic has to find (Danto, 1990 [1986]: 8). Danto's early attempts to present *his own* definition of art following a formula similar to that of Hegel's, however, seem to occur, at least more explicitly, in his 1991 paper 'Description and the Phenomenology of Perception'.

In this 1991 paper Danto returns to some of the issues he had already addressed at a conference in 1983 (later summarised in his paper 'Language, Art, Culture, Text' – reprinted in: Danto, 1986). He does this by reflecting on the differences between pure optical perception which does not require any cultural knowledge whatsoever – the type of perception that he imagines is typical of animals – and a more sophisticated type of perception whereby interpretation is connected to certain forms of cultural knowledge and linguistic acquisition.¹¹ Danto argues that artworks exemplify this latter type of perception and he thinks that they validate the idea, based on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (henceforth PI), that there is not a complete detachment between language on the one side and the experience of the world on the other but that 'experience is indelibly linguistic' (Danto, 1991: 204). Danto presents also the ideas from post-Wittgensteinian theories of science, such as Kuhn's or Hanson's, that insist that in science observations are theory-laden and that there is no 'innocent eye' but rather that 'language penetrates perception' (Danto, 1991: 205).

Danto, following this discussion, argues that artworks are not pure perceptual *signs* (that in his opinion, even animals can understand) but rather *symbols*, which require linguistic and cultural mediation in order to interpret them (Danto, 1991: 211) and thus he says that '[my] sense is that *the experience of art descriptions really does penetrate perception*, but this is because perception itself is given the structure of thought' (Danto, 1991: 214; italics mine). To support this, he presents an artwork from Guercino, which not only requires for its understanding, a linguistic and

¹¹ For yet more references, Danto later on presents a somewhat more refined account about the relations between language and representation in his papers from the symposium on 'the historicity of the eye' (in: Danto, 2001; 2001b).

cultural background, but also knowledge about the history of art (Danto, 1991: 213 – 214). In reflecting on Guercino's work, he connects the ideas critical to the notion of 'the innocent eye', he has previously summarised, and Hegel's theory of art, which is presented almost as if it were a clear antecedent of his own theory of indiscernibles. Thus he says in relation to this painting:

[The] significations language enables us to grasp are abstract beyond the animal's means: the bird [in Guercino's work] for the Holy Spirit, for example. To see the bird and to know that it means (signifies) the Holy Spirit may not be phenomenologically distinct from seeing the bird *tout court*. What further takes place may not take place at the level of perception but at the level of interpretations and connotation. The entirety of what Hegel calls Symbolic Art is in external relationship to its meaning: we don't see the meaning through the symbol but connect it with the symbol. But there may be a more internal connection than this, as Hegel acknowledges in his category of Classical, and especially of Romantic Art, where what we see is determined by what we don't (Danto, 1991: 211).

It is after examining the connection between his endorsement of Wittgenstein's and post-Wittgensteinian's ideas on perception and description and his reflecting on Hegel's theories of art, that Danto presents up to three (proto-?)explicit definitions (in relation to his 1997 explicit definition that, he says, is a summary of his ideas in *Transfiguration*), now following a formula inspired by Hegel's sort of rationalistic pantheism (I give a more detailed account of Hegel's theory in Chapter 4, especially in Section 4.4-B): First he says, a few lines after the ideas of the previous quoted passage where he mentions Hegel's theories, that 'art attains here [in the example of Guercino's work] the level of thought, and *the artwork is a thought given a kind of sensuous embodiment*' (Danto, 1991: 211; italics mine). He then says something similar by talking about the 'embodiment in a sensuous idiom to a thought' (Danto, 1991: 212). Finally he says:

With artistic perception we enter the domain of the Spirit, as Hegel said, and the visible is transformed into something of another order, as the Word is when made flesh. *The enfleshment of the word*: I find that a stirring formulation of the

relationship between the visual and the non-visual exemplified in art and, in my view, in every exemplar of art (Danto, 1991: 214; italics mine).¹²

So now we can understand better why Carroll was so surprised at Danto's oversimplified definition of art in *After the End of Art*, without being able to explain why this definition differed so much from his implicit definition in *Transfiguration*. Danto is presenting a different definition of art in 1997 (or in 1991, in the case of this other paper I have examined), because he has moved from one group of theories, to another: his D2 theory is inspired essentially by his interpretation of Wittgenstein's theory of language in the *Tractatus* (see: *Transfiguration*: 78 – 83)¹³, leading Danto to establish an analogy in his philosophy of art, thus presenting a dualist distinction between artworks (*qua* semantic vehicles of *representation*) and 'real' things;¹⁴ and his transition from D2 to D3 is effected by moving towards Hegel – who stressed the inter-relatedness of the Idea (or Spirit) and the world – and towards those theories *he thinks* claim things similar to Hegel, such as Wittgenstein's PI, post-Wittgensteinian theories of science, and internalist theorists of cognition such as Goodman. This latter set of theories, precisely, puts into question the idea about the separation between language and perception (of raw facts), that Danto had earlier on fully endorsed to develop his previous D2 works based on the *Tractatus*.

As a result of his stressing the idea that language penetrates perception, Danto now stresses (after *Transfiguration*), that the 'aboutness' of artworks is *attached* or rather, following Hegel, 'embodied' or 'incarnated' in the 'real' thing used as

¹² In fact, these attempts to define art explicitly, in 1991, are very similar to another definition he is going to propose in a much recent paper, where he says that works of art are 'embodied meanings' (Danto, 2009 [2007]: 112).

¹³ It is true that Danto in *Transfiguration* sometimes talks about the theory of the later Wittgenstein. He does this, however, in order to fill some gaps of his own theory while leaving untouched his dualist conception about language based on the *Tractatus*. So in a way he sees the theory of the later Wittgenstein in the light of the theory of the *Tractatus*.

¹⁴ Although he is also inspired by Nietzsche's dualism characteristic of his earlier work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Also, Sclafani argues that Danto's ideas in 'The Artworld' and in 'Artworks and Real Things' are based on Kuhn's ideas, when stressing the theory-laden aspect of artworks – an aspect that is also stressed in *Transfiguration* (Sclafani, 1973).

medium. That is, Danto highlights now in D3 this idea in detriment of his earlier D2 idea that was so central in *Transfiguration* (and that was inspired by the *dualism* of the *Tractatus*), that artworks, *qua* semantic vehicles of representation refer, in a *detached* (i.e., dualist) manner to ‘real’ things, by means of their ‘aboutness’. Furthermore, Danto even argues in D3, clearly following the idea that *language penetrates perception*, that ‘with great art *the meaning penetrates the work*, so that to perceive is to understand’ (Danto, 1990 [1986]: 239; italics mine).

The problem here is that Danto in supporting as central in D3 this conception of language, he not only ‘colours’ his theory of *Transfiguration* (inspired by the theory of the *Tractatus*) in the light of the philosophy of language of the PI and the post-Wittgensteinians. In supporting now the idea that ‘to perceive [great art] is to understand [it]’ (Danto, 1990 [1986]: 239) or as he says in 1991, that ‘the experience of art descriptions really does penetrate [the] perception [of artworks]’ (Danto, 1991: 214), he also gets his D1 and D2 ideas, concerning the problem of indiscernibility, into serious trouble. This is because, following the theory of language of the PI and the post-Wittgensteinians, he now argues that (paraphrasing him), to perceive an artwork is *ipso facto* to understand it as such. As a result, to be coherent with his D3 conception about language and perception, Danto would have now to acknowledge that the problem of indiscernibility would never arise, or not at least for a *connoisseur* or an art critic whose previous knowledge about art would allow him to identify *immediately* which one is the artwork and which is not.¹⁵

Thus, in D3 Danto has moved from one paradigm about language and perception, to another; he has effected a sort of ‘conceptual revolution’, when presenting his D2 theory from the standpoint of D3. He does this by *substituting retrospectively* the language and concepts of the theories of Hegel (and the anti-dualist theories of language – that reject the idea of a separation between language and perception or experience – of the PI, the post-Wittgensteinian theories of science, and the internalist theories of cognition), for the language and conceptual scheme used in his previous clearly dualist account of language and the world, based essentially

¹⁵ In fact it seems that as a result, he would be now implicitly taking a position closer to that of Goodman that he had rejected in his 1981 book (see: *Transfiguration*: 42).

upon his interpretation of the *Tractatus* (and of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*). As a result, it falsely appears *as if* there were continuity, if not a logical necessity, in the transition between his ideas in D2, that I have presented so far, and his ideas in D3, that I am going to examine more thoroughly in the next Chapter.

Possibly resulting from Danto's retrospective 'coloration' of his previous ideas, Goehr, Kelly and Margolis make reference to Danto's 1997 definition without any hint of suspicion regarding Danto's distortion of his earlier 1981 claims (see: Goehr, 2007: 57; Kelly, 2007: 152 – 153; Margolis, 2010: 218). In addition, Rollins's (and again Goehr's) account of Danto's implicit definition of *Transfiguration* (Rollins's account can be found in: Murray, 2003: 90 – 95), fails to distinguish between Danto's D2 and D3 theories when explaining Danto's conception of history. This is because Rollins and Goehr follow the idea that Danto's latter D3 ideas follow logically from his ideas in D2. I deny that this is the case.

3.6 Some problems with Danto's theory in *Transfiguration*

A) Art and language: 'aboutness', representations and real things

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Danto's theory of art presented in his D2 period differs from that presented in D1 (i.e., in 'The Artworld'), in the sense that he now introduces and stresses the analogy between art and language. He even argues that artworks have a semantic condition and are *de facto* vehicles of meaning as words are. Such reflections are the basis for his attempt to provide a definition of art in D2, in terms of the constitutional features of artworks.

In the first place, however, there is a problem with the idea that Danto so much stresses, that all artworks have a meaning or are *about* something. This objection has already been insistently put forward by other philosophers of art who have argued that clearly this is not the case for all artworks (as for example in: Dickie, 1997: 80; also in: Beardsley, 1976: 203). In fact, although Danto stresses the

semantic condition of art, nevertheless at some points he seems to hint at the idea that not all instances of art are about something, though he persistently ignores this.

For example, he seems to hint that, in terms of the historical canon of art, not all artworks in the past necessarily had a meaning, or ‘aboutness’. This could well support Carroll’s attempt to show that Danto’s definition of art doesn’t refer to all art but only to a historically located type of art, particularly the ‘art in the age of theory’ (Carroll, 1993: 90). The following fragment of *Transfiguration* is thus illuminating in relation to his suggestion that perhaps not all art, is included in his definition, and particularly Egyptian and Mesopotamian art:

Though there was art in Egypt and Mesopotamia and elsewhere, it is not clear that it was seen as what we today would call art – representations in the semantic rather than in the magical sense of the term. But neither really was there philosophy in Egypt and Mesopotamia, only science. It is my view that art, as art, as something that contrasts with reality, arose together with philosophy, and that part of the question of why art is something with which philosophy must be concerned may be matched by the question of why philosophy did not historically appear in every culture, but only in some, and pre-eminently in Greece and India (*Transfiguration*: 77 – 78).

The problem with this paragraph – with the thesis that art as we know it today arose only with philosophy and hence only in Greece and India – is that it undermines his own reflection that there actually was Egyptian and Mesopotamian *art*. Thus, while Danto seems to afford them the status of art, he denies that they can be included in what we understand today to be *really* art (i.e., representations in the semantic sense of the term). Hence we can see that Danto is stipulating an *ad hoc* classification of what *actually* ought to be ‘art as art’ for us (i.e., semantic). This is because he assumes that art arose with philosophy, in its attempt to become a semantic vehicle of representation that would contrast with (and reveal) reality. But this is precisely what he ought to prove after taking into consideration *all* instances of art (including instances of Egyptian and Mesopotamian art), not the other way round.

Danto’s ideas concerning Egyptian and Mesopotamian art as not-really-art-as-understood-today, thus undermine his implicit attempt to provide a descriptive definition of art instead of a stipulative one. This also shows that Danto has a very

narrow conception of art, one that cannot explain all instances of art but only those about which it is plausible to claim that they are about something or that they have a meaning.

Danto argues that artworks are semantic vehicles of representation similar to words or propositions and even similar to images, gestures, maps or diagrams amongst others (*Transfiguration*: 79 – 80); thus in a way he acknowledges the potential objection to his theory, that not only artworks have meaning or are about something. However, by proposing an analogy between artworks and other semantic vehicles of representation (e.g., words and propositions), he attempts to demonstrate that there is an essential dualist contrast between language (or representational vehicles of sorts – such as artworks, maps, diagrams, etc.) and the world. He does this by resting his theory upon *his* controversial interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Thus, his philosophy of art relies analogously upon taking for granted a dualism understood in terms of a clear distinction between artworks and real things.

Now, independently of the usefulness of Danto's *Gedankenexperiment* of distinguishing between pairs of indiscernible things, his dualist distinction between artworks and real things has several important weaknesses:

- 1) It contrasts artworks to 'real' things in order to clarify what the former are. But, to begin with, the problem here is that it remains unclear what a 'real' thing is for Danto. The answer is not so obvious, because Danto argues that artworks (as well as maps, diagrams, etc.) are something altogether different from real things. Although presumably, resulting from his reflections about meaning and representation, he would argue that his attempt is to show that a 'real' thing is the counterpart of what a semantic vehicle of representation would be: in this case it is possible to contrast representational vehicles (such as words, maps, diagrams, artworks, etc.) to the 'real' things they represent or make reference to. Yet, even if Danto's conception about meaning and representation, allows him to apply in art a logical distinction analogous to that between sign, meaning and reference (i.e., for Danto respectively, the artwork, its 'aboutness' and the indiscernible counterpart to

which it refers), nevertheless these ideas about language become entangled in a confusing manner with Danto's fundamental (dualist) distinction between artworks and real things. As a result, it becomes unclear, for example, if an artwork A that serves as a reference to another one B (e.g., the case of one of Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* serving as a reference for its indiscernible counterpart *Not Andy Warhol's*, made by the appropriationist artist Mike Bidlo – or the example he gives about Cervantes's *Don Quixote* which is indiscernible from that of Menard's, written later on; *Transfiguration*: 33 – 36), is now to be understood only as an artwork (*qua* semantic vehicle of representation that A also is) or as a real thing (resulting from A being the reference of B – i.e., because B seems to be *about*, or at least make reference to, A) or as both. Although the latter would seem to be the most appropriate, Danto leaves unexplained how we should understand these intermediate cases, presumably because they don't fit in terms of the strict dualist distinctions he presents in *Transfiguration*.

- 2) Danto assumes that artworks are always representational vehicles of meaning. In fact, he claims explicitly, in *Transfiguration*, that he understands these semantic vehicles of representation in terms of the picture-theory of the *Tractatus*. So he assumes, following this conception of language, that on the one hand there are 'things' or raw atomic facts; and on the other hand that there are propositions (or semantic vehicles of representation) about things/facts. But this conception of language controversially seems to imply that there are a-linguistically mediated things that can be put in a one-to-one isomorphic relation with propositions (or semantic vehicles of representation) *qua* linguistic counterparts: The problem here, as Hagberg also argues, is that Danto builds his theory upon a traditional view of language, that Wittgenstein himself later criticises (see specially: Hagberg, 1998: 137 – 146; see also: Tilghman: 114 – 116). Danto is led by his interpretation of the *Tractatus* to the assertion that there are on the one hand purely perceptible 'real' things (or *raw* facts) and on the other hand semantic vehicles of representation such as artworks, maps, words, diagrams, etc., that always have an 'aboutness'. Thus he seems to imply that non-artworks (or at least those things that are not semantic vehicles of

representation) do not carry any meaning whatsoever with them and thus are *sensu strictu* pure objects of perception, that is, pure pre-linguistic raw phenomena – i.e., Danto interprets Wittgenstein as claiming that only semantic vehicles of representation would have meaning. However, the later Wittgenstein explicitly argued not only against the Augustinian conception of language as naming. He also argued explicitly against the very idea that it is possible to ever step outside language and separate perception from description, as if, following Danto's terminology, it would be possible to distinguish between 'real (a-linguistic) things' on the one hand and language (or semantic vehicles of representation) attempting to give or explain the meaning of these a-linguistically mediated things, on the other.

- 3) To better support his own dualist position, Danto at times substitutes his references to Wittgenstein for Nietzsche's early theory in *The Birth of Tragedy* to justify his ideas about representation and appearance. However, Danto doesn't seem to acknowledge – or, for that matter, to care at all about – the fact that Nietzsche later repudiated the dualism of his earlier work. This is because later, Nietzsche considered that any dualism was a complete mistake and that it ultimately relied on a Platonic/Socratic mode of philosophy that, he argued, was at odds with the material-sensual reality he so much celebrated. Danto, however, never acknowledges Nietzsche's change of position; he just uses Nietzsche's earlier work, omitting his later self-critical views, because Nietzsche's earlier metaphysical speculations fit his own controversial speculations about the historical origins of civilization and, more specifically, about the essential contrast between appearances (or representations) and 'real' things. If Danto seriously wanted to rest his theory on Nietzsche he needed to take also into consideration Nietzsche's later repudiation of any type of philosophical dualism. This, however, is unlikely to be accepted by Danto, because his own D2 theory rests upon a fundamental dualism based on the distinction between artworks (and other semantic vehicles of representation) and 'real' things.
- 4) Furthermore, if Danto still insists on the validity of this dualist distinction between appearances (or representations) and things, inspired by

Nietzsche's earlier work, then this radically clashes with the view he derives from the *Tractatus*: Danto understands the *Tractatus* not in terms of how it contrasts appearances (as illusions) with the reality behind these illusory things (as the ideas he based on Nietzsche's early work seems to be), but in how it contrasts (true) propositions about facts with the facts themselves. That is, Danto ignores the fundamental differences between Nietzsche's early view about representation, that still substantially relied in Schopenhauer's notion of the Veil of Maya, and those of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, in which propositions play a role radically opposite to Schopenhauer's Veil (or to Nietzsche's Apollonian reality).

Moreover, Danto's interpretation of the *Tractatus* substantially follows the type of 'standard' interpretation currently rejected by Diamond and Conant, among others, for being an old-fashioned misreading of Wittgenstein's work. Thus Danto's reading of the *Tractatus* is opposed to those who challenge this view because claiming that Wittgenstein's aims were not to provide a metaphysical account of language. They instead, argue that Wittgenstein's attempt in the *Tractatus* was actually to dismantle or 'explode' from within any metaphysical claims about language (as some claim seems to be implied in 6.54 of the *Tractatus*). More particularly, they suggest that he was criticising the very idea that is it possible to provide an external metaphysical account of the relations between language and the world and that it is possible to provide an external or objective explanation of the representational nature of language (for an account of non-standard interpretations, see for example: Diamond, 2000; Conant, 2000; more in: Crary & Read, 2000).

Additionally, Danto, in order to demonstrate that artworks are semantic vehicles of representation, is always very partial in selecting one word or another to demonstrate further this idea. The problem here is that whenever he finds it suitable, instead of claiming that all artworks are about something or have a meaning (as he asserts most of the time) he alternatively argues that artworks have 'expressive content' or a 'subject'. In doing so, he seems to support the idea that 'being about something', 'having a meaning', or an 'expressive content' or 'a subject' are

synonymous notions. However, when they are examined in more detail it becomes clear that this is not always the case.

Thus something, for example a painting might have a particular '*expressive content*' and not have a *meaning* (e.g., an abstract painting from Jackson Pollock may have a particular expressive content – resulting from the expression of Pollock's emotions – but may not have a meaning whatsoever), or a book may have a *subject* (e.g., war) yet the *meaning* of the work might be quite another (e.g., the breaking and recovery of a friendship). Alternatively, there might be a work consisting on a set of displayed paintings (where the surface of each painting is covered in a different colour), in which the *subject* might be 'multicoloured surfaces'; yet the collective work might be *about* something entirely different – e.g., *about* the idea that anyone can make art because each of the canvas was painted by someone picked up randomly – as in a recent work exhibited in the Hamburger Bahnhof Museum for Contemporary Art in Berlin.

Furthermore, at the end of 'Answer', and also in *Transfiguration*, Danto attempts to demonstrate that even artworks that are apparently empty of any content whatsoever, might not really be so. He does this by reflecting on the statement that an artist, Shiko Munakata, gave about his – apparently – empty artwork ('Answer': 82; *Transfiguration*: 52 – 53). Presumably Danto's attempt is to show that all artworks, in one way or another, have a distinctive meaning. However, he wants to convince us that he is talking about the meaning of this artwork, when actually he is referring to a statement the artist gives about his artwork when explaining it to the public. But one may question whether such a statement and the meaning of the work are one and the same; whether what the artist says about his work must be correct; and whether what the artist says about the meaning of his work exhausts that work's meaning.

In fact, Danto seems to acknowledge at some point that there might be different ways in which artworks can be semantic vehicles of representation. He asserts: 'I offer the speculation that the phenomenon of confusable counterparts belonging to distinct ontological orders arises only when at least one of the confusable things bears a representational property: where at least one of the counterparts is about

something, or has a content, or a subject, or a meaning' (*Transfiguration*: 139). Thus, resulting from these reflections, Danto could argue that actually his attempt is to show that each of these different ways in which an artwork can be a semantic vehicle of representation can disjunctively cover all the different instances of art.

Yet, even if we could concede this to Danto (provided he could defend that all artworks have either one, many or all of this set of disjunctive features – being about something, having a meaning, a subject, content and/or an artistic statement) there is still the problem that, as I have shown earlier, by 1997 he argues that in *Transfiguration* he actually wanted to defend the idea that all artworks (a) are *about* something and (b) incarnate their *meaning* (*After*: 195 – See also Section 3.5). This idea, however, might imply different things (although they are not completely incompatible from each other, so he might have held some or all of them at the same time or at different stages). It might imply: (A) that actually Danto in 1981 considered the notion of being *about* something, as synonymous to the notions of having a meaning, a subject, an expressive content or being the product of an artistic statement. As a result he would now believe more useful to simply define art as his 1997 explicit (and much shorter) definition goes.¹⁶ (B) That Danto no longer believes by 1997 that all artworks need to have a subject or an expressive content or an artistic statement, although they still need to be *about* something or have a meaning. Or (C) that Danto presents in 1997 an oversimplified version of his 1981 definition (avoiding the set of disjunctive terms he presents in *Transfiguration*) in order to present it as closer to Hegel's claims (see Chapter 4, especially Section 4.3 for Danto's suggestions about the similarity between his own ideas and Hegel's; see also Section 4.4-B for a critical examination Danto's suggestion).

In fact, it seems that Danto's 1981 definition of art is linked to his usage of indiscernible objects. When two artworks, or an artwork and its non-artistic counterpart, appear to be indiscernible, some non-physical property seems to be required in order to distinguish one from another as well as their respective features.

¹⁶ Or following his latest formulation, it would even be possible to define art without the notion of 'being *about* something', as he now claims that artworks are 'embodied meanings' (Danto, 2009 [2007]).

Danto seems to argue that owing to this, what may apply to indiscernible artworks applies also to all instances of art and thus that all artworks are about something, or have a meaning or a content or a subject or produce a distinctive artistic statement. But it is very controversial to argue that all artworks, including for example the Minimalist sculptures (that attempted to be purely physical works lacking any meaning whatsoever) of Carl Andre or Donald Judd, or in music, (non-‘narrative’) plays such as Brahms Violin Concerto in D major Opus 77, or Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto no. 1 in B-flat minor are representational in Danto’s sense of the term – in the sense of being about something, or having a meaning, or a subject or a semantic content.

It is true, however, that Danto could argue that these (and any other) artworks have always ‘aboutness’ because, as he also argued with the work of Munakata, ultimately they are about what each artist claims about them. However, I have already argued that it is not that clear that an artist’s statement does exhaust the meaning of his work, or even that it reveals it. Alternatively, Danto could argue that these works (and any other), in not being about anything, are about ‘nothing’ (as he argues in: Danto, 2000: 133). Yet while this seems to be a plausible response to works such as the Suprematist painting of Malevich *Black Square*, it seems utterly wrong to argue that Judd’s work or Brahms’s, for example, are about ‘nothing’ (or about ‘nothingness’). Another alternative for Danto would be to argue that these works in pretending not to denote anything external to them, they would be close to the works of Kandinsky or of other abstract painters that, instead of denoting something external, denote the internal or ‘subjective’ feelings of the artists that made them (as in: Danto, 2000: 132). However, saying that these (and any other) works are ‘subjective’ because they are, non-denotative in appearance, is nothing more than just saying that other works are ‘objective’ without specifying in what sense they are thus: Danto should still have to explain (and justify), about *what* subjective feelings would each of these artworks be, and *how* would it be possible for these artworks to appropriately express these feelings. In addition, as I have hinted it above, he would have to be more precise also in justifying that the statements that artists make about their artworks, exhaust (and reveal) the artwork’s ‘aboutness’. Otherwise, we could counterclaim to Danto by paraphrasing him in

that without some specificity on his part, the game of attempting to provide ‘aboutness’ to every artwork gets pretty tiresome (see: Danto, 2000: 133).¹⁷

In fact, as I have shown earlier in this Section, Danto acknowledges that some types of art are not art in the semantic sense of the term (such as, following him, is the case of Egyptian and Mesopotamian art), so this may show that in fact his definition of art, rather than being a definition for all art, is a definition applicable only to the new category of ‘indiscernible artworks’ of the type presented in D1 and D2. If this is so, then his definition should be reformulated as a definition of ‘indiscernible artworks’ rather than as a definition of *regular* ‘artworks’.

B) The notion of ‘transfiguration’

Perhaps one of the most attractive ideas in D2, as well as one of the most difficult to understand, is Danto’s notion of ‘transfiguration’. In fact Danto takes the title *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* from a novel, Muriel Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brody*, in which she mentions a fictitious book bearing this title. In fact, Danto first introduces the notion of ‘transfiguration’ almost in passing in ‘The Artworld’ (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 209)¹⁸ and later again in his paper ‘Transfiguration’. But it is not until his book by that same title that he uses it systematically to explain what art is.

The attractiveness of this idea perhaps comes from the fact that it is introduced from religion and transferred into the sphere of aesthetics, thus providing a certain metaphysical *cachet* to this discipline. Danto’s use of this concept is also attractive in the sense that it implies that what is transfigured is a commonplace object turned now into an artwork. So to a certain extent it invokes ideas about the discipline of

¹⁷ There is however another alternative that Danto considers: that some artworks would be making statements about art. In fact this explanation becomes central in his D3 theory (focused around the theory of the end of art), as he insists in this period that artworks, until Warhol, had been trying to formulate the question ‘what is art?’ in its proper form (for a more detailed account of this period, see Chapter 4).

¹⁸ Also when he refers to the title of a painting (Danto, 1995 [1964]: 203)

art as practised in the 20th century, very much concerned with the connections between art and life.

Yet, Danto first introduced this notion in his previous papers without developing it and he used it again in his book *Transfiguration* where he attempts to define art. This seems to indicate that his use of this notion comes simply from his attraction to its the powerful connotations, to make his definition of art more metaphysically attractive rather than to make the explanation of art more philosophically comprehensible.

Of course, Danto could argue that in fact this conceptual obscurity is precisely what was intended; following certain Wittgensteinian ideas, he may want to point out that some parts of the process of art-making cannot be explained but can only be *shown*. In fact, in his paper 'Artworks and Real Things' he explicitly says that he will be using a type of language not common in (analytical) aesthetics, supposedly for heuristic reasons. So this might also be implicitly claimed in *Transfiguration*, when he uses the notion of 'transfiguration of the commonplace' supposedly to enlighten his readers by (paraphrasing Wittgenstein), *showing* concepts and procedures not clearly explained or defined. However, my claim here is that his use of this obscure notion ends up by overturning his attempt to provide an analytically clear understanding of art. In doing so, he finally renders useless many of his other analytically clear, although not always correct, reflections borrowed from the philosophy of language, to clarify his definition of art.

