

Art as Reflexive Practice

Daniel Martin Feige*

Free University of Berlin

A central theoretical task of philosophical aesthetics consists of providing an answer to the question of defining art. Despite the fact that in the 1950s philosophers like Morris Weitz already regarded this task as impossible, the question how to define art today is a major topic within the philosophy of art again — one only has to think of the currently discussed possibilities of disjunctive and historical definitions or the cluster concept of art.¹ According to Stephen Davies,² we can distinguish procedural definitions, whose main exponent is George Dickie with his institutional theory, from functional definitions, as in the analytic context most prominently developed by Monroe C. Beardsley. Similar to Beardsley's definition according to which art is a source of aesthetic experience, the mainstream of German aesthetics has tried to give a definition by means of a concept of aesthetic experience. Even though it has to be mentioned that the conceptual content of aesthetic experience given by the latter tradition based on readings of Kant differs considerably from Beardsley's account, which is based on Dewey's aesthetics, it is nevertheless possible to also understand this tradition as a contribution to a functional account.

In the framework of this distinction my proposal will side with the functional theorists, but I will argue that the functional account is not convincingly spelled out if it operates with the Kantian or Deweyian concept of aesthetic experience. In this paper I will propose a functional account of art that characterizes the function of art as reflexivity. I am convinced that some insights of a procedural theory of art can enter into the account

* Email: daniel.m.feige@fu-berlin.de. I thank Alessandro Bertinetto, Georg W. Bertram, Noël Carroll, Stefan Deines and Richard Eldrige for comments on this paper.

¹ Concerning the Cluster-Theory cf.: Berys Gaut, "Art as a cluster Concept," in *Theories of Art today*, ed. Noël Carroll (Mad./Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 25-44. A naturalistic version of the Cluster-theory from a evolutionary point of view is proposed in: Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

² Stephen Davies, "Functional and Procedural Definitions of Art," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1990): 99-106.

and that it can also meet the challenges of the anti-definitionalists. I will develop my argument in a first step by discussing Weitz's anti-essentialism, Dickie's institutionalism and Beardsley's functionalism to point out their advantages as well as their major shortcomings. In the context of this discussion I will also name criteria that a definition of art has to meet. In a second step I will then develop the outlines of a functional account which proposes to understand art as a certain kind of reflexive practice.

I. Anti-Essentialism, Institutionalism and Functionalism

i. The quest of defining art has been challenged in an influential way by the Neo-Wittgensteinians, its main exponent being Morris Weitz. In his much discussed paper "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" he pursues the meta-aesthetic project of clarifying the logic of the concept of art.³ He claims that a traditional definition "in the sense of a true definition or set of necessary and sufficient properties of art" has not only failed to appear as of now, but that it is logically impossible because it is bound to a "fundamental misconception of art".⁴ Thus in the first place he is not criticizing existing theories for having formulated the wrong conditions, he is criticizing them for having overlooked the logic of the concept of art. As an alternative he applies Wittgenstein's model of family resemblance to the question of defining art, a theory which Wittgenstein has used to answer the question how to define the concept of games. In this spirit Weitz claims: "The problem of the nature of art is like that of the nature of games, at least in these respects: If we actually look and see what it is that we call art, we will also find no common properties — only strands of similarities. [...] [T]he basic resemblance between these concepts is their open texture."⁵ This argument brings Weitz to a critical reevaluation of existing theories: even if they have failed as definitional projects and even if they are in fact normative theories which do not offer a real definition but rearrange the realm of art by normative criteria, they possibly succeed at pointing out central dimensions of evaluating certain aspects of certain

³ Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1956): 27-35.

⁴ Morris, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," 27.

