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A DEFENCE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL THEORY OF ART'S DEFINITION

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Stephen Davies "A Defence of the Institutional Definition of Art."

The institutional definition of art has been presented most prominently by George Dickie. Dickie has defined 'work of art' as (i) an artifact (ii) 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 the Artworld.¹ Each of (i) and (ii) are necessary, jointly they are sufficient for something's being an artwork. More recently he has modified and refined this definition to read as follows: (i) an artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of an artwork; (ii) a work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an Artworld public; (iii) a public is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them; (iv) the Artworld is the totality of all Artworld systems; (v) an Artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an Artworld public.² Again, each of (i)-(v) is necessary and jointly they are sufficient for something's being an artwork.

In this paper my aim is to defend the institutional theory against some of the criticisms which Dickie's account has attracted. Seven points in Dickie's position have been attacked: (I) his assertion that anyone might be an artist, and, in particular, his claim that a urinal salesman might have been as much an artist as was Duchamp in that the salesman was as capable as was Duchamp of conferring art-status upon a urinal; (II) his acknowledgment that his

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definition is circular; (III) his apparent rejection of the need (or possibility) of an account of the aesthetic and of aesthetic properties; (IV) his view that a person, isolated from a social setting from birth, could not produce art; (V) his failure to show that the actions of artists in conferring art-status are rule-governed, as opposed merely to being regular; (VI) his insistence on artifactuality as a necessary condition for art-status; and (VII) his failure in defining art to provide any account of the point of art, i.e. of the place and value of art within the life of the community. I argue that each of the first five objections might be met by a theory such as Dickie proposes were it to characterise more obviously than does Dickie the Artworld in terms of the structure of the roles which comprise that institution. The viability of such a theory depends upon its being able to provide a description of the authority, membership and limits of those roles. I uphold the sixth objection against Dickie, but suggest that the institutional theory can survive the rejection of artifactuality as a necessary condition for art-status. In the case of the seventh objection I defend Dickie by arguing that an adequate definition of art perhaps need not consider the point of art, so that his failure to discuss the matter is not necessarily a weakness in his position.

As these comments suggest, my aim is to defend the institutional theory, rather than Dickie's particular formulation of it. Indeed, my concern is to protect the institutional theory from its main protagonist, as much as from its critics, because the objections I consider are ones understandably invited by Dickie's presentation of the theory. Apart from my rejecting Dickie's claim that artifactuality is a necessary condition for something's attaining art-status, I am generally critical of Dickie's tendency to discuss the conferral of art-status as if it were a type of action rather than an exercise of authority which is vested in socially defined roles. And I am critical of his tendency to assume that it is only artists who have the authority to confer art-status and, hence, of his view that anyone might be an artist. Dickie's presentation of his views on these matters suggests, perhaps, that he is less clear than he might be on what would be involved in justifying the institutional theory of art. In general I suggest that Dickie's account is inadequate or, at best, incomplete -

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and in the case of his discussion of artifactuality, I suggest that his view is mistaken.

I

Dickie maintains that it is artists who confer art-status within the institutionalised context of the Artworld, and that each member of the Artworld is (or might be) an artist. On his view, what distinguishes Duchamp's offering a urinal for appreciation and a urinal salesman's doing the same thing in the course of his employment is the institutional context in which the two acts are performed. The urinal salesman does not create an artwork (as Duchamp did) because he does not act within the context of the Artworld. But there was no institutional bar which would have prevented the salesman having done what Duchamp did. If the salesman did not do what Duchamp did, this was only because he was limited by his own imagination and/or courage. He might have been as successful in creating Fountain as was Duchamp had he acted within the appropriate institutional context. That is, the salesman is as much an artist, within the context of the Artworld, as was Duchamp.

This view is implausible.³ Even if the salesman might have created artworks - for example, paintings - it is not obvious that he could have acted in so radical a fashion as did Duchamp and succeeded as Duchamp did in conferring art-status on a urinal. The point is not one about the Artworld's acceptance or rejection of the salesman's attempt to confer art-status on a urinal, had he made it prior to Duchamp's. The institutional theory does not suppose that only that which is accepted by the Artworld public as art is art; the conferral of art-status, where it is successful, occurs before the piece is submitted to the public, if it ever is. Rather, the point to be made is one about the salesman's authority to alter, as Duchamp did, the conventions by which art-status might successfully be conferred. To accept that just anyone is (or might be an artist) seems to undercut the institutional theory in that it deprives the notion of role-differentiation, on which such an account must rely if it is to be convincing, of any substance.⁴ Roles which are occupied by everyone are not roles of the sort which characterise social institutions. Such institutions are structured in terms of differences in roles and

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differences in the authority which goes with such roles. If everyone is equally 'authorised' to confer art-status, then the notion of authorisation is empty, as is the claim that such 'authority' marks the limits of an institutionally defined role.

This objection seems to me to count powerfully against the institutional theory of art as it is presented by Dickie. Why did he leave his account open to it? Perhaps he did so in recognition of the fact that the creation of artworks does not depend upon formal training or formal qualifications, so that anyone with a conception of art - and who amongst adults would not have such a conception within our society? - might create art. Perhaps also Dickie was impressed by the fact that, once Duchamp created Fountain as an artwork, there seems little to prevent a urinal salesman successfully following suit (although there would be little artistic point in his doing so).

But even if we accept the truth of the claims made above, they do not mitigate the force of the objection. If they seem to do so, this can only be because of the common tendency to equate a person with the role s/he fills, so that all of his or her actions are carelessly viewed as actions performed in his or her capacity as the occupant of that role. That is, the mistake consists in a failure to recognise the institutional limits of the role. Even if Henry Moore is an artist, it does not follow that the eggs which he selects for his morning omelette are artworks, even if he chooses them for their aesthetically pleasing shape, because he is not in cooking his breakfast acting in his role as artist. And, even if the urinal salesman can create some works of art, it does not follow that he can succeed in an attempt to use in a novel way just any of the conventions by which art-status might be achieved.

