Abstract By inverting Goodman’s question, turning “when is art” into “when art is not”, we may be able to perceive certain necessary conditions at the heart of the pragmatics of the artworld. The paper argues that art can be seen as intrinsically connected to the concepts of motion and emotion, and that the work of art involves an intentional increase of the complexity of experience; it can be seen as an “anti-entropy” or an “agrammaticality” which defies our usual classifications. Two works by Anish Kapoor are presented as capturing and embodying these forces.

The purpose of this paper is to use two works by Anish Kapoor to formulate what I take to be a metadefinition of art. My arguments take much of their inspiration from Nelson Goodman and George Dickie, though perhaps my approach will have its own particular flavour and goals. I insist on the fact that I am only offering a metadefinition. Unlike a definition in the usual sense, a metadefinition will not attempt specify the concrete and material essence of artistic practices. It will aim merely at underlining some general features of the pragmatics of an institution, thus respecting what I hold to be the obvious pluralism of that particular Lebensform we call art. But before I get to the definition, I should like to begin with a solemn hope. Very recently, I attended a conference in French aesthetics where absolutely brilliant speakers tackled serious intellectual issues and formulated complex and convincing concepts that I may someday be tempted to use. This did not, alas, prevent them from also proffering utter philosophical nonsense, of which I will provide only two examples. One brilliant speaker (who will remained unidentified) defined the shadow as –

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I quote – the inconceivable memory of that which has never happened. A second brilliant speaker attempted to define the essence of Marcel Duchamp’s art as an exploration of “a phenomenology of things unperceived.” I’m not sure how that which has never happened can leave any sort of trace, let alone a memory. Nor is it clear how there can be a study of the qualia provoked by that which is never felt. True, all of this sounds absolutely fascinating and enticing, but I fear that it doesn’t really mean very much. It may be that this absence of meaning has something to do indeed with the search for essentialist definitions undertaken by these two brilliant speakers; it may that this kind of search needs to ignore the claims of logic. Language can indeed do precisely that, that is, it can give us syntactically correct and stylistically enticing sequences that have absolutely no meaning or possible realm of application, not only no possible realm of application in the empirical world, but also no true realm of application in the world of thought. Here we are dealing with colourless green ideas that are indeed furiously sleeping, and my solemn hope is not to add, in what follows, a similar burst of what Wittgenstein has called gassing.¹

1. When Art is Not

One might profitably begin a quest for a metadefinition of art by turning Goodman’s famous argument on its head. Instead of asking, as Goodman does in his famous article “When is Art”;² we might try to decide when art is not. In other words, what elements, types of behaviour, practices or attitudes might render any allusion to art totally inconceivable. In the two thought experiments which follow, I attempt to show that, among other things, motion and emotion seem to be fundamental to our concept of art.

Imagine (if you will) a world of beings who are conscious but totally without affectivity; intelligent organisms living in a structured society where emotion simply does not exist. These beings would have appetites, of course, since food and reproduction would be necessary for the survival of both the individual and the race. But these operations would be simple biological functions engendering no passions. Would art exist in

such a society? Back in 1966, the official reply of the National Broadcasting Company was a resounding ‘Yes’, a position which provoked great consternation in the young cosmologist and philosopher that I was at the time. You may remember that Mr Spock, of Star Trek fame, was a “Vulcan”, and like all of the inhabitants of Planet Vulcan, a being of pure logic, emotion having been eliminated in the distant past of his race. Mr Spock can understand and recognise human emotions intellectually, but he cannot feel them himself. He can neither laugh nor cry, and he constantly shocks Dr McCoy, his humanist foil in the series, by the brutality of his utilitarianism (pure logic dictating, as expected, that the Utilitarian Calculus is the fundamental law of all ethics and politics).

I was thus highly surprised to see Mr Spock pick up his Vulcan Lyre, in a later episode, and burst into song. The fact that he seemed to be getting pleasure out of the exercise made matters worse. All of this seemed horribly out of character. How could this being of pure logic see in music anything more than a configuration of sounds, having perhaps an interesting mathematical structure, possessing no doubt cathartic powers for those inferior species burdened with emotion, but ultimately remaining utterly devoid of practical utility? The initial episodes of the series had presented him as incapable of emotion – how could he thus be moved by art?

The adolescent philosopher that I was at the time was thus postulating a necessary connection between art and emotion, and popular science fiction has indeed continued to present robots and androids as devoid of passion and thus oblivious to art. Indeed, it is precisely when these robotic entities begin to enjoy art and to feel emotion that the border between them and humanity starts to get blurred. To come back to Goodman, we might indeed be tempted to say that art is not when perception can never be accompanied by affectivity, when the very concept of affectivity is eliminated from the start.

