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Artistic Value and Art’s Definition

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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Abstract

The goal of this research project is to provide a theoretical framework for understanding artistic practices. I argue that the theory of art that I develop can ground both a theory of artistic value and a definition of art in the classificatory sense. I defend an “artistic functionalist” definition of art. By this I mean that artworks function to reward a particular way of attending to the artefacts that I label “the artistic attentional strategy.” This formulation allows for a measure of the functional value of artworks that I call its “core artistic value.” This, I claim, is its value as art.

My methodology involves adapting John Searle’s theory of social facts for the purposes of examining artistic practices. I argue for a method of analysing social practices that provides several levels of description. I characterise behavioural patterns that are common to artistic behaviours—namely, the artistic attentional strategy. I also develop a theory of artefacts that can accommodate the ontological variety required of artworks (i.e., including items of both intangible and material culture), as well as the transgressive nature of some artworks. Artistic practices are those that involve the creation of artefacts that function to reward artistic appreciation (either as a proper function of the artefact or as incidental to its proper function). In some of these practices, institutions are created where these artefacts are produced and promoted and where the primary function of rewarding the artistic attentional strategy is esteemed. These are the high art practices. This framework allows for the examination of artistic practices in different cultures at specific levels—artistic behaviours, artistic practices, and high art institutions.

I argue that my framework can be used to explain multiple artistic senses in which the term “art” is used. Further, my functional account of artworks also provides a basis for an account of artistic value—the value of an artwork as art. I also show that my definition is adequate by testing it against various sets of desiderata for a definition of art.
For Erena and Poppa.
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1. Introduction

In late 2010, the European Commission declared that certain works by Dan Flavin and Bill Viola were not to be categorised as artworks for customs duties purposes. Flavin’s work, the commission claims, was most appropriately categorised as light fittings, and Viola’s sculpture was not an artwork unless turned on (which, of course, it was not while in transit). This resulted in a much higher customs duty being levied on the contemporary art market value of these pieces than if they had been categorised as artworks (Adam, 2010; Blouin Artinfo, 2011). In New Zealand, the “is it art?” question was recently publicly debated when Dane Mitchell won the 2009 Waikato National Contemporary Art award. His work consisted of a pile of binned wrappings from the works of other entrants. The win caused outrage among the other contestants who challenged its status as an artwork (Holloway, 2009).

Further, the eligibility of art funding for projects depends on whether the practice it belongs to counts as art or not. If we are to examine non-Western cultures, how might we explain why their practices of carved figures are artistic, while their practices of canoe carving are not (Shiner, 2003, 145)? And perhaps the definition of art might inform the debate about the conditions under which it is appropriate for curators within Western Fine Art institutions to display non-Western artefacts that have religious and ceremonial functions.

The question of what defines a work of art is not a recent phenomenon. In the early 20th century the Romanian artist Constantin Brancusi was also embroiled in a prominent customs duty court case that occasioned determining whether his sculpture, Bird in Space, was actually an artwork. Time magazine reported the final verdict on the case as follows:

Last week Sculptor Brancusi won his case. In its decision the Customs Court dogmatically defined art: “It is a work of art by reason of its symmetrical shape, artistic outlines and beauty of finish.” Even the most wretched of logicians knows enough not to repeat the same term in both subject and definition (“art”, “artistic outline”). But Sculptor Brancusi had his money refunded (Time, 1928).

An informative theory of art would provide justification for why a particular determination in these cases is fair or not. And if a clear definition is ready to hand—backed by an informative
theory of art—then it would surely facilitate a better reasoned, less arbitrary, and—I would expect—a more just verdict.

The value of the definition of a work of art is not restricted to legal concerns. Often people give art an extremely valuable place in their lives. Every day people listen to music in their leisure time, while lounging around or working out. Tourists often spend some of their vacations in local art galleries in order to absorb some of the cultural treasures. We might recommend a brilliant television series to our friends. A time-tested date formula involves dinner and a movie. We take pride in the artistic accomplishments of our compatriots. We often identify and engage with the themes, concerns, wit, or style of our favourite artists and take pleasure in conveying these various merits to others. In short: art is thoroughly integrated into our lives and our sense of selves. For many, it contributes to a sense of cultural, social, and personal identity. But why do artistic practices hold such a pervasive and enduring place in all human cultures and seemingly across all times? A definition of art may be valuable for its contribution to a deeper understanding of the nature of artistic practices as distinct from other cultural activities.

The actions of artists frequently raise questions about the nature of art that are difficult to answer. In 2012, Vladimir Umanets tagged Mark Rothko’s painting *Black on Maroon* (1958) with the words “A potential piece of yellowism.” In an interview with the BBC, Umanets said “Art allows us to take what someone’s done and put a new message on it” (BBC, 2012). In the case of the products of Yellowism, all interpretations are reduced to one colour: yellow. In the Yellowism manifesto, Umanets claims, rather disingenuously, that the movement is neither art nor anti-art (Lodyga & Umanets, 2012). Nevertheless, the group hold exhibitions of their works and offer them for sale. The consequences of his actions were that Rothko’s painting was quickly taken away for restoration and Umanets was subsequently jailed for two years. A philosophically inclined observer of this case might ask whether, in Umanets’ act of vandalism, he simultaneously created a new artwork. But how do we begin to decide this question? A work of yellowism may not be particularly rewarding to contemplate—the meaning of every object is the same—but the question remains: is it an artwork nevertheless? In cases like this, we may simply want to satisfy our curiosity about

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1 “Every piece of Yellowism is only about yellow and nothing more, therefore all pieces of Yellowism are identical in content—all manifestations of Yellowism have the same sense and meaning and express exactly the same. In the context of Yellowism, all interpretations possible in the context of art, are reduced to one, are equalized, flattened to yellow” (Lodyga & Umanets, 2012).
whether something is art. But—in cases as challenging as this—we require assistance from a theory of art (Gerwen, 2014, 161-162).

There are, of course, more serious philosophical reasons to desire a definition of art. Part of the impetus to understand the nature of art is fuelled by the great importance that is placed on art and its very ubiquity in human life throughout all cultures and all times. We desire an explanation for why these diverse social objects and practices form a cohesive group. A definition of art may be valuable for its contributing to a deeper understanding of art and its place in our lives.

So, from the frivolous to the pragmatic to the profound, there are many reasons why we might ask the question “What is art?” In this dissertation, I defend, what I call, the artistic functionalist definition of art. Underpinning this is my thesis that an artwork is an artefact that functions to reward artistic appreciation. In the course of developing the theory of art that supports my definition, I also elucidate the value of art as art. To achieve this aim, I propose and defend a methodology for a descriptivist theory of art and a theory of artistic appreciation. Functionalist definitions often identify the essence of art with some valuable good that is characteristic of art; the better something is at providing the kind of good that defines art, the better, and more valuable, it will be.

In this dissertation I argue that classificatory uses of the term “art” depend on the rewarding of artistic appreciation as the essential function for art. I provide a description of the essential features of artistic appreciation. I call this the artistic attentional strategy. The power of an artwork to reward the artistic attentional strategy provides the measure of its core artistic value. To avoid the charge of circularity (in the same manner that the earlier verdict regarding Brancusi’s sculpture has been criticised), I provide a detailed account of what it is that circumscribes core artistic value from other closely related forms of value (e.g., historical importance and broader cultural significance). My analysis of the artistic attentional strategy is based on consideration of how artistic value is commonly obtained from art objects. My analysis of core artistic value is based both on examining critically existing philosophical theories of aesthetic and artistic value. The definition of artistic properties that I present will be guided by reconstructing rationally how competent users of the terms “art” and “artistic” interact with artworks. The theoretical framework supporting this definition aims at describing the particular social competence associated with interacting with art, and on this basis I claim that it is a descriptive definition of art.
The kind of project that I am engaged in was suggested by Maurice Mandelbaum (1965). In reference to Paul Ziff’s (1953) argument against the possibility of a definition of art, as he illustrates via an analysis of a painting by Poussin, Mandelbaum states:

[...] Professor Ziff’s description of the Poussin painting was not actually confined to noting the specific qualities which were characteristic of the pictorial surface of that painting; it included references to the relations between these qualities and the aim of Poussin, and references to the ways in which a painting having such qualities is to be contemplated by others. Had he turned his attention to examining these relationships between object, artist, and contemplator, it would assuredly have been more difficult for him to assert that “neither a poem, nor a novel, nor a musical composition can be said to be a work of art in the same sense of the phrase in which a painting or a statue or a vase can be said to be a work of art.” In fact, had he carefully traced the relationships which he assumed to exist among some of the characteristics of the Poussin painting, he might have found that, contrary to his inclinations, he was well advanced toward putting forward explicit generalizations concerning the arts (Mandelbaum, 1965, 225).

Original characteristics of this research project involve extending tools for the philosophical analysis of society developed by John Searle (1995, 2010), which are then applied to long-standing questions in philosophy of the arts regarding a descriptive definition of art, the nature of artistic value, and the characteristics of artworks as social artefacts. These theoretical tools are employed for the purposes of describing general patterns of behaviour regarding what we consider to be art, and how we go about appreciating art. It turns out, as I will later explain, that these two questions are inextricably linked.

The investigation into what constitutes artistic value and the production of a framework for artistic appreciation is important in matters of criticism and the evaluation of artworks. Conclusions drawn in these areas are of central importance to art practices. A theory of artistic value can provide guidance on what artistic properties can be appropriately attributed to an artwork and increase understanding of the relations between artistic evaluations and other types of evaluation related to artworks. This dissertation also has the following concomitant research objectives:
- To develop a theory of art that has explanatory power to account for characteristics of existing theories of art that seem both generalisable and correctly so (and to provide an error theory to account for other characteristics) (Chapters 3 to 7).

- To reconcile functionalist and procedural accounts of art by showing how objective claims regarding the function of artefacts depend upon social institutions (Chapter 4).

- To develop an account of artistic value that can satisfactorily account for the value of avant-garde works and conceptual art as artworks (Chapter 6).

- To describe an account of artistic value that accommodates some of the core characteristics of aesthetic experience argued for by art theorists (Chapter 6).

- To satisfy reasonable desiderata for theories of art proposed by Thomas Adajian, Richard Wollheim, Peg Zeglin Brand, Dominic McIver Lopes, Berys Gaut, Christy Mag Uidhir, and Harold Osborne (Chapter 7).

The argument of this dissertation is structured as follows.

In Chapter 2, I argue for the value of a definition of art. I highlight the shortfalls of alternatives to definitions and critique several arguments against the possibility of definition. I also survey the range of existing definitions and argue that a form of functionalist definition may circumvent their various shortcomings.

Chapter 3 contains my methodology for analysing social concepts like art. I draw comparisons between natural and artificial kinds and show how a Kripke-Putnam theory of reference is possible for social kinds. I then show how the kind of analysis that I propose can ground definitions of the classificatory and courtesy (read: “artistic”) senses of art. I then develop my theory and definition of art in Chapters 4 to 7 in accordance with the general methodology that I lay out in this chapter.

In Chapter 4, I detail my framework for the analysis of artistic practices. I begin by describing my ontological commitments and then proceed to describe John Searle’s theory of social reality. Using art as a test case, I modify Searle’s theory of artefacts and functions to accommodate both intangible and tangible cultural items. I then detail how this analysis of artefacts and functions relates to the analysis of artistic practices.
Chapter 5 involves some preliminary investigations into artistic value. This is divided into two sections. In the first part, I consider the debate about the nature of artistic value by Dominic McIver Lopes, Andrew Huddleston, Louise Hanson, Robert Stecker and Julian Dodd. Lopes argues that there is no such thing as artistic value. Instead, there is only aesthetic value and value of the artefact *qua* the kind of artefact it is. In response, Stecker proposes an anti-essentialist test for artistic value that is then criticised by Dodd. I argue that we can salvage some aspects of Stecker’s test for artistic value, but suggest that an essentialist account of artistic value would be more informative. In the second part of the chapter I argue that there is evidence for a kind of artistic value accorded to and expected of an artefact in virtue of it being regarded as Fine Art (or high art). This can be seen in certain kinds of value judgments and negative classificatory judgments.

In Chapter 6 I define *core artistic value* and defend the position that this is the value of art *as art*. I begin in §6.1 by defining the *artistic attentional strategy*, which is the form of regard that, I claim, is essential to artistic appreciation:

The *artistic attentional strategy* is the activity of arousing a sentiment-response, when engaging with an artefact (typically an artwork), given the collectively recognised constraints of the aims and rules of the applicable thematizing activity, as a consequence of:

(1) *affective:* the causal connection of an appropriate affective state (e.g., a mood, a feeling of disgust, anger, fear, sadness, happiness, surprise, sympathy, indifference, stimulation, etc.)

(1.a) *sensible:* by the perception or apperception of features of intentional activity made manifest in the item

and/or

(1.b) *conceptual:* by the apperception of the content represented by those features (e.g., in response to particular subject matter presented in a novel or poem, in response to a problematic raised by a piece of conceptual art, etc.);
(2) [artifice:] attending to the features of intentional activity that are made manifest in the item for the purposes of appraising how such actions achieve the ends of ((1.a) and/or (1.b)).

In §6.2 I argue that artefacts that have the proper function of rewarding the artistic attentional strategy have core artistic value:

Core artistic value is the power of an artefact to induce a sentiment as a consequence of its use for the artistic attentional strategy (1) in cases where rewarding the artistic attentional strategy is a proper function of that artefact and (2) insofar as the properties that are attended to using the artistic attentional strategy are properties of that artefact.

I show how this is related to other close values like cultural significance and art-historical value.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I specify the artistic functionalist definition of art: an item is art if and only if it is an artefact that has the proper function of rewarding the artistic attentional strategy. I then show that my account can satisfy the various desiderata that philosophers have proffered for a successful definition of art.
2. Criticisms of the definitional project and conjectured definitions of art

Philosophical approaches to the problem of defining art vary: some argue that art is a concept that cannot be defined, while alternative proposals present theoretical accounts of art in lieu of a definition, and yet others propose one of a variety of differing definitions. I will begin by providing some context for my analysis of the debate about definitions of art.

Let’s begin with Plato and Aristotle in Classical Athens around the 4th century B.C.E. According to these philosophers, the essential property of what we would call artworks is that they are representations of real things. Both Plato and Aristotle considered music, Greek tragedy, epic poetry and visual art practices as *mimesis* or imitation (Plato, ca. 380 B.C.E. [2000], books iii & x; Aristotle, ca. 335 B.C.E. [1996]). This theory held sway from antiquity, through to the formation of the category of the Fine Arts in the mid-18th century, and on to the development of photography in the nineteenth century. The advent of photography meant that optical realism was no longer the ultimate goal of visual art as it no longer required skill on the part of the creator to produce an accurate visual likeness. Subsequently, other artistic ends were targeted. It is difficult today to see how a work of geometric abstraction could be plausibly accommodated by the *mimesis* theory. Also, many other diagrams including maps and blueprints are representations but do not count as art.

An alternative idea, that art is essentially an expression of some sentiment or another kind of communication, arose in the nineteenth century and continued into the early twentieth. Leo Tolstoy (1896 [1960]), Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce (1911 [1953]), R.G. Collingwood (1938 [1958]), and Susanne K. Langer (1953; 1957) all held variants of the expressivist theory of art. In many cases it is unclear whose expression any transmitted emotions are meant to be. A comfortable and content composer, for instance, can utilise the expressive character of suitable musical components to create music that evokes feelings of longing and intense sadness. Another problem with this approach is that a message conveyed by an artwork may be achieved by cheaper, more efficient ends—we don’t need an operatic production to express ourselves. Further, other means of expression that might satisfy these theories—laughter, screams, letters, etc.—do not count as art. And there are also cases where it is far from clear what might be expressed by a work: consider atonal music.
Theories of art that distinguish it as providing a distinctive aesthetic experience—typically, beauty, but also the sublime—arose in the eighteenth century from the philosophical theories of Charles Batteux (1746), David Hume (1757 [1995]), and Immanuel Kant (1790 [2000]), among others. Larry Shiner (2001) has argued that the concept of aesthetic experience was extremely important for unifying the practices that came to be known as the Fine Arts in the eighteenth century: painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry. In the twentieth century, Clive Bell (1913 [1958]) and Roger Fry (1909 [1930]) argued that what is distinctive about artworks is that they possess significant form. It is unclear exactly what they meant by “significant form,” but, as it was meant to induce a kind of aesthetic experience, we can note as a counterexample the “anaesthetic” readymade artworks of Marcel Duchamp, who, according to philosopher Arthur C. Danto (2013, 144), succeeded in showing that the connection between art and beauty is contingent. And, once again, the proposed essential property fails to explain what is distinctly valuable about art; many natural objects also possess aesthetic properties.

All of these early art theories fail when translated into descriptive definitions of art because they all succumb to counterexamples that either have the property (or properties) specified—beautiful and majestic natural entities abound, for instance—and yet are obviously not art, or that are paradigm instances of works of art that fail to have the proffered property.

Suspicions about the possibility of identifying a correct definition of artwork status in the tradition of analytic philosophy of the arts were kindled subsequent to the 1953 publication of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. In this treatise Wittgenstein suggests that the items identified by the term “game” are united only by relations of family resemblance, there being no necessary property common to all games. He draws an analogy with a thread, which is a unified item, but which does not contain a single fibre that runs through the entire length of it (1953 [2001], §§66-77). Wittgenstein’s claim is meant to dissuade any attempt at identifying an intrinsic essence for objects falling under concepts like games that could be employed as necessary and sufficient conditions in a definition of that concept. Shortly thereafter, Morris Weitz applied Wittgenstein’s notion of family resemblance to the concept of art (Weitz, 1956). In a similar vein, Paul Ziff proposed that a resemblance to paradigm artworks underlies the concept of an artwork (Ziff, 1953). The anti-essentialist, Wittgensteinian line was also endorsed by William E. Kennick (1958), and later by B. R. Tilghman (1984). The ethologist Ellen Dissanayake has an account of art as a form of “making special” that is also anti-essentialist (1988). And, more recently, Berys Gaut has offered a cluster account as an alternative to a definition (Gaut, 2000, 2005).
In response to claims that artworks cannot be defined, because, anti-essentialists argue, there are no essential characteristics that unite all artworks, numerous philosophers have suggested and defended various definitions. This list includes institutional definitions (e.g., Dickie, 1974, 1984; Difffey, 1969; 1991), historicist definitions (e.g., Carney, 1991, 1994; Carroll, 1993; Levinson, 1979, 1989, 1993, 2002), and aesthetic functionalist definitions (e.g., Beardsley, 1982; Zangwill, 1995, 2002, 2007; Iseminger, 2004). Further, some philosophers have proposed that some cluster accounts might be interpreted as disjunctive definitions (Bond, 1975; Snoeyenbos, 1978; Blocker, 1993; S. Davies, 2004; Dutton, 2009; Stecker, 1997; 2000; 2010).²

The successful specification of the definition of art has so far proven elusive. Some theorists have come to doubt the value of a definition of art, and have defended alternative theories in lieu of a definition. Others argue that we are unlikely or unable, if anti-essentialism is correct, to specify the definition of art. In this chapter I respond to the most prominent alternatives to and criticisms of the definitional project.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first part I review several suggested alternatives to definitions and argue that they lack the explanatory power that may be provided by a descriptive definition of art that is supported by an art theory. In the second part I defend the project of definition against anti-essentialist objections. I aim to show that none of the anti-essentialist arguments offered is decisive against the possibility or value of a definition of art. In the third section I identify a blind spot in Wittgenstein’s anti-essentialist “look and see” approach to characterising our concept of art. Berys Gaut claims that “the anti-definitionalist project is grounded in Wittgenstein’s remarks about family resemblance” (Gaut, 2005, 287). If Wittgenstein’s argument from inspection has been as damaging against the prospect of a definition as is sometimes claimed by anti-essentialists then the blind spot I identify provides a new avenue for investigation in the definition of art. In the fourth section I assess the adequacy of putative definitions of art.

2.1. Alternatives to definition

In this section, I consider four proposed alternatives to defining art: radical stipulativism, pragmatist art-narratives, cluster accounts of art, and defining the individual arts (instead of defining “art”). I examine each of these in turn and show that each is either inadequate to the task of accounting for contemporary practices or otherwise lacks the sort of explanatory power that a simple definition of art would provide. I will also, when relevant, consider what insights might be gleaned from consideration of each theory that may contribute toward formulating a definition of art.

The first position I consider is that of Kathleen Stock, which has been labelled radical stipulativism (S. Davies, 2006b, 34). Stock argues that artworks are such only on the basis that art experts say that they are and additionally she claims that there is no underlying art essence. She suggests that experts first come to a verdict on art status and then identify reasons, or rationalisations, in support of their decision (Stock, 2003; 2009). Stephen Davies has raised the following reasons to doubt the plausibility of Stock’s account: first, such a view cannot account for first artworks in a social context without art experts; second, the arbitrariness of expert judgments provides no explanation for how art experts could achieve expert status without some recognised standards of art competency; third, it makes the distinction between art and non-art purely arbitrary (S. Davies, 2006b, 34-35).

While I do find Davies’ reasons to reject Stock’s radical stipulativism convincing, I also think that her proposal does point to one method that people may employ in judging whether an artefact is art. For example, some readymade art might not be identified as such in some contexts by lay-audiences as these objects may look indiscernible from more quotidian artefacts. One instance of this was when a work by Anish Kapoor was mistaken for rubbish and thrown away (Art News Blog, 2007). Art experts are frequently relied on by the art public to select and present artworks. Artists are not supposed to come off the street and set up their own uninvited installation in an art gallery (but see Scislowska, 2012). In addition to this responsibility, many art audiences rely on art experts for documentation of artworks in the form of, for instance, artists’ statements, exhibition guides, festival or performance programmes, reviews by art critics, artist biographies, art manifestos, artist interviews, etc. in order to find out what the point of particular works are. Many of these sources of information depend on people who occupy art-institutional roles requiring expertise in the art form (e.g.,
art critics, art historians, artists, etc.). But, as I will argue later, it is not true, as Stock claims, that art experts do not have reasons for claiming that something is art. Art experts are such because they have specialist knowledge of artistic practices\(^3\) and also bear a degree of authority regarding how these artefacts should be appreciated artistically.\(^4\)

Thomas Leddy thinks that the Socratic quest for definition is not simply a matter of finding a formula that allows us to distinguish X’s from non-X’s, instead emphasising the aporetic nature of the early Socratic dialogues. He claims, partly in agreement with Noël Carroll (1988), that we should regard definitions as being closer to narratives than rules. But whereas Carroll (as we will see in a later section) takes the historical narrative to be true in some real sense, Leddy takes a pragmatist approach to truth—with historical truths being subject to incomplete verification.

Essences first are perceived as potentialities. They are perceived as meaningful patterns in experience that have a certain potency, a certain life. The apprehension of an essence is dynamic in that it involves an actualization of that potential. As the essence is actualized through artistic practice, critical discourse, philosophical definition, institutional change, and in a number of other interconnected ways, it becomes concept and accepted practice. (Leddy, 1993, 400)

I am not opposed to the kind of art theory project that Leddy is describing when it is used to signpost new directions in artistic practice. Anti-essentialist, pragmatist narrative approaches as he describes them, can, I suggest, be valuable complements to a realist, essentialist definition of art. His project may provide some rationalisation—in the form of some historical narrative—for a proposed change in artistic practices in some direction or other. But Leddy’s proposal does not undermine essentialist definitional projects of the kind I will suggest in later chapters. Despite his anti-essentialism, Leddy’s pragmatist narrative proposal is congruent with mine.

A third alternative position is the anti-essentialist construal of cluster accounts. Berys Gaut is the most prominent defender of, what he claims is, an anti-essentialist cluster account of art. According to Gaut’s specification, a cluster account consists of a list of criteria that

\(^3\) It is worth noting that even art experts may not always get it right. See Art News Blog (2006); Jones (2006).
\(^4\) As an example, see Brown (2012).
“count toward” art status, with none necessary for art, but certain combinations of which are sufficient for art status. If something has all of the criteria then it definitely is art. Also, anything that is art must meet at least some of the criteria (Gaut, 2000, 26-30). The account allows for a certain flexibility: if some new feature becomes recognised as art-making then it could be added to the original list of criteria.

Gaut intends that his cluster account be an anti-essentialist alternative to definitions. However, Stephen Davies has highlighted that a definition of art may be formulated by stating that it is necessary and sufficient for art status that the item satisfy one of the art-making combinations of criteria as specified in a disjunctive list (S. Davies, 2004). Indeed, Denis Dutton presented his own cluster definition of art (Dutton, 2006; 2009). Gaut’s response to this challenge is to state that the cluster account should be contrasted with simple conjunctive and simple disjunctive definitions, while Davies is instead describing a highly disjunctive and highly variegated form of definition (Gaut, 2005, 284-288).

Gaut offers, but is not committed to, the following list of art-making criteria:

(i) possessing positive aesthetic qualities [...];
(ii) being expressive of emotion;
(iii) being intellectually challenging;
(iv) being formally complex and coherent;
(v) having a capacity to convey complex meanings;
(vi) exhibiting an individual point of view;
(vii) being an exercise of creative imagination;
(viii) being an artefact or performance that is the product of a high degree of skill;
(ix) belonging to an established artistic form; [...] 
(x) being the product of an intention to make a work of art (Gaut, 2005, 274).

Several challenges to Gaut’s formulation of the cluster account of art have resulted in subsequent amendments to the theory. Aaron Meskin highlights a weakness in Gaut’s
formulation of “counting toward” the concept of art. The list of criteria might be extended with irrelevant criteria, for example, being made on a Thursday, and that would still satisfy the logical form of a cluster account. Meskin and others have argued that this problem is surmountable. He suggests that an art-relevance test must be satisfied in order for some criterion to be added to the list (Meskin, 2007, 392).

Gaut’s criteria have also been criticised as being focused on Western Fine Art. Gaut illustrates, often using non-Western art categories, that no criterion, \( X \), on his list is individually necessary because art categories exist where criterion \( X \) does not count toward membership. But it is conceivable that traditions might exist that standardly exhibit the opposite of some of Gaut’s criteria. For instance, a conservative traditional form of art that clearly conveys simple messages would count against the third, fifth, sixth and seventh criteria. Much mass art, too, does not fare well with this list. It is worth noting, however, that Gaut is not committed to any specific list of criteria.

The lack of resources of Gaut’s cluster theory for accounting for non-Western art may be understandable if Gaut’s aim is to characterise our notion of art. But Annelies Monseré argues that no cluster account has the resources to account for non-Western art (as both Dutton (2006; 2009) and Julius Moravcsik (1993) have attempted to do) without either engaging in cultural appropriation, by stating that all art has the same “surface features” as Western art does, or else by denying the unity of art as a concept (Monseré, 2012).

The final family of positions I will consider forego a definition of art, and instead focus on the individual arts. Ellen Dissanayake emphasises analysis of the arts over art when she says that “Art” is a “historically conditioned label” that “is dependent on a particular social context” while, by contrast, “the arts have always been with us” (Dissanayake, 1995, 41). Somewhat similarly, Dominic McIver Lopes has recently argued that philosophers should forego the project of specifying the necessary and sufficient characteristics in virtue of which an item is a work of art, which he calls a buck-stopping definition of art. This is because the jobs that a traditional definition of art is supposed to perform are better performed by passing the buck either to a theory of the arts or to theories of the individual arts (Lopes, 2008; 2014, 107; Lopes & Xhignesse 2014). However, he claims that the prospects for an informative theory of the arts—by which he means a theory specifying the characteristics in virtue of which appreciative practices are art appreciative practices—is
dim. We should therefore defer to theories of the individual arts. According to Lopes’ buck-passing theory:

\[ x \text{ is a work of art} = x \text{ is a work of } K, \text{ where } K \text{ is an art (Lopes, 2014, 14; 2008, 109).} \]

In contrast to buck-stopping definitions of art—which attempt to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for an artwork—Lopes’ suggestion is a buck-passing theory of the arts—which consists of theories of individual art appreciative practices—will determine whether something is an artwork or not (Lopes, 2014). Further, there is nothing characteristic about the appreciative practices themselves that unites the arts—after the formation of Western high art practices in the 18th century, new art forms were added by a process of comparing putative arts with existing arts and arguing for similarities. According to Lopes, the chances of successfully formulating definitions of the individual arts are better than those of defining art in general. He points to many early modern theorists who do not attempt to define “art” but instead endeavoured to characterise what is distinctive about the individual arts. Only since the invention of avant-garde works in the twentieth century has the definition of art been seriously pursued, Lopes argues. So long as we don’t need a theory of art to account for the avant-garde works that challenge more conventional artistic traditions, he says, we can make do with definitions of the arts.

In response to Lopes, Stephen Davies argues that the prospects for defining the individual arts may not be better than the prospects for defining art (S. Davies, 2008; 2014). Further, one problem regarding Lopes’ position is that we do use the term “art” in contexts where accuracy regarding the use of that term matters. Different customs duties may apply to art and non-art, and certain funding opportunities may be targeted at the production of artworks. It is precisely disputes surrounding the art status of putative avant-garde works that have historically been the most difficult to adjudicate in an uncontroversial manner. And significant material concerns often hinge on such debates, particularly in legal contexts.\(^5\)

Moreover, as Peter Kivy notes, the project of theorising about the individual arts is not incompatible with the project of a definition of art (Kivy, 1997, 53).

One question raised when considering Lopes’ approach is: What characteristics make activity \( K \), on his account, qualify as one of the arts? If there is a dispute about which

\(^5\) Consider the European Commission 2010 finding regarding customs duties on works created by Dan Flavin and Bill Viola.
practices count as art practices then this account fails to be informative on disputed cases. And we are not just talking about the philosophically problematic, high-art cases like Duchamp’s *Fountain*. There may be disputes about whether certain non-Western practices counts as art practices, or whether certain folk traditions constitute art practices. Lopes suggests a process for the art-ascension of an appreciative kind. He follows Richard Wollheim’s proposal “that new arts establish themselves as such largely on the basis of analogies with existent arts” (Wollheim, 1980, 166). Lopes concludes that the debates surrounding the art-ascension of new arts (e.g., cinema, installation art, videogames) are independent of each other (Lopes, 2014, 115-120). Further, because of the differences between the separate debates, we should not expect to be able to formulate any overarching theory of the arts.

Rob van Gerwen (2014) advocates a slightly different proposal for art ascension. For him, one or more masterpieces from a putative art is employed to justify that appreciative practice’s art status. A masterpiece is “the best an art form has had in store for us until now, or as the works an art form has in store that show the way to a suitable appreciation of works in that art form” (Gerwen, 2014, 174, footnote 36). Next:

[…] the question whether something is a work of art, is answered in steps. The first complicated step involves asking whether it is appreciated within a practical system of values; how these values are interrelated; how the maker and the appreciators relate to one another and lastly, whether particular rules or norms are involved. In short, the question is whether the object or event can be most fruitfully appreciated within a certain practice. When the answer is affirmative, then the next question would be whether that practice is a sub-practice within art practice, an art form. When it is not, then the question might be whether it should be, assuming that it can be so included. (Gerwen, 2014, 177)

Gerwen suggests two components of an artistic attitude: first, it involves some kind of abstention from moral responses and, second, aesthetic appreciation is integral to it (Gerwen, 2004). But these characteristics might be applied to many practices—particularly those that seem, on the face of it, to be typically morally irrelevant (e.g., pure mathematics, theoretical physics, an organised tour through a botanical garden or a boat trip through the Milford sound). And many of these are not counted as artistic practices, nor should they be. Without a
further substantive characterisation of artistic attitude—and aesthetic appreciation—van Gerwen fails to offer guidance as to whether a putative art form should be art. Also, this theory is ethnocentric, with the characteristic of artistic attitude couched in aesthetic theory that arose in 18th Century Europe. It is not apparent that this theory could or should apply to non-Western practices that might be arts. The scope of van Gerwen’s theory is too restricted to account for appreciative practices outside of the conventions of traditional Western Fine Art.

Returning to Lopes’ theory, his buck-passing framework for theories of the arts is not inconsistent with the existence of an essentialist definition of art. Lopes does not have a definitive argument to eliminate this possibility. If a successful characterisation of what makes an appreciative practice an art practice can be formulated, it may only be a short further theoretical step to construct a buck-stopping definition of art, or a theory of the arts. Insofar as Lopes’ theory provides guidance for criticism in the individual arts, it may be a valuable complement to an essentialist definition of art.

A starting assumption of the cluster account is Wittgenstein’s notion of family resemblance. At the very outset of the investigation it is presumed that there are no essential principles that unite the extension of “art” beyond certain kinds of resemblances, none of which (either individually or in combination) are necessary for art status. Assuming that Gaut’s project were successful, we would have no understanding of why these particular criteria and not others are art-making criteria. That is, such an account is descriptive of the bundles of characteristics used to identify art but lacks explanatory value. In this situation, we may always ask the further question: Why are these purportedly art-making properties on the list and not others? A successful definition, on the other hand, would be superior to a cluster account in virtue of identifying the characteristics that explain how the concept adheres.6 And while theories and definitions of the individual arts are important in their own right, it seems to be a philosophical cop-out to simply reject the complementary—not competing—project of a buck-stopping definition of art. Lopes provides a vague methodology for art form ascension via contestation, where putative arts are compared with other arts. But which features are salient in these comparisons? And what explains the relevance of these particular similarities over others? On Lopes’ approach, while we have a methodology for art-

6 Monseré also makes this point in Monseré (2012, 160-161). By listing only surface features of art, a cluster account identifies only those characteristics of art with which we are already familiar.
ascension, we lack a principled justification for why certain practices are grouped together as the arts. In later chapters I argue that we can do better.

2.2. Anti-essentialist arguments against the possibility of defining art

In this section I argue that anti-essentialists are wrong to believe that, even if Wittgenstein’s comments regarding the impossibility of formulating a definition based on his method of inspection are correct, this decisively counts against the possibility of a definition.

Some key anti-essentialist arguments have been offered by Morris Weitz, Berys Gaut, Jeffrey Dean, Aaron Meskin and William E. Kennick. At least one of the arguments from Weitz’s influential paper about the disvalue of a definition is now widely discredited: his argument that a definition would foreclose on future creativity in the arts. Weitz claimed that art, by its very nature, is transgressive. And any definition of art would artificially limit art practices. But, in response, the features of creativity or originality could themselves be candidate criteria in a possible definition of art. Chess and physics are practices that involve originality and yet they can still be defined (Gaut, 2000, 25-26).

I will now review and respond to arguments against definitions in order to defend the viability of the definitional project.

The following are the main arguments against the possibility and value of defining art: First is the open concept argument against the possibility of a definition. Morris Weitz, as I’ve already mentioned, was an early critic of the definitional project. Influenced by Wittgenstein’s ideas in *Philosophical Investigations*, Weitz argues that artworks are connected by a network of resemblances. He maintains that changes regarding what counts as art mean that art belongs in the category of open concepts and so cannot be defined in terms of some essence.

Second is the inductive argument against the possibility of defining art. Existing competing definitions are incredibly diverse to the point of raising questions about whether these philosophers are all engaging in the same task (Walton, 2007). The repeated failure of putative definitions lends support, claims Berys Gaut, to an inductive argument that we
should be open to alternatives to definitions for an adequate characterisation of the nature of art (Gaut, 2000, 26).

Third, there exist psychological theories of concept formation that are inimical to definitional projects. Jeffrey Dean has argued that there are psychological theories of concept formation that provide reasons to doubt that the concept of art can be captured essentially using necessary and sufficient conditions (Dean, 2003; Meskin, 2008). Dean refers to the prototype psychological theory of concept formation, which claims that some categories have a “radial” structure in which there are central paradigmatic or typical cases for a category that form a basis for instances of variations from those central cases. It is also noted that, due to this structure, there is no set of rules that can determine the extension of the concept. This still allows for the existence of reasons for claiming that something is art, and so it is not the case that just anything is art. The prototype theory is distinct from and is an alternative to the classical theory of concepts. The latter theory states that something either does or does not satisfy the list of features that must be possessed in order to be a member of that category. The classical theory of concepts forms the basis for attempts at definitions.

Fourth, Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley argue that there are three requirements for a definition of art that will be difficult, and perhaps even impossible, to satisfy (Neill & Ridley, 2012). These are, first, the critical requirement, that an account of art must be informative regarding critical appreciation of art; second, the conditions requirement, that art is defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions; and, third, the openness requirement, that the extension of art, art practices and expectations regarding art all change over time. Giving up on the openness requirement, as has been the case with traditional theories of art, would leave a purported definition open to counterexamples. If the critical requirement is not satisfied, then the purported definition has no resources to claim intensional adequacy of the definition even if it is extensionally adequate (as is the case with relational definitions like the institutional account). But foregoing the conditions requirement allows the cluster account to provide an informative theory of art that is also open regarding art’s manifest properties. If we must give up on one of the three requirements, then the cluster account is the best choice for a descriptive, future-proof, informative account of art, they claim.

Finally there is the argument to the effect that we don’t need a definition of art. Contiguous with doubts about the possibility of a definition is scepticism of the value of a
successful definition of art. Consider the following quotation from William E. Kennick’s 1958 paper “Does traditional aesthetics rest on a mistake?”:

> We are able to separate those objects which are works of art from those which are not, because we know English; that is, we know how correctly to use the word ‘art’ and to apply the phrase ‘work of art’. To borrow a statement from Dr. Waismann and change it to meet my own needs, “If anyone is able to use the word ‘art’ or the phrase ‘work of art’ correctly, in all sorts of contexts and on the right sort of occasions, he knows ‘what art is’, and no formula in the world can make him wiser” (Kennick, 1958, 321).

In the same paper Kennick posits the warehouse test to reinforce his point. Imagine a warehouse filled with various items: “pictures of every description, musical scores for symphonies and dances and hymns, machines, tools, boats, houses, churches and temples, statues, vases,” etc. Next, imagine asking someone to go into that warehouse and telling them to remove only the artworks. Kennick suggests that someone would be better guided by their own intuitions than by a definition that specifies art in terms of, say, significant form. We can successfully do this, he claims, because we are competent users of the term “art.”

We can respond to each of these arguments in turn:

First, we can respond to Weitz by noting that recourse to resemblance as the type of relation connecting artworks is uninformative without further specification of the relevant kind of resemblance. This is because everything resembles everything else in some way. Additionally, the openness regarding the growing extension of the concept does not rule out a definition. Just because my home library continues to expand does not mean that this concept cannot be defined. Instead, the lack of common perceptible properties suggests that, in seeking art’s essence, we should focus on non-sensorily perceptible properties. In practice this realization has resulted in several definitions in terms of relational properties (see my analysis of procedural and historical definitions in §§2.4.2-2.4.3). The functional definition I propose focuses instead on the kind of artefact that an artwork is recognised as being and recognition of the non-perceptible function of artistic appreciation for which artefacts of this type are designed and used. Gaut also rejects the open concept argument and claims that his cluster account is an adequate account of art (Gaut, 2000, 26). But Thomas Adajian notes that—given Gaut’s arguments that his theory is more linguistically adequate than other
putative definitions—Gaut’s rejection of the open concept argument undermines his own claim to the indefinability of art (Adajian, 2003).

Second, regarding the inductive argument against definition, we may respond that the repeated failures of past attempts at defining art do not entail that a correct definition of art will not be forthcoming. Even Berys Gaut admits the possibility that we have yet to discover the correct definition but says that, given the current situation, we should at least consider alternatives to definitions. Proof against the possibility of a (simple) definition of art, he says, would be achieved by the successful formulation of a cluster account (Gaut, 2005, 275-281).

The third objection employs the prototype theory of concept formation as a reason to doubt the possibility of a definition. Adajian has listed several reasons to be sceptical of using the prototype theory of concepts against the definitional project (Adajian, 2005a). He notes that a psychological thesis about concept formation does not hold much sway regarding the viability of definitional projects aimed at extra-psychological phenomena (e.g., as is the case with social facts that are based on intersubjective acceptance or recognition). Adajian also notes several standard objections to the prototype theory of concepts: first, classically defined concepts also exhibit typicality; second, prototype structure does not account for highly atypical instances of a concept and can incorrectly include phenomena that do not belong to the concept; third, not all concepts have prototypes; fourth, the combining of concepts is not explained easily by prototype theory. (Typical instances of “pet” and of “fish” are not used to constitute the concept of “pet fish”.) Additionally, typicality can vary over time.

In response to Adajian’s criticisms of prototype theory, Meskin notes that some attempts at definition do aim at capturing our concept of art. In these cases, the prototype theory, if true, may count against the possibility of classical definition. And further, even those definitional attempts that do aim at extra-psychological phenomena try “to accommodate intuitions about actual and counterfactual cases” and so the psychological argument still has force (Meskin, 2008, 133). I agree with Meskin on this point and suggest that in order to overcome his challenge we might focus on developing a theory of the extra-psychological social facts that make such intuitions either good or bad. Such a change in method would preserve the descriptive project of definition from the prototype theory, even if the latter is a true theory of concept formation. The kind of definitional project that I engage in aims to capture the extension of the term “art” by reference to the kinds of social facts that comprise artistic practices. Meskin’s defence of prototype theory does not apply if our
concept of art is determined by features of objective social reality. In other words, if the essence of art resides in knowledge of the appropriate use of certain classes of social artefacts, which implicates somewhat objective social norms, and further, if the function of art is a matter of learned social competences, Meskin’s rejoinder misses the target. His objection assumes an understanding of the concept that attempts to locate it in what an individual thinks art is, that is, their intuitions about art. I think that anti-essentialists are looking in the wrong place. I will later argue that we require explanations of the social norms that constrain and make possible art appreciative behaviours and that explain why an individual’s intuitions may be good or bad.

Fourth, there is no logical contradiction between Neill and Ridley’s three conditions for a successful definition of art (the critical requirement, the conditions requirement, and the openness requirement) and this at least leaves open the possibility that all three may be satisfied. As I have previously mentioned, there is a good philosophical reason why we should seek to find necessary and sufficient conditions to complete a definition: We may admit that the possession of bundles of characteristics from a cluster account may have use in identifying art or justifying the art-status of some artefact, and thereby justify the account in terms of some practical adequacy, but we are still missing an explanatory account of why the selected art-making properties are art-relevant. Further, even if we accept both Neill and Ridley’s presupposition that there are no manifest properties common to all artworks (the openness requirement) and also their arguments against the informativeness of definitions based solely on relational properties (and thus failing the critical requirement), there are still other properties available that may contribute to a definition that satisfies all three requirements. I suggest that a definition in terms of the form of engagement that is distinctive to the use of artworks as an artefact kind will satisfy these requirements.

Fifth, and lastly, is the claim that we don’t need a definition of art. Kennick maintained that a definition of art would not be useful in practice for distinguishing artworks from non-artworks. But even if this claim were true under the conditions of the warehouse test, it does not mean that a definition of art could not be valuable for other purposes. As I earlier mentioned, differing opinions about what art should be like have impelled some to question the status of some works of art. Financial motivations have also resulted in lawsuits disputing whether something is or is not art. (Examples include the court cases mentioned earlier which determined that Constantin Brancusi’s sculpture *Bird in Space* was actually art and that works in transit by Dan Flavin and Bill Viola must have customs duties paid at the
higher rate applicable to light fittings and electronic goods rather than at the rate applicable to artworks.) These sorts of disputes would be better informed with a plausible definition of art. Additionally, Stephen Davies notes that a definition might provide some surprising insights regarding the nature of art (S. Davies, 2006b, 31-32). And this might provide for a deeper understanding of art, which would be of interest to the multitude of people for whom art holds significance for their own cultural, social, and personal identity.

Kennick’s quote is very interesting though. While he intends to criticise the value of a definition of art, he simultaneously signals a starting point for an investigation into the definition of art. If there is some principled way of correctly determining the extension of “art,” then the best starting place for identifying underlying principles is to examine how competent English speakers go about applying this term. This line of investigation has recently been coupled with Ludwig Wittgenstein’s advice “Don’t think, but look!”, an approach that doubts the prospect of fruitfulness in the search for a common essence and instead favours the identification of similarities and relationships between members of the extension of the term.

2.3. The blind-spot in Wittgenstein’s “look and see” method

Recent attempts to characterise art influenced by Wittgenstein’s advice have resulted in cluster accounts that consist of a farrago of surface-level art characteristics no one of which is necessary for art, but with certain combinations of these criteria being sufficient for art status. As anti-essentialists have invoked Wittgenstein’s method of inspection in order to argue against the possibility of defining art, we should consider whether the relevant advice is appropriate for identifying the essence of art. Here is what Wittgenstein advises regarding the concept of games:

Consider for example the proceedings that we call “games”. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? – Don’t say: “There must be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’”- but look and see whether there is anything common to all. – For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a
whole series of them at that. To repeat: don’t think, but look! – (Wittgenstein, 1953 [2001], §66, 27e).

Wittgenstein asks us to bracket out the presupposition that there must be an essence unifying the concept and instead asks us to look and see whether we can find one. Presumably he thinks that there is none because he goes on to describe the concept of games in terms of family resemblance relations.

The result of applying the “look and see” method to games, Wittgenstein claims, is that “we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail” (Wittgenstein, 1953 [2001], §66, 27e). He uses the metaphor of fibres in a thread to illustrate the idea. Wittgenstein observes that there is a continuous overlapping of fibres and yet no one fibre runs through the thread completely (Wittgenstein, 1953 [2001], §67, 27e-28e).

In some cases, such advice may be importantly revealing about the nature of the concept under consideration. If we can distinguish what is in common among instances of a thing we can direct other people to that commonality. Wittgenstein provides a sample definition of yellow ochre that involves showing someone a number of coloured pictures and informing them that “the colour you see in all these is called ‘yellow ochre’” (Wittgenstein, 1953 [2001], §72, 29e).

This methodology has also been influential in attempts to characterise art. Wittgenstein himself claims that, due to vagueness in the boundary of the relevant terms, a family resemblance approach is also applicable to concepts in aesthetics (Wittgenstein, 1953 [2001], §77, 31e). As we have seen, soon after the publication of Philosophical Investigations, Morris Weitz employed Wittgenstein’s theory in support of an anti-essentialist account of art (Weitz, 1956, 30-31).

Gaut points out that some philosophers interpreted “look and see” to apply only to intrinsic, non-relational properties. Many subsequent definitional proposals expanded the property range to include relational properties. But, Gaut claims, Wittgenstein intended a much broader method by looking and seeing than simple inspection. According to Gaut,

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7 For further examination of Weitz’s suggestions, as well as other theorists’ treatment of the family resemblance approach, see chapter 1 of S. Davies (1991).
Wittgenstein intended the employment of philosophical thought experiments (Gaut, 2005, 277-278).

Gaut’s interpretation is too broad, though. Wittgenstein might have allowed relational properties to be covered by “look and see,” but, given his sample definition and also given his supplementary instruction “don’t think, but look!” it is unlikely that he was recommending the use of any sophisticated thought experiments.

Anti-essentialists maintain that attempts to define art, both by reference to intrinsic properties of the artefact and by reference to certain kinds of relations that must hold in order for some artefact to be art, have failed. Gaut claims that the failure of the project of defining art should give us reason to consider anti-essentialist accounts as a plausible alternative (Gaut, 2000, 26; Weitz, 1956). As noted earlier, he proposes his cluster account specifically for this purpose. While some varieties of cluster accounts are offered as disjunctive definitions, Gaut insists that his version does not conform to any simple form of disjunctive definition. He suggests that “if we have been predominantly looking for a definition of art, but have hardly examined cluster accounts at all, then continued failure to find a definition makes it reasonable to start looking at cluster accounts” (Gaut, 2005, 276).

Against Gaut’s view, essentialist definitions are preferable to anti-essentialist accounts at the very least for their potential to illuminate the nature of the concept. So we should resort to a cluster account only when reasonable attempts at definition have failed. But as long as existing definitional projects have been guided by common interpretations of Wittgenstein’s advice for analysing concepts, I argue, there is likely to be uncharted logical space where a definition of art may reside. Further, I suggest that it is plausible that the essence of our concept of art may reside in this uncharted logical space. So, if Wittgenstein’s advice has become the most potent argument for anti-essentialism regarding art then, I argue, it has provided anti-essentialists with undeserved confidence by introducing a blind spot that obscures the essence of art from view. If this argument is plausible, the anti-essentialist must admit that further investigation into the possibility of a definition of art is required before any claim to anti-essentialism can be upheld.

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8 Aaron Meskin also counts the inductive argument based on the long history of failed suggestions as evidence in favour of an anti-definitional approach. See Meskin (2007, 388).
9 But, for an argument that Gaut’s formulation of cluster account can be considered as a complex disjunctive definition, see: S. Davies (2004).
Wittgenstein’s instruction to “look and see” seems innocuous enough. What could be simpler? But I will argue that, as a distillation of a methodological approach, it is inadequate to the task of analysing a certain class of concepts, if they exist.

My contention is that there is class of concepts whose essence would be excluded from Wittgenstein’s methodology. The methodological reliance on empirical observation will become problematic if all of the following conditions obtain:

• First, the essence of the concept is in the property that items of that type reward a particular form of engagement with those items.
• Second, the actual manifestations of the entities of that kind are ontologically diverse.
• Third, the resultant observable (or reported) rewards from the relevant form of engagement with these items are varied.
• Fourth, the reward that accompanies the essential form of engagement is for its own sake (e.g., the right engagement with the object is intrinsically rewarding or self-motivating).
• And fifth, there is significant variation in how the form of engagement is manifested in practice.

Given all of the above conditions, it is unlikely that any observable or reportable empirical data could show up the relevant essence just by checking for commonalities.

I suggest that the “look and see” approach is inappropriate for the analysis of concepts whose essence lies in the formal characteristics of how we go about obtaining rewards from objects when there is large variation in the particular ways of engaging with the object, the specific intrinsic rewards that result, and the ontological characteristics of the objects themselves.

There are at least two problems in applying Wittgenstein’s method to analysis of these kinds of concepts. First, if we are observing common features and relations between items then one thing that we definitely are not doing is engaging with the items in the essential manner. Consequently, we cannot, at that time, introspect on how we are engaged in obtaining value from the items. Second, as an external observer to others engaging with the relevant entities in the appropriate manner, we are not in a position to be able to see the similarities in how people obtain value from these items because we do not have the relevant
access to their mental activity. If the essence of a concept lies in its character as a self-rewarding form of engagement, then there is no end-product to be observed. We might be able to ask the participant what value they got out of their engagement with the item, but if the rewards are various, as they are in art, this will not give us much of a clue as to what the essence of art is.

The situation gets worse for analysis of these particular kinds of concepts when coupled with the advice “Don’t think, but look!”, because if there are multiple ways in which people actually do go about obtaining various specific valuable rewards from certain artefacts, then we will not be able to identify the general form of the activity that is specific to these kinds of things without examining multiple actual cases and generalising what is going on from this data set. But this sort of generalising based on second-order examination of our observable activity is excluded from a methodology that commands us only to observe and not to think. Wittgenstein’s methodology is antithetical to conceptual analysis of a certain class of concepts, assuming they exist, the definitional characterisation of which requires introspection and abstraction of the form of our engagement with those objects.

The concept of art is a good fit for this problematic category of concept, one that requires introspection on our engagement with items of that type and abstraction of the form of the engagement that is common in all cases, and so necessitates a different method of conceptual analysis from that endorsed by Wittgenstein. Anti-essentialists argue that, if we employ Wittgenstein’s advice of “look and see” and “don’t think, but look!” as guiding principles in our conceptual analysis of art, then we probably won’t find the essential characteristic of art. I agree with them on this point because, if I am right, such methodological principles introduce a blind spot into the analysis that excludes recognition of the essence of art.

Let’s confirm that art meets the various criteria that qualify it for this class: First, a significant objective of my research project is to show that the essence of the concept of art lies in the characteristic that artworks are the kind of thing that reward a particular form of regard. Namely, they are expected to provide artistic value when appropriately regarded, and their value as artworks is significantly determined by their capacity to do so. Second, there is huge ontological variety among artworks. Artworks may be manufactured artefactual objects, or they may be ephemeral improvised events; works may be singularly instanced or have multiple instances; there is huge variation in the kinds of material employed in artworks;
works come in various sizes or, if works are conceptual, may even have no size at all; etc. Third, the actual rewards appropriately obtained from artworks are diverse: we may take pleasure from a poem, experience intellectual satisfaction from a play, be thrilled by a horror movie, etc. Fourth, the reward that accompanies artistic regard is for its own sake. Engagement with artworks is self-motivating, and appreciation of artworks is often an end in itself. Lastly, there is large variation in how artistic regard is manifested in practice. We listen to a symphony, read a book, watch a play, etc. Given the variety of art forms and genres, the variety of emotions that artworks might aim to evoke, and the variety of approaches they invite, it seems very unlikely that we will find commonality among the resulting valuable effects of art based on a theory-scarce look-and-see approach. We might ask the audience what value they got out of the work, but if the rewards are various, as they are in art, this will not give us much of a clue as to what the essence of art is.

We only have to look at the history of Fine Art to see the variety of both the objects and events that have been brought together in the art forms that constitute the core of Fine Art. There are numerous art theories that include intrinsic value as a regular feature among all of the objects that we call art. There is a multiplicity of valuable ends that may constitute the intrinsic reward: catharsis, enjoyment, powerful emotions of various kinds. One thing that is a regular feature among all art items is that we obtain value from them through the process of appreciation, whether this is by directly attending to features of the work or by letting ourselves be affected by the work (e.g., as in the case of film music).