Dickie's account would have to be modified were it to meet the objections raised. I think that there are ways of changing it which would preserve the viability of an institutional theory. In the following I outline the types of modifications which seem to be required.

The Artworld is an informal institution. That is to say, the procedures by which roles within the institution come to be

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occupied are informal and the limits of the authority which define those roles are not strictly codified, although there are such limits. As an institution the Artworld is structured in terms of its various roles - artist, impresario, public, performer, curator, critic, and so on - and the relationships between them. Within the wider institution are to be found some formally structured elements - theatres, art galleries, ministries of the arts, and so forth.

An artist is someone who has acquired (in some appropriate but informal fashion) the authority to confer art-status. By 'authority' I mean an entitlement successfully to employ the conventions by which art-status is conferred on objects/events. (In particular, I do not mean a right to others' obedience.) This authority is acquired through the artist's participation in the activities of the Artworld. It is not (usually) formally bestowed upon the artist by other members of the Artworld and does not rely on their consent. In exercising this authority the artist acts 'on behalf of' the Artworld in the sense that he or she employs the powers vested in the role of artist, and not in the further sense of "speaking for" other members of the Artworld.

There are institutional limits on the procedures, occasions and contexts by and in which art-status may be conferred, on who can do the conferring, and on the character of the objects/events on which the status may be conferred. (The parallel with Christening has been drawn by Dickie - the parallel resides in the way in which Christening is similarly constrained.⁵) The conventions employed in conferring art-status change through time, as does the possible membership of the roles in which there is authorisation to confer art-status through the activation of these conventions. Not even Duchamp could have created readymade artworks had he lived two hundred years ago. And now that Duchamp has established a new use of the conventions by which art-status may be conferred, that use of the conventions has become available to lesser lights in the Artworld. There are conventions for the conferral of art-status that almost everybody is authorised to employ successfully; but there are (or have been) other conventions which only a limited number of people would have been authorised to employ.

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The emphasis is to be placed on authority rather than skill. It is not that there is one sense of the word 'artist' according to which there are many and another sense in which there are few, just as there is one sense of the word 'chessplayer' in which there are many and another in which there are few although there are many unskilled 'wood-pushers'. The display of artistic skills might be one of the informal ways in which a person qualifies for the special authority which goes with his or her being a recognised artist. But, allowing this, what matters is the authority and not the way in which it is acquired. Many people are authorised to use some of the conventions by which art-status may be conferred, but only a few people are authorised to use all of them, or to modify them, as Duchamp did. Duchamp had the authority to do what the salesman could not have done (at that time). The fact that Duchamp had acquired that authority as a result of achieving recognition as an avant-garde artist is crucial, whether or not he needed to display special skills to merit that recognition.⁶ (He showed no artistic skills which the salesman might have lacked when it came to conferring art-status on a urinal.)

These remarks bear on a number of related issues which have been seen as presenting problems for the institutional theory.

Dickie has a tendency to write as if anyone who succeeds (or might succeed) in conferring art-status is thereby an artist. Thus he implies that a gallery director who confers art-status on a chimpanzee's painting by displaying it in the appropriate institutional context is thereby an artist in being responsible for the conferral of that status. Similarly, anyone who conferred art-status on artifacts made by people acting outside of the Artworld context would thereby be an artist, as would be the person who conferred art-status on a piece of driftwood (without altering its physical properties in any way). Such views seem to me to be counter-intuitive - a person who claimed to be an artist solely on the strength of such exploits would stretch the meaning of the term so far, I think, as to strike us a poseur.⁷ If this is not obvious always, that is because, often, the people who confer art-status on such pieces have established already their credentials as artists. This perhaps disguises the fact that they

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are not acting in their capacity as artists in conferring art-status on occasions such as I have described above. In the ordinary use of the term, we take artists to be people who create objects/events or specifications for their creation, as well as, and thereby, conferring art-status. If this is accepted, the people who successfully, but merely, confer art-status on natural objects without modifying their primary and secondary properties, on the products of animals' 'typing' or 'painting', and on objects manufactured outside the Artworld context, do not act as artists in doing so.

But this need not embarrass the institutional theory of artistic creation, I think. Even if artists are authorised within the institution to confer art-status, it need not be the case that the role of artist is the only role within the institution in which this authority resides. The counter-intuitive appearance of such cases as are described above is removed once this is conceded. What follows, of course, is that some artworks are not the responsibility of any artist (or, at least, of anyone who was acting as an artist in conferring upon them art-status). That is not difficult to accept, I think, once it is recognised that someone with suitable authority within the Artworld is responsible for their acquiring art-status, even if that person did not act as an artist in conferring that status.

With the above in mind we might easily justify a reluctance in following Dickie in his claim that anyone is (or might be) an artist. If Dickie means that anyone might have artistic skills, or that anyone might come to qualify for the role of artist, he is perhaps right. But if he means, as he seems to, that just anyone might have the authority to employ successfully all of the conventions by which art-status might be conferred, then he is mistaken. If we tend to reserve the title "artist" only to a recognised few, as in practice we tend to do, his claim is misleading at best. Once we accept that the authority to confer art-status goes with roles other than that of artist, there is no problem in resisting the temptation to follow Dickie in his unorthodox usage. We can agree that a urinal salesman now might be as capable of turning urinals into artworks as was Duchamp without also having to agree that the salesman is thereby an artist (or as much of an artist)

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as was Duchamp when he adopted what was then a novel use of the conventions for the conferral of art-status.

We might also allow for the case in which a urinal salesman was ahead of his time in trying, unsuccessfully, to do what Duchamp did later. Prior to Duchamp's act, another artist who had as much authority as did Duchamp might have succeeded in conferring art-status on a urinal, without this being accepted or even known about, by the Artworld public. But the urinal salesman, as envisaged by Dickie, was not such a person. In the salesman's case we can acceptably deny that he was an artist and deny that he succeeded in producing an artwork, even though, at some later date, the piece he created had conferred upon it the status of art, although its physical properties were not modified at that later date.