Of course, the above example only shows a tendency to associate these two things, and certainly doesn’t constitute a rigorous proof. I’d like to propose a second thought experiment in order to take us a bit further. Ultimately,
any “institutional theory” of art needs to tie in to ontology, epistemology and metaphysics, and when it does, it should probably end up arguing that art is determined at least partially by our “synthetic unity of apperception” and other fundamental features of our consciousness and our physiology.

If both motion and emotion exist, it is because we are 1) individual beings 2) who exist in space-time and 3) who possess no telepathic abilities.

To demonstrate this point *a contrario*, we can imagine another parallel universe, without Mr Spock this time, but inhabited by a being I will call the Infinite Sponge [*Figure 1*].

![Figure 1](image)

This multi-cellular creature is not only infinite and eternal, it also happens to fill up its universe entirely and to be composed of cells in constant, instant and total telepathic contact with each other. They exist in a form of perfect harmony and symbiosis and share a single, undivided consciousness. Since I am a rather lazy historian of philosophy, I won’t attempt to say to what extent my Infinite Sponge was already dreamed up long ago.
by Leibniz or Spinoza, but I hope the reader will allow me to pursue my thought experiment nonetheless. Let us suppose, then, that unlike Spock, the Infinite Sponge could conceivably experience emotion – nothing in my thought experiment forbids it explicitly (for the moment, at least). But there is one thing that has been eliminated from the picture: In the world of the Infinite Sponge, motion is impossible, for there is no such thing as distance. Here it would make no sense to speak of communication, exchange or interpretation, since a single infinite consciousness occupying the totality of space would not have to worry about hermeneutics. Interpretation, like movement, derives from the distance between individuated beings, and this separation cannot exist in the universe of the Infinite Sponge. The monad need not, and indeed cannot, express its being. It is, and that is all.

Without the need or the possibility of affectivity, expression and interpretation, art could not exist. I would like therefore to use these two examples to suggest that motion and emotion, in the senses that I have implied, are in some way necessary – though not sufficient – conditions of art. I realise that I have only argued intuitively, but it does seem intuitively correct to assert that art would not exist for a being without emotion or for a being without spatial differentiation. For the being of pure logic, art would be superfluous; for the Infinite Sponge it would be totally inconceivable.

2. Literally Speaking

In another context, it might be useful to explore the neurology of the affects and to contrast those theories which “naturalise” emotion by reducing them to neurobiogical states with opposing theories propounded by anti-reductionist thinkers. There are fascinating discussions of these topics in works by Richard Lazarus or Antonio Damasio and one can find a useful summary of the debate in Martha Nussbaum’s Upheavals of Thought (2001) or (in France) Jean-Pierre Cometti’s work on the philosophy of psychology.3 I am convinced, however, that the operation of the emotions

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Anish Kapoor and the Anti-Entropy of Art

The link that I am trying to establish between motion and emotion would take us down other philosophical paths, but I hope the reader will allow me to make this link clear more by means of illustration than by historical argument. I will be looking at several examples, in the arts, of movement in a strictly literal sense. Obviously, museum going in itself involves expending kinetic energy, and even when you read a book on your Kindle or iPad you have to push a button or move your wrist to turn the page. The examples I will examine are much more literal than that and, indeed, literature will have a hard time matching the physical dimension of the works I have in mind. There are of course some exceptions: Mark C. Danielewski’s cult novel House of Leaves (2000) forces the reader to perform acrobatics with the heavy volume as he tries to follow a narration printed in different orientations all across the page. But aside from such examples, speaking of “movement” as a basic component of the reading experience remains largely metaphorical.

One might also want to argue that all of the arts, the visual arts included, involve the “movement” of interpretation. One could indeed say that with the famous duck-rabbit or with a composition by Arcimboldo, one is constantly “moving” back and forth between two visual interpretations. I don’t want to deny this, but I would rather limit my demonstration to concrete examples where movement is physically and literally present in the work. Anish Kapoor provides many such examples, but I won’t resist the temptation to underline the extent to which the visual arts have been inspired by the motor industry. Olafur Eliasson connected motion and emotion in Your Mobile Expectations (2007), a project which involved greatly modifying a BMW. Such automotive art goes back at least to Mario Merz, and we can countless examples in the same tradition, such as Gabriel Orozco, César, Arman, Bertrand Lavier and Erwin Wurm.  


3. Animation

The work of Anish Kapoor combines both motion and emotion and manages to establish a healthy balance between the literal and the metaphorical. My main example will be *Swayambh* (2007) [Figure 2], a piece first created in Nantes involving the movement of a large volume of red wax back and forth through the rooms of the museum.