On the face of it, Wittgenstein’s instruction to look and see seems particularly suited to artworks. But the kind of looking and seeing appropriate for art is typically for the purpose of appreciating the work, not for identifying commonalities. Many artworks are made to be seen, others are made to be heard. So if we consider how we look and see artworks, or listen and hear them, perhaps we might find something common in our engagement with these works. My suggestion is that we need to introspect to identify regularities in the way we engage with the huge variety of artworks for the purposes of appreciation.

It might be objected that all of this sounds overly abstract. How could a concept that we regularly and effortlessly employ have such an abstract basis? I think that it is easier to think of the kind of analysis that I am suggesting as capturing certain competencies that are of a similar type. We can become good at looking at paintings and appreciating them. We can become good at discriminating and appreciating different forms of music. So the response to
our question is that examining the form of artistic regard just is the method of analysis that is likely to be most successful in capturing the essence of a concept when that essence resides in a general way of doing something that is rewarding in itself, particularly when there are many different actual rewards reported by agents, and various objects, all falling under the concept of art, employed in actual instances of this activity. We are identifying in formal terms a way of extracting value that is distinct to this concept and forms its essence.

I have claimed that Wittgenstein’s “look and see” method excludes examination of the form of regard that might be appropriate to art. A potential objection to this view is that there are suggested definitions that do include reference to the form of regard appropriate to artworks (for example, Jerrold Levinson’s historicist-intentionalist definition, which will be considered in greater detail in the next section). But such definitions will be restricted to locating the appropriate kind of regard by reference to relations between objects (for example, in relations between an object and prior artworks) or by reference to certain kinds of manifest properties in the object (as, for example, is the case with aesthetic characterisations of art).

I have argued for the claim that Wittgenstein’s “look and see” method is incompatible with examination of certain kinds of concepts, the category of which could likely contain the concept of art. If this is plausible then we should further investigate this possibility of an essential definition before entertaining the idea of art as a cluster account. I will wrap up this section with three comments on Gaut’s cluster account.

First, Gaut claims that one necessary condition for an artwork that should be acknowledged is the trivial condition that it is the product of an action (Gaut, 2000, 29). This condition is considered trivial because, he notes, it applies not just to artworks but to artefacts of all kinds. He thus maintains that there is no necessary condition for art (as opposed to artefact) status (Gaut, 2000, 27). If there is a non-trivial necessary condition for art status then the implications of the form of cluster account that Gaut defends is wrong as an explanation for art. Further, as explained by Neill and Ridley, if there is a condition that is necessary for the similarity displayed between items of a kind then this would falsify the claim that that kind is a family resemblance notion (Neill & Ridley, 2012, 146). Based on what I have argued so far, I propose that art is the kind of artefact that should reward artistic appreciation. As well as being a non-trivial description of art, I will argue that this is both a necessary and sufficient condition for art-status.
Second, Gaut claims that the wide variety of criteria employed in a cluster account is a virtue because it fits our intuitions regarding the diversity of grounds on which we justify the art-status of an artefact (Gaut, 2005, 278). But it seems to me that there is no principled reason why a diverse set of surface criteria couldn’t be united by a single deeper property that explains both the art relevance of the surface qualities for art and the underlying connection between them. The diverse set of criteria that Gaut points to, if plausible as candidate art-making criteria, might be desiderata whose relevance is to be explained by a successful definition of art.

Finally, Gaut suggests that the following benefit is particular to cluster accounts:

the cluster account also meshes with pluralism about aesthetic values and with a patchwork view of interpretation, which sees it as ascribing a variety of distinct properties to works (Gaut, 2005, 284).

Functionalist definitions typically point to a specific kind of value (often some characterisation of aesthetic value). These theories then face problems accounting for counter-examples of recognised works that are not intended to provide the specific kind of value those theorists recommend. But defining a concept by reference to a certain form of engagement with items of that type (i.e., by reference to a form of valuing) rather than by reference to a particular value per se (e.g., aesthetic value, significant form, expression of emotion, etc.) produces a definition that also allows for pluralism regarding the rewards obtained from engaging with art. And this is exactly the sort of project I argue for.

The varied attempts to employ Wittgenstein’s advice of “look and see” and “don’t think, but look” have given us a range of examples of the items that fall under the concept, a host of typical relations, and some interesting features that frequently occur in art. This is a valuable source of data regarding art. The multiple criteria that Gaut employs in his cluster account might be utilised as desiderata to be explained by a more unified essentialist account. This might be achieved via a definition of art in conjunction with a theory of art.

If what I have said in the previous sections is plausible then a new methodology is required for examining the form of the regard that is appropriate to art. To regard an object is to engage in an act. Following John McDowell, the content of thought during our engagement with an artwork is something like “I am appreciating” (McDowell, 2010). But
What does artistic appreciation consist in? The question of what form of appreciation is appropriate for artworks will be examined in Chapter 6. At this point I claim merely that appreciation involves attending to particular characteristics of the work in an appropriate manner in order to obtain what is valuable from the work as an artwork.

In closing this section, I will note David Novitz’s anti-essentialist position. Novitz claims that when we question whether something is art we are not seeking an intrinsic essence of art, but rather some characterisation of how the artefact is treated. Novitz describes a broad “eudaimonistic” function that art serves—making people feel more at home within the world—but notes that serving this function is not sufficient for being art. Instead, he claims that art is a status that requires social recognition of the eudaimonistic function in order for it to be treated and regarded in the ways distinctive to art. For Novitz, the question of whether or not something is art “is concerned with how we should treat and regard the artifact in question—with what status we should accord it—and not with its intrinsic nature” (Novitz, 1996, 160). B. R. Tilghman takes a similar anti-essentialist line when he states that we should make “a demand for an explanation of the thing as art and a plea to be shown what is relevant to an understanding and appreciation of it as art” (Tilghman, 1984, 55; Iseminger, 1986, 116).

But the two projects that Novitz distinguishes are not mutually exclusive in the way he believes. In fact, I will argue, they are the same. It could be that the essence of art is defined by a precise characterisation of the way that art is treated that is distinctive to all and only works of art. I will later describe the kinds of characteristics that we attend to in the case of artworks. Further explanation is required of what it is to attend correctly to features of a work for the purposes of artistic appreciation. And the reward that we obtain from appreciation of these characteristics I will refer to as core artistic value.

2.4. Definitions of art overview

For the remainder of this chapter I will briefly survey some of the proffered definitions of art and highlight some familiar objections to show the various kinds of problems that a successful definition of art would need to avoid. I also want to suggest that the major issues affecting each definition can be answered with the assistance of an adequate characterisation
of artistic appreciation. This will provide supporting reasons for an investigation into the
definition of art based on the provision of artistic value, a project which I will explore in
greater detail in the later chapters.

Before going any further, I should say a few words about definitions to clarify the
various projects that philosophers may be engaged in when they attempt to define art.

There are three items that we should distinguish when considering the project of
defining art:

1) The term “art.”
2) A concept of art: This is the idea of art.
3) Art’s extension: This is the set of objects that are referred to by the term.

The quotation marks indicate that we have the term “art” which is employed in everyday
conversation. This term has a particular meaning in some context of use. Roughly speaking,
the idea that we associate with the term is our concept of art (without the quotes). A nominal
definition specifies the meaning of the term. The term is also used to refer to some artefacts
and performances in our culture, but not to others. And those items that are denoted by that
term constitute art’s extension. A real definition of “art” specifies the necessary and sufficient
conditions in virtue of which things are picked out by that term. In analytic philosophy of the
arts, the project referred to as the “definition of art” is comprised of an overlap of
investigations into the two kinds of definitions just mentioned.

The traditional philosophical approach to descriptive definition is to specify those
properties in virtue of which a term appropriately applies to an object. That might be done in
a number of ways: First, we might specify how we in fact classify items under that label—in
which case we are defining our concept of X (i.e., in the current context, describing the
criteria by which we classify something as art). This is the epistemological approach to
definition. Second, we might specify the characteristics of the item in virtue of which
something actually is an X (i.e., in our case, it specifies the features that make something art).
This is the metaphysical approach to definition (Anderson, 2000). In the latter case, if the
specified characteristics in virtue of which something is X pick out all and only those items
that fall under that concept—and this conforms mostly to linguistic practice—then they
constitute a descriptive, classical, real definition of that concept.

One plausible desideratum for a successful descriptive definition—in cases where we
are wanting to accommodate linguistic intuitions—is that the definition captures those items
that are typically taken to fall under that concept and exclude those items that do not. There is bound to be some variation on the fringe regarding what items are included and what are not. But if a putative descriptive definition were to include some extremely unlikely candidate as falling under the concept, in the ordinary sense of the term, it would count against the adequacy of that definition—because it would fail to be adequate to intuition. Such cases would count as a *reductio* against that very definition.

One alternative to descriptive definitions are explicative (or persuasive) definitions, which highlight the properties that are, in some sense, central to the concept under examination (Gupta, 2014, §1.5). In the case of explicative definitions, there is no necessary concern about whether the extension of the definition captures the usual suspects. There should be overlap with paradigm instances of the kind, but it does not matter whether leftfield items are also captured because these items are included on a principled basis. Note that the goals of explicative definitions are different from those of descriptive definitions. A good explicative definition will persuade someone that it captured something that is important, or central, or perhaps useful about class of phenomena under investigation and that we should revise our intuitions about what falls under this concept on this basis.

Having made these distinctions, let us proceed with a survey of various definitions of art.

Early attempts at the definition of art in the analytic philosophical tradition were prompted as a response to Morris Weitz’s influential Wittgenstein-inspired 1956 article “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics.” Here Weitz argued that art cannot be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, at least, not ones referring to intrinsic properties of these objects and events (Weitz, 1956). He argued that there are no *intrinsic* properties held by all and only artworks. An example of an intrinsic defining property that is rejected by Weitz is that of significant form as proposed and endorsed by Clive Bell and Roger Fry. Weitz’s article did not end the search for definitions of art but rather provoked philosophers of art to advance a multitude of definitions based on *relational* properties. The subsequent hunt for a shared nature of art or for a common denominator pervading all arts has led to institutional, aesthetic, historicist and hybrid definitions, to name a few.

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2.4.1. Functionalist definitions

Functionalist definitions claim that the essence of artworks consists in some function common to all artworks. Insofar as the successful performance of a function is an indicator of goodness, functional definitions associate the essence of art with some common value (or values). Frequently, functionalist definitions regard the defining function as that of producing valuable aesthetic experience. Roman Ingarden (1964), Harold Osborne (1981), Monroe C. Beardsley (1982; 1983 [2004]), William Tolhurst (1984), Richard Eldridge (1985), Richard Lind (1992), James C. Anderson (2000), Gary Iseminger (2004), and Nick Zangwill (2002; 2007) all support functionalist definitions of art that emphasise either the valuable aesthetic experience, or the production of aesthetic properties.¹¹

Functionalist definitions have the advantage, if successful, of specifying the essential valuable end that differentiates art from other categories of items. Assorted aesthetic functionalist definitions of art have been proposed and defended, but, in their various manifestations, they have been susceptible to serious objections. Monroe C. Beardsley is probably the most prominent philosopher to propose and defend an aesthetic functionalist definition of art. On his account, “An artwork is something produced with the intention of giving it the capacity to satisfy the aesthetic interest” (Beardsley, 1983 [2004], 58). Beardsley regards certain phenomenological qualities as being distinctive of aesthetic experience: “we find that our experience […] takes on a sense of freedom from concern about matters outside the thing received, an intense affect that is nevertheless detached from practical ends, the exhilarating sense of exercising powers of discovery, integration of the self and its experiences” (1983 [2004], 58).

Beardsley’s theory excludes conceptual and readymade artworks, like Duchamp’s Fountain, from being artworks because they intentionally eschew aesthetic experience. Beardsley’s definition is an attempt to persuade us that aesthetic experience is a value central to artworks and that objects that lack this are not art. But the ubiquity of what is publicly accepted as contemporary art—including with its forebears, which lack the intention for the kind of experience that Beardsley describes—means that there would need to be an extremely good reason for us to change our classificatory practices to exclude as non-art those activities

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¹¹ Despite the number of recent aesthetic functionalist definitions, Robert Stecker explicitly excludes them from the consensus view in a recent discussion of attempts to define art (Stecker, 2000, 48).
and institutions that are currently labelled as (contemporary) art practices. However, Beardsley does not supply us with a good enough reason to overturn the strongly entrenched contemporary art practices that are now well-integrated with Western high art institutions. However, I do not know what kind of reason might be persuasive enough to achieve this. Alternatively, if Beardsley’s aesthetic functionalism is considered according to the success criteria of a descriptivist definition, it is inadequate because it does not capture the extension of the artwork concept (particularly of famous instances such as Duchamp’s *Fountain*).

Additionally, Stephen Davies advances the objection that the sorts of aesthetic properties that artworks have are affected by their having art status, and that these properties are based on having features interpreted with reference to some art category, which implies that the art object does not achieve art status based on aesthetic properties alone (S. Davies, 1991, 66-69).

Another example of an aesthetic definition is that of Richard Eldridge, who states: “The aesthetic quality possession of which is necessary and sufficient for a thing’s being art is the satisfying appropriateness to one another of a thing’s form and content” (1985, 308). This account accepts that interpretations of artworks and aesthetic responses are socially mediated. In this respect, I am in agreement. But the vagueness of Eldridge’s definition of the relevant aesthetic quality means that many non-art items—perhaps political speeches, philosophy presentations, and news reports—might count as works of art, which is too broad. Further, there are famous revolutionary artworks (e.g., from Fauvism, Impressionism, Dada) that intentionally flout established conventions, and thus would be excluded as art. Consequently, this fails as a descriptive definition.

Nick Zangwill’s “Aesthetic Creation Theory” of art is as follows:

Something is a work of art because and only because someone had an insight that certain aesthetic properties would depend on certain nonaesthetic properties; and because of this, the thing was intentionally endowed with some of those aesthetic properties in virtue of the nonaesthetic properties, as envisaged in the insight (Zangwill, 2007, 36).

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12 Bohdan Dziemidok (1988), who is in favour of aesthetic theories of art, notes the (then) potential problem for aesthetic definition of the mainstream rejection of traditional aesthetic values in artistic practice.
Zangwill, like Beardsley, is not sympathetic to the use of avant-garde artworks as counter-examples to aesthetic theories of art. He claims that the focus should be on explaining our creative and appreciative practices regarding art. Philosophers should seek a rational account of what motivates people to engage in artistic practices, rather than a definition that claims extensional adequacy for art. The most plausible answer for what motivates us to engage with art, on Zangwill’s account, is a theory of art based on aesthetic pleasure (Zangwill, 2007, 16-35).

I agree with Zangwill that we should seek an account of artistic value but I disagree with the idea implicit in his argument, that a theory of the value of art can be expected to conflict with an extensionally adequate definition. Further, it is misleading for Zangwill to refer to non- or anti-aesthetic works as belonging to a small avant-garde fringe because—as I have already pointed out—many of the works problematic to aesthetic accounts are now comfortably identified under the label of “contemporary art.” Therefore, any theory that attempts to rationalise our motivations for engaging with art must also account for the extra-aesthetic artistic value of contemporary works.

Another recent proponent of aesthetic functionalism is Gary Iseminger. Like Beardsley, Iseminger claims that aesthetic appreciation is the purpose of art, but, unlike Beardsley, Iseminger describes aesthetic appreciation in a way that can accommodate conceptual and avant-garde art forms. Additionally, while Beardsley’s focus is the aesthetic object, Iseminger instead initially concentrates on the purpose of the institutions and practices that constitute the artworld. According to him, “The function of the artworld and practice of art is to promote aesthetic communication” (Iseminger, 2004, 23). A paradigm instance of aesthetic communication, he holds, “consists in someone’s designing and making something to be appreciated that is appreciated by someone else” where appreciation is defined as “finding the experiencing of a state of affairs to be valuable in itself” (Iseminger, 2004, 35-36). Iseminger does not purport to be offering a definition for art, but rather an account of what is understood as the modern system of the arts, which, he claims, originated during the 18th century in Europe. Iseminger’s claim is that the institutions and practices of modern art were originally “designed” for the purposes of aesthetic communication and so, given the assumption that institutions and practices share the relevant similarities with other artefacts, the function of these entities is to promote aesthetic communication.

13 James C. Anderson (2000) uses Iseminger’s definition of aesthetic experience in his functional account of art. See also Adajian (2005b).
Robert Stecker, however, takes issue with Iseminger’s definition of appreciation, which excludes appreciation of an object’s utility. He also notes that we appreciate artworks and not just states of affairs (Stecker, 2006). The character of the aesthetic that results from Iseminger’s description of appreciation has been faulted for being much broader in scope than what is typically recognised as aesthetic experiences, which makes the function of promoting aesthetic communication less plausible as a function of the artworld (Nathan, 2006). Noël Carroll (2008) questions Iseminger’s claim that the artworld was designed for the function of aesthetic communication. Iseminger claims that non-inferential knowledge based on perceptual engagement with the work is required for aesthetic communication, but Carroll argues that there were many works from the time of the formation of the concept of Fine Art that were meant to impart knowledge that might be inferential (e.g., of some perfect, idealised form in nature). Further, there is no evidence to suggest that any “designers” of Fine Art practices had Iseminger’s stipulated notion of aesthetic communication consciously in mind. And Carroll also offers as a challenge to Iseminger that the function of artworld practices is to communicate the ethos of a culture.

Significant objections have been raised against functionalist definitions. Stephen Davies lists four major challenges to functionalist definitions of art, specifically:

[1] it is difficult to find any single or pervasive function that is potentially served by all artworks. [2] And if all art works are functionally successful, it is difficult to account for very bad art. [3] Also, the theory tends to be conservative in dismissing from the realm of art some philosophically stimulating recent works, many of which are widely accepted as art even if they challenge what was thought to be foundational or valuable about their predecessors. [4] Moreover, functionalism does not readily encompass works with social, ritual or didactic functions, as against aesthetic ones, as is so for much non-Western and popular art (S. Davies, 2013, 216).

While these may be fair criticisms of some existing aesthetic versions of functionalist definitions they do not count decisively against the possibility of a successful functionalist definition. I will comment briefly on each objection in turn.

First, as is also the case with inductive arguments citing repeated failed attempts at defining art, the difficulty in successfully identifying a shared function, or group of functions,
that art serves does not preclude the possibility of such a function existing. Furthermore, most functionalists identify very similar art-defining functions, namely, that of providing aesthetic value. So while the sample of functional definitions may have multiple members, the force of the inductive argument is somewhat vitiated by the fact of the repeated failure of roughly the same function among existing cases.

Second, functionalist definitions might account for bad art by positing art-kind categories that are standardly expected to perform certain functions. This allows that some item might be a member of that class but not perform that function very well. For example, the function of buckets is to hold stuff, but a bucket with a large hole that functions poorly with respect to holding stuff is still a bucket nevertheless.

Third, the conservative conclusion of existing aesthetic functionalist definitions is often intentional. The attempts by Beardsley and Zangwill to define art aim at capturing what they argue to be the core of our concept of art without being concerned whether their definitions capture the extension of “art” as commonly employed. Typically, the dismissal of conceptual art, relational art, and other art forms that do not privilege the aesthetic as a central value of art are dismissed as marginal or peripheral cases of little importance to our typical interactions with art (Zangwill, 2007, 8-9). If functional theories do attempt to account for avant-garde art, it is usually in a manner that derives from the more central aesthetic function. They typically aim for an explication of the concept of art rather than for a descriptive definition. The frequent neglect of avant-garde art is a result of the aims of the philosophers in question and not inherent in the project of functional definition, per se.

Arguments proposed by Zangwill et al. to the effect that artworks that do not hold aesthetic value are only marginal art as they lack the value that is primary for artworks are less plausible now given the state of modern art in the twenty-first century. As evidence of this: a 2004 survey of 500 art experts voted Duchamp’s Fountain the most influential modern artwork (Higgins, 2004), museums of modern art abound with examples of works for which the aesthetic is not the focus of attention, and art prizes are frequently awarded to conceptual artists. It is no longer true that conceptual art forms are on the periphery of high art practices to the extent that may have been the case prior to the mid-twentieth century. While this objection is a strike against aesthetic functionalist definitions, I will develop an artistic

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14 Catharine Abell claims that this approach diminishes the value of avant-garde art but this would be the case only if the function selected was one that avant-garde art does not generally do as well as other art. See Abell (2012, 672).
functionalist definition that is inclusive of artistic aims even when they diverge from those of traditional aesthetic theories of art, as is frequently the case for contemporary art.

Lastly, regarding the fourth objection, while artworks may be intended to serve a variety of ends (e.g., propagandistic, religious or didactic functions) this does not preclude the possibility of a form of function that is nevertheless common to all and only artworks and, moreover, a function that is responsible for uniting art in its diverse manifestations under a single category. Such a function or functions might be employed to supplement or support other, perhaps more primary, functions that an art artefact may have. I will have more to say about the attribution of functions to artefacts in Chapter 4.

Arthur C. Danto proposes necessary conditions for art, which Noël Carroll argues constituted an expressionist theory of art. Carroll presents Danto’s necessary conditions as follows:

\[ x \text{ is a work of art if and only if } (1) \ x \text{ has a subject (i.e., } x \text{ is about something) } (2) \ x \text{ about which } x \text{ projects some attitude or (this may be described as a matter of } x \text{ having a style) } (3) \text{ by means of rhetorical ellipsis (generally metaphorical ellipsis), (4) which ellipsis, in turn, engages audience participation in filling in what is missing (an operation which can also be called interpretation) (5) where the works in question and the interpretations thereof require an art-historical context (which context is generally specified as a background of historically situated theory) } \]

Carroll claims that Danto’s definition of art involves the artist’s point of view about some subject matter. Further, “the audience’s reception of the artwork involves taking on the artist’s [point of view] in interpretative acts in which one explores the subject of the artwork in virtue of the artist’s fundamental (existential, so to speak) metaphors” (Carroll, 2012, 126). Danto agrees with Carroll’s description of his theory (Danto, 2012, 300). Danto later supplements these conditions with the claim that works of art were wakeful dreams, in the sense that they represent things that may not be real; they are a step removed from reality (Danto, 2013). One problem with this definition is that it is so broad that it might include such things as propaganda and illusory lifestyle images from commercials as art (Wilson, 2013). A stronger definition would explain what constitutes an art-historical context, which is
necessary for the artist to express their viewpoint. Insofar as Danto’s account presupposes this art context, his characterisation is quite possibly circular (Carroll, 2012, 143).

A final functionalist definition worth noting is not necessarily an aesthetic functional definition—it may even count as the first artistic functionalist definition. This definition is that of Marcia Muelder Eaton. Her view is that works of art are artefacts that are treated in a particular way. She states that:

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x \text{ is a work of art if and only if (1) } x \text{ is an artifact and (2) } x \text{ is discussed in such a way that information concerning the history of production of } x \text{ will direct the viewer’s attention to properties which are worth attending to (Eaton, 1983, 115).}
\]

In this case, the properties worth attending to are those that are actually mentioned in discussions of art. Unfortunately, this involves circularity, as Eaton recognises, though she claims that this is an unavoidably circularity (Eaton, 1983, 116). I agree with Eaton’s intuition that artworks are artefacts that are treated in a distinct way, but I will later argue for a non-circular characterisation of this form of engagement.

2.4.2. Procedural definitions

Defenders of procedural definitions claim that the essence of art consists of the item going through the correct procedure within art institutions to attain art status. Institutional definitions are those that claim that artworks are defined by their relation to art institutions. An early proponent of this kind of approach, influenced by Danto’s notion of the “artworld” (Danto, 1964), was T. J. Difey who claimed that the republic of art conferred art status (1969; 1991). George Dickie’s institutional definition of art is paradigmatic of this type. In the 1984 version of his theory, Dickie claims that “a work of art is an artefact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public” (Dickie, 1984, 80). His complete characterisation of work of art, artist, public, and Artworld is, he admits, circular but, so he claims, not viciously so. For him, it is characteristic of the Artworld that these statuses are systematically interrelated in a dependent manner.
Objections to procedural definitions are frequently of the following sorts: first, what makes the Artworld distinct from other interrelated groupings of institutions and practices, for example, the Sportsworld, is often not specified or made clear. Second, the networks of art institutions are not as formally structured as are the institutions in which knighthood or university degrees are conferred. Third, procedural accounts leave unanswered the question of why someone with appropriate authority might confer art status on something. Fourth, the occurrence of outsider art, such as that produced by Henry Darger, seems to be wrongly excluded by the definition because these self-taught artists operate outside of the confines of the Artworld.

Let’s examine each of these criticisms and elucidate how, by contrast, a functionalist definition based on the provision of artistic value—which I call an artistic functionalist definition—may preserve some institutionalist intuitions while not succumbing to the same objections.

The first objection against procedural accounts is their lack of an explanation regarding what it is that distinguishes an artworld from other networks of institutions and practices. Dickie claims that the terms used in his institutional definition of art are inflected, and so are inter-dependent and not amenable to a linear definition. The terms “artist,” “public,” “artworld,” “artworld system,” and “work of art” are used by Dickie to outline the institutional theory of art.

By contrast, defining artistic value in a way that is independent of an artistic notion of art, such as in the account I propose, allows that such a function can be used to explain other art-institutional roles and statuses that derive from and are essentially related to the concept of artistic value. Artistic value then plays a role as a foundational concept in the explanation of other dependent terms. This would result in something like the following characterisations: “Work of art” is an artifact that provides artistic value; “artist” refers to the role of those who produce works of art; “artworld public” are those informed individuals who engage with artworks for the purpose of obtaining artistic value; “artworld” is the related informal institutions and statuses that support the provision of artistic value (e.g., through the creation, education, and promotion of artworks); and an “artworld system” consists of practices (statuses, institutional roles, etc.) that pertain to the provision of artistic value for a specific category of artefact (e.g., painting, sculpture, music, theatre, etc.).
The second objection directly targets the early formulation of Dickie’s institutional theory of art (Dickie, 1974), in which art status was described as being conferred, a process that implicitly presupposes formalised processes. Dickie later revised his position to recognise that art status does not necessarily require formal art institutions (Dickie, 1984). I would note that Dickie’s move to incorporate informal social systems still allows for formal analysis of social institutions, practices, and artefacts. This task, in relation to art, is the topic of Chapter 4.

In later chapters, I employ John Searle’s theory of institutional facts to provide a bridge between institutional statuses and functions of artefacts that are implicated by the constitutive rules that specify the general form of these statuses. This will provide a more informative description of what exactly these roles and institutions consist of, in a manner that is not dependent on a concept of art. The first task in accounting for the institutional theory of art in a non-circular way is to define and characterise core artistic value concepts that do not sneak in a concept of art.

The third objection asks what it is that qualifies something for art status. George Dickie’s later institutional definition of art as “an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public” relies on concepts that involve a pre-existing conception of art (Dickie, 2004). Richard Wollheim raises a dilemma for the institutionalist regarding this point: if art experts have good reasons for something being art then this may provide resources for a definition of art, but if they do not then it fails to account for the intuitions, first, that there is some relation between being art and being a good work of art and, second, that art is of some importance (Wollheim, 1980 160-164). Dickie later responded that Wollheim had not specified what kinds of good reasons might be relevant, that some of the reasons he might have in mind could equally apply to instances of non-art, and that even though there may always be good reasons to confer art status, this need not provide the resources for a definition (Dickie, 1998). Even though there may be good reasons for something being made art, the relevant kinds of reasons may differ from historical period to period in a way that is not amenable to definition.

I agree with Dickie’s rejoinder to Wollheim’s argument. But, in contrast to Dickie’s theory, and perhaps in accordance with Wollheim’s intuitions, I envisage that by defining art by reference to artistic value, using a characterisation of artistic value that is independent of the notion of the artistic, the functionalist definition of art can break out of the circularity
inherent in Dickie’s definition. At the same time, it can explain what it is that distinguishes art from non-art: the function of an artwork is to reward artistic appreciation, which I will characterise.

Derek Matravers (2000) raises the challenge that we need an account that is informative on the question of what makes some reason a good reason in support of an artefact’s art status, otherwise we cannot account for the value of art. I take Matravers’ challenge to identify something that is desirable from a definition of art, rather than to identify a requirement for a successful definition (e.g., the chemical composition of gold does not tell us why gold is valuable (S. Davies, 2000)). But in any case, my claim is that the project I propose has the resources to answer Matravers’ challenge.

The fourth objection is that outsider art is unaccounted for by the institutional theory. If the token instances of the specified network of interrelated concepts are not all present, as would occur when the role of artist is not filled, then the conditions of Dickie’s institutional account would not be met. But surely this objection would depend on what it takes for something to count as falling under each of these concepts. Under Dickie’s original account, which presupposed formalised institutions, outsider art may have had traction as a counter-example. But, on Dickie’s later, less-formalised institutional theory, if an artist just is one who makes art, then we are begging the question against “outsiders” like Henry Darger being artists by raising this as a counter-example. Again, the issue here is one of circularity in the account, but we can resolve this in the way I indicated when responding to the first objection above.

One final note regarding the compatibility of functionalist and proceduralist accounts of art: Stephen Davies recognises that they may be compatible given certain formulations. But, in practice, aesthetic functionalist and proceduralist accounts of art have come apart regarding determination of the art status of some non- and anti-aesthetic avant-garde works (S. Davies, 1991, 1-2). Regarding such works as Duchamp’s Fountain (1917) or Warhol’s Brillo Boxes (1964), proceduralists can easily explain their art status by the position of such objects within the artworld. Aesthetic functionalists, on the other hand, have two options: reject the art status of these objects or explain their art status by some plausible relation to an aesthetic function. The first option is implausible given common intuitions about the art status of the artworks mentioned—they are considered seminal works in twentieth century art.
An artistic functionalist definition of art, in contrast to any aesthetic functionalist account, has the capacity to provide an explanation of the essence of art in a way that is compatible with proceduralist accounts of the artworld. Not only that but, as I have indicated, it provides an important but missing component in any theory of an artworld: what it is that demarcates an artworld as distinct from any other set of informal and formal social institutions that surround some non-artistic practice. My position is that, in the case of art, functionalist and proceduralist accounts of art may be significantly reconciled. This is not surprising because, in fact, the efficacy of the artistic function of artefacts relies on the existence of social institutions that recognise, maintain, and value that function. The artistic functionalist theory of art then complements and informs proceduralist accounts.

This argument for reconciling the approaches raises the following question: if artworks require social institutions in order to exist, why is the theory of art I am describing a functional definition of art rather than an institutional definition? The answer is that there are many practices in our social reality that require social institutions (e.g., law, sports, etc.) but the distinctive function that differentiates artistic institutions from other practices is that of the provision of artistic value. The function of providing artistic value is thus foundational in any account of art institutions.

Historicist definitions propose that art is that which is appropriately related to previous artworks. Definitions offered by, or formulated from, the work of Jerrold Levinson, Noël Carroll and James Carney fall under this category. Carney claims that “an object is an artwork if it has a causal history that results in its exhibiting a style” as a result of being a member of an art practice (Carney, 1994, 114; 1991). Carroll—though he denies being an essentialist—claims that, “the way in which we identify objects as art is to rely upon strategies internal to the practice of art, which enable us to situate objects that repeat, amplify or repudiate already accepted artworks as contributions to the expanding tradition of art” (Carroll 1988, 150; 1993). Levinson, according to his influential historicist-intentionalist
definition of art, claims that “something is art if and only if it is or was intended or projected for overall regard as some prior art is or was correctly regarded” (Levinson, 2002, 367).

Historicist definitions are subject to several familiar objections: First, the definition does not accommodate the emergence of the very first artworks. Second, some ways of regarding artworks from the past will result in an art-historical narrative, while other ways of regarding these same works will not. Consider artworks that serve propagandistic, didactic and religious functions. The upshot is that this form of definition is incomplete until it describes what form of regard counts as regarding something artistically. Third, non-Western art traditions (even non-Western high art traditions) are widely recognised, but the historicist definition doesn’t account for the existence of independently existing art traditions. If the existence of non-Western Artworlds is admitted, a further supplement to the current definition is required to explain what qualifies that tradition as an Artworld (S. Davies, 2000). Fourth, regarding Levinson’s definition, intentions may fail. It is possible that Marcel Duchamp may not have intended for *Fountain* to be an artwork. He was a member of the Dada, anti-art movement, and submitted the piece to the art competition anonymously in order to test whether the competition organisers really were committed to the democratic ideals of accepting any object for which an entrance fee was paid. Nevertheless, this is generally considered to be one of the most important artworks of the twentieth century.

An artistic functionalist definition of art does not necessarily succumb to these issues. First, the problem of explaining what makes first art first art (or what makes outsider art art) is overcome if we can describe both the conditions required for the attribution of a proper function to an artefact and the form of appreciation that constitutes artistic regard. Second, an adequate characterisation of artistic appreciation should shed light on what historical narratives are relevant in informing the appreciation of later works. Third, a characterisation of artistic appreciation should be informative about what makes non-Western art artistic. And fourth, as I will later show, while Levinson’s definition depends on the intentions of the artist, an artefact’s status is often dependent upon social recognition, so that an artist’s intentions may fail to be realised in the necessary, socially objective manner. The existence of an artefact depends on a social context accepting its use for some purpose. In the context

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15 Stephen Davies notes that this objection also applies to institutional definitions (2015).
16 If this example is not satisfactory, Duchamp also tried and failed to make the Woolworth Building in New York an artwork. Similarly, Piero Manzoni failed to make the world an artwork in 1961, as it certainly hasn’t been accepted by the art-world in general. Instead he made a different work of conceptual art: *Base of the World* (1961).
of an artwork, what matters for art status is whether the appropriate form of regard secures uptake within a community.

The observable entities mentioned in Levinson’s definition are an agent (presumably the artist) who intends an object to be regarded in a particular way, the produced artefact, and the prior artwork. There is one intention and (perhaps) two distinct instances of regarding implicated in the definition: the regard appropriate for the object being considered with respect to its art status and the regard appropriate for an earlier artwork. Whether these two instances of regard are instances that manifest different characteristics but are, nevertheless, still instances of the same form of regard is a question that is left unanswered by Levinson. The new work cannot be intended for exactly the same regard in every respect, otherwise this would raise the question whether we were regarding different instances of some multiply instantiated work. So, we are left with the question of what the art-relevant characteristics of the type of regard required for artworks are.

Note that, while Levinson mentions the term “regard,” we are left none the wiser about the form of regard that is appropriate to artworks. Instead he describes the appropriate regard by reference to regards intended for prior artworks. Instead of being a story about an appropriate form of regard, this amounts to another example of identifying a relation between two artefacts in the same tradition. The characterisation of regard does not have any content without reference to some prior object and the intended way of approaching it. So, while there is mention of some regard being required, the description lacks content, and further does not even suggest that there are any similarities in the form of regard appropriate to all art objects. In Levinson’s definition, the buck is passed for explaining the content and value of an art-appropriate regard to an earlier art-regarding-instance.17

Levinson might claim that this is an advantage of his definition for the reason that what counts as artistic regard may change radically in the future. Indeed, the history of Western high art in the 20th century shows how radical the change in regard might be. But, as I have already mentioned, there are those like Matravers who think that an adequate definition of art should assist in explaining the value of art. While this criterion is not decisive in evaluating the success of a definition, it is a desideratum. Armed with a description of the form of regard that is appropriate for art, we can tell a more informative

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17 Or the appropriate regard is explained by reference to ur-art if we are discussing first artworks.
story about what seems right about Levinson’s proposed definition. And a characterisation of the appropriate form of regard that is essential to art is just the position I am advocating.

More recently, Levinson’s intentional-historical account has influenced Alessandro Pignocchi’s psychological theory of how we engage in classifying items as art (Pignocchi, 2014). If the account is filled out in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, this project may be said to define our concept of art. The project of defining the concept of art is also a goal of Levinson’s account, as well as Gaut’s and Monseré’s. But we should note that even if this project of characterising our classificatory practices with respect to art is successful, we need not expect it to provide any insights into art’s nature. (Similarly, providing a characterisation of how the morning star is identified does not guarantee much insight into the nature of Venus.) In contrast to a definition of our concept of art, a real definition of the nature of art with an accompanying theory of art has the potential—if any kind of definition does—to provide real insight into the nature of art.

2.4.4. Can Levinson’s Intentional-Historical definition accommodate revolutionary art?

In this section I focus specifically on Jerrold Levinson’s Intentional-Historical definition of art and its treatment of revolutionary art. Levinson rightly notes that an artefact cannot be completely different from all prior artefacts of the same kind or else it would have no claim to be the same class of thing. Yet he also claims that revolutionary art, for example Dada, involves a regard that is “completely distinct” from pre-existing art-regards. But if art-regard is the essential respect by which objects attain art status then, ostensibly, we are faced with a contradiction.

I first critically examine Levinson’s two suggestions for accommodating revolutionary art. Next, I argue for an account of transgressive art-regard that explains the confounding effect of revolutionary art like Dada while simultaneously maintaining that a significant overlap of pre-existing art regard obtains. Lastly, I argue that the accommodation of transgressive art-regard in conjunction with some recent theories of the development of human behavioural modernity may result in an undesirable regress that equates ur-art with the very first actual artefact in the historical lineage of artefacts from which modern-day art descends.
2.4.4.1. Past art-regard and transgressive regard

According to Jerrold Levinson’s intentional-historical definition, art “is something that has been intended by someone for regard or treatment in some overall way that some earlier or pre-existing artwork or artworks are or were correctly regarded or treated” (2007, 74-75). He notes that, on his account, regard “has a sense larger than merely view, or even consideration, encompassing more active modes such as taking, treatment, approach, engagement with, etc.,” and more generally, “any mode of interaction with an object which could be proper to some work of art” (1989, 31, footnote 7). The intention for regard as some pre-existing artwork was regarded constitutes the connection required for art status. A connection of this kind between an artefact, X, and pre-existing artworks is required otherwise “we are at a loss to understand what could be meant by [X’s] being art” (Levinson, 1989, 22). An intention for past regard can take one of two possible forms: the relational—or “opaque”—interpretation is when a work is intended for regard as earlier art is or was regarded without having in mind an intrinsic characterisation of that regard; the intrinsic—or “transparent”—interpretation involves the maker intending for the object to be regarded in a specific way that—unbeknownst to the maker—just so happens to be the same way that a pre-existing artwork is or was regarded.18 Moreover, the artefact must not be intended simply for a single, isolated regard that was appropriate to past art, but instead for “a complete, integral ensemble of regards appropriate to some past artworks” (Levinson, 2002, 370). This excludes something from counting as art based only on a tenuous similarity. Some difference in intended regard from prior artworks is allowable, and even necessary, if the work displays artistic originality (Levinson, 1979, 242). Finally, the intentional-historical definition of art does not require that makers have a concept of art or that they work within art institutions. If the producer of an artefact intends it for regard in a way that happens to be substantially the same as some pre-existing art regard in our actual art lineage, the resulting product is an artwork.19

The psychologist Paul Bloom has claimed that other artefact categories also require its producer to intend for a regard that was correct for a past or existing object of its kind (Bloom, 1996). But Levinson emphasises that one of the distinctive characteristics of

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18 Levinson (1979, 237-238); Robert Stecker notes the possibility of an intended art regard that is a combination of the opaque and intrinsic kinds (Stecker, 1997, 88-89).
artworks that separate their category from other artefact kinds (e.g., chairs, tables, etc.) is that art-kind membership on our current conception of art is not constrained by formal or functional criteria. So even if Bloom’s general claim is correct, Levinson claims that “what is special about the artefact concept artwork… is that it is a wholly relational one” (Levinson, 2007, 79).

Given these clarifications, I’d now like to examine Levinson’s accommodation of revolutionary artworks. Levinson offers two characterisations of revolutionary artworks. On the first characterisation, a revolutionary artwork is “one for which any of the past ways of approaching art seems inadequate, inappropriate, pointless or impossible; a revolutionary artwork appears to be ultimately calling for a kind of regard which is totally unprecedented” (Levinson, 1979, 241). Levinson’s second characterisation is that revolutionary artworks are those “which are intended as revolutionary by their artists, that is to say, intended for treatment in a manner completely distinct from what has gone before” (Levinson, 1979, 241).

Levinson’s second characterisation of art-regard is problematic. Taken in its strongest and most literal sense, the implication is that, given the complete set of pre-existing art regards, the kinds of treatment that are correct for revolutionary works do not overlap in any way with previous art regards. But this situation would result in the following inconsistent set of claims.

(1) A connection is required between an artefact and other artefacts of the same kind.
(2) The connection essential for art-kind membership is the intention by its maker that the artefact be (substantially) regarded in a way that some pre-existing art is regarded.
(3) A revolutionary artwork is intended for regard in a way that is completely distinct from prior recognized art-regards.

It should be apparent that we cannot hold claims (1) and (2) while also holding claim (3).

Levinson offers two suggestions to resolve this difficulty. The first, preferred option, is that the revolutionary artist first intends for audiences to regard the revolutionary work in a way that prior art was regarded, but “with the expectation that this will prove frustrating or unrewarding, thus prodding the spectator to adopt some other point of view—this being my real intention” (1979, 241-242). Call this the “disingenuous intent” solution. This approach relegates proposition (3) to the status of a secondary intention and maintains the essential connection to a pre-existing art-regard. Levinson’s second suggestion is a “liberalization” of regard-as-a-work-of-art to include “completely unheralded types of regard.” He suggests that this involves “regard in any way (or ways) in which prior art works are or were correctly (or
standardly) regarded, or in some other way in contrast to and against the background of those ways” (1979, 241-242). Levinson then offers a disjunctive definition: an artwork is intended for regard in a way that some pre-existing work was, or else with the liberal intention just described. Call this the “liberal intent” solution.20

Unfortunately, neither of these approaches is satisfactory. Let’s begin by considering the “disingenuous intent” option in the context of Duchamp’s readymades—instances of revolutionary art par excellence. Levinson elsewhere stresses the importance of the degree of confidence in our inference to the correct artistic intention when classifying items as art (Levinson, 1993, 421). The intentional-historical definition aims to capture the actual extension of art and, as such, is beholden to empirical facts regarding the actual intentions of artists. There are two common methods of inferring intention: first via agent testimony and second via exercising the social skill of mind reading. Both of these methods of inferring intentions count against the disingenuous intent solution. When commenting on the process of selecting his readymades, Duchamp stated that “this choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste… in fact a complete anaesthesia” (Duchamp, 1966, 47). If we are to believe Duchamp’s testimony about his intended form of regard then it turns out that *Fountain* is not an artwork after all—and consequently neither are the artefacts that were subsequently intended for a substantially similar form of regard. But the omission of one of the most influential twentieth century artworks from the category of art, not to mention the myriad of derivative artefacts and performances that it inspired, would count against the extensional adequacy of the historical-intentional definition.

But perhaps Duchamp had a faulty recollection of his intent. Are there any other facts that may bear on the plausibility of attributing disingenuous intent? There is at least evidence that Duchamp intended to create *art* in producing his readymades. Consider the following: “I realized very soon the danger of repeating indiscriminately this form of expression and decided to limit the production of ‘Readymades’ to a small number yearly. I was aware at that time, that for the spectator even more than for the artist, art is a habit forming drug and I wanted to protect my ‘Readymades’ against such contamination” (Duchamp, 1966). These comments were part of a speech delivered at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1961, but even in 1917 we can see in “The Richard Mutt Case,” Duchamp’s pseudonymous article defending *Fountain*, the following comments: “They say any artist paying six dollars

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20 Note that the first and second of Levinson’s characterisations of revolutionary art complement the “disingenuous intent” solution and the “liberal intent” solution respectively.
may exhibit” (Duchamp, Roche & Wood, 1917) and further, in response to the jury’s argument that *Fountain* was just “a plain piece of plumbing,” that, “the only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges” (Duchamp, 1917). Duchamp’s intent to create art is relevant because recent psychological research supports the conclusion that the classificatory intentions of an artefact producer influence the way others classify that object.  

It is likely that Duchamp, a well-established artist, would have been well acquainted with the attitudes and art-regards common to art audiences of the time. Given that Duchamp’s works lacked the typical salient perceptual aesthetic qualities, it is unlikely that his early twentieth-century audiences would attempt to appreciate the available aesthetic properties, as would have been typical of prior art regards, because none of those typical kinds of affordances are immediately apparent! Duchamp would likely have expected that the initial audience’s first encounter with *Fountain* would result in the confounding of their expectations. This is because audiences would have been primed to apply pre-existing forms of art regard in making sense of the work, given art history at that time. But inducing in his contemporary audience the experience of confounded expectations given their aesthetic prejudices falls short of Levinson’s claim that Duchamp intended for audiences to treat or regard the work in a way that prior artworks were actually regarded. Given what Duchamp knew, it is unlikely that he would have had the intentions that Levinson would need to attribute to him in order for the disingenuous intent solution to work. If we can avoid including modern art by means of the surreptitious attribution of artists’ intentions then we should do so.

Levinson’s liberal intent solution fares even worse when taken in conjunction with a strong interpretation of revolutionary art. The liberal intent solution accommodates both “completely unheralded” as well as existing art-regards. The liberal intent solution is illustrated by Levinson’s thought experiment involving the fictitious Jaspers’ creation of a putative revolutionary artwork entitled *John*. One strategy that Jaspers might employ to

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22 The point is not that *Fountain* completely lacks aesthetic properties—all quotidian items have some aesthetic qualities—but instead that works of art of Duchamp’s time (and prior) exhibited salient aesthetic qualities, while *Fountain* does not. In 1974, George Dickie asks, “But why cannot the ordinary qualities of *Fountain*—its gleaming white surface, the depth revealed when it reflects images of surrounding objects, its pleasing oval shape—be appreciated!” (Dickie, 1974, 42). My response is that of course one could do that but it would be mistaken to focus on these qualities as the most artistically interesting aspects of the work. Dickie’s suggested ordinary aesthetic qualities are (and were) eclipsed by other, more controversial, qualities of the work. Further, this was no mistake; Duchamp selected his urinal based on the fact that it elicited a response of visual indifference. Brancusi and Moore, by contrast, emphasised the aesthetic features of their works by exhibiting them in a manner that made such qualities salient.
23 This might be considered as Duchamp evoking uncertainty and provoking elaboration by means of artistic disfluency. See Bullot and Reber (2013).
explain to us why *John* is an artwork is to “try to describe, in intrinsic terms, how he would like *John* to be approached” and “if the approach described is one we can identify as properly attaching to some preexisting art, then we will be satisfied we understand what Jaspers meant in calling *John* art” (1989, 23). Levinson stipulates that the proper attachment of “totally unprecedented” regard consists of standing in an antagonistic relation to earlier and contemporaneous art-regards (1979, 242). But if the way an object is intended to be treated shares no common ground with the existing ways that artworks have been treated then, to reiterate Levinson: “what can we make of the claim that he has given us *art*, as opposed to something else?” (1979, 241-242.) Consider the first use of extracts from classical music in television commercials. An example of this would be the use of Carl Orff’s *O Fortuna* in an early 1970’s television commercial for Old Spice aftershave. The superficial engagement with a commercial that is typical of their viewers *intentionally inhibits* the kinds of regard that are involved in the appreciation of classical music. Instead, the musical extract is employed with the utilitarian aims of forming affective associations with the Old Spice brand and motivating consumer purchasing behaviors. It is implausible, however, that the advertisement counts as a work of art on that basis. The general point is that a rejection of art regards fails to guarantee the kind of relation between an artifact and existing art-regards that might plausibly result in that item being recognised and understood as an artwork. Additionally, the fact that an object is made in conscious opposition to pre-existing ways of treating artworks would serve only to further reinforce the division between that artefact and the category of artworks, given the rationale that underpins premise (2) above.

Returning to our earlier example of *Fountain*, perhaps consideration of the fact that Duchamp, an established artist, was submitting the artefact to an art show might be relevant to justifying the object as an artwork. However, if this is the case, the reasons that justify the importance of prior art regard, and that underpin the intentional-historical account, are insufficient and so we require a supplementary explanation of why art categorisation is warranted.

The upshot is that we cannot avoid the force of the aforementioned inconsistent triad of claims if we continue to maintain that revolutionary art is characterised by a form of regard that is “completely distinct” from prior art regard. I will now argue that a more circumspect characterisation of revolutionary art is required to account satisfactorily for these kinds of works. Further, this approach makes viable a version of the “liberal intent” solution to the inclusion of revolutionary art.
2.4.4.2. Characterising transgressive regard

Levinson notes many examples of intrinsic forms of regard: “listening with intention to timbre” (1979, 237), “with close attention to form, with openness to emotional suggestion, with awareness of symbolism” (1989, 21), “with attention to color, with attention to painterly detail, with awareness of stylistic features, with awareness of art-historical background, with sensitivity to formal structure and expressive effect, with an eye to representational seeing, with willingness to view patiently and sustainedly” (1989, 24). Let’s refer to each of the items in these lists as individual regards, \( R_n \). For most artworks, if not all, the overall correct regard for it consists of a regard profile that is comprised of appropriate individual regards. Let’s identify the entirety of pre-existing art regards with the following set: \{ \( R_1 \), \( R_2 \), \( R_3 \), … \( R_x \) \}. A revolutionary artwork, according to the interpretation presented in the last section, would have a regard profile that consists of individual regards that do not overlap in any way with previous art regards, e.g., \{ \( R_{x+1} \), \( R_{x+2} \), … \( R_{x+n} \) \}. But no plausible explanation has been offered for why an artefact lacking the essential connection to prior art counts as art. Levinson notes that the commonality of a single, isolated prior-art regard does not suffice for art (Levinson 2002, 370). So how might we explain revolutionary art whilst respecting the principles of art-kind membership that underpin the intentional-historical approach to definition?

Let’s return to considering Duchamp’s readymades. Duchamp’s Fountain is a perennial hard case in the philosophy of art and several philosophers have commented on the nature of Duchamp’s innovation. Arthur C. Danto, for example, notes that Duchamp’s contribution to art is that his readymades showed that the aesthetic is a contingent feature of artworks, whereas it had previously been thought essential. He states, “I ... see Duchamp as the artist who above all has sought to produce an art without aesthetics, and to replace the sensuous with the intellectual” (Danto, 2003, 96).

Denis Dutton most clearly shows the high degree of the continuity between Fountain and prior art regards. When testing Fountain against his cluster criteria of art-making properties he found that, out of his twelve criteria, eight were manifest (Dutton, 2009, 193-202). The result of his analysis: “On a numerical calculation of items on the cluster list […] the answer is a resounding ‘Yes, Fountain is a work of art’” (Dutton, 2009, 201).

Several of Dutton’s criteria that are satisfied by Fountain are more easily translated to descriptions of prior art-regards than others. In order for art criticism to exist, for instance, an art regard must have already been employed, though criticism itself might have a role in identifying or maintaining “correct” art regards. Also, art traditions and institutions
constitute the context within which art is made, but art institutions are not essential for the creation of art on Levinson’s account. Even if we bracket out these two characteristics from the list, Fountain still satisfies six out of the ten of the remaining conditions—enough for Dutton to justify its art status.

Consideration of the remaining criteria from the list is sufficient to illustrate the considerable degree of continuity in art regards between Fountain and prior works of art. According to Dutton, Fountain supplies direct pleasure in virtue of being presented as an artwork via a Dadaist gesture. This pleasure depends on a knowledge of prior art, and in this case, of the particular transgressive act of eschewing an aesthetic perceptual response. But the deliberate flouting of conventions is a standard technique of eliciting an audience reaction to art. Early modernist painters intended for audiences to take pleasure in their artistic transgressions against realism. Skill and virtuosity is not exhibited in Duchamp’s manual manipulation of physical materials but is present in his intentional, economical, and effective artistic gesture. Dutton notes that “the response by curators is often to insist that the skill of the artist is present in knowing exactly what unusual, however minimal, act will be admired by a sophisticated art-world audience” (Dutton, 2009, 196-197). Dutton notes that responding to the great novelty and creativity involved in Duchamp’s act provokes both wonder and surprise. Of course, the employment of original techniques for the enjoyment of art audiences has a long history in Western art. Fountain is also an object of special focus, bracketed off from everyday experience. The ordinary is made extra-ordinary “by being given a title, being signed by the artist, or inscribed with poetry—and then put on display in a gallery” (Dutton, 2009, 198). Duchamp’s act of submitting a urinal as an artwork is surely expressive of individuality. Appreciation of what Duchamp meant by his act has involved much attention to the intentions and personality of the artist. Lastly, the very act of making sense of a readymade urinal as an artwork provides intellectual challenge, albeit a challenge of making sense of the work in relation to its status as an artwork.

If one of the paradigmatic cases of revolutionary artworks actually has a significant overlap with pre-existing art regards, then what explanation can be given for the apparent experience of its radical degree of difference from prior artworks? We can identify one possible answer by adapting Kendall Walton’s terminology of standard, variable and contra-standard properties.

A feature of a work of art is standard with respect to a (perceptually distinguishable) category just in case it is among those in virtue of which works in that category belong to that category—that is, just in case the lack of that feature would disqualify,
or tend to disqualify, a work from that category. A feature is variable with respect to a category just in case it has nothing to do with works’ belonging to that category; the possession or lack of the feature is irrelevant to whether a work qualifies for the category. Finally, a contra-standard feature with respect to a category is the absence of a standard feature with respect to that category—that is, a feature whose presence tends to disqualify works as members of the category (Walton, 1970, 339).