II

Another matter to which this discussion is relevant is the following: If we think of artists as persons, rather than as occupants in some of their actions of informally defined roles, then the institutional definition of art cannot avoid appearing to be painfully circular. Art is that which is presented as a candidate for appreciation within the context of the Artworld; and to present something as a candidate for appreciation is to act as an artist does. But how can 'acting as an artist does' be characterised, with the emphasis on the action instead of on the authority of the role, without invoking the explanandum? Dickie acknowledges the circularity involved; indeed, he flaunts it as mirroring the inflected nature of the concept of art. What matters, he suggests, is the distance travelled, rather than the circularity of the route.⁸ But surely he ought not to be so sanguine? Circularity will be a fault in any definition which purports to have explanatory power.⁹ Moreover, Dickie's attitude cannot but give force to the major worry about the institutional definition of art - viz., that the Artworld is identifiable only because art exists independently of it, and not vice versa.

If the circle can be broken, as I believe it might be, then the theory is the better for this fact. There are three ways in which the circle might be breached. Neither the second nor the third

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approach produces desirable results. However, the first approach is satisfactory from the point of view of an institutional definition of art.

One might hope to avoid circularity in the definition by characterising the role of artist not in terms of some type of action which anyone might perform, but, rather, in terms of the limits of authority which define that role. (Anyone might say 'I declare you man and wife', but not just anybody can marry a couple in uttering those words - the person may lack the authority to marry people, or may have the authority only in contexts other than the one in question.) Such an account, I have suggested, must be available if the institutional theory is to be a plausible one. If one can give an account of the nature and limits of that role (or any role which carries with it the authority to confer art-status), and of the social conditions which determine those limits, then the circularity can be broken. Provided that one can describe the limits of the role without appealing to the content of artworks (except indirectly, by reference to the history of the conventions employed in conferring art-status), then the circularity is avoided in that the account of the Artworld need presuppose no particular identification of objects/events as artworks.

In more general terms, the circle will be broken if the theory provides an account of the structure of the Artworld as distinct from that of other (formally or informally) structured institutions, and does so without reference to the character of art. The product of the institution, art, then is distinguished from the products of other structured institutions as that which is generated within the institution of the Artworld. Throughout this paper I have been arguing that the institutional theory presupposes (not unreasonably) the possibility of just such an account.

Once again, the institutional theory can meet a difficulty faced by Dickie's formulation of the theory only if it concentrates more than Dickie has done on an account of the way in which the institution of the Artworld is structured in terms of roles differentiated in terms of their membership, authority and limits.¹⁰

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Alternatively, one might break the circle by arguing that aesthetic appreciation is distinctively different from other forms of appreciation. An artwork, then, will be a candidate for this special type of appreciation. Those who have argued that Dickie needs an account of the aesthetic may, in making this point, perhaps see this as the obvious way to avoid circularity in the definition.¹¹

However, this approach is unlikely to appeal to Dickie, who has been a fervent critic of attempts to describe a distinctive aesthetic attitude. This is not to say that Dickie could dispense altogether with a notion of the aesthetic, or that he would even want to. He has accepted that appreciability is a necessary, but easily satisfied condition for something's qualifying for art-status.¹² And to allow this is perhaps also to concede that the piece in question must have some aesthetic properties. But it is to say, I think, that Dickie does not think that art can be defined in terms of aesthetic properties or a distinctive aesthetic attitude. Even were one to succeed in characterising such an attitude as distinctive (which might well be possible), it is difficult to see how that characterisation could serve one in the attempt to distinguish art from non-art, since it seems obvious that such an attitude could be adopted as easily (if not as profitably) to non-art as to art. Appreciability is mentioned in Dickie's definition, but not because a piece achieves art-status in virtue of its appreciability. That a piece is judged to be likely to provide aesthetic appreciation can be a reason for the artist to decide to confer art-status upon it, but what makes it art is that it has the status conferred, and not the reasons for the conferral of that status. In which case, the appeal here to an aesthetic attitude breaks the circularity of the definition only at the cost of falsifying it, in that that attitude may be exercised just as readily towards non-art as towards art.¹³

Or, thirdly, one might argue as follows: Dickie's recent definition is indexical in that it "passes the buck" from artifactuality to the artist and thence to the artworld, which it characterises as this, (our) institution. Since the artworld is a hodgepodge of artworld systems which have no essential, common property, and since there are non-artworld systems, such as dog shows, which share the

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features of artworld systems as these are described by Dickie, 'artworld' is a term with a reference but without a sense.¹⁴

This account breaks the circularity in Dickie's definition in that the definition is interpreted as being stopped short by an act of ostension which does not take us back to artifactuality. On this view, 'artworld' is a proper noun, rather than the name of a kind of thing, and hence is a particular lacking an essence of the type being sought by traditional aesthetics. And so it is that ostension, rather than a description of an essence, is appropriate. But the cost of breaking the circularity in this way is unacceptably high. The price is this: Nothing created outside of our current Artworld could be a work of art, and no other system, however much it resembled our Artworld, could really be an artworld.

Dickie has indicated his unwillingness to embrace such consequences.¹⁵ He accepts that his definition is indexical, in that the artworld is a cultural practice which must be understood within the context of its own time and place. But he also accepts that cultures other than ours might have their own artworlds (and, within them, create their own artworks). That is, contrary to the view above, he holds that the artworld is a kind of thing, rather than a unique individual. And, further, he accepts that his definition is circular, in that "the buck is passed" all the way round, whatever element of indexicality is inherent in the definition he has offered. Of course, this leaves Dickie with the problem which the third approach to the apparent circularity of his definition hopes to avoid - that of distinguishing non-artworld systems from artworld systems without appeal to the nature of the objects/events generated within them. Undoubtedly, Dickie's insistence on the acceptability of the circularity of his definition dodges, rather than meets, this difficulty. In proposing the first approach to the removal of circularity from his definition I have acknowledged the possibility and the need for an answer to this problem.¹⁶

IV

There is yet another potential problem for the institutional theory which it could meet by characterising that

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institution as generated out of the structure and inter-relation of informally established roles. The problem to which I refer is that of a socially isolated artist. The person in question is not someone, such as Robinson Crusoe, who just happens to be separated from the Artworld within which he was raised. Rather, the person here envisaged is someone who has no familiarity with social life in general, such as a feral child or a Stone Age cave-dweller.¹⁷

The line favoured by Dickie against this objection argues that, without some conception of an Artworld, a socially isolated individual could not produce art since such a person could have no conception of his or her products as artworks.¹⁸ And Dickie seems happy to say that such a person could have no conception of an Artworld.