⁵ Morris, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," 31.

kinds of artworks. But why exactly does the logic of the concept of art has to be understood in terms of family resemblance? Morris Weitz tells us: “What I am arguing, then, is that the very expansive, adventurous character of art, its ever-present changes and novel creations, makes it logically impossible to ensure any set of defining properties. We can, of course, choose to close the concept. But to do this with “art” or “tragedy” or “portraiture”, etc., is ludicrous since it forecloses on the very conditions of creativity in the arts.”⁶

A major theoretical benefit of Weitz’s account is the way in which he makes us sensitive to the heterogeneity of the entities that are addressed by the notion of art. Any definitional approach has to meet this challenge insofar as it has to take into account the heterogeneity of different art forms as well as the historical heterogeneity of what has been produced in one art form and the possibility of an emergence of new art forms. His criticism of traditional aesthetics also makes us sensitive concerning the possibility of counter-examples and thus towards the definitional question whether a theory might be too inclusive or too exclusive. If we, for example, say that a necessary condition for something to be art is to have a narrative or that art hinges on the expression of an emotion, our general concept of art would be both too exclusive and too inclusive. Many entities that in our practice are understood as works of art would no longer count as art while other entities that are not regarded as works of art would suddenly fall in this category. Thus, instead of clarifying the concept of art, they just give the word “art” a new conceptual content. We have to stay clear of this possibility and instead demand from a definition of art that it is consistent with common and paradigmatic uses of the notion of art.

Despite these productive insight, in the end Weitz’s account is nevertheless not convincing. There are many canonized critical comments on Weitz’s proposal;⁷ Weitz proposal tends to be uninformative insofar as “anything might resemble any other thing in some respect”⁸ and becomes

⁶ Morris, “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics,” 32.

⁷ Cf. for example: Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of art: A contemporary Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 218ff. Stephen Davies, *The Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 29ff.

⁸ Stephen Davies, “Weitz’s Anti-Essentialism,” in *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art. The Analytical Tradition. An Anthology* ed. Peter Lamarque and Stein H. Olsen (Oxford:

implausible if denying any necessary conditions of art, even artifactuality. Let me point out one criticism on Weitz that I find specifically important: Weitz argument isn't staying on a conceptual level. In fact he argues for the open-concept-theory in reference not to aspects of the logic of the concept of art, but to aspects of the factual historical art-practice. He thinks that the innate creativity of a practice and its definition render each other impossible — but as for example Berys Gaut rightly pointed out,⁹ “practices can be pursued in original ways yet be definable (chess and physics are examples), or it might be part of the definition of art that its products be original.” Despite his suggestion to look and see how the concept of art is used, Weitz isn't able to give a convincing account of this practice. Asking the question about the specificity of art-practices brings me to Georg Dickie's proposal.

ii. Building on Arthur C. Danto's influential paper *The Artworld*,¹⁰ George Dickie's account of an institutional theory of art has tried to clarify the logic of this practice. He has presented his theory in several versions in answer to his critics. The basic idea of the institutional theory can be reconstructed with regard to its first version from 1974.¹¹ Dickie writes: “A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2) a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld).”¹² (34) Dickie claims that he offers a classificatory rather than a normative definition of art. A classificatory definition could explain, as Dickie hopes, why something does not cease to be an artwork, even if it is a poor artwork. Thus on this account something can

Blackwell, 2004), 65.

⁹ Gaut, “Art as a cluster Concept”, 26.

¹⁰ Arthur C. Danto, “The Artworld,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 61, No. 19 (1964): 571-584.

¹¹ Georg Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic. An institutional Analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

¹² Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic. An institutional Analysis*, 34. Concerning this definition I won't comment on the idea of artifactuality and the notion of a set of aspects that picks up Dantos notion of artworks being construed via interpretation (see Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. A Philosophy of Art*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981) 115ff.), because I think of both that they are defensible.

be art without thereby being good art.