A work exhibiting contra-standard properties for the art category that it is being perceived in forces a decision: either the work can be accommodated within the existing art form or else it belongs to a different art category. (Note that the mere presence of some contra-standard properties does not in itself exclude it from being an artwork.) Fountain—along with the other works that eventually comprised the category of readymades—was contra-standard with respect to all contemporary art categories in (at least) two ways. First, the work is what Duchamp called “anaesthetic,” that is, it is intended to elicit visual indifference. But aesthetic experience was a standard value of works in Western high art forms since the Fine Arts were united under a concept with the assistance of aesthetic theory in 18th century Europe. The absence of the typical demand to attend to the aesthetic properties of Fountain as a constituent part of its proper appreciation is a contra-standard feature of Fountain with respect to all prior and contemporaneous categories of art. Second, Duchamp did not physically construct Fountain; it came ready-made. But the original design characteristics of artworks, with respect to prior works in an art form, had a long history of being appreciated by art audiences as the proper manifestation of artistic creativity, originality and genius. Both of these characteristics—that is, being “anaesthetic” and ready-made—are contra-standard not just with respect to a single art category, but to all prior art categories. In this way, they are in conscious opposition to the dominant properties of aesthetic reward and the exhibition of skill in artifice. Thus, both of these contra-standard properties stand in opposition to a dominant background of pre-existing art-regards and could not count as transgressive regards without such thoroughgoing prejudices.

Walton makes the handy suggestion that we should acknowledge various degrees of standardness of properties of a work. Degrees of standardness correspond to how many work-relevant art-categories have that property as a standard feature (Walton, 1970, 342, footnote 10). For the moment, let us stipulate that an art form indicates a top-level art category (e.g., dance, theatre, music, drama, literature, sculpture, painting, etc.). A maximally standard property will hold in all of the pre-existing sub-categories of the individual art form(s) to
which that work belongs. Given this, we may characterise transgressive regard as an intended kind of attentional strategy called for in the proper regard of the work that deny the attending-to of one or more maximally (or near-maximally) standard, good-making properties (e.g., originality in physical design, aesthetic properties) for the art categories in which the work may purportedly belong.

Twentieth-century art history contains many examples of intended transgressive regards. Part of what was shocking about Fauvism involved the rejection of realistic depiction in favour of stylised representation and bright, unnatural colours. This would have been immediately apparent to contemporary audiences, but it is reliant on the recognition of a relation between a regard that the artist has intended for the work that contrasts with regards that were standard in prior works. Transgressive regard is a form of originality that is relational, not intrinsic, and arises from the contrast of an intended regard with the background of artistic norms in that historical context. This accounts for reactions of shock to the flouting of existing artistic conventions without requiring that all individual pre-existing art-regards are excluded from the revolutionary work’s art-regard profile.

Walton notes that if we are frequently exposed to contra-standard properties then they typically become variable properties of some sub-category (Walton, 1970, 352-353).

So a revolutionary artwork will have a regard profile that substantially consists of existing types of individual art regards \{R_1, R_2, R_3, \ldots, R_m\} but that also has at least one individual art regard, \(R_y\), that is contra-standard with respect to the regards that are dominant in contemporaneous art history. That is, \(R_y\) is inconsistent with the dominant status of \(R_n\), where \(R_n\) is a standard form of regard for all of the individual art categories that the work (purportedly) belongs to. The creation of this work then extends the pool of individual pre-existing art regards from \{R_1, R_2, R_3, \ldots, R_x\} to \{R_1, R_2, R_3, \ldots, R_y\} for subsequent artworks. This provides for a circumspect version of Levinson’s “liberal intent” view. The disjunctive definition of art then becomes: an artwork is intended for regard in a way that some pre-existing work was, or else is substantially intended for regard in a way that some pre-existing work was but also for certain transgressive regards.

To recapitulate: I have argued that a more circumspect version of Levinson’s liberal intent option is a plausible solution to the problem of justifying revolutionary art as artworks. This option is made viable by specifying a more restricted characterisation of the
transgressive regards that partly constitute the regard profile of revolutionary artworks.\textsuperscript{24} This solution does not run afoul of the logical inconsistency apparent in Levinson’s original characterisation of revolutionary art as described in section 2.4.4.1.

2.4.4.3. Transgressive regard and first art

I now turn to an examination of first art. Levinson posits a class of objects called the \textit{ur}-arts, which are those objects from which the first art descends. First art is some new activity or activities that develop and “which are intended for treatment as objects of some \textit{ur}-art are.” Further, “the objects of the activity can only be art works by being thought of in connection with the ends towards which the objects of some \textit{ur}-art were directed” (Levinson, 1979, 243). Those objects that are correctly intentionally descended from first art constitute art. There is a simple rejoinder available to objections that claim that the subsequent development of art regards might have developed in a different—and perhaps a more utilitarian—way and that is to point out that such an objection is beside the point: as a matter of fact, we have art today, and that is the result of a concrete intentional-historical relation to prior art regards.

More recently, Stephen Davies notes that some modification to Levinson’s definition is required because “first art” is intentionally related only to \textit{ur}-art and so does not satisfy the definition, since on Levinson’s account \textit{ur}-art comes before art without itself being art. As such, any successor artefact that references the correct regard for “first art” will also not satisfy the definition, as first art is not art in the required sense, and so on (S. Davies, 1997b). Levinson’s subsequent disjunctive solution is as follows: “something is only art if and only if either (i) it satisfies the basic definition or (ii) it is an instance of first art—that is, one of those things from which all other art, that satisfying the basic definition, springs” (Levinson, 2002, 372).

At one point Levinson supposes Paleolithic cave painting to be one of the \textit{ur}-arts (Levinson, 1993, 421). It is unclear to me just what justification he has for making this a starting point in an art lineage or for discounting it as art proper. Perhaps these cave drawings, paintings and engravings simply constitute the earliest discovered objects that look art-like by modern standards. But, while the cave paintings at Chauvet are up to 37,000 years

\textsuperscript{24} I should note that Alessandro Pignocchi offers a similar characterisation of revolutionary art in his incorrect gloss of what I earlier labelled Levinson’s “disingenuous intent” solution. Pignocchi states: “[Levinson] argued that many artworks that seem entirely revolutionary are, in fact, revolutionary only in some respects, while in other respects, they are strongly connected with tradition.” (Pignocchi, 2014, 435).
old, the sophistication of these depictions, the skilled techniques required to source the materials, and the long period over which the various drawings—sometimes in the same cave—were made, provide strong evidence that these drawings were each a part of some existing tradition or other. Further, Stephen Davies notes that, rather than being conservative about the art status of these drawings, “the overwhelming majority of [archaeological] experts … call them art without qualification or hesitation” (S. Davies, 2012a, 3).

Levinson does not finally commit to his earlier supposition about the ur-art status of Paleolithic cave painting but, on the intentional-historical account, some practice in the Western art lineage was an ur-art. Rather than attempting to engage in identifying the ur-art of some tradition with an actual archaeological find, for the rest of this paper I will consider the logical implications of the circumspect liberal intent solution for notions of ur-art and first art.

Levinson draws a useful analogy between the functioning of the intentional-historical definition and genetic descent. He argues that the intentional-historical definition picks out the concrete, actual lineage of artworks.

Suppose you want to find out who are the present-day descendants of Charlemagne. Well, it must first be granted that there was a Charlemagne, that he was a particular person, presumably around 800 a.d. You might then be able to ascertain his progeny in the immediately succeeding years, if you had very good sources. But now return to the present. You could tell who among us now are the descendants of Charlemagne if you knew—if it were granted you—who counted as descendants in the preceding generation. And you could ascertain who in that preceding generation were descendants if you were granted who among the still preceding generation were descendants, and so on. At each stage, you can say who the descendants of Charlemagne are, how to pick them out, if you are vouchsafed who they are in the previous period (Levinson, 1989, 26).

This picture is useful because, while Levinson is here considering genetic descent, the analogy also holds for determining ancestry. If we attempt to track the male forefathers of Charlemagne, we can theoretically trace the genetic lineage right back, given access to the relevant facts, through evolutionary changes to a time prior to the category of *Homo sapiens*, and even beyond that. If intending for prior regard is the art analogue of genetic descent, then

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25 Levinson informed me that he is not committed to this claim (Personal correspondence. July 2014).
what resources does the intentional-historical account provide for identifying ur-art, and thereby preventing an undesirable regress?

One solution that suggests itself is that we might exclude an early artefact from being a work of art if its intended regard is wholly different from the types of regard that are appropriate to art today. But this is not consistent with the intentional-historical definition of art. First, to say this is to concede that there is more to the essence of art than just its intentional-historical character: it implies a substantive conception of art-regard. Second, whether something is art, according to the intentional-historical definition, is based solely on prior art regards, so it either must be an artwork or not at the time it was made based on the relevant relation between the intentions of its creator and pre-existing regards. If an unlikely prehistoric artefact is art, then it would just so happen as a matter of concrete historical fact that its artefact lineage—as tracked by the intentional-historical relation—resulted in the art we have today.

In order to draw a dividing line between art and non-art, a significant schism in an artefact’s prior regard relation is required. That is, there must have existed at some time an artefact for which the complete regard intended by its maker differed significantly from anything that had come before. One way that this might occur is via a sudden development in cognitive capacity. The “Big Bang” theory of cognitive modernity posits just such a sudden leap. One defender of the Big Bang theory is paleoanthropologist Richard Klein, who states, “There was a kind of behavioural revolution [in Africa] 50,000 years ago. Nobody made art before 50,000 years ago: everybody did afterward.”\textsuperscript{26} Klein suggests that the sudden leap from pre-modern to modern man was the result of genetic mutation affecting the way the brain worked.

Levinson’s theory of the historical division between art and non-art seems more plausible if a theory of a leap in cognitive ability can be used to explain the sudden emergence of a truly revolutionarily new kind of artefact; a kind that was intended for never-before possible forms of regard that had become possible due to a sudden cognitive leap that heralded the emergence of symbolically mediated behaviour.

But Klein’s is only one of many theories of the development of behavioural modernity. Sally McBrearty and Alison S. Brooks argue for a gradual development of modern human capacities. They claim that evidence for the sorts of modern behaviours that indicate psychological modernity appear in Africa in the Middle Stone Age, tens of

\textsuperscript{26} Quoted in Appenzeller (1998, 1451).
thousands of years earlier than Klein’s prediction (McBrearty & Brooks, 2000, 453). Moreover, as earlier archaeological evidence of artefacts that display symbolic behaviour come to light—some dating back beyond the Middle Stone Age—the Big Bang account becomes less plausible. Christopher Henshilwood, for instance, argues that numerous specimens of geometrically inscribed red ochre at Blombos cave spanning tens of thousands of years—the oldest being around 100,000 years old—provide much earlier evidence of symbolic thought and a tradition of engraving (Henshilwood, d’Errico & Watts, 2009). This evidence is consistent with a theory of a relatively rapid expansion of regards that may be construed as revolutionary, but one that would have occurred over an extended time period and that was not solely explained by reference to genetic mutation. While evidence still remains scant, it is reasonable to be sceptical of the Big Bang account.

Another possible way in which a significant break from prior artefact regards might have occurred is simply through intentional radical innovation with respect to the use of a new artefact. But just how likely is this? It is difficult to say.

Some artefacts in tribal cultures were (and are) multi-purpose. Hunting implements may be employed both for practical means as well as for artistic ends. The bullroarer, for instance, dates back to the Paleolithic period and could serve the dual purposes of both long-distance communication and musical instrumentation. It has also been used in ritual ceremonies in Dogon, Native American and Australian Aboriginal cultures (Morley 2013, 105-109). It has been hypothesised that the bullroarer and other musical instruments may have developed from the bola hunting technology (Lawergren, 1988, 35). Another example is the use of the hunting bow as a musical instrument (S. Davies 2012a, 5), of which there are multiple depictions in cave drawings and even descriptions in Homer’s epic poems (Lawergren, 1988, 36). The use of bow and stone-tipped arrow technology can be dated as far back as 64,000 years ago (Lombard & Phillipson, 2010). These examples exhibit forms of regard that are common to various musical instruments today. While these are examples of developing forms of use of musical instruments, not artworks specifically, it is illustrative of the way in which classes of utilitarian social objects may afford a wide agglomeration of regards.

This suggests a story of development that might be common to the ancestors of modern art forms. We begin the story with the existence of some functional item that might

In New Guinea, the bullroarer may have developed from hunting slings (Lawergren, 1988, 35).

Note that the complementary use of bow and arrow technology provides further evidence of early cognitive and behavioral sophistication (Lombard & Haidle 2012).
be, for instance, a hunting implement (e.g., bow, bola, some method of imitating animal calls) or other tool (e.g., ochre or hand-axe) or a ceremonial ritual. Perhaps the imitation of animal calls may have later been employed in some rituals. At some point these items were embellished aesthetically (e.g., in the case of musical instruments, the tool gets put to musical use; in the case of ochre crayons, some geometric lines are engraved into it or with it, etc.) Later, symbolic meaning may be attributed to the items (e.g., engravings in ochre may come to signify certain meanings or a finely embellished hand axe may distinguish the object’s importance). Mimetic visual representation could have developed in carved or drawn objects. A relatively continuous line of innovation, and an accompanying addition of intended regards, may have developed alongside an increasingly sophisticated tradition of craft technique. If this story of a gradual, incremental change of artefact regard or usage is plausible, then there is unlikely to be a historical juncture in intended regard where the non-art versus ur-art versus art distinctions could be made. In most cases, the items are substantially intended for regard as prior objects were.

A possible objection to this view is that the first instance of intending an aesthetic regard for a tool that was meant historically only for practical use would likely have been a transgressive act at the time. So, too, might the addition of symbolic meaning challenge the exclusively dominant position of an aesthetic regard. The same might also be claimed for the employment of mimetic representation, if it overturned the dominance of geometric designs. This would offer multiple historical junctures at which a claim of ur-art might be made. But, in response, if what I have argued in support of the liberal intent solution for revolutionary art is correct, the inclusion of “revolutionary” regards—consisting of a regard profile of both similar regards and transgressive regards to prior artefacts—can easily be accommodated. Under these conditions, it seems extremely unlikely that the necessary degree of innovation occurred to mark the emergence of first art.

One concluding thought. In accommodating revolutionary art, the concessions required for the liberal intent option diminish the plausibility of our being able to identify a clear, historical break between ur-art and first art regard in the relevant concrete artefact lineage. The intentional-historical definition of art, if it is to adequately account for first art, requires that this kind of historical discontinuity actually did occur. An inability to mark this divide would have the unfortunate consequence of equating ur-art with the very first actual artefact(s) in the historical lineage of artefacts from which the modern-day arts are a successor. In this situation, the intentional-historical definition would include in art’s extension many pre-historic tools—and anything else since then that has been intended for
the same regard. But we do not classify these artefacts as artworks, which is a problem for the intentional-historical definition.⁴⁹

2.4.5. Hybrid disjunctive definitions

Another alternative is the hybrid definition proposed by Robert Stecker (1994; 1997; 2000). Stecker attempts to overcome the shortcomings of historicist and functionalist definitions by joining them together in a disjunctive definition. According to Stecker:

an item is an artwork at time \( t \) if and only if it is in one of the central art forms at \( t \) and is intended to fulfil a function art has at \( t \) or it is an artefact that achieves excellence in fulfilling such a function (Stecker, 1997, 4).⁵⁰

This disjunctive definition overcomes a number of weaknesses in existing functionalist and historicist definitions. But a major problem with Stecker’s proposal, that Stephen Davies highlights, is that it is incomplete: it does not account for other Artworlds with distinct historical narratives (S. Davies, 2013, 220).

Davies offers his own disjunctive definition, which he claims overcomes this problem:

something is art (a) if it shows excellence of skill and achievement in realizing significant aesthetic goals, and either doing so is its primary, identifying function or doing so makes a vital contribution to the realization of its primary, identifying function, or (b) if it falls under an art genre or art form established and publicly recognized within an art tradition, or (c) if it is intended by its maker/presenter to be art and its maker/presenter does what is necessary and appropriate to realizing that intention. (S. Davies, 2015, 9; see also 2012a, 28-29).

⁴⁹ This is a challenge to Levinson’s claim that a misfiring of the intentional-historical definition resulting in non-art lineages is unlikely (Levinson, 2002, 369).
⁵⁰ For another disjunctive characterisation of art, see also S. Davies (2012a, 28-29; 2015).
Davies claims that his definition can account for first art in various art traditions made even by isolated individuals by means of disjunct (a). Davies says that for the first artists in a tradition—though they could not have used that term—“skill and achievement take the place of intentions, traditions, and genres” (2015, 9). On this account, it takes only a single individual to instantiate an art tradition—or at least to create an artwork. Moreover, Davies argues that the first art could not have been conceptual art—the aesthetic goals in the first disjunct are those of ordinary kinds of depiction, expression, narrative. He lists the following examples of aesthetic goals: “Expressions of powerful emotions, compelling narratives, realistic or evocative depictions, dexterous or difficult to realize actions, vivid enactments of historical or imagined scenes, and complex abstracta, all executed with exceptional expertise, are also on the list” (S. Davies, 2015, 10). Regarding already established art traditions, Davies’ definition allows that art traditions may subsequently develop in unexpected ways—(b) and (c) are not constrained by any substantive description of artistic appreciation. Lastly, an individual cannot instantiate a new artworld in a culture if there already is an artworld in existence. Their products will need to fit under (b) or (c) in order to count as art.

We should note that instead of disjunct (a) constituting the grounds for a new practice, it seems to presuppose norms of an aesthetic practice. “Excellence,” “skill,” “achievement,” and “significance” are all terms that presuppose norms of evaluation. Aesthetic norms need to be in place to distinguish original nonsense (Kant’s terminology) from the excellent achievement that Davies aims to identify. Additionally, we might expect that some social norms need to be in place in order for the item to have a proper function, in a socially objective manner (as opposed to some idiosyncratic use). As it currently stands, even though the first disjunct is meant to allow for a single, isolated individual to create art, multiple words imply the use of social norms.

Davies’ account also does not require any similarity between first art and much later art. Let’s assume a parallel universe where Duchamp’s readymades were rejected as art by Fine Art institutions in the early twentieth century. Instead, they became revered and had an influence in non-art institutions—let’s call these new institutions artworld*. Conceptual art*, Dada, Pop art*, happenings, and other styles that rejected traditional aesthetic goals flourished under the institutions of artworld*. But the institutions of the Fine Arts continued on as if the others had never happened. The idea is that a separate set of institutions were developed by artworld* participants in the early twentieth century and were promoted by wealthy artworld* collectors. Contemporary artworld* galleries were opened for the
exhibition of works. A body of criticism surrounding artworld* arose. In this parallel universe, none of the products of the artworld* would count as art—even though they are extremely similar to contemporary art. The reason—on Davies’ account—is simply a contingent matter of art history. In the chapters that follow, I argue instead that there are good reasons why these kinds of art movements—conceptual art, Dada, etc.—count as art.

Speaking generally, if a non-circular definition of the essential function of an artwork can be constructed, as is the goal of this thesis, there would be no problem in accounting for the possibility of independent artworlds. But any adequate functionalist definition must be cautious about any substantive characterisation of artistic appreciation, as it may later fall prey to obsolescence due to developments in artistic practice.

Each of the classes of definitions that I have mentioned in this chapter emphasise different elements of the social conditions that are required for art. Functionalist definitions treat artworks as social artefacts that perform a particular function; procedural definitions emphasise the importance of social institutions for maintaining a distinctive network of social roles that is required for the existence of art in a culture; and historicist definitions recognise the importance of established conventions within an art tradition that an artist is required to work with (or against) in the creation of their own artworks for the purposes of artistic regard.

This chapter has been negative in its assessment of many of the presented theories. In the chapters that follow, I will show how the valuable insights of these attempted definitions of art may be reconciled within a framework of art-institutional facts. I have claimed that an account of artistic appreciation is desirable for an informative definition of art. In what follows, I deliver on the promissory notes made in this chapter.
3. Methodology for analysing social concepts; defining art

In the previous chapter I argued that a definition of art would be both useful and desirable. I have also argued that there is no compelling reason to doubt the possibility of a functionalist definition of art and that a functionalist definition of art is more desirable and potentially more informative about the nature of art than existing alternatives.

In this chapter I outline a general methodology for the conceptual analysis of art. In the first section, I examine how we should analyse social concepts like art. This involves considering the differences between natural kinds and social kinds. I argue that we can account for art by reference to the formal characteristics that are essential to the specific function of these artefacts, namely, to reward artistic appreciation. The result of completing this project is a theory of art, I claim. In the second section, I explain how this theory of art provides adequate support for a definition of art. This short chapter defends a general approach for building a theoretical framework for art, which I then fill out via further analyses of artefact function in Chapter 4, and artistic appreciation and artistic value in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.1. The behavioural competence approach to analysing (some) social concepts

A significant difference between some natural kinds—for example, water and mammals—and categories of social objects—for example, bottle openers and money—is that whatever makes some item a member of the natural kind exists independently of what we think about it. For example, the essence of water is the basic chemical structure H₂O; generally speaking, anything that is water in the actual world has that chemical structure and only water has that structure. H₂O is thus the essence of water. The existence of instances of that pattern of chemical structure in the physical world provides an objective basis for identifying water. On the other hand, social kinds require a social context for their existence; instances of these kinds depend on intentional actions. Art, for example, is a social kind. Its existence depends on our actions; it is culturally mediated.

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31 I.e., heavy water is excluded.
Some questions that could be posed regarding the definition of social concepts include the following: if we aim to provide a definition of social concept X, then whose concept of X are we referring to? Do we want a descriptive definition that accommodates everybody’s intuitions about which items fall under X? But people may have different intuitions about which things are Xs. (For example, consider the differing answers that people provide to the question: “Is this art?” (Kamber, 2011.)) Further, if practices involving the concept change over time, how do we decide whether we should capture the conception of X that applied in, say, 1500 (when artworks might often serve religious and other functions, and when the visual arts still aimed at realistic representation) or 1900 (before Duchamp’s innovative readymades showed that art objects need not be either physically modified nor aesthetically rewarding) or today? What can we say about foreign cultures that do not have a term that correlates to our word for X? Could a culture have a concept of X if it lacks a correlate for the term we use to refer to X? Such questions may give prima facie reason to be skeptical about the possibility of defining many important social concepts in a non-arbitrary manner by reference to forms of social practice. This is one reason that might be offered to doubt the possibility of defining art.

In this section §3.1 I provide some suggestions about how to analyse and define (some) social concepts by reference to minimal characterisations of forms of behavioural competence. By minimal characterisations I mean an account of the features of a behaviour that stops at the point where the characterisation is sufficient to distinguish that behaviour from other forms of activity. I discuss the benefits of minimal characterisations later. The forms of behavioural competence that I suggest we characterise gain their objectivity by means of collective attitudes. This approach, I suggest, might offer a way to overcome some of the typical objections to classical, real definitions for at least some social concepts.

Three issues that I address in this section that are pertinent to the analysis of social concepts are: (1) the challenge of the prototype theory of concept formation for real definitions of social concepts; (2) the problem of avoiding synchronic clashes of intuition regarding what falls under a concept; and (3) dealing with diachronic changes regarding what counts as falling under a concept.

Probably the most developed recent defence of a method of conceptual analysis is presented in Frank Jackson’s From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis (Jackson, 1998). For Jackson, “conceptual analysis is the very business of addressing when and whether a story told in one vocabulary is made true by one told in some allegedly more
fundamental vocabulary” (Jackson, 1998, 28). Jackson describes conceptual analysis in slightly more detail as follows:

Serious metaphysics requires us to address when matters described in one vocabulary are made true by matters described in another. But how could we possibly address this question in the absence of a consideration of when it is right to describe matters in the terms of the various vocabularies? And to do that is to reflect on which possible cases fall under which descriptions. And that in turn is to do conceptual analysis. Only that way do we define our subject—or, rather, only that way do we define our subject as the subject we folk suppose is up for discussion. It is always open to us to stipulate the situations covered by the various descriptive terms, in which case we address subjects of our stipulation rather than the subjects the titles of our books and papers might naturally lead others to expect us to be addressing (Jackson, 1998, 41-42).

The idea is that the folk use terms in their language to refer to things in a way that is not random. If there is some rationale implicit in the use of the terms within a community of speakers in a way that conveys meaning, then this suggests that the associated concept can be analysed. The folk need not have explicit knowledge of a theory that explains their application of the term, but a rational reconstruction of this ability can be derived through examination of the relevant intuitions, in principle.

3.1.1. Some differences between definitions of physical phenomena and social phenomena

The truth of propositions about mind-independent objects is grounded in physical reality. Recently, various philosophers have defended accounts that explain the nature of social objects—money, cocktail parties, political parties—by reference to collective attitudes. According to John Searle, in contrast to the objects of mind-independent reality, there is a class of mind-dependent objects that have a mode of existence that depends on the mental states of individuals. Such social objects are instantiated when they are collectively recognised, and the intentional states of individuals within a community grounds this collective attitude. We can describe these mind-dependent objects—excluding mental states themselves—as (at least partly) consisting of collective attitudes (e.g., collective intentions and collective recognition). Further, mental states are directly related to brain states, and this provides a way of grounding discussion of collective intentionality within the perspective of a
single physical world (Searle, 1995, 1-29). For the purposes of this section, I will assume that collective intentionality can be used to ground social facts in an objective manner.

There are various competing accounts of collective intentions.32 (For example, some hold that it is ultimately reducible to descriptions in terms of individual intentions, others that it involves in some sense a distinct form of intentionality, as Searle would have it.) For the purposes of this section, we do not need to decide on the correct theory of collective intentionality. I will have more to say about collective attitudes in Chapter 4. For the moment, let us proceed based on the assumption that the existence of collective attitudes is largely unproblematic—though the details are contentious.

Frank Jackson has much to say about the importance of possible world semantics for his method of conceptual analysis. The comments I make in this section do not require modification to this part of his theory. Also, any account in terms of collective intentions can be layered on top of Jackson’s existing physicalist theory of mental states by means of the appropriate supervenience relation. In this respect, the minimal characterisation of the forms of behavioural competence approach is consistent with serious metaphysics. This chapter can then be seen as an exploration of the prospects for conceptual analysis of a restricted category of social concepts that are grounded in collective intentions.

An initial difference between classical, real definitions of natural and social phenomena is that when specifying a definition of some phenomenon, if the essence of $X$ is specified by $Y$, then some item falls under the concept of $X$ if and only if $Y$ obtains. In the case of most natural phenomena, the state of the actual world that determines whether $Y$ obtains in any particular instance is mind independent. So whether $Y$ obtains can frequently be determined one way or another by some means of empirical verification. In the case of social concepts, however, the reliance on collective intentions in grounding the objective status of $Y$ introduces a problem of verifiability, because the relevant collective intentions may be established to a greater or lesser degree within a particular community. This means that we might have a very precise descriptive definition of social concept $X$ in terms of $Y$ characteristics of collective intentions, and yet a degree of indeterminacy may apply when considering whether any particular situation is an instance of $Y$. But this does not count against the possibility of a real definition of social concepts. In the case of social concepts, when $X$ is defined in terms of $Y$, $Y$ specifies the characteristics in virtue of which something falls under the class of $X$. Thus, if we are presented with some particular item, and if we are

to make the case that this item is an X, we do so by providing evidence for the position that it has Y characteristics.

As Jackson observes, we cannot simply use folk intuitions about what the world is like to refute or justify claims about what the world is actually like (Jackson, 1998, 41-42). While this claim holds for physical reality, it requires additional comment when considering social reality. We may have some mistaken folk conceptions about the nature of our actions, and so these folk intuitions may have no bearing on the characterisation of our collective behaviours when described as forms of intentions-in-action involved in the actual execution of such behaviours. So, in this sense, Jackson’s observation holds. But note that we can change social reality by persuading people that they should behave in a certain way with respect to some object. Social facts are maintained when people with shared recognition of the kinds of acts that are appropriate to perform in some context repeat those relevant patterns of activity. This may result in new behaviours with respect to some item, or else may affect the subsequent degree of the establishment of existing collective intentions to a greater or lesser extent. That is, some claims about social reality may subsequently be made more or less objective by changing people’s behaviours.

3.1.2. Collective intentionality and the prototype theory of concepts

A common objection to the project of providing a definition of most concepts in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions is that the prototype psychological theory of concept formation, if true, counts against it. This theory, some claim, provides evidence that concepts are structured more like Wittgenstein’s account of family resemblance, in which case a cluster account might characterise the concept more adequately than a classical definition.\(^{33}\)

But, in response, grounding social concepts in collective intentions seems, on the face of it, to have the advantage of not being susceptible to claims that prototype psychological theories of concept formation rule out the possibility of identifying necessary and sufficient conditions for something to fall under a concept, as is required for a descriptive classical, real definition. This is because this kind of analysis does not locate the features of the world that objectively ground the concept in the mind of any single individual—in which case the prototype theory may be relevant—but instead locates the objective grounds of the concept—that is, the

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\(^{33}\) Though note that cluster definitions might also be specified in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions.
characteristics of $Y$ that must obtain in order to be necessary and sufficient for an instance of $X$ to be instantiated—at the level of collective attitudes.

As I mentioned in the last chapter, Aaron Meskin raises the challenge that, if attempts at definition depend upon our classificatory practices and our classificatory practice is guided by prototype concept structures, then the prospects of finding necessary and sufficient conditions for concepts (e.g., art) are unlikely (Meskin, 2008). But I take it that the prototype theory of concept formation does not claim that everyone shares exactly the same conception of art, and so there will be some method of reconciliation required in order to characterise a communal conception of a term. This will require some reflection on which individual intuitions should be accepted and which should be rejected. And so the real problem here, as I see it, consists in explaining how it is possible to decide in a principled way which intuitions should be kept and which discarded in cases where there is a clash of intuitions.

3.1.3. The problem of synchronic clashes of intuitions

I will begin my answer to this problem by noting that not all intuitions are created equal. There may be better or worse intuitions about whether a certain item falls under a concept. This is because the determination of whether something is of a certain kind may require knowledge of some behavioral competence that is appropriate with respect to that item. Consider the following question: Which of the items below is a delicacy?

1) A Swiftlet bird’s nest.
2) Salt-cured sturgeon roe from the Caspian and Black Seas.
3) Quail eggs preserved in a mixture of clay, ash, salt, quicklime, and rice hulls, for several months.

The correct answer is that some of these might be considered acquired tastes, but all of these are considered by at least some populations as desirable and valued food items, and as such, as delicacies. Recognition of these items as delicacies might depend upon certain information about how these items are treated in particular social contexts. It might be that we, ourselves, do not treat the objects as edible delights, nor might we be able to imagine ourselves doing so. Without knowing that there are cultures that do value eating these items, we may have difficulty identifying them as delicacies. But once we recognise the fact that they are valued
in this way, we can say that—even though they might not conform to our own taste—they are regarded as delicacies in other cultures.

The point of this example is that we may need to acquire knowledge of behaviours that are typical with respect to certain items—and thus grounded in the collective intentions of a community—in order to correctly identify those items as falling under a particular concept.

I have used the example of delicacies but I suggest that this approach might have broader application—including Wittgenstein’s notorious example of the concept of games. But while we can easily verify delicacies—perhaps by observing regular patterns of people expending effort to find and consume these items and, moreover, enjoying that activity—other cases may require more abstract characterisations of the concept-defining forms of behavioral competence in order to make apparent the commonalities among varied cultural manifestations.

Another complication is that there may be multiple concepts that can be applied to the same underlying phenomena, which classify it differently. For example, Hesperus (the evening star) and Phosphorus (the morning star) are exclusive categories, but the underlying phenomenon, the planet Venus, will count in either category under different circumstances. In this case, a theory of the underlying phenomena—Venus—can be useful in explaining the application of more constrained classificatory concepts—Hesperus and Phosphorus. (This example might bear a similar relation to (as an example) the art-related concepts of conceptual art and the traditional conception of the Fine Arts with respect to the underlying phenomenon of artistic practices more generally.)

In any case, where the application of a concept requires knowledge that a behavioural competence is appropriate with respect to some object—the behavioural competence constituting the essence of that concept—there is the possibility that someone may lack the requisite knowledge or competence to make a correct determination as to whether something falls under that concept. My solution to synchronic clashes of intuitions is this: In order to resolve the issue in a principled manner we must first rationally reconstruct the relevant behavioural competence that applies for some concept. Only then can we explain how certain intuitions may have gone awry. To take a hypothetical example: Assume that artistic appreciation is the behavioural competence that is essential to artworks. Given this, an individual may lack the knowledge required to appreciate certain kinds of artworks in the way that is appropriate to the kind of works that they are, and consequently may mistakenly intuit that the item is not an artwork. If we are armed with a general characterisation of the
competence of artistic appreciation and can show that some cultural manifestation of this
behavioural competence is appropriate to the object under consideration, we will then be in a
position to explain why the mistaken intuition is erroneous.

Further, we can use the behavioural competence approach to ground explanations of
practices and institutions from distinct cultures that fall under the same umbrella term. I
propose that we can distinguish three levels of description in terms of my framework. Let us
consider the art case again. The most fundamental level is the behaviour of artistic
appreciation. Second, the value of artistic appreciation is central to explaining the emergence
of social practices that provide a degree of objectivity regarding how art objects should be
appreciated. Within these practices artworks are manifested. Third, in some cultures, there
arise institutions that are exclusively dedicated to supporting the production of and
engagement with artworks for the purpose of artistic appreciation. The institutions achieve
this by, for instance, producing art criticism, training apprenticed artists, or providing
dedicated venues for artistic appreciation, etc. The existence of these art-exclusive
institutions constitutes a high art tradition. Following Stephen Davies, I'll call the artistically
appreciated products of this activity art-with-a-capital-A (e.g., Western Fine Art). The other
artefacts that fall under the broader range of artistic practices I will call art-with-a-small-a
(e.g., domestic arts, pottery, songs, etc.).

The development of the idea of art-with-a-capital-A in the West—originally under the
term “Fine Art”—has been described most thoroughly by philosophers Paul Kristeller and
Larry Shiner (Kristeller, 1951;1952; Shiner, 2001). They claim that this is our primary
concept of art and that it arose in the course of social changes in the eighteenth century. I
agree with them that something like their nominal institutional conception of Fine Art exists,
even if I have some reservations about their analysis of the origins of Fine Art institutions.
But I will later argue that this is not the most fundamental meaning of “art” used by English
speakers. Their theory excludes consideration of non-Western art and domestic arts.

3.1.4. The problem of diachronic changes in folk intuitions

Another problem that needs to be addressed is that of changing folk suppositions about what
features are essential for some item to fall under a social concept. Consider the example of
Western high art prior to Marcel Duchamp’s readymades. Aesthetic properties, for instance
the beautiful and the sublime, were considered a prime value of high art prior to Duchamp’s
works, but afterward this was no longer assumed. This then raises the question of which conception we should attempt to define.

My answer is that we need to provide only the most minimal characterisation of the intentions-in-action required to instantiate the behavioural competence that distinguishes that behavioural competence from other unrelated kinds of activity. I am not suggesting that this is an easy task. However, given the problem we face, the goal of minimal characterisations of distinct behaviours provides the best chance of sensibly grouping related items under a concept both before and after periods of significant innovation within the relevant practices.

We can find a precedent for this line of thought in the work of Arthur C. Danto who argues that Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* allowed philosophers to ask the crucial question of what distinguishes Warhol’s artworks from ordinary, non-art Brillo boxes. According to Danto, developments in artistic practices have revealed the essence of art by means of identifying the contingent properties of artworks (Danto, 2013, 48-49). We don’t need to buy into Danto’s Hegelian story, however. The hypothesis is that it is possible that we now have a conception of art that might be analysed to reveal the essential characteristics of artistic practice that apply to artworks from all times. Assuming that the minimal characterisation of the forms of behavioural competence approach is appropriate for defining art, the essential characteristics of the behavioural competence captured by such an analysis would have been instantiated even though its minimal characterisation might not have been explicitly determined until the contingent features of the behavioural competence were revealed as such.

Further, the minimal characterisation of the forms of behavioural competence approach to conceptual analysis might explain why we regard practices that originally evolved and have been maintained in other cultures as falling under our own concept terms. It would also have the benefit of explaining how another culture could have instances of a concept—manifested through repeated forms of behaviour—without necessarily having a distinct word for that concept.

Finally, the minimal characterisation of the forms of behavioural competence approach could potentially result in an elegant, yet informative, classical definition for some term. If so, this would partly serve to undercut the comparative benefits that may be claimed by defenders of more explicative or stipulative approaches to definition.
3.2. The relationship between a theory of art and definition of art

If we analyse art using the behavioural competence approach that I described in the previous section, we will—if successful—have a theory of art behaviours, art practices, and dedicated art institutions. But how does this relate to the project of definition? Presumably, someone can engage in a kind of behaviour without having a specific concept for that behaviour. But definitions describe the meaning of a term. In this section I argue that the three levels of analysis that I have described in the last section (behaviours, practices and institutions) can be employed in explaining uses of the terms “art” and “artistic” in a way that shows what the terms might mean.

3.2.1. What are we doing when defining art?

In § 2.4 I briefly described what the project of definition involves. In this sub-section, I provide further detail about what we are doing when we engage in the project of defining art. There are differing opinions regarding what is required in order to define art. Some theorists question whether non-Western cultures can have our concept of art without a corresponding term in their language for “art” (Novitz, 1998). Dominic McIver Lopes points out that it is unnecessary for a culture to have a concept that corresponds to art in order for art to exist in that culture. This is because art might be made incidentally in the process of making some artefact in that culture (Lopes, 2007). If we agree with Lopes that a concept of art is not required to make art, then this raises a problem of explaining just what the project of a cross-cultural definition of art amounts to.

In the previous section, I provided the method for constructing a theory of art. Julius Moravcsik remarks, in his proposal for characterising art as a cultural universal, that this sort of project is distinct from that of defining the word “art” (Moravcsik, 1988, 157-158; 1992). Art, according to him, is “designed to have some non-functional features for appreciation and interest, and these entities are of some interest and are objects of appreciation in virtue of these features to some members of every community” (Moravcsik, 1988, 159). He states that art, similar to language, has “universal elements that surface in various ways in various
cultures” (Moravcsik, 1988, 164). This means that art appreciation will also vary in its surface features from artworld to artworld. Also, there will likely be variation in the concept of art in each artworld.

Moravcsik then proposes to do empirical research into identifying artworlds in multiple cultures by locating certain features that are typical of art products. These include “1) Expressing feeling, 2) Being representational, 3) Being institutionalized, 4) Related to functional/utilitarian activities, 5) Assume a separate faculty of aesthetic taste” (Moravcsik, 1992, 311; but see also 1993). I have already noted Monseré’s objections to cluster accounts like this in §2.1. But—as evidenced by §3.1—I think Moravcsik’s initial proposal to attempt to characterise art as a cultural universal is worth pursuing, even if not in a cluster form. Having noted this difference between a theory of art and a definition of a concept of art, we still need to clarify the connection between the two projects.

Nick Zangwill proposes the following four reasons to doubt the feasibility of analysing the concept of art. First, the project assumes that there is a concept of art to be analysed, but many languages lack a word for what we call art. Second, in different cultural contexts, terms that refer to objects that we might call art result in different categorisations of objects. Third, even if we have a concept of art that is universally shared, there is no reason to assume that the items that fall under it share a common nature. Given the radical changes in art in the twentieth century, for instance, it might seem implausible that a similar kind of appreciation is shared between Robert Barry’s All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking (1969) and Michelangelo’s ceiling of the Sistine chapel. Fourth, even if there is a shared concept and a shared nature, we would still need much more theory in order to understand art and artistic practices fully (Zangwill, 2007, 5). Zangwill argues that, as a methodological approach, conceptual analysis by reference to extension and intuition is no longer a plausible method for characterising art. It is not a definition of a concept of art that philosophers should be targeting. Instead, the focus should be on a theory that explains the phenomenon of art (Zangwill, 2007, 18).

I will make several claims in response to these points. First, I will defend the claim that there is a shared nature of art by defending an art theory based on the method I outlined in §3.1. This theory will provide a framework for further investigation into the nature of

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34 Robert Stecker argues that there is vagueness about what is art and that this might explain the numerous proposed definitions of art, some of which may be more or less adequate (2000, 54-59).
artistic practices. For any artworld that has a concept of art, the practices might have different surface features in different cultural contexts. Because of these different ideas about what artistic aims art should have, this may result in concepts of art that classify putative art items differently. (E.g., a mid-19th century European notion of art would probably exclude Rauschenberg’s *Erased de Kooning* from counting as art.) The project that I am engaged in provides a theory of art that posits the relevant similarities in appreciation that can reasonably unite these items under “art” in a classificatory sense. Thus the projects of conceptual analysis and of providing a theory of art are complementary.

The project I propose defines the real essence of art in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. In this case, what makes something art is grounded in certain patterns of intentional collective behaviours. The identification of such patterns of behaviour provide an objective basis on which to ground a real definition. The terms that relate to a nominal notion of art within a culture or to the various art kinds that exist within a culture denote items that really are art in virtue of their satisfying the real definition of art. In such a way we can allow that the nominal notion of what counts as “art” has changed over the course of the twentieth century through radical art movements but, nevertheless, an underlying, pan-cultural, real essence of art exists (albeit manifested at the level of social reality). And I’ll again reiterate the point that the nominal notion of art and art kinds relates to particular cultural manifestations of how people treat social artefacts that function to reward artistic appreciation. That is, the nominal notion relates to what I’ve called the functional concept of art which is expressed in how competent artistic appreciators go about appreciating art. Just as the nominal notion of art in the West has changed in the course of the twentieth century, so have the collection of competencies similarly expanded for appropriate appreciation of new artistic styles of art.

Further, while my project aligns with a specific pattern of appreciative behaviours that ground artistic practices, it is possible that the definitions I provide are not exactly descriptive of even the Western conception(s) of art. The result will be a definition that is possibly somewhat descriptive and somewhat revisionist regarding art. But, as Robert Stecker points out, if we have a definition that helps make sense of artistic practices, then this is of value.

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35 See also Stephen Davies’ (2003) comments on real and nominal essences where he distinguishes between a humanly invented category, for example, parking tickets, that have a “purely nominal” essence as opposed to the underlying real essence of natural kinds. Art, he argues, does not have purely nominal essence because “it depends in part on widely shared, biologically conditioned senses, capacities, and appetites of human beings, as well as on social factors that are local, culturally specific, and historically relative” (2003, 7).
(Stecker, 2000, 60-61). On the other hand, if the result of my project is a true essentialist definition of art grounded in social facts, it will show that anti-essentialists positions—for example Gaut’s cluster account—are false (Neill & Ridley, 2012, 146).

Given what I have just said, can this project then be charged with being Western-centric? My response is that, so long as we have reasonably demarcated a set of art behaviours and practices distinct from other cultural behaviours and practices, in a cross-cultural manner, then we have identified something informative and interesting regarding social institutions in a way that transcends just the West. If my investigation leads to the identification of a distinct form of valuing that appears to have existed in all cultures and in all times then this is a valuable result in itself.

I think that the above mapping of relations between the real essence of art and nominal notions of art can help explain why it is that Kendall Walton thought that attempts to define art might seem to have different aims (Walton, 2007, 148-150). Cluster accounts and definitions that aim to account for the Western nominal notion of art have encountered serious difficulty in demarcating which criteria are in or out. This is understandable if any attempt to define or characterise a distinctly Western set of art practices is recognised as capturing, at best, a changing nominal Western notion of art. Theories and definitions that have tried to account for a universal notion of art based on intrinsic and relational characteristics that Western art shares with non-Western counterparts are also doomed to failure (and in some cases to ethno-centrism also) if the real essence of art resides in its essence as a kind of artefact that is used in a distinct way, pan-culturally.

Zangwill claims that the definition of a concept aims to supply its meaning. However, the project of definition in the tradition of analytic philosophy of art typically seeks only necessary and sufficient conditions for something being art. But, he says, that does not give the meaning of a word, and so the project of defining art is incoherent (Zangwill, 2007, 4). But I think the project of definition is coherent if we clearly specify the kind of work that we expect necessary and sufficient conditions to achieve (even if it does not account for the meaning of a concept). A classical, real definition of art provides the necessary and sufficient conditions for something being art—according to some sense of the term. This would be akin to the use of “art,” given a particular sense, in phrases like “this thing is art” or “those things are works of art.” The modest description of definitional agenda is to provide the correct
conditions for the application of the term “art” given a particular sense of that term. But how many senses of “art” do we need to consider?

George Dickie notes at least three senses of “art”: the classificatory, the evaluative, and the courtesy (or derivative or honorific) sense (1974, 21-27). The classificatory sense designates an item as falling within a category. The evaluative sense is used to note that something is an excellent example of its kind. The courtesy sense is used when the speaker wants an audience to regard something that is non-art as art. According to Richard Wollheim, however, there is only a single sense of the meaning of the term “art.” He claims that two of Dickie’s senses are mere figures of speech: the evaluative case involves ellipsis (“this painting is a work of art” is shorthand for “this painting is [an excellent] work of art”); the courtesy sense is a metaphorical use of the term “art” (1980, 158-159). Thus definitions of art need to focus only on a single meaning of the term.

I agree with Wollheim that we need to explain a primary meaning of “art.” But I have a few suggestions for art-related uses of the “art” term.

One broad, primary sense of the term is to identify a range of objects and practices from multiple cultures that may be classified as art. Such categories of artefacts often do have a standard function of rewarding artistic appreciation, but do not necessarily belong to Western Fine Art forms. It is worth pointing out here that while many categories of artefacts might reward being appreciated as art (perhaps aeroplanes might fit in this category), it is not the case that regarding the item in that way is considered a standard feature for that category of artefact. Appreciation of the artistic qualities of an aircraft is not a typical way of engaging with aircraft. This shows that social conventions are important to the functional definition of art and these will be analysed in later chapters. As I noted in §3.1, we can distinguish two classificatory senses (against Wollheim’s single classificatory sense)—art-with-a-small-a and art-with-a-capital-A. I have just indicated the former.

The second sense of “art” that I wish to demarcate identifies a more restricted category of objects belonging to the institutions of Western high art (e.g., such formal institutions as art museums, concert halls, performance theatres, etc.). In practice, we frequently determine which sense is intended by the contextual features relevant to understanding how the term is used. I will argue in later chapters that this Fine Art sense of

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36 The term “art” may also be used to refer to other, non-artistic, skilled activities. For example, the art of motorcycle maintenance.
“art” is derivative from the first, purely functional sense of the term. Fine art institutions emerge and are maintained within societies to produce, develop and promote categories of artefacts that reward regard for core artistic value. I will use John Searle’s theory of institutional facts to account for Fine Art institutions in the West, and also account for the analogous institutions in non-Western cultures. This is art-with-a-capital-A.

The term “art” in either of its classificatory senses rigidly designates a kind of item in virtue of patterns of behaviours towards instances of art, picking out items in the world whose function is to reward artistic appreciation—one class being a subset of the other (Putnam, 1973; Kripke, 1980). James Carney endorses this general view when he states that “If ‘art’ is to satisfy the rigid designator model, then there must be a counterpart to scientific theories for natural-kind terms that could be the final court of appeal for whether x is art” (Carney, 1982b, 152-153; see also 1975 and 1982a). Peter Kivy (1979, 428-430), has questioned whether appeal to existing theories of art—as Carney suggested—could ground rigid designation. First he questions whether theories of art are in any way like scientific theories. Second, he questions the possibility of a scientific theory of aesthetic properties. In response to Kivy, I firstly agree that my theory of art should be subject to empirical verification and my project does produce a theory that is verifiable. In addition, the relevant behaviours are grounded in patterns of objective social facts, which is suitably analogous to the patterns of physical facts that are the subject of the natural sciences. Further, as will be seen in Chapters 5 and 6, my theory does not need to explain the nature of aesthetic properties. It merely posits them as something that can be used for the purposes of artistic appreciation. One difference that I have mentioned between natural and social kinds is that it is the intentional actions of those who engage with artworks who establish the social facts about them. Thomas Leddy (1987) raises this as a potential problem for rigid designation. But so long as there is a reliable pattern to be identified that is grounded in objective social facts, I see no problem here.

Another difference I have with Wollheim is that I think the courtesy sense of “art” has an interesting analysis, as calling something “art” in this sense is equivalent to saying that some non-art item is artistic. There might be an interesting and informative distinction between things that are art (in the classificatory sense) and things that are merely artistic. “Art” in the courtesy sense might be applied to a wide array of objects and practices to describe them as rewarding efforts at appreciating their artistic qualities. It is not uncommon for people to call something art in a way that involves some positive assessment of the high
level of practical skill evident in its production, but stop short of labelling the object as belonging to a category of artefact that provides artistic value as a standard feature of that category. (That is, the object would not be deficient in respect of the kind of object that it is if it did not reward being regarded for the purposes of artistic appreciation.) This evaluative sense of “art” clearly indicates an item as rewarding artistic appreciation without the object meriting classification as art.

Further, I have more to say about the evaluative sense of art, particularly in its negative usage. Often people will make a claim that something is not really art because they judge that it is not valuable enough in some art-relevant respect. In Chapters 5 and 7, I will explain how the evaluative sense is connected to the classificatory sense of art-with-a-capital-A.

Dominic McIver Lopes is sceptical about the prospects for a buck-stopping (i.e., a simple classical and real) definition of art because, he claims, the philosophical debate about definitions is at an impasse. Here is the problem of defining art, stated succinctly: “I think that the data are our intuitions, and intuitions are driving the theory, so we can’t use intuitions to test the theory” (Lopes & Xhignesse, 2014, 2). The basis for his claim is that there is a split between theories that provide different verdicts on test cases, including Duchamp’s Fountain, Andy Warhol’s Brillo Boxes, and John Cage’s 4’33’’ (1952). A traditional aesthetic functionalist theory of art might exclude these “hard” cases from being art, while an institutional account might include them. Lopes’ problem is that we cannot decide which way to go independently of the intuitions that shape the theories.

My response to this kind of worry is that a correct definition of art will require an account of just what it means for people to have correct intuitions regarding art status. In order to rectify an ambiguity in talk of the use of intuitions, I will distinguish between two ways of construing talk of intuitions regarding art status: On the one hand, we can refer to a person’s intuitions about whether some particular thing counts as art. This is the sort of activity that people are regularly (and typically unproblematically) engaged in. This social competence is manifested in an unselfconscious manner via the recognition and use of something in our social environment as art (in the specific way that I detail in Chapter 6). Art status occurs in these situations by the object being acknowledged as belonging in some art kind category: a painting, a musical work, an improvised performance, etc. On the other hand, intuitions about a theory of art may be prompted by asking someone “What is art?”
This question is apt to occur more in philosophical enquiries regarding the nature of art. These latter sorts of intuitions usually require some kind of self-conscious commitment to a theory of art (even if only an ill-formed account). A response to such a question might consist of some account of what “good” art is, with goodness being accounted for by reference to the subject’s favourite kind of art. Such intuitions will more often be influenced by personal commitments to particular art theories than the first kind of intuitions. And as these art theories may be prescriptive about art status, rather than descriptive, they may not match common intuitions about whether something is art.

As an illustration of the latter kinds of intuitions, Alan Goldman claims an evaluative concept of art to be fundamental. But Goldman seems to favour a traditional kind of Fine Art when he poses the leading question of why contemporary artworks should be viewed in the way that works by Rubens and da Vinci should be viewed (Goldman, 1995, 2). This, I think, masks a mistaken assumption on Goldman’s part that all works should be evaluated in terms of traditional aesthetic value. On my account this aesthetic functionalism regarding art is a limited case of a more generalised form of artistic value. It is not that spectators like Goldman do not accept or recognise that non- or anti-aesthetic avant-garde works are art. It is that they may be primarily familiar with “aesthetic” ways of valuing art. It would be more appropriate for such spectators to say that X is not the kind of art that they like rather than to flat out deny that anti-aesthetic works are art, or that they are poor as artworks simply because they do not reward aesthetically. Conceptual art, for instance, needs to be evaluated with respect to the appropriate artistic ends given the kind of artwork that it is, which may require the friend of aesthetic value to familiarise themselves with new ways of appreciating artistically.

So it is the former kind of intuitions that we should interrogate regarding art status according to ordinary-language employment of the term “art” because, when competently executed, these intuitions reliably identify artworks in the social world. And capturing what exactly the essence of this is constitutes the aim of a descriptive classificatory definitional project. The latter sorts of intuitions about some individual’s theory of art are infrequently exercised in the social world, and so do not contribute much in a practical sense to affecting the ordinary-language notion of art. If my descriptive project is successful, it will therefore result in an art theory that explains ordinary-language intuitions. And consequently a related aim of my investigation is that commitment to the art theory that I provide will produce intuitions regarding a theory of art that will largely align with ordinary-language intuitions.
about whether some particular thing is art (i.e., align with our concept of art as expressed in practice).