Now, if Dickie's point were that it is difficult to see how such a person could have any concepts at all, and hence that no coherent description of the objection could be available, then it has some force. Indeed, perhaps this is the safest line to take against the objection. However, I am not sure that Dickie rests his reply on such a general, Kripkean/Wittgensteinian view of the matter.

But if we do accept that the person described in the counter-example might have some concepts, it may not be necessary to follow Dickie in embracing the counter-intuitive conclusion that such a person must lack a conception of an Artworld and, hence, of art. Here, as before, it is an appropriate emphasis on role-differentiation and a care not to equate the individual with any role he or she might fill which is required. One need not assume that a multiplicity of roles can be filled only by an equivalent number of people. A single person might fill a number of roles within a single institution, including the various roles of artist, impresario, critic, curator, audience, and so on which together would comprise an Artworld, despite the absence of a social context provided by the presence of other people. That is to say, social isolation need not count against the creation of the institutional context upon which depends, according to Dickie's theory, the creation of artworks.

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The institutional theory must hold that the Artworld is a structured institution (and not merely an "institution" to the extent that it is social). Ultimately, I have suggested, it must describe that structure in terms of the rules and conventions which define the roles which comprise the institution, which govern the membership of those roles, and which govern the limits of the authority of those roles. It is important, then, that it describe the actions of artists as rule-governed. Moreover, it must show those actions to be rule-governed not merely in the sense of being regular, but in the stricter sense according to which rule-following is a self-conscious, deliberate action. It is not necessary that a person who acts in accordance with a rule always be able to formulate the rule which is followed, but it is essential that that person has a conception of the rule and of what it is to act in accordance with that rule. Yet further, the institutional theory must show that the rules followed by members of the Artworld necessarily are such as to define the roles which structure an institution. This is required in order to demonstrate that art-making is institutionalised (and not merely a social practice) and to show that art-making is essentially (and not merely contingently) institutional.

One objection denies that the institutional theory could make good the most minimal of the claims made above. It claims that there must be an incompatibility between the free creativity displayed by artists in the production of novel works, and the restrictions imposed by rules on their followers.¹⁹ A first reply to the objection might note that there need be no incompatibility between the strict application of rules and the creation of the new - the fact that mathematical addition is a rule-governed activity does not mean that hitherto new additions cannot be performed. But this first reply does not do justice to the objection, which can rightfully note that new artworks, unlike new mathematical additions, often seem to set out to alter, or even to subvert, the rules and conventions which governed their predecessors. To this development of the objection a further reply is needed. It might go as follows: The fact that the rules of art-creation are challenged by the practices of artists need not show that art-creation is unrestrained by rules. Rather, it might be the case that there is a hierarchy of rules, with meta-rules controlling the way in which first-order rules may be modified. That is to say, that the first-

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order rules for art-creation can be changed by artists does not show that, ultimately, art-creation is not subject to rules, because the process of change might itself be governed by meta-rules. Indeed, unless the introduction of novelty is rule-governed to some extent, it is hard to see how we could distinguish between something which was novel as a new work of art or artform, and something which was novel as being a move from the production of an artwork to being the production of something which was not an artwork. That art-creation is rule-governed in certain essential respects need imply neither the stifling of creativity nor conservatism, either in the creation of new artworks or in the modification of the conventions of art-creation.

Yet others have argued that, whilst the actions of artists are rule-governed, the rules followed comprise no more than a social practice and are, at best, only contingently institutionalised.²⁰ To some extent this objection has been invited, I think, by Dickie's tendency to characterise the creation of art more as a type of activity than as an exercise of authority vested in a type of social role. Wieand, more than most, appreciates that social practices, such as waving good-bye, need not entail the existence of structured institutions 'on behalf of' which one might act, and that, therefore, the institutional theory must show more than that the actions of those who confer art-status are social practices.²¹ He doubts that this has been, or could be demonstrated. Amazingly, Dickie agrees with this verdict and, in doing so, seems to throw his theory away.²² But his later discussion suggests that he meant to deny no more than that the structure of the Artworld is formalised.²³ In denying that artists act 'on behalf of' the Artworld in conferring art-status, Dickie means only that they are not formally authorised so to act by the Artworld. But I believe that Dickie is mistaken in accepting that one cannot act 'on behalf of' an informal institution, provided that the institution in question is one structured in terms of distinct roles carrying with them different authorities. In acting 'on behalf of' the institution the person acts by virtue of his or her position in the institution, rather than by the consent of its other members. And the institutional theory must claim that the Artworld is just such a structured institution.

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What is at issue here is an empirical matter: Are the actions and practices of artists, art-makers, art-entrepreneurs, art-audiences etc. intentional and rule-governed in a way which justifies the claim that the Artworld is an institution which is socially structured in terms of roles such that some role-occupiers might be said to act on behalf of the institution in presenting to other members of the institution objects for aesthetic appreciation? And, if so, is this fact essential to those objects' having the status of artworks? Obviously these are not easy questions to answer, given that the alleged institution is not formally structured (at least, not in all of its elements) and is both extremely complex and diverse. If they were answered in the affirmative, the institutional theory would be proved correct. Short of such proof, it can be said, at least, that the claims of the institutional theory are plausible.