![Figure 2](image)

In an interview conducted for the show, Kapoor reveals that the work was originally intitled *Paint Train*. He ultimately found this original title a bit

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3 [http://arttattler.com/archiveanishkapoor.html](http://arttattler.com/archiveanishkapoor.html)
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heavy-handed, since the work was going to be exposed in Germany and he feared that any reference to trains might be taken as an allusion to the Shoah. Kapoor modified the format of the work and, borrowing explicitly from Indian thought, changed the title to *Svayambh* – a term which means *self-produced* or *self-generated*. Despite the change of title, the work remains indeed a locomotive of red wax that slides imperceptibly along its rails within the white cube of the museum. Kapoor claims that the work has no particular content or subject.⁶ I suppose he means that the movement of self-generation (for the wax is modified by each passage through the hall) is an end in itself.

The question one might want to ask is *Why?* Why bother? Why bother to give movement to sculpture in this way? If the piece has no specific subject, does the movement add anything important? Is the motion in some way connected to an epistemological or cosmological message? If not, if there is no added value, then the animation is just a gadget and the work has no greater impact than a toy electric train.

To defend Kapoor, it would be wise to take a second and perhaps more famous example, *My Red Homeland* (2003) [Figure 3]:

![Figure 3](http://a403.idata.over-blog.com/1/96/04/42/S-rie-A-10/Kapoor-MyRedHomeland-2003.jpg)

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This piece could have been called *Svayambh* as well since it involves the same process of self-formation: the passage of the metal arm through the liquefied red wax shapes and reshapes the changeable substance of the work. Now I’d like to argue that the connection between motion and emotion here is established both on literal and metaphorical levels. Kapoor’s “red homeland” is of course India, his place of birth, but also his heart and his blood. The potentially endless *circulation* (movement and return) of the red substance, the indeterminate character of the shape it will take, the malleability of the material combined with a sense of what it was before—all of this combines to produce an experience where motion produces emotion. In these two works, Kapoor breathes life into inert material by making it move. Gilles Tiberghien claims that *Svayambh* is “an object infused with a spirit and which seems to move on its own” (Tiberghien 22). One could say that the sculpture is “animated” in the strict sense of the term: possessed of spirit and motion. According to Eckhard Schneider, *My Red Homeland* animates “the concrete space located between the beholder and the object” (Schneider 24). Kapoor himself says more or less the same thing about *Svayambh*.

Now motion and emotion combine here because, as Schneider points out, working on this space between involves working on one’s consciousness:

This interplay between space and time, between the immanence of the object and his awareness of his own self, becomes... a test case for the beholder’s own consciousness. (24)

But since consciousness (for those of us who do not live in the universe of the Infinite Sponge) is determined by movement, it can be said that Kapoor’s art of movement aims for a deeper understanding of experience and perception. This is exactly what Schneider goes on to claim:

Kapoor... is out for more than the mere factual phenomenon of a unified whole of colour, space and material. He is also interested in a complex simultaneity of seeing and knowing, of reason and emotion, of action and reaction. His aim is to achieve a subtle equilibrium of forces. (23)

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8 See Tiberghien 25.
I would like to argue that being made conscious of an “equilibrium of forces” is both a kinetic and an emotional experience.

4. The Anti-Entropy of art

According to Jean de Loisy, there is a certain hermeneutic infinity in the movement of Svayambh: “The invisible energy that moves the block gives the unfolding process the possibility of an infinite and fatal duration” (de Loisy 9). Though the gravity of many of Kapoor’s allusions are clear, I see nothing “fatal” in this process, and I think de Loisy is closer to the mark when he argues that part of Kapoor’s goal involves “organising the possibility of an endless commentary” (8). Kapoor makes the same point with respect to Cloud Gate, his monumental outdoor sculpture in Chicago [Figure 4], arguing that the scale of the work remains uncertain, that it remains undefined because it captures all light.9

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9 See Tiberghien 35.
This “uncertainty” or indeed infinity of the work is clearly connected to movement, since even if the spectator remains motionless, the sky is constantly changing. Schneider lays the same emphasis on infinity in the case of *My Red Homeland*:

‘My Red Homeland’ is overwhelming by virtue of the physical proximity of this sheer mass of red vaseline in all its rawness. We are involved as witnesses of an immense act of shaping, conceived as a never-ending process... (25)

So against any claim that the movement of these sculptures is merely a gadget, I would like to applaud their capacity to make us perceive the pragmatic and non-material status of art, its anti-entropic power. I would like to argue that this anti-entropic power of art, along with a kind of agrammaticality that I will define shortly, provides a metadefinition of our institution, a constitutive rule (in Searle’s sense of the term) of that *Lebensform* we call the *Artworld*.