I have been discussing intuitions regarding art so far, but it should be clear from what I have said that these intuitions about the art status of a thing are the result of the unconscious (or sub-conscious) exercising of a social competence: the correct recognition and use of something as the member of an art kind. But intuitions about whether something is art may be right or wrong. So it is not only intuitions about whether something is art that we need to consider as data for our project, but correct intuitions about whether something is art. We then need to ask what makes for a correct judgment about the art status of an artefact. This will require a theory of art.

My contention then is that any plausible definition of art needs to be backed up by a theory of art. This is clear by virtue of the number of clarifications and explanations that are required in order to defend any putative definition of art. I think that the proper aim of a theory of art should be to account for those features of the supporting theories of opposing definitions of art that seem intuitively correct, and explain exactly why these intuitions are correct in an informative way. Unintended unintuitive consequences of opposing theories need to be explained only if they are consequences of the new theory. If the new theory conflicts with any platitudes then it should have the resources to provide principled reasons why the rejected proposition is wrong (the aim being to convince a rational bearer of the platitude that they should give up on the truth of that platitude).

So my response to Lopes is that the essence of the classificatory concept of art does not reside just in our individual intuitions about whether or not something is art. Instead, the essence is grounded and expressed in our art appreciative behaviours and their associated artistic practices. Through characterising the behaviour of artistic appreciation in general terms, we have a basis for constructing a theory of art as a cultural universal. I will have more to say about artistic appreciation and artistic value in Chapters 5 and 6. If we couple artistic appreciation with a theory of artefacts (in a broad sense that allows for intangible culture) and of functions, then, I argue, we can also provide a more precise account of what works of art are.

Finally, I should comment on what we can reasonably expect to do with the classificatory and courtesy senses of art. The classificatory definition specifies the conditions in virtue of which certain social facts about an item are good reasons for that artefact to count
as having art status (thus answering Matravers’ challenge, raised in §2.4.2). If somebody proposes a fact about an object in order to defend its art status that does not in some way provide evidence for the presence of the characteristics described by the definition of art (e.g., the fact that the artefact was made on a Tuesday) then we should either ask for further information from that individual or else doubt that they understand the concept of art. A definition explains the salience relation between the fact and the art status of some object.

This kind of definition of art cannot claim to determine which items are artworks and which are not in every case. This is because the social facts regarding artwork status may be too vague and/or ambiguous for some item. But even in such cases, the definition will enable us to make sense of the characteristics in virtue of which something is considered artistic. This more modest application allows for the indeterminacy of artwork status in particular cases, yet satisfies the demand that a definition explain the kinds of reasons we might put forward to argue that some object or practice is art. This limitation means that we sometimes need to change our expectations regarding the use to which a definition of art can be put.

Does this diminish the practical use of a definition of art? No. I am arguing for more reasonable expectations regarding what we can achieve using a definition of art, given the nature of the entities involved. There are not always social facts that can be used to conclusively identify social objects as having art status. Instead, such a definition guides us in understanding the respects in which and the extent to which something is art. And this is still of a practical use. This limitation also does not mean that anything goes. The evidence in support of an object being art must be based on social facts which provide the appropriate level of objectivity regarding its status. This means that it may be easier to make a case for the art-relevant facts of artefacts in highly formalised contexts as these situations will likely have well established methods for confirming social facts about these objects (at least more so than in less-formalised, folk contexts).

3.2.2. Expertise and artefact categorisation

Psychologists Grant Gutheil, Paul Bloom and others have carried out experiments that test the effect of understanding creator intentions on artefact categorisation. In one series of experiments, they gradually deformed instances of everyday objects like cups and plates and
asked groups what kind of artefact it was (Gutheil et al., 2004). The result of this research is that adults are more likely than children to base their artefact categorisation of the transformed or destroyed objects on the artefact category of the undamaged object. The authors of the study conclude that “object history is a central component of a mature theory of artifact kind membership” (Gutheil et al., 2004, 38).

Art seems to be of a different kind to cups and plates because, first, while it is easy to identify form and function criteria for plates and cups, it is difficult to do so for art and, second, while there might be agreement that something was intended to belong to a class of artefacts (e.g., that tagging a Rothko counts as an instance of Yellowism), there may be a further question as to whether items in the intended class are art. Could art expertise potentially assist in making a correct determination here?

There is a difference in the nature of verification of the referent between natural kind and social kind terms. The experts who we may rely on for verifying that something meets the conditions to be classified under a natural kind concept are not responsible for constructing new ways to satisfy membership. Natural kinds are identified by specifying characteristics of those objects that are mind-independent. Scientific experts describe the referents of ordinary language concepts by reference to features of the physical world. Expert scientific verification of water always requires that the chemical has the chemical structure H₂O.

By contrast, the experts of social kinds may be accorded the authority to constitute new ways for a thing to obtain some status. In the art case, artists themselves may be granted the authority to construct artefacts that are meant to be appreciated in ways that are significantly original when compared with prior artworks. Some categories of experts of social kinds can be responsible for constituting new art forms. Verification of the status of a social kind may depend on institutional facts like social laws and constitutive rules, which may have been introduced by other experts in this domain. Scientists in the natural sciences do not have this power over the classificatory concepts that they have expertise over.

Artefacts exist to perform certain kinds of functions, and so it is possible that the only thing that unites a particular artefact kind is the ability of the objects to perform a particular function. In many cases, when we are told that a social artefact is of a certain type, we can work out how to put it to use. This is not always the case, though. According to the theory I propose we cannot know how to “use” a kind of artwork until we know how to appropriately
obtain artistic value from it. There exist many cases of avant-garde works that we are told are art by art experts who know how to obtain artistic value from these kinds of works. We may find ourselves reliant on their advice in order to know not only that something is an artwork but also how we should engage with it as the kind of artwork that it is. So, for art, just as in the water case, we can separate expert verification of the referent of a term from ordinary understanding of how to use a particular object to perform some function. But there is a difference: in the water case, once something is confirmed as H$_2$O, ordinary language users know what sort of functions the substance can be used for. This is due to the lay person’s familiarity with the chemical structure of water. In the art case, however, once some art expert has identified something as art, it might be the case that ordinary language users do not know how to use the object to perform its function. In this case, the expert’s understanding of some kind of art and the non-expert ordinary language user’s understanding of that kind of art can come apart. Verification of something as art does not necessarily mean that an ordinary language user has an understanding of how it might perform its essential artistic function (though they understand that the object does have such a function).

Let’s revisit Kennick’s warehouse test. Kennick’s point is that we are adept at recognising pictures, music CDs, paintings, poetry anthologies, statues, and so on as the kinds of artefacts that embody artworks. But the warehouse test is less convincing if we think about certain more recent artworks. Consider the readymades of Marcel Duchamp (e.g., *Fountain* (1917)) or later examples including Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* (1964), Carl Andre’s *Equivalent VIII* (1966), or Tracey Emin’s *My Bed* (1998). Such works are perceptually similar to more quotidian items (a urinal, Brillo boxes, a pile of bricks, and a bed). However, we do not typically encounter these works in warehouses. It is more usual to find these works in the context of being exhibited in an art institution. And things that are exhibited in art galleries, for instance, by being placed on a pedestal, along with an information placard that provides the name and year that the object was created, the materials used, and the name of the artist, we infer to be art.

Now, these latter examples are revealing, I think. If someone didn’t know the point of these artworks by sight, then they might not know what to make of them. It is only by relying on the sorts of contextual cues just mentioned, perhaps in conjunction with other art institution documentation (advertisements, exhibition guides, or performance programmes, for instance), that a mostly reliable determination of art status might be made. This means that, for at least some artworks, it is not by reference to the kind of artefact that it is that these
objects might be believed to be works, but instead because the art institution advises us that this is so. It might only be later, through, say, reading Wikipedia articles or by talking to a friend who has studied art history, that the unaccustomed viewer becomes acquainted with the appropriate way to engage with works of these kinds. It is these sorts of considerations that lend greater plausibility to institutional definitions of art, at least regarding some objects of Fine Art status.

When we state that some item is “art,” in a classificatory sense (i.e., its creator did not just employ some technical skill but, more specifically, they employed artistic skill), there are two types of epistemologically objective judgments related to two distinct-but-related methods of verifying that something is art that might be applied to determine the truth of our assertion: first (and more fundamentally), we may come to believe that something is art if we also believe that it is from the category of artefact that provides artistic value as a standard feature of that kind of artefact (that is, if the object does the kind of thing that art should do), and, second, we might come to accept that some item is art based on whether the art institutions that exist to foster certain artistic values recognise that it is so (that is, if it is recognised as art by formal art institutions). The former implies that the speaker knows how to appreciate the work, while the latter does not imply that. For example, we might consider various non-Western artefacts or some products of domestic arts as art because we recognise them as provisioning artistic value. On the other hand, as I’ve already mentioned, we might believe that some avant-garde works are art only because we have been told so by art institutions. But my position—contra Stock—is that reliable testimony from art experts about the art status of an artefact bottoms out in knowledge about how that work functions to provide artistic value.
4. Artefact, function, and the function of art

In this chapter I develop a framework that can ground a functionalist definition of art. This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section I briefly characterise the ontological commitments inherent in my project and describe John Searle’s theory of social reality. In the second section I use artworks as a test case for an analysis of artefacts and functions in the context of both tangible and intangible cultural items. In the third section I explain how my analysis of artefacts and functions can be employed in the institutional analysis of artistic practices. I also briefly introduce the artistic functionalist definition of art. (A detailed analysis of artistic value is presented in Chapters 5 and 6. Following that, a full defence of the artistic functionalist definition of art is provided in Chapter 7.)

4.1. A brief note on ontological commitments

In this thesis, I endorse ontological contextualism regarding artworks. Ontological contextualism is the position that artworks are artefacts, or social objects, that have their properties grounded by certain socio-historical facts regarding the context of creation. I will not provide arguments for ontological contextualism here. However, in order to analyse artworks as products of specific socio-historical contexts, conceptual tools for the analysis of social facts and institutions are required. In what follows I will offer criticisms of two alternative proposals for the ontology and epistemology of social objects that are consistent with ontological contextualism. In the second part of this section I present Searle’s framework and argue for its adequacy in accounting for the function of artworks as social artefacts.

There are numerous theories that purport to explain the nature of artistic objects. The acceptance of any one of the several revisionist ontological accounts of art requires a process of reflective equilibrium, which is the process of giving up on certain beliefs regarding the nature of art in order to gain some benefit from the proposed ontological theory (e.g., cost of

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37 For arguments in support of grounding claims about the nature of artworks in artistic practices, see Kania (2008); Thomasson (2005a); D. Davies (2004) (pages 18 to 20 in particular). For more information about ontological contextualism, see Gracyk (2009).
giving up on certain intuitions regarding art for the gain of a more elegant explanation). By contrast, the project of developing a descriptivist account of art aims at respecting, as much as possible, how artworks are regarded and treated in practice. According to this view, the fewer plausible intuitions about the nature of artworks that are sacrificed, the better the account is. We can picture the contrast between revisionist and descriptivist accounts of art as lying on a continuum marked by the extent to which intuitions about art practices are traded off against other benefits of the particular ontological account.

I will briefly describe two theories of the nature of artworks that preserve many intuitions about artworks—and are thus descriptivist, like my account—and that are consistent with ontological contextualism: artworks as abstract artefacts and fictionalism regarding artworks.

Amie Thomasson defends the view that artworks are abstract artefacts (a position that is descended from the work of Roman Ingarden) (Thomasson, 2005b; 2007). Thomasson argues for a view called “moderate realism,” which is the position that a complex object that is not mind-independent or completely mind-dependent, but which belongs to an ontological category somewhere in-between the two extremes, is created when a new artwork is made. The ontologically objective nature of artworks, on this account, allows for epistemically objectively true statements about artworks. But, against this position, we do not need to posit that artworks exist in some class of ontologically objective items in order to have epistemologically objective facts. I will say more about this in what follows. And if a framework can adequately account for artworks without positing a new ontological category, then it would make sense to not invoke the new category. I will shortly describe how this may be explained by employing John Searle’s theory of institutional facts. If Searle’s theory is correct then, in the interests of ontological parsimony, we should reject the theory of artworks as abstract objects.

The second theory of the nature of social objects that I wish to consider is Fictionalism. Fictionalism regarding social objects is the name of a group of theories that claim that such objects are not real (i.e., such objects do not really exist). The cost of adopting fictionalism about artworks is the loss of literal truth or falsity regarding claims about these items. Fictionalism argues that statements about artworks are not literally true, but are most properly viewed as useful fictions. For example, when we say that “Shakespeare

38 See, for example, Dodd (2008).
wrote *Othello* in 1605,” it appears that the proposition posits the objective existence of that work of art. But, according to fictionalism, it is not literally true that Shakespeare wrote *Othello* in 1605. This is because no new entity was created, not really. The fictionalist would paraphrase statements like these to communicate facts about agents and ordinary things in the world without requiring the existence of artworks. Fictionalism is sometimes regarded as a linguistic theory rather than as an ontological one.

If we take what is ontologically objective to be that which exists independently of mental states though including mental states themselves (for example, those objects that are studied by the natural sciences) then artworks surely are not of this kind. Insofar as Fictionalists may be committed to this claim then I agree with them. Ontologically objective entities may be used in the production of artworks, but a description of an artwork according to scientific descriptions would underdetermine the artistic properties of that kind of artefact.39 So, we are interested in more than what is simply created in an ontologically objective sense when we refer to artworks.

These considerations move the investigation to finding just what sorts of ontologically subjective, mind-dependent elements are employed, and under what conditions, to explain our discourse about artworks and related practices. Beliefs are intentional states that represent some state of affairs and moreover include the conviction that the object of that intentional state obtains in some context. What makes a belief true or false depends on whether the represented content of that belief actually does obtain in the relevant context. But if fictionalism is correct then there is no real state of affairs that is represented by claims about social objects, and so consequently no literal truth value for propositions about art. One strategy that has been proposed to account for propositions about social objects is pretence. This is the claim that propositions about social objects are not—or perhaps should not be—put forward as literally true claims about an objective world of artefacts, but are affirmed in a pretend manner. There is only the pretence at reference to genuine objectively existing artefactual artworks.40

I will briefly note two concerns with this approach. First, as a matter of phenomenology, when we make knowledge claims about social objects it feels very similar to knowledge claims about the natural world. Personally, it doesn’t feel like I am engaging in

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39 See Danto’s argument against indiscernibles in Danto (1964).
40 For an overview, see Kania (2012) and Kroon (2011; 2004).
pretence when I state a fact about an artwork. Fictionalists may respond by stating that one need not consciously engage in pretence in these sorts of situations. But—and here is my second point—if we can explain these claims without recourse to empirically unsupported, sub-conscious make-believe and if this new theory can account for the same phenomena as the fictionalist account then, all other things being equal, we should prefer it over the pretence model.

The framework that I suggest can adequately account for the nature of artworks and for true claims about these objects without recourse to new ontological entities and without positing unconscious (sub-conscious?) pretence actions is John Searle’s theory of social reality and institutional facts. In Searle’s books *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995) and *Making The Social World* (2010), he presents an analysis of social institutions like money, marriage, and language. Searle’s theoretical framework provides the tools to account for institutional facts (e.g., the fact that this document is a PhD dissertation) by reference to what he labels as Status Function Declarations. In the following section, I will provide a brief overview of his theory.

4.1.1. John Searle’s social ontology

John Searle bases his social ontology on his accounts of intentionality and speech acts. Searle notes that we can state certain propositions about social objects like money, for example, that are true or false in an epistemically objective way. It is not simply a matter of opinion whether I am holding a five dollar bill. The truth or falsity of these claims is not entirely determined by reference to facts about physical reality (which Searle calls “brute facts”), as might be described by the natural sciences, but is instead dependent on facts about the intentional states (attitudes, feelings, and points of view) of human beings. Insofar as institutional facts are dependent on mental states, Searle describes them as ontologically subjective. Ontologically subjective entities are contrasted with ontologically objective

41 But note that, on an account of consciousness as a biological phenomenon, like Searle’s (1999, 53), an account of intentional states is a way of theorising about brain states at a different level of description. Describing someone’s mental state will underdetermine the facts about that individual’s brain states, but this is analogous to claims in the natural sciences about the prime number length of the life cycle of certain species of cicada (a higher-level description) underdetermining which individual cicadas have a life this long (a lower-level description) (Campos et al., 2004).
physical entities that exist independently of mental states (excepting mental states themselves).

Even if something lacks objectivity in an ontological sense, ontologically subjective items may still have epistemically objective social facts acknowledged about them. In the case of social objects, the conditions that make something a true fact are different from the conditions that make facts about physical objects true. Searle’s theory of institutional facts accounts for certain social facts in a way that preserves our intuitions regarding the possibility of truth or falsity regarding claims about social objects. So, if we assume that there are epistemically objective social facts regarding artworks then there is a truth of the matter regarding whether some state of affairs actually does obtain in the social world. A theory that can provide a mechanism for how this works could thus be used to explain how it is possible to state objective facts about artworks.

It is worth noting that some judgments about ontologically subjective phenomena are epistemically subjective. Searle suggests as an example that a judgment of who the better painter is out of van Gogh or Manet is a matter of epistemically subjective opinion. This is meant to be a case where there is no epistemically objective ground that determines the truth or falsity of such claims (Searle, 1995, 8; 2010, 18).

John Searle provides a theory of institutional facts to explain how objective facts about our social world (for example, the fact that “Wellington is the capital of New Zealand”) may be accounted for when the basis of such facts are mental states in the minds of groups of individuals. He states the problem this way “How can there be an epistemically objective set of statements about a reality which is ontologically subjective?” (Searle, 2010, 18) In order to show how Searle’s theory of social facts may be employed in developing a theory of art and of artistic value, I will need to introduce his terminology.

A first thing to note with respect to explaining the connection between institutional facts and the physical world is that consciousness has a biological, and thus physical, basis. Searle uses this fact to explain the connection between social facts and brute facts about the world. Further, with consciousness comes intentionality. Searle describes intentionality as “the capacity of the mind to represent objects and states of affairs in the world other than itself” (Searle, 1995, 6-7). Ontologically objective entities have intrinsic features that are determined by their physical properties (e.g., mass, length, etc.). In addition to its intrinsic features, ontologically objective entities may be accorded intentionality-relative features that
are dependent on mental states of members of a social group.\textsuperscript{42} An example of an intentionality-relative feature would be that some piece of paper (a physical object) is a contract (an intentionality-relative feature). For intentionality-relative features, that something seems to have some particular feature is logically prior to it actually having that feature.\textsuperscript{43} This is because the object is unable to perform the function associated with such intentionality-relative features based on its physical properties alone.\textsuperscript{44}

A key notion required to explain how an object obtains intentionality-relative features is collective intentionality. The term collective intentionality describes a class of intentional states that are required for epistemically objective facts. Searle describes this as a We-Intentionality as opposed to an I-Intentionality. Collective intentionality involves one agent intending to do something with the expectation that others will perform their part in the relevant collective action. This applies to cases where I am doing something as part of our doing something. For example, I may present a talk as part of our engaging in a seminar. On Searle’s account, collective intentionality is not simply reducible to individual intentionality, though it is of course constituted by intentional phenomena in individual minds (Searle, 2010, 50-55). A social fact is any fact involving collective intentionality. Another example of a social fact would be if we went for a walk.

The imposition of functions on objects beyond what it can be used for based on its physical properties requires the use of status functions. Searle defines status functions as follows:

A function that is performed by an object(s), person(s), or other sort of entity(ies) and which can only be performed in virtue of the fact that the community in which the function is performed assigns a certain status to the object, person, or entity in question, and the function is performed in virtue of the collective acceptance or recognition of the objects, person, or entity as having that status (Searle, 2010, 94).

\textsuperscript{42} Intentionality-relative features were previously called “observer-relative” features in \textit{The Construction of Social Reality}. See Searle (2010, 17).

\textsuperscript{43} Though Searle does note that there may be “systematic fallouts” that can be discovered by social scientists. Such systematic fallouts do not, however, count as institutional facts according to Searle’s definition. For one thing, these social facts carry no deontology. See Searle (2010, 21-22).

\textsuperscript{44} Note: this is only for cases where the relevant kind of social object is tied to a physical object necessarily. Searle recognises that the connection to a physical object is not always required (for example, the use of digital bitcoins as currency). For his discussion of “Freestanding Y terms,” see Searle (2010, 20-21).
Searle argues that status functions are attributed in every instance by Status Function (SF) Declarations. He claims that “all of human institutional reality is created and maintained in existence by (representations that have the same logical form as SF Declarations)” (Searle, 2010, 13). Declarations are a specific type of speech act that cause a certain state of affairs represented as the content of a mental state to obtain by the act of declaring that the state of affairs obtain given that the declaration occurs within the appropriate contextual constraints (e.g., as when the chairperson of a meeting declares that the meeting is adjourned). In these cases, a new state of affairs in the world obtains through the collective recognition of those states of affairs that are represented in individual intentional states (Searle, 2010, 16).

Searle argues that collective intentionality is employed in the maintenance of status functions of objects through recognition of the status function obtaining in a particular situation. Such status functions are maintained by the recognition that a constitutive rule applies in a situation. Constitutive rules make possible new forms of activity that would not otherwise occur. An example of a system of constitutive rules are the rules of chess. Constitutive rules take the form of X counts as Y in C. That is, something, X, is recognised as having some status, Y, in a certain context, C. Constitutive rules are contrasted with regulative rules that regulate existing behaviours (e.g., laws regulating driving). The speech act analogue to constitutive rules is that of a declaration, as it makes something the case by “declaring” that it is the case, while the analogue to a regulative rule is that of a directive, as it aims to direct behaviour in a particular manner.

Another important feature of status functions is that deontic powers are assigned with its imposition. Every status function carries with it rights, authorisations, entitlements, obligations, duties, and so on. The assigned deontic powers may be positive, giving the social object the power to do things that it could not have done without the imposition of a status function. Alternatively, negative deontic powers may be assigned so that an agent who bears a certain status is obligated to do something. These deontic powers provide members of society with reasons for acting that are independent of that agent’s desires and inclinations.

Institutional facts are a category of social fact. An institutional fact is generated by the collective imposition of a function on an item that it could not perform by virtue of its physical properties alone. These include facts about culture and society. An example of an institutional fact is the fact that Barack Obama is the US President. Searle notes that the key move toward the creation of institutional facts is the assignment of a status with associated
functions and deontic powers that is recognised collectively (that is, the imposition of status functions). Searle states that “All and only institutional facts are status functions” (Searle, 2010, 23). The assignment of a status function requires the use of constitutive rules to assign some function to an entity over and above what its mere physical properties enable. In the typical case of creating institutional facts, the Y in the constitutive rule “X counts as Y in C” is one of these status functions. This form of constitutive rule can be glossed as “We make it the case by Declaration that for any x that satisfies condition p, x has status Y and performs the function F in [context] C” (Searle, 2010, Chapter 3). In order for X to count as Y in C over time, there needs to be continued recognition or acceptance of the assigned function. Status functions are reinforced by repeated use. When the imposition of status function becomes a regular process, the result is a normative constitutive rule. One variation on the status function declaration is the case of “freestanding Y terms.” Here, no physical object is recognised as having a status function, there is simply a declaration that some new entity exists. Freestanding Y terms have the status function declaration of the form “We make it the case by Declaration that an entity Y exists that has status function(s) F in C” (Searle, 2010, 99-100).

Searle’s account of status function declarations requires some form of symbolic communication for their creation. Searle regards language as the primary social institution. The conventions of language provide meaning which can be employed in the establishment of status functions. Any competent speaker, via a meaningful utterance, has the power to create linguistic institutional facts. And institutional facts that belong to all other social institutions (which Searle calls “non-linguistic institutional facts”) require representation in some language for their creation (Searle, 2010, 109-115).

One way that institutional facts can be created is through performative utterances. Uttering the sentence “I declare this meeting adjourned” in the right contexts will count as adjourning the meeting, as a matter of social fact. Not all institutional facts can be created simply by declaring something to be the case. For example, I can’t simply create the institutional fact that I am President of the US by declaring it. Also, institutional facts might be created without agents being consciously aware of assigning something some power through the occurrence of regular collective behaviour that implicitly recognises something as having those powers.
There are several other features of institutional facts that we should note: First, institutional facts can be iterated (that is, we might use one status function in the X position for another recognised constitutive rule). Second, there can be interlocking systems of these iterated structures persisting through time (e.g., company formation requires a company declaration and also appropriate legislation that specifies the conditions of a legitimate company declaration). Third, some institutional facts may exist outside of established institutions and are maintained by actions that respect a constitutive rule without the rule necessarily being made explicit. For example, a boundary wall that functions as such due to its physical properties may deteriorate and later function as a boundary line only in virtue of the observance of the rule that the path of the old wall marks a boundary line. Fourth, as institutional facts are the result of status functions, and as every status function carries a deontology with it, all institutional facts also carry a deontology. Fifth, Searle does not consider some facts that are the result of institutions, but which do not directly arise as result of the observance of constitutive rules, to be constitutive rules. For example, the systemic fallout from economic institutions that comprises a recession does not carry with it any deontic powers and so fails to count as an institutional fact.

Searle notes that the social objects designed to serve functions are really placeholders for ongoing activities. Objects, such as bank notes, have been created to serve status functions. These functions are manifested only in the use of the object (in the case of bank notes, they give bearers the power to acquire goods and/or services). Searle says that, because of this, there is a priority of process over product.

Now, we do not move around in society consciously applying constitutive rules to objects. Instead, we develop social competences in order to cope with the social contexts we find ourselves in and these internalised competences are amenable to being described in terms of rules regarding applicable status functions in the particular circumstances. Searle says that we rely on background abilities when navigating the world. He elaborates by stating that “one develops skills and abilities that are, so to speak, functionally equivalent to the system of rules, without actually containing any representations or internalizations of those rules” (Searle, 1995, 142). The Background enables such capabilities as linguistic interpretation, perceptual interpretation, the structuring of consciousness, the ability to ascribe a narrative to extended temporal sequences, and a set of motivational dispositions. The Background also facilitates certain kinds of readiness and disposes us to certain types of behaviours. The phenomenon of flash mobs, for example, exploits our readiness by
confounding what we expect in a given context. (I will say more about the Background in §6.1.5.)

Searle offers the following summary of the relationships between some of the concepts that I’ve introduced in this section: “all and only institutional facts are status functions; status functions imply deontic powers, and deontic powers always provide desire-independent reasons for action” (Searle, 2010, 23). The sorts of things that Searle means by institutions are ubiquitous things like money and marriage. In the art context we would refer to such status functions as a painting, a sculpture, a musical work, a dance performance, a drama, a poem, etc. All of these objects exist within networks of other institutional facts. Many institutional roles are implicated in the existence of these status functions. Examples include: painter, sculptor, composer, choreographer, playwright, poet, etc. And, if Searle’s account is right, this opens up the possibility of accounting for both the concept of functional art and the status of formal institutional art on a functionalist basis.

4.2. Artefacts and functions

In this section I consider what we can learn about the nature of artefacts and functions by addressing the distinctive challenges that works of art pose for existing theories. I employ the term “artefact” in a broad sense of social object that includes chairs and tables as well as oral histories, emails, letters and numbers. Any theory of artefacts that can accommodate artworks must be able to account for intangible cultural items in addition to material culture. Many accounts of artefacts rely on objects belonging to artefact kinds. There are, however, cases of original, exemplary artworks, such as Marcel Duchamp’s Bottle Rack (1914) that precede, and have a role in establishing, the artefact category to which it is attributed, namely “readymades.” Further, members of the category of readymades lack certain features that were counted as standard for works of art at that time—hence their transgressive originality.

This section is divided into four sub-sections. In the first part (§4.2.1) I analyse artefacts and suggest conditions for artefactuality. I argue that artefacts require a proper function but that does not require that the artefact belong to any artefact kind. In the second part (§4.2.2), I critically examine theories of function attribution that are determined by the intentions of the designer(s) of the artefact and/or the actual intentional use of the item by
agents. Call these “intention-based” theories of function attribution. I argue that existing theories fail to provide a convincing way to distinguish an accidental function from the proper function of an object. In part three (§4.2.3), I consider non-intentional theories (in the above sense) of function attribution. Here I argue that some transgressive avant-garde artworks raise a new problem for theories that base function ascription on a history of selective reproduction. I then suggest five categories of collectively recognised acts that we should take into consideration in order to distinguish the usefulness of an artefact from its proper function. In part four (§4.2.4), I consider complex artefacts that are constructed from multiple elements. This leads to consideration of the conditions under which parts of artefacts are themselves artefacts. Finally, I consider whether parts of artefacts also have functions.

Artefactuality, according to various characterisations of the term, is taken to be a necessary, if trivial, condition for something’s being an artwork.

In Immanuel Kant’s view, the proper sense of the term “art” is a rather thin artefact notion, that “of the causality of the powers of representation of human beings” (Kant, 1790 [2000], 50). For Kant, art requires “doing” and the product of this doing is a work. Further, “only production … through a capacity for choice that grounds its action in reason” properly constitutes art (Kant, 1790 [2000], 182). But Kant’s notion of artefact, as it is, would count as an artefact any deliberate product of the imagination—e.g., fantasies, puzzle solutions, tentative holiday plans, etc.—that may be mentally represented by only a single individual. But given that artefacts are generally considered to be social objects, it is plausible that public manifestation is a further condition of artefactuality. This means that a singular physical item, an existing performance directive, a potentially public event, etc. is required.

Berys Gaut’s cluster account has, as a necessary condition for art, that it is the product of an action (Gaut, 2000, 29). For Gaut, this involves either the making of an artefact or a performance. Certainly, the addition of there being a physical action—e.g., an utterance, or perhaps the physical modification of an object—is required. But there may be multiple unintended consequences of a single action and these should not count as artefacts. If I walk through an art studio and, in the process, inadvertently step in paint and leave footprints on a stray canvas, then through my deliberate act of walking I will have only accidentally stained a canvas. I could not be said to have created a painting. A distinction can be marked here between an intended product of an action and an unintentional byproduct. An unintentional byproduct might be appropriated and gain collective recognition as a certain kind of artefact, but in these cases it is the process of appropriation that is responsible for creating the new
artefact, with the earlier processes forming a part of the object’s causal history. A plausible necessary condition for attaining artefact status is that the product be the intended product of an action (even if that action is an act only of selection).

4.2.1. Theories of artefactuality

Many existing accounts of artefacts provide an analysis of technical artefacts. According to Pieter E. Vermaas and Wybo Houkes, technical artefacts “are made and used for primarily practical purposes” (Houkes & Vermaas, 2010, 263-264). Typically, physical artefacts have been the primary focus in literature on artefacts, but cultural technologies may extend beyond objects of material culture to the conceptual. This sub-section may be viewed as an exploration of the prospects for a theory of artefacts that encompasses this broader category of artefacts. Artworks exhibit extraordinarily wide ontological variety. For example, some artworks are individual material artefacts, some works are singular events, and some are multiply-instantiable kinds. Artworks thus constitute an informative test case for any adequate theory of artefacts in this broad sense. In this sub-section I consider the necessary conditions for artefactuality that can accommodate the ontological variety exhibited by artworks. Further, artworks are a particularly difficult test case for a characterisation of artefacts and artefact function because the account must be consistent with the radical innovations of twentieth-century avant-garde art. I suggest that any account of artefact that can accommodate the range of items included in a broad notion of “art” will go a long way toward accommodating all other kinds of artefact.

Let us begin by considering the adequacy of some existing accounts of the characteristics necessary for artefact status. The philosopher Lynne Rudder Baker argues that the following four conditions are necessary and sufficient for (technical) artefact status:

(A1) x has one or more makers, producers, or authors. Designers and executors of design (perhaps the same people) are authors.

(A2) x’s primary kind (its essence, its proper function) is determined in part by the intentions of its authors.

45 For examples, see UNESCO’s catalogue of intangible cultural heritage (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015)
(A3) x’s existence depends on the intentions of its authors and the execution of those intentions.

(A4) x is constituted by an aggregate that the authors have arranged or selected to serve the proper function entailed by the artifact’s primary kind (Baker, 2004, 102-103).

Baker’s account is intended for artefacts that have practical functions performed in virtue of the structure of their physical properties. Given this, the proposed conditions do not adequately characterise all items that fall under the broad sense of artefact that we are examining. For example, if we consider Baker’s condition A4, it is unclear how this constitution condition might pertain to, say, the letter “A” or the numeral “0.” Nevertheless, even if we constrain ourselves to technical artefacts, there are several problems with this definition.

First, we may note that any one of conditions A2, A3 or A4 entails the first clause of condition A1. The conjunction of A2-A4 entails the second clause. Condition A1 is uninformative beyond the role played by “authors” in the other conditions. Consequently, A1 is redundant.

Second, Baker’s definition assumes that every artefact belongs to a primary kind. She says: “An entity’s primary kind is given by the answer to the Aristotelian question: What is x most fundamentally?” (Baker, 2004, 100) There is a presumption in Baker’s account of artefacts that the appropriate artefact category either comes ready-made, prior to the creation of the artefact, or else that a primary kind is intended by the author (consider Baker’s condition A4). But it is not apparent that a novel artefact would necessarily belong to a primary kind that determines the proper use of that artefact. A novel, single-instance artefact might be produced with the intention that it has an innovative proper function—with no thought given to instantiating any new primary kind. In this sort of case, perhaps if there are further similar items produced, a primary kind grouping may later eventuate. (Alternatively, the item may come to be recognised as sole exemplar of a new primary kind.) An additional account must be provided for the recognition of an object as belonging to an artefact category because some newly created social objects may be so innovative that they do not fit neatly into an existing category of artefact. In this situation, Baker’s conditions A2 and A4 are not satisfied, yet, as I will argue, a new artefact is created.
An example of this kind is Duchamp’s instantiation of the category of readymades. I will defend a characterisation of artistic regard, which is taken to be the kind of use proper to artworks, in Chapter 6. For the moment, let us say that artistic regard may involve paying attention to: the provenance of a work; any originality in technique or content; the way content is presented in a medium; its aesthetic properties, etc. Retrospectively speaking, the first readymade is taken to be *Bottle Rack* (1914). This artefact did not belong to a class of “readymades,” nor was it immediately accepted as an artwork—it was lacking in what were considered at the time to be two necessary conditions for art: craftsmanship and interesting aesthetic qualities. Nevertheless, *Bottle Rack* could be appreciated for the wit displayed by Duchamp in his efforts to work consciously against some of the prevailing conventions and values of Fine Art practices. It was only after the production of several exemplary artworks, including *In advance of the broken arm* (1915) and *Fountain* (1917), that the art category of readymades came to be widely recognised. Here, the social objects pre-date and significantly determine the most appropriate sortal term. The distinctive way to appreciate these original works was tied to the titles of the works before it was tied to the art category of readymades. These original exemplars suggest that what Baker refers to as the “proper function” of an object—in this case, rewarding attention to evidence of Duchamp’s originality and wit in a way that later came to be subsumed under the notion of artistic regard—can pre-date any intended “primary kind.” Taking this fact into consideration, we can see that the satisfaction of a function-determining sortal description is not essential for an object to attain artefact status. Further, an artefact can have a socially recognised intended function without being recognised as belonging to an artefact kind that has that function as a standard property of its members.

Finally, we are left with the question of what conditions are required to satisfy a primary kind. Conditions A2 and A4 assume that x is a member of a primary kind, while condition A3 characterises aspects of x’s existence which, in conjunction with A2 or A4, presupposes its *existence as a member of* a primary kind. Without a supplementary theory to explain primary kind membership, we are unable to account for the failure of some maker to produce an artefact of an intended kind.

Risto Hilpinen describes an artefact as something intentionally (and successfully) produced as some category of thing. Moreover, where there is a function associated with that kind of artefact, the object may be evaluated on the basis of its fit for purpose. Again, this raises the question of what is required to successfully produce an item for some purpose. Hilpinen says: “An object is an artifact made by an author only if it satisfies some sortal
description included in the author’s productive intention” (Hilpinen, 2011, §5, par. 9; See also Hilpinen, 1993). But what conditions need to be met for something to satisfy a sortal description? A painting might intentionally be used as a doorstop, but this doesn’t count as the creation of a new artefact (i.e., a doorstop). Whatever is required in order to create something that satisfies a sortal description, if it is to result in the creation of a new artefact, must involve more than the successful execution of the intentions of a single individual.

Hilpinen further adds the condition that “An object is an artifact made by an author only if the author accepts it as satisfying some sortal description included in his productive intention” (Hilpinen, 2011, §5, par. 11). But the artwork-as-doorstop example could easily satisfy this author-acceptance requirement. The successful production of an artefact must require some further condition that results, or would result, in more than just the producer recognising it as a new artefact.

A similar issue affects Randall Dipert’s definition of material artefact. Dipert defines an instrument as “an object that has been intentionally used in intentional activity” (Dipert, 1993, 24). If an object is intentionally modified, or deliberately left as it is, if it is used in intentional activity it counts as a tool. Dipert defends the following definition of an artefact proper:

An artefact is an intentionally modified tool whose modified properties were intended by the agent to be recognized by an agent at a later time as having been intentionally altered for that, or some other, use. In other language, an agent has intended that an(other) agent later comes to believe, on the basis of perceiving the presence of one or more (intentionally modified) properties, that (1) the object is an especially suitable means for achieving an end and that (2) the object’s creator intended to cause this belief by these properties (Dipert, 1993, 28-29).

Further, he says “When they are weak in usefulness or recognisability, they are failed artifacts but still artifacts” (Dipert, 1993, 31). So something can count as an artefact for Dipert regardless of whether anyone else ever actually does or even would subsequently identify the modified object as modified for some purpose. But it is questionable whether the modified object should count as an artefact if it is unlikely to be recognised as such. On this definition, complete failure in the execution of the producer’s intention would still result in an artefact just so long as the object is changed in some way.

As it happens, the psychologist Paul Bloom notes several problem cases that illustrate that the intentions of the creator are not enough to ensure artefact kind membership.
Imagine a madman who creates a tiny pile of dirt, assuming that people will happily sit on it, and he states that this pile was successfully created with the intention to be a chair. Still, we would not view it as a chair. We would have a parallel response to a brain-damaged artist who carefully draws something that looks exactly like a cat, and proudly describes it as a picture of a dog. Or to a 2-year-old who creates a flat disk out of clay and claims that it is a cup. Finally, consider Deadman, created in 1972, in which Chris Burden had himself enclosed in a sack and placed on a California freeway. Burden (as well as Danto, 1986) clearly viewed this as a work of art, but many would disagree—and this is not because we doubt the sincerity of someone who places himself in the middle of traffic in order to make an aesthetic point. These examples can be taken to suggest that even if we believe that an object was created with the sincere intent to be a member of certain kind, this is not always enough for us to believe that the object is in fact a member of the kind (Bloom, 1996, 19-20).

The possibility of failing to recognise an artefact as either being of the intended kind or of serving the intended function raises the question as to whether producer intentions are sufficient for determining the artefact’s kind. Bloom’s examples suggest that they are not. It is not apparent that the example of the tiny-pile-of-dirt-as-chair counts as an artefact, though it satisfies Dipert’s definition. It is unlikely to count as an artefact because nobody else in the community is likely to recognise and accept that the pile of dirt should be used to sit on—if they even recognise it as serving any function whatsoever. Based on these considerations, I contend that Dipert’s definition is too broad.

Bloom argues that, for the purposes of defining artefact kind membership, “we construe the extension of artifact kind X to be those entities that have been successfully created with the intention that they belong to the same kind as current and previous Xs” (Bloom, 1996, 10). In order to be “successfully” created, the entities must have turned out as intended. Bloom argues that such artefact-kind intentions in the causal history of the object are crucial to its satisfying artefact kind membership (Bloom, 1996, 18-19). He even notes cases of the “transfiguration” of everyday objects, the most famous instances being Duchamp’s readymades, as instances where artefact kind membership depends primarily on a person’s sincere intention that an object falls under a particular artefact kind.

While I agree with Bloom that producer intentions regarding artefact kind membership are important factors to consider when identifying artefact kind membership, I disagree that these are fundamentally determinative of artefact kind membership. For
example, his account fails to explain the difference between Duchamp’s successful “transfiguration” of a snow shovel into the artwork *In advance of the broken arm* (1915) and his failed attempt to make the Woolworth Building in New York into a readymade in 1915. In both cases the right artefact-kind intentions were present, but the former case was successful while the latter was not. Some further feature is required to explain the difference between the two cases.

Jerrold Levinson also notes that the creator’s intentions regarding the success of the artefact are not determinative of artefact category. According to Levinson, what is also required is that the object satisfies the success conditions for a concept, for example, a chair, in an *objective* sense. Further, he says, this requires “the conception of a chair endorsed by competent users of the term ‘chair’ in general, one that imports at least some minimal features of form or function” (Levinson, 2007, 78). But he claims that artworks are distinctive in lacking these kinds of minimal success conditions for kind membership. This is due to the diverse ontological variety of artworks and also to the fact that—under certain conditions—pre-existing objects may be declared to be artworks (Levinson, 2007, 77-79).

I will set aside for now the question of whether Levinson is correct about the lack of formal or functional success conditions for art-kind membership. But I endorse Levinson’s position that recognition both that a new artefact is produced and that the intended product of an action satisfies some category of artefact significantly depend on social recognition, not just on recognition by an individual, of artefact kind membership. For example, a short piece of wood with a screw partly drilled into one side may be appropriated for use as a bottle opener. If this piece of wood is recognised as a bottle opener—by being stored with the rest of the kitchen utensils, being employed as a bottle opener by multiple agents in the course of multiple events, by being referred to as “the bottle opener” by these agents, etc.—then the object has attained the socially recognised status of a bottle opener. Individual intentions may fail. And a solo producer’s recognition of an object’s function is not enough.

In addition to Levinson’s observations regarding artefact kind membership, I contend that, even in cases where an extremely novel artefact is created—one that does not belong to an established kind—it is essential for artefact status that some proper function is associated with it via this same process of collective recognition. If something is to count as an artefact then there must be some recognised way of using it. Even if Levinson is correct in his claim that there is no function that defines art-kind membership, this would not entail that

46 Note that Levinson invokes a condition of propriety-right as a constraint on such intentions: Levinson (1979, 236).
something could be an artwork without some norms regarding proper engagement with it as the distinct artwork it is. If we did not know how a particular artefact should be used, or at least recognise that there is a proper form of engagement with it, it is unclear whether the object is an artefact in any meaningful sense. In the absence of a proper function, the object would more likely be considered as some kind of unfinished product or waste material. So, even if there are cases in which the relevant artefact kind does not have a particular proper function associated with it, the designation of artefact status will always involve the collective recognition of a relevant proper function to that artefact.

As I already mentioned in the previous section, Searle, among others, uses the term “collective intentionality” to describe a class of intentional states that are required to establish epistemically objective facts. I will here introduce an important distinction in collective attitudes between collective intentions and collective recognition.

According to Searle, in contrast to the objects of mind-independent reality, there is a class of mind-dependent social objects that have a mode of existence that depends on the mental states of individuals. Collective intentionality involves one agent intending to do something with the expectation that others will perform their part in the relevant collective action. Searle describes it as a We-Intentionality as opposed to an I-Intentionality. This applies to cases where I am doing something as part of our doing something. For example, I may show you how an artefact should be properly used as part of our engaging in tuition. On Searle’s account, collective intentionality is not simply reducible to individual intentionality, though of course it is constituted by intentional phenomena in individual minds (Searle, 2010, 50-55). 47

Collective recognition, by contrast with collective intentionality, is a much weaker kind of collective attitude. It does not require cooperative activity and may be reduced to an I-intentionality. Social objects are instantiated when they are collectively recognised, and the intentional states of individuals within a community grounds this collective attitude. We can describe these mind-dependent objects—excluding mental states themselves—as (at least partly) consisting of collective intentions. In the case of artefacts, all that is required is that multiple individuals accept the existence and the attribution of a proper function to an object and that they each believe that other members of the group also accept that same attribution (Searle, 2010, 102-104). Collective recognition may be made manifest by repeated patterns of intentional behaviour within a community. Marcel Scheele takes a similar line when he

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47 Searle is not the only philosopher who employs collective intentionality in a philosophical analysis of society. See also, for example, Bratman (1992) and Tuomela (2007).
suggests that theories of function ascription requires “rational reconstruction of action (or use)” of an artefact by multiple individuals (Scheele, 2006, 34). In the next section I will suggest which kinds of activity are relevant to functional ascriptions. But we can see that collective recognition of In advance of the broken arm (1915) as a readymade by the artefact’s being recognised (in history books, art history classes, art galleries, etc.) and appreciated in the way appropriate to readymades marks Duchamp’s success in creating this work. By contrast, Duchamp’s attempt to make the Woolworth Building into a readymade failed because it did not meet with anywhere near the same degree of acceptance or use.

Collective recognition of proper function might be manifested in one of two ways. If the category of artefact is well recognised and has stereotypical instances then there may be recognition of artefacts as regular instances of that artefact kind—in Baker’s terminology, “primary kind”—or, failing that, there may be recognition of the purpose of a novel, particular object. It is frequently the case that artefacts are brought into existence by producing copies of existing kinds of artefacts. In such cases, if (1) there are collectively recognised artefact categories, and (2) a producer succeeds in executing their intention to create an artefact that satisfies the existence conditions for one of those artefact categories and, moreover, (3) the artefact is a recognisable typical instance of what that kind of thing is meant to be like, then a new instance of that kind is created. In this case there is a testable assumption that another individual would recognise the artefact as of the kind intended by the producer and, therefore, expects that it should execute the relevant proper function(s).

Cases of putatively non-standard instances of an artefact kind, or cases of novel creations that do not belong to a pre-existing kind, are slightly different. In these situations we cannot simply defer to the ontological presuppositions inherent in the collectively recognised artefact kind. Determinate answers in these cases therefore require either explicit or demonstrably convergent collective acceptance of the artefact as either belonging to an artefact kind or else as having some proper function.

Stephen Davies also notes the need for a social context for something to secure artefact status (S. Davies, 1991, 120-141). Davies explains the cultural-significance sense of “artefact” to mean “that which has significance for the members of a culture; that which invites interpretation as opposed to mere explication” (S. Davies, 1991, 123-124). The meaning of the term “interpretation” in Davies’ second clause, as I will employ it, is the thinner notion of recognising the symbolic meaning presented by an item rather than the more demanding notion of interpretation that is required when, for example, reflecting on the semantic content of a literary work and formulating a coherent account of that content. This
is because something may be significant for the members of a culture, for example, telephone numbers, email addresses, bank account numbers, etc., without inviting explicit interpretation of its signification.

Davies distinguishes the cultural-significance sense of “artefact” from the primary, ordinary sense of the term as “that which is modified by work, by contrast with that which occurs in its natural state” (S. Davies, 1991, 123). However, Davies notes that any object that is an artefact in the primary sense of the term also satisfies the conditions for artefact in the cultural-significance sense. For the purposes of the current discussion, I employ “artefact” in a broad, cultural-significance sense. This is in order to examine both those social entities that require modification of physical material as a constitutive part of creating the artefact, along with a broad range of ontological categories that includes events and repeatable kinds, and also the co-opting of an existing material object for use as a new artefact.

The above considerations suggest that the following three criteria are essential for artefacts in the cultural-significance sense. First, the artefact must be manifested in a way that is public, or in a way that is public in principle. Second, it must be the intended product of an action. Third, an artefact must be socially recognised, or recognisable, as having an associated proper function(s). Additionally, if the account of artefact is to be rich enough to account for artworks as artefacts, an artefact must be capable of interpretation. These conditions exclude from the category of artefacts such things as waste, which includes failed and destroyed artefacts, as well as unintended by-products.

It might be noted that the notion of an artefact in the cultural-significance sense is extremely broad. It can just as easily categorise as an artefact a lecturer or a guide dog as it can a chair. This is deliberate. My aim here is to identify the conditions necessary for artefact status in both the broad and narrow senses of the term. Some social practices, like those of art, require a broad notion of artefact in order to account for the huge ontological variety of artworks. Some artworks are artefacts in the primary sense, for example, paintings, hewn sculptures, while others are artefacts in the broader sense, for example, musical works, novels and plays. For the purposes of this essay, I assume that all art shares the same thinly characterised function of rewarding artistic regard. I will have more to say about how we may identify functions in the next section. Note that this is not a commitment that all or even most artefact kinds may be individuated by reference to a distinct function that the kind serves, only that some (perhaps broad artefact categories) are—namely, those artefact kinds that are identified by reference to a distinctive proper function. But many artefact kinds will have at least one proper function—roughly, a kind of use that things of that kind ought to have the
power to support—and it is also at least *prima facie* plausible that any artefact that does not belong to a proper kind will also have an associated function.

As functions are a core element of artefactuality and may, in some cases at least, bear on artefact categorisation, they demand further investigation. In what follows, I address some further questions that are raised by the criterion of artefact function. First, how do we determine the proper function of an artefact? Second, are components of artefacts also artefacts? Third, do components of artefacts also have functions?

4.2.2. Intention-based theories of function attribution

Hilpinen defines an artefact as “an object that has been intentionally made or produced for a certain purpose” (Hilpinen, 2011, para. 1), which suggests that artefacts have functions—i.e., there is a norm regarding these objects that they should serve at least one particular purpose. And Baker notes that “artifacts have proper functions that they are (intentionally) designed and produced to perform (whether they perform their proper functions or not)” (Baker, 2004, 102). The primary goal of this sub-section and the next is to characterise function attributions.

Houkes and Vermaas provide the following four desiderata regarding a theory of function for technical artefacts. First (D1), the theory should account for a distinction between a proper function and an accidental function of an artefact. According to these theorists, “proper functions can typically be understood as functions ascribed standardly to the artefact, whereas accidental functions are ascribed only occasionally” (Houkes & Vermaas, 2003, 265).48 Second (D2), the theory should account for malfunctioning artefacts (those artefacts that fail to perform their proper function). Third (D3), “a theory of functions should entail that for every function there exist structural conditions sufficient for its performance. Moreover, if a theory ascribes a function to an artefact, it should provide partial justification for the belief that the physical structure of the artefact satisfies such conditions” (Houkes & Vermaas, 2003, 265-266). And, fourth (D4), the theory should allow the attribution of proper functions to novel, innovative and atypical artefacts.

48 See also Houkes & Vermaas (2010, 5).
I will make a few brief comments regarding these desiderata. I am in agreement with D2. D1 may be considered overly demanding by some, though I will later examine the ascription of proper function—in contrast to usefulness—in greater detail. Regarding D3, there is a stronger and a weaker reading of the first sentence. The strong reading is that it is in virtue of the structural conditions of an artefact that its function is discharged—and so the physical properties of the object must be sufficient for this task. But note that some functions rely on more than physical properties—take, for example, contracts, parking tickets and eviction notices. We can include the latter examples if we take a weaker reading of the claim: that the physical structure of the artefact constitutes a token that is sufficient for the task at hand—for instance, conveying an authorised message—without the further requirement of being able to execute the proper function of the artefacts solely in virtue of those physical properties. Further, as I noted in the introduction, if we want to account for the various technologies that are employed within a culture then we must not restrict ourselves to physical objects. Consequently, I take D3 to be an optional requirement depending on the scope of the artefacts under examination. Lastly, I agree with desideratum D4 and later argue that we should also add to this condition an account of transgressive artefacts.

In practice, the attribution of function is not restricted to artefacts. We can also discover the functions of natural objects, as when identifying the functions of biological organs. For example, the function of a heart is to pump oxygenated blood around the body. According to Immanuel Kant’s analysis of teleological judgment, people associate certain ends or purposes that natural objects serve with concepts of those objects as part of coming to a sound, systematic understanding of the natural world as it is presented to us (Kant, 1790 [2000], §61.4, 234). If this is right, then, in cases where functions are attributed to natural objects—for example, hearts—the process of function attribution requires intentionality. This means that functions are not basic features of the world; they are mind-dependent. John Searle describes the attribution of functions to natural objects as follows:

when we discover functions in nature, what we are doing is discovering how certain causes operate to serve certain purposes, where the notion of purpose is not intrinsic to mind-independent nature, but is relative to our sets of values. So we can discover that the heart pumps blood, but when we say that the function of the heart is to pump blood, we take it for granted that life, survival, and reproduction are positive values, and that the functioning of biological organs serves these values (Searle, 2010, 59).
This idea of an end or purpose as being something valuable is recognised by Aristotle when he says that “not every last thing tends to be an end [telos], but only the best” (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E. [1980], 28, 194a32-33). And further “in objects produced according to art, it is we who produce the matter for the sake of some function, but in natural objects it is there all along” (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E. [1980], 29, 194b5-10). Note that in the explanations of biological function offered by Aristotle, Kant and Searle, the criterion of design does not play an essential role. Aristotle’s account of function posits a telos that does not necessarily require intentional design. In Kant’s case, a function of a natural object is not hypothesised as an explanation for that object, but is only used for the purposes of our understanding. Similarly, on Searle’s account, a function of an object in nature identifies some valuable end that is (typically) served by that kind of object.

In the case of artefact function, however, the fact that something was designed to serve some purpose is frequently considered to be an essential element of its function. Gary Iseminger suggests that the following condition is sufficient for the attribution of a function to an artefact: “If something is good at doing something that it was designed and made to do, then doing that is its (artefactual) function” (Iseminger, 2004, 80). He does note, however, that a full description of artefact function will need to answer counterexamples where something happens to be good at doing something that it was not designed to do.