In the second place, the idea of transfiguration of the commonplace as it is posed, it refers to a transfiguration of a *commonplace object* which is now indiscernible, yet different from its non-transfigured counterpart. In considering this he seems to refer to a purely semantic transformation of objects. This is because the artistic object is physically indiscernible from the common object it was *before* becoming an artwork by means of the process of transfiguration. So it presupposes that such a commonplace object undergoes no *physical* change whatsoever when being transfigured into its indiscernible artistic counterpart. This seems to be implied by Danto in most of the cases he mentions the notion of 'transfiguration' where he suggests that seeing an object transfigured is similar to imagine (or to see)

something as something else without occurring any physical or external modification whatsoever in the object (*Transfiguration*: 56, 99, 107, 111, 126, 130, 172, 173, 208).¹⁹

But if this is what Danto attempts to do, the only *plausible* cases of transfigured (i.e., semantically transfigured) commonplace objects, indiscernible from their non-transfigured counterparts, he mentions in D2 are Duchamp's *In Advance of Broken Arm* (a snow shovel) the urinal entitled *Fountain*, and, perhaps, some of the fictive objects presented by J. as art, that nevertheless it remains unclear whether always succeed in being transfigured as art;²⁰ and in fact, if we examine Duchamp's urinal more thoroughly, we observe that, although Duchamp's work still could be seen as a commonplace object semantically transfigured into an artwork, nevertheless it should be pointed out that Duchamp actually did *make* some relevant and *uncommon* physical modifications (i.e., uncommon for *commonplace objects*) to this artwork: he signed it with the pseudonym R. Mutt and placed it in an atypical position to be contemplated as a type of sculpture.²¹

In fact, it should be stressed that Danto's paradigmatic case in *Transfiguration* (i.e., Warhol's *Brillo Box*), is *not at all* a case of commonplace object semantically transfigured into an artwork: Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* cannot be referred to as really

¹⁹ Actually, in some of these cases Danto uses the notion of 'transfiguration' as analogous to that of 'the *is* of artistic identification' that was first presented in 'The Artworld' and that, as I have already pointed out in Chapter 2, was really problematic (see especially: *Transfiguration*: 126, 130, 172 – See also Chapter 2, Section 2.3-B).

²⁰ This is because Danto often presents J as a sort of institutionalist à-la-Dickie, because J believes he can make art just by *fiat* (see particularly: *Transfiguration*: 3, 7, 13). Thus presumably Danto would have to claim, to be coherent with his criticisms of Dickie's theory (*Transfiguration*: 31 – 32), that J often fails in his attempts of making art because declaring something art, he argues, is not enough to transfigure something into an artwork. It is also true, however, that later Danto acknowledges that maybe, at least in the case of 'Red Square', J succeeds in making an artwork because the work is surrounded by a sort of theoretical atmosphere related to art (*Transfiguration*: 51). It remains unclear, however, if Danto considers that the same applies to the rest of J's works.

²¹ Or in my opinion as a hybrid type of sculpture-performance, given the relevance of the ironic Dadaist gesture performed by Duchamp.

semantically transfigured commonplace objects *because they were from the very beginning painted sculptures made by Warhol*, rather than by the manufacturer or the original designer of the brillo boxes (James Harvey). In other words, Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* are not commonplace objects (e.g., brillo boxes from the supermarket) *transfigured* into artworks but were from the very beginning artworks (*Brillo Boxes*) made by Warhol *representing* a type of commonplace object (brillo boxes) designed by someone else (Harvey). Something similar occurs with the imaginary case presented by Danto, in which something identical to a can-opener is created as an artwork, by an artist who ignores the existence of its functional and non-artistic indiscernible counterpart (*Transfiguration*: 29 – 30). This object, like Warhol's *Brillo Box*, wouldn't be a case of a functional commonplace object (i.e., a commonplace can-opener) *transfigured* by the artist into an artwork but rather, an artwork *created* by an artist and only similar in appearance to a functional can-opener.

Furthermore, it is also relevant to point out that the rest of the objects Danto introduces – the randomly splattered painting with the shape of Rembrandt's *The Polish Rider*, the blue painted necklace and so on – are all either artistic objects only *similar* in appearance to quite rare (i.e., non-commonplace) ones, or were commonplace objects in the past *but so physically modified* that it makes little sense to speak about a kind of transfiguration of a *commonplace* object.

If by 'transfiguration' Danto means, however, not only a semantic change, as he seems to imply in most of the cases he uses this notion (as I have shown above), but also the possibility of a physical change, then the above criticism might be irrelevant (although he only presents one example of a clear physical 'transfiguration', in which he talks about Picasso's modification of a number of objects to transform them into artworks, or into parts of artworks – see: *Transfiguration*: 46). The problem, however, is that Danto never explains or clarifies explicitly what he means by 'transfiguration'. Further, if the 'transfiguration' of the object involves a physical change, there wouldn't be any reason to call such a change 'transfigurative'. It would suffice to refer to this change in a clearer way ('a *modification* of the commonplace' for example) although, in

this case, the metaphysical *cachet* of the phrase would dissolve completely, a sacrifice that Danto might be not willing to make.

Finally using the idea of ‘transfiguration’ in combination with that of ‘metaphor’ (as in: *Transfiguration*: 172), only makes things more complicated. This is because in doing so, he is now relating two obscure concepts rather than using just one, to clarify what art is. In this sense, even if Carroll is quite successful in his attempt to explain Danto’s theory, he never takes into consideration (nor does Danto himself), when endorsing the analogy between artworks and metaphors, that ‘metaphor’ is one of the most problematic rhetorical tropes in linguistics and in philosophy, periodically pondered and never conclusively defined. Rollins’s account of Danto’s definition (in: Murray, 2003: 90 – 95) has the same problem as Carroll’s, although I don’t consider his explanation as good as Carroll’s is. Thus, Danto’s introducing in combination the notions of transfiguration and metaphor to define art yields the very problematic result of attempting to clarify an obscure concept (art) with two even more obscure concepts, respectively coming from religion (transfiguration) and from the poetic *praxis* (metaphor).

C) Variations upon the artworld

In Danto’s early paper ‘The Artworld’, the notion of the concept of ‘artworld’, was understood as the world of artworks. However, Danto’s usage of the notion of artworld together with some of his reflections on art institutions, sites and *connoisseurs*, led other theorists to see him as an institutional theorist akin to Dickie. These and other misunderstandings, as was explained earlier, led him to reject clearly in D2 such an understanding of his theory. However, the re-elaboration of his theory, not only adds some new relevant ideas about art but also, as a consequence, modifies some other notions – particularly his concept of the artworld.

Hence it is possible to observe in *Transfiguration* that some meanings of the term ‘artworld’ vary importantly from those in his early paper ‘The Artworld’. Actually

it is possible to classify Danto's notion of 'artworld' in *Transfiguration* in five different ways:

- 1) There are those *explicit* references to the notion of 'artworld', compatible with (or at least not necessarily different from) those in 'The Artworld' (see: *Transfiguration*: 7, 45, 46, 125, 126, 135, 193, 208). This is specially clear in the following passages when he says that '[there] was room in the space of the artworld by then and in the internal corpus of Picasso [for his presenting a painting necktie as an artwork] which did so much to define the space of the artworld' (*Transfiguration*: 46) or when he says that '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' (*Transfiguration*: 135). The other passages pointed out above, can be also understood as referring to the artworld in this sense.
- 2) There are those *implicit* references to the artworld in which (without mentioning the term itself), Danto is clearly referring to this concept as developed in 'The Artworld': e.g., when he talks about 'the confederation of enfranchised artworks' (*Transfiguration*: 40). He also seems to talk about the artworld in terms of the logical succession of artworks in the history of art when he says that 'not everything is possible at every time, as Heinrich Wölflin has written, meaning that certain artworks simply could not be inserted as artworks into certain periods of art history' (*Transfiguration*: 44). He also talks about 'the realm of art' (*Transfiguration*: 126).
- 3) As Danto was attempting in D2 to reject the interpretations of his theory as an institutional theory *à-la-Dickie*, there are also those critical references to the notion of 'artworld' as, he believes, is understood by institutionalists like Dickie (*Transfiguration*: 5, 32, 91, 144).
- 4) Further, in *Transfiguration* he also refers to the artworld in terms of the 'language' of the artworld, and in doing so, he also points towards the existence of a community of users of this 'artworld'. For instance, he says

'The artworld of the period would have excluded from the expressive vocabulary of its contemporaries the deliberate exploitation of archaic forms, in contrast with the situation today' (Transfiguration: 45; italics mine). He also says that:

A comparable list [of words such as 'powerful', 'swift' 'fluid', etc.] could be culled from the columns of any art magazine, any volume of art criticism [...]. *These words are the currency of the artworld [...].* It seems clear that *the members of the language community one may refer to as the artworld* not merely tend to share the values these words express, but would seldom disagree among themselves as to whether a given term applies to a given work [...]. *The rules for applying these terms within the artworld* must be pretty well understood in practice. (Transfiguration: 155 – 156; italics mine).²²

- 5) Danto's reflections grouped in (4) lead him to talk, later in *Transfiguration*, more explicitly about the artworld in terms clearly different from those he uses in 'The Artworld'. That is to say, in this case he is not talking about the artworld as constituted by a class of artworks, as Beardsley argued in his discussion of 'The Artworld' (Beardsley, 1976: 203), but in this particular case, as constituted by a class of people. It is possible to observe this when Danto says: 'what I call "style" must have been less what Giotto saw than the way he saw it, and invisible for that reason. *It must have been a way of seeing shared by a sufficiently large group of citizens of the artworld* of his time, or they could not have praised Giotto in terms of the sort Vasari employs' (Transfiguration: 163; italics mine).

It is in fact unclear, as a consequence of these few comments in (4) and (5), whether Danto's original intention in *Transfiguration* was actually to understand the artworld just in terms of (1) and (2) or also in the terms comprehended by (4) and (5) (i.e., in terms of its language and its people). This is, however, very problematic if Danto wants to distance himself from the institutional theories of art understood in Dickie's terms, because it is possible to observe in (4) and (5) certain elements similar to Dickie's (e.g., understood in terms of the artworld publics, artists and its

²² Danto further develops this idea along similar lines in the following pages (Transfiguration: 157 – 158).

members in general). In fact, Danto elsewhere recognises that at times he might have spoken about the artworld in these terms and that this might be ‘an institutional theory of sorts’. Nevertheless he also argues that this is far from supporting what institutional theories such as Dickie’s, actually do support (Danto, 1993: 204).

4. DANTO'S THEORY OF THE END OF ART

After *Transfiguration* (1981), Danto presents his theory of the end of art, based on Hegel. It is also after this 1981 work, when he progressively develops an explicit definition of art that was implicit in *Transfiguration* (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5). As a result, not only is Danto's explicit definition of art presented in accordance with the new anti-dualist conception of language – i.e., that doesn't detach language from perception (or experience) – that he endorses after *Transfiguration*, but also in accordance with his D3 theories of the end of art, which themselves rely upon his own definition of art. In doing so, Danto is attempting to reinforce the claims of D2, concerning what art is, with his D3 claims about the end of art.

The major thesis of this new period, thus concerns the idea of the 'end of art', and is characterised by three distinctive features: first, it implicitly endorses Danto's previous ideas (from D1 and D2) about art although now from the perspective of his new ideas about language and about Hegel's philosophy. Second, it is progressively developed and modified in a series of papers rather than in a single book. Finally, after first proposing this theory in 1984, Danto also began working as an art critic, thus supporting his various philosophical versions of the end of art with new ideas acquired as an art critic. He did this by contrasting his own theory with the theories of art historians and art critics, such as Vasari, Panofsky or Greenberg that he hadn't take into consideration earlier (*contra* Carroll, I argue that Greenberg is irrelevant for his previous D1 and D2 theories and becomes important only in the last stage of his D3 period – See: Carroll, 1997: 388). Possibly, owing to his experience as an art critic after 1984, Danto also takes into account, in more detail during this period, several art movements, artworld practices and contemporary artists.

The primary paper where he first develops the thesis of this period is 'The End of Art' (hereafter 'End' – first published in 1984), but it is possible to trace the origins of this thesis to his paper 'The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art' ('Disenfranchisement' – both this paper and 'End' were reprinted later in the same 1986 volume, wrongly leading some interpreters to assume that these two papers were first presented that year. See for example: Davies's and Novitz's section on Danto in: Davies, Higgins *et al.*, 2009: 227). It is also worth pointing out that the

ideas contained in 'End' were later reformulated in the papers collected in his book *After the End of Art* (*After*). Further relevant reflections on the end of art can be found in other papers, among them 'Approaching the End of Art' ('Approaching'), 'Art, Evolution and the Consciousness of History' ('Consciousness' – also included in the 1986 volume with 'Disenfranchisement' and 'End'. This paper is the only one of them that was first published this same year), 'Learning to Live with Pluralism', 'Narratives of the End of Art', and 'Art and Meaning' (reprinted in *The Madonna of the Future*). There are also a few other remarks about the end of art in his book *The Abuse of Beauty*.

In fact, as I have already argued, it is possible to establish connections between Danto's *Transfiguration* and his thesis about the end of art. We should nevertheless be aware that, even though it is also possible to trace some of these ideas to Danto's *Transfiguration*, this doesn't mean that the thesis about the *End of Art* is a logical consequence of the ideas contained in *Transfiguration* as some authors, such as Carroll, Goehr or Rollins seem to think (Carroll, 1993; Goehr, 2007; see also Rollins's section on Danto in: Murray, 2003).

Finally, it should also be pointed out, as Solomon and Higgins also stress (Solomon & Higgins, 1993: 109), that because 'End' was first published in a book entitled *The Death of Art*, Danto's thesis has been often misunderstood: that thesis, contrary to appearances, and as he stresses in *After* (*After*: 4), is neither a pessimistic theory about the current condition of the artworld, nor a theory about the death of artmaking, as some interpreters have often wrongly claimed (see, for example: Young, 1997).

4.1 Danto's early ideas about the end of art:

From the time when Danto first submitted, in 'The Artworld' (D1), his own theory about the conditions necessary for art to exist, he continually stressed the centrality of history and the historical context for understanding artworks and what art is. As Carroll says, Danto's philosophy of art is characterised by his stressing the role of history when reflecting about art, against, in his opinion, the opposite tendency

within the analytic tradition (Carroll, 1999 [1997]: 30 – 31). Thus, in D2 and particularly in *Transfiguration*, the historical context also plays a central role, in this case, in determining the ‘aboutness’ of the artwork, intentionally created and dependent upon the historically and culturally located artist. In the thesis concerning the end of art, the role of history plays an even more central role. This is because it appears not only as the determining factor for the ‘aboutness’ of particular artworks but also as teleologically determining the current pluralism in the art produced after the end of art.

Danto believes that once the history of art reaches its end, an era of artistic pluralism arises, concerned with non self-referential issues in art. As a result, he argues, artists are not only free to make whatever kind of art they wish, but free as well to address their art to purely functional human purposes and social needs.

In fact, in ‘Disenfranchisement’ Danto already attempts to understand the historical relations between art and philosophy in a way that establishes the *rationale* for the theory of the end of art: there he considers art as a practice apart from philosophy but which nevertheless has often been intermingled with philosophical issues and problems in a manner very unsatisfactory for both disciplines. This relation, Danto argues, has often led to the disenfranchisement of art, in the sense of its ephemerisation by philosophers. Against this situation, he argues that both art and philosophy, ought to take different paths from each other in order to de-ephemeralise and reenfranchise art.

Later, in ‘End’, he argues that philosophy and art have finally taken different paths and thus artists are now free to present whatever they want as art. Given this apparent connection between ‘Disenfranchisement’ and ‘End’, I support Forsey’s position, that to understand Danto’s thesis about the end of art properly, it is important to understand his perspective, in ‘Disenfranchisement’, on the history of the relationship between art and philosophy (Forsey, 2001).

Hence, in 'Disenfranchisement' Danto attempts to explain why:

- 1) Historically, philosophers have considered it important to address themselves to art.
- 2) Philosophers have attempted to explain art as being either cognitively useless (Plato) or – which, in Danto's opinion, amounts euphemistically to the same thing – as being at a certain distance from everyday practical experience (Kant), from empirical phenomenal reality (Schopenhauer), or from philosophical-conceptual thinking (Hegel).
- 3) The disenfranchisement perpetrated by philosophy on art should be replaced with a new re-enfranchisement, in which artists are no longer constrained and ephemerised by philosophers or obliged to deal with philosophical issues.

Interestingly, in 'Disenfranchisement' Danto suggests that the disenfranchisement of art and its aggressive ephemerisation by the philosophical tradition is a reaction against the power of art itself. He argues that art, by virtue of its rhetorical structure (see Chapter 3) has the power to 'modify the minds and then the actions of men and women by co-opting their feelings' ('Disenfranchisement': 21). This, he asserts, is one of the main reasons why philosophy has so often attempted to segregate *les beaux arts* from the reality corresponding to *les arts pratiques*: because of sensing the political danger that lies in art. As Danto says:

Indeed, it has at times struck me that the conventional division between the fine and the practical arts – between *les beaux arts* and *les arts pratiques* – serves, in the name of a kind of exaltation, to segregate *les beaux arts* from life in a manner curiously parallel to the way in which calling woman the *fair sex* is an institutional way of putting woman at an aesthetic distance – on a kind of moral pedestal which extrudes her from a world it is hoped she has no longer any business in. The power to classify is the power to dominate, and these parallel aestheticizations must be regarded as essentially political responses to what were sensed as dark dangers in both [...]. Aesthetics is an eighteenth century invention, but it is exactly as political, and for the

same causes, as Plato's was of setting artists at a distance for which aesthetic distance is a refined metaphor ('Disenfranchisement': 12).

In his paper 'End', rather than attempting to explain art in political terms as he had in 'Disenfranchisement', Danto explains art in terms of a historical process of self-understanding (i.e., of art). Even so, 'End' also endorses the idea submitted for consideration in 'Disenfranchisement', that art has been historically disenfranchised because it has been seen as a type of philosophy in an alienated form. Once the end of the self-understanding of art is reached, art becomes free from philosophy and thus finally can deal with issues other than philosophical self-reflection.

The ideas offered in 'End', however, were greeted with a considerable number of objections. The claim that art had reached its end was in itself contentious (see for example: Margolis, 1999 [1997]²³). Additionally the fact that Danto referred his theory to that of Hegel, was also problematic, because, as Solomon and Higgins point out such a theory has often been misunderstood by the English speaking world (see: Solomon & Higgins, 1993: 109).

To justify his theory of the end of art, in 'End', Danto argues that the history of art was first structured in terms of the progressive effort to improve the mimetic representations of reality. Once the new technological advance of cinema appeared, however, such teleology became obsolete. Because of this, artists, above all in painting and sculpture, began to redefine the aims of their work. Danto argues that this is one of the reasons why the Expressionist movement appeared: as an alternative to the aim of promoting mimetic representations in art. The problem with the Expressionist theories, however, Danto argues, is that they don't allow for any idea of progress because any form of expressing one's feelings is as good as another. To the contrary, Danto asserts not only that there is progress in art, but also that art has reached its end. To explain how it is possible to account for the historical evolution of art (i.e., of art history in terms of progress), and for the idea that the end of art has actually occurred, he refers to Hegel's theory, which had already addressed these issues. As Danto remarks:

²³ From a conference he presented in 1990.

[Given] the way progress itself was conceived, about 1905 [with the discovery of cinematography] it appeared that painters and sculptors could only justify their activities by redefining art in ways which had to be shocking [...]. It became increasingly clear [with Post-Impressionist paintings] that a new theory was urgently required, that the artists were not failing to yield up perceptual equivalences but were after something not to be understood in those terms [...] painters were not so much representing as expressing [...]. But even *more* interesting from our perspective is the fact that [with Expressionist theories of art] the *history* of art acquires a totally different structure. It does so because there is no longer any reason to think of art as having a progressive history: there simply is not the possibility of a developmental sequence with the concept of expression [...] one style follows another as in an archipelago [...] if we are to think of art as having an end, we need a conception of art history which is linear [...]. Now Hegel's theory meets all these demands ('End': 100 – 107).

Hegel's theory, Danto believes, can account for both the idea that there is historical progress in art and for the idea that art has reached its end. This is because Hegel has a philosophy of history in which humanity, understood in terms of the Idea or Spirit (*Geist*) of human Consciousness, develops historically – and, in doing so, develops history itself – towards its own cognitive self-understanding. For Danto, Hegel's theory of the *Geist* has the form of a *Bildungsroman* in which this main character progresses towards a final stage of self-recognition ('End': 110). Danto believes that if Hegel could argue this plausibly, then it is also legitimate to argue in analogous terms, that the *Spirit* of Art History has reached the climax of self-understanding with 20th century art.

Danto argues in 'End', that since the beginning of the 20th century, a variety of different artistic movements have attempted to answer the question of what art is in terms of their own artworks and theories. So, he argues, artists promoted a philosophical enquiry about the nature of art, turning art into a kind of philosophy in an alienated form. However, precisely because art is an alienated form of philosophy, it is incapable of properly doing the job of philosophy. Thus, he argues in 'End' that art is liberated from that effort once the task is handed to philosophy, which is capable of properly defining art in conceptual terms. In fact, Danto argues,

art ends when it is known what art is and means, and this knowledge can only be attained by philosophers of art:

What is Art? The question became urgent in the twentieth century, when the received model collapsed [...] each movement raised the question afresh, offering itself as a possible final answer [...]. It is this way of looking at things which suggests another model of art history altogether, a model narratively exemplified by the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of self-education which climaxes in the self's recognition of the self [...]. The great philosophical work which has this form is Hegel's astonishing *Phenomenology of the Spirit* [...]. It is possible to read Hegel as claiming that art's philosophical history consists in its being absorbed ultimately into its own philosophy [...]. The historical stage of art is done with when it is known what art is and means. The artists have made the way open for philosophy, and the moment has arrived at which the task must be transferred finally into the hands of philosophers ('End': 109 – 111).

In fact, this idea supports Forsey's claim that the theory of the end of art confirms Danto's previous theory of 'Disenfranchisement'. This is because, she asserts, Danto's attempt in 'End' is the most aggressive disenfranchising programme ever undertaken against art. This is due, amongst other things, to the fact that in 'End' Danto argues that artists are incapable of doing the job of philosophy and thus that it is the task of philosophers, rather than of artists, to finally explain what art is (Forsey, 2001: 407).

Now, implicit in 'End' is the idea that, if art has reached its end, it is because philosophy already knows 'what art is and means'. Curiously, Danto never says in this paper what art is and means. So in 'End', he might be implicitly endorsing the idea that what art 'is and means' is what has been already argued in *Transfiguration*. Carroll also suggests something similar when arguing that Danto's philosophy of art history depends upon his philosophy of art developed earlier (Carroll, 1993: 97). If this is so, then the end of art has to be understood as reaching its climax with the appearance of Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*, because it was Danto's achievement to provide, in *Transfiguration*, a definition of art based on such a type of indiscernible objects.

4.2 Danto's revision of the end of art in 'Art, Evolution and the Consciousness of History':

In part, presumably to respond to criticisms of his thesis about the end of art, and of his use of Hegel to support his theory, Danto further modified his thinking before presenting what we could regard as the later synthesis of his ideas in his 1997 book *After the End of Art (After)*. Thus Danto provides, for example, in his paper 'Art, Evolution and the Consciousness of History' ('Consciousness'), a somewhat refined account of the theory of the end of art. Carroll, however, seems to put together the theories of 'End' and 'Consciousness' without making any distinction between them (Carroll, 1999 [1997]). This is probably because both papers were reprinted in the same volume (Danto, 1986). Unlike Carroll, I intend to explain separately the reformulations of the end of art that Danto introduced in this later paper. It is also relevant to point out that Danto's claims in his paper 'Approaching the End of Art' (1985), are transitional between his ideas in 'End' (1984) and in 'Consciousness' (1986); yet, most of the views of this transitional paper are better organised in 'Consciousness'. For this reason I will mainly examine this latter paper as an example of Danto's ideas before he published *After*.

In 'Consciousness', Danto distinguishes his account of the development of the history of art from his account of the relevant developments in the philosophy of the history of art (i.e., the theoretical reflections concerning the configuration of the history of art). He also distinguishes, in this paper, between two periods in the history of art, in a slightly modified manner from those presented in 'End': here he has a first period that supported the idea that art was teleologically oriented towards achieving better mimetic representations (as in 'End'); and a second period, not considered in his 1984 paper, but already introduced in 'Approaching', corresponding to the appearance of modernity (or modern style), in which artists attempted to reach a definition of art by making artworks that reflected upon the concept of art. Thus he no longer speaks generically of 20th century art as he did in 'End', but of Modern art.

Danto argues that this later period of Modern art, characterised by the advent of self-reflection, ends when the aim of defining art is handed over to philosophers. However, in this paper, as well as in ‘Approaching’ – unlike in ‘End’ –, he is unclear as to whether the final definition of art has been already submitted or not. The only observation he offers is that ‘[art] 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’ (‘Consciousness’: 233).

Additionally, he argues that there are two main theories that may be useful to explain the historical development of art:

- 1) There is Vasari’s view about the history of art. Vasari stressed in his 1550 book about the lives of different artists, the idea that the history of art was a progressive effort of improving mimetic representation. In contrast to the discussion in ‘End’, Danto holds here that such a conception of the history of art became problematised with the post-impressionist rejection of optical illusion and of the use of perspective in their paintings (‘Consciousness’: 232), rather than with the appearance of cinematography, as he still holds in ‘Approaching’.
- 2) When this occurred, Danto claims, a theory different from the idea of mimetic progression became possible: namely Panofsky’s theory of perspective as a symbolic form (1924), which is an ‘iconological’ theory (that is, ‘a way in which a culture represents its inner life to its members’ – Carroll, 1999 [1997]: 34). Danto first introduces Panofsky’s theory in ‘Approaching’ and he argues, in ‘Consciousness’, that this theory became possible when post-impressionism showed how the mimetic programme in art was seen just as a particular way of organising the world of the Renaissance but irrelevant in modern art.

Panofsky's iconological theory, Danto argues, is explicative of many practices and historical facts. He argues that Vasari's and even Panofsky's own theories might be themselves symbolic forms of different conceptions of history typical of their respective historical periods ('Consciousness': 229); nevertheless he also argues that Panofsky's theory cannot account for a progressive conception of history ('Consciousness': 230), because for Panofsky, any symbolic form is as good as any other and from this standpoint, there would be no evolution from one form to the next. Danto insists, however, that the history of art *is progressive* because it evidences a movement from art to philosophy, which for him means a movement of the history of art towards the cognitive self-understanding of what art is ('Consciousness': 232). So, Danto argues, Panofsky's theory is useless because it cannot explain the historical progress in art.

It is for this reason that even though Danto is very sympathetic to Panofsky's theory (see for example, later in: *After*: 129), nevertheless he believes that the only theory that can appropriately synthesise both the correct (for Danto) intuitions of Vasari and Panofsky, is Hegel's. Presumably this is because Hegel's theory is clearly teleological, as Vasari's is, and it seems to be understood by Danto as providing a pseudo-Panofskian conception of the 'symbolic forms' by means of the theory about the different objectifications of the *Zeitgeist* – in different cultures and historical periods – in its teleological process towards self-understanding. Actually in 'Approaching', Danto seems to think of Hegel's theory, in relation to Panofsky's, more or less along these lines ('Approaching': 215).

Another idea that Danto develops in 'Consciousness' is the one already introduced in 'End', about the progressive dissolution of the barriers in post-historical art. He now argues that once the end of art has been reached, there are further dissolutions besides the one between the different art disciplines, such as between art criticism and art, artist and art dealer, art dealer and art critic as well as between gallery and street ('Consciousness': 233). This is relevant because it invites us to take into account other further dissolutions within the art *praxis* that he is going to take into consideration later on – such as between High Art and Craftmanship (*After*: 114; 136) and High Art and Commercial Art (Danto, 2000: 135) – thus significantly extending the instances of 'art' that he had offered in *Transfiguration*.

4.3 Danto's later revisions in *After the End of Art*

As mentioned earlier, in the papers collected in his book *After*, Danto elaborates what appears as the latest and most elaborate synthesis of ideas concerning the end of art. Since *After*, he has further reflected about the end of art (as for example in *The Abuse of Beauty*), although it is in *After* that he explains this idea most extensively as he understands it by 1997.

Perhaps the changes he effected in *After* were the result of his becoming aware that in his previous papers he was endorsing a number of ideas that didn't fit very well with his earlier theory in *Transfiguration*. For example, in 'End' he appears to have implicitly accepted the mimetic theories in art because they had helped move the history of art further towards the process of self-understanding in the 20th century (or until the appearance of Modern Art); while in *Transfiguration* he had rejected the idea that mimetic theories had any theoretical validity whatsoever. Further, while he supported the expressionist character of his D2 definition of art he now attacks expressionist theories in D3 because he claims that they cannot account for a teleological development of history.

Alternatively, perhaps Danto's modifications in *After*, are to address problems internal to the theory about the end of art which are criticised by other theorists (such as Margolis or Carroll amongst others – Carroll, 1993; Margolis, 1999 [1997]; see also in: Haapala, Levinson & Rantala, 1999 [1997]).

In any case, in *After* Danto reflects explicitly, on his modifications to the theory he had earlier submitted in 'End' and slightly modified later in 'Consciousness'. In effect, Danto says:

I had in the course of ten years of reflection arrived at a very different view of what the end of art meant than I had when that concept first possessed me. I had come to understand this doubtless incendiary expression to mean, in effect, the end of the master narratives of art – not just of the traditional narrative of representing visual appearance, which Ernst Gombrich had taken as the theme of his Mellon Lectures, nor of the succeeding narrative of modernism, which had all but ended, but the end of master narratives altogether (*After*: xv).