The much discussed aspect of this definition is that Dickie is saying that something becomes an artwork in a classificatory sense due to “persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution.” Of course the institutions he has in mind have to be mainly understood as informal institutions, because often there are no codified procedures in the realm of art. What he calls “artworld” is thereby understood as a whole of a practice that is constituted out of sub-systems that designate roles to the acting persons, e.g. the artist and the audience. Concerning the audience, the artworld opens up possibilities due to the habitualization of ways of perceiving and acting and thus also concerns modes of practical knowledge. As Noël Carroll rightly noted, “the institutional theory emphasises that there is a social practice with rules and designated roles underpinning the presentation of such things and that the instantiation of these social forms and relations in the required way is crucial to art status”.¹³

Even if this insight is true, we can nevertheless ask whether art can be defined solely with regard to institutional reconstructions of the structure of this practice. Apart from the problem, that the institutional theory might not give plausible answers to the question whether in fact early art is produced within an institutional setting, it surprisingly hasn’t much of an answer in view of the question: “What makes an institution an art institution?” As Robert Stecker rightly noted: “Dickie, and other institutionalists, give us very little by way of answer to this question. Instead, they give us features, like being an artifact presentation system, that both art and nonart institutions share in common. Dickie explicitly relies on our unarticulated background knowledge of current artistic practices to implement the distinction.”¹⁴ The major shortcoming of the institutional theory is nevertheless something else: The problem is that the institutional theory leaves questions of the *value* of art unanswered, as far as it treats those questions as not being constitutive for something to have the status of a work of art. Even if Dickie is right to point out that a bad work of art is still a work of art and that artworks are candidates for appreciation, he neglects to take into account that the concept of art is somehow a

¹³ Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of art: A contemporary Introduction*, 232.

¹⁴ Robert Stecker, “Is it Reasonable to Attempt to Define Art?” in *Theories of Art today*, ed. Noël Carroll (Mad./Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 49.

normative concept. A definition of art has to do justice to the normative dimension of the concept of art, even though it shouldn't become normative itself in a prescriptive way (e.g. predicting how the development of a specific genre should proceed). Dickie's theory somewhat lacks to give an informative answer to the questions why we have such an interest in art, why we spend a lot of time and money to see exhibitions, to listen to concerts or to watch artistic movies. Even if it is convincing to accentuating the social and historical dimensions of art practices — and I think it is — it is not convincing to neglect the normative dimension of these practices.¹⁵

iii. A functional definition of art can do justice to this normative dimension without abandoning the insights developed as of now. Functional accounts have the form that within a practice A is a medium to pursue the end B and that A can pursue it for the better or the worse. Functionalism is granting A the function of B of course not only in the case when it actually fulfills B, but if there is a practice, in which A could fulfil B. Concerning the definition of art, functionalism holds, as Stephen Davies rightly noted, “that there is some distinctive need met by art in our lives and that it is in terms of this need that art is to be defined.”¹⁶ While art may be used in the name of many interests, not all usages of art can explain why we have the concept of art and what the value of art *qua* art is for us. In the analytic context Monroe C. Beardsley has developed the concept of aesthetic experience as a functional account in such a way.¹⁷ Beardsley proposes to understand the function of art in its providing an aesthetic experience. Drawing upon Dewey's aesthetics, he names dimensions of what he calls aesthetic experience like fixation on heterogeneous and interrelated components, intensity, coherence and completeness. His theory tries to offer a general concept of the aesthetic and not only a definition of art in the narrower sense. Due to criticism, Beardsley has later on given different interpretations of aesthetic experience — most notably, he reacted to criticism of Dickie, who argues that Beardsley's previously

¹⁵ Also see: Nigel Warburton, *The Art Question*. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 87ff.

¹⁶ Stephen Davies, “Functional and Procedural Definitions of Art,” 99.

¹⁷ Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics. Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958).

named characteristics of aesthetic experience are in fact properties of the experienced object and not qualities of the experience and thus he rightly proposed an external account of aesthetic experience.¹⁸