One further issue with Iseminger’s characterisation of artefact function is that it bases the function of an artefact on its suitability to perform some end that it was designed to perform. On this definition, there can never be something that performs its function poorly because, if it wasn’t good at doing what it was designed to do, then whatever it was designed to do does not count as its function. But this conflicts with the idea that, if there is a large hole at the base of a particular bucket, and the function of buckets is to contain items, then the hole makes it bad at performing its function as a bucket. So—in the absence of some further criterion for function attribution—Iseminger’s definition does not leave open the possibility that an artefact may malfunction.49

We might also question whether design is essentially constitutive of artefact function. Cases exist where artefacts have been co-opted for another use. Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain was only minimally modified by the addition of the signature “R. Mutt” and yet undoubtedly an artwork, a new artefact, was created in the process. He also created several other readymade works that were significantly unmodified, including Traveller’s Folding Item

49 See also Carroll’s comments on the function (or functions) of art practices (Carroll, 2008).
(1916), *Pulled at 4 pins* (1915) and *Bottle Rack* (1914). The claim that design is essential in order to create an artefact would require that only a very thin notion of design be employed in the creation of these particular artefacts. In an article attributed to Marcel Duchamp, he says of *Fountain*:

> Whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object (Duchamp, Roche, & Wood, 1917, 5).

Whether such intentions count as acts of design is unclear. At the very least, we can say that the assignment of proper functions is necessarily intentionality-relative. That is to say, the attribution of a proper function to something is grounded in facts regarding intentional use, intentional regard, and the intended function of the object in the process of its creation. Assigning a function to a thing allows facts, both social and physical, to be located in a system of values. Searle proposes two key characteristics of functions along these lines:

1. Whenever the function of X is to Y, X and Y are parts of a system where the system is in part defined by purposes, goals, and values generally.

2. Whenever the function of X is to Y, then X is supposed to cause or otherwise result in Y. This normative component in functions cannot be reduced to causation alone, to what in fact happens as a result of X, because X can have the function of Y-ing even in cases where X fails to bring about Y all or even most of the time. Thus the function of safety valves is to prevent explosions, and this is true even for valves that are so badly made that they in fact fail to prevent explosions, i.e., they malfunction (Searle, 1995, 19).

Now might be a good time to address a concern about the adequacy of Searle’s account of function. Peter Kroes argues that Searle’s account of the functions of technical artefacts is incomplete on two points. First, he argues that Searle does not provide sufficient criteria for something’s being an artefact in a way that distinguishes the primary function of an artefact—what things of that kind are for—from accidental functions—other uses to which an object may be put. Second, intentionality is required in an account of technical artefacts to account for the possibility of artefact malfunction (Kroes, 2003; 2012, 63-69).
I agree with Kroes that collective recognition is required for the assignment of proper function to artefacts. But there is a relatively simple solution to his concern about primary function. Searle labels as “regulative rules” the directives that regulate existing behaviours; for example, the laws that regulate driving. I suggest that in the case of using technical artefacts, the observance of regulative rules is required for the assignment of proper functions. In this context, regulative rules amount to norms of use. For example, if something is a screwdriver, then the proper use of that artefact as *a screwdriver* involves its use for tightening and loosening screws. The rule regulates how an artefact of that kind should be used. Given this addendum, any possible alternative use of the screwdriver is then a case of accidental function. This could apply to original, exemplary artefacts just as much as to those social objects that belong to artefact kinds with primary functions. Further, any technical artefact that is unable to perform its primary function because of its physical characteristics is a malfunctioning instance of its kind.

Once functions are associated with an artefact or an artefact kind, it is possible to evaluate instances of those kinds of artefacts. From the discussion so far, the proper functions associated with kinds of artefacts require social recognition. The social recognition of function is manifested among a population through stable, norm-regulated patterns of behaviour involving the artefact. This collective recognition of function also applies to innovative social objects that stand as exemplars or prototypes without belonging to an artefactual kind.

Another consequence of artefacts and artefact kinds having collectively recognised functions associated with them is that individuals may be corrected on the mistaken use of an artefact. For example, it would be appropriate to advise an art curator of their blunder if they exhibited an artwork plinth, instead of the artwork itself, because both objects would have been employed for the wrong purposes (Jones, 2006). And if someone claimed that a painting is a good artwork because it is suited to holding doors open, we would question whether she had a correct grasp of the notion of a painting. Also, there may be cases where the artefact is correctly identified as the type of object that it is, but it functions poorly with respect to its expected function. Searle notes that such criticisms serve to reinforce recognition of these expected functions. According to Searle, evaluative judgments like “That is an ugly painting” reinforce the collective recognition of the function of paintings (Searle, 1995, 20).

In Searle’s example, implicit in the critic’s judgment is the assumption that paintings should be beautiful. But there may be paintings where the express aim of the artist is that they be aesthetically neutral, or that they be judged according to standards other than beauty (e.g.,
the Fauves). It is therefore a problematic assumption that all paintings do aim to be beautiful or that their value is always to be judged by an aesthetic standard, because this might result in paintings not being judged appropriately with respect to the kind of paintings that they are. As a solution, we might hold the general judgment expressed in Searle’s example to be acceptable only in cases where the various sortal terms that may characterise the artefact—in this case, the relevant art categories—also support, or are consistent with, the function implied by the judgment. The reference to the artefact as a “painting” may then stand in as a general term that encompasses all of the sub-classes of painting that the particular artefact belongs to. This is consistent with Searle’s general claim that evaluative judgments support the recognition of function.

Hilpinen notes the following ways in which an intentionally produced artefact may be evaluated as the category of artefact it is:

(E1) The degree of fit or agreement between the intended character and the actual character of an object,

(E2) The degree of fit between the intended character of an object and the purpose F, in other words, the suitability of an object of the intended kind for the purpose F,

And

(E3) The degree of fit between the actual character of an object and the purpose F, that is, the suitability of an artifact for F (Hilpinen, 2011, section 5, para. 3).

In artistic cases where the physical properties of an object are such that they may elicit positive aesthetic responses, the properties of the object that are being exploited are response-dependent aesthetic properties. If the function of the object is to elicit an aesthetic response, then the actual character of the object is fit for its function based, at least in part, on physical properties of the object. But, in the case of readymades and conceptual art (e.g., Robert Barry’s *Inert Gas Series* (1969)), it would seem that the physical properties are not necessarily what makes such artefacts fit for the function of artistic regard. Nevertheless, the amended version of Searle’s theory of function assignment that I present here can help us to understand the way in which these artefacts function. It is by virtue of the collective recognition of these artefacts as readymades or conceptual works that these artefacts function as the specific types of artworks they are.
Philippe Huneman argues for particular similarities and differences between technical artefacts and some works of art. For Huneman, both technical artefacts and artworks are types of *technè*. Huneman labels one shared property—characteristic of *technè*—“intention”.

He states that intention is the “structure of intention directed toward a second degree intention (‘A intends B to use X in a way Z’)” (Huneman, 2007, 6). Given this, “to account for the structure of intentions regarding artifacts, one has to consider second-degree intentions, namely intentions *bearing on other intentions*” (Huneman, 2007, 6). To illustrate this point, Huneman considers the artefactualisation of a series of stones spanning a river via their use by an individual as a natural bridge. He states: “we can see the user’s intention as an intention directed towards other user’s behaviour. In effect, the mere fact that I cross the bridge commits me to believing that it is a ‘walkable’ bridge, and then to lend to other people this potential intention of crossing it” (Huneman, 2007, 8). Moreover, “this intention of some user can be seen from his acting—thus, the idea of an intention as a mental and conscious event is here unnecessary” (Huneman, 2007, 8).

Huneman’s example is problematic. The intentional use of the stones as a bridge does commit the user to a belief that the physical properties of the stones can support this use. However, the use does not necessarily involve any intention that anyone else might or should use the stones as a bridge. We could imagine someone who planted a secret crop on the other side of a river and who uses the stones as a personal bridge to access that crop. We could also imagine someone from the same community spying on that individual and who subsequently begins using the stones as a bridge to covertly steal from the other’s crop. Here we have two individuals (though in theory we could posit a greater number of copycats) who use the stones as a bridge without any intention of “lending” that use to others. This seems to be a situation where the stones have been appropriated by multiple agents within a community for use as a bridge. And Huneman states that “if people cross the river by walking on the stone, then we say it’s a bridge” (Huneman, 2007, 4). But, contra Huneman, this example seems to be a case of the artefactualisation of the stones—i.e., the creation of a bridge—without the use of intention.

The example of readymades is employed by Huneman to illustrate a difference between those artworks and other artefacts: he claims that readymades have no function in contrast to most—if not all—other categories of *technè* (Huneman, 2007, 12). Huneman asserts that the reason why readymades have no function is because they are separated from a *context of use*. Regarding the relationship between readymades and a context of use, Huneman states: “we have a set of items that can receive functions relatively to our
intentions; yet the ready-made is no more one of them” (Huneman, 2007, 12). It is not the case that a new function is assigned when an artefact becomes a readymade, instead the readymade simply has no function. Further, “the notion of a context of use, is the idea of a set of objects related to each other, and correlative to potential intentions that are equally related together in a kind of system” (Huneman, 2007, 12).

But Huneman’s claim that readymades have no function is contentious. First, as I have already noted, there are numerous philosophers who maintain that artistic regard is a characteristic and proper use for works of art. Further, Huneman offers no reason why the art gallery context is not itself a context of use. Readymades exist within a network of display cases, information plaques, exhibition catalogues, art gallery buildings, art history books, art history courses, conservation and restoration tools, and so on. The art context facilitates the activity of people appreciating readymade works in a sustainable way. We should therefore reject both of Huneman’s assertions that readymades exist outside of a context of use and that, because of this, readymades have no function.

Scheele argues that social considerations “are at best necessary, but not sufficient conditions” for the assignment of proper function (Scheele 2006, p. 26-27). One reason they are not sufficient is because some artefacts perform their functions in part due to their physical properties. Scheele describes proper function as “what the artefact is meant for. This type of use is proper use” (Scheele 2006, p. 25). Scheele emphasises the practical value of proper functions in apportioning responsibility in two general kinds of failure in artefact use. The first case is where proper use of the artefact fails to achieve the desired goal and/or results in an accident. He states: “The fact that the artefact was used properly is reason to suppose that the artefact malfunctioned and that therefore the user is not responsible for this failure—barring cases of neglect of maintenance. The responsibility may be assigned to the artefact or its retailer, manufacturer or designer” (Scheele 2006, p. 26). First, I’m not quite sure what it means for an artefact to take responsibility for a fault, presumably responsibility must bottom out in agents. Perhaps this is meant to capture the situation where nobody is responsible—some rare or freak accident with a circular saw or a wood chipper, for instance. Second, and perhaps associated with the first point, it might be that the product has an element of risk associated with its use. Medical pharmaceuticals are employed in the aim of improving the quality of life of individuals. But certain drugs may be known sometimes to cause serious side effects—perhaps in a small portion of the population—that harm the patient more than they heal. Where the manufacturer and retailer provide adequate warnings of risks, and where users ingest the medication in accordance with its proper use, there is a
large probability that they are not responsible for failure to improve the quality of life as a result of side effects. Scheele’s second general case is where accidental use of the artefact fails to achieve the desired goal and/or results in an accident. In these cases, the user is to blame. This may be so, but as I have just mentioned, apportionment of blame to the user is not restricted exclusively to this scenario. So, generally speaking, proper function may often play a role in apportioning blame for failed use or accidents, but not always.

Previously in this section I suggested that we should appeal to norms of use in order to distinguish accidental function from proper function. But this advice is vague. Can we be more precise in our identification of the kinds of social facts that are indicative of these norms? Scheele provides two cases of artefacts that implicate collective intentions in the ascription of function: the first is a church that has lost its religious function and now functions as a public venue by virtue of being hired out on a contract basis by its new owners; the second example is the figure eight piece of climbing equipment, which was designed for the purpose of abseiling but which has now acquired the function of a belaying device by means of climbers copying other climbers. He concludes that the collective intentions of users should be taken into account when considering the attribution of proper function to an artefact (thus identifying two proper functions for the figure eight case). But there still remains the question of just how we might distinguish the proper function of an artefact from an accidental function. In order to avoid the criticism that he is offering a trivial account of the attribution of proper function in the figure eight example, Scheele appeals to actual assignments of responsibility in cases of failed use as a test for proper function. This move avoids triviality because this kind of determination is grounded in collective intentional acts, as opposed to mere collective recognition (Scheele 2006, p. 31).

I agree with Scheele that the apportionment of responsibility for unfortunate outcomes due to using an artefact serves to maintain social facts related to the proper function of the artefact, but this cannot be the only way to identify it. Surely there are items that have established proper functions without ever actually determining culpability regarding the failed use of an artefact. (For example, it should be obvious to someone acquainted with readymades that if someone hypothetically appreciated only the gleaming white surfaces of Duchamp’s Fountain, then they failed to appreciate it properly.) And surely a determination that the artefact malfunctioned already presupposes that the artefact has a function.

Rather than focusing on determining culpability for use failure—as Scheele does—I suggest that it is more fundamental to note the importance of proper function for evaluation of the goodness of an artefact (for example, judgments of the type “x is a good K,” or “x is a
malfunctioning K”). Such judgments have practical import for situations where we choose to acquire a particular kind of artefact, or retain an artefact for later use, or discard it. Further, if an artefact is of a particular kind, it will be expected to have been designed to be able to perform the relevant proper function. If the design of an artefact is such that it could not perform the proper function of that kind, this would provide reason to question whether the artefact really is of that kind. I will later suggest some common kinds of collectively recognised acts that—when taken together—can ground proper function. This will show how artefact functions might be assigned in a principled way using acts of collective recognition (e.g., copying behaviours) without demanding acts of collective intentionality.

4.2.3. Non-intentional theories of function attribution

In this sub-section I examine accounts of the attribution of proper function that do not depend completely on the intentions of the artefact’s designer(s) and/or subsequent actual use. Beth Preston defends a reproduction account of artefact function. Preston describes reproduction theories as appealing to “a history of selective reproduction as the primary determining factor for artefact functions, and they regard human intentions as having a secondary or indirect role, mediated by various non-intentional factors” (Preston, 2009, 219). This kind of account is similar to etiological accounts of function from the domain of biology, where the process of natural selection explains the mechanism of reproduction. Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson endorse a pluralist version of the reproduction account, which they name “the selected effects theory”. Instead of a single proper function for art, they claim that “in different times and places, different capacities of artworks have caused them to be manufactured, reproduced, and kept in existence” (Parsons & Carlson, 2008, 219).

One significant problem for reproduction theories of artefacts is that they cannot account for radically novel artefacts. This issue is acknowledged by Preston, but she argues that we should not be too concerned about this for the reason that by far the majority of cases of artefact production involve reproduction rather than radical innovation (Preston, 2009, 231; 2013). But as we have seen with the example of Duchamp’s readymades, this is a significant disadvantage for a theory of artefact that attempts to account for social objects like

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50 The novelty challenge to etiological accounts has previously been raised in Houkes & Vermaas (2003).
avant-garde artworks.\textsuperscript{51} If our aim is to understand the relation between historical precedence and artefact function, then we cannot simply dismiss the hard cases, no matter how rare. Such cases are potentially informative regarding the nature of the connection between artefacts and their functions. Further, it is also plausible that theories of function assignment via collective attitudes may be employed in a more fine-grained explanation of the successful reproduction of some kinds of artefacts. Reproducing historical precedents may be one way of creating social objects that belong to artefact kinds with established functions, but it is only one of the methods by which functions are associated with social objects.

In addition to the novel artefact challenge, readymades also raise an issue regarding diachronic changes in the characteristics that are considered essential for the successful proper functioning of a category of artefact. It was considered essential for artworks in the nineteenth century that they reward appreciation for both the craftsmanship and aesthetic qualities—typically, the beautiful and the sublime—made manifest in those artworks. Moreover, if any art composition lacked these features, this would constitute rational grounds for \textit{excluding} the item from the category labelled “art.” This perspective on art status lends support to a theory of the “evaluative” conception of art.

In the twentieth century, however, the category of readymades raised a challenge to these two standard characteristics. Duchamp’s appropriation of existing objects meant that there was no craftsmanship to be appreciated in these kinds if works and, further, he deliberately selected objects for their “anaesthetic” qualities. Thus, readymades constitute cases where the design and use of the artefacts deliberately excludes qualities that were previously considered necessary for the proper use (that is, artistic appreciation) of members of their purported parent category (art). For this reason we may consider readymades not just as novel artefacts but also as \textit{transgressive}. In Kendall Walton’s terms, readymades were bearers of contra-standard properties—that is, properties that would tend to exclude them from their purported parent kind (Walton, 1970, 339). And, indeed, some philosophers who defend aesthetic definitions of art have claimed that artefacts like \textit{Fountain} are not artworks on this very basis.

Readymades not only provide the challenge of genuinely novel artefacts—that is, they are not simply a challenge to etiological accounts of function because of their originality and, consequently, the lack of precedence regarding that function—they pose the additional problem of relating to an existing artefact category in a transgressive manner. Walton

\footnote{As already noted, this problem similarly affects the intentional-historical theory of artefact concepts as proposed by Paul Bloom. See Bloom (1996).}
suggests two ways in which the problem of the presence of contra-standard properties in a putative member of the artefact kind may be resolved: either (1) the item is re-categorised as a member of another artefact kind where the offending property is not contra-standard, or else (2) the artefact is accepted into the existing category by means of turning the previously standard property into a variable one (Walton, 1970, 352-354). If option (1) requires a new artefact category, then the solution may be akin to some more typical examples of novel artefacts. Readymades, on the other hand, are an instance of Walton’s option (2), which required a change in conventions and practices regarding works of art to make appreciation of a work’s aesthetic properties and craftsmanship into contingent features of artistic regard.

Transgressive artefacts not only aim to serve new values but, in doing so, they deliberately reject dominant values of many close artefact categories that they may be purported to belong to. So whereas novel artefacts need not have any connection to the uses of existing artefact kinds, transgressive artefacts necessarily do. Often transgressive works elicit shock from audiences because they defy expectations in this way. For example, Robert Rauschenberg’s Erased de Kooning (1953) is transgressive because—contrary to prior visual art—it consists of a framed erasure. And controversy still rages about the proper way to understand John Cage’s 4’33” (1952) composition (Cage & Goldberg 1976; Levinson 1990, p. 270; Carroll 1994; S. Davies 1997a & 2012b; Kania 2010; Horn 2012).

Further, whereas Duchamp’s readymades constituted a new class of artworks, new sub-category formation is not a necessary result. For example, the first performance of The Rite of Spring (1913) caused a riot between conservative and progressive members of the audience due to the fact that it eschewed the traditional ballet’s artistic ends of graceful dance and beautiful music in favour of Vaslav Nijinsky’s jarring choreography and Igor Stravinsky’s convention-defying musical composition. The provocative nature of transgressive works like The Rite of Spring can be explained only given the work’s relation to existing conventions of ballet. But The Rite of Spring did not result in a new class of artworks. Instead, the kinds of values that constituted acceptable aims for ballet were eventually extended. This ballet seems quite inexplicable on a reproduction theory that accounts for the proper function of an artefact based on the valuable selected effects of ancestors of its kind. In this instance, it is the historically valuable artistic effects of ballet that are being rejected. Therefore it is not necessarily the case that transgressive artefacts lack ancestors—as Houkes and Vermaas characterise the novel artefact challenge (2003, 274)—but instead that transgressive artefacts work against the valued ends that were previously thought essential for a class of artefacts.
Preston also argues that there is a tension between two of Houkes and Vermaas’ theory desiderata: (D1) distinguishing between proper and accidental function and (D4) accounting for the attribution of proper functions to novel artefacts. Preston argues that the difference between proper and accidental functions is due to the stipulation that “proper functions may be derived only through production relations, and not through use relations,” but the intentions designers do not seem very different from the intentions of users, thus, “if proper functions could be derived through use relations, all artefact functions would be proper functions” (Preston, 2003, 605-606). In order to resolve the impasse, Preston suggests that desiderata D4 be rejected. Similarly, Bence Nanay’s Modal Theory of artefact function does not distinguish between proper and accidental functions (Nanay, 2010; 2013). For Nanay:

Artifact x has function to do F at time t if and only if some ‘relatively close’ possible (but not actual) world where x is doing F at t and this contributes to the fulfillment of the goals of the agent who is using the artifact are closer to the actual world than any of those possible worlds where x is doing F at t, but this does not contribute to the fulfillment of the goals of the agent who is using the artifact (Nanay, 2013, 521-522).  

Nanay notes that on his account not every use counts as a function. He does, however, admit that his account of function captures the notion of usefulness (Nanay, 2013, 523-524; Nanay, 2010, 427). But this is problematic if—as Nanay intends—his account is meant to allow for malfunction. There may be multiple cases where some kind of artefact is frequently used for purposes that it was not designed for. I might, for example, often stand on a dining room chair to change a light bulb in the kitchen. Or I might regularly use a paperclip as a SIM card eject tool for my smartphone. But in both cases, if the artefact physically fails to assist in achieving the goal (the seat doesn’t support my weight when standing on it; the plastic surrounding the paperclip wire stops me from applying sufficient pressure to the eject button), it seems intuitively wrong to say that the chair or the paperclip malfunctioned. However, these would be likely uses for these artefacts in the respective situations if they were ready to hand. Consequently, Nanay’s account gives a false positive for artefact malfunction. If we are to correctly account for artefact malfunction, we require an associated account of proper function.

52 See also Nanay (2010, 429).
Both of desiderata D1 and D4 seem plausible. If—against Preston’s advice—we wish to retain both conditions, we are forced to examine attributions of proper and accidental functions in greater detail. As I have already noted, the attribution of proper function will provide a way to evaluate the goodness of an object as the kind of object it is. Usefulness, on the other hand, is related merely to the value of some affordances of the item given a particular scenario. In what follows, I advance on Scheele’s theory by suggesting common categories of social facts that are relevant to the ascription of proper function to artefacts.

In addition to an examination of artefact use, my suggestion is that we should examine particular kinds of intentional acts that, collectively, are indicative of function ascription. In order for the specific acts to comprise social facts, they require collective attitudes by two or more agents. Proper function may be ascribed by means of one agent observing another and inferring their intentions (a process that Scheele mentions but does not adequately explicate) or by one agent teaching another (informally or formally). The former process involves collective recognition while the latter involves collective intentions. The following categories of actions imply that the artefact—viewed under some description—should perform some kind of function. There are at least five categories of acts that are relevant here: appraisal, acquisition, maintenance, discarding/disposal, and category exclusion of an artefact based on functional considerations of the item. It should be possible to hone in on a characterisation of proper function, as distinct from usefulness, by examining similarities in the reasons (particularly reasons relating to how the artefact is used) that justify an appraisal of that artefact and also the reasons why that kind of artefact is acquired, maintained, disposed of and/or excluded from some category by users within a community.

Let us begin by considering acts of appraisal. Proper function is not the same as usefulness. There is a conceptual connection between an artefact kind and a proper function that is associated with the evaluation of that kind of item. That is, if an item is a good (or at least functioning) member of its artefact kind then this provides a user with a reason to use it to perform the proper function associated with that kind. Conversely, a bad instance of that kind is unable to perform its proper function under normal operating conditions. For accidental functions, the same rules do not apply. The successful or unsuccessful use of an artefact for the discharging of an accidental function has no bearing on whether the artefact is good or bad with respect to the kind of artefact it is. On this basis, we can propose a test to identify some—but not all—supplementary functions of a token artefact of a kind: if the

53 For a detailed analysis of normative claims about artefacts see Franssen (2006).
artefact is unable to perform the function under consideration, and assuming normal operating conditions (for example, assuming that the mobile phone battery is charged, or that the vacuum cleaner is plugged in), would this count against the value of the item *qua* member of that artefact kind? If it does not, then it is not a proper function. If it does, however, further investigation may be required in order see if the performance of the particular function being tested does not rely on properties of the token that are required for the performance of the item’s proper function. (Note that Scheele’s suggestion that proper function is proved by a judgment of malfunction is dependent on a negative appraisal.)

Also telling are the reasons why an artefact is *acquired*. Presumably, an artefact is acquired (procured or made) for some purpose. The reasons an individual offers—or that are inferred—for why they should acquire that artefact can be informative in establishing the proper function of that artefact or its kind. In this case, it is important to note that the agent is acquiring the item for some use that is associated with some description of that item. Acquisition of an artwork as an investment does not tell us about the proper function of an artwork as an artwork. The collectively recognised reasons for *maintaining* an artefact may also be indicative of proper function. For example, sharpening a blade is a form of maintenance concerning the function of cutting, restoring a painting preserves the qualities that are required for artistic appreciation, and so on. The collectively recognised reasons that lead to the discarding or *disposal* of an artefact may also be indicative of the properties that are required for its functioning. This is particularly so if the discarding activity follows from a change in some properties of the item.

Finally, let us consider acts of *category exclusion*. I have said that some artefact kinds may not be defined by reference to their proper function. Nevertheless, some child artefact kinds may belong to a broader family of artefacts that share a similar characterisation of proper function, broadly construed (e.g., chairs, sofas, stools, etc. all function to support the activity of someone sitting on them). The fact that an artefact is of a particular kind gives a user a reason to believe that the artefact can perform the proper function of that kind. Maarten Franssen phrases it thus:

‘*x* is a *K*’ expresses the normative fact that *x* has features *f* (in particular its design history) and that because of *f* a person *p* has a reason to believe that *p*, if *p* has a desire to achieve the result of *K*-ing, has a reason to use *x* for *K*-ing (Franssen, 2006, 53).

If *x* is a putative *K* then, given Franssen’s analysis, it is expected to be useful for the purpose of *K*-ing. Given this, a more decisive test may be applied to these child artefact categories:
given that primary functions are a standard characteristic of a particular family of artefact kinds, if members of a child kind for that family did not (or their design meant that they could not) have the power to satisfy the function under consideration, would that provide a rational reason to exclude that child kind from belonging to the parent kind? If so, it is a proper function; if not, then it is not.

Again, Duchamp’s *Fountain* provides a useful example. Duchamp submitted *Fountain*, consisting of a signed urinal, to an exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists. It was rejected from the show. Suggested reasons for exclusion included: the vulgarity of the object—which offended moral sensibilities; the claim that it was an act of plagiarism—which contravened the standard feature of originality; and the claim that it was plain—which meant it lacked aesthetic interest. Given the prevailing artistic conventions, the absence of originality and aesthetically interesting properties meant that *Fountain* would not have seemed suitable for the purposes of artistic appreciation. As I have already mentioned, it was only later, once audiences were comfortable with new conventions for appreciating art, that *Fountain* gained general acceptance as an artwork.

I should note that the social recognition of these kinds of acts is only required for establishing collective recognition of the proper function of an artefact or artefact kind. The affirmation of the artefact’s function might be achieved by private intentional activity if the intentional act by the agent falls under a description that is collectively recognised. But—as I have already noted—at some point the agent would likely have learned the function from someone else—perhaps by observing them—which is an act of collective recognition.

There may be many reasons why any of the categories of activities might occur that have nothing to do with the proper function of an item. For example, a fence may be repainted as part of maintaining it, but this does not bear directly on its function. Or, we may discard functional items simply because it is time for some spring cleaning. Nevertheless, I suggest that if there is some sort of use that reasonably and repeatedly underpins many of these five categories of activity with respect to an artefact, then that use is likely indicative of that artefact’s proper function.

I have suggested five categories of acts to distinguish proper function from usefulness, but there may of course be many other conventions and kinds of activity that occur within the relevant context of use that support an artefact’s proper function. These acts establish social facts about the proper function of an artefact because, in each case, agents are involved in intentional behaviour with respect to the object that can be deemed rational by recourse to the proper function of that kind of object. Convergent, collective recognition of
the proper function of an artefact (or an artefact kind) is grounded in acknowledgement of the rationality of these acts with respect to that function. Coming back to the example of artworks, we can additionally find evidence for the artwork function of art regard in the activities that support this goal: We can see it in the manner of public display of artworks in public and private institutions; The kind of attention that is accorded to the works by art critics, art collectors and members of the public who engage in art criticism; The meticulous recording of the provenance of artworks; The proscription of certain acts so that the appreciable qualities of works are preserved—“No touching the exhibits!”—or so that works of art are given proper attention—“Turn your phone to silent during the show,” “No late entry to the performance until intermission”; And so on.

4.2.4. Components

In closing this section, let us consider the relationship between components of artefacts, proper functions and artefact status. In the art context, this issue has a bearing on understanding the role that parts of artworks play with respect to the ends of artistic appreciation.

Complex artefacts may be analysed into various components. Cars and computers, for example, both have multiple components with specific functions. Each of these components may be designed to perform some function that either directly contributes to complete the artefact’s function—by making the artefact better with respect to its primary function—or else that assists in some supplementary function. As examples of the latter, with respect to cars, consider manufacturers’ logos, the employment of luxury materials and additional extras like power windows and elaborate speaker systems. It seems from our prior analysis that, insofar as the component is itself a distinct object that satisfies the conditions for artefact status, it may be counted as a constituent artefact within a purposeful system and, therefore, it will have an associated proper function in an ordinary sense.

Of course it is possible that a technical vocabulary may be employed in a specialist analysis of certain objects. Such technical language does not necessarily result in new artefacts being identified. Instead, technical vocabularies may allow for more precise discussion of the collection of properties of the artefact that a technical term may refer to. For example, we may refer to the head on a glass of Guinness, to distinguish the foam on top
from the body of the beer, without thereby identifying a new artefact. Similarly, we can refer to the blade and handle of a knife. Or consider Aristotle’s division of the plot of a story into beginning, middle and end. The use of a term to refer to certain properties of an artefact that do not comprise a distinct artefact may describe some part of the whole as functioning in a way that contributes, or otherwise impacts on, the function of the artefact. Unless the part of the whole that is identified by the term is collectively recognised as performing a certain role, there is no function assigned to that part, even if, in particular instances, it may be described as functioning, that is, causing, some valuable outcome. Under what circumstances might this latter kind of case occur? This situation might obtain when some artefact could potentially perform its proper function in multiple ways, with one method of use utilising the identified part to function in a valuable way, and another method that does not employ that part in any functional role at all. This could occur in cases of alternative interpretations of literary, film or musical works, for example, where certain characters, events, or other properties of the work may be salient under one construal of the narrative but extraneous under another.

We can illustrate the situation of components being used in multiple different ways by reference to works of art. In attempting to make sense of the work, we regularly posit claims about the contribution that specific features of a work make with respect to the meaning of that work. Consider Arthur C. Danto, in the role of art critic, describing Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece* (1964):

> Ono sits impassively on the stage, like a beautiful resigned martyr, while the audience is invited to come and cut away a piece of her clothing. One by one, they mount the stage, as we see in a video at the Japan Society, and cut off part of what she is wearing. […] Ideally the cutting continues until she is stripped bare. I find it a very violent piece, reminding me somehow of Stanley Milgram’s experiment in psychology, in which people are encouraged to administer what they believe are electrical shocks to the subject (who pretends to be in agony). The audience has certainly overcome, a bit too gleefully, the gap between art and life—it is after all a flesh-and-blood woman they are stripping piecemeal with shears. It reveals something scary about us that we are prepared to participate in a work like that (Danto, 2000).

But just because an artwork is rewarding when perceived according to one set of systematic relations of its parts, the effect caused does not necessarily determine the unique function of each of the components of the artwork. We can contrast Ono’s comments on her 2003 execution of *Cut Piece* with Danto’s violent interpretation. She says: “Following the political
changes through the year after 9/11, I felt terribly vulnerable [...] Cut Piece is my hope for world peace.” Ono hoped to emphasise through her performance that this is “a time where we need to trust each other” (Murphy 2003). Another example of components of a work being put to different tasks is Henry James’ novella, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). In this work, the ghost characters can be taken at face value in the service of a ghost story or—on an alternative interpretation—the work can be read as a psychological thriller where the ghosts are merely imagined.

We are now in a position to answer our remaining two questions from §4.2.1. First, are components of artefacts also artefacts? The result of this discussion is that artefacts may be constituted by other artefacts, but this is not necessarily the case. For example, Duchamp’s *Fountain* has an artefact—a urinal—as a component of the work. A chapter of a novel, however, is not itself a distinct artefact. Second, do components of artefacts also have proper functions? Components of artefacts can themselves have proper functions (e.g., as when a canvas is a foundation for a painting). But even in cases where parts of an artefact are not themselves artefacts, we may identify the contribution of these parts toward the overall functioning of the artefact, even if this contribution is only conditional upon a particular specification of artefact use.

4.3. Artistic practices and the function of works of art

In §4.1 I presented a brief overview of Searle’s theory of social reality. In the previous section I argued for a theory of artefacts and functions that can accommodate works of art. These elements together provide a general framework for the examination of artefacts and their proper function. In this section I provide further details about the artistic function of art and its relation to other, non-artistic functions.

This section is divided into three parts. First I will consider functions in the context of art. Part of this will involve distinguishing between artistic and non-artistic functions. I also discuss the interpretation of symbols and artistic conventions. Second, I will consider what is involved in the institutional analysis of art practices. In the third section I will introduce the artistic functionalist definition of art. This will be defended in greater detail in the chapters that follow.
4.3.1 Artistic function, non-artistic functions, and the interpretation of art

The characterisation of artefact that I provided in the last section is flexible enough to allow that artefacts could exhibit huge ontological variety. Artefacts in this sense can accommodate improvised musical performances, single-instance paintings, and multiply-instantiated poems. My aim of defending a functionalist definition of art requires the characterisation of an artefact function that is distinctive to all and only artworks, in all of their ontological variety. In what follows, whenever I use the term “artist” I am loosely referring to those who create artworks. I will define both terms in greater detail in Chapter 7.

In §2.4.1 I examined definitions that posited particular functions for art. I also argued that each of them is susceptible to counterexamples. Often they fail to account for what is valuable about works that fall into categories of recent and contemporary art (e.g., relational art, the Young British Artists, installation art, conceptual art, etc.). Aside from efforts to define art by reference to a distinct purpose it serves, some philosophers have examined the functions that art may perform. Jonathan Gilmore, for instance, argues that artworks have at least one or more functions (or purposes), but he simply asserts that there is no single function or set of functions that are specific to artworks (Gilmore, 2011).

Against this, I defend the view that rewarding artistic appreciation (in the specific sense that I will later detail) is the function that is served by artworks. Further, this kind of appreciation is a necessary condition of our classificatory and courtesy senses of art. In the chapters that follow I defend the view that the activity of artistic appreciation manifests a particular kind of value that is distinct to artworks. I label this core artistic value. For the remainder of this section I will assume that an adequate characterisation of core artistic value is possible. (I will have more to say about the specific form of artistic appreciation and, consequently, core artistic value in Chapters 5 and 6.) For now, I will make a few comments about how Searle’s framework bears on the definition of art and the notion of core artistic value.

Some facts about an object relating to artistic appreciation may be useful in identifying whether it is art or not. If the facts about the object that relate to artistic appreciation make it better or worse as the artefact that it is when considered under an
applicable description—either its title and/or the various categories of artefact that the object belongs to—then that object has the provision of core artistic value as a function. If the primary function of the object is the provision of core artistic value then it definitely is art in at least its broad classificatory sense. More typically in the case of non-Western artefacts and pre-Eighteenth century artefacts, the provision of core artistic value would supplement other functions, adding further value to an object that was already valuable in other ways (S. Davies, 2006a). Again, if the object would be better or worse as the kind of object that it is if it had (or lacked) characteristics that provide core artistic value then a case might be made that these kinds of objects are art.

I have said that artefacts are artworks if their primary function is to provide core artistic value. We might point to artistic properties in order to justify that these artefacts are artworks. But this raises a question: are certain artefacts artworks because they have (artistic) properties that can reward artistic appreciation? Given my comments on affordances earlier in the chapter, my answer is no. Instead, we recognise that certain things count as a kind of artefact and this categorisation has certain norms of use associated with it. (Alternatively, if the artefact does not belong to an established category, we recognise its particular proper use.) But some may argue that there are certain response dependent properties that may be exploited by artworks that create the same affective response in a viewer regardless of whether the viewer considers the object as a certain artwork or not. Further, they claim, such responses justify its claim to being art. For example, it has been argued that there are certain aesthetic universals that cause a positive aesthetic response in all humans (Dutton, 2009; 2013; S. Davies, 2012a). But, even if the arguments supporting aesthetic universals were true, it would only secure the position that some artworks exploit these response dependent properties in the work. It is always open to the artist to employ such response dependent properties for the purposes of artistic ends, or not, depending on their productive intentions and/or the kind of artwork being produced.

One example where positive aesthetic properties are employed in an artwork for aesthetic and symbolic use simultaneously is the use of beauty in Islamic art, for instance in brilliant colours and geometric design, to indicate the divine. The aesthetic properties elicit a positive aesthetic response but this effect is utilised to enhance a related symbolic purpose. Another interesting example is The Feast of Trimalchio (2009) by AES+F. In this instance the work is, at first glance, beautiful: it is an immersive work that surrounds the audience with depictions of beautiful and alluring people in exotic and opulent environments with
ambient classical music. But we are not meant simply to enjoy these objects. The aim of the work is to present an “advertisement” for consumerism and wealth as a means of critiquing the decadent excess of the ultra-rich (particularly Russian oligarchs). The superficial use of beauty is ironic, being juxtaposed with the “more-is-more” consumer attitude that is meant to repulse rather than attract. The point of these examples is to note that proper appreciation of the role of aesthetic properties in a work of art always depends on other features about the kind of work that it is.

We can describe the first example above in terms of Searle’s framework. In the case of constitutive rules, the assignment of function is reliant on more than just the physical properties of the object. So if something was intended to function as intricate geometric patterns through the skilled application of paint, this would not count as a status function if, simply by virtue of the physical, response dependent properties, the pattern is seen as intricate. This is because, in the case just mentioned, there is no function being performed in excess of our response to the physical properties of the object’s design that causes a pleasurable response. But the use of geometric complexity and beauty as a recognised convention in Islamic art for symbolising Allah is a status function. In this latter case, the status function involves symbolic representation.

These instances where certain conventions indicate meaning are cases of what Searle calls linguistic institutional facts. Linguistic institutional facts are a special class of institutional facts that can be used to represent higher-level institutional facts without themselves being based on more primary institutional facts. Searle says:

Within the category of agentive [observer-relative] functions is a special category of those entities whose agentive function is to symbolize, represent, stand for, or—in general—to mean something or other (Searle, 1995, 23).

In the case of artworks generally, when certain symbolic representations are employed within a social context this means that some kind of item (e.g., a kind of recognisable pattern in some medium) conventionally stands for—or means—something else. (For example, the cartoon convention of streaked lines behind a character indicates movement.) These symbolic conventions may also be employed in other practical or ritual contexts. The figure of the Virgin Mary is frequently depicted in Christian art using expensive lapis lazuli pigment (e.g.,
see Giotto’s Crucifixion fresco from the Scrovegni Chapel (c. 1300)). Appreciators of this religious art are expected to recognise this artistic convention in order to experience the work properly. The symbol of the Virgin Mary, used in a religious social context, will have an elevated significance due to the other religious ideas associated with that figure. In a situation where an artist from a highly Catholic social context invokes this symbol, she will also be invoking the further status associations that are connected with that symbol. A sympathetic, appropriate response, given the context of creation, would require recognition of these status functions in the context of creation of the work.

Apart from symbols, there may be depictions of objects that are recognisable due to naturalistic presentation. Some musical sounds may imitate other everyday sounds. And so not every aspect of what is represented by an artefact is dependent on interpretation through constitutive rules. Between the two extremes of naturalistic representation and arbitrary symbolism, regulative rules might be employed to modify or supplement typical natural-perspective visual representations in visual art, or to supplement normal linguistic usage for a particular reading audience—for example, as in the droogs’ slang from A Clockwork Orange—or provide additional rules for the interpretation of sound structures—for example, in determining whether a track is a slow instance of a fast-paced genre or vice versa. A representational convention that scenes in a wall relief should be read from left to right would be an instance of a regulative rule. This, again, is contrasted with a constitutive rule where the rule makes possible some kind of fact, for example, a constitutive rule that larger figures represented in a wall relief have a greater social status than smaller-sized figures.

If we need to know about conventions regarding a particular kind of artefact in order to fully appreciate it, what are the implications for “artworks” from cultures that we no longer have access to? Examples would include the cave paintings from Chauvet and Lascaux. In these cases I would say that we simply do not have enough information to be able fully to understand the cave drawings as the kind of artefact they are. The necessary cultural information is lost to us. This, however, may not stop us from appreciating certain aesthetic qualities of these works and we can surely begin to appreciate the amount of workmanship and effort that went into the production of these drawings. It is quite clear that these cave paintings are examples of skilled labour, which makes them some kind of artefact, and the representational and aesthetic qualities together suggest to us that they provided artistic value within the society that produced them, even if such value was supplementary to some primary
function and even if we do not have the requisite information with which to fully understand and appreciate such artefacts.

I have emphasised the importance of the artefact function being correctly identified. This might be done by identifying the kind that the artefact belongs to. If a new object belongs to an artefact kind that is similar to another one that a user is familiar with (and can competently use), they will probably only require minimal assistance in correctly using the new artefact. But for some new kinds of artefacts, as in the case of some avant-garde art, the proper use of the artefact is more opaque. As I have mentioned, this has occurred numerous times in the course of twentieth century high art when audiences have been confounded by the works presented to them. In the case of readymades and found art, for example, many members of the public who are unable (or unwilling) to engage in appreciating these objects have claimed that such items are not art. If the argument is that avant-garde works are not art because they do not function to reward artistic appreciation in the way expected by traditional Fine Art audiences, then this line of argumentation would provide support for the position that the concept of art is associated with the function of artistic appreciation (even if the audiences making the argument only have a restricted view of what artistic appreciation consists in).

Avant-garde cases are typically surrounded by formal networks of status functions: artists, art critics, curators, etc. Artworks are artefacts, so the function is often determined by reference to (or by inferring) the intended goals of the artist regarding how the work should be appreciated. This may involve asking the artist, or comparing the current artefact to previous works, either by the artist or in the history of various art schools or movements that may be implicated. But the success of this way of grounding the function of the artefact within a community, of course, depends on the recognition by an audience that an artwork is to be appreciated in such-and-such a way. Alternatively, the judgment that they are art may be based on the speculation of art experts, like art critics, who may consequently affect how audiences view that work.

These have been some preliminary remarks on how Searle’s account of social reality relates to the interpretation of works.
4.3.1.1. Artistic functions for items with non-art functions

In this section I consider artistic functions in cases where items have non-art functions. I have said that artefacts may have the primary function of providing artistic value. In this case they are artworks. Another type of case is where a noted designer or artist is commissioned to make artistically rewarding instances of typically quotidian items. An example would be the merchandise sold by Damien Hirst as part of his 2012 retrospective. The products included luxury wallpaper, skateboards, and deckchairs. These objects may be functional with respect to utility but, given the addition of artistic properties through employment of designs by the artist, they are also meant to be recognised for their artistic properties. This case differs from the situation of, say, the Britten motorcycle in the respect that the characteristics of the motorcycle that are artistically and aesthetically interesting also contribute to the motorcycle’s performance in speed—and thus support a non-artistic proper function. In the Hirst example, the designs merely supplement whatever use those items have (and, given the prices, the artistic value of the objects might often outweigh the utility of the merchandise). The Britten motorcycle is functionally beautiful, while the Hirst merchandise is not. Stephen Davies characterises functional beauty as follows:

For a utilitarian object $u$, with aesthetic features that are not trivial or merely incidental to its overall character, aesthetic evaluation is relative to function, but is not an overall evaluation of how well $u$ performs its function, so much as a judgement about the input made by its aesthetic properties to its doing so. In other words, a functionally beautiful $u$ (evaluated as a $u$, not in terms of secondary functions that are not central to its kind as such) is a $u$ possessing aesthetic properties that contribute positively to its performing its intended principal function. A beautiful chair is one having features that make it graceful and stylish and, at the same time, comfortable to sit on, stable and supportive of the back (S. Davies, 2006a, 237).

In the case of functionally beautiful objects, I agree that appreciation of the design elements related to utility that are also exhibited as aesthetically pleasing contributes to the artistic value of the object. But, as I have pointed out, there are functional objects that may be beautiful without the design elements responsible for the beauty of the object contributing in
any way to the artefact’s fitness for utility. In cases like that of the Hirst example, the appreciation of the artefact’s artistic value—including its aesthetic value—can be considered independently of its fit for utility.

There are cases where objects from cultures that no longer exist have been found that may be of a kind primarily intended to serve non-artistic functions but which are artistically embellished (e.g., elaborately decorated weapons). If the evidence of work in excess of its primary function is reasonably explained by reference to the artefact’s artistic properties—e.g., it employs designs that are artistically pleasing—and it seems reasonable to infer that a society saw fit to retain these features through sustained use and reproduction of this sort of thing—e.g., if there are many artefacts that exhibit the same degree of artistic workmanship—then we may have good reason to claim that this kind of artefact functioned to reward artistic appreciation. In such a case the artistic properties may not be an end simply in themselves, but instead contribute artistic value along with whatever other value these artefacts provide as the kind of artefact that they are. In other words, a case can be made that the artistic properties embellished an already functional artefact.

It may be objected that some traditions are highly conservative regarding the creation of certain objects. For example, it may be that certain types of religious objects in a particular tradition need to adhere to a specific design in order to be recognised as a correct instance of its kind. In such a case the perpetuation of the artistic properties of the object that that kind of artefact has in excess of what is required for the function of the object might be rationally explained solely by norms of correctness. But if people desire these artefacts for their aesthetic or artistic properties, and this contributes to the other aims of the artefact—e.g., by presenting political ideology in an attractive way, by embellishing objects of worship, etc.—then a case can be built for the social acceptance of artefacts of these kinds in part because of their artistic value. For instance, consider social realist propaganda posters, embellishments on religious icons, etc. So we may argue for an artistic function when it is reasonable to infer that the artistic elements are not present by mistake. That is, when a reasonable explanation for these elements is that they are conscious part of the artefact’s design and where the continued presence of these properties is not explained just by appeal to correctness.

In this section I have discussed the distinction between artistic and non-artistic function. But now I want to briefly consider cases where artefacts do not have the function of providing artistic value when categorised as the typical kinds of artefacts that they are, and
yet still reward artistic appreciation. The question is: What makes the difference between simply attending to an object in a particular way—i.e., attending to any object with artistic regard—and holding that some object functions to reward artistic appreciation?

I have already argued that artefact function is determined by norms regarding what we should and should not do with artefacts of a certain kind. But there may be specific cases that are treated in a special way because of various properties that may reward artistic appreciation. For example, a motorcycle may have certain features that are aesthetically appealing while at the same time innovatively solving technical issues. If this particular instance or make of object gains acceptance by its contemporaries as functioning to reward artistic appreciation then this may either be an instance of a new category of artefact that functions to reward artistic appreciation, or else is a one-off exemplary case. We need to test its use for this putative artistic proper function against the five categories of acts that I described in §4.2.3.

Further, someone may call an item “art” while not intending that its function is to reward artistic appreciation. In this case, the artefact is described as art in the courtesy sense, which indicates that the object is particularly well suited to rewarding artistic appreciation, even though this is not its function. The definition of the artistic attentional strategy in Chapter 6 will elucidate the characteristics that are identified by the use of “art” in the courtesy sense.

4.3.2. Institutional analysis of art practices

In the previous sections I have already made reference to various status functions, including artist (or equivalent status functions related to specific art forms like painter, sculptor, etc.), art critic and curator, that have played specific roles in Western high art institutions since the 18th century that determine how artefacts that we group as artworks are to be used.

Institutional theories of art, like that of George Dickie, make the claim that artworks are such because of the conferral of an art status by the appropriate authorities within artworld institutions. What I want to add to this position is that any conferral of art status (or any art form subset statuses) imposes a status function, the instances of which all share a
function kind of a similar form. More specifically, if an artefact gains the status of being a painting then it should function to reward artistic appreciation. And this goes not just for paintings but for any artefact kind that functions as art.

A distinction needs to be drawn between two uses of “institution” employed in this dissertation. The philosophical literature on the definition of art uses the term “institution” to refer to the formalised institutions of Western high art that arose during the 18th century. But when Searle uses the term with respect to institutional facts, he is referring to a much broader usage that includes human social institutions (including Western high art institutions). Language, money, marriage and art are all institutions on Searle’s account. Unless I am discussing Searle’s theory, I employ “institution” to refer to formalised high art institutions. The art-relevant status functions that I have so far referred to belong to formalised institutions, but, I argue, there are corresponding status functions in pre-Enlightenment Western and non-Western cultures. In a later chapter I will show how the artistic functionalist definition may be applied to such cultures.

I have already made several comments regarding symbolic content in artworks. The question of the correct interpretation of work meaning has been the subject of long-standing philosophical debates. Is it the artist who determines the meaning of a work, as Croce and Collingwood thought? Or is it a mistake to take the author’s intended meanings into account if they are not successfully conveyed by the work, as William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley argued (1946)? Or is it, more radically, the individual reader who gets to determine the meaning of a text, as Roland Barthes suggested (1967 [2001])?

One consequence of the descriptive method of analysis of institutional facts that I employ is that the meaning of the work is determined—or is at least constrained—by social facts related to how that work is treated in practice. This is not an intrinsic feature of ontological contextualism. On some approaches, common art intuitions are treated as desiderata that a successful art theory should explain. There is tacit acceptance by some theorists that a descriptive account of social practices will require the sacrifice of some art intuitions as a matter of reflective equilibrium (as I mentioned in §4.1). This is even after setting aside the complications of whose intentions should count, and the fact that there may be conflicting intuitions regarding some aspects of art. This is not to say that the rejected intuitions are necessarily wrong, but instead that they should be sacrificed, due to the limitations of a particular ontological theory, for the purposes of explanatory clarity.
The method of analysis that I propose differs from the above. Rather than taking a selection of art intuitions as privileged starting points, I instead make all intuitions answerable to rational justification based on a rational reconstruction of the relevant social competences (e.g., a competence in appreciating conceptual art). I will base the rational reconstruction of social competences on claims about social and institutional facts. Art intuitions, then, must be explainable in terms of these rational reconstructions of social competences. In providing a rational reconstruction of relevant social competences I can expose various art intuitions to rational scrutiny and through this process I can also provide error theories about intuitions that are the result of the execution of social competences in ways that may be ill-informed, incompetent, etc.

Now, it is open to someone to question the grounds of such a rational reconstruction. If art status relies on social competences that are enacted without the requirement that we consciously process the relevant rational procedure then how can we be sure that a rational reconstruction adequately captures what occurs when we appreciate art? While some social competences may be mastered in infancy, it is unlikely that infants will have mastered the appreciation of the most sophisticated of art forms, such as conceptual art, aleatoric music, etc. This means that we have the opportunity to examine the social cues that are relied upon in order to develop competence in the appreciation of certain art forms.

To briefly summarise the ground that has been covered this chapter: I have stated that the position of ontological contextualism regarding artworks is a presupposition of this investigation. I further claim that artworks are artefacts. The properties that an artefact has are determined by the socio-historical context of creation of the object. A description of the physical properties of artworks will underdetermine facts about the function of an artefact. If an artefact cannot perform its function based on its physical properties alone then it requires collective recognition of a status function in order to operate. There are varieties of ways in which people may be mistaken with respect to how artefacts should be correctly used. Correct use is grounded in practices that recognise that objects that have a certain status function imposed on them are meant to be used in particular ways. My aim is to describe the formal features of correct use with respect to the normal use of art artefacts, in this case artistic appreciation.
4.3.3. The artistic functionalist definition of art

A most general formulation of the artistic functionalist definition of art that I wish to defend is as follows:

An item is art iff it is an artefact that has the proper function of rewarding the artistic attentional strategy.

The core artistic value of an item is determined by the form of valuing that I argue is distinctive to art, namely, the artistic attentional strategy. Given that the proper function of art is to reward the artistic attentional strategy, this form of attending to its properties will entail that the item has core artistic value. In the next two chapters I examine theories of artistic value and defend my definition of core artistic value. As part of this, I present a detailed description of artistic appreciation. The purpose of this chapter, however, is to present the framework of artefact and function that are a constituent part of my account of art and artistic appreciation. For now, I will make a few clarifications about how the theory of artefact function and institutional facts that I have so far presented in this chapter bears on the above definition.

An artist does not need to take up their tools and consciously think “I’m going to make some art” in order for core artistic value to be expected from the kind of artefact they produce. An artist may intend to paint a cubist painting, or write an absurdist play, or compose music in a classical style. In cases where the artefact categories are art forms, I contend, the products are expected to provide core artistic value. When some category of artefact, or even some particular artefact, is recognised as art, this emphasises that the expectation of artistic value applies to these kinds.  

The following points are also relevant: first, I employ the broad notion of artefact category that is inclusive of such art genres as found objects and readymades; second, the characterisation of the artefact kind as being a source of core artistic value is to allow for a distinction between an artwork type and token instantiations of that artwork. A play may be

54 Someone might point to an object of some non-art kind and refer to it as art in an evaluative sense. This item only really becomes art, however, when it is recognised by the linguistic community (perhaps by a culture or subculture) as functioning to be a source of core artistic value.
physically instantiated many times, but a token performance or printed copy of a play only bears the core artistic value of the work, while the play type is the source of core artistic value; third, providing core artistic value may be a standard feature of a category of artefact to which it belongs because it is a proper function for that kind of artefact. This definition allows for the possibility that items may belong to an art category but be bad as art.