Thus, Danto now argues that after the end of art, there will be no more master narratives of the historical development of art understood in terms of a progressive teleological evolution. To demonstrate this, Danto not only examines modern art and modern art theory as practiced in the 20th century more thoroughly – that is, in terms respectively of the art of the period of Manifestos, and of the theory of modern art as understood by Greenberg. He also reintroduces some ideas presented in D2 and more specifically in *Transfiguration*, to stress the idea that post-historical art, in contrast to what had come before, is characterised by artistic pluralism.

In *After*, Danto argues that the history of art can be divided into two different consecutive narratives. In the first place again, there is Vasari's narrative, central to which is the idea that artists strive for increasingly better mimetic representations of reality. After post-impressionism, this narrative becomes obsolete and a new narrative emerges: the 'era of ideology' appears, in which each artistic style, as a disguised philosophical practice, attempts to provide a type of stipulative definition of what art is (*After*: 30). This, Danto says, was often done either in terms of manifestos, or in terms of art criticism and essays in art magazines like *October* and *Art Forum*, as types of disguised-covert manifestos (*After*: 26 – 30).

To be more precise, he argues that it is Greenberg's theory of modern art that best represents the second great alternative narrative of the whole history of art: Greenberg attempted to demonstrate, with his own theory of modern art, that the earlier mimetic *credo*, derived from Vasari, that valorised realistic representation, was actually concealing the true nature of art (*After*: 73). This true nature of art, he claims, was finally revealed with modern art and more particularly with abstract expressionism. Thus, Danto argues, Greenberg's narrative did not in fact constitute a break with Vasari's narrative, as he seems to suggest in 'Consciousness' in his discussion of modern art. On the contrary, Greenberg attempted to establish a continuity with Vasari's teleological narrative, once it was revealed that the true goal of art was not to improve mimetic representation but to reveal its own underlying nature (*After*: 76). Thus, the *real* underlying aspiration of the whole history of art, Greenberg argued, was to progressively reveal the conditions of possibility of the different art disciplines, understood in terms of providing absolute

priority to their respective materials and media (e.g., flatness and the properties of the pigment, in the case of painting) (*After*: 72).

Greenberg's materialist aesthetics, however, arise from his (Greenberg's) misreading of Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* as if it was a sort of *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* although addressed essentially to the experience and production of art (*After*: 67 – 69; See also: Capdevila, 2004). As a result of this interpretation, Greenberg misunderstood Kant's later *Kritik* as a sort of normative *Kritik der Reinen Kunst* (i.e., Critique of Pure Art), and thereby attempted to demonstrate that, with the appearance of modern art:

- 1) Artistic practices had to be consistent on the one hand with the theoretical practice of philosophical modernity, understood in terms of a critical self-examination of the spheres of enquiry.
- 2) Modern art had to be consistent with Kant's philosophical transcendental criticism, understood in terms of revealing the conditions of possibility and the limits of the objects of enquiry.
- 3) This meant, in effect, that art had to entail the search for the purest formal elements that would represent the conditions of possibility and limits of each artistic discipline.

However, Danto argues, Greenberg's formulation was in fact typical of the age of manifestos, in that it favoured a particular artistic style as true art and excluded others by stressing the relevance of purity, a position typical of the era of ideology (*After*: 70). This sort of ideological narrative-making typical of the era of ideology, Danto argues, ended once the question about the nature of art was answered – allowing for the validity of all styles in art. Thus Danto says in 'Master Narratives and Critical Principles', one of the papers collected in *After*:

The age of Manifestos, as I see it, came to an end when philosophy was separated from style because the true form of the question "What is art?" emerged [...]. Once it was determined that a philosophical definition of art entails no stylistic imperative

whatever, so that anything can be a work of art, we enter what I am terming the post-historical period. Thus sketched, the master narrative of the history of art [...] is that there is an era of imitation, followed by an era of ideology, followed by our post-historical era in which, with qualification, anything goes [...]. Art today is produced in an art world unstructured by any master narratives at all (*After*: 46 – 48).

The true form of the question ‘what is art?’ that, Danto argues, made possible the end of art, is: ‘what makes the difference between a work of art and something not a work of art when there is no interesting perceptual difference between them?’ (*After*: 35). In this sense, then, Danto recovers the original idea from *Transfiguration*, that the essence of art, that drove the history of art and that was finally revealed by him, is one in which perceptual criteria plays no role. Moreover, the proper answer to this question is, for Danto, strikingly similar to Hegel’s:²⁴

[Like] all definitions, mine (which was probably only partial) was entirely essentialist [...]. The only figure in the history of aesthetics I found to have grasped the complexities of the concept of art [...] was Hegel [...]. In the marvellous passage where Hegel sets out his ideas on the end of art, he writes “What is now aroused in us by works of art is not just immediate enjoyment but our judgment also, since we subject to our intellectual consideration (i) the content of art, and (ii) the work of art’s means of presentation, and the appropriateness and inappropriateness of both to one another”. At the conclusion of chapter five [*After*: 98], I suggested that we need little more than (i) and (ii) to map the anatomy of criticism [...] *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 (*After*: 194 – 195).

Danto claims that his definition, as summarised above, was inspired by Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* (*After*: 35), which demonstrated that no perceptual criterion can be applied to distinguish an artwork from its indiscernible non-artistic counterpart. Yet, as I pointed out in the previous chapter (in Section 3.5), Danto’s explicit definition summarised in *After* does not correspond to what he argued in *Transfiguration*, but

²⁴ Other interesting reflections from Danto concerning the similarities between his and Hegel’s theory can be found in *Three Decades after the End of Art* (in: *After*: 21 – 39; more particularly in: *After*: 30 – 31).

is rather a retrospective oversimplification of his D2 theory, written in somewhat Hegelian language. In doing so, he ‘coloured’ his previous D2 theory by embracing Hegel’s theory in D3, and embracing anti-dualist theories of language (that do not detach language from perception) that apparently, for Danto, are similar to Hegel’s *sort of* rationalistic pantheism. This decision to follow Hegel, he asserts in the above passage, is because ‘the only figure in the history of aesthetics I found to have grasped the complexities of the concept of art [...] was Hegel’ (*After*: 194). Thus, the admiration for Hegel leads him to claim that he was arguing something similar to him in *Transfiguration*, when actually this is not strictly true. In fact, he modifies his theory retrospectively to make the reader believe he was, like Hegel, grasping ‘the complexities of the concept of art’ from the very beginning.

Furthermore, besides modifying his earlier implicit 1981 definition, it is relevant to point out here, that Danto also modifies his earlier claim that the demonstration that no perceptual criterion can be used to distinguish between artworks and non-artworks, was discovered by Warhol: he now argues that this was also discovered by almost all artistic movements between the 1960s and 1970s (i.e., Minimalism, Arte Povera, Post-Minimalism, Fluxus, Conceptualism, etc.) (*After*: 113; Danto, 2006 [2003]: xvii). This has to be taken into account even if at some other moment he stresses more the centrality of Pop art in leading to the end of the master narratives of art (*After*: 122).

4.4 Some problems with Danto’s theory of the end of art

A) The history of art as the search for the definition of art

Danto argues that the historical development of art has been a quest, led by artists, to understand what art is and means. He claims that the end of art is reached when the question, about what art is, is posed in its proper form. Once this occurs, philosophers can then give a proper answer and thus an adequate definition of art that shows that all styles and forms are equally valid in art – i.e., that everything is now possible in art.

However, in *After* he has to respond to criticisms that show that actually not everything is possible after the end of art. One of the examples Danto responds to, is that of an artist whose Rembrandt-style paintings were rejected for an exhibition for being in a style already superseded (*After*: 207). In response, he suggests that after the end of art, anything can be presented as an artwork with certain *provisos*. He thus introduces the binary distinction use/mention (*After*: 205 – 206) and argues that we must distinguish between the *use* of a particular style, corresponding to the historical context of the artist, and the *mention* of past styles. That is to say, an artist attempting to *use* past styles will automatically fail to present his works as artworks but he can *mention* past styles in order to produce an interesting posthistorical artwork.

This argument, however, has a number of problems: in the first place Danto is acknowledging that it is not true that after the end of art anything can be an artwork. In the second place, any *provisos* that might be offered to rule something out as an artwork after the end of art, can also be used to explain why not everything was possible in art before the period of the end of art either. The problem, in other words, is that Danto's *provisos* undermine the idea of a radical break between posthistorical art and its predecessors (Davies argues something similar in his review of Danto's book – See: Davies, 2001b: 215).

Of course, Danto could answer that he didn't really claim that anything would be possible nowadays in art, but merely that with Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* and the like, it became clear that artistic objects could be, since then, indiscernible from non-artistic ones. If this were his claim, however, it then poses additional problems because:

- 1) Duchamp, with his snow shovel *In Advance of Broken Arm* (1915), had already done this, several years before Pop Art appeared and even before modern art as understood by Greenberg was first proposed. Thus if Danto wants to be consistent with the idea that post-historical art appears with the indiscernibility of artistic and non-artistic objects, then he ought to take seriously into consideration the possibility that the end of art should have occurred, not with Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* but earlier on with Duchamp's

works, particularly with his snow shovel and perhaps also with his urinal (as he seemed to hold earlier – see: ‘Disenfranchisement’: 15). In fact, in *After*, he recognises Duchamp as precursor of Warhol in asking the question about art’s nature in its proper form (*After*: 112 – 113). Ultimately, however, he finally dismisses the similarity between Duchamp and Warhol, supposedly to better support his thesis that the end of art occurs with the art produced during the 1960s, especially with the set of *Brillo Boxes* that had inspired his theory in *Transfiguration* (*After*: 132).

- 2) Carroll suggests that if Danto argues that (a) his theory is similar to Hegel’s and (b) that the definition of art (and thus also the end of art) becomes possible with the discovery of the problem of indiscernibles, then the end of art would have occurred, not in 1964 A.D. but in 1964 B.C. or earlier. This, Carroll argues, is because Danto, in holding these two ideas, seems to be implying that Hegel was already aware of the problem of indiscernibles, with the Symbolic type of art – otherwise he couldn’t have formulated his own theory, which is so similar to Danto’s, and which takes as a point of departure, this early type of art (i.e., Symbolic art). In fact, in Danto’s 1991 paper ‘Description and the Phenomenology of Perception’ – that I examined in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.5) – he seems to point in the direction that Carroll suggests. However, in that case, it seems that Danto is endorsing the idea that art had ended with Classical, or maybe with Romantic art, because Danto appears to assert – at least in the following passage – that the artworks of these periods already showed perfectly the nature of art. I quote again Danto’s passage because I find it strikingly counter to his own claims that the end of art occurs in the 1960s with the appearance of Readymades (because it is only then when it is possible to discover the ‘true’ definition of art):

What further takes place [when interpreting the work of Guercino presented by Danto, and in fact, following him, when interpreting all artworks] may not take place at the level of perception but at the level of interpretations and connotation. The entirety of what Hegel calls Symbolic Art is in external relationship to its meaning: we don’t see the meaning through the symbol, but connect it with the symbol. But *there may be a more internal connection than this, as Hegel acknowledges in his category of*

Classical, and especially of Romantic art, where what we see is determined by what we don't [...]. So art attains here the level of thought, and the artwork is a thought given a kind of sensuous embodiment [...] I have taken over a view of Hegel's (above) that art has the power of thought (Danto, 1991: 211 – 212; italics mine).

- 3) Claiming that artworks can be indiscernible from non-artistic objects is not sufficient for also claiming that today there is a complete atmosphere of pluralism in art. There is no causal relation between one idea and the other. The most Danto can claim is that this shows that artworks don't need to be abstract to be art, and that they don't need to be clearly different from everyday objects.
- 4) With the theory of artistic objects indiscernible from non-artistic ones, Danto makes the claim that today anything can be an artwork. But to be consistent with his theory, Danto has to claim that these artworks (in order to be artworks) also have to possess the rest of the elements in the definition of art he proposed in *Transfiguration*. That is to say, artworks have to be semantic vehicles of meaning, have to be intended by artists to be art, and so on. Otherwise that earlier theory would not apply to all artworks (for example would exclude post-historical artworks) and thus would be an invalid universal definition of art. Although, if he concedes the former (against the latter idea), then *contra* what he claims, there would be a high degree of continuity between post-historical art and previous art rather than a radical break between them.

Danto also says, in 'End', that the end of art occurs once we know what art is and means. In this, he takes for granted that we do now know what art is and means. Alternatively, he says in *After* that the end of art occurs once we have answered the question of what distinguishes artworks indiscernible from non-artistic objects. Again, in this case, he still assumes that the correct answer to this question has been given. In fact, his theoretical chronology locates the end of art with the introduction of artworks indiscernible from non-artistic objects during the 1960s, especially with Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*. This, he argues, made possible his own philosophical theories corresponding to D1 and D2. Presumably, then, Danto believes that we

know what art is and means because he was capable, in *Transfiguration*, of explaining what distinguishes artworks from their non-artistic indiscernible counterparts.

But if this is so, then the whole theory of the end of art rests on the assumption that his theory in *Transfiguration* (or its 1997 reformulation), which attempts to explain what art is and means, is correct (see for example his claims in: *After*: 195). If the theory in *Transfiguration*, or its later reformulation, is incorrect, however, as many philosophers of art have claimed, then we don't really know what art is and means and thus we have not yet a final answer to the question of what distinguishes artworks indiscernible from mere 'real' things. In that case the entire theory of the end of art collapses because it rests on a false assumption: that the proper question about the nature of art had finally and correctly been answered. And if Danto's theory is incorrect, we can claim that the fundamental condition for the history of art to end hasn't yet been fulfilled and therefore there hasn't been any end of art whatsoever, (unless the end of art occurs for a reason different from that conceived by Danto).

In his later paper 'Narrative and Neverendingness' (1999), Danto presents an alternative version, already hinted at in 'Consciousness', about the end of art. He claims in this paper that the end of art occurs just when the right question about the nature of art is posed. Once this happens, art ends, and the search for a proper philosophical answer is handed to philosophers. Yet he never states here that an answer has or needs to be given for the narrative of art to reach its end, perhaps in order to avoid the above mentioned criticism. So here Danto could say that his theory of the end of art does not depend upon the theory in *Transfiguration* being the final correct answer to the question of what art is and means. But if this is the case, how can we know that the question posed by artists, that he claims leads to the end of art, is correct if we haven't given any answer yet to this question? Here Danto is just making the unproven assumption that we may know that this question is correctly posed (see also: Carroll, 1999 [1997]: 37). So in this case he leaves unanswered why he believes that the question about 'what makes the difference between a work of art and something not a work of art when there is no interesting perceptual difference between them?' is the correct and final one.

B) Hegel and the philosophy of the history of art

Danto claims that the history of art developed teleologically until it reached its end in the 20th century with Pop Art and other artistic movements of the 1960s. To support this idea, he frequently refers to Hegel's theory. However, Danto's theory would make sense only in so far as it can demonstrate that the history of art has been developing in such a way as to explain finally what art is and means.

Danto thus insists that the history of art has developed teleologically, and that the history of art has ended, even when there is no empirical proof for this: only his own theoretical assumptions. So each time he has to choose between whether the history of art is teleological (as Vasari or Greenberg would have it), or not (as the Expressionists or Panofsky seem to imply), he provides Hegel's theory as an alternative. Curiously, he does this as if it would resolve the debate in favour of the teleological view.

This, of course, is not enough, and in fact Danto may say that this is an incorrect interpretation of his occasional references to Hegel. He may say that his references to Hegel are not ultimately to justify his own theory but to clarify for his readers what he has been attempting to claim so far. But if this is so, then he ought to be able to present his thesis without the need to mention Hegel, something which he is unable to do. And because he takes such frequent recourse to Hegel it looks as if he is introducing a *fallacy of authority* to support his own controversial ideas.

Additionally, Danto tends to reinterpret Hegel in his own favour: that is, in a way that misleadingly suggests his own theory to be claiming similar things about art than Hegel. But contrary to Danto's claim, and against Solomon and Higgins interpretations of Hegel (Solomon & Higgins, 1993), this is not the case, because:

- 1) Hegel's philosophy of art is a coherent part of his overall philosophy of history while Danto's is not. Danto's theory, on the contrary, as he stresses in *After* (After: 43), is a philosophy of the history of art which is not in continuity with the overall view of the philosophy of history he offered some 20 years before he first submitted his thesis about the end of art.

- 2) Moreover, Hegel's philosophy of history is very different from Danto's: Hegel attempted to explain how history developed progressively from Symbolic art, to an (idealised) artistic Classical Greek culture leading finally to the philosophical culture of German Idealism. In this, he believed that the *Geist*, or Spirit of Human Consciousness, evolved consecutively from one to the next of the three forms of the Absolute Spirit: art, religion and philosophy.²⁵ Hegel, in fact, believed that art was in the past the best way to achieve the best representations of the 'most sublime ideas and interests from the Spirit'. Greek (or Classical) art, for Hegel, achieved the best harmonic balance between material exteriority and internal spirituality. This led him to understand Greek art as *the paradigm* for art. The balance characteristic of Classical art, however, would break down with the appearance of what he termed Romantic art, in the medieval period. This occurred, Hegel asserts, because Romantic Art was characterised by its religious spirituality, thus making inwardness and religiosity more relevant in artistic representations. He further argues that this period, in which art played a central role for the spirit of humankind, was itself replaced by the next one characterised by religion, and then the latter by philosophy. He believed that religion and, later on, philosophical thought were better than art at (self-) understanding and (self-) representing the *Zeitgeist*, first during the medieval period, and then reaching its climax with the philosophical culture of German Idealism, and more particularly, with Hegel himself.

This theory, as I have hinted, is very different from Danto's. Danto is not interested, as Hegel was, in showing how (Classical) art is 'something of the past', art being progressively replaced by religion and then religion by philosophy as the best ways to represent and understand the Spirit of Human Consciousness. On the contrary, we could say that Danto is interested in showing that art today is still central to the representation of the highest ideals and notions of the human spirit. However, he

²⁵ In the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* Hegel calls these three stages respectively 'the religion of art', 'manifest religion' and 'absolute knowledge'.

assumes that Hegel's claims about the progression of the three absolute forms of the spirit is analogous to his own claim that during the last period art has been immersed in a stage of philosophical self-reflection. These are, however, two very different sorts of claim, although Danto tends to regard the latter as a plausible interpretation of Hegel's theory (as can be observed for example in: 'End': 109 – 111; also in: *After*: 47). Danto's claim that art becomes philosophical is very different from Hegel's argument that philosophy replaces religion, which has itself replaced art, as the current highest form of representing and understanding the Spirit.

- 3) In addition, Danto often confuses Hegel's reflections on the end of art, or more precisely, his claim that art is now 'something of the past', with Hegel's reflections on the end of history. Hegel's end of history supports the idea that the spirit has reached absolute self-reflection, thus making possible the realisation, in empirical reality, of his spiritual freedom. The end of history occurs after the third form (philosophy), has replaced the second form (religion), a process that ultimately leads to the stage of self-understanding. For Hegel, however, the end of art occurs before that, when the first absolute form of the spirit (art) is substituted by the second form (religion). The problem with Danto is that he misinterprets Hegel by conflating these two different moments of the Spirit: the end of art and the final moment of self-understanding of the Spirit. He apparently does this to justify his account of why art has ended once it has reached its final moment of self reflection, with the appearance of artworks indiscernible from non-artistic objects during the 1960s.²⁶

Furthermore, Danto believes that his 1997 explicit definition (presented in *After*) is not only a good account of his 1981 implicit definition of *Transfiguration* but that it is also very similar to Hegel's way of understanding art (*After*: 194 – 195). However, this is deeply misleading because while Hegel's theory and definition are

²⁶ Forsey also points out some of these differences between Danto's and Hegel's theories (Forsey, 2001: 406).

still framed in a mentalist type of philosophy (the *Geist* is understood as a sort of collective and historicised Kantian subject or consciousness) Danto's definition is framed, instead, in a philosophy of language and more specifically, upon his interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (even though he attempts to obscure this fact during his D3 period by presenting a formula reminiscent of the philosophy of language characteristic of the PI and the post-Wittgensteinian theorists of science).

It is true, however, that Hegel's ideas about art summarised in terms of the relevance of the content and the means of presentation, could be held without endorsing any type of mentalism *à-la-Hegel*. However, Danto's own version of the definition, relying on the notion of 'aboutness', unlike Hegel's, does intrinsically rely upon a theory of language that does not easily lend to the notions of content and means of presentation. Yet Danto seems to be implying that Hegel's notions of 'content' and of 'means of presentation' are respectively similar to those of 'being about something' and 'incarnating its meaning' introduced by him. This seems deeply implausible and thus points towards the idea that Danto, again, is attempting to explain Hegel as if both were claiming similar things.

C) Historical necessity and the development of history

In his theory about the end of art, Danto attempts to account for why the history of art followed a particular line of development, until the break that occurred during the 1960s which led to a post-historical era of pluralism.

However, in attempting to understand the logic of historical development in retrospect, Danto, like Hegel, tends to understand historical contingency in terms of historical necessity, and what actually happened as what had to happen: every event in the history of art is presented as if it were necessary. This is because Danto endorses *a priori* the idea that everything that happened in history was the result of the rational development of the *Geist* of the *Kunstgeschichte* towards self-understanding. In claiming this, however, he takes the controversial position that the history of art makes the artists, not that artists make the history of art: the artists and their actions are for him by-products of the internal drive of the *Geist* of art – i.e.,

the consequences of what art wants. His reasoning thus leads him to conclude, implicitly, that nothing in art can be really unexpected, or really the product of the artist's will, imagination and rebelliousness: if an event occurs in the artworld, that is because this is what art wanted.

Furthermore, Margolis claims that, in supporting this idea, Danto is closely following Greenberg's very controversial idea (that Danto himself rejects) that artists such as Van Gogh ought to be evaluated in terms of 'what art wanted'. Danto criticises Greenberg because 'he once considered Van Gogh's work as due to his finding what went on in the canvas more interesting than what went on in the world' (Margolis, 1999 [1997]: 14); that is, Danto criticised Greenberg for his attempt to understand the works of a great artist only by means of what Greenberg believed to be essential in art, namely, their formal properties (particularly the flat surface of the painting and the properties of the pigment). Yet, Danto, even if critical to this way of understanding art, also follows ideas similar to Greenberg's: when criticising the works of Kiefer as (inferior) 'Symbolic art', Danto seems to argue that the works of all artists ought to be examined in terms of 'what art wants', that is, in terms of the search for the essence of art that shows how 'meaning penetrates the work' (Margolis, 1999 [1997]: 8). Danto believes, following Hegel, that this doesn't occur with Symbolic art because in these types of artworks, their meanings are completely arbitrary in relation to their media. Thus, following this conception, those works that fail in following 'what art wants' (i.e., to show that the meaning penetrates the work), such as, in Danto's opinion, Kiefer's, are not even worth considering *in extenso*.

Moreover, in supporting the idea that good artists follow 'what art wants' (i.e., to make artworks that reveal their nature as 'embodied meaning', following Danto's latest formulation – Danto, 2009 [2007]: 112), Danto seems to believe that the works of artists such as Beuys, Duchamp or Warhol have to be understood basically as philosophical efforts to explain and exemplify what art is, rather than, for example, as efforts to make claims about ecological devastation (Beuys), political claims against the bourgeoisie (Duchamp) or claims about the beauty of everyday objects of consumption, against the ideological-marxist rejection of consumerism and representational art held by the members of the abstract expressionist

movement (Warhol). That is to say, Danto, like Greenberg, seems to be endorsing the idea that the works of all artists (including Van Gogh's) have to be understood as efforts to progressively reveal the essence of art, rather than as efforts to reflect the particular artist's interests or points of view. This, however, seems to be a completely unacceptable and oversimplified way of examining the works of all these great artists.

Moreover, there is no way to empirically validate the historical necessity that Danto believes that the history of art follows – i.e., there is no way to verify whether the historical events were a matter of historical necessity or of historical possibility. How can we say *for sure* that the history of art couldn't have been otherwise? There is simply no way to be certain that artistic events happened because of historical need or an intrinsic drive. We cannot claim this, unless we really can empirically validate that the internal drive of art is guided by the attempt to define what art is and means, an attempt that is finally reached with Danto's reflections in *Transfiguration*, something which has already been put into question (further, Carroll also suggests that even Danto's way of understanding philosophy in terms of indiscernibility is also controversial in itself – see: Carroll, 1999 [1997]: 37).

Additionally, Danto often stresses the role of historical context to account for why certain artists, such as Duchamp, could introduce certain instances of art in terms of the logical development of the history of art. Yet, in doing this, he disregards the fact that artists often presented their artworks, *not as a result of the logical development of the history of art, but completely counter to it*. In fact, Danto admits that when post-impressionists exhibited their work, they were met with criticism and rejection on all sides (see for example: *After*: 55 – 56); and *Fountain* was not accepted as an artwork by those responsible for the exhibition in which Duchamp presented his Ready-Made. Furthermore, some of these objections still endure; e.g., Beardsley and Cohen, for example, still reject the idea that Duchamp's *Fountain* is an artwork. Thus artists often presented their artworks not *because* of the historical context that made this possible. *Au contraire*, they often presented their artworks as responses *against* the historical context that made their work until then, and even later, completely unthinkable as art for the majority of the public, other artists, art critics, art collectors and curators.

In fact, Danto's theory, in stressing the teleological development of history that ultimately follows the criteria of 'what art wants', faces the same difficulty as Hegel's. In attempting to explain everything in terms of the *rationale* of the *Geist*, Hegel confused methodological explanation with empirical justification: all historical events were justified in so far as they ultimately helped to fulfil the teleological process of self-understanding of the *Geist*. In this case, Danto's theory will always find a justification for all art events, in so far as he believes them to be, in one way or another, part of the logic followed by the *Geist* of the *Kunstgeschichte*. Actually for Hegel, even the period of self-alienation of the *Geist* (i.e., the period of its self-misunderstanding) was also justified; he holds that it was a necessary painful moment in the process of reaching the final stage of self-understanding of the Spirit. Danto claims something similar when he says that:

In my own version of the idea of "what art wants", the end and fulfilment of the history of art is the philosophical understanding of what art is, an understanding that is achieved in the way that understanding in each of our lives is achieved, namely, from the mistakes we make, the false paths we follow, the false images we come to abandon until we learn wherein our limits consist, and then how to live within those limits. The first false path was the close identification of art with picturing. The second false path was the materialist aesthetics of Greenberg, in which art turns away from what makes pictorial content convincing, hence from illusion, to the palpable material properties of art, which differ essentially from medium to medium [...] in my sense, once art itself raised the true form of the philosophical question – that is, the question of the difference between artworks and real things – history was over. The philosophical moment had been attained [...]. To say that the history is over is to say that there is no longer a pale of history for works of art to fall outside of. Everything is possible. Anything can be art (*After*: 107 – 114).

However, the mere possibility of proving that previous historical paths were wrong, doesn't imply necessarily that a final (self-)understanding of art is or can be achieved at all. It rather shows that art may have followed wrong paths that are discovered as such only *a posteriori*, for example by discovering that some paths lead to theoretical *cul-de-sacs*. Yet Danto seems to expect that once these wrong paths are discovered, we are in position to tell what the correct path of art history is in a way analogous to the theory of negative theology: we know what God is by

knowing what God is not. But applying the theory of negative theology to art also has inconvenient consequences: we can only make *hypotheses* (not conclusive statements) about what God – and by analogy, the *Geist* of Art – might not be, without conclusively demonstrating what either of them *de facto* are.

D) Danto's eager claims about the end of art

After presenting his first paper on the end of art in 1984, Danto was accused of being self-contradictory because a few months later he began working as an art critic. How is it possible, for someone claiming that art had reached its end to expect, at the same time, to deal with newly produced artworks? Danto responded to this criticism by claiming that he never said that the production of art would end (*After*: 25 – 26): on the contrary, he believed that this new posthistorical period, marked as it was by a radical break with previous art, would lead to a new pluralistic and very creative era in art production.

Because he had proposed his theory of the end of art before he began his work as an art critic for *The Nation* – and thus before he acquired a much deeper understanding of the history of art – the objection could be reformulated differently. It could be argued that Danto was overly eager to produce a major philosophical statement with insufficient empirical evidence to validate this thesis. Danto claims, however, that his was an empirical claim not a philosophical one (Danto, 1999: 29). So in this case he could argue that he wasn't just playing with philosophical ideas but that he had already grasped empirically what was going on in art, even before beginning his career as an art critic. That career, he could say, only served to provide him with more material which confirmed his early hypothesis about the end of art.