But just like the mainstream of German aesthetics, which relies on a concept of aesthetic experience that is mainly based on new readings of Kant, this proposal tends to be in danger of un informativity: If a concept like aesthetic experience is meant to offer an integrative account of experiencing a walk in a forest, a fugue by Bach or an experimental movie by Michael Snow, we can cast doubt whether it is in fact an informative account and whether it is in fact really talking about one kind of experience. It may well be the case that the constitutive properties of these experiences differ in central ways. A definition of art should thus present a concept which marks informative distinctions — between art and other forms of cultural practice; between mere aesthetic objects and works of art; within every art form itself, like the difference between artistic and mere music. Besides this objection the criteria Beardsley names also seem at least in part to be wrong with regard to a lot of contemporary works of art. Ready-mades, for example, cannot be plausibly described in terms of Beardsley's theory. He acknowledges this fact and draws the conclusion that Duchamp's "Fountain" is no work of art at all — which shows that his theory is not only too inclusive, but also too exclusive.¹⁹ Thus Beardsley falls prey to the wrong kind of normative theory formulation that Weitz had in view. Even though Beardsley's theory is not convincing in the respects I discussed, the general logic of the way he defines art is promising. The problem thus isn't that functionalism is wrong, but that Beardsley names a wrong function of art as a constitutive function. But there is another theoretical possibility for a functional account that is not based on a reformulation of Kant or Dewey, but on a reformulation of Hegel. To my mind, a reformulated Hegelian account of art placed within the framework of a functionalist theory can do justice to the mentioned criteria for a definition of art, namely that a definition has to present informative dis-

¹⁸ Georg Dickie, "Beardsley's Phantom Aesthetic Experience," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 62, No. 5 (1965): 129-136.

¹⁹ Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics. Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, 524ff. Monroe C. Beardsley, "An Aesthetic Definition of Art," in *What is Art?*, ed. Hugh Curtler (New York: Haven Publications, 1983), 15-29.

tinctions, that it has to be consistent with common and paradigmatic uses of the notion in our everyday linguistic practices, that it has to take seriously the heterogeneity of the field of art and that it can do justice to the normative dimension of the concept of art.

II. Reflexivity as the Function of Art

Concerning functional accounts in general, it has to be noted that works of art can be used for numerous different purposes. For example, artworks are lucrative assets in the art market, and they can display the social status of a person. These are *external functions* of artworks. Concerning external functions it can be conceptually differentiated between those external functions which are nevertheless *dependent* on the artwork and those external functions which are *independent* of the artwork. As an example for a dependent external function we can think of using a certain symphony in a commercial; as an example of an independent external function we can think of putting a sculpture on a weighing machine to get a certain weight on one side. Contrary to Beardsley, I also count purely hedonic functions as external functions — many mere aesthetic objects can fulfil these functions. Of course we can just be delighted by the colours of Mondrian's "Broadway Boogie-Woogie" or some sound-dimensions of Schubert's "Winterreise". But even if these are legitimate uses of these artworks, we would say that we somehow miss not only certain dimensions of these works, but miss those works of art as a whole.

In line with the Hegelian theory of art, which outlines the logical place of art in the human world when he allocates art to absolute spirit, I would like to separate these external functions from an *internal function* of art. It has to be noted that the difference between external functions and internal functions does not imply a hierarchy and it also does not imply that works of art fulfil necessarily only one function at a time — it just implies that the concept of art cannot be reconstructed by simply referring to external functions.²⁰ Hegel writes: "As regards the worthiness of art

²⁰ See the notion of plurifunctionality in: Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statements: Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge/Mass.: MIT Press, 1960), 350-377.

to be treated scientifically, it is of course the case that art can be used as a fleeting play, affording recreation and entertainment, decorating our surroundings, giving pleasantness to the externals of our life, and making other objects stand out by artistic adornment. Thus regarded, art is indeed not independent, not free, but ancillary. But what we want to consider is art which is free alike in its end and its means.²¹ This freedom of art is nevertheless not understood as opposite to functionalism as far as Hegel understands the freedom of art precisely as art fulfilling a certain function. About the internal function of art in the human world Hegel writes: „Now, in this freedom alone is fine art truly art, and it only fulfils its supreme task when it has placed itself in the same sphere as religion and philosophy, and when it is simply one way of bringing to our minds and expressing the Divine, the deepest interests of mankind, and the most comprehensive truths of the spirit.”²²

In a reformulation of the Hegelian vocabulary we can say that works of art are means for *understanding ourselves* (Selbstverständigung). This can be reformulated in terms of art as a whole being a *reflexive practice*. Unlike the Kantian account of the reflexivity of the aesthetic judgment, which proposes from a transcendental point of view to understand art and the aesthetic as reflexive insofar as the subject ensures itself about its cognitive faculties and thus that it fits in the world, Hegel understands this reflection as a reflection of our position in the world, being a historical and social position. Thus, even though works of art can be about many

²¹ Georg W.F.Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art. Vol. I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 7.