I claim that this functional definition is applicable to art that I have described in the broad classificatory sense of art. It is also a necessary characteristic of art in the narrower, high art classificatory sense of art. Artefacts with high art status are involved in more complex and more formalised value systems (I will discuss the difference in Chapter 7). Fine Art institutions are social institutions of a type that specifically aim to foster practices that provide artistic value to society. Art institutions can also stipulate new ways of performing art functions. That is, they can constitute new rules for art appreciation.

Any new categories of art objects that attain art status within formalised high art institutions must still satisfy the artistic functionalist definition if it is to be recognised as art, I maintain. It might be the case that audiences who are new to some institutionally developed categories of art will need guidance on how to obtain core artistic value. Consider someone new to avant-garde style works who encounters John Cage’s 4’33” or Duchamp’s Fountain for the first time. Such works would not make sense as artworks until the audience works out how they should appropriately appreciate such artefacts. But even paradigm categories of entities-without-aesthetic-interest, such as various conceptual art pieces and readymades, are sources of core artistic value.

There are certain additional formalised art-institutional roles that facilitate the performance of the function of the work of art. For instance, features important to identifying the work of art and supporting other of its institutional functions will be documented. For example, details such as the work’s location of origin, dimensions, genre/category, materials, artist, description/synopsis, biographical details of artist, reference number—e.g., ISBN or museum reference code—year(s) of production, estimated value. This information may be stored in various types of associated documentation, such as information plaques, receipts of purchase, certificates of authenticity, etc. There are also many institutional roles related to artworks, all invested with certain responsibilities. Producers of art cover art student/apprentice, art teacher, artist, director, artistic director, performer, producer, stage manager, editor, lighting and sound crew, etc. Presenters of art include curator, purchaser,
gallery owner. Among the receivers of art are the art historian, reviewer, critic, publicist, public audience, subscriber, patron. Administrative/legal roles include human resources, casting agent, accountant, copyright lawyers, security, ushers/attendants, maintenance crew, insurance appraiser, etc. Each of these roles names a status function within a network of formalised Western institutions.

I will close this chapter by considering some potential objections.

Now, it might be objected that the definition of art in the functional sense is too broad, and so includes as art some objects that we would not typically consider to be art. One example to consider is that of an aesthetically pleasing meal. If a superlative meal is presented to someone who finds it particularly aesthetically rewarding, is it thereby an artwork? If we assume that there is plenty of technical skill in its production, beautiful presentation, and an ingenious balance of tastes, then the meal could plausibly be called artistic and so would at least merit being called art in the courtesy sense above. But this does not yet satisfy the conditions for its being an artwork in a classificatory sense based on the definitional criteria that I propose. In order for the meal to be an artwork it would have to belong to a category of artefact that is expected to reward being regarded for its artistic value. If the meal is a surprisingly splendid looking dish that has been presented at a family Sunday roast then it would be a perfectly good Sunday roast regardless of whether it rewards artistic regard. In this case, the aesthetic value is in excess of what is expected from such a meal, and the meal would not be classed as an artwork in the classificatory sense. But, on the other hand, if the meal were presented as part of a fine dining experience it would be expected to reward artistic regard by virtue of being an instance of a fine dining meal. In the latter case, I would consider the meal to be an artwork in the classificatory sense of the term. (See Chapter 7 for more information on the classificatory sense.)

This might seem a borderline case for the definition, but I would point out, first, that any argument for art status would rely on its rewarding artistic regard. Second, I would present examples from other non-Western cultures that could make the example seem more plausible as art (at least in the broader classificatory sense) by not being encumbered with Western fine-art presuppositions. Consider the Balinese tradition of Banten food offerings to the gods. The tradition involves beautiful compositions of food, often arranged so as to convey symbolic meaning. Such food arrangements are meant to bring pleasure to the gods. But if Banten plausibly count as artworks in the classificatory sense, then, I would argue, it is
also plausible that dishes presented at fine dining establishments also count as art in at least that sense.

Does the position I am arguing for still allow for a metaphorical usage of the phrase “work of art”? Yes. Generally speaking, it allows for this usage in cases where the objects in question would be accepted as being good as the kind of object that they are if they lacked the properties that are being appreciated artistically. This is category-relative. For example, generally speaking, a motorbike may be good as a motorbike if it lacked artistically appreciable properties. (Luxury brands of motorbikes, however, may have a reputation for innovative and sleek design, and so would be bad as that brand of motorbike if they lacked these features. Metaphorical usage just is the courtesy sense of art.)

Another potential challenge to my approach might come from empirical evidence of artistic practices. There have been radical shifts in the course of twentieth century high art that have changed the Western conception of what can be high art. The question is whether further artistic innovations may render obsolete the claims to there being a functionalist essence of art based on the evidence of contemporary and historical practices. It is possible and probable that new and surprising ways of satisfying the function will arise. But this does not count against the definition. It only shows that there can be new ways of satisfying it. While I do not know what innovations may take place in social practices in the future, I suggest that if art practices evolve to the point that they no longer satisfy the kind of artistic appreciation that I defend in Chapter 6, it is unlikely that the artefacts central to that practice will have a reasonable claim to being art.

Further, the classificatory definition that I propose is meant to capture the essence of what artworks are by reference to a valuable, distinct art function we think that artefacts of this kind should have the power to perform. As I have already mentioned, the practical utility of the artistic functionalist definition for developing a list of what items are or are not works of art will be limited by the degree of objectivity regarding our knowledge of social artefacts and their associated functions. It may be disputable whether a particular artefact does, as a matter of objective fact, have the function that would make it an artwork. But such empirical considerations regarding the actual social conditions surrounding a particular case of an artefact do not undermine a definition that describes what the essence of some concept is. It simply points out that there are varying degrees of objectivity regarding social facts. If we insist on considering the practical utility of a definition of art we should think of it this way:
if we were to argue for the art status of some artefact, what evidence would we refer to in order to strengthen our case. I am arguing that the sort of evidence that would strengthen the case for the art status of some object is that which shows that the function of that social artefact is to provide core artistic value.
5. Analyses of the value of art

Before I detail my theory of artistic appreciation and of core artistic value, a survey of analyses of artistic value is in order. Charles Taliaferro concludes an account of what makes good art with the following remark:

Artistic merit seems a matter of many factors including imaginative creativity, the virtues of communication and expression, truths in works of art, judgments of good and evil, possible religious and scientific value, and the distinctive goods of aesthetic texture, the sublime, and the beautiful (Taliaferro, 2001, 101).

This is a varied list, and many values listed in this quote are not specific to art. Artistic value is the value of an artwork in virtue of its being a work of art. A question that naturally arises is whether there is any kind of artistic value that all and only artworks have. This might be different from the value an artefact has in virtue of being a certain kind of artwork because a particular art form may typically include values (e.g., moral or didactic) that are required for it to count as that kind of work and yet contingent with respect to the fact that the object is art. For example, works in a certain genre of literature may be valuable in part because of their power to promote a particular moral message or ideology—morality plays, for instance—but these values are not values that are essential to art per se. Non-art can also effectively serve those ends. In order to defend a distinct notion of artistic value, we need to distinguish it from other values that some artwork may have. Additionally, it should be uncontroversial to state that our typical commerce with artworks involves artistic appreciation. But what is the relation between artistic appreciation and artistic value? And what is the relation between artistic and aesthetic value? Further, how do these relate to the other forms of value (moral, etc.) that an artwork might have?

Robert Stecker notes that essentialists about artistic value are committed to the following claims: (1) that artistic value is a unitary value. (2) That this value is distinctive to art only. (3) That this value is common to all art. (4) It is intrinsically valuable in the sense that it is valuable for its own sake (Stecker, 2010, 222). The primary aim of this chapter and the following is to argue for an essentialist conception of artistic value.
This chapter lays the groundwork for a theory of artistic value that I will fully detail in Chapter 6. The structure of this chapter is as follows: In the first section, I consider recent theories of the nature of artistic value. Here I respond to sceptical arguments against the claim that there exists a distinctly artistic value. I also consider positive proposals regarding the value of works of art by Alan H. Goldman and Malcolm Budd. In section two of this chapter, I turn to the phenomenon of art esteem, which is accorded to all items that fall under the category of high art, and which I claim is indicative of the distinctive value of art.

5.1. Aesthetic Value and Artistic Value

In this section I critically examine recent arguments regarding the existence or non-existence of artistic value and—assuming it does exist—its relationship to aesthetic value. Several philosophers defend a notion of artistic value as distinct from aesthetic value (Stecker 2010). But Dominic McIver Lopes argues for a kind of aestheticism: there is no such thing as the artistic value of a work, only aesthetic value and value \( qua K \) (where \( K \) is some art-appreciative practice that the work belongs to) (Lopes, 2011, 2014). In response, Andrew Huddleston (2012) argues that achievement value should be included as part of an account of the value of an artwork. In making this case, he counters Lopes’ arguments against Richard Wollheim’s notion of thematizing activities. In §5.1.1, I argue that Huddleston misrepresents the role of a thematizing activity, thus undermining his criticism of Lopes. Additionally, Wollheim’s original conception of thematization has greater utility than Huddleston recognises. In §5.1.2, I argue against Louise Hanson’s (2013) contention that we are making a category mistake when we class “artistic value” as the same kind of thing as the other values on Lopes’ list. I will show that her observations instead suggest that we are in need of a theory of artistic value as a functional value. Lastly, in section §5.1.3, instead of attempting to characterise artistic value, Robert Stecker (2012) proposes a test for it. This test meets dogged criticism by Julian Dodd (2014). I argue that Stecker can avoid Dodd’s criticisms.

As a preliminary step, let us briefly consider how aesthetic value and artistic value are employed in the existing philosophical literature.

There is considerable debate about the nature of aesthetic value. Several theorists argue that some forms of aesthetic pleasure are grounded in our biological nature (Dutton,
Theorists differ as to what features might count as the aesthetic properties of a work, which provide its aesthetic value. Paradigmatic aesthetic properties include the beautiful and the sublime (Zangwill, 2007). Some aesthetic theorists emphasise the formal composition of a work, while others extend aesthetic properties more broadly to other perceptible properties of a work. Also, many theorists include additional aesthetic properties like daintiness, dumpiness, garishness, and more recently, disgust (e.g., Sibley, 1959; 2001; Korsmeyer, 2011). Narrow conceptions of artistic value restrict themselves to those properties that I have just mentioned—or subsets thereof.

Some defenders of the aesthetic theory claim that an art appreciator must be appropriately psychologically distanced in order to obtain an aesthetic experience (Bell, 1913 [1958]; Fry, 1909 [1930]; Stolnitz, 1961). George Dickie rebutted various examples of disinterestedness that were used by defenders of aesthetic attitude theory by showing that typical examples of purported improper psychological distance were really cases of not paying attention to the relevant features of the artwork (Dickie, 1964). This leaves open a question of what features, exactly, someone should be paying attention to, and how attending to these relevant features might contain value.

Additionally, some theorists assume that aesthetic properties supervene on non-aesthetic properties (Goldman, 1995). But things get complicated: it turns out that the category of art—genre, style, etc.—that we perceive a work in affects the perceptible properties of a work (Walton, 1970, p. 347). Further, even a difference in what we think is represented in a work can affect aesthetic ascriptions (Danto, 1964).

There is a further question of the extent to which our aesthetic responses are affected by cognitive processes. Accurate representations of vomit or faeces may arguably elicit a “transparent” disgust response based on a sensory trigger, but cases of moral disgust are cognitively grounded (Contesi, 2015). There are other properties that are sometimes contrasted with aesthetic properties in that they require the appreciator to think about the
semantic content of symbols, themes, allusions to or quotations of prior works, and attending to the skill employed by the artist in creating this work, in this particular genre, with this particular medium, and so on. Note that sometimes the phrase “aesthetic properties of a work” might be used in a broad sense to include all of the properties that I have just mentioned. This should suffice for a brief description of aesthetic value and issues about its nature.

Alan H. Goldman argues that the ordinary concept of art implies aesthetic value or aesthetic experience (Goldman, 1995, 2). Moreover, this valuable experience provides an explanation of why Fine Art deserves to be experienced. He claims that various sources of value in a work interact and that “This interaction creates fully engaging and intensely significant experience of these elements and works” (Goldman, 1995, 7-8). Goldman argues that base (non-evaluative) properties are the cause of particular evaluative, aesthetic responses in ideal viewers. In this way, aesthetic properties are response dependent. He says the following:

All three functions of aesthetic judgments—objective (or assertive), expressive, and normative—are captured by an analysis of a form that might be used to characterize secondary qualities (such as colors) and moral properties (such as rightness) as well. The form may be schematized as follows:

Object O has aesthetic property P = O is such as to elicit response of kind R in ideal viewers of kind V in virtue of its more basic properties B (Goldman, 1995, 21).

Goldman adds the following remark: “for the aesthetic properties on our list, V will remain relatively constant, but R and B will vary depending on the type of property P is.” Ideal viewers will be “knowledgeable, unbiased, sensitive, and of developed taste (if this involves more than knowledge and sensitivity)” (Goldman, 1995, 21).

The “knowledge” criterion involves knowledge of the relevant type of work, of “contrasting works,” and knowledge of the cultural context in which the work was produced. “Unbiased” means that there is no influence of a personal relation with an artist. “Sensitivity” to aesthetic properties may refer to an ability of sense discrimination in order to avoid circularity, or perhaps the capacity to respond appropriately to paradigm instances of art that
ideal critics should either react to positively, or else be able to furnish reasons for judging negatively (Goldman, 1995, 22).

But there is a tension in Goldman’s theory. He elsewhere states that it is the aesthetic properties of a work that ground the type of work that it is:

We may accept as our basic criterion for identifying aesthetic properties that they are those that ground or instantiate in their relations to us or other properties those values of artworks that make them worth contemplating. If we accept an evaluative concept of art according to which artworks are artifacts that reward sustained contemplation, then aesthetic properties are also those that determine artifacts to be works of art […] and that determine what kinds of artworks they are (Goldman, 1995, 20).

Here is the problem: if the fact that an Object O has an aesthetic property P is reliant on an ideal viewer V who must have knowledge of the relevant kind of work, then it cannot be the case that the aesthetic property (P) determines the kind of work that it is, as Goldman claims. Goldman can’t have it both ways. It is worth remembering Danto’s (1964) and Walton’s (1970) point that we cannot attribute aesthetic properties to a work without an understanding of the kind of work that it is. It is only when we know the kind of work that it is that we can begin to identify the particular properties given the background knowledge of conventions of works of that type.

More recently, Goldman has admitted that his account of aesthetic value does not account for all that is valuable about an artwork as an artwork (Goldman, 2006, 333). One example of this is the historical importance of a work. But he responds by saying that some content of a work that is typically regarded as non-aesthetic (e.g., moral content) may be aesthetically relevant if it “contributes to or detracts from the richness of the experience of a work by prompting or blocking full responses to it” (Goldman, 2006, 338). This draws some effects of works into experiences of the content of the work and thus makes these effects contribute to its aesthetic value. If some knowledge gained from the content of the work fails to change how the content of that work is perceived and the affective response to that work, then it is not an aesthetic value.

On the theory of artistic value I propose, we can afford to set aside the question of whether some characteristic employed in an artwork has its (aesthetic) pleasure or displeasure
ultimately caused by nature or nurture. This is because the artistic value of an artwork depends on social facts about the reception of the work, regardless of the biological or social psychological mechanisms employed in establishing those facts. (This claim is not meant to detract from the value of investigations into the nature of aesthetic properties.)

Let’s say that there is a fact that some property $P$ of work $X$ is beautiful (or some other aesthetic quality) in cultural context $C$. If the beauty of property $P$ is due to biological causes then there is a good chance that this property might also be beautiful for humans in social contexts outside of context $C$. But if the ground of the beauty of property $P$ is due to features of the culture, then it might not be beautiful outside of cultural context $C$. But—according to ontological contextualism—the social facts that relate to the artistic value an artwork has are established in the socio-historical context of origin. Further, aesthetic properties are employed by artists for some end—e.g., objects with culturally durable pleasurable aesthetic qualities might be employed in a work that ultimately cautions us against morally corrupt practices involved in producing such objects. If this is true, then the lesson to learn is that, given that many other qualities of artworks are grounded in the culture of origin—conventions of art forms, for instance—we will always need to relativise our assessment of a work to the culture of origin when considering the artistic value of that work.

Also, I am not claiming that aesthetic properties are not important when discussing the value of an artwork. I am instead stating that such properties are employed by the creators of artworks for artistic purposes. But we can note here that the aesthetic properties do not exhaust the value of art as art. Moreover, Goldman’s theory offers no method to distinguish value that the work has as art from other values the work may have.

In addition to aesthetic value, an artwork might realise many other kinds of value. Here are some that Dominic McIver Lopes lists: “cognitive value, moral value, therapeutic value, political value, propaganda value, economic value, decorative value, entertainment value, hedonic value, distraction value, prurient value, theological value, communicative value, bragging value, collector value” (Lopes, 2011, 520). Some describe the artistic value of a work as the value of an artwork as a work of art (Carroll, 1996, 226). Robert Stecker notes two arguments that provide prima facie evidence in support of a notion of artistic value as distinct from aesthetic value (Stecker, 2012). First, “there are valuable artworks that lack aesthetic value” (e.g., Duchamp’s Fountain) and second, “even among artworks that have aesthetic value, their value as art is not exhausted by their aesthetic value” (for example, the
value of originality in a work) (Stecker, 2012, 355; Carroll, 1986). The problem for those who defend a notion of artistic value distinct from aesthetic value is to circumscribe the kind of value that belongs to all and only works of art.

5.1.1. Huddleston contra Lopes

Dominic McIver Lopes notes that the notion of artistic value as distinct from aesthetic value has its roots in Danto’s argument from indiscernibles (Lopes, 2011). To illustrate Danto’s argument, a Brillo Box carton is not an artwork, but Andy Warhol’s Brillo Boxes, which are perceptually identical, are art. Thus whatever makes the difference between art and non-art status is not its perceptible properties, and so—assuming that aesthetic properties are perceptible properties—we may exclude aesthetic properties from an explanation of that difference. Lopes adapts Danto’s argument to make a similar point about the value of the objects. One could argue that, if aesthetic properties supervene on the non-aesthetic perceptible properties of the object, then both have the same aesthetic value, and yet Warhol’s Brillo Boxes are more valuable than the everyday kind. So, the argument goes, there is some kind of artistic value distinct from aesthetic value.

Lopes is happy to agree that artworks may have various kinds of values but, he argues, it is trivial to say: “V is an artistic value = V is a value in art” (Lopes, 2011, 521), as this would include any kind of value realised by any work of art as an artistic value. He questions how we might move from this trivial theory of artistic value to a stronger account of characteristically artistic value. He then argues that such a theory is unlikely.

The strategy that Lopes employs is to suggest two models that might provide some insight into artistic value and then he rejects them both, thus concluding that there is no adequate way to account for a characteristically artistic value. Of the two models, Lopes’ argument against art as a thematizing activity is the subject of criticism by Andrew Huddleston (2012). I will now examine this argument because, while I side with Lopes over Huddleston on this matter, it provides a good way of introducing the notion of a thematized activity, which I will put to use in my account of artistic value.\footnote{The other model that Lopes considers is Walton’s theory of categories of art. I will consider this in §5.2.2.}
Gregory Currie (1988) and David Davies (2004) propose theories that explain artistic value as grounded in the achievement of the artist as made manifest in the work. Lopes answers the question of what acts and achievements are artistically relevant by recourse to Richard Wollheim’s notion of thematizing activity (1987). Wollheim’s account of thematizing activity is guided by the following thought regarding painting: “For what makes a painting a painting is what the artist does, not what he says. It is what he does that matters” (1987, 15). Further, “Corresponding to each description of an action is a thought, and an action is intentional under a certain description if what guides the person’s action is the corresponding thought. A thought guides an action when it both causes it and forms its character” (Wollheim, 1987, 18). “Thematization” is defined as the “process by which the agent abstracts some hitherto unconsidered, hence unintentional, aspect of what he is doing or what he is working on, and makes the thought of this feature contribute to guiding his future activity” (Wollheim, 1987, 20). By means of this psychological process, some aspect of the activity gains significance. Not only does thematization explain how general features of a practice develop so as to be able to convey meaning, it also extends to account for the development of an individual artist’s style. Moreover, the process of thematization is for some end—aesthetic pleasure, for instance—and endows a medium with meaning, making it intelligible (Wollheim, 1987, 21-22). Lopes illustrates this as follows: “Painting is a thematizing activity because a painting is intelligible as the product of an activity of marking up a surface to support seeing-in. Accordingly, an achievement in painting is one realized by marking up a surface to support seeing-in” (Lopes, 2011, 531). But, Lopes argues, art is not a thematizing activity, as such. This is because, “artists have no inert materials that they can make to carry meaning except the materials of some art form or genre” (Lopes, 2011, 532). Painting, theatre, music and the other arts are all thematizing activities with media that can be manipulated for the purposes of appreciating artistic achievement. And there are no additional art resources to be thematized over and above what is available in the individual arts, he claims.

Now, Lopes would agree with Huddleston’s comments that appreciating an artistic achievement typically involves appreciating it as an achievement in some more specific art practice, where that practice constitutes a thematizing activity (Huddleston, 2012). But where they disagree is over Huddleston’s further assertion that art itself is a thematizing activity. Huddleston suggests that Wagner’s invention of the Gesamtkunstwerk—works integrating both music and drama—is a counterexample to Lopes’ supposed claim that an art-
subordinate thematizing activity is always required for an artwork (Huddleston, 2012, 709). This is because Wagner did away with existing art categories in constructing these works, and yet he created art. The fact that Wagner created art while eschewing existing art practices suggests to Huddleston that art itself is a thematizing activity.

In order for this example to work, Huddleston seems to assume that a thematizing activity is synonymous with an established (artistic) practice—but this is not the case. Wagner was fairly well-known for his Schopenhauer-inspired philosophical essays about art and culture before he was known as a composer. We can make two observations: these essays point to a conscious effort by Wagner regarding the considered use of the various media available to him for the purposes of conveying meaning in his artworks. Even though it is not indicative of a practice, the intentional activity accords with Wollheim’s characterising a thematizing activity as “internal,” or grounded in the psychological states of the artist. Second, from a perspective external to the artist, Wagner’s essays in the philosophy of art—including “The Art-Work of the Future” (1849 [1895])—provides cognitive scaffolding for an audience’s appreciation of the signified meaning he intended as well as the artifice achievement manifested in Wagner’s works. Thus Wagner does not constitute a counterexample to the idea of thematizing activity, but instead is a vivid illustration of it.

Huddleston then moves on to a more serious argument. He claims that Wollheim intends the notion of thematizing activity to play the following role: “by way of the agent’s psychological states, to separate the person who produces a painting as a work of art from the person who simply, perhaps even unintentionally, produces a painting that is not a work of art” (Huddleston, 2012, 709). Huddleston then goes on to argue that if he is cooking dinner for friends, then he could intentionally be involved in the activity of cooking and, at the same time, the activity of being a good friend. Both cooking and being a good friend involves practices, tacit norms and actions that are intelligible to the agent. Thus, Huddleston argues, we should think of both as thematizing activities. Further, by analogy, when painting, an artist is also simultaneously engaged in the thematizing activity of making art (Huddleston, 2012, 709-712).

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56 The Wagner example might make problems for Lopes in a different way—if Lopes is dependent on the categorisation of an artwork within an artistic practice in order for it to be art then the idiosyncratic music drama kind produced by Wagner does not itself seem to be part of a practice. There is a way out, though, as Lopes might subsume Wagner’s music dramas under operatic practices.
This argument seems to neglect a very important role that thematizing activity plays for Wollheim. He states that the spectator, when attempting to understand a painting, “must be attuned to the intention of the artist where this includes [...] the desires, thoughts, beliefs, experiences, emotions, commitments that motivate the artist to paint as he does” (Wollheim, 1987, 44). One of the roles that Wollheim has for “thematization,” in the context of painting, is that it is meant to be useful to the appreciator for their understanding of what was done in the production of the painting, thus allowing evaluation of the achievement of the artist. Given that Huddleston is arguing for the relevance of achievement value, it is unfortunate that he overlooks this role of thematization.

It is in this respect, then, that Huddleston’s description of the activity of “being a good friend” provides incomplete information for the purposes of determining the significance of the agent’s actions. Armed with only this description, and not knowing that the agent was engaged in cooking, the observer is in a state where they are, as it were, blocked from engaging in mind reading—in the psychological sense. They are not in a position to infer proximate goals and desires, nor could they potentially predict the actions that might occur next. But something like this is what is expected from a thematizing activity; it allows movements and accompanying thoughts to be understood as meaningful actions. The agent’s actions are meaningful under the description of “cooking” and so this is a thematizing activity. However, the same actions are not intelligible under the sole description of “being a good friend”, which excludes this from counting as a thematizing activity.

Let us apply this to the art case. Presumably, in order to appreciate the achievement value of a work, we need to be in a position to reconstruct what was done in the production of that work. But there is definitely not enough information to have any sense of the achievement involved if we are merely told that some artefact is art. Is the video some kind of art film or is it only documentation of a performance? Is an item meant to be painting or is it sculpture (consider Walton’s Guernicas)? The more specific the description of the kind of practice of which some item is a product, the more fully we might appreciate the artistic achievement. The fact that something is a painting or a performance can give us some guidance regarding the evaluation of artistic achievement, whereas simply identifying something as art does not. Thus “art” is not a thematizing activity in Wollheim’s sense. Though there are thematized activities that are arts.
Another point of contention by Huddleston is that Lopes’ aesthetic value of art depends on artistic achievement. He compares a masterpiece painting, Giogione’s *Tempest*, with an identical painting generated randomly by a machine. The first has great artistic value, while the latter does not. He then concludes that “When aesthetic value is a value of art as art, it is only because this aesthetic value has been achieved by an artist” (Huddleston, 2012, 713). Presumably, the achievement value of a work depends on the skill demonstrated by the artist in the production of the piece. I agree that the reactions of curiosity, astonishment, awe or marvel to skill exhibited in a piece are a part of the aesthetic response. But these are more relevant to some arts—namely, the Fine Arts—than others—for example, spaghetti westerns and pulp fiction. So Huddleston’s argument is plausible with respect to Art-with-a-capital-A as opposed to the more humble art-with-a-small-a. (In chapter 6, I will clarify the relationship between appreciation of achievement based in thematized activity and artistic value.)

5.1.2. Hanson contra Lopes

Next, I consider three arguments by Louise Hanson for the position that artistic value is not a value of the same kind as the others on Lopes’ list of values realised by art. Her aim is to argue that talk of artistic value, unlike other kinds of value, entails no philosophical commitments in excess of recognising that there can be good art. Her first argument appeals to redundancy: if someone answered the question: “what makes something good art?” with the answer “artistic value,” the response would not add any further information (Hanson, 2013, 499). This suggests to Hanson that there is nothing more to the term than being good art. But, in response to Hanson, I agree that what makes the answer unsatisfactory is its un informativeness, but redundancy is only one possible explanation for this. Consider the following. Hanson takes moral value to be a bona fide value. But responding to the question “what makes something a good act?” with “its moral value” is similarly uninformative without some further account of moral value. Similarly, an informative answer to the art question calls for a more precise theory of artistic value that can explain what makes for good art. More precisely, given the various values on Lopes’ list that an artwork may realise and which do not contribute to its goodness as a work of art, we are interested in a theory of what makes a work of art good as art.
Hanson’s second argument is that *artistic value is held only by artworks*. If artistic value is a value akin to the rest on the list, she argues, art status should not affect whether something has artistic value (Hanson, 2013, 499-500). Her observation that only art has artistic value is a plausible one. But it suggests to me that artistic value is a functional value—that is, it is a value that belongs to art by virtue of it being used in a particular way—namely, I suggest, for the purposes of artistic appreciation. Some object might offer some affordance for some end—that is, it has properties that may be useful for serving some end—but that does not necessarily mean that the object has that affordance-employed-for-some-purpose as a value *qua* the kind of object it is. The artistic affordances of video games, ancient Greek vases, etc. may be drawn out by placing them in an art gallery context where the objects are meant to function to reward artistic appreciation. But the use of these affordances for appreciation does not necessarily realise a value of video games *qua* video games or Greek vases *qua* Greek vases as per their original context of use.57 We might also point to objects that are not artworks and yet comment on how artistic they are—thus indicating some artistic affordances that might, in other contexts, count as artistic value for that object. Further, it might be that other values in Lopes’ list of values are functional values that are incidentally realised in the course of engaging with some art. Consider, for example, financial value. If what I have said is correct, Hanson’s argument fails to show that artistic value is of a different kind to the other values in Lopes’ inventory.

Finally, taking her previous argument into account, Hanson argues that if artistic value just is what an artwork has to the extent that it is good art then *we are making a category mistake* in talking about artistic value as being on the same level as other kinds of value (Hanson, 2013, 500). I disagree. As I have just said, if artistic value is a functional value then it is of a similar kind as, say, financial value. Hanson is suggesting that, because artistic value seems to include aesthetic value—and possibly other values—that it is of a higher order. I agree with Hanson that aesthetic value, when it is present, will contribute in some way to the artistic value of a work. But this intimate connection does not mean that artistic value is categorically different from other values on the list.

57 For a defence of the non-art status of ancient Greek vases, see Vickers & Gill (1994).
5.1.3. Stecker’s test for artistic value

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Robert Stecker argues that there is good reason to think that there is such a thing as artistic value as distinct from aesthetic value (though aesthetic value may constitute part of artistic value for some works). He states:

…on my view, artistic value derives from what artists successfully intend to do in their works as mediated by functions of the art forms and genres to which the works belong. Here is a test I have proposed elsewhere that captures this: does one need to understand the work to appreciate its being valuable in that way? If so, it is an artistic value. If not, it is not. (Stecker, 2012, 357)

Further,

Understanding derives primarily from interpreting artworks and, in particular, on my view, interpreting them for work meaning. This is a matter of discovering what an artist does in a work, usually, though not always, as a result of intending to do just that. (Stecker, 2012, 357)

This is a non-essentialist proposal for identifying artistic value as it doesn’t define what artistic value is. According to this test, cognitive or ethical value may be part of the artistic value of a work if you need to understand the work in order to appreciate this value. Stecker’s suggestion avoids Lopes’ trivialising argument against artistic value—even though Stecker’s proposal is non-essentialist—as it allows us to identify values related only “to what the artist does in the work, or to aims intrinsic to an art form or genre” (Stecker, 2012, 359).

Stecker offers and rebuts a potential counterexample of sentimental value. He considers a couple for whom a song is associated with an important event because of the mood it evoked. In this case, an understanding of the song’s expressive properties is required, so sentimental value seems to pass his test even though this is not an artistic value of the work (Stecker, 2012, 358). Stecker’s initial solution is to claim that there are two components to sentimental value. First is the value of the song for expressing a feeling. Second is “the
special significance of that expression of emotion for a particular couple that is based on the special occasion on which the song was heard” (Stecker, 2012, 358). The second component does not pass the test.

The two-component account of sentimental value is revised by Stecker (2013) in light of criticism by Julian Dodd (2013). Dodd notes that, on Stecker’s theory, it can still be argued that the composite sentimental value is an artistic value because the first component of it does pass the test. Stecker then responds to Dodd by arguing that the two components should be tested separately, equating sentimental value with the second of these. “The fact is that to understand sentimental value, even the specific kind of sentimental value that this song has for this couple, one just has to know that the song is special to them because of the occasion on which they heard it and because they found it to express their mood then” (Stecker, 2013, 289). On this revised account, what was originally considered the first component—the appreciation of the expressiveness of the music—is merely a causal factor of the subsequent sentimental value. Dodd then criticises Stecker’s revised explanation on the basis that mere recognition that something has an artistic value—even if that requires work understanding—is too thin to count as appreciation. In addition, we need to know why (non-causally) the object has that value in order to appreciate it (Dodd, 2014, 402-403). Further, someone not familiar with some (negative) artistic value, for example, kitsch, might be told that an unfamiliar work possesses it. Here testimony is enough to know that a work has some value, but if we run Stecker’s test in these circumstances, kitsch value fails to count as an artistic value (Dodd, 2014, 403-404).

At this point, I want to take a step back and ask whether there was an easier way out for Stecker’s test when he first conceived of the counterexample. Here is my suggestion: any value that is properly a value of the object will be a value that the object itself has as the kind object it is. Again, this is an ontological solution. The work—when considered as the kind of work that it is—does not have sentimental value in Stecker’s original proposed counterexample; this is only a value that exists due to a particular relationship between the work, some event, and the couple. So we can dismiss sentimental value because it does not properly belong to the work in virtue of the fact that it is the kind of work that it is.

In order to maintain his test, Stecker would need to commit to a theory of artefacts that supports the notion of proper function for an artefact, the provision of which would provide a basis for functional value. The notion of proper function would exclude
idiosyncratic uses of the affordances of the work (such as the sentimental value). If artistic value is then posited as a proper function for artworks, then Stecker could say that properties of the work that satisfy his test, as well as the requirements for proper function, properly constitute artistic values.

My suggestion in defence of Stecker’s original proposal preserves his non-essentialism regarding artistic value, preserves a thick notion of appreciation, and renders Dodd’s counterexamples ineffective, thus lending credibility to his test for artistic value. But I think that we can go one better and provide a more informative account of artistic value. In Chapter 6, I argue for an essentialist theory of artistic value.

5.1.4. Budd’s theory of artistic value

Malcolm Budd (1995) argues that we cannot characterise artistic value by examining the concept of art because artistic practices changed radically in the twentieth century. Instead, he focuses on art-with-a-capital-A.

I specify a distinctive value – a value that works of art can possess, and which is possessed to a high degree by all great works of art; I then count an evaluation of a work of art as an evaluation of it as art in so far as the work is being evaluated with respect to the distinctive value I have specified (Budd, 1995, 3-4).

Budd’s project, then, is an explicative account of the value of art. He claims artistic value is “(determined by) the intrinsic value of the experience the work [of art] offers,” where the work of art is understood as the kind of work that it is (Budd, 1995, 4).

For you to experience a work with (full) understanding your experience must be imbued with an awareness of (all) the aesthetically relevant properties of the work—the properties that ground the attribution of artistic value and that constitute the particular forms of value the work exemplifies (Budd, 1995, 4).
Budd makes the further points, first, that artistic value is a kind of experience, not a particular experience and, second, that artistic value belongs to the work, not the experience. Also, Budd claims that artistic value can be realised in many ways.

Artistic value is intrinsic and not instrumental. Instrumental value is a beneficial consequence or effect of the experience of a work, while artistic value is the value of the experience of the work of art itself. Consequently, the artistic value of a work is inextricably tied to the experience of that individual work, while the same constraint does not necessarily hold for any other instrumental values the work may have. Further, Budd claims that the intrinsic value of art, which is distinctive of the artistic value of works, is evidenced by people seeking out repeat experiences from similar kinds of artworks. There is an uncontentious relation, he says, “between people’s experience of a work of art and their later psychological condition and behaviour” (Budd, 1995, 6). Of the Fine Art lover, he says:

But we do have a general knowledge of the kinds of relation that can hold between people’s experience of a work of art and their later psychological condition and behaviour. We know that the gratification some people derive from fine works of art—even the finest works of art—leads them only to seek out the experience of more fine works of art; along other paths, their experience of art is sterile. Such people have an exceptional capacity to isolate or compartmentalize their appreciation of art. At bottom, they are unconcerned that the works of art they admire should affect their lives in any way that will be beneficial to themselves or others. Their approach to art is unreflectively or self-consciously ‘aesthetic’ or sentimental; the denial of this possibility is itself a form of sentimentalism (Budd, 1995, 6-7).

Budd accepts that other values that are not specifically artistic or aesthetic values may contribute to the value of a work of art. “The truth is that artistic value does not exist in a watertight compartment impermeable by other values; on the contrary, other values can be determinants of artistic value, as when a novel’s value is a function of its intelligence, wit, imagination, knowledge and understanding of human life” (Budd, 1995, 10).

A work needs to be experienced with understanding on this account. This does not necessarily require first-hand knowledge as you may form a correct judgment based on the assessment of a knowledgeable critic, or from extrapolating the experience from similar
works (Budd, 1995, 12). Aside from these methods, the viewer should be acquainted with the artwork in the relevant manner and first hand, with understanding, to form a judgment on its artistic value. Budd claims that this flows easily from his description of artistic value as the experience a work of art offers.

Budd concludes that artistic value is intrinsic, sentiment-dependent (but not radically subjective), intersubjective (being justified by reasons), anthropocentric (requiring human sentiments and concerns) and incommensurable (but not incomparable) (Budd, 1995, 43).

There are problems with the notion of intrinsic value. Stecker, for instance, claims that the appreciation of artworks is bound up with other more instrumental goals because “the value of the features and of the works that have them is bound to the value of what they are a means to” and thus artistic value is not intrinsic (Stecker, 1997, 253). If Stecker is right, then appreciating something “for its own sake” or for its “intrinsic value” may simply be disguising a form of instrumental value (or valuing) that is distinctive to the appreciation of artworks. I think this is the case for art. In the case of religious masterpieces, the pleasure of their appreciation is functional in facilitating worship. I will characterise the form of valuing appropriate for artistic value in the next chapter.

Regarding Budd’s anthropocentricity, I can understand that, in a large number of masterpieces that include emotionally charged content, an understanding of human concerns and values is required in order to have an appropriate response to a work. But this is not essential to all kinds of works. Some conceptual works of art do not require a specific understanding of human sentiments—e.g., Joseph Kosuth’s One and Three Chairs (1965). It is conceivable that the intelligence, wit and originality of some works might be appreciated by non-human audiences. If these are appropriate responses to works of art (as I will later argue they are) then anthropocentricity is not an essential element of artistic appreciation, at least for some famous pieces of art.

Budd has eschewed a descriptive account of artistic value in favour of a more revisionist account of artistic value based on masterpieces of traditional Fine Art. The problem with this is that it may simply discount the valuable aspects of a work that do not conform to his circumscribed notion of artistic value. This may be a theoretically convenient approach, but without a descriptive account of artistic value, we will have an incomplete understanding of the appreciation of art—particularly with respect to the more conceptual and avant-garde works of the twentieth century.
5.2. Lopes and the Buck Passing Theory of Value

In his recent book, *Beyond Art* (2014), Dominic McIver Lopes argues that there is no artistic value that is common to all the (Fine) Arts. In this section, I argue—contra Lopes—that art esteem is a value that is inextricably linked to Fine Art practices. The structure of this section is as follows. I begin by showing that Lopes’ arguments for the claim that there is no characteristically artistic value fail to secure that conclusion. I then present my positive argument in three stages. First, I argue that Lopes implicitly acknowledges a kind of additional art value for Fine Art when cautioning against considering everyday appreciative practices as “extraordinary” in the same way that the arts might be. Second, I offer evidence in support of the claim that the distinct character of the high arts involves the attribution of art esteem. Lastly, I defend the position that any claim to the devaluation of non-Western practices due to art appropriation still involves the attribution of art esteem. In the final section I examine the philosophical import of art esteem. I comment on its nature, its role with respect to art’s function of rewarding deep artistic appreciation, and its connection to the evaluative conception of art.

5.2.1. Buck passing, appreciative kinds, and artistic value

In this section I revisit Lopes’ buck passing theory of arts. One central idea endorsed by this approach is that philosophers should not think that there is some characteristic that all artworks have that distinguishes them as artworks. This is what buck stopping theories assume. Similarly, we should not think that there is a characteristic that defines a particular set of appreciative practices as artistic practices. Instead, we can achieve the ends that such theories should serve by means of theories of the individual arts. According to the buck passing theory:

\[ x \text{ is a work of art} = x \text{ is a work of } K, \text{ where } K \text{ is an art (Lopes, 2014, 14)}. \]

An art is an appreciative kind that has gained recognition as one of the arts. Lopes also argues for his buck passing theory of art in preference to buck stopping theories by noting that: “the concept of art was theorized as a classification of activities as art kinds” (Lopes, 2014, 29).
So the early moderns sought what Lopes calls a theory of the arts—a theory that groups certain activities as Fine Art activities. The original theory was Batteaux’s imitation theory of the arts. Batteaux’s theory no longer has any currency, but the grouping of the arts remains and has subsequently been enlarged. On this basis, Lopes argues against the prospects for an informative theory of the arts.

Lopes offers a supplementary theory of the individual arts as appreciative practices that share certain features (for example, the arts are all medium-centred appreciative practices) but those features on their own are not enough to make one of the practices an art.

\( K \) is an appreciative kind if and only if there is a property of being good qua \( K \), or being good-modified for a \( K \), or being good qua \( K^* \) for a \( K \) (Lopes, 2014, 132).

All of the arts are appreciative kinds, but not all of the appreciative kinds are arts. As I previously mentioned, Lopes suggests that appreciative practices attain the status of an art by means of a dialectical process involving the identification of analogies and disanalogies between the aspiring art kind and existing arts. This process may culminate in the admission of an appreciative kind as a new art. Lopes is keen to stress the degree of continuity between the arts and non-art appreciative kinds. He says, “The strategy is to treat the arts alongside the non-arts with respect to what makes them all ordinary” (Lopes, 2014, 124).

Works of art, according to Lopes, just are those items that are members of appreciative practices that are art kinds. This last claim distils the essence of Lopes’ buck passing theory of art.

Regarding value, Lopes claims that “art criticism essentially involves the assessment of art works’ value” (Lopes, 2014, 83). The informativeness of the buck passing theory is defended because it “entrusts the task of grounding criticism to theories of aesthetic value and to theories of value in the arts” (Lopes, 2014, 83). Further, Lopes argues that “there is no characteristically artistic value. There is only aesthetic value and the values that works bear as members of specific art kinds” (Lopes, 2014, 83). What does Lopes mean by “artistic value”? Characteristically artistic value, according to Lopes, is “neither aesthetic value nor a disjunction of the value that works have as members of specific art kinds (paintings, songs, and the like)” (Lopes, 2014, 83). The use of “characteristic” in the form of an adjective leaves it an open question as to whether Lopes means a value that all artworks have, or a value that all and only artworks have. Lopes states that “Artistic value… is value as art, or value that an art work has by its nature” (Lopes, 2014, 89). One way to construe an artistic value is as a value that is common across all of the arts. Lopes notes that Noël Carroll endorses this “common denominator” view of artistic value when Carroll states that any value that is not a
value in all artworks is not an artistic value (Lopes, 2014, 89; Carroll, 1996, 226). Lopes argues that “a broad conception of aesthetic value may serve as a foil to artistic value” (Lopes, 2014, 163). Further, Lopes claims that the appreciation of items in non-art appreciative practices may also involve aesthetic value.

Lopes’ positive claim about work value is that “what is needed to ground criticism is a theory of aesthetic value […] combined with a theory of artistic value that identifies the artistic value of an art with its value as a song, painting, or the like” (Lopes, 2014, 101-102). He then proffers the following buck passing theory of artistic value:

\[ V \text{ is an artistic value of an art work } = V \text{ is a value of the work as a } K, \text{ where } K \text{ is one of the arts} \] (Lopes, 2014, 102).

The buck passing theory does not support the claim that there is a characteristically artistic value because, Lopes says, “it does not imply any substantive unity to the values realized by works in the different arts. Artistic value is the aggregate of pictorial value, musical value, and other such values; it need not be their common denominator” (Lopes, 2014, 102).

5.2.2. Lopes’ arguments against a nonaesthetic, characteristically artistic value

A challenge is raised by Lopes toward those who argue that there is a characteristically artistic value. He first notes that artworks are recognised as being valuable for the purposes for which they were made. This excludes all sorts of other fortuitous ways in which a work may be valuable. He stipulates value in art as follows:

\[ V \text{ is a value in art } = V \text{ is realized in a work of art to the extent that the work serves the purposes for which it was made or distributed} \] (Lopes, 2014, 85).

For the purpose of examining the viability of this position, Lopes entertains what he calls the “trivial” characterisation of artistic value:

\[ V \text{ is an artistic value } = V \text{ is a value in art} \] (Lopes, 2014, 86).

This characterisation gives an extremely long list of artistic values: aesthetic value, propaganda value, moral value, decorative value, etc. But Lopes notes that nobody disagrees that there can be multiple ways in which art is valuable. The challenge for defenders of artistic value is that a stronger conception of artistic value is required in order to make a non-trivial claim that artistic value exists.
Lopes considers and then rejects two models that might assist in identifying a characteristically artistic value. The first is Kendall Walton’s theory of categories of art, and the second is Richard Wollheim’s account of “thematizing activities.” Against the latter, Lopes argues that art is not a *sui generis* thematizing activity, and so Wollheim’s model—and an associated conception of value as achievement according to the conventions of the relevant thematizing activity—does not apply to art in the same way that it might apply to, say, painting or music (Lopes, 2014, 96-100; Wollheim, 1987, 19-23). Insofar as Lopes attempts to apply Wollheim’s model in this manner, I agree with his conclusion.

Of greater interest is Lopes’ consideration of Walton’s categories of art (Lopes, 2014, 92-96). According to Walton, the aesthetic properties that a work has will depend on which properties are standard, variable, or contra-standard for the category of art (media, genre, form, etc.) in which the work is appreciated (Walton, 1970, 339). Lopes advises that Walton’s theory must be retrofitted in order to model artistic value. I take it that this involves maintaining that the conventions of a particular category of art hold certain aims or characteristics to be valuable in a standard, variable or contra-standard way, and that this forms a context for identifying the value(s) that a work of that kind has. Lopes then stipulates that “a work’s value as a K is the value it seems to have when it is correctly appreciated in the category of Ks” (Lopes, 2014, 93-94). Consequently, “A work’s value as art is the value it has when and only when it is compared to all and only artworks” (Lopes, 2014, 94).

But if there is a relatively consistent value that all artworks have in virtue of having art status then, if this counts as a standard property for artworks, it is not necessarily the case that considering works in a class where they can be compared only with other artworks will account for this value. We should note a difference between a work’s value in relation to other works, on the one hand, and a work’s value given the fact that it is an artwork. We should also note that the kind of comparative value that Lopes is suggesting would exclude from consideration such a standard, equipollent, characteristically artistic value, if it exists. Granted, this would not be a typical value that applies to the artistic appreciation of artworks, but if we are interested in finding the values of works of art in virtue of them being works of art then identifying any characteristically artistic value like this should be one of the goals of the thought experiment. One reason why we should be identifying any standard art value of this character is because it bears upon another part of Lopes’ broader project: the comparison of art categories alongside non-art appreciative kinds. The question, of course, is just what the nature of such a value might be.
Lopes claims that the real problem with Walton’s categories is that objects have their value properties *qua* paintings, *qua* music, and so on. We do not appreciate artworks in the broad category art. He asks rhetorically, “What non-aesthetic standard, contra-standard, and variable features individuate the category of art comprising all works of art?” (Lopes, 2014, 96).

Lopes is right about the fact that we do not appreciate works with respect to the category of artworks. But that does not mean that the observations of Walton’s categories of art are not useful. For example, Lopes neglects one prediction of Walton’s theory that might prove informative: if something is standard for a category then if a putative object of that kind is perceived to not have that property—i.e., if it has a contra-standard property—then there will be pressure either to re-categorise the item, or else to modify the category to allow for that property (by making the previously standard property into a variable one). For example, one standard property for art circa 1917 that was revealed by Duchamp’s *Fountain* was the property of being a product of craftsmanship. But this standard property was challenged by means of *Fountain* exhibiting the contra-standard property of being readymade—i.e., by being an already constructed urinal. (Another standard property of art that Duchamp supposedly contravened was the creation and presentation of aesthetic properties. *Fountain* was selected for its visually anaesthetic qualities.) Perhaps we can identify standard properties by examining the claim that some item is not or should not be classed as art? Perhaps there is something in common among those properties that have been considered contra-standard that will indicate the nature of a standard property of art. I will revisit this thought in a later section.

5.2.3. The argument from perceived increased value of everyday appreciative practices when viewed as Arts

In this section and the next I argue for the non-aesthetic, characteristically artistic value—at least with respect to the high arts—of art-esteem. First, let’s consider the perceived increase in value as the quotidian attains art status. The observation that everyday objects gain in value in the course of becoming art is reflected in the title of Arthur C. Danto’s book *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981). Danto begins his preface as follows: “A character in Muriel Spark’s novel, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*—Sister Helena of the Transfiguration, who once was Sandy Stranger, a Glasgow teenager, disciple, and rogue—is described as having written a book called *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*” (Danto,
He says that this title also reflected the state of contemporary art practices, particularly with respect to readymades and conceptual art: “transfigurations of the commonplace, banalities made art” (Danto, 1981, v). Similarly, regarding a specific medium, Carolyn Korsmeyer notes that “one earns a bit of stature for food by advancing it as an art form” (Korsmeyer, 1999, 141; see also Saito, 2007, 17-18). But we should note that these comments by Danto and Korsmeyer do not exclude the difference in value being explained by reference to the addition of different kinds of value in each case as the object becomes an artwork or the practice becomes an art form. If there are many different ways in which everyday practices may be transfigured into arts by the addition of diverse values—perhaps by attributing different kinds of significance to existing objects in different appreciative kinds, as is suggested by Danto regarding the process of transfiguring readymades—then this would fall prey to Lopes’ trivial characterisation of artistic value. The moral here is that the argument from indiscernibles could potentially have any number of different kinds of values that explain the difference in value between the non-art and art status of an object.

A more promising approach is to consider the regarding of everyday practices as if they are arts. There are some practices where no new signification is added to objects as they are brought into the gallery context. Some examples include recent art gallery exhibitions showcasing videogames, perfumes, as well as the more historical example of the introduction of Greek vases into the gallery. In these cases, movement into art galleries has resulted in greater attention being paid to various properties of these items that might have previously been ignored, taken for granted, or otherwise only superficially attended to. (Examples may include: consideration of the development of style, attention to technique in manipulating the medium and recognition of influences.)

Yuriko Saito observes that referring to something mundane (in other words, a member of an “everyday” category of appreciative kinds) as a work of art implies “that such artistic status somehow elevates the significance of those activities out of the mundane to something special and privileged” (Saito, 2007, 39). Relatedly, she also claims that “As long as art is conceived as something different from our daily affairs, even if it is meant to illuminate or emulate some aspects of our everyday life, it has already acquired a special status, not shared by our everyday life itself” (Saito, 2007, 35). Lopes concurs with Saito’s observations regarding the special status of art: “one way to mark the importance of an activity is to call it an art, even when it is better not to” (Lopes, 2014, 122).

Viewing items in an everyday appreciative kind as members of an art may involve the exclusion of consideration of some other, more utilitarian functions of that artefact. In Lopes’
words, “An art-centred approach to appreciation is partial and incomplete” (Lopes, 2014, 123). In the absence of any other factors, this would seem to count as a diminishment of perceived value.

Let’s now consider the implications of these comments about regarding everyday practices as if they are arts. We have said that in the case of regarding an appreciative practice as an art, some utilitarian functions may be removed from consideration. If a valued function is later excluded from the value of the item qua appreciative kind by means of considering it as a work of art, then—on the face of it—we would expect the value of the item to be decreased or, at best, unchanged. But, as a matter of observation by both Saito and Lopes, the items have an increased value (“elevated significance”, “importance”) when viewed as members of arts. We seem to be missing an account of an art-kind-premium value—let’s call it the φ-value—that would cause the item to become more valuable. But just what is this φ-value?

One response that Lopes might make is to say that the increase in value for items in an appreciative kind that attain art status can be attributed to an increase in aesthetic value. This would preserve Lopes’ claim that there is no further value qua art beyond aesthetic value and value qua Ks. But this seems implausible. There are theories about functional beauty that may explain some increase in value by means of aesthetic interaction with non-aesthetic, functional properties. But in attaining art status, it has been claimed that items in these kinds may lose functions, so this would again suggest a diminution of value. Further, even if experiencing the increase in value were to require an aesthetic judgment, we do not require an aesthetic judgment in order to judge that a work of art gains φ-value. On Lopes’ experiential account of aesthetic judgment—or α-judgment in his terminology—“an α-judgement is not transmissible from person to person except through an image or similar surrogate” (Lopes, 2014, 175). This is because, according to Lopes, the representation of the aesthetic property of an object is inseparable from the representation of the responsible non-aesthetic properties. But we do not need to experience a representation of the object in order to judge that it has φ-value. Thus, whatever the proper characterisation of φ-value, a judgment of its attribution is not an (experiential) aesthetic judgment.

The other possible response is that φ-value is just a value qua K. Indeed, if we accept Lopes’ contention that all there is to valuing an item in an appreciative kind, K, is aesthetic value and value qua K, then this is the only available category. But our observation is that the

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58 See S. Davies (2006a); also Parsons & Carlson (2008).
set of values that constitute value \textit{qua} K changes for an appreciative kind merely in virtue of viewing it as an art. And this addition to value-qua-K means that there seems to be a value that would be common to everyday appreciative kinds upon ascension to art kinds in the absence of any other factors: \( \varphi \)-value. In the next section I will defend the suggestion that this \( \varphi \)-value is explained by “art esteem.”