Yet, as I have shown earlier, Danto's later approaches, after developing his career as an art critic, led him in *After*, to minimise his major claim, that in the posthistorical era anything can be presented as art – i.e., he says that in the posthistorical era, only 'with qualification, anything goes' (*After*: 47). Thus, perhaps, if he had thought of presenting the idea of the end of art for the first time

twenty years later, after further developing his career as an art critic, he would have hesitated to make such a grandiloquent claim.

Danto further asserts that after the end of art, there is a progressive dissolution of the boundaries between high art, craft and commercial art. In part, he argues this because he holds that the end of modern art meant the end of the Greenbergian aspirations of purity and faithfulness to the media of the different art disciplines. Given that both Greenberg's and Vasari's histories of art gave a central role to painting, the end of art meant also for Danto that painting was no longer *the paradigm* of art. This, he affirms, allowed for a greater pluralism, both in the production of artworks and in the introduction of new and previously unthinkable hybrid art disciplines: video art, sound art, land art, body art, happenings, site-specific art, and so on. It also permitted the introduction of new materials and media, leading to a new diversified panorama which questioned the previous distinction between art and craft. As he says:

[Painting], since no longer the chief vehicle of historical development [in posthistorical art], was now but one medium in the open disjunction of media and practices that defined the art world, which included installation, performance, video, computer and various modalities of mixed media, not to mention earthworks, body art, what I call "object art" and a great deal of art that had earlier been invidiously stigmatized as craft (*After*: 136).

In fact, he observes, the introduction in art of new media and materials, previously 'stigmatized' as craft, makes posthistorical art more similar to the art produced before Vasari (i.e., before 'the era of art') than to the art produced during Vasari's and Greenberg's narratives (*After*: 114). This, he argues, is because before Vasari there was not yet a clear distinction between art and craft. In posthistorical art, Danto argues, this difference is again blurred because, although 'with qualification', now everything is possible, even the introduction of craft objects as art.

Nevertheless Danto's claim, that posthistorical art (i.e., the art after the 60's) allowed craft objects, materials and media to be considered as art, is undercut by his acknowledgement that the breaking of these generic boundaries had already occurred in the period of Modernism. Modernist art, he observes, emphasised a

formalist appreciation of other sorts of cultural artifacts and works of craft, making it possible to consider them as art (*After*: 109). So in this case, contrary to what he claims, he recognises that it was already in Picasso's period, and not the art of the 1960s (when the end of art begins in his chronology), that these boundaries between art and craft began to break down. As he says:

During the course of modernism, African art rose in esteem, making a transition from the museum of natural history [...] to the museum of art and the art gallery [...]. When these objects became pivotal to the history of modernism, spectacularly in the case of Picasso, whose visit to the anthropological museum at Trocadero proved momentous for his own development and the subsequent development of modernist art, critics and theorists began to look at them in a new way, no longer seeing the need to distinguish between modern and "primitive" art, since they were presumed to be comparable at the level of form. Roger Fry wrote a powerful essay on "negro Sculpture" in 1920 and emphasized the immense change that had taken place [...] But in fact modernism dissolved a great many boundaries, largely by aestheticizing or formalizing objects from diverse cultures which Riegl's contemporaries [...] would have found beyond the pale of taste (*After*: 108 – 109).

Of course, Danto could answer that he never claimed that the difference between art and craft began to disappear with the end of the narrative of modern art. He could argue that actually his claim was that the new condition of pluralism in art that began with modernism *consolidated* in the post-historical period of art, without further discussion, the conversion of craft-objects into art objects. The claim would still be dubious, however, because today there is still considerable controversy about the extent to which craft objects ought to be considered as art (see for example: Corse, 2009; Lemkow, 2011b).

Additionally if, as Danto claims, it was formalism, during the development of modernism, which first allowed the appreciation of certain works of craft as artworks, then perhaps we could conclude that he was also too eager in disenfranchising formalism as vitally important in opening the pluralism typical of the era of 'posthistorical' art.

5. DICKIE'S EARLY INSTITUTIONAL THEORY OF ART

The debate over definitions of art among Weitz, Danto and Mandelbaum was later followed by Dickie's attempts to define art. Dickie's early definitions of art, however, raised even more objections than Danto's, partly because of his crude institutionalist stance, and partly because of his misconceptions about art. Further controversy was generated by some misinterpretations of Dickie's theories in relation to the rest of his philosophical ideas. As a result, he progressively reformulated the ideas he had first presented in 1969, to defend and refine the core of this earlier theory (DK1) and his earlier institutional definition of art (DK1Def). Later he presented a very different theory (DK2) and definition of art (DK2Def), although it remained an institutional theory. Dickie's later definition, however, will be examined in the next chapter and only his earlier definition and its subsequent refinements will be taken into consideration here.

Dickie's early definition of art was presented in his 1969 paper 'Defining Art'. As he explains in one of his more recent papers (Dickie, 2001: 52 – 53) two refinements of this earlier definition were presented in two of his later books, respectively in *Aesthetics, an Introduction* (hereinafter, *Introduction*) in 1971 and in his *Art and the Aesthetic* in 1974. The papers corresponding to or postdating these years reflect on the ideas presented in these later versions. Among Dickie's relevant papers that touch on the earlier and revised versions of this institutional definition of art are: 'The Institutional Conception of Art' ('Institutional'), 'Defining Art: II' ('Defining II'), 'A Response to Cohen: The Actuality of Art' ('Response') and 'A Reply to Professor Margolis' ('Reply').

Thus, to better understand Dickie's earlier institutional theory (DK1) and definition (DK1Def), we need to understand the changes he made in his different versions. To an extent, some of this has been done (Davies, 1991; Carroll, 1994). Nevertheless, as Dickie himself points out, these assessments often examine only one of his theories and definitions in isolation (as in the case of Davies's and Carroll's works mentioned above), thus leading to misinterpretations or unfair oversimplifications of the overall body of his thought and work – as Dickie protests later in responding to Davies's, Wollheim's or Danto's critiques (Dickie, 2001: 38 – 39; 53 – 54).

Further, when they look at Dickie's attempts to define art, the various different interpreters tend to isolate his ideas about the definition of art from his other earlier and later criticisms of theories of psychical distance (Bullough), aesthetic perception (Aldrich) disinterested attention or intransitive apprehension (Stolnitz, Vivas) and aesthetic object (Beardsley). This, I claim, is unhelpful, and as I will show, it overlooks the continuity and thus the internal consistency of what I claim to be Dickie's overall philosophical project. This project began in the mid-50's as a criticism of thinking that psychological-aesthetic explanations are required to understand how we identify and appreciate aesthetic features and artistic objects (Dickie, 1956). As he developed this project, he came to claim that psychological-aesthetic explanations of art were false because the identification, assignation and appreciation of the features of artworks were actually due to a set of norms and conventions internal to each type of 'art game' (Dickie, 1962: 299 – 300) or, as he says later in *Art and the Aesthetic*, some norms and conventions were internal to each 'system' of the artworld, and, some others, such as the act of 'status conferral', to the artworld itself as a whole (see: *Art and the Aesthetic*: 30 – 33).

If this is correct, then the already traditional (if not orthodox) interpretation, from Davies, Tilghman and others such as Danto, which argues that Dickie basically develops Danto's and Mandelbaum's theories, is wrong or at best only partial: Dickie's institutional theory, as Carroll suggests, is a consequence of his earlier critical reflections on the relevance of aesthetics to art (Carroll, 1994: 3; also in Carroll's section in the chapter on Dickie in: Davies, Higgins *et al*, 2009: 249). Moreover, it is later on, after attempting to refine and build on the logical implications of Beardsley's theories on metacriticism (i.e., which provide the basis for Dickie's institutional explanations, based on the role of norms and presentational conventions as the preconditions for art criticism) that he converges with Danto's interests. This convergence occurred as a result of both Danto and Dickie attempting to respond to Weitz's criticisms of any attempts to define art. I will demonstrate this in the course of the chapter.

Now, in order to understand better Dickie's earlier definition of art, I will examine in this chapter, the three versions of Dickie's early theory and definition of art

(DK1/DK1Def), that respectively correspond to ‘Defining Art’ (his DK1a theory, where he also presents his DK1aDef), *Introduction* (DK1b/DK1bDef) and *Art and the Aesthetic* (DK1c/DK1cDef). This will make the refinements of the theory more visible, and will also indicate where to look in order to better understand and critically examine the early stage of Dickie’s overall theory of art (DK1). In addition, the possibility of making a comparison between Dickie’s theories and Danto’s (examined in the previous chapters), provides a better opportunity to reveal some positive and negative elements of their thinking that are often ignored when examining only one of these philosophers in isolation.

I will attempt, however, to avoid repetition and to focus on the central aspects of Dickie’s three versions of his early definition of art. To do so, I will treat in each subsection just the novelties introduced in each definition and the modifications he thus introduced after each attempt at improving his DK1 theory. Only in few cases, and for heuristic reasons, will I eschew this procedure by referring to later developments of his theory. In fact Dickie attempted later, in *The Art Circle*, to reformulate his institutional theory of art completely (see Chapter 6) in reply to the objections his earlier DK1 theory had received. Owing to this, I will examine some of the problems in Dickie’s earlier theory in this chapter; and other objections, such as the problem of circularity, and Beardsley’s reflections on the Romantic artist, in the next. This is because Dickie’s later DK2 theory is in part a direct response to those objections.

5.1 DK1a: Dickie’s first paper on the institutional definition of art.

In ‘Defining Art’, Dickie presented the first version of his earlier institutional definition of art. Here, he attempts to respond to Weitz’s claim that art cannot be defined. To do so, he takes into account some of Margolis’s, Mandelbaum’s and Danto’s ideas, to develop further his own thesis.

Thus, he first endorses the idea that artworks correspond to the *genus* of artifacts and that the definition of art ought to be formulated in terms of *genus et differentia*

(Margolis²⁷). Secondly, he takes into account the relevance of the non-exhibited and relational properties of artworks (Mandelbaum). Finally he makes reference to an ‘artworld’ to explain the production of new instances of art (Danto).

To arrive at his first definition (DK1aDef), Dickie also takes into account Weitz’s idea about the difference between the evaluative sense and the descriptive sense when talking about works of art. In doing so, he attempts to avoid confusing evaluative claims about non-artistic objects that in a particular context might be metaphorically called ‘works of art’ (e.g., in such phrases as ‘this piece of driftwood is a work of art!’).²⁸ He also makes it clear that not all artworks are necessarily good artworks, but that *au contraire*, it is in fact fairly common to find bad works of art in galleries and museums.

In order to proceed with his attempt to define art, Dickie also responds to Kennick’s sceptical arguments against universal definitions of art that attempt to explain what art is by means of what we do with certain objects. Kennick is critical of such approaches, in part because we are largely ignorant of how past cultures related to art; Dickie responds that he is not engaging a universal concept (one that could also

²⁷ It is disappointing to see that often, if not always, Dickie’s interpreters have disregarded the influence of Margolis’s definition of art on Dickie’s. This influence can be traced to Dickie’s different versions of the DK1 definition and to his other reflections related thereto. It is thus worthwhile to quote here Margolis’s definition, for a heuristic comparison between his and Dickie’s definition (as well as to recover his early, and forgotten, attempt to define art) that shows their several similarities. Margolis argues that ‘a work of art is an artifact considered with respect to its design’. And he adds that ‘By “design”, I have in mind only the artist’s product considered as a set of materials organized in a certain way [...] I should say that critics of the various arts are, among other things, concerned to describe the design of particular works of art [...] we must define “work of art” in a value-neutral way to allow for speaking about evaluations of works of art [...]. To say that a work of art is an artifact is to say that some human being deliberately made it [...] corresponding to the artist’s being engaged in deliberate activity, the work of art he produces is said to have some purpose (Margolis, 1965: 44 – 45).

²⁸ Later, in *Art and the Aesthetic*, he adds Sclafani’s suggestion of a third sense of a work of art: the secondary or derivative sense of art. In doing so, Dickie now says that both the descriptive and the evaluative can be applied to works of art, while the secondary or derivative can be applied metaphorically to non-artistic objects.

refer, for example, to Egyptian art) but only ‘the concept of art which we have (we present-day Americans, we present day Westerners [...] since the organisation of the arts in or about the 18th century’[...])’ (‘Defining Art’: 254). Thus he avoids on the one hand the potential charge of anachronism, a criticism that applies to Danto and many other philosophers of art who attempt to define all historical types of art without pondering the theoretical risks of doing so. Dickie also avoids the charge of having presented an ethnocentric theory of art, claiming explicitly that he is only examining the concept of art ‘we present day westerners’ have, without necessarily precluding the idea that artifacts²⁹ from other, non-western cultures could also *de facto* be works of art.

Having made these limitations clear, and to develop his definition further, Dickie quotes Danto’s claim in ‘The Artworld’ that ‘to see something as art, requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of history of art: an artworld’ (‘Defining Art’: 209 – see also Chapter 2 on Danto’s ‘The Artworld’). Dickie claims that the *differentia* he seeks is the ‘atmosphere’ Danto is talking about, but understood as a social property. Thus Dickie introduces the idea that this particular social ‘atmosphere’ is constituted by ‘some society or subgroup of a society’, which acts upon certain artifacts and confers upon them ‘the status of candidacy for appreciation’. Hence, the first version of his earlier definition states that:

[DK1aDef]: A work of art in the descriptive sense is (1) an artifact (2) upon which society or some sub-group of a society has conferred the status of candidate for appreciation.

What follows in Dickie’s early paper is an attempt to clarify or qualify certain aspects of this definition. In the first place, he argues, being a candidate for appreciation doesn’t imply that the artwork will actually be appreciated (e.g., it may always remain hidden in a cupboard). Secondly, he says, not all aspects of the work of art are there to be appreciated (e.g., the colour of the back of the painting is not

²⁹ To be faithful to Dickie’s terminology, I will hereafter use the American version of the term ‘artefact’ (i.e., ‘artifact’).

there to be appreciated as part of the artifact *qua* artwork). Thirdly, he explains that the artwork is a candidate for appreciation within the system of the artworld, rather than within other systems such as, let's say, that of the carworld. A car with the status of candidate for appreciation within the carworld would not be an artwork, while a car with the status of candidate for appreciation within the artworld would be *de facto* a work of art.

Finally, Dickie stresses that being a candidate for appreciation is not the same as placing something before somebody in order to appreciate it. This is because Dickie, again in terms similar to Margolis, is well aware that one may be able to appreciate artworks, aesthetically or non-aesthetically, as well as any other objects, artificial or natural, without this implying that the latter are works of art.³⁰ Thus Dickie aims to show that an artwork receiving the status of candidate for appreciation, such as Duchamp's *Fountain*, differs from a mere non-artistic object, such as a non-artistic urinal placed before someone to be appreciated for its physical or aesthetic/visual properties.

To avoid confusing 'appreciation' with 'aesthetic appreciation', he explains that by appreciation he means 'the kind [of appreciation] characteristic of our experiences of paintings, poetry, novels and the like [...] something like "in experiencing the qualities of a thing one finds them worthy or valuable"' ('Defining Art': 255). He also stresses that some objects foreign to our current artworld may be enfranchised by this artworld system in order to allow appreciating them as artworks if and when candidacy status is conferred on them by a society or sub-group of this society. Nevertheless, he argues, this doesn't mean that once they are artworks, they lose their previous ontological condition. Thus Dickie supports the possibility that an artifact may be both a religious artifact and an artwork, implying neither an internal contradiction nor any ontological inconsistency at all ('Defining Art': 255). This latter idea would be irrelevant if it weren't the case that Dickie is clearly supporting a different position from Danto's: while Danto always argues in dichotomic-atomistic terms (i.e., something is one thing or another, following Danto's

³⁰ See also Margolis's reflections on the problem of conceiving aesthetics as central to the definition of art (Margolis, 1965: 42).

terminology, either an artwork or a ‘real’ object³¹), Dickie accepts that something may be both an artwork and the object it was before being enfranchised by the artworld.

In examining Dickie’s theory, it is also relevant to point out, as I stressed in the previous chapters, that his notion of the ‘artworld’ is different from what we find in Danto’s ‘The Artworld’ and in most of Danto’s references in *Transfiguration*. Dickie’s notion of ‘artworld’ is to be understood as a social atmosphere defined in legalistic terms and as a loose customary institutional practice, because *contra* Davies’s criterion, there are no codified lines of authority (see: Davies, 1991: 85 – 90). Additionally, the act of conferring the status of candidate for appreciation within the artworld doesn’t require any kind of formal utterance or ceremony to be socially sanctioned. In point of fact, Dickie argues, everything depends on the institutional setting which allows for the conferral of status of appreciation as a kind of christening, but in a very informal way.

This conception of the artworld is clearly different from Danto’s, the latter being understood in terms of the historically organised community of artworks. The only exceptions are those few cases where Danto later on refers to the artworld in terms of its members and institutions (see Chapter 3, Section 3.6C), and thus, inaccurately, brings his theory closer to Dickie’s notion of ‘artworld’, which he otherwise attempts to reject.

³¹ I put ‘real’ in inverted commas because in Chapter 3 on Danto, I have discussed the problem of how Danto contrasts artworks with ‘real’ things, as if it was clear what a ‘real’ thing is in opposition to non-real things in his theory (because maps, diagrams and artworks, for example are not *sensu strictu* real things for him). Additionally there is the huge ontological problem of contrasting anything (semantic vehicles of meanings, for example, such as words, illocutions or artworks) to ‘real’ things, without clarifying whether these other non-real things are illusions, transcendental ideas, supra-real entities and the like, or if Danto was just talking about ‘real’ and non-real things in the loose sense.

5.2 DK1b: Dickie's revision of his earlier attempt to define art

After presenting the first version of his early institutional definition of art in 'Defining Art', Dickie offers a more thorough formulation of it (DK1bDef) in his book *Aesthetics, an Introduction* (henceforth *Introduction*) – retaining many of the ideas first introduced in 'Defining Art' and adding a number of new reflections that help him better support his institutional approach. In *Introduction*, however, he modifies his previous definition, now formulated in the following terms:

[DK1bDef]: A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2) upon which some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld) has conferred the status of candidate for appreciation.

This DK1b definition now presents the idea of 'acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld)'. In saying this, he now explicitly states in the definition, that the candidacy of appreciation is given by a person or persons that form part of the artworld and that acts on behalf of it. However, Dickie insists that even if a person or persons might act on behalf of the artworld, this doesn't mean that the artworld is a formal institution. He still stresses that the artworld is an informal institution, that is, that it functions informally, at the level of customary practice, without any defined lines of authority and lacking any codified procedures (*Introduction*: 103). He argues for this because he thinks that an excessively formal conception of the artworld would undermine the 'freshness and exuberance of art' (*Introduction*: 104). Then he goes on to state that the artworld is informal to the extent that anyone 'who sees himself as a member of the artworld is an "officer" of it and is thereby capable of conferring status in its name' (*Introduction*: 104).

Before, in 'Defining Art' (DK1a), Dickie had raised the example of the paintings made by Betsy the chimpanzee and argued that if these paintings were exhibited in the Chicago Art Institute rather than in the Baltimore Zoo, they would then be regarded as artworks. This, he claimed, would be because everything would depend on the institutional setting. The problem with this argument, however, is that it seemed to imply that if this were the case, then Betsy ought to be seen as an artist. To avoid this implication, he now argues in *Introduction* (DK1b), that the work

shouldn't be attributed to Betsy but to the (human) person(s) responsible for the conferral of its status. This is because Betsy would be incapable of seeing herself as an agent of the artworld. Only a human conferrer would be able to see himself/herself as such an agent.

This idea, pointing towards the relevance of human intention in art, was in fact already implicit in 'Defining Art'. There, Dickie argued that a society or sub-group of a society could *confer the status* of candidate of appreciation although actually that status would be conferred *by a single person* (i.e., a person conferring a status implies a *human being, intentionally* doing so) and in fact he finally talks *explicitly* about the role of human intentionality in his later book *Art and the Aesthetic* (see: *Art and the Aesthetic*: 46).

However, there is an apparent internal inconsistency in that original DK1a claim: there, he says that a sub-group of a society confers the status, but he later goes on to say that only a single person can do so. Thus he further clarifies this idea in *Introduction*, observing that:

A number of persons are required to make up the social institution of the artworld but only one person is required to act on behalf of or as an agent of the artworld and to confer the status of candidate for appreciation [...] of course nothing prevents a group of persons conferring the status, but it is usually conferred by a single person, the artist who creates the artifact (*Introduction*: 103)

In considering whether a single person or a group may confer the status of candidacy for appreciation, Dickie avoids the Romantic ideal of the artist understood as a lone producer. That ideal is often implicitly endorsed by Danto and other philosophers, who tend to assume the conception of an artwork as being *always* the product of a single artist. Dickie avoids this, because he takes into account the fact that in theatre or in films, and even often in painting and sculpture as well, the work is the product of a group of people: the primary artist and his collaborators, the director and his film crew, and so on.³²

³² It is surprising that even Danto passes over the fact that many of Warhol's artworks made in *The Factory* resulted from this collective way of artmaking.

However, while avoiding the Romantic notion of the lonely artist, Dickie also accepts that often it is a single person, for example the director or the primary artist, who finally decides whether the work is the thing that will be exhibited as the artwork, or just a sketch/essay of the artwork to be exhibited at some later time.³³ Dickie also makes it clear that while a given person or a group of people cannot be mistaken *in* conferring the status of candidacy for appreciation on some artifact, they nevertheless may be accountable *for* that conferral. This is clear in cases where the status is conferred on a bad or inferior artwork.

Additionally, in *Introduction*, Dickie further clarifies an idea he had held in 'Defining Art' – the idea that the 'status conferral' is analogous to the process of christening. He now adds in *Introduction* the *proviso* that '[just] as christening a child has as its background the history and structure of the church, conferring the status of art has as its background the Byzantine complexity of the artworld' (*Introduction*: 107). Presumably, then, the background of certain historical and structural elements, similar to those required to understand and support the complex of institutions and practices underlying religious rituals, are also relevant for the artworld. This is, however, just a presumption because, as Sclafani argues, the analogy with 'christening' is left unexamined, hence leaving many questions concerning the act of 'christening' artworks unanswered (Sclafani, 1973: 113 – 114): Dickie neglects to clarify what he means by the 'Byzantine complexity of the artworld' or to what degree it is possible to extend his analogy between the history and structure of the church and its rituals and that of the artworld and its institutionalised actions and procedures – e.g., who can confer the status of candidacy, and with what powers is he invested? Which are the conventions that allow the process of 'christening' artworks? etc.

Cohen also criticises Dickie for failing to provide a thorough examination of the notions of 'conferring the status of candidacy for appreciation' and of 'christening'

³³ In the case of painting, or as an 'unfinished' version of the performance in the case of theatre and cinema.

(Cohen, 1977). He suggests that Dickie's notions fail, because he argues that while Dickie thinks that anyone can make this type status conferral (or that anyone can 'christen' an artwork), this seems to be far from what actually occurs.

In order to prove this, Cohen claims that there are constraints in artmaking (Cohen, 1977: 188), which, he argues, shows that Dickie is wrong in thinking that anyone can confer status. Cohen argues that only artists previously enfranchised by the artworld who have previously shown their mastery in art – by making previously more socially-accepted types of artworks as, for example, Duchamp did with *Nude Descending a Staircase* before he presented *Fountain* – can go on and confer the status of candidacy of appreciation to other more problematic objects. Yet, Cohen's attempts to find a better way to explain Dickie's notion of conferring status by understanding this act analogously to the illocutionary act of 'promising' (Cohen, 1977: 189 – 193), fails. This is because Cohen interprets Dickie to be supporting the idea that artworks, like promises, can be made by everyone, while Dickie clarifies much later in 'Wollheim's Dilemma' (1998) that he never thought that anyone could make art, but that he thought that only artists could do it.³⁴

5.3 DK1c: Dickie's final revision of his early attempt to define art

After presenting a second version of his earlier definition of art, Dickie felt it necessary to further revise some aspects of his theory. In the first chapter of *Art and the Aesthetic* he provides his third and final version of his early definition (DK1cDef). He also adds a number of reflections and *provisos* by way of clarification. In fact, most of the ideas submitted in *Art and the Aesthetic* are already contained in the papers 'Institutional' and 'Defining II', as well as in his response to Cohen ('Response').

³⁴ In the next Section I present a more detailed account of Dickie's claims concerning the agents of status conferral in DK1 which show that – to be fair with Cohen (and Wollheim) – until his 1998 paper 'Wollheim's Dilemma' Dickie was very unclear about who could confer status in art and who couldn't.

Now, Dickie summarises in *Art and the Aesthetic* the final version of his early definition of art (DK1cDef) as follows:

[DK1cDef]: 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).

In this new version, of Dickie's early definition, he introduces the idea that it is not an artifact *in toto* but a set of its aspects that have obtained the status of candidacy for appreciation by means of the procedure of status conferral. This reinforces the idea that the object of appreciation is not the artwork *broadly speaking*, but rather *a set of aspects* of an artifact that the established conventions and norms of the different systems and subsystems of the artworld allow. These are the target of (artistic) appreciation.

In proposing this, Dickie is presumably also attempting to clarify that what is conferred is not the *status of art* but rather the status of candidacy *for (the) appreciation of a set of aspects* of a given artifact so to present it as an artwork. Later criticisms, however, such as those of Wollheim, show that Dickie was not clear enough about this idea. This is because Wollheim tends to understand Dickie as talking about the act of conferring the *status of art* upon artifacts (see: Wollheim, 1984; 1992 [1980]). As a result, Dickie insists in his paper 'Wollheim's Dilemma' that in his DK1 theory what is conferred is not the status of art but rather the status of candidacy for appreciation (to a set of its aspects). In *Art and Value*, Dickie also criticises Davies for making the same misinterpretation as Wollheim, although he concedes that part of the problem may have arisen from his previous characterisation of the act of status conferral (Dickie, 2001: 38 – 39).

Thus, Dickie is not completely fair in 'Wollheim's Dilemma', because in *Art and the Aesthetic*, before introducing his definitions, he talks about Duchamp conferring the *status of art* on his works (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 32 – 33). He then attempts to be more specific, presumably to avoid the type of misunderstanding Wollheim had made, but in the process he reinforces even further the identification of the act of conferring the status of candidacy of appreciation with the act of conferring the

status of art. This can be observed in his assertion that '[the] definition will be given in terms of artifactuality and *the conferred status of art* or, more strictly speaking, the conferred status of candidate for appreciation' (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 33 – 34; italics mine). In fact, to add more confusion, at the end of the chapter, Dickie talks again about conferring the status of art, rather than about conferring the status of candidacy for appreciation to a set of aspects of a given artifact. Thus he says that 'a mistake cannot be made *in conferring the status of art*, a mistake can be made by conferring it. *In conferring the status of art* on an object one assumes a certain kind of responsibility for the object in its new status' (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 50; italics mine).

Moreover, Dickie's ambiguity concerning the act of status conferral leads Wollheim to argue, also *contra* Dickie's intentions, that Dickie's theory implies that the status of art can be conferred by anybody elected or self-elected, thus having the appropriate status within the institution of the artworld. Dickie, owing to this, insists in 'Wollheim's Dilemma' that, in his final DK1c reformulation, he attempted to make it clear (a) that he never talked about conferring the status of art but about conferring the status of candidacy for appreciation (Dickie, 1998: 129 – 130); and (b) that only artists can confer the status of candidacy for appreciation (Dickie, 1998: 131).

Yet, to be fair to Wollheim (and Cohen – see previous section), it is nevertheless true that, at the time he presented his critique, it was never very clear whom Dickie considered capable of conferring status. In the earlier definition, he proposes that the status is conferred 'by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld)'; later, in his 1974 book, he talks about 'artists [as those who] create the works' (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 36) although later on in the same book he is again ambiguous about those capable of conferring status. Thus, he says that 'the status is *usually* [i.e., not always] conferred by a single person, the artist who creates the artifact' (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 38; italics mine). Moreover, he even claims, in relation to the example of the paintings of Betsy the chimpanzee being exhibited in the Chicago Art Institute, that:

For example, a year or two ago the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago exhibited some chimpanzee and gorilla paintings. We must say that these paintings are not works of art. If, however, they had been exhibited a few miles away at the Chicago Art Institute they would have been works of art – the paintings would have been art if the director of the Art Institute had been willing to go out on a limb for his fellow primates [...]. Please note that although paintings such as Betsy's would remain her paintings even if exhibited at an art museum, *they would be the art of the person responsible for their being exhibited* [e.g., the director of the Art Institute?]' (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 45 – 46; italics mine)

Now, in 'Wollheim's Dilemma' Dickie tries to close this debate, on the notion of 'status conferral' and on the idea that artists are those responsible for making artworks. Yet while we must take Dickie's late clarifications in 'Wollheim's Dilemma' of his earlier DK1 ideas at face value, we should concede here that Wollheim's critique (and that one of Cohen that I have earlier examined) is also perfectly valid.