²² Georg W.F.Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art. Vol. I*, 7. In the German Hotho-Edition of Hegel's Aesthetics the functional point of this passage is even more clear: „Das allgemeine Bedürfnis zur Kunst also ist das vernünftige, daß der Mensch die innere und äußere Welt sich zum geistigen Bewußtsein als einen Gegenstand zu erheben hat, in welchem er sein eigenes Selbst wieder erkennt. Das Bedürfnis dieser geistigen Freiheit befriedigt er, indem er einerseits innerlich, was ist, für sich macht, ebenso aber dies Fürsichsein äußerlich realisiert und somit, was in ihm ist, für sich und andere in dieser Verdopplung seiner zur Anschauung und Erkenntnis bringt.“ Georg W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik. Band 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 52. „Denn andere Zwecke, wie Belehrung, Reinigung, Besserung, Gelderwerb, Streben nach Ruhm und Ehre, gehen das Kunstwerk als solches nichts an und bestimmen nicht den Begriff desselben.“ Georg W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik. Band 1*, 82.

things and exemplify any properties, they also always concern us and our position in the world. To name some examples: In understanding certain representational paintings we understand not only something about a depicted world, but also something about our (historically and socially coined) ways of seeing the world;²³ in following the inner logic of a jazz performance like Bill Evans' "Time Remembered," we are not only emotionally engaged, but understand the movement of the music as a thematizing and playing-through of our existential movings and possibilities in a specific way and as thematizing and playing-through specific existential movings and possibilities;²⁴ in understanding specific novels we not only follow a fictional chain of events, but in following it, we thematize ourselves and imaginatively so our possibilities of acting and perhaps even our whole way of living. Thus, if we say we learn something in our encounters with works of art, this should not be understood in terms of an epistemic practice, because as a part of an epistemic practice, art would be fighting a losing battle. Even if we may gain knowledge about history and the world while reading a historical novel, if this was the main function of this novel, we could read books on history right away fulfilling this function a lot better. Thus we have to say the internal function of art is neither providing an aesthetic experience in hedonic terms, nor gaining knowledge about the world. In contrast works of art are candidates for our self-understanding and thus part of a reflexive practice.²⁵

Concerning this account of art as a reflexive practice, we have to ask how art specifically fulfils this function. An answer to this question is necessary due to the fact that there are other reflexive practices as well — apart from art, Hegel obviously listed philosophy and religion. Hegel as well as other major exponents of the tradition of philosophical aesthetics proposed to specify the reflexivity of art by means of the use of sensuous

²³ Cf. for example Hegels Interpretations of Dutch Painters: Georg W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik. Band 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 225ff.

²⁴ Cf. Richard Eldrige, "Hegel on Music," in *Hegel and the Arts*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 119-145.

²⁵ A major problem of Goodmans Languages of Art is thus, that he proposes to understand art as an epistemic practices, that is just differentiated from other epistemic practices by symptoms of the aesthetics, that are conjunctive sufficient and disjunctive necessary for art. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

materials within the work of art; most contemporary German aestheticians reformulate this notion by way of a concept of aesthetic experience that is orientated towards a specific sensual engagement with works of arts. But as a definition these proposals are confronted with counterexamples at least concerning the notion of sensuality insofar as for works of art like the works of the concept art and a lot of classical narrative novels it has to be said that they don't exemplify sensuous properties.²⁶ Arthur C. Danto has to my mind convincingly shown that only some properties of an object or event that is a work of art are in fact properties of the work of art — artworks are construed via interpretation.²⁷ This suggestion gives us good reasons to say that the notion of sensuous properties is a misunderstanding concerning at least certain works of the concept art and a lot of novels and thus as a misunderstanding of the specific way of art fulfilling the function of *Selbstverständigung*. This holds true despite the fact that the vast majority of works of art has to be reconstructed in terms of sensuous properties of artistic materials. Thus we have to consider the possibility *that there is not just one way of being an artwork*, that is to say in line with a Weitzian or in line with the more recent disjunctive or cluster definitions with a functional twist: In the light of the heterogeneity of different works of art there is no single way in which art fulfils the function of reflexivity.