The objection being considered here could, perhaps, be weakened to a complaint that the institutional theory, by its failure to describe in detail the nature and limits of the roles which comprise the social structure of the Artworld, has failed to establish its case.²⁴ This form of the objection has some force, though it succeeds only in suggesting that the theory is incomplete and not in showing it to be mistaken. Two replies to this form of the objection - that the institution is informal, and that the job of describing it should fall to sociologists and historians rather than to philosophers - strike me as inadequate. Obviously it will be harder to describe the rules and roles of informal institutions than those of formal institutions. But such a description must, ultimately, be possible if the institutional theory is correct, even if too precise a specification of the limits of the roles, of the qualifications for membership, and of the authority which is vested in such roles, will be inappropriate. And the philosopher cannot easily dismiss an account of such matters as "merely empirical" and, hence, as below his or her notice. As I observed above, the acceptability of the theory rests finally on the truth of empirical claims.

VI

I turn now to a different matter - Dickie's insistence that arti-factuality is a necessary condition for something's qualifying for the conferral of art-status. Dickie has consistently held some such

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view from the earliest days of the institutional theory, and it receives even greater emphasis in his most recent accounts. In taking this line, Dickie is replying to Weitz's charge that there are not even any necessary conditions for something's being an artwork. According to Weitz, a piece of driftwood may become a work of art without its being modified in any of its physical properties - so artifactuality is not a necessary condition for art-status.²⁵ Dickie agrees with Weitz that 'art' can be applied to a piece of driftwood in its primary, classificatory sense, and not solely in its secondary, commendatory sense. But Dickie rejects Weitz's conclusion. He suggests that the act of conferring art-status changes the status of the driftwood to that of an artifact, and that all artworks necessarily are artifacts. On this matter I think that Dickie is mistaken.

Now, I take it that Dickie is not claiming merely that, as an artwork, a piece automatically becomes a cultural artifact; i.e. something with significance to members of a culture.²⁶ Instead, I take it that he means by 'artifact' an object/event which has been modified by work, or which has been manufactured from other elements.²⁷ So the question is: Does mere status-conferral count as "work" such that artifactuality, as well as a change in status, is produced through the act of status-conferral? It seems to me that it would be to stretch the notion of work, and (hence) of artifactuality, beyond acceptable limits to believe so.²⁸ In the following I consider two possible lines of reply to the objection, each of which is inadequate.

Perhaps one way of defending Dickie's view is this: That most works of art are artifacts is not a matter which is incidental to the place which art has in our lives - we could not have the concept of art that we do have in a world in which all aesthetically pleasing objects were natural in their occurrence, or were made primarily for their functional significance. It is for just this reason that "driftwood art" has seemed to be problematic. In recognition of this, we should see artifactuality as an honorary status conferred upon the driftwood when it is dubbed an artwork. The status is real (just as honorary degrees are real degrees), even though it is specially conferred and is not merited in the usual fashion (just as honorary degrees are not merited in the usual fashion).²⁹

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But this line of defence surely fails. Artifactuality is not the name of a status acquired by objects, but, rather, a causal consequence of their treatment or genesis. Statuses (honorific or otherwise) are the kinds of things which may be conferred, but causal consequences are not; statuses may be merited or not, but no relevant notion of merit applies to the recognition of something's being a causal consequence. If the argument given above can be applied to "driftwood art" at all, it would indicate that, for such artworks, it is art-status (and not artifactuality) which is honorary.

An alternative defence might go as follows: When Duchamp conferred art-status upon a urinal he changed more than the urinal's status, he also changed its aesthetic properties. Duchamp's Fountain ""comments" as an artwork on all statuary and media of statuary in a way in which otherwise indistinguishable urinals which are not artworks do not. By conferring art-status on the urinal, Duchamp created these additional aesthetic properties - "additional" in that these properties are over and above the aesthetic properties which might undeniably be displayed by other, similar urinals which lack art-status. Since, after all, it is aesthetic properties which artists "manufacture", and not mere objects, then the conferring of art-status is an act which creates an artifact which did not exist as such prior to that conferral. This is what distinguishes artists from artisans. And it is in this way that the conferral of art-status goes hand in hand with the creation of an artifact. Someone who confers art-status on a piece of driftwood transforms its aesthetic properties (if nothing else about it) in doing so, and in "manufacturing" these properties turns the driftwood into an artifact.³⁰

Again, I think that the proposed defence fails. Now, I accept that artworks take on aesthetic properties which their untransfigured counterparts (to use Danto's terms) lack, and that whoever confers upon artworks their art-status is responsible for their acquiring these properties. But I do not see this concession as meeting the objection raised above to the claim that artworks necessarily are artifacts, for I do not see this change as one which amounts to the creation of artifactuality. As I wrote before, one creates an artifact by working on a piece (or by specifying that it be

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worked on). Not just any change that one succeeds in bringing about in the piece's properties will show that it has been worked on. In the normal sense of the word, to work on something is to modify its physical properties. The aesthetic properties created through the conferral of art-status are "tertiary", relational properties, rather than "primary" or "secondary" properties. Art-status might (sometimes) be conferred via an act of titling, for example. But naming is a way of conferring status and, thereby, of generating new "tertiary" properties, and not a way of creating artifactuality. I do not intend to legislate on the matter, but it seems to me that normally we understand work of the kind which creates artifacts to involve the modification of "primary" and "secondary" properties, and no such modification occurs where art-status is conferred by an act of titling (coupled with moving the object to a gallery, etc.).