As to the idea that what is to be appreciated is a set of the aspects of the work, not the work *in toto*, I have mentioned earlier that Dickie already argued, in 'Defining Art' and in *Introduction* that some parts of the artwork – the colour of the back of the painting, for example – are not there to be appreciated by the artworld public. But now Dickie feels compelled to introduce this in the definition, perhaps in order to reinforce also the connection with his pre-1969 views, before he first published his paper 'Defining Art'. In these pre-1969 papers, especially in 'Is Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics?' (1962 – two years before Danto's publication of 'The Artworld') and in his 'Art Narrowly and Broadly Speaking' (1968), Dickie had already postulated a requirement for the identification of the aesthetic features of artworks for art criticism: the previous endorsement by the public of a set of conventions and norms, corresponding to the different types of 'art games', that would help isolate the relevant features of those artworks.

It is now possible to see how Dickie's final version of his early definition in *Art and the Aesthetic* (DK1cDef) is continuous with the theories he had presented before he outlined his institutional definition of art. If this interpretation is correct then it is also plausible to argue that Danto's 'The Artworld' (1964) – *contra* the criterion of

Davies, Tilghman, Stock and Danto himself – is not so much the main source of inspiration for Dickie (Danto, 1981: viii; Davies, 1991: 81; Tilghman, 1984: 48; also in Stock's section on 'Definitions of Art' in: Davies, Higgins et. al., 2009: 232) but rather the logical implication of his previous views. This is because his attention, before 1964, was already directed towards defending an institutional approach to critical appreciation in art, and he had begun to develop it, at least, as early as the 1962 paper mentioned above.

Thus, in the preface of *Art and the Aesthetic*, Dickie explicitly distinguishes his theory from Danto's and stresses that it comes from a different source.³⁵ In this preface, he explicitly traces the continuity of his thought from his pre-1969 papers which argue against the aesthetic attitude and perception theories. He also explains the genesis of his institutional definition of art as mainly the logical development of Beardsley's ideas rather than Danto's. Moreover, it is noteworthy that in this preface he avoids relating his theory to Danto's by not mentioning him at all. Below I give a long quotation to prove this, because the true origins of Dickie's views have been systematically ignored by interpreters and critics:

When I first began teaching aesthetics in 1956, I assumed, without having thought about it, that [...] an aesthetic attitude, is a necessary ingredient of and a foundation for any aesthetic appreciation of art or nature [...] I began using Monroe Beardsley's *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* for my aesthetics course [...]. The account of the field of aesthetics that Beardsley gives in his book in no way depends on the notion of the aesthetic attitude [...]. The significance of Beardsley's omission, that aesthetics does not rely on the aesthetic attitude, was not apparent to me at first [...]. About 1961, I used an aesthetic-attitude text for my course and in the middle of the term came to feel [...] that the aesthetic-attitude approach was profoundly mistaken [...]. The search first took the form of a deeper criticism of psychical distance, was later broadened to include criticism of other aesthetic-attitude theories, and led finally to an attempt to give an account of the aesthetic object which is free of

³⁵ Although it must be stressed also that his previous book *Introduction* follows a structure parallel to Dickie's theoretical development: from the critique of aesthetic theories he had already presented before 1969, to the institutional definition of art that he developed in 1969 and later. Such a structure seems to invite the readers to conclude that Dickie's later theory derives from his pre-1969 theories, rather than from Danto's 'The Artworld' (even if Danto's paper was an important source of inspiration for Dickie).

dependence on the conception of aesthetic attitude. This account followed the general metacritical approach of Monroe Beardsley, although I rejected some parts of his theory and developed notions he leaves undeveloped. In 1967, as a commentator on a paper by Morris Weitz, I began thinking about Weitz's well-known claim that "art" cannot be defined. This endeavour resulted in a short paper on the topic which subsequently went through several stages of development [...] I then realized that the conception of aesthetic object which I had worked out earlier is also an institutional concept and came to think that perhaps the institutional concept of art and the institutional concept of [the] aesthetic object might be brought together as related features of a single theory. This book is the attempt to develop such a theory (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 9 – 11).³⁶

Thus Dickie attempts to demonstrate that his institutional definition of art is in part a logical implication of his reflections on the failure of the aesthetic theories to explain the nature and preconditions of the experience of artworks. His institutional approach also appears to be the logical implication of the (partial) success of Beardsley's attempt to clarify the principles that organise the preconditions for art criticism.³⁷

Finally, to make it clear that his theory derives from Beardsley, rather than from Danto, Dickie also acknowledges, later on, that: '[in] developing my own conception of [the] aesthetic object I will be following the lead of Monroe Beardsley. In so doing, it will be necessary to reject one part of his theory and to develop a network of ideas underlying his theory but not explicitly recognized by him' (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 147). Later still he adds that '[in] the Preface to this book I claimed that the theory of art developed in Chapter 1 and the theory of aesthetic object [based on Beardsley's theory of metacriticism] worked out in this chapter are parts of a single institutional theory. That they are two parts of a single whole is perhaps now clear' (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 179). Dickie's theory, then,

³⁶ Some of the papers Dickie refers to in this Preface, that predate his institutional definition of art but that provide the theoretical basis for this type of institutional definition, are: 'Bullough and the Concept of Psychological Distance' (1961), 'Is Psychology Relevant to Aesthetics?' (1962), 'The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude' (1964), 'Beardsley's Phantom Aesthetic Experience' (1965), 'Attitude and Object: Aldrich on the Aesthetic' (1966), 'Art Narrowly and Broadly Speaking' (1968).

³⁷ Beardsley does this, particularly, by means of the principle of distinctiveness and the principle of perceptibility.

contra the criterion of some interpreters (such as Davies: see Chapter 7), is not so much in opposition, but rather in continuity with Beardsley's.

Actually, in *Art and the Aesthetic*, Dickie not only attempts to improve his earlier definitions of art. He also attempts to clarify what he means by the artworld, particularly its institutions, conventions and procedures.

Dickie argues that the different institutions of the artworld, such as that of the theatre *qua* set of established practices and conventions, come from a long tradition that can be dated at least back to ancient Greece (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 30). He thinks that this is relevant to justify the continuity of 'an established way of doing and behaving' fixed by a set of 'primary and secondary conventions' of a given system (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 33; 174 – 175). Thus, Dickie argues that Primary conventions indicate to the audience how to relate to the different artworks; secondary conventions indicate, rather, how to identify the relevant aesthetic features of artworks that will be the object of critical assessments and appreciations (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 174 – 175).³⁸

To clarify further what he understands by the artworld *qua* institution, Dickie cites the *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* in order to stress that by institution he means 'an established practice, law, custom, etc.' rather than 'an established society or corporation' (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 31), because some of his interpreters had misunderstood this point. The misunderstanding, however, would later persist, particularly supported by Wollheim's caricature of the artworld as a sort of society or corporation of members nominated by obscure procedures and making almost random decisions in relation to art that would be hardly accountable to society (Wollheim, 1984).³⁹ In addition, Dickie argues that the artworld is in fact

³⁸ To understand better Dickie's criticism of the aesthetic attitude as precondition for art criticism and his stressing that such attitude is only a product of a 'primary convention', see also Chapter 4 in *Art and the Aesthetic* (particularly the paragraphs corresponding to: *Art and the Aesthetic*: 102 – 105).

³⁹ This leads him to ask: '[is] there really such a thing as the artworld, with the coherence of a social group, capable of having representatives, who are in turn capable of carrying out acts that society is bound to endorse? (Wollheim, 1984: 15).

constituted by an open, and often overlapping, bundle of systems or subsystems (sculpture, theatre, literature, music, painting, etc.) that have emerged in different historical moments and that provide the basis for the introduction of very different instances of art. In fact, Dickie argues that '[one] central feature all of the systems [within the artworld] have in common is that each is a framework for the presenting of particular works of art' (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 31).

In pointing out these two ideas, Dickie allows for the elasticity and creativity that, as Weitz also stresses, is characteristic of art (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 48). Thus artworks do not depend on the existence of institutional corporations or a particular enclosed *locus*. They are a set of practices determined *only* by the norms and conventions of the tradition of each of its systems. When new atypical artworks are introduced in these systems, Dickie argues, then a new subsystem can be introduced allowing different procedures and artworks to appear without disrupting the tradition. Thus, for example, he argues that it seems plausible to think of 'happenings', as arising from the theatre system as a new subsystem (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 33).

However, even if Dickie understands the notion of the artworld institution as an established set of practices, laws, and so on, nevertheless he asserts that in order successfully to conduct these practices, a 'minimum core' of roles is required. The 'minimum core' is constituted by the 'presentation group' (the artist or artists who create the work), the presenter(s) (actors, curators, etc.), and the 'goers' (i.e., the general public that appreciate the works – *Art and the Aesthetic*: 36). Of course, one person can perform some or all of these roles, as for example a lonely Robinson Crusoe making art on an island and appreciating it himself. Once this presentation group exists, additional roles can be introduced, such as those of producers, museum directors, newspaper reporters, critics for publications, art historians, art theorists, philosophers of art, and so on (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 35 – 36).

The important issue here is that the institutionalised roles performed in the artworld and the primary and secondary conventions of artworks, 'must be learned in one

way or another by participants. For example, a theatregoer [...] is a person who enters with certain expectations and knowledge about what he will experience and an understanding of how he should behave in the face of what he will experience' (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 36).

Once these conventions are endorsed, then it is possible for someone seeing himself/herself as an agent of the artworld, to act on behalf of it and to confer the status of candidate of appreciation to a set of aspects of an artifact. He/she does this apart from some other better known actions such as drawing representational figures, painting the canvas, etc. (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 32). In conferring this status of candidacy for appreciation, Dickie argues, the relevant aspects of the work will be available for appreciation and critical assessment as a work of art.

5.4 Some problems with Dickie's theory

A) Dickie's notion of 'appreciation'

Dickie stresses very clearly that by 'appreciation', he doesn't mean 'aesthetic appreciation' but a more generic type of appreciation, which can be directed as well towards both non-artistic objects *and non-aesthetic artworks* possessing qualities worth appreciating *qua* relevant parts of the work to be assessed. As he says in *Art and the Aesthetic*:

I shall argue later [...] that there is no reason to think that there is a special kind of aesthetic consciousness, attention or perception. Similarly, I do not think there is any reason to think that there is a special kind of aesthetic appreciation. All that is meant by "appreciation" in the definition is something like "in experiencing qualities of a thing one finds them worthy or valuable", and this meaning applies quite generally both inside and outside the domain of art (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 40 – 41).

These reflections may have been in part a response to Cohen's critique of the idea of thinking that all artworks are 'candidates for appreciation': Cohen claims, quoting Fried, that Dickie's criterion fails because Dada attempted to introduce new instances of art that couldn't be appreciated at all (Cohen, 1977: 185 – 186). Cohen

seems to be on the right track about Dada's rejection of traditional value or quality in art. Nevertheless he is surely wrong in arguing that this shows that Dadaist artworks cannot be appreciated in Dickie's sense. In that regard he seems to take Dickie's notion of 'appreciation' wrongly in the restrictive sense of what Dickie terms, and rejects, as 'aesthetic appreciation'.

Dickie, in his 'Response', is nevertheless ambiguous about how to understand the notion of 'appreciation'. He goes on in this paper to claim that no objects couldn't be appreciated (i.e., when understanding appreciation in the generic non-restrictive sense). However, when he focuses specifically on the example of Duchamp's *Fountain*, he seems to claim that this artwork, *contra* Cohen's criteria, could actually be appreciated in aesthetic terms in much the same way we would appreciate the works of art of Brancusi and Moore. As he says:

Fountain has many qualities which can be appreciated – its gleaming white surface, for example. In fact it has several qualities which resemble those of works of Brancusi, and Moore. Also, the very things which Cohen cites as paradigms of things which cannot be appreciated – ordinary thumbtacks, cheap white envelopes, and plastic forks – have appreciable qualities which can be noted if one focuses attention on them [...] it is unlikely that any object would lack some quality which is appreciable ('Response': 199 – 200).

As a result of this response which seems to contradict Dickie's previous rejection of aesthetic appreciation, it is necessary to clarify these reflections. To do so, we need to take into account Dickie's ideas that:

- 1) What makes an artifact an artwork is not its possession of any aesthetic features. Rather, as Dickie controversially claims, to be an artwork it is enough for it to be immersed in the institutional framework of the artworld. This, he argues, allows one to confer the status of candidacy for appreciation on a set of aspects of that artifact, when one is acting on behalf of the artworld.

- 2) Non-artistic objects can be worthy of appreciation. This becomes clearer when, for example, we apply the evaluative or derivative sense of art to non-artistic objects (e.g., this piece of driftwood is beautiful! It is a work of art!). Thus, non-artistic artifacts can be the object of aesthetic appreciation and even of appreciation in Dickie's broader sense, and yet not be works of art because they are not located within the institutional matrix of the artworld.

Now, when these ideas are taken into account, it becomes clearer that Cohen and other critics such as Iseminger fail to see the distinction Dickie makes between 'appreciation' of artworks and 'aesthetic appreciation'. In doing so, they also fail to see Dickie's distinction between the domains of 'art' and 'aesthetics'.

However, it is also true that Dickie's response to Cohen is in a sense superfluous because if artworks don't require aesthetic properties in order to be artworks, then it is not really important whether or not *Fountain* has a gleaming white surface similar to the works of Brancusi or Moore. It would suffice to say that the important thing is that a set of primary and secondary conventions, within a certain artworld system, allow the 'appreciation' of a set of aspects of this artwork in question, independently of whether *Fountain* has aesthetic features similar to Brancusi's and Moore's or not. The problem here is that for Dickie there is no 'aesthetic' type of appreciation but only appreciation in this generic sense; yet, to better shield his theory from objections, he nonetheless responds by talking about aesthetic appreciation, thus leading, to even more confusions concerning the notion of 'appreciation'.

Dickie's ideas are yet more ambiguous when he refers to 'aesthetic objects' when talking about artworks (*Introduction*: 47 – 68; also: *Art and the Aesthetic*: 147 – 181). In doing so, he explains, he is basically trying to make clear that by 'aesthetic object' he means Beardsley's coined notion of 'the object of criticism' (*Introduction*: 61) and more specifically 'the object of appreciation and/or criticism' (*Introduction*: 68); here 'appreciation' is understood to be the un-aesthetic and more generic type of appreciation he repeatedly points out he is referring to.

Furthermore, when talking about the act of conferral, Dickie seems to be claiming that those features of the artwork that are to be appreciated, in the sense of being ‘worthy or valuable’, are the product of the secondary conventions (as Iseminger understands Dickie’s theory: Iseminger, 1976), while in fact this is not the case. Dickie claims instead that the secondary conventions *distinguish* those pre-existing features, within the artifact, both aesthetic and non-aesthetic, that are to be part of the artwork, and thus that are ‘worthy or valuable’ for appreciation, from those that aren’t.

From this standpoint, then, Iseminger’s critique also falls short, because both he and Dickie think that aesthetic features exist *prior* to primary and secondary conventions. Thus Dickie would agree with Iseminger’s claim that:

[Appreciation] surely can take place outside the artworld [...] the central claim of the institutional theory of the aesthetic – that the status of a state of affairs as aesthetic is conferred in accordance with the convention of the artworld – must be wrong. The importance of the artworld lies not in its making the aesthetic possible but rather in its facilitating the aesthetic, by encouraging the production of things whose function is to be appreciated and by providing a suitable context in which they may be appreciated (Iseminger, 1976: 130)

In fact, given that Dickie rejects the idea of aesthetics as a necessary condition for artworks, he cannot be considered a supporter of what Iseminger understands to be ‘an institutional theory of the aesthetic’. Rather, he supports an institutional conception of the aesthetic object (see: *Art and the Aesthetic*: 11), understood in terms of its being ‘an institutional theory of the object of (artistic) appreciation and/or criticism’, something that Iseminger clearly fails to see.

Iseminger is on the right track, however, if what he is really trying to do is to point out that Dickie’s articulation of his ideas in DK1 is misleading. Thus, he could claim that his attempt is actually to correct Dickie by stating that what he (Dickie) in fact means, but fails to state clearly, is that what is conferred is a *status* for artistic appreciation/criticism on a set of pre-existing aesthetic and non-aesthetic features of an artifact. If Dickie does not clarify this, then his theory might be

wrongly interpreted as claiming that the features to be appreciated are always aesthetic features and that they don't predate the artwork but are always the product of the secondary conventions of the various artworld systems (i.e., as if Dickie supported an 'institutional theory of the aesthetic').

Thus to avoid confusion about the notion of appreciation in DK1, Dickie's latest version of his definition ought to be as follows (let's call it DK1c*Def because of the change of (2) for (2*); the suggested modifications are in my italics):

[DK1c*Def]: A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2*) which has had conferred *upon a set of its pre-existing aesthetic and non-aesthetic aspects, by a series of conventions*, the status of being candidate *for criticism (or critical appreciation)* by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld).

However there remains a problem. Responding to Cohen's critique, Dickie argues that, if we follow his own notion of 'appreciation' in generic terms, then anything could be appreciated. But if this is so, what is the point of introducing the notion of 'appreciation' in his definition to clarify what an artwork is? To meet the objection, Dickie ought to claim explicitly in his definition, that an artifact is an artwork only when it is a candidate for appreciation *within the artworld*. Thus the revised definition (DK1c**Def) could be as follows (again the suggested modifications are in my italics):

[DK1c**Def]: A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2**) which has had conferred upon a set of its pre-existing aesthetic and non-aesthetic aspects, by a series of conventions, the status of being a candidate for criticism (or critical appreciation) *in a certain social institution (the artworld)* by some person or persons acting on behalf *of this institution*.

B) Dickie on the artworld and the diversity of rules and procedures in art

Given that Dickie's definition of art is dependent upon the institutional setting of the artworld and its institutionalised conventions and procedures, he is obliged to

clarify what these conventions and procedures are, and how they relate to the artworld settings. More particularly, Dickie's earlier controversial claim in DK1a ('Defining Art'), concerning the analogy between the process of christening and that of status conferral, required further explanation. In order to do this, he later claims in DK1b (*Introduction*) that to better understand the analogy, it is necessary to understand and take into account the history and structure of the church and the 'Byzantine complexity' of the artworld.

Unfortunately, in DK1b, Dickie leaves aside any further examination of this 'Byzantine complexity' of the artworld and only later, in his paper 'Institutional', examines it more thoroughly. He does this by introducing the idea of the artworld as a particular form of life. The ideas summarised in this paper, as a sort of experimental and sympathetic first approach to Wittgenstein, are later revived in his book *Art and the Aesthetic*, where he introduces his DK1c definition of art. However, there he leaves aside any further suggestion of understanding the artworld as a form of life, perhaps because of objections similar to those Tilghman later made, that his conception of the artworld is actually very different from Wittgenstein's original notion of 'form of life' (see: Tilghman, 1984: 47 – 70)

Dickie does persist, however, in *Art and the Aesthetic*, with his reflections about the nature of the artworld. He does this by insisting that the artworld is historically constituted by a set of systems and subsystems that may have an ancient origin, such as is the case of theatre. He also claims that to exist, the artworld requires a 'minimum core' of members constituted by artists, presenters, and 'goers' (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 36).

Now, in conceiving the artworld as historically constituted by a set of even more basic systems, a number of concerns arise in relation to his definition of art. More particularly some problems arise concerning Dickie's idea that there is a common procedure (i.e., conferring the status of candidacy for appreciation) that would make possible the introduction of instances of art within the artworld.

Firstly, there is a problem with the idea that the artworld is constituted by its systems and subsystems: in claiming this, Dickie is suggesting that to understand

the institutionalised procedures of the artworld, it is necessary to first understand the institutionalised conventions and procedures *of the systems and subsystems* that together constitute this artworld. However, if this possibility is seriously held, it may turn out that the procedures and rules of the various different art systems and subsystems diverge from each other to the extent that is not possible to find a unique procedure (such as conferring the status of candidacy for appreciation) available in all the art disciplines within the artworld. If this is so, it would jeopardise Dickie's efforts to find a universal definition of art in terms of the unique convention whereby the status of candidacy for appreciation is conferred.

Another problem arises when Dickie suggests that it is plausible for these different art systems to have been associated in the past with very different institutionalised practices and corporations. He argues, for example, that theatre has been historically associated with such different institutions as Greek religion and the Greek state in its origins; the church in medieval times; and with private business and the state today (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 30). Owing to this, he allows for the possibility that the procedures of the different systems of the artworld, such as the theatre-system, may have radically changed since ancient times in response to changes in the social and political demands of the different institutions and practices with which it was associated.

Yet, after arguing in favour of the development of the different artworld systems (i.e., in this case of the theatre-system) in relation to other institutions and practices, he nevertheless insists that 'what has remained constant with its own identity throughout its history is the theatre itself as an established way of doing and behaving' (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 30). But surely this is too much of a concession, and in fact begs the question, as to whether this is actually so. Moreover, even if we concede that theatre *may* have remained *more or less* within the same 'established way of doing and behaving' since ancient Greece (something about which I have serious reservations), it is not clear that the same occurred with other systems constitutive of the artworld, such as let's say, the music system.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Larry Shiner, for example, argues in his *The Invention of Art* that both the theatre system and the music system underwent important changes in the course of its recent history since at least the 18th

Moreover, Dickie argues in his paper ‘Institutional’, following Weitz’s reflections, that in the course of time it is perfectly acceptable to modify the rules of some sorts of games, apparently without this implying much ontological difficulty. As he says:

At any given time the rules of major-league baseball are set, that is, closed. The reason, as Weitz correctly states, is the need to have definitive criteria to ensure that all disputes on the field can be resolved – the game must go on. However periodically [...] it is possible to change the rules. For example, it has been suggested recently in the newspaper that the rules may be changed so that the foul lines in back of first and third base are angled out slightly [...]. We have the closed concept “major league baseball” at time one. Then at some time when the concept is not being applied [...] the concept is opened up, altered and closed. And finally we again have a closed concept – “major-league baseball” at time two (‘Institutional’: 22 – 23).

If this is so, then it is possible to argue analogously that some rules of an artworld system, understood as a game of sorts, valid at time one, could also be changed at time two. This could be done, for example, by introducing a new procedure for ‘conferring the status of candidacy for appreciation’ in art to ordinary objects at time two, without this implying much of a problem for the practice of artmaking in general.

However Dickie has some reservations in this case as to the extent to which the concept has suffered a change or has been altogether replaced by a different one (‘Institutional’: 23). Furthermore, he could argue that his remarks about games cannot be extrapolated to art: he seems to think that, in different way from the concept of ‘major league baseball’, the concept ‘art’ (or the subconcept of theatre or painting, for that matter), has been clearly the same all along because the same rules are always applied. (This seems to be the implication in *Art and the Aesthetic*: 32).

century. He insists that a number of rules and procedures were introduced that radically modified the practices of its ‘presenters’ and the expectations and the behaviour of its publics (‘goers’), and as a result the works, practices and types of performances of its ‘artists’ (Shiner, 2004).

Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, Dickie also takes into account the possibility that from time to time, new sub-concepts or subsystems (he often uses these notions interchangeably) may appear, so as to make possible the creative introduction of new unexpected instances of art, without this leading to problems in the long run ('Institutional': 29; *Art and the Aesthetic*: 33).

If this is so, then it could be argued that the procedure of 'conferring the candidacy of status for appreciation' is characteristic of the subsystem 'Dadaist sculpture' arising out of the artworld system 'sculpture' to allow the creation of new readymade instances of art. This would not imply, however, that the 'sculpture' system would thus have to share the same procedure characteristic of its newly created subsystem. In fact Dickie is often aware of the fact that different rules may apply in different art games or art systems (Dickie, 1962: 299 – 300; Dickie, 1968: 75), or even within the same type of artistic system (of the theatre, for example, when he says that 'there is no point in trying to lay down rules to which every play must conform independently of the kind of play it is': Dickie, 1964: 57), without implying any ontological problem or contradiction or even the idea that a different concept is being used. Thus, he shouldn't have any substantial problem either in accepting the existence of different conventional procedures in the different art systems.

Moreover, Dickie points out in *Art and the Aesthetic* that '[the] obstacle to creativity no longer exists [...] [If] the new work is very unlike an existing work then a new subconcept will probably be created. Artists today are not easily intimidated, and they regard art genres as loose guidelines' (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 48). In this case, then, the conferral of the status of candidate for appreciation could be just a loose guideline, maybe amongst others, characteristic of a new type of art genre or subsystem (Dadaist sculpture) that appeared in the early 20th century.

C) Dickie's implicit 'Trojan' fourth definition of art?

From Dickie's first formulation of his earliest definition of art in 1969 to the final formulation (of his earliest definition) in 1974, he brought to bear several new ideas in the attempt to respond to the criticisms that his theory received. He also progressively modified his early definition in an attempt to make it more accurate.

Even so, it is debatable whether Dickie's third version of his definition (DK1cDef) is a valid definition of all art. Moreover, Dickie introduced other ideas, when justifying his position, that could have improved that early definition but which nevertheless he did not include as part of his definition (i.e., in DK1bDef or DK1cDef). This may have been in part because he didn't want radically to modify the core of his DK1 definition, but just to add a few improvements to it.

Nevertheless, in adding further detailed reflections on the nature of the artworld, and on the 'aesthetic object' *qua* institutional object of (artistic) appreciation and/or criticism, he accidentally formulated an implicit definition of art that acted as a sort of 'Trojan horse'. This is because this 'Trojan' definition was (implicit) in Dickie's theory, although was different from and incompatible with those definitions he had explicitly given and which have so far been presented in this chapter (i.e., DK1aDef, DK1bDef, DK1cDef); in fact, this 'Trojan' definition would render possible a very different definition from those summarised above, and that would be presented later in his 1984 book *The Art Circle* (DK2def).

Additionally, one of the most striking aspects of Dickie's DK1 definitions is his concern to explain in detail the *differentia* of artworks, while leaving its *genus* (i.e., condition (1) of the definition) undeveloped in each of his subsequent revisions (DK1aDef, DK1bDef, DK1cDef). The problem with this, as Davies also points out (Davies, 1991: 123 – 141), is that it remains unclear what Dickie really means by an artwork being an 'artifact'. So clarifying what Dickie means by 'artifact' might also be of help in clarifying what Dickie thinks art is and to determine whether the different interpretations in current analytic aesthetics of Dickie's DK1 definitions are correct or not.

It is on reprinting his *Introduction* in 1997, with the slightly modified title of *Introduction to Aesthetics - An Analytic Approach* (hereinafter *Introduction1997*), that Dickie first provides an explicit definition of artifactuality for his DK1 definition. It is important to note, however, that this definition is in accordance with his later DK2 definition, presented in *The Art Circle* (1984). In his *Introduction1997*, in accordance with his new ideas in *The Art Circle*, he defines ‘artifact’ as ‘an object made by man, especially with a view for a subsequent use’ (*Introduction1997*: 83). Note however that this definition is a reformulation, corresponding to his DK2 period that he also applies *in retrospect* to his earlier implicit view concerning artifactuality.

In fact, Margolis had earlier criticised Dickie for failing, during his DK1 period, to provide any account or justification whatsoever for why artifactuality would be the *genus* of art. After the publication of *Art and the Aesthetic*, Dickie responds in his 1975 paper ‘Reply’, with the assertion that Margolis does not provide any justification for his (Margolis’s) idea that artworks are artifacts either. However, Dickie might be wrong, because actually Margolis’s explanation of why an artwork is an artifact, seems to provide a good justification of why it is so. Actually Margolis says that ‘to say that a work of art is an artifact is to say that some human being deliberately made it [...] corresponding to the artist’s being engaged in deliberate activity, the work of art he produces is said to have some purpose’ (Margolis, 1965: 45). So it seems that Margolis defines artifactuality, more or less, as ‘something made deliberately by a human for some purpose’; and as such he justifies that ‘artifactuality’ is the *genus* of art (i.e., because he believes artworks, as a *species* of artifactuality, *ipso facto* are to be considered as man-made and deliberately created for some further purpose). Note the similarity between this conception of artifactuality and Dickie’s later DK2 definition of artifact above.