5.2.4. Art esteem as a characteristic value of the Arts

I have argued that viewing everyday practices as arts involves the attribution of a further value: art esteem. But this is not enough to claim that all of the existing arts share this same value. There seem to be some practices other than the everyday that either do not change very much in importance when considered as an art, or else which are objected to as being regarded as art because that appellation diminishes their value.

Let’s point to some other candidate non-utilitarian appreciative kinds that might seamlessly be counted as arts. Kabuki theatre and Chinese opera seem uncontroversial candidates. Other practices that might fit this criterion include Islamic calligraphy and the chado (or Japanese tea ceremony).

Regarding the Japanese tea ceremony, Saito says: “Although this art form celebrates the mundane, it does so by creating a special setting and occasion for us to contemplate and savor the ordinary” (Saito, 2007, 38). This “special” status is also reflected in the other practices mentioned. They do not seem to gain in status by means of being recognised as arts, nor are they diminished. I suggest that on closer inspection of the arts we will find conventions in these constitutive practices that are constitutive of something analogous to art esteem. In that case, the reason that they do not seem to change in value upon art ascension is because they already bear the esteem that is accorded to the Western arts.

Numerous theorists claim that there is a difference in the level of esteem between non-art practices and art practices. Their observations can help shed light on the nature of art esteem.

According to the historical account of the concept of art as a grouping of practices—an account endorsed by Lopes—all art kinds attained art status around or after the mid-18th century. Lopes endorses two central theses from Paul Kristeller’s “The Modern System of the Arts” (1951; 1952; Shiner 2001). First, “following a long and gradual period of development, a concept of art finally came together in mid-eighteenth-century France” (Lopes, 2014, 25). Second, “the concept was finally crystallized by the articulation of a theory” (Lopes, 2014,
27), namely, Batteaux’s imitation theory of the arts. Lopes notes—following Kristeller—that while the individual arts are ancient, grouping the individual arts together as Fine Arts was new. Lopes emphasises the importance of Batteaux’s theory for the formation of the category of Fine Arts—as a theoretical concept, not a folk concept—but Larry Shiner also notes that an element of esteem was inextricably associated with this concept from its very inception:

The category of fine art and its criterion of refined pleasure and informed judgment was neither a purely intellectual construct nor the simple expression of an existing social division but part of an effort to institute a new distinction at once social and cultural. On this high cultural ground, noble and bourgeois could meet as a fine art public, rejecting both the frivolous diversions of the rich and highborn as well as the vulgar amusements of the populace. […] The new category of polite or fine arts would henceforth serve European and American societies as a crucial marker for a new kind of social refinement and cultural distinction (Shiner, 2001, 97-98).

Jane Forsey argues that “artworks for Kant have a unique content, even a profundity in their attempted depiction of rational ideas…” (Forsey, 2013, 176). Forsey employs a distinction made by Kant to differentiate artworks from design items: “Where [artworks] differ from the dependent beauty of design is that the cognitive content is not directed to our knowledge of purpose (and perfection) but to the—profound, expressive—content this purposive content seeks to convey” (Forsey, 2013, 176).

Forsey is not alone in according a distinguished status to art. Ellen Dissanayake argues that art is a kind of “making special,” along with ritual and play. According to Dissanayake’s positive characterisation of art, it is “concerned with shaping and embellishing everyday ordinary reality so that it becomes extraordinary” (Dissanayake, 1982, 148). Thomas Leddy endorses Dissanayake’s view, and further states that “When the ordinary becomes extraordinary, when it is transfigured, it begins to enter into a space that is perceived as or as like a sacred space” (Leddy, 2012, 76). Leddy later notes that: “‘sacred’ and ‘spiritual’ can be used metaphorically to refer to everyday aesthetic phenomena, especially things that have great personal or group value” (Leddy, 2012, 177).

Leddy notes that the characteristic of the sacred ritual resonates with the Fine Arts. He stipulates his use of the term “ritual” as referring “primarily to religious rites, although it also applies metaphorically to such non-religious practices as ground-breaking ceremonies and to

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59 Though note that Leddy thinks that the ordinary becoming extraordinary is not exclusive to art.
social conventions such as shaking hands” (Leddy, 2012, 74). Further, “Many, perhaps most, tribal societies, both in ancient times and today, have seen ritual as set off from the everyday. Ritual creates a separate sacred space” (Leddy, 2012, 74). Regarding the ritual-like features of Fine Art, Leddy says:

A sign of the closeness of art and ritual can be seen in the fact that some art-forms, for example, the Japanese tea ceremony, consist largely of rituals or ritual-like activity. Many ritual activities are also evaluated by participants in terms much like those of art, although we should not forget that ritual usually has a different purpose than art (e.g., appeasing gods). Moreover, ritual objects often find a place in art museums because of the skill required in their production, their expressiveness, and other art-like qualities. Fine Art museums, in this respect, are similar to churches (Leddy, 2012, 74-75).

Note that Lopes’ comments are consistent with these views. He says: “Calling an activity art has an honorific impact. It singles the activity out as important and especially worthy of attention” (Lopes, 2014, 122). This implies that whatever value is conferred by the honorific appellation “art,” it is a consistent presence among the arts. But if “art” is an honorific, it will at least indicate, if not confer, the value of esteem. Note also that I am not endorsing any particular theoretical justification for why these artefacts are due esteem—as Forsey does in endorsing a Kantian account of the content of art. I am merely arguing for the existence of such a value across the high arts.

Finally, let us consider the situation where non-Western spiritual practices (or other, originally non-art practices) may be perceived to lose their dignity as spiritual objects by being regarded as art. Larry Shiner has the following to say about ritual artefacts from other cultures that are accorded art status—historically under the labels “primitive” or “tribal” art:

The spiritual meanings of carvings made for specific ritual uses are not the same as the spirituality we ascribe to fine art. A Baule carver produces a fearsome helmet mask to be worn in dances to protect his village, but once the mask is isolated in the art museum case, photographed for the coffee-table book, or wrapped in the modern discourse of art, it enters a different system of meanings. Tales of its rich associations may provide a shiver of excitement for the jaded art viewer, but the mask has become,
as Quatremère said of alterpieces wrenched from Italian churches for the Louvre, only art (Shiner, 2001, 273).  

Clearly the original spiritual function of non-Western ritual artefacts is ineffective in the context of the gallery. This would indicate that, even if the objects were treated with a certain degree of esteem by virtue of attaining art status as members of art kinds, this esteem is different in character from other respects in which something might gain esteem. But this situation does not result in the complete removal of esteem. This is a trading of the forms of importance. Insofar as art esteem is a function of practices of the appreciative kind, non-Western artefacts attain Fine Art’s esteem—by being embedded in practices that embody Fine Art esteem—at the same time as they might lose other measures of value.

5.2.5. The nature of Art esteem

Now is a good place to clarify what I mean by art esteem. I do not mean that the work necessarily contains moral content. Nor need the work necessarily endorse a moral message. What I mean is that the conventions of Fine Art practices—and particularly the properties that are relevant to artistic appreciation—ensure that works of art are treated with deference. For example, Saito notes the following way that conservation of the artistic qualities is manifested: “We normally respect the integrity of a work and give it precedence over possible aesthetic improvement” (Saito, 2007, 24). And regarding our engagement with Fine Art, she further observes that “We sit still and quiet during a classical music concert or theater performance, and we look at a painting or sculpture without touching, smelling, moving or holding it” (Saito, 2007, 20). The conventions of Fine Art practices are loaded with actions that are prescribed and proscribed so that the appreciable qualities of works are preserved—“No touching the exhibits!”—or so that works of art are given proper attention—“Turn your phone to silent during the show,” “No late entry to the performance until intermission,” etc.

The role of Fine Art institutions in shaping the way in which we interact with works of art is recognised by Larry Shiner, who states:

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60 This point is explored in greater detail in Feagin (1995).
61 Indeed, Alan Tormey even argues that artworks have rights. See Tormey (1973).
62 There is the example, though, of Monet who defaced several critically acclaimed paintings that were to be exhibited (Oloffson, 2010).
It is only in the eighteenth century that the art museum, the secular concert, and literary criticism take on their modern functions and meanings and spread across Europe. Such institutions embodied the new opposition between fine art and craft by providing places where poetry, painting, or instrumental music could be experienced and discussed apart from their traditional social functions. This institutional separation probably did as much as any number of essays or treatises by intellectuals to establish a distinct category of fine art (Shiner, 2001, 88).

These significant institutional changes helped establish new Western Fine Art practices. We can find other evidence for art esteem in the various activities that occur across the arts. We can see it in the manner of public display of artworks in public and private institutions; the degree of care and attention that is accorded to the works by art critics, art collectors and members of the public who engage in art criticism; the meticulous recording of the provenance of artworks; and so on. Through these sorts of activities, the esteem of art is recognised, and the conventions that ensure art-esteem are maintained. In short, the esteem that is attributed to works in artistic practices is made manifest in observance of the conventions of that practice. That is, art esteem is a function of the conventions of an art appreciative practice. And the conventions that confer art esteem are manifested in analogous ways across the individual arts. We can see that the rules of artistic practices protect and facilitate artistic regard of the works. (I will defend a characterisation of this artistic appreciation in the next chapter.) It will suffice to say, for the time being, that artistic regard may involve paying attention to the provenance of a work; any originality in technique or content; the way content is presented in a medium; aesthetic properties, etc. Given that these rules act primarily in the service of facilitating artistic appreciation, I suggest that what I have been calling art esteem—as a value of artworks—is established by an institutionalised valorisation of art-regard.

The artistic conventions for an art practice—within which art esteem is constituted—are the same conventions that guide the actions of artists in the production of a work in that practice. The decisions that artists make with respect to subject matter, consideration of the venues in which their work will be presented, consideration of the potential forums for discussion of their work, etc., all bear on the production of works. And typical subject matter, art venues and forums may involve conventions that confer art esteem. Most of the

63 Note that, while I discuss Western Fine Art in this section, art esteem is a necessary indicator of art-with-a-capital-A practices in all cultures.
time these conventions are not explicitly raised as part of the content of a work, but in some cases artists will acknowledge them for the purposes of critiquing this esteem and its institutional manifestations. (Consider, for example, the performance art of Andrea Fraser.) The choice of a urinal for Duchamp’s *Fountain* was not inconsequential—it was intended to mock the esteem of the art world. Saito notes, regarding revolutionary art that “Their very subversiveness, novelty, or irony is possible *only if* they are interpreted within the context of the prevailing practice of the artworld” (Saito, 2007, 35).

All that I have said so far in arguing for the existence of art esteem may be considered a matter of sociological observation. However, in the remainder of this section, I provide some philosophical reflections on the nature of art esteem and its implications for the value of works of art *qua* artworks and for the evaluative conception of art.

As I have already mentioned, it should be clear that institutionalised art esteem is not a value of art in a sense that indicates the value of the given work in contrast to the value of other artworks. Because of this, it is not a constituent part of the value of a work that is evaluated by means of artistic appreciation *per se*. Consequently, one may object that I am describing a trivial value of art. But this is mistaken. There is at least one pragmatic reason and two philosophical reasons why we should take art esteem seriously.

First, the pragmatic reason: I agree that if our interest was only in comparing artworks, art esteem would have very limited application. But, as I have already said, Lopes intends for his account of appreciative practices to compare art practices alongside non-arts. And with this sort of comparison, art esteem can be of relevance, especially when comparing the arts with those everyday practices that are not accorded an equivalent esteem. Art esteem can make the difference between, on the one hand, a non-art, everyday artefact *being valuable for the purposes of* deep artistic appreciation (i.e., this is not a value *qua* the artefact kind it is), and, on the other hand, an art object having value for the same purpose *qua its status as an artwork*.

The explanation of this pragmatic reason relies on what I take to be the first of the philosophical point of interest. A common mistake, I think, is to believe that just because some object has affordances for some function, that this object is valued for these properties *qua* the kind (category) of artefact that it is. But we should be aware that an object having a particular affordance is not sufficient for its having a value *qua* that kind of object due simply to the potential, or adventitious, use of that affordance. Some objects may be constructed in a way that offers certain affordances only because that is what things of that kind are like. This might be the result of a scenario where the properties that we would deem artistic in the art
context are—in the originating practice—highly derivative or stereotyped—in other words, where objects of this kind without these particular qualities would be regarded as defective as objects of that kind. In these circumstances, these artistic affordances need not be paid much attention by users. An object may have value for a particular ad hoc use that those affordances provide. But, this would be on a par with a screwdriver being valuable for holding a door open—it is simply an affordance of the object put to use for an ad hoc purpose—which does not constitute a value of the screwdriver qua screwdriver. Only when the use to which an affordance can be put counts as a function for that kind of object does the artefact have value for that quality qua that artefact kind. Art esteem is indicative of the fact that it is a function of artefacts that belong to institutions of the arts that they reward a replete form of artistic appreciation because this aim is constituted by institutional rules that specify the use of artworks for that purpose.

Consider Greek vases again. In the original context they were functional objects that were ornamental; their primary function was as vessels, not as objects for artistic regard. At this point they did have affordances that would reward artistic regard, and so were artistic. Moreover, they would be bad as the kinds of things they were if they did not reward that kind of regard. This is because they were probably imitations of more expensive, elaborate artefacts. This means that these affordances were guaranteed by virtue of the kind of artefact they were. But in the course of their typical use these artistic qualities would be given superficial artistic regard as the vases were seemed to be treated as ornamental implements for storing or pouring liquids. But when considered as artworks their artistic properties are given far greater interest—they function like art.

For cases like those of Greek vases, the conventions of the art institutions place the art audience in the role of what would, outside of the institution, probably be the domain of those who have intimate knowledge of the craft: the enthusiast, connoisseur, aficionado, master craftsman, or collectors in that field. And these exceptional categories of folk take a supererogatory interest in the object as the kind of object that it is. The qualities of the objects and their histories were always present in the object, they were just not typically given much attention. Part of the institutional esteem accorded to artefacts by placing them within art institutions means that their (artistic) qualities matter. In the art context, skill in artistic appreciation is the marker of proficient use, and art audiences may be better or worse at appreciating artworks. The skill of these audiences in appreciating the artefacts that belong to the arts is not supererogatory, but indicates mastery of engagement with the artworks as artworks.
An important feature of art esteem is that it is a motivator for the public to engage with items for the purposes of greater-than-superficial art regard. It acts like a promissory note in the respect that audiences will be rewarded by engaging with the artefact for the purpose of artistic appreciation. Insofar as art esteem is a reason for an individual to voluntarily choose to engage with an artefact—i.e., to give the object artistic regard rather than walk past it—then that motivating cause is a value that the object has. By virtue of art institutional rules, items that belong to the arts have art esteem value conferred upon them.

This value is dependent on the confidence of the spectators that their engagement with the work for the purposes of artistic appreciation will be rewarded. But this doesn’t undermine the claim that art esteem is a value of the work. Let’s make a comparison with money. Money just is a promissory note but this value is mostly detached from the precious metals that used to underwrite its value; instead, money has value based on the mechanisms of the currency market. Similarly, the value of art esteem is based in the degree of confidence that the work will reward the time and effort expended in artistic appreciation. 64

A potential objection to this suggestion is that we do not need art esteem to motivate the audience to appreciate the work because this motivation is already accounted for by the properties of the object that reward artistic appreciation. But, as I have noted regarding some everyday practices, there may be affordances that support artistic appreciation that are only typically given superficial attention. Art esteem, by contrast, prompts users to engage in deeper artistic appreciation with these objects in the art context.

Another possible objection is that if art esteem counts as a value because it vouches for an artefact of that kind satisfying a function of artworks of that kind, then, by parity of reason, we should also have screwdriver esteem as a value of screwdrivers, and so forth. But the explanation of the difference between the artwork case and the screwdriver case is that art esteem provides motivation to engage voluntarily with artworks by executing their function—we choose to go to the gallery over other activities—whereas the value of the function of the screwdriver is manifested only for instrumental purposes—we employ the function of screwdrivers in the service of some other goal. Engagement with screwdrivers as screwdrivers—e.g., to tighten and untighten screws—is instrumentally motivated, not self-motivated. There is no institutionalised esteem for screwdrivers.

64 Note that I have claimed that art esteem is a value but I have not committed to any particular theoretical justification for why it should be valued. My interest here is in the implications of the existence of such a value for artefacts in the arts and other appreciative kinds.
This is not to say that art esteem is limited to non-instrumental artefacts. Sometimes art esteem is employed in the service of other, more instrumental goals. Even in these kinds of scenarios, art esteem can act as a (supplementary) motivator and, in some instances, make more palatable activities that might otherwise take place with a greater degree of resistance (e.g., furthering didactic, propagandistic, or spiritual purposes, etc.). The point being that art esteem in these contexts still motivates and facilitates voluntary engagement.

A third potential objection is that art esteem might be a value of the institution rather than a value of the work. But, in response, the value of art esteem must be connected with the work in order for it to realise the function that belongs to that kind of artwork—namely, rewarding deep artistic appreciation in the way appropriate for that art kind. The properties of an artwork that are available for artistic appreciation are not necessarily enough to motivate people to engage in anything more than superficial appreciation. Consider, for instance, the informal “experiment” run by The Washington Post in which classical musician virtuoso Joshua Bell played incognito at L’Enfant Metro station in 2007. Here are the results:

In the three-quarters of an hour that Joshua Bell played, seven people stopped what they were doing to hang around and take in the performance, at least for a minute. Twenty-seven gave money, most of them on the run—for a total of $32 and change. That leaves the 1,070 people who hurried by, oblivious, many only three feet away, few even turning to look (Weingarten, 2007).

I take this to be indicative of the point that art esteem and the depth of audience engagement with an artwork as an artwork are inextricably connected. In this way, art esteem is a value of the work itself.

All that I have said is consistent with Lopes’ idea that artworks have value aesthetic value, and value *qua K*. But, at the same time, it describes a value that is a common denominator for all appreciative kinds that are arts. But note that art esteem means that the value of an item *qua K* is not necessarily the same for items in a non-art practice that becomes an art practice. This is because, as I have explained, what may have been mere affordances for deep artistic regard in the non-art appreciative kind may properly serve functions—rewarding artistic regard—by virtue of being a member of an art kind.

Finally, I move onto the second philosophical point in relation to the evaluative concept of art. The flip-side of art esteem, of course, is that the artworld public do not simply

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65 See David Davies’ arguments regarding religious art and artful pornography in D. Davies (2012).
ignore categories of works that they deem to be unworthy of esteem; they criticise them vehemently. Works of conceptual art have routinely been the target of criticisms that they are “not really art” for such reasons as lacking beauty, not requiring technical skill or effort, or not expressing any worthwhile meaning. It is not just the public who engage in such criticisms, they are even made by artists (Holloway, 2009). These are all criticisms related to whether works in these kinds merit the deference they are given. The criticism seems to be that it is only because the works are displayed within art institutions that they receive any attention at all. Works of contemporary art that bring everyday items into the gallery are deemed to lack the degree of esteem and gravitas requisite for art, and so are more profanities than artworks. Indeed, Leddy cites Ronald Hepburn who holds the view that “one is being profane when one treats something that merits reverence as common and ‘robustly everyday’” (Leddy, 2012, 176; Hepburn, 1999, 177-178; see also Hepburn, 2001, 124-125). This evaluative notion of art kinds is also reflected in the Stuckist art movement manifesto where they state (rather paradoxically) that “Art that has to be in a gallery to be art isn’t art” (Childish & Thomson, 1999). I take these lines of attack on some contemporary art movements as being indicative of recognition that artworks are in practice treated as being worthy of our esteem and so, I assume, the reasoning is that works of art ought to be worthy of our esteem—rather than simply gaining it by fiat. (There are of course qualities by which works of contemporary art may be valorised: originality, wit, irony, shock, insightfulness, etc. Another consequence is debate about which qualities merit art esteem.) If my claim is right, then the argument of the Stuckists (and sympathisers) can be read as making a revisionist claim that we should count an item’s deserving esteem as a standard property of a work of art. In this debate, I think, we can see here just the sort of dialectic that Walton predicted regarding the contravention of standard properties for an art kind—in this case, art itself: the category can either be modified to include the contra-standard property of a work seemingly not being worthy of esteem by making it a variable property—as some would argue the art world has in fact done (Doonan, 2012)—or else by excluding such items as art, as those who might sympathise with the Stuckists would have it. So a corollary of what I have argued in this section is that an item’s being worthy of art esteem—as a recognised standard property of Fine Art—might explain the phenomenon of the evaluative conception of art.

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66 For example, refer to the arguments of the following online forums: Is modern art real art? (2013) and Malpal (2013).
Now, one problem with art-esteem as I have described it is that a defence of the distinctly art-nature of the esteem is required. That is, I may have described esteem as being commonly accorded to works of high art, pan-arts, but I have yet to explain how such works of art merit esteem in virtue of its nature as art. As things stand, it may be the case that some kinds of works of art are esteemed due to non-art factors—historical significance, financial value, as a marker of social status (perhaps with respect to fashionableness or sensitivity of taste of the owner/appreciator, regardless of whether they actually have these)—so an account of what justifies the esteem accorded to art is required. I provide my positive account of artistic appreciation in the next chapter.
6. Core Artistic Value

In Chapter 4 I analysed artefacts and the attribution of proper function to artefacts. In Chapter 5 I presented arguments in support of the position that artistic value exists, and that it is distinct from aesthetic value. In this chapter I provide a theory of artistic appreciation and artistic value. I do this using the notions of the *artistic attentional strategy* and *core artistic value*. These two ideas are intimately linked. The artistic attentional strategy is the proper form of engagement with an artwork that is employed for extracting value from it *qua* the kind of artwork it is. Core artistic value is the kind of value that an artwork has *qua* a work of art. It is also distinct from aesthetic value.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In §6.1. I characterise the artistic attentional strategy. In §6.2. I explain core artistic value and relate it to other values that art may have.

Before I specify my theory of artistic value, I will outline various desiderata that a theory of artistic value should satisfy. Malcolm Budd states that the following three questions about artistic value require an answer: First, what is it that individuates artistic value from other forms of value? Second, what is the status of artistic value (relative or absolute, subjective or intersubjective, real or projected)? And third, how do we gain epistemic access to the artistic value of a work (Budd, 1995, 3)?

Fourth, some account is required to explain why particular features of a work are relevant for artistic appreciation. I.e., what features of an artwork should we be attending to when we appreciate artworks as artworks and why? Alan H. Goldman puts the problem this way:

…if the concept of art is an evaluative concept, then there is this burden of explaining how the central features of artworks, whether representational, expressive, or formal, contribute to the values derived from contemplating and appreciating the works (Goldman, 1995, 3).

Fifth, some works are regarded as being artistically better than other works. Such comparisons are even made between works in different art forms. A theory of artistic value
might also reasonably be expected to provide some guidance on the evaluation of art. For example, imagine that we have an option of several artworks in front of us. We have been entrusted by a large random group of people to select the most artistically valuable work for preservation. How might we go about this selection process?

Sixth, does the account respect the phenomenology of art appreciation? Goldman describes the phenomenology of artistic evaluation as involving a gestalt judgment about the overall goodness (the artistic value) of a work of art. When we are asked to justify our judgment, we point to certain specific features of the work that either provide some positive contribution to the work as a whole or that contribute in a negative way to the work (Goldman, 1995, 132-143).

Seventh, if the theory is meant to apply to all art, can it account for the appreciation of genre-defining works, e.g., Duchamp’s Bottle Rack (1914)? Lastly, eighth, given that art exists in non-Western cultures, can the theory be applied in varied cultural contexts?

There are undoubtedly more questions that we could ask of a theory of artistic appreciation. But the above should provide good preliminary tests for theoretical adequacy.

6.1. The artistic attentional strategy

Previously, in Chapters 3 and 4, I developed a theory for describing artefacts within a context of social practices. Given this framework, I now want to focus on characterising the specific form of engagement that is distinctive to artworks, the artistic attentional strategy, and (later, in §6.2) the associated kind of value that is distinctive to artworks, core artistic value.

The aim of this section is to describe the artistic attentional strategy. This is a general account of the form of regard proper to all works. Budd focused on the appreciation of masterpieces of Fine Art, as was mentioned in the previous chapter. My target is a broader notion of art, including mass and popular art, as well as folk art.

The project of characterising artistic regard is not new. David Davies, for instance, has defended a neo-Goodmanian form of regard (D. Davies, 2007, chapter 1; 2011, chapter 1; 2012; Goodman, 1968, 252-255; 1978, 67-69). Davies characterises artistic regard as follows:
In the case of the art object, it is intended to function as a means of representing, expressing, or exemplifying certain things. Suppose, in order to have a general expression in terms of which we can relate different art forms to one another, we call the entity which serves as the means whereby such functions are performed the 
*artistic vehicle.* [...] We can then characterize the representational, expressive, and exemplificational functions performed by the artistic vehicle as the artistic content which it serves to articulate. We have seen that the artist presents the artistic vehicle with the intention that it articulate a particular artistic content. [...] We have also seen that, in so doing, the artist relies upon certain understandings shared with her intended audience. She assumes that the audience will know that it is supposed to treat the object in particular kinds of ways. This involves a certain degree of attention to the artistic vehicle, an interest in which properties it exemplifies, an assumption that there is a more general ‘point’ behind the vehicle’s manifest properties, and that this point is being made by means of the piece’s more obvious representational, expressive, and exemplificational properties. Finally, we have seen that the shared understandings upon which the artist relies may include knowledge of other artworks either by same artist or by other artists whose work has related goals (D. Davies, 2007, 12-13).

Jerrold Levinson (2005) endorses a partial characterisation of the interest taken in artworks—this has been labelled “L-artistic interest.” According to Levinson, this interest involves attending to the work’s “form and the relation of that form to its content; the way the content has been embodied in the form, the way the medium has been employed to convey the content” (Levinson, 2005, 232). Davies notes that these different kinds of regard do not overlap: “even in the case of art with an artistic primary intended function, we cannot simultaneously both (a) respond aesthetically and emotionally to a work in a way that the artist intended, and (b) take an L-artistic interest in it” (D. Davies, 2012, 76). My account of the artistic attentional strategy is broad enough to accommodate both forms of interest. Moreover, while Davies and Levinson tie their accounts to the intention of the artist, my account depends on social uptake in the form of collective recognition. If the artist’s intentions were to settle the matter, Duchamp’s failed attempt to turn the Woolworth Building into a readymade actually did create an artwork, and Piero Manzoni would have actually made the world his artwork in his *Base of the World* (1961). But both of these
conclusions are not endorsed by art history. My theory has the resources to explain why this is the case.

In order to account for the phenomenology of artistic appreciation as part of our account of artistic value, we need to describe how it is that a competent appreciator can form an informed perception of the goodness of a work and then be able to justify her judgment by use of reasons. John Searle has similarly attempted to account for the structure of epistemically objective social reality. His approach is as follows:

... what then is the correct stance, the correct methodology, for describing the structure of social reality? To start with, in this chapter and the next, I will use a first-person intentionalistic vocabulary to try to lay bare certain elementary features of social ontology. Later ... I will show how some, though not all, of the intentionalistic apparatus can be explained in terms of, and ultimately eliminated in favor of, what I have elsewhere called the “Background” of capacities, abilities, tendencies, and dispositions (Searle, 1995, 5).

I will show that this approach can be fruitfully applied to understanding the appreciation of artworks. I will describe the formal characteristics of the kind of attending that characterises competent appreciation of artworks. The artistic attentional strategy—which I suggest is a necessary stance taken by an art audience when appreciating art as art—is, in its most replete sense, as follows:

The artistic attentional strategy is the activity of arousing a sentiment-response, when engaging with an artefact (typically an artwork), given the collectively recognised constraints of the aims and rules of the applicable thematizing activity, as a consequence of:

(1) [affective:] the causal connection of an appropriate affective state

(1.a) [sensible:] by the perception or apperception of features of intentional activity made manifest in the item

and/or
(1.b) [conceptual:] by the apperception of the content represented by those features (e.g., in response to particular subject matter presented in a novel or poem, in response to a problematic raised by a piece of conceptual art, etc.);

and

(2) [artifice:] attending to the features of intentional activity that are made manifest in the item for the purposes of appraising how such actions achieve the ends of ((1.a) and/or (1.b)).

Our attentional strategies—typically, our reading, listening and viewing strategies—have the above structure when we engage with artworks, I claim. I will next explain the components of this definition. I will begin by describing the informed affective responses to a work that fall under part (1) above. These are the sensible affective component (§6.1.1.) and the conceptual affective component (§6.1.2.). I then characterise part (2) of the above definition, the artifice evaluation component (§6.1.3.). Given these cognitive and affective components, I then describe the all-things-considered, appropriate sentiment-response toward an artwork (§6.1.4.).

I will provide the following cursory comments on this definition which will be defended and elaborated upon in greater detail in this chapter.

The (1.a) “sensible affective” response acknowledges that whatever is being perceived or apperceived is the product of skilled activity. I take skilled activity to be the sort of action that requires reasonable effort to master. The (1.b) “conceptual affective” response allows for artistic value to be obtained through language usage (e.g., as in poetry, novels, recognition of signifying gestures, etc.). The (2) “artifice” component of core artistic value recognises the skill involved in the composition of the item. That skill might involve theoretical expertise exhibited in the composition, creative use of the medium, or the exhibition of mechanical skill. It is an appraisal of the work that the artist has executed in the creation of the item. Any artefact might be appreciated in this way but, if it is not art, it is unlikely to be a standard feature of that kind of artefact.
In filling out the above sections, I will specify a rational reconstruction of the cognitive processes that are essential to appreciating works of art. After much practice with certain categories of artworks, much of the cognitive processing that is involved in the artistic attentional strategy will become habitual. In §6.1.5, I will complete the theory by explaining the relevance to this account of both the appraisal theory of emotions and of John Searle’s theory of the Background.

Before I proceed, we need to revisit Richard Wollheim’s notion of a thematizing activity that I described in §5.1.1 (Wollheim, 1987, 19-25). The notion of thematizing activity is broad enough to account for many forms of creative acts in art and outside of it. Wollheim discussed the notion in the context of painting, which he took to be a thematizing activity that supported seeing-in (“seeing-in” being another of his technical terms). (I will later show that artworks in general support the artistic attentional strategy.) In the case of the artistic attentional strategy, the relevant thematizing activity is that which guides the production of the work. This is because it is traces of this activity that are present in the finished work.

In cases of well-established art forms, an informed audience will be aware of the kind of thematizing activity that an artist has engaged in. Wollheim’s theory of thematizing activity focuses on the productive activity of the designer/artist. But this activity aims at producing something—a performance event, a physical artwork object, a composed set of performance instructions. These are collectively recognised artefacts according to my account of artefacts and function attributions in Chapter 4. In line with this account, it is the collectively recognised aspects of the relevant thematizing activity that constitute the socially objective rules (or conventions) and aims of that activity.

If the thematizing activity involves an established practice, both producers and audiences may be familiar with typical conventions of that activity. Some art objects might require an understanding of theory in order to be appreciated as the type of work that they are, as in the case of some works by Karlheinz Stockhausen, but in other cases we may be suitably informed by acquaintance with the relevant conventions through enculturation. Artefact categorisation—when not sui generis—is important for providing conventions related to how audiences should perceive and obtain meaning from the work. Because of this, in order to apply the artistic attentional strategy appropriately to an artefact like a work of art, we typically need to identify the artefact kind correctly.
Alternatively, if it is a thematizing activity that has rules based on the goals and theoretical interests of the producer, as was arguably the case with Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, then better informed audiences will be familiar with the express constraints and aims of the designer/artist. In this case, the use of the artefact (presumably) in accordance with these intentions will establish the relevant social facts for evaluating that artefact.

So an informed user is one who has knowledge of the thematizing activity associated with the relevant artefact kind, to a level where they would be (or could arguably be) considered competent evaluators of objects that belong to that kind of activity. Also, every person, through the process of enculturation, has the background information and skills to perform the activity of artistic appreciation for at least some forms of art. It must be noted that it is assumed in the following sections that an appreciator always presupposes a thematizing activity of which the work is a product.

Also note that the affective responses that count as belonging to the work must be caused by the properties of the work given any relevant conventions. This excludes idiosyncratic personal associations, for example, a song reminding someone of a particular pleasurable episode of their life. (See my earlier discussion of this in §5.1.3.)

Finally, I have already noted that there are narrower and broader notions of aesthetic properties. This ranges from Nick Zangwill’s description of the appreciation of sensible formal characteristics to the following account by Levinson: “To appreciate something aesthetically is to attend to its forms, qualities, and meanings for their own sakes, and to their interrelations, but also to attend to the way all such things emerge from [a] particular set of low-level perceptual features that define the object on a nonaesthetic plane” (Levinson, 1996, 6). In the previous chapter I said that some of the more cognitively grounded responses to art (e.g., moral disgust) might be excluded by those who have a narrow conception of the aesthetic. I’m not going to attempt to circumscribe a notion of the aesthetic here. Instead, the artistic attentional strategy subsumes most of those elements that have been considered aesthetic according to both narrower and broader conceptions of the term.
The affective part of the definition is divided into the (1.a) sensible affective component and the (1.b) conceptual affective component. As I just noted, the production of works of art always involves thematizing activities. Collective recognition of the rules of the thematizing activity to which the artefact belongs grounds the standard of appropriateness for appreciation. This is because this collective recognition supplies the conventions for use and interpretation of the object, and may also involve recognition of the designer/artist’s creative intentions. The (1.a) sensible affective component is also beholden to such conventions.

The conventions of an artistic practice may impact on whether we perceive things as fast or slow, high or low, bright or dark, etc. Familiarity with these conventions often results in processing fluency (Bullot and Reber, 2013). When an appreciator is fluent with the conventions that apply to a kind of work, there is subjective ease in recognising what is being presented and little or no conscious occurrent thought is required in order to perceive content according to the appropriate conventions of representation. The perception of content happens automatically, as it were.

The (1.a) sensible affective component is a response to perceiving or apperceiving the perceptual features of the work that are present in virtue of the decisions made by the artist. In general, the sensible affective components are caused by perceiving the work and its content. The evocation of affective states by means of colour, sound, movement, or form in a way that is not dependent upon interpreting the semantic content of symbols constitutes the sensible affective component of a work. This includes the kinds of formal properties that Zangwill refers to when he discusses the aesthetic in its narrow sense (Zangwill, 1998). Also included are enculturated or innate affective states that typically occur as a result of recognising a representation as being a representation of some thing (e.g., as when there is a response of disgust and/or discomfort caused by watching a film of people inducing themselves to vomit in Martin Creed’s Work No. 610 (“Sick Film”) (2006)). We might require familiarity with the conventions that are required to organise our perceptions. For example, the process of enculturation may supply a level of unconscious competence regarding musical conventions or conventions of visual perspective. Also, the use of motion lines to indicate movement in cartoons is perceived, rather than consciously interpreted, under normal circumstances. Further, artists may appropriate material that already has a
particular expressive character in order to elicit that response. They may also exploit various features of our senses. An example might that of the Op Art movement that exploits quirks in visual perception. Shimmering materials or contrastingly loud sounds may also be used to attract attention, etc.

This description of affective responses elicited by non-semantic means does not imply that verbal art forms like poetry and literature cannot include a sensible affective component. Effects like alliteration, assonance, consonance, and rhythm in a poem can elicit relevant responses. Just so long as the affective response is not caused in virtue of the semantic content of a verbal art form, it can be included under the sensible affective label.

Examples of the appropriate affective state that may arise can include such states as a mood, disgust, anger, fear, sadness, happiness, surprise, sympathy, shock, and indifference. A sense of foreboding in a painting may be effected by the use of a particular colour arrangement; a feeling of being overwhelmed might be caused by the physical enormity of a work; a spectator may be startled by a loud and sudden scene in a movie. These affective states are in response to sensible features of the artefact, or in response to content represented by the object, and so are not necessarily straightforward emotional responses that would motivate appreciators to actions that would be appropriate for similar responses directed toward real world objects (Walton, 1990, 240-289).

Further, departure from standard artistic conventions may be exploited by artists to provoke an affective response of the viewer being confounded. This causes a state of processing disfluency (Bullot and Reber, 2013), which might be employed for other artistic ends that I will discuss in §6.1.3. The unexpected, high-pitched bassoon opening of Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring (1913) seems to have been among the many musical innovations that confounded audiences who were expecting a more traditional or “normal” opening, resulting in a negative aesthetic reaction for audience members not sympathetic to such an innovation.
6.1.2. The conceptual affective component

The (1.b) conceptual affective component is an affective state that is provided through occurrent interpretation of the semantic content of a work—including work meaning. This is typical in cases of poems, novels, and in the recognition of signifying gestures. But, if Arthur C. Danto is right in his claim that all artworks are about something (Danto, 2013, 38), it applies to all artworks. In interpreting the work we seek a meaningful coherence in how the content of the work is structured (or else a purposeful incoherence due to how the work is structured in light of some artistic goal). This involves an occurrent understanding of what is represented by particular symbols or systems of depiction.

   Conceptual content may also involve processing parts of the visual or audio components as standing in for semantic content (e.g., religious symbols in paintings, leitmotifs, etc.). Not only that, but affective responses due to a conceptual understanding of what is represented in a particular painted scene are included under this label. These could be, for example, images that represent events in Jesus’ life and in that way go beyond merely visual elements that would fall under (1.a).

   Making sense of what is represented in a work requires knowledge of the relevant conventions regarding the structure of the particular form of presentation (see the note on thematizing activity above). In some cases, this will be informed by long-standing traditions regarding a certain type of representation, for example, as in the case of Greek tragedy (c.f. Aristotle’s Poetics (ca. 335 B.C.E. [1996])). Or it may require some background information about the themes that are typically engaged with in an artist’s oeuvre, for example, the political and social themes that are relevant to works by Ai Weiwei. This contextual background information allows the audience to interpret what is signified by the work.

   A simple example of the sort of symbolic content described in (1.b) is the meaning of words in a novel or poem. In some cases it may require understanding that the scenario described in a poem is a metaphor for something else. Another example might be a problem that is raised by a piece of conceptual art, when the object is considered in accordance with the interpretative conventions that are relevant to that category of artefact. Identifying the “point,” or meaning, of a work would count as symbolic content. The attributes of religious saints in Christian art—for example, the club of St Jude—also count. Also included is the
recognition of allusions to things outside of the work that might reasonably be inferred given the content of the work. Identifying an allusion requires concepts (i.e., the connecting of features of the current work with another object).

Further, often (1.a) sensible responses inform (1.b) conceptual responses. Represented objects that elicit (1.a) disgust might be intended by the artist for the purposes of critiquing that disgust response via (1.b) messages in the work that suggest a more self-reflective point of view. The repetitive geometric patterns in Islamic art may elicit a (1.a.) response that is heightened by knowledge that such qualities are meant to signify God (1.b.). The fact that a depicted woman in a Christian painting is wearing a brilliant lapis lazuli-coloured dress (1.a) symbolises that she is the Virgin Mary (1.b).

Onomatopoeia might produce a mixed (1.b) and (1.a) response, but if there is to be any response due to onomatopoeia then it would necessarily involve the understanding of semantic content.

The conceptual affective component includes (but is not limited to) what has been labelled as fictional emotions insofar as these are the result of cognising represented situations (e.g., understanding that a represented situation is sad and, because of this, having the response of sadness).

Emotional responses to the semantic content of a work are context sensitive. For example, the fact that a work is satirical means that the viewpoint or actions of the character are meant to be open to ridicule. There may be typical subject matter that is treated by works that belong to that kind. Stereotypes regarding the portrayal of particular character types are also common. But these qualities also allow for conventions to be subverted in the service of artistic aims.

Competent and sympathetic treatment of esteemed subject matter may arouse a feeling of respect in an audience who are sympathetic to the ends of the artist. But if the artist is inept in their portrayal of the subject matter then the audience may respond with derision toward the work. If the treatment of the subject matter by the artist is in a non-sympathetic manner, as is the case in satire, then an audience who are appreciating the work in a way that is sympathetic to its artistic ends should not experience accompanying feelings of respect toward the subject. Once again, if the audience feels that the portrayal of the subject is unjust
or badly executed by the artist then they may criticise the artistry employed while continuing to feel respect for the subject matter. This latter case would be an example of artistic demerit.

There is a rich philosophical literature on the interpretation of works (and particularly literary interpretation). I will not offer a theory here. But the following information might be relevant to interpreting some works. We might want to know who the artist is in order to relate this work to other works by the same artist. We might want to know who influenced this artist as this might provide clues to various allusions in the work, or clarify some stylistic characteristics. We might want to know whether the artist belonged to any particular artistic movement (or perhaps even a political movement). Sometimes certain choices of subject matter or the particular treatment of subject matter might allude to other ideals and forms of symbolic representation. Again, consider Ai Weiwei’s *Sunflower Seeds* (2010) and the connection with Maoist Socialist Realism art that used sunflower seeds to represent the many millions of Chinese people.

If we are asked to justify our interpretation, we point to certain features that function to serve the particular valuable aims of the work. We infer that, because certain formal characteristics were important for works in this style, that a particular feature—when interpreted through the artistic conventions of the relevant thematizing activity—is intended to serve some function relative to some particular end, and it either does this well or poorly. These justifications are employed in our evaluations of artistic worth.

In order to ward off potential objection that my characterisation imports a notion of art, I should point out that the kinds of semantic features that I have mentioned also apply to other non-art media: political newspapers and blogs, even advertisements.

In contrasting the two sources of affective response just described, I distinguish between two different causes of affective response due to attending to the content of a work: the (1.b) conceptual affective component generates an affective response in virtue of understanding what is represented in a work, while the (1.a) sensible affective component is not dependent on occurrent conscious thoughts about semantic features of a work. The two different sources of affective response may be effective concurrently in the experience of a work. The distinction I draw is based on differences in the cause of the affective response.
6.1.3. The artifice evaluation component

The (2) artifice evaluation component of the artistic attentional strategy involves evaluating what the artist has done in composing the features of a work (i.e., the work’s causal history) that result in (1.a) sensible and (1.b) symbolic affective responses, given the rules, aims, and state of the art of the activity of which the work is a product. This form of valuing requires conscious recognition of the work as a designed object of some description. Further, the art appreciator will point to characteristics of the artwork and its production that perform functions that are salient for them. The perception of the work has two aspects: we are aware of the sensible and symbolic affective responses to components of that work and we also view the work as a composed artefact that results from design intentions. In the former case, which was described in §§6.1.1-6.1.2, we process the affective and symbolic aspects of the work using the knowledge we have of the rules and aims of the relevant thematizing activity, while, in the latter case, we consider those responses and explicitly consider relevant rules and aims of the thematizing activity that those responses make salient. The thematizing activity involved is often skilled activity that requires reasonable effort to master. This may include the conscious learning of rules and conventions (as when constructing poetry in structured poetic forms), the development of physical dexterity (as is required for dancing), the mastery of specialised production techniques (as in carving), and so on. Thus an audience appreciates the technical skill employed in the composition of the artefact, given its medium and the kind of artefact it is, and how well it elicits its affective aims given the relevant kind of thematizing activity.

Wollheim’s use of thematizing activity relates to the actual psychological states of the artist when producing the item. But such thematizing activity occurs within a context of socially recognised practices. My use of thematizing activity is one of an hypothesised thematizing activity, given what is known by audiences about the context of creation and given what was contemporaneously collectively recognised as the rules and aims for the relevant activity. The rules or conventions that apply to a kind of activity that the thematizing activity belongs to are relevant in assessing what was done in the creation of an artefact. The relevant social facts that pertain to a kind of thematizing activity may include: conventions regarding norms of that category of social artefact (in the art case, this will include the typical
subject matter, typical structure, typical emotions aimed at, etc.), the history (and criticism) of works in the same genre and previous works by the same artist.

Most features of a work have been deliberately selected and placed by an artist in order to perform some function. Other features that have not been deliberately added but have nevertheless been kept can be said to have been selected by the artist by her choice to not alter that feature before publicly presenting the work. The latter have been included either because they contribute in a gestalt manner toward some valuable effect or because they are innocuous. Regardless of whether every perceptual feature was the result of a deliberate intention, the artist(s) at least regarded the final configuration of the artefact as functioning to reward the artistic attentional strategy. Because of this, we may fault the artist(s) if these features turn out to cause some unintentionally negative outcome (e.g., if some colours in a painting are too garish).

While Wollheim’s notion of thematizing activity relates to the intentional states of an individual artist, it is not always possible or conventionally desirable to disentangle the mental states of individuals involved in a collaborative production. Instead, the good or bad decisions made by artists based on hypothesised thematizing activity may be attributed to a group. The aim is not always to work out which collaborator did what—though this might be relevant to assessing the work in some cases—instead we are interested in assessing whether the decisions made in the production of the artefact were good decisions.

The relevant skill might involve theoretical expertise exhibited in the composition, creative use of the medium, or the exhibition of mechanical skill. Examples of (2) artifice evaluation consists of evaluating the achievement involved in the production of the item, that is, an appraisal of the skill, creativity, innovation (or the technical achievement more generally) exhibited by the artist in the creation of the work. In the case of performances of works, we need to attribute the achievement to the appropriate roles. Credit for the achievement of the work that is performed should go to the composers of the work, while approbation for some aspects of the execution of the performance must go to the performers or to the director, etc. The sorts of considerations here involve the innovative treatment of subject matter, the employment of distinctive techniques (either as a characteristic of this work specifically or as part of the artist’s oeuvre). In the case of industrial design, appreciation of the design achievement of the pleasing form of the object given all of the technical constraints regarding the functionality of the object falls under this category.
Appreciation of the patterns of production decisions that constitute the style of an artist also fall under this category (for example, van Gogh’s distinctive use of bold brushstrokes and vibrant colours).

Appreciation of a sculpture might involve appreciation of the mechanical abilities of the artist in skillfully working the material. It may also involve appreciation of theoretical innovations of the artist, for example, in treating of new subject matter that had not previously been engaged with in the applicable art tradition. It is worth noting that art forms need not aim at emphasising the technical skill involved as a component of the artistic value (for example, in the case of a conservative art tradition with well-established and rigidly applied rules of construction and composition).

I will close this section by discussing the relevance of rules and aims of the (hypothesised) thematizing activity when considering the merit or demerit of originality and disfluency.

If works of a certain kind are meant to be original regarding certain characteristics then these considerations would factor into an evaluation of the artist’s achievement. Comparison with prior works is required in order to determine what is original in the work. An understanding of the aims of a work, what the work was intended to convey and how, given the kind of work that it is, can be used to identify whether the original technique employed is successful or not with respect to what was meant to be achieved. But conventional rules and aims are important. If the content of a kind of performance should be largely stereotypical, then any radical deviation from the norm could be considered defective by an audience.

Disfluency occurs when an appreciator’s automatic processing of the represented content of the work is interrupted, perhaps because they do not know how they should interpret certain parts of the work. This prompts them to make sense of why something is being presented to them in this particular way (Bullot & Reber, 2013; Reber, Schwarz & Winkielman, 2004). If this effect is caused unintentionally, or is due to poor production, then this is a defect in the work. But, again, context is important. If disfluency is an intentional effect, it may prompt the audience to examine in a critical manner just what contribution toward the end of the work is made by the effect of discombobulation.
If the same method of disruption of processing is employed as a regular device by an artist then it can come to constitute a part of the artist’s style. In that case, whatever the artist intended to bring to the attention of the viewer, if anything, becomes part of the content of the work. This is because an audience informed of prior works will have competence in appropriately interpreting what is intended to be foregrounded (perhaps by “breaking the fourth wall” in a play to foreground the social themes that are explored in that play). If this means of foregrounding becomes a conventional aspect of a genre or a particular artist’s style (as is the case with Bertolt Brecht’s plays) then this would make responses to the foregrounded content part of the conceptual affective component of the work.

In both of the cases of evaluating originality and disfluency, an appreciator needs to consider what function is performed by the components that elicit these responses, given the relevant rules of production of the artefact kind being assessed.

6.1.4. The (all-things-considered) appropriate sentiment

Engaging in the artistic attentional strategy art can be a complex affair. The three components of the artistic attentional strategy that I have described in §§6.1.1-6.1.3 all interact with each other. An appropriate sentiment means that there are correct and incorrect forms of regard for different kinds of artefacts. The category that we perceive an item in has a significant impact on our perception of its aesthetic properties (Walton, 1970, 334-367). Non-appropriate sentiments would include those responses by individuals who are not practiced with the relevant artefact kind, or who mistake the point of the thematizing activity, or who are mistaken in their artefact categorisation. These kinds of responses are failures to engage properly in the artistic attentional strategy.

The fact that an informed individual is engaging with the work means that they are knowledgeable about how artefacts of this kind should be regarded. This information is typically obtained through the process of enculturation, particularly in the case of popular arts, but such knowledge may also be supplemented by other sources (e.g., art history courses, books, etc.). If we deride Duchamp’s Fountain as an artwork because it is not aesthetically rewarding (i.e., the experience of merely perceiving the physical object is
unstimulating) then, regardless of whether the reason is true or not, we have arguably missed the point of the work. First off, the point of the work includes the fact that it is *anaesthetic*.

Conventions that relate to how a kind of work is expected to be structured will impact on the experience of a work. It is a norm in thrillers, for example, that the plot is structured in such a way as to evoke suspense. If a thriller is created that contains no suspense, then an informed viewer will likely feel dissatisfied with respect to expectations regarding what works of this kind are meant to be like.

But note that producers of art are often (at least in the context of Fine Art) in a privileged position of being authorised to fill in the details of what ends an artwork is meant to achieve given the background of artistic conventions, whether the significant characteristics of the piece are meant to contravene particular established conventions (perhaps they initiate a new artistic movement by means of an art manifesto and specify the goals of the movement there), and varying levels of detail about just how they think that they are achieving that goal. Musicals are typically meant to be pleasant, but auteur Lars von Trier’s *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) is a notable exception to the genre. The authority of the artist to assign such characteristics to the work is dependent upon the recognition and/or acceptance of the legitimacy of the artist for making these kinds of claims.

In order to make sense of the artefact as an artwork, we need to posit an aim or “point” to the work. This provides structure for attempts at appreciating the core artistic value of the object as an appreciator can then consider how well the various features of the artwork serve that end. The aims of the producer may sometimes be inferred, given the conventions of the art form. The fewer conventions surrounding how we should determine what the work is about, which audiences need in order to obtain artistic value, the more reliant the audience becomes on art experts: art historians, critics, curators, or statements/manifestos from the artists themselves, or previous works. Features of previous works by the same artist may be required to inform appreciation of the work by providing information relevant to structuring an understanding of the work. An example of this would be recurring themes in the artist’s previous works. The overall appropriate sentiment will result from how well the work actually does achieve the recognised ends.

Again, in some contexts, the artist may be regarded with a certain level of authority over the meaning of the work. Consider Samuel Beckett’s legal attempts to restrict some performance interpretations from being produced. Here society has provided Beckett with the
tools to potentially impose his (now posthumous) authority over the text. This means that we cannot determine what a work means without some analysis of the social facts surrounding the type of work, including such considerations as the level of authority that the society within which the work emerged gave to its author in determining the meaning of the work.

The appropriate sentiment also recognises the interaction between the various affective and evaluative components that I have discussed—the sensible affective, conceptual affective and artifice evaluation components—and recognises that standards of appropriateness exists for these based on social facts about conventions regarding these kinds of artefacts. Further, an appreciator’s considered response toward a work may take some time to process. For instance, it might not be until well after being exposed to a narrative that ingenious connections between pieces of the storyline are recognised.

The artistic attentional strategy is intended to be agnostic regarding the world view or art theory beliefs held by the artefact appreciator. The definition of the artistic attentional strategy requires an understanding of such cultural elements only insofar as they contribute to the perception/apperception of sensible and conceptual elements of the artefact, and insofar as they inform understanding of the technical achievements of the artefact’s composer. We do not need to commit ourselves to the metaphysical presuppositions of the producer to determine the core artistic value of the work as an artefact of a specific culture.

I will not speculate on the psychological mechanisms that account for the satisfaction that we derive from taking the artistic attentional strategy toward an artwork. It suffices to say that, first, when we engage with an artefact for the purposes of the artistic attentional strategy we should sympathise with the applicable conventional—or perhaps the producer’s—aims that we infer to be appropriate for this kind of thematizing activity and, second, when the artistic attentional strategy is successfully executed in a sympathetic manner toward a good artwork, a satisfaction results. A lack of sympathy with the hypothesised aims of the thematizing activity is likely to eliminate any satisfaction provided by the work as the kind of work it is.
In this section I discuss John Searle’s notions of the Background, which is required to fill out my characterisation of the artistic attentional strategy. This theoretical tool assists in explaining learned social competences and fitting attitudes.

The Network and the Background are important for accounting for certain characteristics of the phenomenology of artistic appreciation. Searle characterises the Network as “a set of intentional states most of which are unconscious at any moment” (Searle, 2010, 31). The Network contains all of the beliefs and desires that we draw on in order to act upon the world. The Background is a notion that refers to the “abilities, capacities, dispositions, ways of doing things, and general know-how” that we use to apply those intentional states in acting on the world (Searle, 2010, 31).