In *The Art Circle*, Dickie suggests that the artist uses the driftwood (or the urinal) in making it into an artwork, so that it becomes a complex object. Just as driftwood-used-as-a-tool becomes an artifact, he says, so driftwood-used-as-an-artistic-medium becomes an artifact.³¹ Now, I am doubtful that driftwood-used-as-a-tool does become an artifact. To use something as one would or could use a tool will not necessarily show that thing to be a tool. Here the work is done with, rather than on, the driftwood. But even if Dickie is correct about the driftwood-used-as-a-tool, I do not believe that he is right about the driftwood-used-as-an-artistic-medium. Where the "use" consists in picking up the driftwood, hanging it in a gallery, and so on, which is what Dickie claims, then I would deny that it has been worked upon in a way which achieves artifactuality as that notion normally is understood. As an artwork the driftwood is, perhaps, a complex object. But, for the reasons I have outlined above, that change in its status does not result in its becoming an artifact (except in the secondary sense in which it takes on a new, cultural significance.)

Duchamp's urinal was an artifact before it was an artwork, and it is an artifact as an artwork in virtue of those actions (which were not Duchamp's) which made it an artifact in the first place. In acquiring art-status the urinal becomes, perhaps, a new kind of object (namely, an artwork), but it does not become a new kind of

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artifact. Complementarily, the driftwood was not an artifact prior to its becoming an artwork and, in becoming an artwork, it was not modified in a way which makes it into an artifact, despite its acquiring art-status and aesthetic properties which previously it lacked.

The defences which I have offered on Dickie's behalf for his claim that artifactuality is a necessary property of artworks are plausible, but unsatisfactory, I think. For that reason I believe that Dickie is mistaken in his insistence on the necessity of artifactuality. But that mistake does not undermine the general attempt to offer an institutional definition of art. The institutional theory retains its character even if we reject, as I have done, the (supplementary) necessary condition that artworks be (or become) artifacts.

Dickie's discussion of artifactuality seems to open the door to another objection to his theory. Many artifacts have a place in the Artworld without thereby being artworks - theatre programmes, and the like. Dickie classes such artifacts as "secondary", by contrast with artworks which are classed as "primary" artifacts. The objection argues that Dickie will have trouble in drawing this distinction. Theatre programmes are artifacts offered for appreciation within the context of the Artworld. But, this is how he defines 'artwork'. So his definition fails in not allowing for a distinction which he must and does recognise between artworks and these other artifacts which are candidates for appreciation within the context of the Artworld but are not artworks. Dickie's definition of 'artwork' presupposes that we can draw the distinction, whereas it should provide a basis for our drawing the distinction.

This objection is one which Dickie might meet, I think. Several different lines of reply each seems to be adequate. (A) It may be arguable that the role performed by those who produce the "secondary" artifacts in the Artworld can be distinguished from the roles of art-creators. (B) Although Dickie rejects aesthetic attitude theories, he does allow, I suggested above, for an account of aesthetic appreciation as distinct from other forms of appreciation in some respects. If that is so, he might argue that theatre programmes are not 'candidates for appreciation' in the appropriate sense, i.e. in the sense intended in his definition. (C) It is true that a definition must

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characterise a distinctive feature of the definiens and, equally, it is true that Dickie's definition, in its unelaborated form does not. Clearly the full interpretation of Dickie's definition (perhaps along the lines suggested above) is intended to do this. Perhaps this is appreciated by the objector being considered who here aims at an epistemological, rather than a conceptual, point - that is, the complaint may be that Dickie's definition is not readily applicable in the attempt to distinguish "primary" from "secondary" artifacts. But nor need it be so if it is to be successful. A definition need not be useful in this way as a condition of its acceptability. The way in which we learn to identify and refer to a kind of thing frequently pays no heed to its defining properties, and so also it may be with artworks. If the objection rests on an epistemological point, and not a conceptual one, it fails for this reason.

VII

Finally, I turn to the seventh objection mentioned at the outset of this discussion. The objection is this: The institutional definition of art as presented by Dickie pays no heed to the place/function of art within the life of the community. Whatever that place/function might be, we would not value art as art in the way that we do were it not for the fact that art fills that place and meets that function. Neither would we have a reason for distinguishing art from non-art. No adequate definition of art could fail to mention such matters. It is not in the nature of the proposed institutional definition of art that it could reveal the point of our having a concept of art. Accordingly, that definition may be rejected as inadequate.³²

In reply to this objection one might make this concession: It is difficult to see how the definitions of many terms would be both acceptable and informative unless they made reference to the point of the concept being defined. How would one define the meaning of 'poison' except by reference to certain facts of biology and the consequences of those facts on the lives, capacities and aspirations of human beings? That is, how would one define 'poison' except in terms of the consequences of human beings' taking or being subject to certain substances which affect them in ways the

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significance of which can be understood only by reference to the value which such beings place upon their lives and capacities?

But having made this concession, one can go on to observe that not all definitions need take account of the point of the concept being defined. In particular, some notions are such that their definition must be given in terms of procedures, and not in terms of that which gives point to such procedures. I take the notion of property (in the sense of goods possessed) to be a case in point. Who owns what is defined in procedural terms, rather than in terms of the consequences of granting rights over goods which give point to such procedures. Thus it is that the rich might (really) own so much as to make it impossible for the poor to experience the benefits of property, even though the procedures for acquiring and transferring proprietorial rights over goods were once chosen or once evolved with the point (let us suppose) of providing each person in the community in which those procedures apply with secure access to a share of that which they need to meet their basic needs. Similarly, it is procedures which define who (really) has or has not a knighthood, even though the original point of conferring knighthoods has long since ceased to have social relevance. It is just where structured institutions are in place that the determining and defining conditions for classificatory distinctions are likely to be procedural, without their needing to take explicit cognisance of that which gives point to those procedures (if, indeed, they have any particular, or any remaining, point at all).

With this in mind, it is clear that the institutional definition of art cannot be judged to be inadequate in view of its failure to refer to the point of our classifying artworks as such. An adequate general theory of art could not ignore a consideration of such matters, but an adequate definition of art perhaps could do so. Indeed, if the Artworld is essentially institutional, as the institutional theory maintains, then we might predict that a definition of art would refer to procedures and roles, rather than to that which gives/gave them their point. In the absence of an argument which shows that art is a concept like that of poison and not like that of property - and I know of no such argument in the literature - the objection simply begs the very question which is at issue.³³

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A different formulation of what is essentially the same criticism might be stated as follows: The institutional theory does not explain why someone who has the authority to confer art-status would choose to exercise that authority with respect to one object/event, rather than another. So it explains how something becomes an artwork without explaining why it is an artwork. There is an ambiguity in the question "What makes something a work of art?" which is exploited by the institutional theory. It answers one interpretation of that question, but, in doing so, ignores the interpretation which asks for art's definition.