Now, it is unclear to what extent Dickie in DK1 already shares the same conception of artifactuality as Margolis. Clearly, in the works in which we find DK1a and DK1b, he takes a different position from Margolis, claiming that artifactuality is not due to an act of creation (the condition of having been made) but to an act of status

conferral. However, in DK1c he is no longer sure that artifactuality is the sort of thing that can be conferred, at least in cases such as that of the exhibited driftwood (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 45). In any case, in *Art and the Aesthetic* he would still disagree that an artifact is *necessarily* the product of an act of creation, as Margolis argues, although he doesn't explain what type of action makes something an artifact. As for the other elements of Margolis's conception of artifacts, they seem to be endorsed by Dickie in his DK1 period, when contrasting natural objects with artifacts (i.e., the latter involving some type of human agency intending to use the object in one way or another). So in this case Dickie seems to understand implicitly the notion of 'artifact' in *Art and the Aesthetic* as:⁴¹

(1*) an object with a status conferred or acquired by means of a human agency, especially with a view to a subsequent use

Thus, if the above (plausible) implicit definition of 'artifact' suggested in *Art and the Aesthetic* is introduced in his DK1cDef, the definition would take more or less the following form (note that below I modify only part (1) of the definition, corresponding the notion of 'artifactuality' that I have attempted to clarify, and leave part (2) untouched – i.e., as is already presented by Dickie in DK1c):

[DK1c+(1*)Def]: A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1*) an object with a status conferred or acquired by means of a human agency, especially with a view to a subsequent use (2) a set of its 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).

Or, if introduced in its revised form DK1c**Def presented in Section 5.4-A, after taking into consideration the problems of its original version, it would run as follows:

⁴¹ Note: the suggested definition is introduced as (1*) rather than as (1) because it is just an attempt to reconstruct Dickie's implicit definition of artifact, from the clues given and the language used in his paper *Defining*, as well as in his books *Introduction* and *Art and the Aesthetic*. Also I have taken into account the explicit definition of artifactuality in his *Introduction1997* and Margolis's definition of art and artifact as guidelines for Dickie's (possible) implicit definition of 'artifact'.

[DK1c**+(1*)Def]: A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1*) an object with a status conferred or acquired by means of a human agency, especially with a view to a subsequent use and (2**) which has had conferred upon a set of its pre-existing aesthetic and non-aesthetic aspects, by a series of conventions, the status of being a candidate for criticism (or critical appreciation) in a certain social institution (the artworld) by some person or persons acting on behalf of this institution.

In any case, Dickie, in stressing the artifactual condition of artworks, implies that an artwork *qua* artifact is always to be regarded as being for some subsequent use. Furthermore, he persists with the idea that an artwork, or some of its features, exists in order to be appreciated within the artworld system(s) and in order to be the object of (art) criticism. Given both ideas, there is an additional reason for thinking that Davies is not completely successful in his attempt to understand Dickie's institutional/procedural definition of art as a definition unconcerned with the function of art, and hence in his attempt to show that Dickie's theory radically differs from Beardsley's functional theory of art (Davies, 1991). In this regard, Rowe and Oppy point towards the idea that if Dickie regards artworks as human artifacts, then they ought to be understood as functional items, having either a particular use or function (Rowe, 1991) or a diversity of proper uses or functions that may or may not be fulfilled in particular instances of art (Oppy, 1993).

Dickie also argues that artists do not have much trouble in introducing radically new instances of art; this is not only because they often create new artworld systems or subsystems for this specific purpose, but also because they take the rules of these new systems or subsystems just as loose guidelines for the production of new instances of art (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 48).

Now, this seems to be incompatible with Dickie's assertion that all artworks are ultimately the product of an action of 'conferring the status of candidacy for appreciation': if conferring this status were enough to produce art, then the creation of new subsystems in art and the usage of the rules of each art system and subsystems, as loose guidelines for artmaking, would be unnecessary. Also note, *vice versa*, that if the rules are just loose guidelines for artists, and if new

subsystems can come into being allowing creativity and freshness in art, then this universal act of conferral becomes unnecessary.

In the case of theatre, Dickie insists that '[what] the author, management, and players present is art, and it *is art because it is presented within the theatreworld framework*. Plays are written to have a place in the theatre system and *they exist as plays, that is, as art, within that system*' (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 30; italics mine). He also claims that '[one] central feature all of the systems have in common is that *each is a framework* for the presenting of particular works of art' (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 31; italics mine). What he is actually claiming here, then, is that something is art if it loosely follows the rules *of the system it pertains to*, rather than if it strictly follows the rules or procedures *of the artworld in general* (i.e., the alleged general rule of conferring the status of candidacy for appreciation). This is because he insists that the framework of reference for understanding artworks is always the system or subsystem it pertains to, rather than the whole artworld in general.

In short, considering all this, Dickie's assertion that artists, in order to create art, follow a strict general rule that consists in conferring the status of 'candidate for appreciation' on their works, completely misrepresents the complexities of his real views.

Thus if we take into account Dickie's alternative reflections, summarised here, to explain what an artwork is within a particular system, an implicit definition arises. This implicit definition undermines Dickie's explicit insistence on the act of status conferral and on the idea of a person or persons acting on behalf of the artworld. It also allows a transition towards the new definition he is going to propose in his DK2 period, where he, in fact, disregards these two notions, as well as others held so far in his DK1a, DK1b and DK1c theories.

This 'Trojan' definition, let's call it DK1(t)Def, if we take into account the additional reflections in *Art and the Aesthetic*, can be stated as follows – note that I

will call (2t) the second part of this ‘Trojan’ definition DK1(t)Def so to clearly distinguish it from the others:

[DK1(t)Def]: A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1*) an object with a status conferred or acquired by means of a human agency, especially with a view to a subsequent use (2t) which has had a set of its aspects specifically directed towards public presentation. This set of aspects is presented in accordance with the primary and secondary conventions of a particular artworld system or subsystem. The conventional presentation of this set of aspects allows them to be the proper object of criticism (or critical appreciation).

6. DICKIE'S LATER INSTITUTIONAL THEORY OF ART

Dickie's theory soon drew the attention of many aesthetic theorists from the analytic tradition. However, Dickie's insistence, against many objections, on the institutional nature of art, led to the accusation of his providing oversimplifying explanations of art and artistic practices. He was also accused of misconceiving the types of institutions involved in artmaking and art exhibiting. Revising his ideas in response, he ultimately presented a theory of art different from that discussed in the previous chapter, as DK1.

Dickie's later institutional theory and definition of art (hereinafter, respectively, DK2 and DK2Def) were first sketched out in his paper 'The New Institutional Theory of Art' ('New'), and were fully developed in his book *The Art Circle*. Further reflections came in his *Introduction to Aesthetics, an Analytic Approach* (the 1997 revision of his earlier *Introduction* – i.e., *Introduction1997*) and in his recent book *Art and Value* (*Value*). Other relevant papers published after presenting his DK2 definition are: 'Art: Function or Procedure: Nature or Culture?' ('Nature/Culture' – Also in his *Art and Value*); 'Art and the Romantic Artist' (later introduced in *The Art Circle*: this paper forms part of a selection of articles about Beardsley and is briefly replied towards the end of the book in: Fisher, 1983: 300 – 301); and 'Wollheim's Dilemma' (also summarised in: *Value*: 63 – 71). The latter was presented in the previous chapter because in this paper Dickie basically attempts to defend his earlier DK1 theory against Wollheim's criticisms.

6.1 Dickie's DK2 theory in relation to the earlier DK1 version

Dickie insists that his later theory (DK2) and definition (DK2Def) are an attempt to correct his earlier ideas to the extent that they have to be conceived as a clearly different approach from his DK1 conception of art (*Circle*: 7; *Introduction1997*: 82; *Value*: 52). However, and to Dickie's dismay, this new DK2 theory – together with its definition and its implications – have been generally ignored by major figures like Danto, Carroll and Davies, when they attempt to describe Dickie's institutional

theory. These philosophers often talk about Dickie's DK2 in terms of DK1's theory and definitions – for example, when misconceiving Dickie's later DK2 theory in terms of its DK1 notion of status conferral (as in: Davies, 1991; also in Stock's section on 'Definitions of Art' in: Davies, Higgins et. al., 2009: 232). In other cases, DK2 has been taken as irrelevant to a proper representation of Dickie's theory *qua* institutional theory (Carroll, 1999b); in other cases it has been simply ignored (as Dickie protests about Danto in: *Value*: 55 – 56).

It is true that in DK2 and DK2Def, Dickie keeps some elements first presented and developed in DK1 and the three versions of DK1Def. For example, he still endorses the idea of the artifactual nature of artworks. He also continues to argue that the institutional framework of art is constituted as an informal practice guided by a set of informal rules and conventions. However, in this new definition, Dickie leaves aside most of the formal and legalistic terminology that he now sees as inadequate for explaining an informal practice such as artmaking. He also recants most of the ideas presented in part (2) of his DK1aDef, DK1bDef and DK1cDef that attempted to explain artmaking in terms of an act of status conferral analogous to the act of christening.

Thus, on the one hand, it is possible to argue that the core of Dickie's DK2 theory is already contained in the several DK1 versions, and as a result, that an examination of DK2 also requires taking DK1 into account. Ignoring the changes Dickie introduces in DK2, however, as the above mentioned authors did, brings us no closer to explaining Dickie's institutional theory as it is currently understood. There are in fact important implications in the changes he introduced in DK2, in his attempt to explain anew the (institutional) nature of art.

That said, the general tendency to ignore the content of DK2 theory in favour of the earlier versions of DK1, is in part Dickie's own fault. To be sure, he does defend, against the misconceptions of his critics, ideas in DK1 that he later goes on to repudiate. Dickie is thus responding, later in his DK2 period, to the objections (particularly those of Cohen and Wollheim – see: *Value*: 54; 63 – 71; also in 'Wollheim's Dilemma') raised against those aspects of DK1 that he has already rejected. But those responses are irrelevant and misleading when we are trying to

understand DK2 – because the changes introduced in DK2 *per se* already render these objections beside the point. Perhaps he ought not to have responded at all, because by doing so, he seems still to endorse the earlier ideas he no longer holds.

Dickie's DK1 theory, as I have argued in the previous chapter, had several controversial aspects; others, misleading at this stage, needed further clarification. Dickie made several attempts to resolve these problems in successive revisions of DK1, but several other problems remained, and his theory is still widely contested.

One of the problems that remained in all of the DK1 versions, and that Dickie attempted to correct in DK2, was his earlier insistence on the central role of the act of status conferral in art. This idea lacked any kind of empirical evidence, and appeared implausible (see for example: Wollheim, 1984). Further, Dickie's idea that certain artifacts were artworks in virtue of their institutional placement rather than in virtue of having a nature distinctively different from other types of artifacts, was counterintuitive. Moreover, Dickie's argument reminded some critics of Euthyphro's way of presenting his argument about piety⁴² (see: Young, 1995; also Davies, 1991: 78).

Additionally, Dickie's attempts to refine DK1, led to a succession of larger and thus more ungraspable definitions. This was because in DK1 he focused upon increasingly refining condition (2) of the definition. This implied a growing unbalanced relation between condition (1) – that is, just being an artifact, without any explicit clarification of what an artifact was – and condition (2) where Dickie defines *the differentia* in relation to the *genus* of artifactuality of artworks. Critics noted as well that the circularity in the DK1 definition, when explaining art in terms of the artworld, could not explain the meaning of the term 'art' without already presupposing it in the definition (i.e., because the definition contained the term to be defined).

⁴² i.e., the argument that piety is good because the gods like it; an argument that is contested by Socrates/Plato who says that the correct formulation seems to be the other way round: that is, that gods like piety because it is good.

In DK2, Dickie sets out to solve these problems and to reinforce nevertheless the plausibility of an institutional definition of art. To do so, his focus of attention now is part (1) of the *definiens* (i.e. artifactuality) rather than part (2); that is to say, the *differentia* that had become by then the larger and more complex part of the definition. In fact, he claims now that ‘the whole approach is through the artifactuality condition and although the new definition retains the two part form, it will be evident that the two parts are intimately related’ (*Circle*: 11).

To do this, he explicitly defines for the first time, in ‘New’, the nature of artifactual objects *qua genus* of artworks (‘New’: 216). By doing so, he can now have a better chance to construct a more adequate definition of art. This is because in DK1, as we have already seen (in Chapter 5), he had simply offered the idea of artworks as members of the *genus* artifacts without explicitly defining what an artifact is. Unfortunately, he thus obscured a relevant part of the definition of art. He now attempts to correct this flaw, but the implications of these later efforts to clarify explicitly the meaning of artifactuality, in DK2, seem not to have always been grasped completely by certain critics. This can be observed for example in Rickman’s paper on Dickie’s conception of artifactuality – that is contested in a very brief but emphatic response by Dickie (see: Rickman, 1989; Dickie, 1989)

6.2 Dickie’s reformulation of his institutional theory and definition of art

As in the case of DK1, Dickie’s new DK2 institutional definition of art cannot be fully understood without taking into account his debt to Beardsley. In this case, Dickie accepts Beardsley’s criticisms in relation to the types of institutions that his DK1 theory seems to endorse (Beardsley, 1976). The basis for Beardsley’s criticism is that Dickie attempted to make it clear, in his three versions of DK1, that the artworld ought to be understood as an informal institution, without defined lines of authority or strictly codified rules and procedures; yet, his notions of ‘status conferral’, ‘candidacy for appreciation’ and ‘acting on behalf’ of the artworld, sounded to Beardsley – and to Wollheim and Danto as well – much like the actions typical of institutions, organisations or legal bodies with formally codified

regulations and norms (in fact Dickie has acknowledged this problem explicitly in: *Circle*: 67).

Hence Dickie accepts Beardsley's criticism concerning the need to distinguish between institution-types and institution-tokens – or, following Wieand's distinction, between action-institutions and person-institutions (*Circle*: 52). Institution-tokens/person-institutions are organisations such as General Motors, the Church of Rome, or the Tate Modern. Institution-types/action-institutions are institutionalised actions that may or may not involve institution-tokens/person-institutions. For example, storytelling or marriage, Dickie says, would be typical action-institutions. Offering food to visitors, or saying 'hello' as a way of welcoming somebody, are also action-institutions that do not require any organisation or corporation for them to exist. However, institutionalised actions of the sort of status conferral are action-institutions that do involve person-institutions (i.e., in the form of organisations, corporations or legal bodies). This is because such actions always involve collective actors, such as the judicial system of a country (conferring the status of heir on someone), the church (conferring marital status) or a constitutional monarchy (conferring knighthoods and other honours). Thus Beardsley insists that Dickie's misleading terminology seems to indicate that artmaking *qua* action-institutions involves person-institutions, but this is actually contrary to what Dickie sets out to establish. So Dickie also accepts Beardsley's suggestion that art as an action-institution doesn't require any person-institution to exist.

As a result, Dickie's new definition of art (DK2Def) leaves aside this type of legalistic terminology and is now presented as follows:

[DK2Def]: A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.

To better grasp the meaning of this definition, it is worth taking into consideration also Dickie's definition of artifact [Af] as:

[Af]: An object made by man, especially with a view to subsequent use.

Thus we can understand art in DK2Def, provisionally, as (in italics the *definiens* of [Af] introduced in [DK2Def] in place of the term ‘artifact’):

[DK2Def+Af]: A work of art is *an object, made by man, especially with a view to subsequent use*, of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.

In this definition Dickie attempts to make clear that the action involved in submitting new instances of artifacts, and hence also of art, is always *an act of making*, rather than a product of the formal act of status conferral, as he had suggested in DK1. This implies that, as he remarks in *The Art Circle* and in his response to Rickman, the act of pointing and calling something ‘art’, as in the case of Dalí doing this with some rocks, is not an act of making (the rocks are neither altered nor used) and thus Dalí would not thereby be creating an artifact nor hence an artwork out of them (*Circle*: 46; Dickie, 1989). One of the most important consequences of this change in Dickie’s view is that he no longer supports the idea that *anything* is possible in art. This represents a relevant alteration in his theory that has important ontological implications for the types of objects that can or can’t be artworks. It should also be pointed out that this new consideration is in disagreement with Danto’s D3 theory (see Chapter 4), which supports the idea that after the end of art, it is possible to present anything as an artwork.⁴³ Thus Dickie asserts the following concerning the creation of artifacts and artworks:

It now seems to me that artifactuality is just not the sort of thing that can be conferred and that *Fountain* and its like must be construed as the artifacts of artists as the result of a kind of minimal work on the part of those artists [...]. An added benefit of this change is that the minimal work requirement acts as a limiting factor on the membership of the class of works of art, a factor which so many have pointed out is

⁴³ Later he slightly modifies this idea by claiming that anything is possible in art although with certain *provisos*.

lacking in the old version. According to the new version, it is clear that not everything can become a work of art (*Circle*: 11 – 12)

Even if Dickie does accept most of Beardsley's critique – that he had introduced an excessively formal and legalistic terminology in his DK1 definition of art – he also claims that Beardsley is not completely right in his criticisms. In particular, he disagrees with Beardsley's claim that understanding art as an action-institution independent of person-institutions allows artists isolated from art institutions to create art in a way that renders the institutional theory incorrect.

Hence, Dickie asserts that '[in] a way, what I shall want to argue against Beardsley is that although an artist can withdraw from contact with various of the institutions of society, he cannot withdraw from the institution of art because he carries it with him as Robinson Crusoe carried his Englishness' (*Circle*: 49 – 51). This is because, for Dickie:

- 1) The institution of art is an action-institution, that is, an *institutionalised action*, that doesn't require, in particular, any corporation to exist (such as the Saatchi and Saatchi Gallery, the Royal Academy of Art, and so on).
- 2) An artist, in order to be one, needs to be somebody already acquainted with certain cultural notions about art *qua* action-institution. Thus, even if an artist is isolated from institutions, he cannot be incapable of producing art because, as an artist, he already carries with him certain cultural notions about the institutionalised actions involved in artmaking and art appreciation.

Actually, his new DK2 approach, that insists on the idea of artmaking as an action-institution, leads him to cast aside his earlier terminology about the role of *institutions* in art. In DK2, he supports the idea that the framework required to produce art should be understood in terms of a *cultural matrix*, rather than in terms of an institutional matrix or framework that contains some actions socially

sanctioned or institutionalised. As he argues, ‘what I now mean by the institutional approach is the view that a work of art is art because of the position it occupies *within a cultural practice*, which is of course in Beardsley’s terminology an institution-type [i.e., an action-institution]’ (*Circle*: 52; italics mine). Then he says more specifically that ‘[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’ (*Circle*: 55; italics mine)

This change of perspective and terminology has major implications for Dickie’s theory, even though Beardsley argues that these changes render Dickie’s thesis trivial (in Fisher, 1983: 300). Now Dickie believes that artworks, *qua* artifacts, are man *made* objects, and the only requirements for them to exist, are:

- 1) That the person who makes them is situated within a cultural matrix or acculturated in some way or another.
- 2) That the (artifactual) work is made with a certain cultural understanding of art. This understanding is that the work in question is to be presented to, and estimated by, a particular stable type of acculturated public, capable of seeing the work as distinct from other types of cultural artifacts.

As a consequence, the only cases in which an isolated individual would be incapable of producing art wouldn’t be, as we have seen earlier, an artist who lives in an ivory tower, or an artist who (like Robinson Crusoe carrying his Englishness with him) carries with him the action-institution of art. It would be rather a member of a primitive tribe lacking the most basic notions of art (*Circle*: 55) or someone completely isolated since the very beginning of human culture, such as a sort of Romulus-figure (Hagberg, 2002). As Dickie says:

Beardsley’s notion of a Romantic artist, as I have interpreted it, holds open the possibility that art-making in at least some cases could be totally a product of individual initiative, a process which could occur in a cultural vacuum. Suppose that a

person totally ignorant of the concept art (the member of a primitive tribe or the culturally isolated individual mentioned above, for example) and unacquainted with any representations were to fashion a representation of something out of clay [...] he would not have any cognitive structures into which he could fit it so as to understand it as art. Someone might make the mistake of identifying art with representation (a deeply ingrained identification) [...]. Once this temptation is put aside, we can see that the creator of the representation cannot recognize his creation as art and that, therefore, it cannot be art [...]. In the case in question, the person who creates the representation could not have the relevant thought or thoughts because he lacks the relevant cognitive structures (*Circle*: 55).

6.3 Towards a cultural theory of art

In fact Dickie's conception of the *institution* required for artmaking progressively changes: first, in DK1, it is understood as a particular 'regional' institution (i.e., the artworld) that exists at least in Western cultures (this seems to be implicit in his reflections in: 'Defining': 254; also in: *Art and the Aesthetic*: 28). In DK2, the artworld is presented as being a *human institution* ('New': 217). There he explains that artmaking is a cultural phenomenon and as such subsumes the artworld institution under the institution of human *culture* ('New': 219, *Circle*: 52). This formulation takes its fullest shape in *Introduction1997* and *Art and Value*. Thus in chapter 7 of *Introduction1997* Dickie talks about the existence of a new direction in art theory (taken by Mandelbaum, Danto, Cohen and himself) that stresses the central role of cultural context (*Introduction1997*: 77); in fact, it is worth pointing out that in this short section (barely half a page) he uses the word 'cultural' as many as seven times to clarify this distinctive approach. It is also relevant to point out that this way of talking about his own theory (and that of the other above mentioned philosophers) cannot be found in any of his papers or books previous to DK2.

Furthermore, in *Art and Value*, and in his paper 'Nature/Culture', he finally decides to classify his institutional theory as a cultural theory of art, as an alternative to Davies's suggestion of classifying it as a procedural theory (Davies, 1990; 1991 – for a detailed account of Davies's view of procedural theories of art, see Chapter

7).⁴⁴ Owing to this, Dickie now stresses that cultural theories of art such as his are to be contrasted with natural theories (rather than with functional theories) that explain art in terms of biological/psychological mechanisms (in ‘Nature/ Culture’; also in: *Value*: 33 – 51).⁴⁵ In fact, in *Art and Value*, Dickie argues that art is not a natural product arising from the human species *qua* biological sub-product. He argues, perhaps in an oversimplified manner, that the theories supporting this latter approach conceive of humans making artworks in the same way that bower birds make bowers. Against this, Dickie argues that art is a cultural phenomenon and not just the product of simple physical human instinctual labour (*Value*: 20 – 46).

With this later conception of art as a cultural phenomenon, Dickie now claims that his own methodological approach is closer to that of an anthropologist than to that of a philosopher (*Value*: 12 – 31). Actually he stresses in *Art and Value* that his theory has been, since the very beginning, more anthropological than Danto’s (*Value*: 7).

Thus, in DK2 Dickie now distinguishes between the artworld framework and the cultural framework. He does this in order to claim that the precondition of art is the cultural framework which allows the appearance of art and, with it, its structurally related institutional elements (that presuppose each other): that is to say, not only the artworld, but also the artist, the artworld public, etc. (*Circle*: 84). In fact, Dickie argues, the artworld structurally arises together with the first works of art, and he also claims that each of the elements related to art presuppose and ‘bend in’ on each other in a circular or an ‘inflected’ manner (*Circle*: 79). Where in DK1 he seemed to endorse the idea that the artworld was the actual precondition of art, in DK2 he claims something entirely different, based on his conception about the interrelatedness of this set of elements. Owing to this, he lays claims in DK2 that his theory is now to be understood as a structural theory of art (*Value*: 42).

⁴⁴ Interestingly, Davies later on in *The Philosophy of Art* accepts Dickie’s alternative classification.

⁴⁵ The classification of his theory as cultural rather than natural is already implicit in *Circle*, where he distinguishes between cultural objects such as artworks, and natural objects (*Circle*: 98).

Furthermore, Dickie says that the artworld ought to be understood as constituted by a number of roles (as core members): Thus he says that ‘described in a somewhat more structured way, the artworld consists of a set of individual artworld systems, each of which contains its own specific artist roles, plus specific supplementary roles’ (*Circle*: 74). These roles, he says, first appear as a consequence of the progressive institutionalisation of a certain type of acculturated human labour (artifact-making). The first artworks thereby produced are then first addressed to a transitional particular type of public possessing certain knowledge about how to deal with them. As Dickie says:

[It] is perfectly reasonable to suppose that art did not have the instantaneous beginning that the Romantic-origin thesis requires. Art may have emerged (and no doubt did emerge) in an evolutionary way out of the techniques originally associated with religious, magical, or other activities. In the beginning these techniques would have been no doubt minimal and their products (diagrams, chants and the like) crude and in themselves uninteresting. With the passage of time the techniques would have become more polished and specialists have come to exist and their products would have come to have characteristics of some interest (to their creators and others) over and above the interest they had as elements in the religious or whatever other kind of activity in which they were embedded. At about this point it becomes meaningful to say that primitive art had begun to exist, although the people who had the art might not yet have had a word for its art. (*Circle*: 56)

6.4 Dickie’s set of interrelated definitions in DK2

Dickie thus concludes that artworks are intrinsically embedded within the structure of the artworld, once this structure has gelled (*Value*: 62). This, he claims, occurs as a result of the evolution of the institution of culture which progressively allows the institutionalization of a number of activities that are finally grouped together as art. This does not imply, however, that the making of art requires an explicit knowledge of these correlative or co-dependent (i.e., circularly-inflected) structures, but merely, at least, to have some previous experience with certain types of art (*Circle*: 54).

What, then, are these other co-dependent or circularly-inflected elements that Dickie considers constitutive of the institution of art *qua* action-institution? They include the following: the artist, the work of art, the public, the artworld and the artworld systems. However, the definitions of these elements, he argues in *The Art Circle*, need not follow a particular order when being presented (*Circle*: 80). He defines them as follows (*Circle*: 80 – 82):

- (I) An artist [At] is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art
- (II) A work of art [DK2Def] is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public
- (III) A public [Pb] is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them
- (IV) The artworld [Aw] is the totality of all artworld systems
- (V) An artworld system [AwS] is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public

Before examining how these definitions relate to each other, and more particularly to examine *in extenso* Dickie's new definition of artwork (here summarised as DK2Def), some explanations are required.

First, the reason Dickie proposes this series of definitions is his need to respond to the accusation that his theory is circular. In *Circle*, he argues that in DK1 he just didn't have any problem with agreeing that his theory was circular (*Circle*: 12). He even argues that this previous definition wasn't viciously circular (*Introduction1997*: 92). Furthermore, in these two books, he accepts that his new DK2 version is circular, although he now claims that the reason why these concepts are circularly interrelated is that they form part of an 'interrelated system': the different interlocking definitions he provides attempt to show that they have an inflected nature *qua* cultural concepts. They refer to different roles, systems and

actions that once arose together and thus can only make sense in their interrelatedness.

Secondly, although Dickie introduces these definitions explicitly and together here, none of them, except that of ‘work of art’, are very different from the explanations of these concepts he provided earlier in DK1. In particular, the definitions of ‘artworld’ and ‘artworld system’ are almost identical. Also, the definitions of ‘artist’ and ‘public’, although not explicitly summarised in DK1, carried implicitly the same meaning, given that Dickie already insisted there on the fact that both artists and public, to perform these roles appropriately, need to have some basic notions about the rules and conventions of the various different artworld systems (*Art and the Aesthetic*: 36). Perhaps the only additional idea in DK2 is Dickie’s claim that the understanding which both public and artist must have is not merely an understanding of the conventions and procedures of art. It is also necessarily an understanding of the different artistic media as well (*Value*: 59 – 60), and the understanding that comes with the process of acculturation, corresponding to a society that already makes and appreciates the most basic types of artworks.

Thirdly, we should note that Dickie’s definition of ‘public’ is not a definition of an ‘artworld public’; it is merely a definition of ‘public’ in general. This will avoid confusion when we attempt to reconstruct the whole definition of art – which I will do here, by substituting each of the terms in the definition of a work of art [DK2Def], by its *definiens* whenever Dickie provides it in his DK2 series of interrelated definitions: that is, the *definiens* of [Af], [At], [Pb], [Aw] and [AwS]).

Thus, it is possible to reconstruct Dickie’s DK2 implicit definition. To do so, let us consider again the definition of art [DK2Def] summarised earlier, together with that of artifactuality [Af]:

[DK2Def+Af]: A work of art is an object, made by man, especially with a view to subsequent use, of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.

If we introduce the *definiens* of ‘public’ [Pb] into this definition we derive the following (the suggested modifications are in italics; hereafter, I will substitute, in

the last part of the definition, ‘the’ – in brackets – for ‘an’, as this seems to be more in accordance with the rest of the definition):

[DK2Def+Af+Pb]: A work of art is an object, made by man, especially with a view to subsequent use, of a kind created to be presented *to a set of persons from the artworld, the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand [the] object which is presented to them.*

However, to continue ‘unfolding’ Dickie’s new definition of art, it is not possible to substitute the term artworld [Aw] by its *definiens*, as Dickie currently presents it, as ‘the totality of all artworld systems’. This is because, presumably, he doesn’t believe that a particular artwork has to be appreciated by the publics of *all* the artworld systems, but only by at least some of them. The more plausible interpretation of Dickie’s definition when incorporating the modified *definiens* of [Aw], would run as follows (modifications in my italics – I shall also slightly modify the second section of this definition by cutting it in two parts, so to make it more comprehensible):

[DK2Def+Af+Pb+Aw]: A work of art is an object, made by man, especially with a view to subsequent use. *This object is* of a kind created to be presented to a set of persons *from, at least, a subset of the totality of all artworld systems*, the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand *the* object which is presented to them.