Nevertheless we can say something general about *those* works of art that have mainly been discussed as paradigmatic for art as a whole, namely works of art that fulfil the function of reflexivity by exemplifying the sensuous dimensions of their artistic materials. The following thoughts thus concern only certain works of art, but I subsequently will discuss the possibility to generalize this way of fulfilling the function of reflexivity also for those works of art that don't exemplify the sensuous dimensions of their artistic materials. We can characterize the specific way these works of art fulfil the function of reflexivity, by an analysis of the way we understand them. As Heidegger in his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art"

²⁶ Cf. James Shelley, "The Problem of Non-perceptual art," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (2003): 363-378.

²⁷ Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. A Philosophy of Art*, 115ff.

concerning a painting of van Gogh rightly notes,²⁸ whereas within our everyday use of equipment there is no need to interpret because our understanding of equipment is taken up in a tacit hermeneutical background of practices that ultimately concerns practical understandings, our understanding of art is not taken up into this hermeneutical background. Works of art potentially pose difficulties for our understanding in a way that they challenge the recipient's everyday capacities of understanding as we don't have a practice that embodies definitive rules and conventions of interpretation. This isn't meant to say that there are no rules and conventions — obviously there are. But concerning for example instructions on the subject of interpretation for students of literature or art history, we know that they are auxiliary means and can always prove to be inadequate in light of a single artwork. Every work of art is unique and demands the recipient to identify its *constitutive elements and properties* — and in the case of artworks exemplifying sensuous properties of artistic materials, these properties are never mere sensuous properties as in the case of ordinary use of predicates of perception.

We can say that this is due to the fact that those artwork exemplifying the sensuous dimensions of their materials establish an *inner logic of their elements*. These elements of a work of art are constituted holistically. Consequently, we cannot describe elements of an artwork in an atomistic manner and independent of the context they are embodied in within the artwork. For example, it is usually not informative to notice that a certain voicing is used in a Beethoven-Piano-Sonata and a recording by Brad Mehldau alike — both fulfill quite a different function depending on their surrounding voicings. Concerning the structure of works of arts we have to be holists. But this holism of elements is not sufficient as a description — it is for example also true for the way that words gain their meaning in language. Elements of a work of art are not only holistically constituted, but, unlike for example the elements of language, within a work of art the differences between these elements become articulated. Thus the inner logic of an artwork can be described in such a way that each artwork specifically constitutes what counts as an element for it as well

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13ff.

as articulating the differences between those elements. Thus, if a work of art operates with materials like words that are also used outside of art they are not the same things as outside of the work of art anymore,²⁹ because we always have to ask what it is about them that is important within the outlines of the artwork — e.g. their sound-dimensions, the rhythmic qualities of their combination, their usage within different strophes, possibly their immersion into bigger narrative units and even probably their graphical presentation. Coming back to the mentioned example, we can say that a certain voicing for a certain chord in a Beethoven-Piano-Sonata and a recording by Bill Evans is not only a different element within two different artworks because of the fact that we know both pieces are from a different period and a different kind of music: It is a different element because it is surrounded by distinct voicings and certain dimensions of these voicings become accentuated within the piece of music itself: A musical work of art is for example presenting the harmonic progression itself and it articulates the difference between each of them. Thus the harmonies are not only constituted holistically.³⁰