Again, the objection begs the question against the institutional theory's insistence that what is essential to something's being art is the procedure by which it becomes an artwork, and is not the reasons the conferrer of art-status might have for conferring that status. Artists might have many different (and concurrently held) reasons for conferring art-status. One good reason for conferring art-status on a piece is that that piece would serve the point (or one of the points) of art (supposing that art has such a point or points). An institutionalist might happily allow that the practice of art-creation, as well as the evaluation of artworks, will inevitably pay heed to the function served by art in our lives. But, as I have argued above, it is far from apparent that the institutionalist must also concede that which would invalidate his or her theory - that art is to be defined in terms of its point. What makes something an artwork is the way in which it acquires that status, whether and how it might merit that status.

I have argued that the seventh objection is not decisive. But what is clear, I think, is that it is the debate between the institutionalists and the functionalists about who is begging the question which, in the last analysis, will settle the fate of the institutional theory of art's definition.

VIII

In the light of the defence offered above to this seventh objection there is a moral to be drawn about the quest for a definition of art. Probably most people look to a definition of art in the hope of

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finding an account of the value and importance of art. The interest and worth of aesthetics lies in its facilitating just such an account. In the above I have suggested that the institutional definition of art is not necessarily faulty in its failure to be enlightening in this respect. Suppose that the institutional theory is correct in its account of art's definition. This will not mean that the theory is ultimately without interest or importance. But it will show that not too much should be expected from the enterprise of definition, and that more fertile areas for enquiry lie elsewhere. Indeed, it is possible that the general air of dissatisfaction expressed by aestheticians in connection with the institutional theory of art's definition reflects the unreasonableness of their expectations as to the revelatory importance of definitions of art, and does not reflect a lack of satisfactoriness in the definition offered by the institutionalists. That there is more to philosophical aesthetics and to art than could be captured by the institutional theory might indicate only that there is more to aesthetics than the determination of a definition of art.

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NOTES

1. Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis, Cornell U.P., Cornell, Ithaca, 1974, p.34.
2. The Art Circle, Haven Publications, New York, 1984, pp.80-82. Here Dickie has abandoned talk of 'conferral' in favour of talk of 'achievement'. The change appealed to Dickie for these reasons - 'conferral' made the activity sound too formal, and

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'achievement' implies work and, hence, the creation of artifactuality. Nevertheless, I prefer and hold to the earlier usage. 'Conferral' connotes the essentially institutional character of the act of art-creation, whereas 'achievement' is too general to retain the implication that what is involved is an exercise of authority.

3. Richard J. Sclafani, 'Art as a Social Institution: Dickie's New Definition', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 32, 1973, 111-114, agrees.

4. This point is made by Bruce W. Morton, 'Review of Aesthetics: An Introduction', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 32, 1973, 115-118, William L. Blizek, 'An Institutional Theory of Art', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 14, 1974, 142-150, Jeffrey Wieand, 'Can There be an Institutional Theory of Art?', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 39, 1980, 409-417 and Alan Simpson, 'Art and Games', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 26, 1986, 270-276.

5. This analogy has been challenged by M.H.Mitias, 'Art as a Social Institution', *The Personalist*, 56, 1975, 330-335, Anita Silvers, 'The Artworld Discarded', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 34, 1976, 441-454, and Timothy Binkley, 'Deciding About Art', in *Culture and Art*, editor Lars Aagaard-Mogensen, Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1976, 90-109. In each case the criticism is unfounded, I think. Mitias wrongly believes that Dickie believes that no rules or procedures are involved in conferring art-status, whereas they are involved in christening (or, his example, knighting). Silvers rightly notes that the two activities have different points, but fails to observe that the analogy is not extended to include their points. Binkley misunderstands the way in which his specifying/indexing is like both Dickie's conferring and like Christening.

6. Timothy Binkley, 'Piece: Contra Aesthetics', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 35, 1977, 265-277, and Steven Goldsmith, 'The Readymades of Marcel Duchamp: The Ambiguities of an Aesthetic Revolution', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 42, 1983, 197-208, appreciate the importance of the fact that Duchamp was an established artist.

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7. My misgivings are shared by Ted Cohen, 'The Possibility of Art: Remarks on a Proposal by Dickie', *The Philosophical Review*, 82, 1973, 69-82, by Blizek, *op.cit.*, and by Colin Lyas, 'Danto and Dickie on Art', in Aagaard-Mogensen, *op.cit.*, 170-193.

8. *The Art Circle*, pp.77-82.

9. See Monroe C. Beardsley, 'Is Art Essentially Institutional?', in Aagaard-Mogensen, *op.cit.*, 194-209, Graham McFee, 'Review of *The Art Circle*', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 26, 1986, 72-74, and Robert Stecker, 'The End of an Institutional Theory of Art', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 26, 1986, 124-132.

10. Terry Diffey, 'The Republic of Art', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 9, 1969, 145-156 and Soren Kjorup, 'Art Broadly and Wholly Conceived', in Aagaard-Mogensen, *op.cit.*, 45-53, have both emphasised that an institutional theory of art must characterise the roles which structure the Artworld and of the limits, membership, authority, etc. of those roles. Wieand, *op.cit.*, rightly attacks Dickie for his concentration on types of actions and not on the roles and offices of the Artworld.