Next we can substitute the term ‘artworld system’ [AwS] by its *definiens*. Observe that in the following definition, the term ‘artist’ included in [AwS] will be introduced earlier when referring to the maker of the artwork *qua* artifact (again modifications are in my italics – I will also cut the last section in two parts to make it more comprehensible, although, at the same time, I will attempt to follow the original meaning):

[DK2Def+Af+Pb+Aw+AwS]: A work of art is an object, made by man (*i.e., an artist*), especially with a view to subsequent use. This object is of a kind created to be presented to a set of persons from at least a subset of the totality of all *the frameworks for the presentation of a work of art. These persons are* prepared in some degree to understand the object which is presented to them.

This leads us to the final step in which it is possible to include the *definiens* of ‘artist’ [At] in the reconstruction of Dickie’s definition. Note here that the term ‘person’ introduced in the definition of [At] always refers to a human person (and hence it can substitute for the term ‘man’ introduced earlier in the definition of artifact [Af]). Also, although in this definition the term ‘work of art’ is included in the definition of [At] and as we have just seen, also of [AwS], it seems unnecessary to mention it in the final *definiens* presented here. In fact, it seems that the resulting definition makes perfect sense without it (my modifications in my italics):

[DK2Def+Af+Pb+Aw+AwS+At]: A work of art is an object, made by *a person who participates with understanding in its making*, especially with a view to subsequent use. This object is of a kind created to be presented to a set of persons from at least a subset of the totality of all the frameworks for the presentation *of this type of object*. These persons are prepared in some degree to understand the object which is presented to them.

Now, owing to the fact that this ‘unfolded’ definition is, up to this point, excessively large and complex, I will organise the phrases in a more comprehensible manner. Also for heuristic reasons, this definition will be divided into three numbered parts. This is, however, only a methodological suggestion to make the definition more digestible to the reader, rather than an attempt to recover Dickie’s DK1 attempt (rejected in DK2) at establishing a clear division between the different parts of the definition, (i.e., the *genus* and the *differentia*). To do so, and to avoid confusing the above [DK2Def+Af+Pb+Aw+AwS+At] version with the numerically-organised one below, I will call the latter [(DK2Def+Af+Pb+Aw+AwS+At)*]:

[(DK2Def+Af+Pb+Aw+AwS+At)*]: A work of art is [1] an object made especially with a view to subsequent use, by a person who participates with understanding in its making. [2] This object is of a kind created to be presented to a set of persons prepared in some degree to understand the object which is presented to them. [3] The set of persons to whom the object is presented corresponds to, at least, a subset of the totality of all the frameworks for the presentation of this type of object.

6.5 Some Problems with Dickie's later DK2 theory

A) Definition of art or definition of something else?

Dickie wrote *The Art Circle* primarily to develop a thorough alternative DK2 theory and definition of art (DK2Def). His other purpose, however, was to support the idea that art is the product of a series of inflected circularly-interconnected elements, an idea that was already latent in DK1 (see for example: *Art and the Aesthetic*: 34). He argues that in stressing this, he is finally demonstrating his idea of artmaking as an institutionalised practice.

So far, however, we have seen that appealing to circularity when talking about art can be problematic; the circularity can render a definition vacuous or, in this case, a series of interrelated definitions. Dickie was aware of the problem, but insists that his theory is nevertheless informative and that its circularity is an attempt to show the indissoluble structurally interrelated set of elements required to make art (*Circle*: 82).

Yet, in this case, the amount of information that Dickie's theory provides is very limited. As Carroll points out, in fact, Dickie's definition can be applied to many other practices different from art, such as philosophy or even wisecracking (Carroll, 1994: 12). We can observe that Carroll is correct because we can also claim, for example, that Dickie's definition (as reconstructed in Section 6.4) is also perfectly intelligible when applied to other things – for example, a work of philosophy:

A work of philosophy [φ] is [1] an object made especially with a view to subsequent use, by a person who participates with understanding in its making. [2] This object is of a kind created to be presented to a set of persons prepared in some degree to understand the object which is presented to them. [3] The set of persons to whom the object is presented correspond to, at least, a subset of the totality of all the frameworks for the presentation of this type of object.

We can also substitute 'scale model' or 'prototype computer' for 'work of art' without affecting the rest of the definition. Thus, Carroll seems to be on the right

track with his assertion that Dickie fails to provide a definition exclusively applicable to artworks.

In this case, Carroll points out that Dickie only succeeds in formulating a definition of what it is to be a 'coordinate communicative practice' that requires a whole structure to persist in time. Thus Carroll would argue that Dickie fails to show the *differentia* of artworks from the *genus* of which he considers artworks to be a species: that is to say, of the *genus* of 'coordinated communicative practices'. As a result, he only provides a definition that can be applied to many different things corresponding to this particular *genus*. Stecker, similarly argues that Dickie, in attempting to define artworks, is actually defining only a class of public artifacts (those to be exhibited and examined publicly) which can include many things other than artworks (Stecker, 1986).

Thus Dickie's theory can only *explain* the art of those societies, like ours, which have the determinate notions of artists and artworld publics, and determinate and distinct artworld systems or subsystems. The theory, however, is incapable of providing a final proof that these structural elements in DK2 (i.e., [At], [AwS], etc.) are *sufficient* or even *necessary* to create art in our western culture(s) or even in others.

Moreover, Dickie also thinks that he has demonstrated, with his critique of Beardsley's conception of the Romantic artist, that art cannot be created outside culture. But again, he doesn't *demonstrate* this: he just demonstrates that Beardsley is wrong to think that the possibility of an isolated 'artist' creating art shows the failure of the institutional theory. Dickie then goes on to claim that Beardsley's failure demonstrates that art cannot be created outside culture.

In fact, however, Dickie just demonstrates that artists, *qua* creative individuals already acculturated, even in isolation, can make art. He never takes into consideration, as Levinson in fact does, the possibility of a socially isolated individual, completely ignorant of art and art institutions and practices, making art. This shows that Dickie's structuralist theory of art, and more particularly his thesis about the indissoluble link between artworks and artists, is used as the premise that

helps him to justify this same thesis as a conclusion (i.e., the fallacy of begging the question).

B) The shift towards an anthropological perspective

Dickie attempts to overcome some of the major problems in his DK1 theory and definitions by presenting a different DK2 theory and DK2Def. In doing so, he changes the scope of the inquiry. Where he had earlier made use of legalistic examples and terminology to support his idea about the relevance of the artworld institutions and practices, he now resorts in DK2 to examples and terminology from the field of anthropology. This would seem to provide better support for his idea about the relevance of culture and cultural practices in explaining what art is. Thus in DK2 he establishes parallelisms, above all in *Art and Value*, between his approach and that of anthropological research (*Art and Value*: 7 – 28; for a first attempt at this approach, see: *Circle*: 45).

As we have seen, some of the changes Dickie introduced pointed towards the idea of art as something created by means of an institutional action; he then argues explicitly that understanding art as an institutionalised action points towards its cultural nature. Later on he argues that this demonstrates the anthropological basis of his enquiry.

This idea of understanding art as an action-institution rather than as a person-institution allowed Dickie to avoid some of the strongest objections to his earlier theory, particularly those of Wollheim and Beardsley. Wollheim argued that Dickie's theory raised a number of problematic questions, concerning the how, when and where of the process of nomination of membership (within the world of art or artworld understood as a person-institution) that allowed these new members to confer the status of art upon artifacts (Wollheim, 1992 [1980]: 16; see also: Wollheim, 1984). Beardsley argued that an isolated artist could make art independently of any person-institutions in a way that rendered false the institutional theory (which he understood as supporting the idea of the institution of art as a person-institution). In stressing the idea that art ought to be understood as an

action-institution rather than as a person-institution, Dickie now avoids the idea that artists need artistic institutions (i.e., person-institutions) or nomination of status for membership to make art, and thereby also avoids Beardsley's and Wollheim's objections against the role of institutions in art.

Dickie's later terminological reformulations, however, end up exchanging one problem for another: instead of misusing in DK2 certain types of legalistic notions, he now misuses the notions from anthropology. He does this particularly with the central concepts of 'role' and 'culture'. Moreover Dickie misconceives the methodology of anthropology when he compares it with his own theoretical approach.

In the first place, Dickie insists that 'roles' are central to the artworld (when he speaks, for example, about the role of artists and publics – see for example: *Circle*: 26, 55, 57, 65 – 67, 71 – 75, 81, 84; also *Value*: 59 – 62; and in: *Introduction*1997: 89). His use of the term 'role' is misleading, however, because it confuses different meanings of the term, as we shall see.

For example, having a role can be understood as having a function understood in causal terms, as for example, when talking about the role of sugar in diabetes. Dickie clearly uses this meaning when talking about 'the role of art' in fulfilling certain human needs (*Circle*: 85). He also uses this meaning in several other places, in discussing the role of status conferral in creating art, or the role of definitions, the role of artistic theories and so on (*Circle*: 58, 78, 65, 86). In this sense, the 'role' of artists could mean the 'function' of artists: an artist could be understood as someone who has the *function* of creating art, although this function might just be a result of a causal relation between artworks and artmakers. In this regard, the use of the term 'role' is not exclusive to anthropological research, as Dickie seems to think, but attaches to any attempt to understand the necessary causal relations between two successive events.

Having a 'role' can also be understood, in anthropology or sociology, as having an acknowledged social status that places an individual in a particular socially distinctive *stratum*, thus determining his/her particular behaviour, as well as his

rights and duties, within a given cultural group. This latter meaning would apply, for example, to artists such as Duchamp or Warhol who were *already socially acknowledged as artists*. However, this distinctive role doesn't apply to certain other artists who already have the *causal function of artmakers* (e.g., housewives, shamans, university students, office workers and so on) but who are less well known, or not at all known, by the publics in general. These individuals thus might be artists in virtue of their place in the causal chain of events (i.e., their making artworks) but do not have yet the distinctive socially acknowledged role of artists.

Dickie seems to be using this latter meaning of 'role' when he claims that '[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*' (*Circle*: 55; italics mine), and when he claims that '[in] order to obtain an adequate account of the framework, as a first step it must be discovered what it is that makes it possible for someone *to assume the role of artist*' (*Circle*: 65; italics mine).

However, it seems that Dickie, in other places, conflates the two meanings because he appears to switch between them (or at least to fail to distinguish the two distinct meanings of 'role') in several passages. Thus, sometimes it looks as if he is using the second notion of 'role', when actually he means to use the first. At times he seems to conceive of the 'role' of the artist in terms similar to the way we may talk about the role of red wine in the production of antioxidants. At other times he seems to characterise the role of the artist in ways similar to when we talk, let's say, about the role of the shaman: the social figure that compiles and transmits the communal knowledge and practices of the tribe, and creates cohesion amongst its members. The latter usage is similar, we might say, to the anthropological approach, but in fact Dickie often just refers to the former when he talks about the role of artists as those having the *causal function* of making and presenting artworks to the artworld publics.

Thus, in *Circle*, he first says that: '[these] failures [of certain ideas in his previous theory] arose because the statements occurred within a discussion of the presentation of works of art to audiences, a context within which the creators of works of art *do not ordinarily play a big role* [i.e. *function*]'; then in the next phrase

he again uses the notion of 'role', apparently with the same meaning. Thus he says: '[any] description of what earlier I mistakenly called "the primary convention" *must exhibit a role* [i.e., again 'function'?] for playwrights, poets, painters and the like' (*Circle*: 74; italics mine).

Dickie's notion of 'role' becomes more confusing in those passages where the ambiguity of the term 'role' is stronger (i.e., where the term 'role' can be understood either as 'function' or as an 'acknowledged social status accompanied by certain rights as well as certain duties towards the community'). Thus, he talks about the 'function' of the 'presenters', and two pages later he talks instead about the 'role' of these 'presenters', thus apparently implying that by 'role' he now means 'function', although the notion of 'role' understood more or less as an 'acknowledged status with certain obligations towards the community' could also apply here. Thus first he says '[if], however, artists create and publics perceive and understand, there is a *function* which lies between them and brings them together. In *Art and the Aesthetic* I characterized this *function* as the task of the "presenter" ' (*Circle*: 72; italics mine). And two pages further on he says that: '[if], however, there is no primary convention, there is a primary something [...]. What is primary is the understanding shared by all involved that they are engaged in an established activity or practice within which there is a variety of different roles [functions?/acknowledged social status?]: creator roles, *presenter roles* and "consumer roles" ' (*Circle*: 74; italics mine). Thus, given Dickie's ambiguous use of the term, here and elsewhere, it is difficult to determine whether he understands 'role' in one way or another. This is because he seems to play with the ambivalence of the statements regarding the role (function? socially acknowledged status?) of artists, publics and other members of the artworld (especially in: *Circle*: 71, 74, 75).

At times, moreover, Dickie uses quite other meanings of the term 'role', thus making it harder to know whether he has been all along talking about very different things in his formulation of the role of artists and of the members of the public. Hence for example in the following he uses the notion of 'role' to signify some sort of knowledge that artists or the public might have. He says: '[the] framework which I have begun to describe owes something to Danto's suggestion about art history, although it is hard to pinpoint exactly the relationship; that is, I have stressed the

historical dimension of the artist's and the public's role [knowledge?] – what they have learned from the past' (*Circle*: 67). This is clearer when he says that '[the] role [knowledge?] of the artist has two central aspects. First, there is the general aspect which is characteristic of all artists, namely, the *awareness* that what is created for presentation is art. Second, there is the wide variety of *art techniques* of which the ability to use one in some degree, enables one to create art of a particular kind' (*Circle*: 72; italics mine).

Finally, the term becomes even more confusing when he explicitly uses 'role' as synonymous with 'activity'. He says: 'one can see that *the activity or role* of artist, the conception of the product of this activity as a work of art, and *the activity or role* of public, had to develop together' (*Circle*: 84; italics mine).

This confusion of meanings becomes especially marked where he uses some or all of these different meanings of 'role' in the same page (such as in *Circle*: 65, 74, 84).

In the second place, Dickie is very unclear about the relation between art and culture in DK2, particularly when he attempts to clarify whether art can be found only in certain cultures or in all human cultures. On the one hand, he insists that his is a structural theory, and so stresses the idea that art only occurs in those cultures in which the other related structural elements (i.e., artist, artworld, artworld public, and artworld systems) can also be found. Thus, he claims, a member of a primitive tribe lacking the concept 'art' may be incapable of creating art. Here Dickie seems to be arguing that art depends upon a *certain type of culture* to exist, because, of course, a primitive tribe does have a culture of its own. In fact, Dickie accepts Catherine Lord's suggestion that his is an 'indexical' theory of art – by which Lord means that art is an activity particular to the context of a given culture, rather than an activity shared by all cultures – although he also leaves open the idea that art may nevertheless exist in cultures different from ours, having not identical but analogous structural elements (Lord, 1987; Dickie, 1987).

However, contrary to these claims that regard art as a non-universal activity, Dickie also argues in *The Art Circle* that it is possible for a primitive culture to produce art

even though it lacked the very concept of art (*Circle*: 56). Pursuing this idea, it is also plausible to imagine that a culture might make art even though it still lacks any determinate conception of ‘an artist’. Moreover, Dickie claims that art is a human (transcultural?) practice (*Circle*: 111). He also refers to ‘the human activity of the artworld’ (*Introduction* 1997: 88). In both cases, he seems to argue that art is not something characteristic of a particular culture or cultures but that it can occur everywhere because it requires only the institution of ‘human culture’ to exist.

Thus it is possible to observe here how ambiguous Dickie is about the relations between art and culture: resulting from his reflections, in some cases he seems to imply that art is related to a particular type of cultural reality, and in others he seems to imply that it is intrinsically related to the ‘institution’ of human culture.

Additionally, Dickie claims in *Art and Value*, that:

In any event, even if cultural anthropologists could not find a cultural structure identical with that described by the institutional theory, I believe they would find a structure very much like it. That is, they would find a structure of the general sort that the five declarations I gave as definitions in *The Art Circle* can serve as a summary account of (*Art and Value*: 28)

This is surely an enormous assumption, because Dickie never supports this idea with any proof that an anthropologist would ultimately have a view similar to his. Moreover, a theorist from the opposing side (e.g., someone supporting a biological explanation of art, for example, such as Dutton’s – see for example: Dutton, 2010), could claim in similar terms and without any further proof, that a biologist would probably support his theory or a theory similar to his. Yet, both claims would be just hypothetical and useless for validating either of the two theories. This is because even if, as Dickie claims, his theory or one similar to it could be accepted by anthropologists, some aspects of a biological explanation of art could also be defended by this same anthropologist (or by a biologist) without proving that Dickie’s (or Dutton’s) theory is correct *in toto*.

Dickie's argument, then, is a fallacy of authority: he attempts to defend his theory by appealing to a higher authority that, hypothetically, would validate it, rather than by just solid arguments, careful specifications and empirical proofs.

Given that it is central to his new DK2 theory of art, Dickie is therefore obliged to clarify what he understands by the notion of 'role'; he should also clarify what he understands by the relations (that he constantly stresses), between art and culture (i.e., does mean that art exists in *some cultures* or that art is the product of *human culture*?). He ought also to justify the claim that his methodology is similar to that of anthropology, and that an anthropologist would support his theory. Otherwise, his analogy between his own theory of art and an anthropological one will fail in the way he claims Carney's suggested analogy between art and science fails (*Value*: 16 – 20).

C) The word 'art' and other analogous terms

Furthermore, we can observe how Dickie takes for granted, without further discussion, the idea that art is a cultural product rather than a biological-ethological one. In *Circle* he argues that the word 'art' is closer to the word 'brother' than to the words 'tiger' and 'gold' (*Circle*: 43 – 44); some words, he argues following Ziff's ideas in *Semantic Analysis*, have a particular meaning and others do not because they lack necessary and sufficient conditions. Terms like 'tiger', Ziff argues, do not contain within them necessary and sufficient conditions (there could be tigers with three or five legs); words such as 'brother', however, do have a particular meaning because – as Dickie seems to imply – they are culturally or socially stipulated to have distinctive meaning in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions.

From this point of departure, Dickie says: 'I *believe* that "art", like "brother" has a particular meaning in English – at least one distinct sense' (*Circle*: 44; italics mine). He makes this claim, however, without providing any proof, and without considering the possibility that the word 'art' may be like other words lacking a particular meaning, like 'tiger' or 'gold', because he bases his theory merely upon a *belief*. Dickie takes this as a postulated premise of his theory, but in fact it seems

perfectly plausible to argue that if words such as 'tiger' and 'gold' cannot be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions (thus allowing us to include within the category 'lions' exceptions to the rule, such as spotted lions or dwarf lions, without much difficulty), then the term 'art' could also be similarly defined.

In *Art and Value*, where he asserts the similarities between his approach and that of cultural anthropology, he also compares the word 'art' with the word 'bachelor' and the (imaginary) word 'puka'. He posits an anthropologist searching for the meaning of a word such as 'puka', used by an imaginary primitive tribe. He thus argues that such an anthropologist, to understand the meaning of this word, needs to understand the underlying structures (roles, actions and so on) that allow for its existence and appropriate usage (*Value*: 25). Then he goes on to suggest that this (imaginary) culture may use the word 'puka' in a way similar to the way in our society we use the word 'bachelor'.

This example is provided in order to defend the idea that when we attempt to understand the meaning of the word 'art', we are also required to understand its usage and the practices to which it is related. Dickie believes it can be shown that the word 'art' cannot be segregated from the practices of artists, publics and the different artworld systems, and we are thus required to explicate these practices when we try to explain what art is.

However, Dickie's analogy between the words 'art' and 'bachelor' reveals an important problem. Clearly, for the word 'bachelor' to exist, a series of cultural conventions and institutions must also exist, but it is not that clear that the same is true of the word 'art'. In drawing the analogy, Dickie hopes to have the reader take for granted the idea that art also depends upon certain cultural conventions and institutions. But this similarity between the notion of 'bachelor' and the notion of 'work of art' is what he has to *demonstrate*; it is not something he can *assume* as an undisputable fact. Moreover, just as he claimed, without any proof in *Circle*, that he *believes* the term 'art' to be like the term 'brother', so he claims in *Art and Value*, that 'I *believe* the concept art is like the concept bachelor (and the concept puka)' (*Value*: 23; italics mine). Again, his thesis is based on the *belief* that supports his point of departure, not upon any clear empirical proof or self-evident truth.

For his explanation to succeed, Dickie needs to have given, in the first place, proofs for the belief that ‘art’ has a particular meaning (following Ziff’s terminology) and that, for it to exist, it must be examined together with other cultural notions and practices (such as occurs with the term ‘bachelor’).

In the second place, Dickie should also have compared the term ‘art’ with other words about which there is controversy as to whether their referents require cultural institutions to exist or not. Only in this way could he start clarifying, by means of empirical observation and theoretical research, the extent to which art is a phenomenon more or less related to particular cultures – as for example the notions of ‘bachelor’ (or ‘puka’) – or whether it is more similar to terms that can be applied cross-culturally – such as ‘family’ or ‘hunting’. It may be that, by comparing the term ‘art’ with other words not obviously related to a particular culture – such as those two mentioned above – he could discover that the term ‘art’ (in contrast to ‘brother’ or ‘bachelor’) can be applied cross-culturally to all human societies, by virtue of being for example, following Dutton, a natural product of the human species.

Besides this, Dickie notes that the word ‘bachelor’ might be wrongly used to translate the word ‘puka’ (*Value*: 21), thus inviting the idea that the way we use the word ‘art’ should also be handled carefully when we talk about other cultural artifacts. However, he uses the analogy between ‘art’ and ‘bachelor’ only to justify (but not to demonstrate conclusively) the need to understand the word in relation to an institutionalised set of cultural practices; but he does not reflect at any point on whether using the word ‘art’ can be as problematic as using the word ‘bachelor’ to explain other cultures’ institutionalised practices. He might also have stressed this, in order to support his own thesis better, by showing how often we refer misleadingly to certain works as ‘art’, when speaking about the products of other cultures or even of other historical periods.

7. STEPHEN DAVIES: ON INSTITUTIONAL THEORIES OF ART

Stephen Davies's *Definitions of Art* (1991) was written to provide a better understanding of the debate surrounding the different institutional theories of art. Davies organises the contending theories into four main groups: functionalism, proceduralism, historicism and intentionalism; in that, however, he argues that the two latter theories are always to be ultimately classified as part of either of the two former ones. In presenting and examining the *pros* and *cons* of these different theoretical positions, Davies argues in favour of his own proceduralist definition of art, which in turn is based on Dickie's ideas.

Davies's efforts to provide a synthesis of this debate in *Definitions of Art*, in terms of a main divide between functionalism and proceduralism, has received considerable support. In particular, major figures involved in this debate about institutional definitions, among them Dickie, Carroll and Levinson, have recently endorsed or commented on Davies's distinction between these contending groups (Carroll, 1993; Levinson, 1993; Dickie, 1997c). Other current theorists have also used Davies's distinction in trying to understand better the current debate about institutional definitions of art (Scholz, 1994; Graves, 1998; Österman, 1998; Matravers, 2000; Corse, 2009; for additional reflections on Corse's ideas on Davies, see also Lemkow, 2011b). Also some of Davies's ideas are raised in Stock's section on 'Definition of Art' (Davies, Higgins *et al*, 2009: 231 – 232) and references to Davies's book are made by Yanal – in the introduction to his edited book on Dickie – as well as by Brand and Margolis in their respective papers (Yanal, 1994; Brand, 2000; Margolis, 2010).

After his *Definitions of Art*, Davies continued to refine his ideas about the basic opposition between the contending functionalist and proceduralist theories of art. He has also developed a broader understanding of Dickie's and Danto's earlier and later theories. As a result, he is now more open to accept the plausibility of hybrid definitions, such as Stecker's, and even Danto's (now understood as hybrid too), and to think them superior to purely functionalist and purely proceduralist definitions (Davies, 2003).

Recently, Davies has also published an introductory book on aesthetics (Davies, 2006) in which he seems to endorse Dickie's alternative classification of natural *versus* cultural theories of art (see Dickie, 'Nature/Culture'; also in Dickie's: *Art and Value*). In this later work, Davies follows Dickie in framing the debate in terms of natural *versus* cultural theories of art, rather than in terms of functionalisms *versus* proceduralisms. This may have resulted from Davies's revision of his earlier conception of the radical divide, presented in his *Definitions of Art*, between functionalists and proceduralists. It may also be related to his better understanding of Danto's and Dickie's theories, that he had very superficially summarised in his 1991 book, even though he claimed that this same book attempted to 'outline and develop a perspective on the debate in Anglo-American philosophy about the definition of art' (Davies, 1991: 1).

In this chapter I will examine Davies's ideas mainly contained in his *Definitions of Art* and his position concerning Danto's and Dickie's earlier and later theories – given that Davies's *Definitions of Art* is still considered *the* guide to the debate over institutional definitions of art in analytic aesthetics. I will also examine Davies's book because there he proposes his own version of a proceduralist definition of art based on a (mis)interpretation of Dickie's and Danto's theories that I have already attempted to dispel (see Chapters 2 and 3 on Danto and 5 and 6 on Dickie). Further, I will also provide grounds in this chapter for arguing against the idea that Davies's examination of the debate in terms of a functionalist/proceduralist divide adequately explains the current debate about definitions of art. In addition, I will also examine Davies's ideas in *Definitions of Art* rather than his later views, because even if his later work evidences a better understanding of Dickie's and Danto's theories, he still continues to refer to his 1991 book in his approach to the subject. The problem is that he does this without assuming any degree of self-criticism about his previous oversimplified views of these two theories. I argue that this is unacceptable, if Davies's attempt is to provide an actualised and more thorough assessment of the debate over institutional definitions of art.

In this chapter, I will first briefly summarise Davies's reflections about the divide between functionalists and proceduralists. I will examine the problems of conceiving the debate about definitions of art in terms of such a divide, and the problem created by Davies's superficial account of Danto's and Dickie's theories. This last chapter will thus make clear why the account of institutional definitions I give in this thesis provides a better understanding than Davies's of their nature, plausibility and development.

7.1 Davies's *Definitions of Art*: on Functional versus Procedural Definitions

In *Definitions of Art*, Davies explains the distinction between functional and procedural definitions of art, and the debate between them, as follows:

I conceive of the debate as revealing a division between two approaches to the question of art's definition – the functional and the procedural. The functionalist believes that, necessarily, an artwork performs a function or functions (usually that of providing a rewarding aesthetic experience) distinctive to art. By contrast, the proceduralist believes that an artwork necessarily is created in accordance with certain rules and procedures (Davies, 1991: 1).

Davies then uses an argument based on a process of elimination: if functionalist theories fail to explain all instances of art, then proceduralist theories ought to be held as the correct approach. He notes that, apart from functional and procedural definitions, there are also historical and intentional definitions, but asserts that these latter two can be understood in terms of either functionalism or proceduralism – as, for example, he argues, occurs with the different historical approaches of Levinson and Carroll.

To proceed with an analysis of both positions, Davies first establishes what he understands respectively by 'functionalism' and 'proceduralism', and why certain concepts should be defined in terms of functionalism and others in terms of conventions and procedures. He gives further details about functionalism in the following passage:

[It] might be thought that what makes a thing an *X* is its serving [...] the point of the concept of *X*. In some cases this is so, but in others it is not. Where it is the case that what makes a thing an *X* is its functional efficacy in promoting the point of the concept in question [...] then I shall say that *X* is to be defined *functionally*. (Davies, 1991: 27).

He then explains why, in some cases, proceduralist approaches are more suitable for providing an adequate definition of the concept in question:

When conventions and the point of the concept they were instituted to serve part company, it may be revealed that instances of the concept in question are to be characterized in terms of the conventions or procedures giving rise to them and not in terms of the concept's point. In other words, sometimes that which falls under a concept is properly to be defined in procedural, rather than in functional terms (Davies, 1991: 33).

Thus, Davies claims, a concept might be defined in terms of the function its instances are intended to serve. Nevertheless, he also argues that in some cases, the conventions and procedures allow the introduction of new instances of this concept that are no longer in accordance with its original point. This, he argues, occurs when conventions and procedures 'part company' from the point of the concept: sometimes conventions and procedures take on a life of their own, in a way in which they are no longer required to produce functional instances of the concept. In these cases, it becomes important to clarify whether a concept should be defined in either functional or procedural terms, or in a mixture of both.