Reconstructing this logic of elements of works of art certainly can, as I argued, only reconstruct the way art is a reflexive practice concerning some kinds of works of art. I briefly want to comment on the two major examples of works of art that cannot be reconstructed in terms of sensuous artistic materials. Talking on the one hand about a great number of novels we have to say that these kinds of works exemplify the specificity of their narration that is nevertheless not a specificity of the sensuous — phonetic, rhythmic, graphic etc. — dimensions of the words and sentences, they use to tell their story. Concerning classical narrative novels we can nevertheless say that they follow the described logic of constitution of elements of works of art, namely, if those elements are understood as narrative rather than sensuous elements: The differences of events, characterizations of characters, the specificity of the chaining of events and so on become articulated within the work of art. The story told could not have been told

²⁹ For a discussion of the concept of artistic material cf.: Martin Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 106ff.

³⁰ Also cf. for this logic of elements constituting a work of art: Georg. W. Bertram, „Kunst und Alltag: Von Kant zu Hegel und darüber hinaus,“ *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 52/2 (2009): 203-217.

differently but in this case it's also not a matter of a different sensuous presentation of words. Taking on the other hand about some works of concept art and the ready-mades we have to say instead that the majority of those kinds of works of art don't exemplify the sensuous dimensions of artistic materials and that they aren't constituted in terms of the described logic of elements but rather exemplify concepts and ideas. In this way, a lot of ready-mades for example proceed in a self-reflexive fashion in thematizing our artworld knowledge: Concerning Duchamps famous "Fountain", we need to have gained certain art-related understandings as a background for understanding the work of art, but we also have to understand this artworld knowledge as being thematized by "Fountain". Knowledge doesn't help to intensify the sensuous encounter with "Fountain", but it is necessary to understand "Fountain" as thematizing certain kinds of knowledge. Thus talking about "Fountain" in terms of something like a sculpture or, alternatively, of an art object in a traditional sense, is going into the wrong direction.³¹ But this description might not be true for every existing ready-made: let's keep in mind, that there is not just more than one way of being a work of art, but there is also more than one way of being a ready-made. We need to give an account of ready-mades that takes serious the different kinds of ready-mades that exist. Thus some ready-mades exemplify the explicated logic of elements, because certain aspects — like their place in the museum, the specific way they are arranged in the room, the lighting, aspects of their installation etc. — may be constitutive for them.

This described structural logic has to consider what Noël Carroll rightly points out, i.e. "artworks come in categories".³² We can say that every innovation or conservation in the realm of art has to be understood against the background of expectations and habitualizations that embody a hermeneutical horizon of understandings. This horizon is a condition of the possibility of artworks being understandable for subjects and involves different kinds of theoretical and practical knowledge. Any understandings embodied within our way of life can come into play here as well as practical knowledge about characteristic usages of artistic media and also

³¹ George Dickie has offered this kind of wrong interpretation in reaction to criticism of Ted Cohen: Georg Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic. An institutional Analysis*, 42.

³² Noël Carroll, *On Criticism*. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 93. Also see his remarks on the plural-category approach: Noël Carroll, *On Criticism*, 170ff.

artworld knowledge in a narrower sense, i.e. things like the knowledge of styles and conventions of genre. But this hermeneutical horizon is, as I have argued, not sufficient to describe our ways of understanding every kind of work of art, because in the majority of all cases these ways have to be understood from the logic of how artworks establish their elements that omit a purely conventional or rule-governed understanding of our understanding of art. What I call inner logic here should of course neither be understood as something completely autonomous from the interpreting subject, nor as something static. Artworks, being relational entities in the Hegelian and Dantoian sense, change with interpreting them, because every interpretation can offer different readings of the relation of the artworks' elements and even different individuations of their elements. Artworks are ultimately not translatable, because in every historical situation they offer new possibilities of interpretation, which are related to the recipients' capacities to make sense of them as part of a reflexive practice.