11. Dickie's need for an account of the aesthetic (in order to distinguish aesthetic appreciation from appreciation in general) is discussed by Robert McGregor, 'Art and the Aesthetic', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 32, 1974, 549-557, Blizek, *op.cit.*, David D. Richardson, 'Nature-Appreciation and the Artworld', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 16, 1976, 186-191, Hubert G. Alexander, 'On Defining in Aesthetics', in Aagaard-Mogensen, *op.cit.*, 110-118, Gary Iseminger, 'Appreciation, the Artworld and the Aesthetic', in Aagaard-Mogensen, *op.cit.*, 118-130, Beardsley, *op.cit.*, and Robert Schultz, 'Does Aesthetics have Anything to do with Art?', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1978, 429-440. See also Carolyn Korsmeyer, 'On Distinguishing "Aesthetic" from "Artistic"', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 1977, 45-57.

12. See 'The Actuality of Art: Remarks on a Criticism by Cohen', *The Personalist*, 58, 1977, 169-172.

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13. Dickie makes clear in Chapter Six of *The Art Circle* that this is his argument. Both Cohen, *op.cit.*, and Robert McGregor, 'Dickie's Institutionalised Aesthetic', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 17, 1977, 97-101, recognise the possibility of such an argument, but both wrongly think that this reveals some inadequacy in the institutional account.

14. Although her argument is difficult to interpret, I take myself in the following to be giving a version of the position adopted by Catherine Lord, 'Indexicality, Not Circularity: Dickie's New Definition of Art', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 45, 1987, 229-232.

15. George Dickie, in reply to Catherine Lord, 'Why Not Both?', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 45, 1987, 297.

16. Perhaps there are fundamental concepts, such as that of 'identity', which cannot be defined without their being employed, but which can be discussed, nevertheless, in a revealing fashion. Were 'art' such a concept, Dickie's approach might be defended. But I doubt that this is so.

17. Weaker versions of this criticism are voiced by Beardsley, *op.cit.*, and Jerrold Levinson, 'Defining Art Historically', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 19, 1979, 232-250.

18. *The Art Circle*, pp.52-56. I discuss both this argument and the one which follows in greater detail in an unpublished paper, 'The Definition of Art'.

19. See Catherine Lord, 'Convention and Dickie's Institutional Theory of Art', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 20, 1980, 322-328. Lord follows David Lewis' account of conventions (*Convention: A Philosophical Study*, Harvard U.P., Harvard, 1969) in arguing that the actions of artists are not governed by conventions. Peggy Zeglin Brand, 'Lord, Lewis and the Institutional Theory of Art', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 40, 1982, 309-314, argues that the actions of artists do not contravene Lewis' conditions for convention-ruled behaviour. Brian Baxter, 'Conventions and Art', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 23, 1983, 319-332, does not believe that

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Lewis-type conventions are very important within the Artworld, but perhaps this is because he accepts Lord's arguments.

20. See Beardsley, *op.cit.*, Iseminger, *op.cit.*, and McGregor, *op.cit.*. Susan L. Feagin, in 'On Defining and Interpreting Art Intentionalistically', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 22, 1982, 65-77, argues that the artist's intentions would be rendered irrelevant by the institutional theory. In this I think she is mistaken and I have argued against her particular views in 'A Note on Feagin on Defining Art Intentionalistically', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 27, 1987, 178-180.

21. Wieand, *op.cit.*.

22. *The Art Circle*, p.52.

23. *The Art Circle*, pp.67 & 72-75.

24. Dickie's failure to give an account of the structure of the institution of the Artworld has consistently been criticised - see Cohen, *op.cit.*, Sclafani, *op.cit.*, Silvers, *op.cit.*, Timothy W. Bartel, 'Appreciation and Dickie's Definition of Art', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 19, 1979, 44-52, and Richard Wollheim, 'The Institutional Theory of Art', *Art and Its Objects*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge, 1980, 2nd edition, 157-166.

25. See Morris Weitz, 'The Role of Theory in Aesthetics', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 15, 1956, 27-35.

26. Jack Glickman, 'Creativity in the Arts', in Aagaard-Mogensen, *op.cit.*, 131-146, characterises artifactuality in this way. His views are criticised by Michael H. Mitias in 'The Institutional Theory of Artistic Creativity', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 18, 1978, 330-341.

27. A number of writers have thought, perhaps rightly, that Dickie was departing from the usual meaning of the term as given here - see Blizek, *op.cit.*, Mitias, *op.cit.*, Binkley, *op.cit.*, Lyas, *op.cit.* and Alexander, *op.cit.*.

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28. There is the further point that not just any kind of work performed on something will turn it into an artifact, or a new kind of artifact. If I dust the chair I do not turn it into a new kind of artifact, although I work on it. Similarly, if Duchamp dusted the urinal before taking it to the gallery he did not turn it into a new kind of artifact. This point does not come into play in the following discussion because I argue that Dickie does not show that work of any kind is performed on the driftwood or the urinal in turning them into artworks.

29. Dickie now admits in *The Art Circle*, p.44, that he presented a view such as this in *Art and the Aesthetic*.

30. Lucian Krukowski, 'A Basis for Attributions of "Art"', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 39, 1980, 322-328, sees Dickie's account in some such terms. In a similar way, Blizek, *op.cit.*, believes that Dickie links artifactuality with artistic creation rather than with manufacture. Some such account of artifactuality is offered by Gary Iseminger in 'The Work of Art as Artifact', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 13, 1973, 3-16.

31. *The Art Circle*, pp.44-46.

32. This objection is mentioned by Beardsley, *op.cit.*, Levinson, *op.cit.* and George Schlesinger, 'Aesthetic Experience and the Definition of Art', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 19, 1979, 167-176.

33. Dickie makes clear in *The Art Circle*, pp.84-86, that he doubts that art has any particular point. He admits that there is more to art than the institutional theory talks about, but does not think that there is any reason to think that this "more" is peculiar, and hence essential, to art. Here I think he is confused. Dickie is concerned with what is essential to something's being an artwork. But there is no reason to assume that what determines that will also reveal the point of our distinguishing art from non-art, as I have argued above. I discuss these issues in much greater detail in 'The Definition of Art'.