In *Definitions of Art*, Davies seeks not only to provide a general overview of the current debate between the supporters of functionalist and proceduralist definitions, as he had done in a previous paper (Davies, 1990); he seeks also to defend his own procedural definition of art. Functional theories, he believes, have failed to provide a definition adequate to all instances of the concept 'art' (Davies, 1991: 46); owing to this, he believes that only pure procedural definitions provide adequate alternatives. Davies asserts that the current break, between the original function of art and the procedures and conventions that allow the introduction of new instances

of art, has made it no longer possible to provide a definition of art in a mixture of functionalist and proceduralist terms:

When it comes to defining the nature of that which falls under a concept, it may be found either to be essentially functional or to be essentially procedural or to be essentially both [...]. When the evolution of the procedures leads to the use of those procedures in ways that go so far as to conflict with the point of the concept (so that the concept cannot be defined in jointly procedural and functional terms) the question of whether or not items of the type in question are to be defined functionally or procedurally is crucial [...]. How is the definition of art to be approached? The character of much modern art and the attitude adopted toward it by the public is symptomatic of a separation between the point of art and its works (that is, the products of the procedures in terms of which art status commonly is taken to be conferred). There is a tension between both the forms and approaches of modern and of more traditional art. For this reason the otherwise attractive option of defining art in jointly functional and procedural terms seems not to be viable. Equally unattractive, I think, is the option of defining art disjunctively – as either functional or as the product of certain procedures. Such an approach deals with the tension I have identified only by ignoring its existence [...]. So the question becomes: Is art to be defined functionally or procedurally? (Davies, 1991: 36 – 38).

Davies then examines the *pros* and *cons* of the functional definition. Beardsley, he argues, represents the best attempt so far to define art in functional terms, and he also claims that any fair assessment of functionalism should take that attempt into account. On the other side, Davies believes that proceduralism is best represented by Dickie's work. Addressing the *pros* and *cons* of Beardsley's functionalism, and concluding that it cannot explain all instances of art, Davies moves to an examination of the validity of procedural definitions. To do so, he focuses on Dickie's theory, and concludes that Dickie's, and more particularly his own, procedural definition (based above all on Dickie's, although it derives some ideas from Danto and Diffey), are more plausible and reliable approaches to the definition of art.

7.2 Some problems with Davies's reflections on Functionalism *versus* Proceduralism

A) Aesthetic functionalism and other functionalisms

Davies claims, in an argument based on a process of elimination, that if functionalism fails to explain all instances of art, then proceduralism offers the only alternative. To assess functionalism, he examines what he claims provides the best attempt to define art in functional terms: Beardsley's theory.

In fact, Beardsley's functionalism is a form of aesthetic functionalism. Davies explains that Beardsley's theory 'characterizes an artwork as either an arrangement of conditions intended to be capable of affording an aesthetic experience with marked aesthetic character, or (incidentally) an arrangement belonging to a class or type of arrangement that is typically intended to have this capacity' (Davies, 1991: 52). Beardsley thus rejects as artworks things that do not meet either of these two conditions.

In the article Davies published a year before his *Definitions of Art*, he proposes that the function of art is to provide a distinctive aesthetic experience (Davies, 1990: 99). In *Definitions of Art* (1991), he offers several ways of characterising art although always under the assumption that its primary function, if any, is to provide an aesthetic experience that promotes pleasure and enjoyment. This is also implied by his acceptance of Beardsley's theory as the best representation of functionalism.

Thus, Davies claims that '[the] functionalist believes that, necessarily, an artwork performs a function or functions (usually that of providing a rewarding aesthetic experience) distinctive to art' (Davies, 1991: 1). He goes on to make four observations about this function. First he notes that 'many artworks play an important role as art in our lives' and that the experience can be 'rewarding and enjoyable' (Davies, 1991: 38). Second, he mentions Beardsley's assertion that 'art enriches life by integrating and reconciling us to our world' (Davies, 1991: 55). Third, he says that '[there] is no single way in which the experience of art is pleasurable. The experience, or an element within it, may be simply sensuous (and

even sensual) [...]. Additionally, the experience may be variously and complexly cognitive, and the pleasure that goes with the experience is the pleasure of understanding a pattern, of solving a puzzle, of grasping connections [...]. What I mean is that the experience is a thoughtful one' (Davies, 1991: 59 – 60). Finally, at the end of the book, he proposes that '[the] primary function of art is to provide enjoyment, but this is not to deny that an interest in art can have far-reaching social benefits [...]. One good reason for creating an artwork is that it is enjoyable when approached in one or another of the ways in which art has been approached in the past' (Davies, 1991: 220),

Having examined Beardsley's functionalism he then opposes to it his own version of Dickie's theory, although he claims to be providing a general overview of the current debate about definitions of art in Anglo-American philosophy. This reveals, first, that his theory is actually a very narrow overview of the current debate, mainly focused on the dispute between Beardsley's functionalism and his own procedural definition of art. It is narrow as well in that he basically conceives functionalism in terms of *aesthetic* functionalism (i.e., Beardsley's), without considering other kinds of functionalisms on equal terms.

In fact, there are, *contra* Davies, other non-aesthetic functionalisms that he could have taken into consideration, such as, for example, Goodman's cognitive functionalism. As Goodman says:

The worlds of fiction, poetry, painting, music, dance and the other arts are built largely by such nonliteral devices as metaphor, by such nondenotational means as exemplification and expression, and often by use of pictures or sounds or gestures or other symbols of non-linguistic systems. Such worldmaking and such versions are my primary concern here; for a major thesis of this book is that the arts must be taken no less seriously than the sciences as modes of discovery, creation, and enlargement of knowledge in the broad sense of advancement of understanding, and thus that the philosophy of art should be conceived as an integral part of metaphysics and epistemology (Goodman, 1978: 102).

Goodman here conceives the central function of art as providing an advancement of understanding almost akin to that of science, a view which Davies ignores, without any good justification.

Another type of functionalism that should be considered is Danto's, which stresses that all artworks have 'aboutness' (i.e., they are about something, have a meaning or content or a subject – see Chapter 3). In claiming this, Danto points towards a type of semantic functionalism that Davies completely overlooks in his analysis of Danto's theory, but which Dickie acknowledges in his paper 'Nature/Culture'.

Davies in effect claims that if *aesthetic* functionalism fails to explain all instances of art, then we must resort to procedural definitions – but it is not at all clear that other types of functionalisms (cognitive functionalism, for example) would similarly fail to explain all instances of art, thus leaving proceduralism as the only possible alternative. Further, it is plausible to argue that a functionalism of the cognitive or a semantic type would be able to explain non-aesthetic 'hard cases' of works of art such as Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'Artista*, Warhol's *Silver Disaster: Electric Chair* or even Duchamp's *Fountain*. This is because all these artworks seem to be *about* something and at the same time they seem to promote new (cognitive) reflections on our relation to certain facts about the world, and about our current social and cultural environments.

Moreover, Davies does accept the possibility that instances of a concept may have different functions at the same time (i.e., synchronical functionalism). He also accepts that at different times a particular function might be substituted for another (i.e., diachronical functionalism), without this implying that functional definitions are no longer valid to explain what art is. As he says: 'I do not mean to imply that there can be no more than a single point for any given concept; nor that the point or points of a concept might not alter through time' (Davies, 1991: 27). He further observes that 'art might have long since lost its original function [...] if art in general has taken on some new function or functions, then it serves as a functional concept and might be definable in terms of its function or functions' (Davies, 1991: 50). Thus Davies leaves open the possibility of a synchronical or diachronical combination of aesthetic, cognitive and semantic functionalisms to explain all

instances of art in a way that would render procedural definitions of art unnecessary.

Davies believes, however, that procedures and conventions have drifted apart, or as he says, that they have ‘taken a life of their own’ apart from the original intended function or functions of art. He conceives this process to have reached a point where it is necessary to leave functionalist definitions behind and embrace procedural definitions as the only alternative for defining art. But in fact Davies merely takes this for granted, because he supports the idea that conventions and procedures have separated from the aesthetic function of artworks (especially with the ‘hard cases’ in art), without demonstrating that they also have drifted apart from the cognitive or semantic function of artworks. Before championing the procedural approach, then, he should first examine whether cognitive and/or semantic functionalism (or any other types of functionalism), are still valid in art and compatible with past and current conventions and procedures.

B) Instances of the concept and definitions of procedures

Davies argues that functionalism fails to explain all instances of art. He explains that this is because ‘hard’ cases in art that do not provide any aesthetic function, are rejected by functionalists as representing true instances of art. Yet proceduralists have no problem in taking these cases as art, because they believe that the conventions and procedures of art have drifted apart from the traditional goal of providing an aesthetic function. Davies, additionally, claims that while the traditional function of artworks does not necessarily apply in all instances of art, the same procedures and conventions do apply in all of these instances.

However, this argument raises a number of problems, because Davies takes for granted that:

- 1) The same conventions and procedures apply in past and current art before conclusively demonstrating that this is so.

- 2) The same conventions and procedures apply in all art disciplines, although there are substantial differences in the practices corresponding to many of these disciplines (e.g., between theatre and sculpture, between music and painting or between literature and dance).
- 3) There is no other alternative to proceduralism, because proceduralism cannot fail in explaining all instances of art. In his commitment to the idea that proceduralism will hold for all cases of art, he simply does not regard the possibility that this approach might fail, or necessitate the search for a third alternative.

In fact, Davies's assumption that the same conventions and procedures apply in past and current art is based on the idea that Duchamp had performed an act of 'status conferral' to transform a commonplace urinal into a work of art. Moreover, he argues that Duchamp had used what he believes was a traditional procedure (i.e., status conferral), although used in a different way from how it was previously used, thus allowing him to create a new instance of art.

It is not at all clear, however, that Duchamp used the procedure of 'status conferral' to make *Fountain*. Actually, there is still considerable controversy about this idea and even Dickie, in his later DK2 attempt to define art, had rejected the idea that artworks are produced by an act of status conferral (see Chapter 6). It is striking that Davies ignores this change in DK2, while at the same time he acknowledges the existence of Dickie's later definition of art (Davies, 1991: 83 – 84).

In fact, Davies's assumption that all art is made in accordance with the way he conceives of Duchamp's *Fountain*, is anachronistic: he sees the past procedures and conventions of making artworks in terms of the procedures and conventions *he proposes that* Duchamp used. Thus, his theory has the same problem he accused Danto's theory of having: it is too parochial to explain the huge diversity of instances of past and present art (Davies, 2001; 2001b).

Besides, in conceiving of the debate over definitions of art mainly in terms of a divide between functional and procedural approaches, Davies can only see the

possibility that either one or the other can succeed in defining art. However, this assumption is unfair because in his argument by elimination, he admits only the possibility of the failure of functionalist definitions, and never the possibility that proceduralism could also fail. It is true that he accepts that his theory might not be completely correct (Davies, 1991: 3), yet he never offers an alternative to proceduralism. This is probably owing to his unjustified confidence that proceduralism will ultimately be able to explain all instances of art, by sorting out its common procedures and conventions.

The present diversity of artistic disciplines (music, painting, literature, computer-generated art, dance, video art, site-specific art, body art, ephemeral art, happenings, audio art, etc.) seems, however, to underscore a multiplicity of procedures and conventions in all art disciplines. It is true that, Davies could argue that while at first sight, there may be an irreducible diversity of first-order conventions and procedures in art (let's call them X), nevertheless there could be a second order of conventions and procedures (W) common to the plurality of this first-order diversity. But again this claim would be based on the *assumption* or expectation that there is a final unity of conventions and procedures to be found in art (whether in a first order or in a second order level) that would make coherent the effort to define art in procedural terms.

But what if this is not possible either? What if the expectation of finding a common second order set of conventions and procedures common to all art – in short, Davies's apparent expectation – also fails? In this case the proceduralist is then obliged to look for a third order of conventions and procedures (V), possibly even a fourth order (U) and so on (T, S, R,...) until perhaps, although with no assurance at all, a final unity of conventions and procedures of the n^{th} order is reached which could account for all instances and disciplines of art.

Owing to this, unless a proceduralist can provide good reasons to think that there is this unity of procedures and conventions, and unless he summarises and justifies them properly (recall that the later Dickie – and many others – categorically reject the act of status conferral as a procedure for artmaking), his project will lead to an infinite regress in the search for this unity of first, second, third, etc. order

conventions and procedures. This would ultimately leave art undefined (i.e., because of the problem of infinite regression in procedural definitions of art), unless an alternative to proceduralism can be taken into account to explain all instances of art.

C) Is Davies's notion of 'proceduralism' useful?

Davies coined the notion of 'procedural definitions of art' and substituted it for the notion of 'institutional definitions' that had been used so far to refer to Dickie's and Danto's formulations. Presumably he did so because he believed it was more suitable, although he never provides any reason why the older notion of 'institutional definitions' should be replaced.

Given his conception of the central role of procedures in art, perhaps, he thinks it is more heuristically useful to use the notions of 'proceduralism' and 'procedural definitions' instead. Notions of 'institutionalism' and 'institutional definitions', he would say, point misleadingly towards the idea that person-institutions, such as the Tate Modern or the Saatchi and Saatchi gallery, play a central role in art (see Chapter 6, Section 6.2 for the discussion about person-institutions and action-institutions).

At times, however, even Davies seems unsure about whether it is best to think about current definitions of art in terms of 'proceduralism' or 'institutionalism', because he often uses the latter notion instead of the former (for example in: Davies, 1991: 3, 38 – 39, 78, 113 – 114). Furthermore, when he comes to examine Danto's theory, Davies argues that it is unclear whether this theory can be considered as proto-institutionalist or as providing a fully institutionalist account: that is, he does not refer to Danto's theory as 'proto-proceduralist' or as 'proceduralist' (see: Davies, 1991: 81). These explicit references to institutional theories show that Davies hasn't sufficiently worked out the need or the justification for this new term ('proceduralism') to refer to these institutional theories.

Davies claims that institutionalist theorists are committed, not just to the idea of defining art in terms of procedures and conventions, but to the idea of defining art in terms of what he thinks to be its common procedures. Namely, he believes that institutionalists support the idea that art is produced by someone with the appropriate authority, conferring the status of art on his artworks (Davies, 1991: 39). Given this, and his rejection of functional definitions, he also endorses the idea of ‘status conferral’ for his own definition of art (Davies, 1991: 218 – 219).

This concept of the procedures typical in art, however, is insufficient to understand the philosophical divide concerning definitions of art: Davies argues that the debates about the different definitions of art are to be understood in terms of functionalism or proceduralism. Davies’s belief that an institutionalist is committed to the idea that artworks are made in accordance with the procedure of ‘status conferral’, however, implies that Dickie’s later definition of art (DK2), is not an institutional theory of art. This is because Dickie, in his later works, rejects the idea that artworks are the product of such an act of conferral. In fact he criticises Davies’s *Definitions of Art* for considering more highly of Dickie’s earlier DK1 theory and definitions that supported the idea of ‘status conferral’, and that he (Dickie) had later rejected in DK2 (‘Nature/Culture’: 21; also in: *Art and Value*: 38; see also Chapter 6 – Sections 6.1 and 6.2 – on Dickie’s later rejection of his DK1 definitions). In addition, if we follow Davies, DK2 cannot be classified as aesthetic functionalism because it doesn’t hold that the *aesthetic* function of art is relevant to the definition of art itself.

The problem with Davies’s theory is that he never clarifies whether institutionalists and proceduralist claim the same thing or not. If he argues that they actually do claim the same thing, then the main proponent of the institutional theory, George Dickie, in his second DK2 period, can be grouped neither among the proceduralists/institutionalists nor with the (aesthetic) functionalists. If institutionalists do not argue the same thing as proceduralists, it would seem that Dickie’s DK2 is proceduralist but not institutionalist. However, in that case, Davies’s work would be incomplete because it fails to characterize the differences between these two groups. As a result, it remains unclear, in *Definitions of Art*, whether DK2 is a procedural theory but not an institutional theory or if it is both.

Moreover, if Davies had made a more thorough examination of Dickie's positions, he would have realised that DK2 puts no stress on the idea that, in general, procedures in art are relevant to its definition, so as to consider him a proceduralist *tout court*. In fact, in DK2, Dickie speaks only in general terms of the act of 'making' art and stresses the relevance of the cultural matrix instead. This results from Dickie's reformulation of the institutional nature of artworks that asserts that they are the product of action-institutions that do not require person-institutions for their existence.

It is not surprising that Davies fails to see the profound differences between DK1 and DK2, because he explicitly – and disturbingly – says that he is not interested in examining in detail the different positions but only in considering their different approaches (Davies, 1991: 38; see also: Davies, 1991: 79). But this is precisely the problem with Davies's *Definitions of Art*: He is too quick to provide a simplified overview of the various different theories, and more precisely of Danto's and Dickie's, in order to present his own as superior (in his opinion) to the others, and in doing so fails to afford them a fair and complete assessment (as I have shown, in Chapters 2 and 3 on Danto's theories and in Chapters 5 and 6 on Dickie's).

As a result, his own proposal about how to define art procedurally fails, because it is based on a superficial account of Danto's and Dickie's different theories (i.e., D1, D2, D3, DK1, DK2). It also fails because it provides an oversimplified account of the overall debate about definitions of art, understood in terms of a divide between those supporting an approach akin to Beardsley's aesthetic functionalism and those supporting an approach akin to DK1.

Further, Davies's attempt to frame the debate about definitions of art in terms of an essential division between proceduralists and functionalists is more confusing than helpful, because he never clarifies whether institutionalists and proceduralists claim the same thing or not. This becomes more urgent the moment he argues that institutionalists always support the idea of status conferral in art, something which the later Dickie explicitly rejects, although he still sees himself as an institutionalist. Davies might well respond that, in *Definitions of Art*, he meant that the notion

‘proceduralism’ would be a synonym of ‘institutionalism’, but that he nevertheless failed to see that perhaps not all institutionalist/proceduralists support status conferral in art, yet they do still define art in terms of conventions and procedures. It is not clear, however if this would still hold for DK2, because as I pointed out in Chapter 6, Dickie focuses now more upon the notion of culture and on the idea of artmaking as an institutionalised action, without stressing, as he did in DK1, the role of procedures for artmaking.

Accordingly, I would suggest dropping the notion of ‘proceduralism’ and of ‘procedural definitions’. This is because Davies, in attempting to summarise the debate in terms of these new notions, unnecessarily multiplies the concepts used in a confusing (and redundant?) manner that only adds obscurity to the debate: do all proceduralists believe in the idea of status conferral, as Davies claims that institutionalists do? If so, is the later Dickie an institutionalist and a proceduralist or not? Davies’s attempts to provide an overview of procedural definitions of art, without providing a sufficiently thorough analysis of the different procedural/institutional theories, only brings confusion rather than clarity to the debate.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Since the different institutional theories were first proposed, they were progressively modified in response to the criticisms they received and to the changing views of their proponents. However, I have attempted to stress the fact that, when interpreters and critics summarize the theories of Danto and Dickie, these variations or later changes are seldom taken into account, to the extent that many of the objections addressed to these theories actually refer only to part of their works or to their older and thus obsolete versions. Yet it is also true that some aspects of these different works; and especially of these older versions, provide interesting reflections that were dropped in later developments and are worth re-examining in relation to the earlier body of ideas. Thus, for example, Dickie stresses in DK1 an important point which is dropped in DK2. This is that he is only focusing on Western art since the 18th century, presumably to avoid the anachronistic and ethnocentric ideas, that Danto, for example, is unable to avoid.

Further, the ideas developed in the different institutional theories of art, and particularly those of Danto and Dickie, are currently included in academic courses of the philosophy of art and aesthetics. But no book apart from Davies's *Definitions of Art*, explicitly addresses itself exclusively to this issue. It is true that other authors have attempted to summarise Danto's and Dickie's theories in their own work; we can point, for example, to Tilghman's *But is it Art?* and Hagberg's *Art as Language*. Also Carroll has briefly discussed the different institutional definitions of art in his recent book *Philosophy of Art – A Contemporary Introduction*. Even Dickie himself has attempted to summarise the debates on definitions of art in his *Introduction to Aesthetics – An Analytic Approach* (1997), and in other publications.

In some of these cases, however, the object of the discourse is not to clarify the different institutional definitions of art; the theories offered are just used as means for explaining something else. Tilghman, for example, is interested in clarifying the misinterpretations in aesthetics of Wittgenstein's theories; Hagberg is interested in examining the relations between the different theories of art and their claims or

presuppositions about language while attempting also to clarify Wittgenstein's ideas. Other interpretations are insufficiently developed and do not adequately take into account the different periods and changes that these theories have undergone (as is the case with Carroll's book and even of Davies's as I stressed in Chapter 7). Other approaches, such as Dickie's, have a different problem: while he attempts (more than Danto) to reflect upon the developments of his own theory and upon the reasons for these changes, he nevertheless lacks an external perspective, and as a result there are elements of that development that he is unable to see. Similarly, the same happens with Davies's book when he attempts to favour the institutional/procedural definitions of art, and particularly his own version, over functionalist, historicist and intentionalist approaches: he lacks a sufficient self-critical distance on the problems of his own approach and of his conception of those institutional/procedural theories of art. The fact remains, however, that Davies's *Definitions of Art* remains the only full length and thorough guide to this topic.

Owing to this, I have attempted to fill this gap by focusing, essentially, upon the different versions of the institutional theories of art offered by Danto, Dickie and Davies, without committing (or at least not consciously) to any one version or to any other alternative definition of art. In doing this I hope to provide a more disinterested and useful guide than Davies's, so to provide scholars and researchers with more bibliographical sources that would address those hitherto neglected aspects they would like to discuss or examine more conscientiously concerning this debate. Thus, given that my own approach differs substantially in methodology, explanatory content and preferences from that of Davies's (concerning Danto's and Dickie's different claims), I hope this work will be of certain value for later researchers on this topic.

Further, the different summaries and criticisms, concerning the theories of Danto and Dickie that I have developed in a more systematic, genealogical and contextual manner than Davies, should provide material for new areas of enquiry that are, in fact, already suggested by these same authors.

Thus, Dickie in his later period (DK2) suggests modifying Davies's consideration of the debate about definitions of art from the dichotomy 'functionalism *versus*

proceduralism' to the dichotomy 'natural *versus* cultural theories of art'. This new standpoint allows us to see Danto's and Dickie's theories, as well as those of Davies, Levinson, Beardsley or Carroll, in a new light. It also allows us to clarify some other hitherto ignored or insufficiently acknowledged aspects of those theories by putting them in relation, as Davies does later in his book *The Philosophy of Art* (Davies, 2006), with philosophical theories more sympathetic to anthropological or ethological explanations. Davies thus suggests there the idea of putting the different institutional theories of art in relation to the cultural theories of art of Larry Shiner, and the ethological-Darwinian theories of art of Dennis Dutton or Eileen Dissanayake.

This new approach to the debate about what art is, in terms of cultural or biological explanations, suggested by Dickie and later supported by Davies, looks very promising. Recent theoretical developments and experimental research on neuroaesthetics, Darwinian aesthetics and evolutionary psychology conducted so far, do in fact provide new relevant information about the biological basis of human aesthetic preferences. However, these scientific approaches to art, developed from the fields of psychology and biology, also require a proper management of the concepts they use (such as those of 'art', 'aesthetic experience', 'artwork', 'artist' 'creative activity' and so on) before any further research or experimentation can be conducted. This conceptual clarification is required in order to avoid such often-made mistakes as confusing, for example, 'aesthetic experience' with the experience of artworks or the process of artmaking with any type of creative activity. Thus the methodological work of conceptual clarification is required as a preliminary step before developing these ideas, and before submitting any conclusions, supporting ethological explanations of art.

This conceptual clarification can come also, for example, from the work of biologists such as Stephen Jay Gould and Richard L. Lewontin as well as from that of the evolutionary psychologist Stephen Pinker, amongst others. This clarification is useful owing to their criticisms of the abuse of Panadaptationist explanations (inspired more by Wallace's theory of evolution than by Darwin's) in biology, that supporters of the natural/biological explanation of art, such as Dutton seem to be supporting – actually, it is interesting to point out here that Davies has recently

published a paper defending the adaptationist position that Dutton holds, by criticising Gould and those supporting an anti-adaptationist explanation of art (See: Davies, 2010). Alternatively, Larry Shiner's work on the social history of art, *The Invention of Art*, provides important material for this conceptual clarification; his genealogical analysis of the term 'art', and of its shifting within the evolving taxonomy of the arts, offers us a clearer understanding of its earlier relations with the notions of *Techné* and with the mechanical arts. His analysis also offers a better understanding of the progressive divergence and later re-convergence of art and craftsmanship.

In fact, I believe, as Shiner does, that both, natural and cultural theories of art, are necessary to each other (Shiner, 2008) and that, also following the later Davies (Davies, 2006), they can and ought to be put in relation with other analytical approaches to the definition of art, in order to increase our understanding of art, about the different cultural practices of humankind, and about the specific traits all humans share as a result of their being members of the same evolved species.

Additionally, there is a second line of development that can and ought to be developed and that, with the exception of particular cases such as Goehr and Vilar, has been scarcely explored: the connections between 20th century analytical and continental approaches to the elucidation of what art is (Goehr, 2007; Vilar, 2005). This connection seems even more promising after Danto attempted to connect his own theory of art with that of Hegel, whose influence in 20th century continental philosophy is evident. Thus Goehr has, for example, recently published a book in which she explores some of the connections between Danto's and Adorno's theories of art, casting a new light on certain underlying aspects or subterranean currents in their theories that had so far been ignored by other researchers. I have attempted recently to follow Goehr's programme, first by acknowledging the important differences between Adorno's and Danto's theories, and then by suggesting the equally important similarities in their ideas and their underlying philosophical and cultural currents (Lemkow, 2011).

Also, Davies later acknowledges (although without any explicit self-criticism regarding his earlier view), that the debate about definitions of art cannot be

conceived in terms of either purely functional or purely procedural terms. This allows us to look for the areas of agreement, and not only the disagreements, in these two contending positions. Thus, to understand better Dickie's institutional theories (i.e., DK1 and DK2), a consideration of Dickie's theoretical connection to Beardsley's metacritical theories can and ought to be taken by identifying the areas of agreement and not only the disagreements between these two philosophers. On the one hand, this would make possible a new way of understanding Dickie's theory independently of Danto's. On the other, it would allow us (in contrast to what Davies so heavily stresses) to understand Beardsley's theory as inspiring, and not only as opposing, the institutional approach. Of course, insisting too much on the idea of finding similarities and continuities between authors, rather than radical differences and discontinuities, could end in the complete misunderstanding of these same theories (e.g., by regarding Beardsley as a proto-institutionalist, or by claiming that Dickie's theory is not connected at all to Danto's because it basically continues Beardsley's metacritical project). So, to avoid this line of interpretation, the idea would rather be to cast aside, but only for a while, those connections traditionally taken into account and which have proven plausible if not correct. This will cast a new light upon those aspects of the theories of Beardsley, Dickie and Danto that so far have been neglected as a result of understanding them basically in terms of the received view.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that I have characterised most of the previous interpretations of Danto's and Dickie's theories (and now Davies's theories also, 20 years after his 1991 publication of *Definitions of Art*) as 'received views', without attempting to attribute a conscious 'standardisation' programme to those supporting these interpretations. In fact, I have attempted to make it clear that there are a number of received views, rather than just one sharing all the aspects that I have summarised in the introductory Chapter (in particular, in Section 1.4). There are thus *several interpretations* that have been traditionally taken for granted and that I have attempted to dispel by adopting a different, more historical and chronological, methodology. The methodology used has been to go directly and systematically to the original bibliographical sources, and ordering and summarising the works and ideas in chronological order, rather than thematically. In fact, most of these traditional interpretations of Danto's and Dickie's theories have been compiled (and

asserted as true) in a synthesis of sorts, by Davies in his *Definitions of Art*. For this reason, I wish to offer my own work in contrast to that of Davies so as to allow later researchers to make a comparison between our respective interpretations and determine whether his or mine (or both?) are correct.

I acknowledged in several places, however, Davies's progressive change of views on the institutional theories of art summarised in his earlier work. However, he still continues to refer to his earlier book, without any explicit word of self-criticism, whenever he wishes his readers better to understand this debate. I hope it is clear by now, that I also regard this procedure critically. If Davies really wishes to make abundantly clear his later change of opinion favouring a less rigid understanding of this debate between pure proceduralists and pure functionalists, he should publicly distance himself from the position he took in *Definitions of Art*.

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