More specifically, Searle notes that our ability to navigate the social world depends on the multiple capacities that comprise the Background. These background capacities form the basis for intentional thought. Searle defines the Background as “the set of nonintentional or preintentional capacities that enable intentional states to function” (Searle, 1995, 129). He describes capacities as general causal structures that include various competencies and dispositions. An example he uses to illustrate the point is the ability to speak English. Such capacities could be described at the neurophysiological level, but we do not currently have a full understanding of how these work. As a result, Searle says, we are restricted to describing them as capacities that are available for certain mental activities.

Background capacities operate at a sub-conscious level. In our everyday actions there are many learned capacities that we become so competent in that we can employ them in a non-self-conscious manner. Consider hand-writing a sentence, or brushing one’s teeth, or riding a bike, or even reading a sentence. At some stage in our individual developmental history when we were trying to learn these capacities, we had to think consciously about what we were doing and whether we were doing it correctly.

A common framework that psychologist Noel Burch developed describes the learning process for a new skill in four stages.67 Stage one is unconscious incompetence. This is when

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67 This model was developed in the 1970s and is attributed to Gordon Training International employee Noel Burch. See Adams (2011).
the individual does not possess the relevant skill and does not recognise that they are lacking in the relevant competence. The second stage is conscious incompetence. In this stage the learner is consciously engaged in working out the right ways to act which constitute the correct execution of a skill, but has not yet attained a competency with consciously acting in the right way when executing a task that involves that skill. Stage three is conscious competence. This is the point where the learner can consciously work out what should be done in order to execute the particular skill in the correct manner. The fourth and final stage is unconscious competence. This is when the learner has developed the dispositions that allow them to execute the relevant skill successfully without having to think about what should be done in a particular circumstance. When the skill is mastered to this level, the competence becomes part of the set of background capacities of that individual.

Through our engagement with multiple artefacts of the same or similar kind we develop certain beliefs about these artefacts. These beliefs provide us with expectations regarding the typical structure of kinds of artefacts, or what these kinds of things are like. If our expectations about a kind of artefact are confounded then this might be a source of surprise for us and may prompt us to pay attention to what is occurring.

Searle does not commit us to requiring conscious learning of specific rules. According to his account, we develop dispositions to act competently in some capacity. The fact that we might be able to discover regularities regarding the operations of these dispositions that allow us to construct rules does not require that anyone actually has a conscious grasp of those rules. What is required is that there is a correct way of acting to be learned that constitutes competent action. Social competences may be picked up just though the processes of enculturation, including the imitation of others who are competent at performing some task. Here is Searle’s description of the Background:

The key to understanding the causal relations between the structure of the Background and the structure of social institutions is to see that the Background can be causally sensitive to the specific forms of the constitutive rules of the institutions without actually containing any beliefs or desires or representations of those rules.... In such a case [of gaining unconscious competence of the activity of playing baseball], it seems to me, he is not applying the rules more skillfully; rather, he has acquired a set of dispositions or skills to respond appropriately, where the appropriateness is actually determined by the structure of the rules, strategies, and
principles of baseball. The basic idea, which I will now explain, is that one can develop, one can evolve, a set of abilities that are sensitive to specific structures of intentionality without actually being constituted by that intentionality. One develops skills and abilities that are, so to speak, functionally equivalent to the system of rules, without actually containing any representations or internalizations of those rules (Searle, 1995, 141-142).

If this description is right then it might help explain some of the responses employed in philosophical thought experiments that call on “intuitions.” If we ask, given some situation, whether x counts as y, this—at least in part—involves imaginative employment of our dispositions for our social competence regarding what counts as y. If this claim is right, then analysis of these social competences may help provide explanations for why certain intuitions are held, and the conditions under which appeals to these kinds of intuitions fail.

To tie this to intuitions regarding art status, the relevant intuitions about whether some particular thing is art depend on learned social competences. If this is right then we will not be interested in all intuitions about whether something is art, but only about those that are the result of the proper execution of the relevant social competencies. A model of the relevant social competence is thus required in order to explain when intuitions regarding art status are correct and when they are not.

What is the Background responsible for when we engage with art? In the case of artistic appreciation, my claim is that regularities in the relevant intentions-in-action can be reconstructed. Central to artistic appreciation, as I have claimed, is the artistic attentional strategy. The artistic attentional strategy—directed at certain categories of artefacts—can be developed as a social competence and comprises part of the Background. Intuitions about whether something is or is not art can be affected by someone’s competence, or lack thereof, in obtaining core artistic value from an artwork.

The formal characteristics of the intentions-in-action that constitute the artistic attentional strategy are given content when they are expressed within a social context. The characteristics of the social context that provide the background social facts are described in the framework for analysis of artistic practices. The definition of the artistic attentional
strategy describes the common characteristics of the intentions-in-action that are essential to artistic appreciation.

I have mentioned that we cannot read a text without having first mastered the linguistic rules of the relevant written language. Similarly, we cannot interpret a score without competencies regarding the unwritten conventions that inform the proper interpretation of what is notated. When watching a play, we need to know how to attend to those features that constitute the action of the play and ignore any other elements that are simply conventional regarding the play’s production (for example, in Chinese theatre viewers should not pay attention to property masters on stage who do not constitute part of the play’s action). These developed competences are all part of the Background.

In the case of someone who is learning to appreciate some kind of art, the rules that constitute the recognised conventions for the appreciation of an art form may be consciously applied. For instance, we need to understand the conventions and representational aims of cubism in order to perceive correctly what is depicted. At the beginning we may need to work out how to view a cubist work consciously, but this may become easier with practice. Later, once the appreciator is competent regarding the conventions of those kinds of works, applying the artistic attentional strategy becomes a matter of second nature. If we consider learning other social competencies like reading, we first have to invest conscious effort in understanding the rules that make the printed words significant and meaningful to us. Once we have internalised the rules of a written language, we will be competent in reading. At this point we do not exert conscious effort in working out what the printed letters signify, we simply read. The same goes for understanding various kinds of art. We become adept at identifying works as certain kinds of works, and the more familiar we are with these kinds of works, the less conscious effort we need to invest in decoding what is significant in the piece.

It should be noted that there may be qualitative differences in the affective response (1.a & 1.b above) obtained by appreciators of core artistic value who have varying degrees of competency with the relevant conventions for interpreting the content. That is to say, in actual cases of evaluating the artistic value of some item there may be some individuals who are more skilled than others in employing the conventions for that kind of work. Audiences who have internalised the conventions of a certain artistic style or the artistic aims of a

\[68\] Correctly identifying the content of a performance may be difficult if some event occurs that is outside of normal conventions (Gajanan, 2015).
particular school may effortlessly synthesise the manifold of sense data in a way that is not available to those who lack the same degree of familiarity. For example, a highly skilled critic may be sensitive to the fittingness of certain characteristics of a work that might go unnoticed by an appreciator who is less familiar with the relevant artistic conventions. Recognition of these technical aspects of the work by less skilled appreciators may impact upon their experience of the sensible and symbolic affective response to the work.

Central to our investigation in this chapter is a description of the intentions-in-action that occur in the course of artistic appreciation. I suggest that the formal characteristics that I use to define the artistic attentional strategy can be justified by appeals to personal experience. However, this model could be tested for its fit with empirical data obtained from publicly available art criticism and art theory. The sources of this data might include: books by art critics on how to appreciate art, art critical comments on music blogs, and treatises on art appreciation (both Western and non-Western). But this is an empirical project that I will not pursue here.

My account of the artistic attentional strategy as a learned social competence that results in a fitting sentiment response to a work comports well with Justin D’Arms and Daniel Jacobson’s sentiment-based conception of value (D’Arms & Jacobson, 2000). I suggest that fitting affective responses result from mastering the relevant competences required to employ the artistic attentional strategy. Further, these fittingness responses, which depend on the adherence to certain norms, or general rule-following, occur reliably in cases of both of conscious competence and unconscious competence.

6.2. Core artistic value and other forms of value

In this section, I propose the notion of core artistic value. This, I suggest, is the value that is common to all works of art in virtue of being a work of art. I then show how this is related to other kinds of value a work of art may have. The following is my definition of core artistic value:

Core artistic value is the power of an artefact to induce a sentiment as a consequence of its use for the artistic attentional strategy (1) in cases where rewarding the artistic
attentional strategy is a proper function of that artefact and (2) insofar as the properties that are attended to using the artistic attentional strategy are properties of that artefact.

The characterisation of the artistic attentional strategy specifies the form of engagement that is essential to artistic appreciation. If this is a proper function for an artefact, then the power of an artefact to satisfy this form of attention comprises its core artistic value. This is because, if the artefact belongs to an artefact kind, the proper function of the relevant artefact kind provides a measure of value for members of that kind qua that kind of artefact. Alternatively, as I argued in Chapter 4, an artefact might not belong to a pre-existing kind but still have a proper function.

The term “sentiment” refers to the valuable, complex experience that is emergent from an audience member’s engagement with an item for the purposes of rewarding the artistic attentional strategy. This value is not to be measured in the same way as, say, the horsepower of an engine. In that case, you could swap one engine for another engine of the same power and it will do the same job. Instead, the sentiment response is inextricably linked to—and emerges from—the activity of applying the artistic attentional strategy to that unique work. The result is a complex cognitive and affective experience.

Further, the second conjunct notes that the core artistic value of an item is only to the extent that the properties that belong to the artefact are attended to for the purposes of rewarding the artistic attentional strategy. For example, a projector screen does not have the core artistic value of the movie that is currently playing on it because the properties that are appreciated when attending to the movie are not properties of the screen itself.

Core artistic value is grounded in the socio-historical conditions of the context of creation of a work. We are interested in the artistic value of the artwork in the context in which it achieved art status, i.e., when it was presented as ready for an audience. I will explain in Chapter 7 how core artistic value and art status are connected.

In order for an object to have core artistic value in an objective sense, there must be collectively recognised rules that constrain what specific features of an artefact are relevant to attend to when employing the artistic attentional strategy. The conventions that are relevant to obtaining core artistic value are those that pertain to the description under which the
artefact is being viewed (e.g., an existing artefact kind or *sui generis* title). The requirement that we be familiar with social conventions does not pertain just to artworks specifically. An attempt to understand a road sign depends on the understanding of conventions surrounding road sign symbols and road rules. An attempt to read the newspaper requires an understanding of the language in which the content of the paper is printed. Such conventions provide a relatively objective protocol which is assumed by the producer as background knowledge for an appropriately informed individual about these kinds of artefacts. These conventions provide structure regarding our understanding of what is to be taken as content and what is not.

Employing Kendall Walton’s terminology, some characteristics of a category of items, such as the flatness of a painting, are conventionally standard and so these sorts of characteristics do not contribute positively to its core artistic value; they do, however, provide a structured background against which the artistically salient properties appear. The latter is a result of conventions that influence, for example, the materials used, techniques employed, typical subject matter, the relevance of the artist’s intentions regarding the interpretation of content, etc. Such variable properties can and do bear on the core artistic value of a work. These collectively recognised rules may be provided by the conventions of an art form, or they may be collectively accepted ways of attending that are specified by an artist.

At the heart of core artistic value is an artistic attentional strategy that appreciators take toward works of art and that artists anticipate of their audiences. The conventions of a category of artefact that constrain the artistic attentional strategy may be more or less numerous depending on the category of artefact. This will affect the different ways in which a work can be rewarding via application of the artistic attentional strategy. For some works there may be a consensus on its main interpretable elements but other elements may not be so settled. This indeterminacy with respect to ways to make sense of the work can provide for a work that is rich in possible interpretations. However, if there is no collectively accepted way to interact with a work and make sense of it, this can cause a state of interpretative indeterminacy. The latter situation does not have the necessary social facts established to a degree that is sufficient for an assessment of the core artistic value of a work. This might be the case with new, genre-breaking works. However, it may be the case that a consensus regarding the way to appreciate a work does eventuate within a community of appreciators. If not a complete consensus, at least enough people must engage with a work in some particular way in order to establish the necessary social facts to guide appreciation. Once these social facts are established, it is possible to assess the value of a work.
This characterisation of core artistic value, which demarcates a distinct mode of valuing, has an advantage over theories that describe artistic value in terms of the qualitative features of a valuable experience. Core artistic value is more catholic than most functionalist definitions regarding the sorts of experiences that count as valuable with respect to something’s being art. Gary Iseminger, for instance, locates the value of an artwork in the experience of the work, not in the work itself. He claims that this is advantageous over George Dickie’s account of appreciation which, he says, does not distinguish appreciation from the valuing of an object for more instrumental purposes (Iseminger, 2004, 42-43). The problem with Iseminger’s qualitative description of aesthetic experience is that it is a poor candidate for explaining the value of conceptual artworks. Instead of a qualitative description of aesthetic experience, what is required to shore up Dickie’s account of appreciation is a detailed theory of how to engage appropriately in appreciating an artwork that can also account for avant-garde works. I propose to satisfy that by means of the theory of core artistic value.

I have outlined the formal features of the artistic attentional strategy. There is a huge variety of ways in which artistic appreciation may take place in practice, but my claim is that, for all artworks, the appreciation of art necessarily takes the general form that I specify. The background operating assumption involved in evaluating the artistic value of an artefact that has the standard function of providing core artistic value (i.e., an artwork) is that the producer of the artefact configured it in such a way that it rewards individuals who have the relevant background knowledge and competencies required to regard the object appropriately for the purposes of obtaining core artistic value.

An important point to reiterate is that the function of an artefact distinguishes the proper use of the artefact from other uses that object might be put to by virtue of some other affordances it has. For example, the physical structure of a small decorative statue might provide affordances that would make it useful as a paperweight. But this use does not count as using the statue as an artwork. In specifying the use of an object as an artwork, we consequently have a way to measure its value as an artwork.

I will now describe the difference between core artistic value and other closely related forms of value that are often considered in art historical accounts.

I distinguish core artistic value from the cultural value of a work. Various contingent historical factors subsequent to the production of the work may increase its exposure and
cultural significance. If we consider the *Mona Lisa*, this work was relatively obscure until it was appropriated by Napoleon Bonaparte for his bathroom, waxed lyrical about by Walter Pater (1869, 507), and, in 1911, stolen from the Louvre by Vincenzo Peruggia. These incidents might have caused the work to become immensely culturally valuable, but I would want to distinguish this sort of value from the value of the work as the kind of artefact that it is.

This is not to deny that there is a link between artistic value and cultural value. Even though I have distinguished cultural significance from core artistic value, it is worth noting that some features of cultural significance can bear on conventions surrounding how we should engage with the work as the kind of work that it is. One case is that of notoriety. The function of a work is dependent on the artefact being recognised and treated as functional in a particular way. If the conventions or information surrounding a work are only cemented as a consequence of criticism, then this may have a bearing on how the work performs its artistic function in a social context. Consider Duchamp’s *Fountain*, which was cemented as an artwork after continued debates about its art status. Limits on the ambitious intentions of the artist by social acceptance can be shown by Manzoni’s *Base of the World* (*Socle du Monde*, 1961), where he claimed that the Earth was his work. This bold claim was rejected by the artworld public, but the plinth that he made is still regarded as part of his conceptual work. But cultural value is more a function of the influence or exposure of the work than it is a function of the work as the kind of artefact that it is.

Core artistic value is also distinct from the historical importance of the work in influencing later works, which is also sometimes included in assessments of a work’s artistic value. This distinction does not mean that the subsequent historical importance of the work is not typically thought of as a value attributable to the work in relation to its art-historical tradition, but instead I mean only that the characteristic of core artistic value is more fundamental to the appreciation of the work. It is only because of the core artistic value inherent in the artefacts that constitute the products of a particular tradition, I claim, that the practice forms an art tradition and not an historical tradition of some non-art kind. And it is only by reference to characteristics of the work that partly constitute core artistic value that we can describe how a work has influenced later works in the tradition. A work’s influence on later art might arise through the reuse and refinement of innovative artistic techniques that were first exhibited in the work, or by the work influencing future artists to treat of the same subject matter when it had not previously been employed in that art form, etc. I distinguish
this value due to subsequent historical development from core artistic value and I refer to it as the work’s art-influence value. This art-influence value is attributable to a work given hindsight but is not a constitutive part of the appreciation of the work as the kind of artefact that it was when it gained art status.\(^\text{69}\)

There is also the issue of explaining how it is that an artwork might be noted as exemplifying the high-point of a particular art tradition. The problem involves reconciling the facts that such a characteristic is a quality of the work that an audience does not have epistemological access to until well after the work attains art status and yet we still want to say that this is a property of the artwork. Here I will argue that this is an estimation of the value of an artwork relative to an art tradition, but that such value is derived from comparisons of work features that constitute the core artistic value of the work with other works preceding and succeeding it. Thus, features of the work relevant to its core artistic value play a fundamental role in assessing the work’s value relative to its art-historical tradition.

Consideration of a work’s art-historical importance would likely include consideration of its art-influence and cultural significance, but such factors may be analysed separate from core artistic value. Further, the art-historical value of a work, a work’s being the high-point of a tradition, and the cultural significance of a great work can seem strongly influenced by—or otherwise closely related to—the features of the work that are responsible for its core artistic value. Core artistic value is central to art practices and is the form of valuing upon which other values closely related to that practice may be derived. If these values are considered a constituent part of the value of art as art, it is only in a loose sense of the phrase. Strictly speaking, the only value of art as art is core artistic value.

There are a range of other social values that works of art might have. Jonathan Gilmore lists the following forms of value: moral, cognitive, religious, political, educational, historical, and pleasure-related (Gilmore, 2011, 289). Malcolm Budd further includes social, sentimental (e.g., associating a song with a significant, pleasurable life event), economic and therapeutic values (Budd, 1995, 1). Sentimental value is not properly a property of an artefact as it is idiosyncratic, whereas properties of an artefact require collective acceptance. Further, I agree that artworks may realise one or more of the other social values on the list. We might learn about life in Victorian London through the novels of Charles Dickens. Much early

\(^{69}\) This position is advocated by Levinson (1988). However, an opposing view is argued by McFee (1992).
religious Christian art was meant to be didactic. But, according to my definition of core artistic value, these values are only of relevance to the value of art as art insofar as they need to be considered when employing the artistic attentional strategy to that artefact. (For example, appreciation of artifice achievement may require recognition of some instrumental function of the artefact.) The claim that there is an essentially artistic value is not inconsistent with the claim that art also often serves a multitude of other valuable social functions. The claim is just that these other functions are incidental to the fact that something is a work of art.

Further, the artistic attentional strategy implicates itself in a pre-existing network of cultural values by foregrounding (celebrating, reaffirming, questioning, satirising, etc.) these values. Part of an appreciator’s response to a work may be deliberately calculated by the artist as a reaction to their treatment of such values. As a result, an understanding of the particular cultural contexts and the sorts of general cultural values associated with the subject matter of the work will inform the affective response to a particular work. It is not the case that everyone is expected to have the same response to a work. The works of Ai Weiwei are deliberately intended to challenge Chinese social norms. In the case of contemporary Fine Art, the core artistic value of a work typically sides with responses to works that are sympathetic to the aims of the artist (as this usually determines the particulars of the function of a work), but it might be the case that not everyone is able to sympathise with the aims of certain artists whose works deliberately challenge particular norms. This works the other way, too. It might be the case that some viewers find it difficult to sympathise with the aims and values of artists whose works celebrate certain subject matter in a way that implicates cultural values that they are not sympathetic toward. Consider reactions to Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* (1935).

I will conclude this chapter by considering briefly whether the theory of core artistic value satisfies the desiderata that I listed at the beginning of this chapter.

First, the theory of core artistic value—and the associated account of the artistic attentional strategy—individualizes artistic value from the other kinds of value that art may have. I have also accounted for closely-related values such as cultural significance and art-influence value. Second, core artistic value is dependent upon the artefact being attended to under some description applicable to its context of creation—for example, as a member of an art category. Core artistic value relies on intersubjective, collective recognition of rules for appreciation. The value of the work is realised in actual efforts at appreciation. These
repeated patterns of intention-in-action provide an objective basis for assessing the value of a work. Third, our epistemic access to the artistic value of a work depends on our being able to apply the artistic attentional strategy correctly to that work. Fourth, my characterisation of the artistic attentional strategy describes the features that should be attended to when appreciating art as art. I have employed the theory of the proper functions of artefacts to explain how this kind of attention counts as a value for some artefacts. Fifth, regarding comparisons of artistic value, while the core artistic value of works that belong to different art categories may not be commensurable, they are nevertheless comparable. Sixth, I have argued that the artistic attentional strategy is inclusive of the kinds of features that are frequently viewed as aesthetic properties of a work. I have also used Searle’s notion of the Background to account for the phenomenology of learned competence in appreciating works of art. Seventh, the account is based on the collective recognition of rules that constrain the artistic attentional strategy. This can accommodate both works that fit in established art categories as well as unique, *sui generis* works of art that may, retrospectively, instantiate a new artefact kind. Finally, there is nothing in this account that constrains it to Western cultures (though I leave confirmation of this claim to other empirical investigations).
7. The Artistic Functionalist definition of art

In Chapter 4 I developed a theory of artefacts that could accommodate both material culture and intangible cultural heritage. This includes improvisational performances, hewn statues, and multiply instanced works such as plays and novels. In Chapter 6 I coupled this with an account of the artistic attentional strategy to characterise the notion of core artistic value. In this chapter I show how these theoretical tools can be employed in an artistic functionalist definition of art in the classificatory sense. In §7.1, I detail functionalist definitions of the classificatory senses of art and characterise the evaluative and the courtesy senses. In §7.2, I show that this account satisfies numerous desiderata for a definition of art that have been suggested by philosophers.

7.1. Defining art

I will now define art in the classificatory sense. In the previous chapter I detailed the following definition of core artistic value:

*C*ore artistic value is the power of an artefact to induce a sentiment as a consequence of its use for the artistic attentional strategy (1) in cases where rewarding the artistic attentional strategy is a proper function of that artefact and (2) insofar as the properties that are attended to using the artistic attentional strategy are properties of that artefact.

The following is the Artistic Functionalist definition of art in the classificatory sense:

An item is *art* iff it is an artefact that has the proper function of rewarding the artistic attentional strategy.
The function that is distinctive of anything that is labelled an artwork, I argue, is that it rewards the artistic attentional strategy. Recall that this form of attending to the item’s properties entails that the work of art is a source of core artistic value. Artworks are a source of core artistic value in that the properties of the item that function to reward the artistic attentional strategy—i.e., that contribute to core artistic value—are collectively recognised properties of that item. This excludes such things as idiosyncratic sentimental responses to the work from contributing to the work’s core artistic value.

The stipulation that an artwork is the source of core artistic value is to account for the fact that mechanical means of presenting a work—such as music speakers or a film display screen—are conduits for the appreciation of works of art, but are not themselves sources of core artistic value. The appreciable properties of the works belong to the music and film works that are presented by means of such technology. There are more complex cases, for example the performance of plays, where we may appreciate properties of the play itself as well as the performance of that play. On this ontology, there can be multiple art items, but it must be noted that the performance of a play has an existence that is dependent upon the existence of the play that it is a performance of.

I have noted that artefacts that are often called artworks may have other, non-art functions. Artefacts—and artefact kinds—may have multiple proper functions. My definition allows that artworks might have other, non-art proper functions, including didactic, propagandistic, and religious functions. Also, an artefact’s performance of one or more of these non-art functions might require the artistic attentional strategy, thus potentially making it art in an incidental sense. Here, the features of an artefact that reward the artistic attentional strategy may make the object appealing or desirable and thereby assist in facilitating its primary utilitarian function. Some utilitarian function might be a necessary feature of some genre of a work of art (e.g., the didactic value of Christian religious art) but such functions are incidental with respect to the nature of the object as art. In all cases, if the object is deficient in performing a certain function that objects of that type are expected to do, its value is diminished as an object of that kind.

Based on what has been said in this and in earlier chapters, here are some features of artworks: First, both producers and consumers expect that art serves the function of rewarding the artistic attentional strategy. Second, there are conventions and/or other collectively recognised rules that are relevant to directing how artefacts of that kind of art
perform the function of rewarding the artistic attentional strategy. Third, it follows from core artistic value being entailed by the artefact having the primary function of rewarding the artistic attentional strategy that such items are evaluated on this basis by reference to the conventions relevant for the artistic attentional strategy. Fourth, we would also expect maintenance and disposal behaviours and so on for artworks that indicate rewarding of the artistic attentional strategy as a primary function (see §4.2.3).

I will suggest that an artefact category can—in some cases—be proposed (and maintained) by conjoining two terms and using them to refer to some item(s). In order for this to produce a work of art, at least one of the terms used must be a recognised artistic category. Depending on the context, the use of an established artistic artefact category conjoined with another artefact category term may import the expectation of the power to provide core artistic value to the newly described artefact category. This may be due to the application of Grice’s maxim of relation (1975, 46). Further, the conventions relevant to assessing the artistic value of the established category may be imported into the new artefact category by force of conversational implicature.

For example, the Welsh industrial designer Ross Lovegrove is a well-established, award-winning industrial designer whose works are inspired by biological forms. That is, his designs have achieved social recognition as having a particular style. Products designed by Lovegrove are expected to reward attention to the creation of functional objects that realise his design vision of seamlessly integrated natural forms. A familiarity with his previous products will provide an informed appreciator with all the information they need to appreciate the category of object specified by “Ross Lovegrove’s Ty Nant water bottle.” Lovegrove attempted to capture the concept of running water in the form of the water bottle produced. Solving the technical difficulties associated with mass production of these bottles took him three years.

Some architects may become recognised for designs that reward the artistic attentional strategy, and this kind of reward may become a function of their works. In the same way, an individual item of a kind that is not typically art, but which is produced by an artist and recognised as a work by that artist, may be a sui generis artwork. Or as in the case of Jean-Luc Godard’s Dziga Vertov Group films, a well-known artist may attempt to repudiate their oeuvre, and yet despite this still have their films appreciated given the background of their prior artistic output.
Further, some artefacts may quickly attain iconic status that creates a situation where the artistic attentional strategy is expected from that item. This can affect subsequent maintenance behaviour of that object in a way that sustains its ability to reward the artistic attentional strategy. (Perhaps the Forth Bridge, which was a wonder of the world when it was created, attained art status this way.)

According to this account, an item is art if and only if it has a primary function as a source of core artistic value. By characterising the notions of the *artistic attentional strategy* and *artefact* independently of a prior concept of art I thereby characterise *core artistic value* as a specific conjunction of these notions. This provides a definition of art without circularity.

Given this foundation, we can also specify definitions of other close terms. The person or persons who are responsible for creating an artwork—particularly those properties that are the source of the consequent core artistic value of the item—are *artists*. If there are conventions that constrain a practice of obtaining core artistic value, as I have described it, then we commonly refer to these as the conventions of an *art form*. And the practices that serve to reproduce and reinforce the conventions upon which core artistic value is based are *artistic practices*.

We should also distinguish between works of high art—art with a capital “A”—and the broader sense of art—art with a small “a”—that includes more humble objects. “Art” always demands appreciation of the artifice component when appreciators engage with it properly. However, this is not the case for “art.” In the latter case, a more replete account of the core artistic value of the item will include explicit consideration of the artifice component—that is, the artistic achievement—of the work. This is often the job of art experts like professional critics, but enthusiasts or fans may also engage in this activity. But—in addition to this proper engagement with a work—it is also acceptable for lay viewers and listeners of “art” to engage only with the accessible sensible and conceptual affective components. This is the case with popular music and most Hollywood films, for instance. (There are other cases of amusements—internet memes, for example—where attending to what was done in producing the piece is superfluous to evaluating the artefact as the kind it is. These items are not art.)

Some artefacts may be esteemed because they serve social functions that are regarded as valuable. Many religious works inherit this form of esteem. Artefacts of high social status that function to reward the artistic attentional strategy often have an implicit demand for the
replete form of regard from all who adequately engage with that item. This constitutes Fine Art esteem. This also makes them “Art,” I suggest. It is this reason, I claim, that makes it intuitively correct to count the *chado* (Japanese tea ceremony) as being in the same category as Western Fine Art.

The role of exhibitions in art galleries is to present various items and foreground their capacity to reward the artistic attentional strategy. This does not necessarily make the kinds of artefacts presented in the exhibition a kind of art form (i.e., consider recent exhibitions of video games). But gallery exhibition may provide the impetus for audiences to engage the objects with the full artistic attentional strategy within the context of the exhibition (e.g., as an art-exhibition videogame). What makes the artefact category an art is determined by whether items of that kind are typically deemed good or bad depending on their capacity to reward artistic appreciation. But, in the case of the exhibited non-art items, it is in virtue of the kind of attention that should be accorded to items on exhibition that we attend to the artistically appreciable properties of those non-art items. The exhibition provides a temporary context in which these items are attended to for the purposes of artistic appreciation.

Before considering the other senses of art, I will address two potential questions. If the blanket demand for the evaluation of the achievement of the artist—i.e., consideration of what was done in the production of a work—is what distinguishes “Art” from “art,” does this make all performing arts “Art”? Not necessarily. Perceiving intentional activity does not necessarily require an appraisal of the skill in performing that activity. For example, it may be typical for some genres of song that audiences enjoy watching the performance without the requirement that they appraise the technical mastery involved. That work may be the domain of professional critics.

Second, why, are things like biographical accounts not art? After all, people seem to enjoy reading them. The answer is that an assessment of the value of biographies as biographies does not require that they provide value according to the (replete) artistic attentional strategy. In particular, we need not pay attention to assessing the work that went into writing the biography—that is, the artifice component of the artistic attentional strategy—unless, perhaps, something goes wrong (for example, in cases where the events reported did not happen). In this way, a biographical account can be much like other kinds of journalistic writing. The primary function of biographies is something like the provision of information about someone’s life. A biography would still be a perfectly good biographical
account if it were written in a very formulaic style. Biographies may be more or less artfully written, but such features are incidental to its value as a biography per se. However, this does not exclude the possibility of sub-categories of biography that are meant to function to reward the artistic attentional strategy—in which case they would be arts.

Next is the courtesy (or honorific) sense of art. It is worth noting that other non-art artefacts will have conventions for interpretation, much like art. For example, news articles, maps, furniture assembly instructions. The difference is that, in these other cases, the conventions are not standardly employed to facilitate the form of engagement that I have characterised as the artistic attentional strategy. That is, there is no expectation that a non-art artefact should supply core artistic value. Further, as I have just mentioned, non-art objects may be perfectly good as the kinds of things they are even if they do not reward this form of attending. Many objects might have this attentional strategy applied to them. And, depending on the affordances that the object provides, the artistic attentional strategy might be more or less rewarding. But only artworks are recognised as calling for this kind of attention in their proper use as works of art. Having said this, many non-art objects may invite the artistic attentional strategy in virtue of their exceptional aesthetic qualities or skilled execution. Someone may point this out by calling a non-art artefact “art” in the courtesy sense.

In closing this section, I will comment on the evaluative sense of art when used negatively—i.e., when saying that an Art item is not art. We might characterise any non-artistic values that artworks have as incidental values (at least with respect to art status). Art institutions may have been built on the expectation that art not only provide artistic value but that it is also a catalyst in serving other, socially valuable, esteemed, incidental values, at least, according to the prevailing ideologies.

Moreover, the incidental values may change: The modern system of the arts may have been constructed in the service of establishing a new social class in the 18th century, which was valuable at that time, but today contemporary art often engages in social critique. Thus, the very versatility of art in having its self-motivating form of engagement employed in conjunction with other valorised social ends is the basis of the esteem of the Fine Arts. (But note that there is also criticism—and hence growing awareness—that the practices of Fine Art institutions have not served all social groups to an equal extent.) In this sense, art esteem is parasitic on perceived social value. But insofar as art is perceived to promote and reinforce
socially valuable activities that may not otherwise have taken place, the high social investment in art can be justified by the social value it provides.

Collective recognition of Fine Art status makes the claim that the artwork is worthy of full engagement of the artistic attentional strategy because of Fine Art’s esteem. But if something that is deemed art by Fine Art institutions fails to have the kind of features that merit Art esteem, this may have an influence on whether certain audiences consider it to count as High Art. If the subject matter is deemed of minimal importance, or if there are no lofty social intentions inherent in the production of the work, then some of the art public may question whether a work deserves to be “Art.” Some artwork genres, for example, conceptual art, have been criticised for not really being art, at least in a High Art sense, by this evaluative criterion.

7.2. Testing the artistic functionalist definition

In this section I argue either that the artistic functionalist definition of art can satisfy the various desiderata for a definition of art that have been proposed by philosophers, or else that the proposed conditions are mistaken requirements.

7.2.1. Thomas Adajian’s constraints on a definition of art

Thomas Adajian lists eight general observations about art that should be accommodated by a definition of art (Adajian, 2012, §1). If a definition of art is consistent with these facts or, even better, helps explain some of these features, then we can have some degree of confidence that it comports well with our subject matter: artworks and artistic practices. I argue that the artistic functionalist definition of art adequately satisfies Adajian’s constraints. His first constraint is as follows:

1. “Entities (artifacts or performances) intentionally endowed by their makers with a significant degree of aesthetic interest, often surpassing that of most everyday objects, exist in virtually every known human culture” (Adajian, 2012, §1, para. 1).
Musical traditions exist in most (if not all) cultures. There are also songs, dances, mythical tales, religious statues, and ceremonial masks that are worked beyond what is required for the performance of quotidian functions. Examples include Mongolian folk songs, Indian Mudiyettu dance drama, and Khmer shadow theatre from Cambodia, not to mention domestic arts and songs sung by mothers to their children or work songs performed while engaging in mundane activities.\(^7\)

By focusing on the formal characteristics of artistic appreciation, the artistic functionalist definition allows that aesthetic objects might exist in all cultures even if no word exists in their language that distinguishes all art practices from other practices. Artefact kinds that exhibit aesthetic properties, when created through skilled human artifice, are particularly suited to functioning to reward the artistic attentional strategy.

2. “Such entities, and traditions devoted to them, might exist in other possible worlds” (Adajian, 2012, §1, para. 1).

There is an intuition that the history of the world may have gone a different way than it actually did, and yet it is possible that art would still have been made. In a similar vein, if we consider art in a way that is not culturally biased, it seems intuitively possible that aliens have art.

My characterisation of the function of art accommodates the intuition that there are other possible worlds with their own categories of art, some even in the absence of terms equivalent to “art.” Any entities that are capable of the level of social organisation required for artefacts to exist that function to reward the artistic attentional strategy possess the necessary competences required to create art.

3. “Such entities sometimes have non-aesthetic ceremonial or religious or propagandistic functions, and sometimes do not” (Adajian, 2012, §1, para. 1).

\(^7\) See the UNESCO intangible heritage lists for a wealth of examples (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015).
Didactic medieval religious paintings, sacred ceremonial masks, and portraits glorifying conquering emperors are among the art objects imbued with practical functions that are rarely (if ever) served by contemporary high art.

I have previously stated that artefact kinds perform a multitude of functions. The function performed by works of art—namely, to provide core artistic value—in certain artefact categories might supplement other non-art proper functions that the relevant artefact kind may have. By locating the essence of art by reference to the formal features of a function that all artworks share, this theory allows that such works might perform other functions too.

4. “Traditionally, artworks are intentionally endowed by their makers with properties, usually perceptual, having a significant degree of aesthetic interest, often surpassing that of most everyday objects” (Adajian, 2012, §1, para. 1).

Many artists have been interested in producing works that provide experiences of the beautiful and the sublime. Consider Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* (1486), Michelangelo’s *Pieta* (1489-1490), J.M.W. Turner’s *Snow Storm: Steamboat off a Harbour’s Mouth* (1842), or the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

The artistic functionalist definition is generous regarding the qualitative experiences that artworks may provide. Traditional characterisations of aesthetic properties and descriptions of aesthetic experience are compatible with the formal characteristics that I specify as essential to rewarding the artistic attentional strategy.

5. “Art, so understood, has a complicated history: new genres and art-forms develop, standards of taste evolve, understandings of aesthetic properties and aesthetic experience change” (Adajian, 2012, §1, para. 1).

Various artistic movements around the turn of the twentieth century challenged academic commonplaces regarding the aesthetic. Examples of artworks and movements that went against common expectations regarding the sort of qualitative experience that art should provide include Edvard Munch (*The Scream* (1893-1910)), expressionist painters, and the Fauves.
Aesthetic experience, in terms of the beautiful and the sublime, has had a central focus in Western Fine Art. (The sublime in nature, which is an aesthetic invention of the eighteenth century, is another example of changing taste.) The characterisation of the artistic attentional strategy allows for a range of qualitative experiences to be accommodated as contributing toward the artistic value of a piece. Additionally, art institutions have been invested with the power to constitute new categories of art by developing and specifying new ways for audiences to obtain core artistic value (within the constraints of the artistic attentional strategy).

6. “There are institutions in some but not all cultures which involve a focus on artifacts and performances having a high degree of aesthetic interest and lacking any practical, ceremonial, or religious use” (Adajian, 2012, §1, para. 1).

This echoes the claims that an adequate account of Art in non-Western societies is a desideratum for an adequate theory of art (Shiner, 2003; S. Davies, 2000). We can certainly identify examples of institutions from a variety of cultures that produce artefacts with high aesthetic value for its own sake. Consider Japanese Kabuki theatres, or the institutions that arose in the Ming Dynasty to foster painting, poetry, music, literature and drama. Painting traditions and architecture flourished under the Indian Mughal Empire (e.g., The Taj Mahal), and Persian royal workshops supported the tradition of miniature paintings. Closer to home we have theatre production companies, orchestras, dance companies, artists’ collectives, drama schools, Fine Art schools, film schools, musical conservatories, artists’ residencies and creative writing courses. These are supported by other institutions including performance venues (e.g., music halls, theatres, etc.), art galleries, art history departments, art-book publishing houses, art journals, arts funding bodies, art societies, writers’ guilds, actors’ unions, and so on. Not to mention traditions of art criticism, art theorising, and art biography.

The existence of highly developed art institutions in multiple cultures can be explained by the independent formation of institutions that foster certain kinds of core artistic value. The function of rewarding the artistic attentional strategy provides a motivation for employing these artefacts as art, which reinforces the objective social facts that support its status as art through continued use. This use, of course, need not rely on the expectation by audiences’ of any valuable result beyond the experience itself. The practices may have been
esteemed because of their relationship to esteemed social groups or classes. Also, there may be many recognised (and unrecognised) social goods that result from this practice.

7. “Such institutions sometimes classify entities apparently lacking aesthetic interest with entities having a high degree of aesthetic interest” (Adajian, 2012, §1, para. 1).

This applies particularly to some twentieth century avant-garde art forms (e.g., conceptual art, happenings, etc.). But consider such classic examples as Duchamp’s *Fountain*, John Cage’s *4’33”*, Dada, etc. that consciously reject aesthetic value as traditionally conceived.

Aesthetic value, in all its various theoretical formulations, covers only a sub-set of the valuable experiences that may occur though artistic appreciation. Nevertheless, all art from high art institutions provides value in the manner specified by the artistic functionalist definition. Art institutions have the power to constitute new ways of obtaining this value (see §6.1.4).

8. “many things other than artworks — for example, natural entities (sunsets, landscapes, flowers, shadows), human beings, and abstract entities (theories, proofs) are routinely described as having aesthetic properties” (Adajian, 2012, §1, para. 1).

As a consequence, aesthetic value is not exclusive to only artworks. This fact is accommodated by the artistic functionalist definition of art, which claims that core artistic value is exclusive to art. Nevertheless, as I have already mentioned, my theory allows that the artistic attentional strategy might also be applied to non-art.

Adajian notes two additional constraints. First, enumerative definitions lack any principled reason why something should appear on the list, so “given that accepting that something is inexplicable is generally a philosophical last resort, and granting the importance of extensional adequacy, list-like or enumerative definitions are if possible to be avoided” (Adajian, 2012, §1, para. 3). Clearly, my definition is not structured as an enumeration of elements. Second, definitions that allow for borderline cases are preferable to ones that don’t because most definitions outside of mathematics are vague (Adajian, 2012, §1, para. 3). My definition identifies the kinds of social facts that would be relevant to justifying the art status
of an item. There is, however, a range of more or less established social practices that ground the relevant social facts—resulting in borderline cases.

7.2.2. Richard Wollheim’s four conditions

Jerrold Levinson describes Richard Wollheim’s four objections to the institutional theory (IT) of art as follows (Wollheim, 1980, 157-166):

(1) IT violates the intuition that there be an interesting connection between being an artwork and being a good artwork, that is, something beyond the former’s serving as a logical presupposition of the latter (Levinson, 1989, 27).

The artistic functionalist definition explains that it is the proper function of rewarding the artistic attentional strategy that is the basis for classifying an artefact as an artwork. The value of a work as art is also dependent upon its capacity to reward this form of engagement.

(2) IT violates the intuition that artmaking be an important activity, apart from the artistic value, if any, of what is made (Levinson, 1989, 27).

I explained in the previous section that Fine Art traditions are often recognised as serving valuable social functions or ideals. This is used to justify the esteem that the arts are accorded. Such esteem facilitates audiences’ full engagement with the artistic attentional strategy.

(3) IT makes Duchampian artmaking central, whereas a theory of art should exhibit such as a special case, both ironic and provocative in relation to normal or ordinary art (Levinson, 1989, 27).
Duchamp’s readymades are an important test case for theories of art. This is because much contemporary art has been influenced by these and other avant-garde art forms. The artistic functionalist definition of art accounts for both traditional and contemporary art forms.

(4) Finally, IT must respond to the question whether proposers of candidates for appreciation need have good reasons, or any understandable reasons, for doing so, but either way it proves unsatisfactory (Levinson, 1989, 27).

If a proposer has good reasons, then it seems the holding of those reasons would be, or could be made, itself a virtually adequate account of arthood. Yet if a proposer need have no such reasons—which is the more likely Institutionalist response—then an epistemic difficulty arises, that of how we could ever justifiably believe, of such an agent, “that, in drawing our attention to a certain artifact, he is putting it forward for appreciation, unless we can also attribute to him some idea of what it is about the artifact that we should appreciate, and further, believe that it is because of this that he is drawing our attention to it” (Wollheim, 1980, p. 165; Levinson, 1989, 27)

I agree with this criticism of the institutional theory. Also, my definition specifies the kinds of social facts that constitute good reasons for something’s having art status.

7.2.3. The possibility of failed art

Christy Mag Uidhir notes that art theories need to have something of the following included: “An object is art if and only if that object is the product of a successful art-attempt” (Mag Uidhir, 2010, 399). I have described the kinds of social facts that need to obtain in order for something to count as art. I have also noted that this can result in the failed intention to create art because of a lack of collective uptake. This was the case for Duchamp’s attempt to make the Woolworth building into a readymade (see §2.4.3).
7.2.4. Peg Zeglin Brand’s desiderata for a feminist theory of art

Carolyn Korsmeyer notes the role of feminism in changing artistic practices, but argues that the concepts of art and artist still retain an implicit masculine gender through the historical connection of contemporary art institutions to traditional Fine Art (Korsmeyer, 2004, 104-129). Indeed, the male gaze has often been the stance taken toward the women represented in traditional Fine Art.

Peg Zeglin Brand provides the following desiderata for a feminist theory of art. As my definition is based on a theory of art, my theory should be tested to see how many of these desiderata can be accommodated.

1. A recognition that the past history of art, criticism, theory, and philosophy has been dominated by a particular subpopulation with a particular taste and a particular agenda. The artworld has been undemocratic from the start and still continues to be (Brand, 2000, 193).

My theory of the artistic attentional strategy is based on the social facts regarding interpretative conventions and aesthetic responses that obtained in the period in which the work was created. My theory does not address the specific gender bias in the Western Fine Arts, but it can certainly accommodate theories that do account for the perpetuation of such biased conventions in artistic practices. It also acknowledges that Art esteem may be ideologically grounded.

2. A recognition that the roles of authority within the artworld have had no basis in objective criteria and that value judgments issued by such “experts” are subjective and idiosyncratic (Brand, 2000, 194).

On my account, the criteria that form the basis for art expertise is grounded in knowledge of the applicable conventions for practices involved in making art. The criteria involved are objective in the sense that they are collectively recognised, intersubjective conventions or rules. This theory also provides an account of what makes an art expert an art expert as well
as their influence on the artistic attentional strategy. Given this, my framework provides tools to supplement potential theories that critique bias about who gets to perform the roles of art expert in any particular social context and, consequently, the kinds of interests that are served by those art institutions and the effect of this on artistic appreciation.

3. A recognition that the Hegelian approach to the linearity of “art” is flawed; it fails to recognize “art” from a variety of cultures and across a significant length of time, art that may not fit the narrowing criterion of originality (Brand, 2000, 194).

As I mentioned in §7.2.1, my account is intended to accommodate non-Western artistic practices.

4. A recognition that sexist and racist assumptions have permeated philosophical aesthetics as instituted in the eighteenth century and continued into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Brand, 2000, 194).

While I do not take up these issues in my theory of art, research into sexist and racist assumptions might be identified in the social conventions that guide the application of the artistic attentional strategy in the applicable cases. The theory, as it stands, does not have the resources to explain the systemic exclusion of certain social groups from the production of art. But this may be provided by a sociological analysis, as Brand notes.

5. A recognition that Ur-roles have been filled in ways that the artworld has failed to recognize (Brand, 2000, 194).

The fact that my theory gains its objectivity through social facts recognises that an individual cannot produce art without the assistance of a community. Thus, social and political views may be encoded in the recognised meaning of a work, as well as in the conventions used to interpret that work. Incidentally, my account does not allow for an isolated individual to institute an art tradition as they cannot establish social facts on their own.
6. A recognition that gender and race are essential components of the context in which an artwork is created and thus cannot be excluded from consideration in procedural (historical, intentional) definition of “art” (Brand, 2000, 194).

Certainly, insofar as these influences are encoded in the conventions that guide the artistic attentional strategy in some arts, these components may be noted by analysis of the artistic attentional strategy when applied to the relevant artistic practices.

7.2.5. Dominic McIver Lopes’ criteria for a theory of art

Dominic McIver Lopes offers two criteria as standards of correctness for theories of art (2014, 15-23). The first is that the theory is viable, which is the demand that the theory can deal with counterexamples. The second criterion is informativeness. Lopes offers the following requirements for informativeness, courtesy of Partick Maynard: “to explain phenomena in clear terms, to situate them within wider contexts, to solve old problems, to match the distinctions we observe and the tendencies we exhibit, and to begin to tell us why [the phenomena] should be so important to us” (Maynard, 1997, xiv).

Regarding viability, I have specified the kinds of social facts that are required for the existence of an artefact, the attribution of proper function and the function of rewarding the artistic attentional strategy. Because of this, the artistic functionalist definition of art provides a theory that can rebut potential counterexamples. Given that cases must be judged according to the social facts involved, determinations of art status are only as precise as the subject matter allows.

Greater specificity regarding the characteristics of particular art forms can be provided by supplementary theories of the individual arts. But I have provided a theory of art that provides a rationale for something’s being art—namely, the ability to reward the artistic attentional strategy. This definition is also informative regarding other long-standing issues such as the nature of artistic value. I have also commented on the theory’s informativeness regarding different senses of the term “art,” and on the value that is accorded to art, particularly to Fine Art.
7.2.6. Berys Gaut’s criteria for adequacy

Berys Gaut offers the following three constraints for a theory of art (2000, 30-31). First, the theory must have intuitive adequacy. According to Gaut, the account must match our intuitions regarding actual and counterfactual cases of art. Second, it must have normative adequacy, which involves rejecting some intuitions on the basis of reflective equilibrium. These cases require a theory of error to justify the revisions. Third, it must have heuristic utility. This means that it should comport well with a package of other theories about the domain.

I have argued the artistic functionalist theory provides a plausible account of what counts as good reasons for something’s being art. I have also explained in §6.1.5 that we can rationally reconstruct the background competencies that are the cause of intuitions about art status. This provides a rational basis for explaining which intuitions are good or bad regarding art status. Further, I have specified the artistic attentional strategy in general characteristics that easily allow for it to fit with more specific theories regarding individual art forms, as well as other kinds of cultural analyses.

7.2.7. Harold Osborne’s requirements

Harold Osborne claims that the question of the definition of art is the same as the question of the “qualities which all works of art have in common and which other artefacts, including those presumptive works of art which are rejected by the critic, do not possess” (Osborne, 1955, 42). He then presents the following standards for a successful definition of art:

(1) It must be applicable by anyone who adopts it to every object that person classifies as a work of art. (2) It must not be applicable to any object which a person who adopts it is unwilling to classify as a work of art. (3) It must be applied by anyone who adopts it as his sole criterion for assessing the relative worth of different works of art (Osborne, 1955, 47).
My definition rejects the first standard. Intuitions clash and not all intuitions are equally well informed. But, as I mentioned in §7.2.6, my functionalist definition provides rational reasons to persuade someone that an object is art (or not). I reject the second standard on the same basis. Consider conceptual art. It is perhaps tempting for some who encounter a piece of conceptual art that confounds their presuppositions about how works should be appreciated to declare something along the lines of: “But it’s just a bed with some paint on!” or “It’s just a pile of bricks!” But even the appreciation of traditional works requires socialised skills regarding artistic conventions that have been exercised to the point of becoming second nature. Acknowledging that artworks are artefacts that reward the artistic attentional strategy, and that competency in such appreciation necessitates understanding of established conventions of appreciation—including knowledge of specific facts regarding the location of a work in an art-historical narrative; recognition of themes and aims that regularly appear in the oeuvre of an artist; and so on—means that mere perception and description of the components that constitute a work is inadequate for appreciation of the object as a work of art. Sometimes people lack the requisite knowledge to appreciate an artwork appropriately.

Regarding the third standard, I have characterised core artistic value as being central to artistic appreciation, though other close values may also be included. I have also argued that it can be employed in comparisons of artistic merit (see §6.2).
8. Conclusion

I will conclude with several brief comments on some of the advantages of the artistic functionalist definition of art and of the theory of art that I offer in support of it.

First, my theory provides a novel approach to the conceptual analysis and definition of at least some concepts that are essentially grounded in social reality, as opposed to physical reality. The essence of art is expressed—and gains its objectivity—based on repeated behaviours of a specific kind. Central to this is the form of valuing that I describe as the artistic attentional strategy. This form of valuing explains why artistic practices evolve and are maintained in all cultures. These practices, I claim, are interrogable manifestations of concepts of art, whether such concepts refer to collections of works in a specific style, geographical location or time period. This feature makes the form of analysis I propose applicable to all cultures.

Second, there is a long history of functionalist definitions. Existing instances identify art as functioning to provide an experience of a particular qualitative character. This experience is usually cashed out in terms of the aesthetic. Historically, this experience has been put forward as the distinctive value that artistic practices provide to society. But, as I have already mentioned, aesthetic functionalist approaches are simply untenable as a thoroughgoing account of the value of contemporary art and, by extension, contemporary artistic practices.

Rather than describing the experience of a value in qualitative terms, my approach identifies a form of valuing. In doing so, I identify the general characteristics common to our engagement with artworks from across all art forms, all cultures and all times. Importantly, I argue, it is also a form of valuing that is distinctive to anything that we call art or that we view as artistic.

Third, various evolutionary theories have arisen regarding the value of art. For example, Denis Dutton argues that art production is a means of signalling fitness to potential mates (Dutton, 2009). Brian Boyd (2005) suggests that art has group benefits of facilitating social cohesion and creativity by causing occasions for shared attention. I will not here endeavour to propose any theory regarding the evolutionary significance of artistic appreciation. I will, however, note two points of interest. First, attempts to argue for the evolutionary significance of art cannot do without initial philosophical analysis regarding the
subject matter of their inquiry. Without some description of the subject matter that is to be explained or examined, there is no way for a scientific investigation to be conducted. Attempts to analyse artistic practices using scientific methods must therefore have, as a prerequisite for that investigation, some preliminary description of the art phenomena that is to be investigated. Second, there are several markers that signal that a behaviour may be of evolutionary importance. These are (1) that the behaviour is old, (2) that it is pleasurable to do, and (3) that it occurs pan-culturally. The characterisation of the artistic attentional strategy that I have developed in this dissertation satisfies all of these requirements, and so I suggest that this would constitute a category of behaviour that would be suitable for further investigations into the evolutionary significance of art practices.

Fourth, art making traditions are a resource-intensive business. The establishment and maintenance of art traditions require investments of time, skill and materials. So why do these practices persist and flourish given their expense? My answer resides in the characterisation of artistic appreciation that I have sketched. I have described an extremely versatile, self-motivating form of activity that engages us both cognitively and affectively. And often the concrete practices and art forms are aligned—either intentionally or not—with other social goods. Art may result in a shared sense of identity and thus facilitate social cohesion; it may provoke us to reflect on aspects of the world we might otherwise take for granted; it may educate us and lift our spirits. Art may be intended to communicate moral and religious lessons to large audiences, or to reinforce ideologies, or develop emotional understanding. Engagement with works of art is self-motivating. But the sorts of purposes external and incidental to something being art may not be so self-motivating (e.g., the attainment of moral or cognitively valuable ends). It is a mistake to identify any one of these possible social goods that art may serve as art’s reason for being. Instead, art essentially involves audiences in a satisfying, self-motivating form of regard that is versatile enough to enrich our lives in countless ways.

To conclude: The very essence of art is expressed in and derives its objectivity from our continued intentional activity within art traditions that are driven by core artistic value and the artistic attentional strategy. Further, this form of valuing explains the enduring nature and ubiquity of those practices.
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