After trying to outline some basic ideas concerning the modes in which art fulfils the function of reflexivity, let me finally come back to the notion of reflexivity once more in trying to connect it to my earlier Hegelian statement about artworks being a candidate for understanding ourselves. The notion of reflexivity would be misguided if art would be understood as a practice that lets us understand something that we already knew as participants of a historical way of life and that could be expressed otherwise. This notion has been proven wrong regarding the reconstructed logic of our understanding of works of art. Even if works of art illustrate, they never do so exclusively, since they also change the thing they illustrate in their own way. Instead of understanding reflexion as a theoretical activity, that could be reconstructed in representational terms, we should rather understand it as a *practical activity*, that changes our understandings, our ways of seeing, hearing and behaving, our ways of narrating aspects of our lives and so on. This changes include quite different dimensions, like dimensions of habitualization or dimensions of normative revaluations of our ways of thinking, seeing and hearing. Enhancing the Hegelian concept of art, Heidegger's example of the Greek temple as a work of art examines the role this temple plays for a dynamic world-disclosure of historical subjects: "But men and animals, plants and things, are never present and familiar as unalterable things fortuitously constituting a suitable environ-

ment for the temple that, one day, is added to what is already present. [...] Standing there, the temple first gives to things their look, and to men their outlook on themselves.”³³ In following the themes and presentations an artwork develops the recipient’s understandings undergo a transformation, because he has to adjust his ways of seeing, thinking etc. to the ways of seeing, thinking etc., the artwork demands. A subject who arranges his life in contact with certain types of artworks will thus establish new modes of seeing, hearing, thinking, acting, and so on.

In pointing out this possibility of art, we can say that art has to be understood as situated at the basics of a given historical culture. What comes into focus here is art being a practice that is constitutive for our way of life.

References

- Beardsley, Monroe C. *Aesthetics. Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958.
- Beardsley, Monroe C., “An Aesthetic Definition of Art.” In *What is Art?*, edited by Hugh Curtler, 15-29. New York: Haven Publications, 1983.
- Bertram, Georg W., „Kunst und Alltag: Von Kant zu Hegel und darüber hinaus.“ *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 52/2 (2009): 203-217.
- Carroll, Noël. *On Criticism*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Carroll, Noël. *Philosophy of art: A contemporary Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Danto, Arthur C., “The Artworld.” *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 61, No. 19 (1964): 571-584.
- Danto, Arthur C. *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. A Philosophy of Art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- Davies, Stephen, “Functional and Procedural Definitions of Art.” *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1990): 99-106.

³³ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 21.

- Davies, Stephen. *The Philosophy of Art*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.
- Davies, Stephen, "Weitz's Anti-Essentialism." In: *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art. The Analytical Tradition. An Anthology*, edited by Peter Lamarque and Stein H. Olsen, 63-68. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.
- Dickie, Georg. *Art and the Aesthetic. An institutional Analysis*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974.
- Dickie, Georg, "Beardsleys Phantom Aesthetic Experience." *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 62, No. 5 (1965): 129-136.
- Dutton, Denis. *The Art Instinct*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Eldrige, Richard, "Hegel on Music." In *Hegel and the Arts*, edited by Stephen Houlgate, 119-145. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007.
- Gaut, Bery, "Art as a cluster Concept." In *Theories of Art today*, edited by Noël Carroll, 25-4. Mad./Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000.
- Goodman, Nelson. *Languages of Art*. London: Oxford University Press, 1969.
- Hegel, Georg W.F. *Lectures on Fine Art. Vol. I*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Hegel, Georg W.F. *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik. Band 1*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986.
- Hegel, Georg W.F. *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik. Band 2*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986.
- Heidegger, Martin, "The Origin of the Work of Art." In Heidegger, Martin. *Off the Beaten Track*, 1-56. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Jakobson, Roman, "Closing Statements: Linguistics and Poetics." In *Style in Language*, edited by Thomas A. Sebeok, 350-377. Cambridge/Mass.: MIT Press, 1960.
- Seel, Martin. *Aesthetics of Appearing*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

Shelley, James, "The Problem of Non-perceptual art." *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (2003): 363-378.

Stecker, Robert, "Is it Reasonable to Attempt to Define Art?" In *Theories of Art today*, edited by Noël Carroll, 45-65. Madison/Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000.

Warburton, Nigel. *The Art Question*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Weitz, Morris, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1956): 27-35.