The Second Law of Thermodynamics stipulates that all transformations of a system produce entropy defined as a state of greater disorganisation and lesser energy. According to the law, all complex systems naturally and inevitably evolve towards a state of lesser complexity. Metaphorically speaking, the work of art counters this movement towards disorganisation and stasis. The endless process of interpretation reverses entropy, metaphorically speaking, by producing hermeneutic states that are increasingly complex. I claim therefore that works of art exist for this purpose, that is, they exist to prevent stasis, at least in the artworld of today, for it would be unwise to claim that such stasis and consensus was never a part of what can be loosely called artistic practice. But in our current institution, the singularity of art (in an almost cosmological sense of the term) can be seen in its desire for a perpetual movement of meaning, in its desire to transcend traditional physical boundaries or categories in pursuit of the unexpected. One might even say, metaphorically speaking, that the purpose of art is to recreate eternally that initial breath of life that yields an infinite expansion of reception, interpretation and analysis. One might say, metaphorically speaking, that all great works of art are great insofar as they produce endless motion and emotion.
But am I speaking only metaphorically? Thinkers such as Alan Sokal or Jacques Bouveresse are right to scold us for the abuse of metaphor in realms where literal language would do the job. Yet art may not be one of these realms; perhaps any metadefinition of art demands an image, a transfer of symbol schemata, perhaps some kind of synaesthesia, or some kind of illustration. I would like to argue that a work like *My Red Homeland* manages to render visible the pragmatic operation of art. It illustrates the notion of plasticity, it embodies the hermeneutic circle, and via its own movement, it recalls the spatiality, temporality and affectivity that are at the heart of all works of art. To ask *When is art?* is to go beyond the level of material definition in order to explore the immaterial nature our intentionality. This is the lesson of Duchamp. And the value of a work like *Svayambh* is that it manages to materialise in wax and movement the pragmatic immateriality of our gaze.

### 5. Alterity and Agrammaticality

I would like to conclude by adding two other concepts to my metadefinition, the first being the popular notion of “alterity” that I would like to redefine slightly. Now we know that language – or I should really say *linguistics* – likes to classify and to sort things into pre-established categories, and alterity, in this general sense, is precisely that which frustrates this desire. All thinking is classification – all thought is sorting (to use a slogan I.A. Richards put forth back in the 1930’s) – but grammar especially is the search for water-tight categories and clear rules. But linguistics leaves a remainder; it can never fully explain or exhaust our expressive potential. We can go back to Willard Van Orman Quine and his famous “gavagai” thought experiment, to see the aporia of classification and translation. To remind you briefly, Quine imagines an anthropologist deep in the jungle who accompanies a tribal chief on his daily walks. The anthropologist notices several times that when the chief sees a rabbit running in the underbrush, he cries out, “Gavagai!” The Quinean argument is that the anthropologist is wrong to write down in his notebook “Gavagai *equals* rabbit”, since the chief could be saying “meat” or “dinner”. Indeed, if his tribe believes in leporine reincarnation, he might be saying, “Look, it’s Granddad!” or, as one French linguist has pointed out, he might be using some verbal form
such as “it’s rabbitting”. Quine was arguing for a certain incommensurability between languages, but the conclusion I would like to draw is that the safe categories of grammar can be blown apart by the truly Other.

Now there have been times in the history of art where art itself involved classification and order. To a certain extent, the appeal of *curiosity cabinets* was based on the pleasure of classification (though behind the glass cases there was indeed a troubling diversity). Still more obvious are those forms of art – the *jardin à la française*, for example – which corresponded to classical ideals, and one might want to explore the etymological and historical relationships between *classicism*, *classification*, and plain-old *social class*. But there are newer forms of art which are more interested in declassification, in making *unreal* and in breaking up all existing categories. Such art exists, in many cases, to underline the alterity and plasticity of all categories, not just the categories of art. These works and practices are *rhizomatic*, one might say, in the sense of always inviting us to go somewhere else, to see things in a different way, to make unexpected connections. An “agrammatical theory” conceives of the artwork as crossing boundaries, seeking alterity, seeking the other side, disrupting categories and moving in unforeseen directions, simply for the sake of the alterity involved. My thesis is that art has become intentionally “agrammatical” in a sense; that is, it automatically tries to break the rules. This can indeed be tedious, at times, and can turn into a meta-rule. But even if the Other becomes a tiresome obsession, there is nonetheless a deep philosophical dimension in its relentless deconstruction of familiar categories.

Grammar needs to persuade us that categories are solid; art wants to subvert them at times, or at least get us to question them. Take something as traditional or established as the *Mona Lisa*. Without going so far in my willful confusion of categories as to ask what this painting tastes like, I still can see it as subversive in its own implicit way: What kind of painting is it exactly? Is it really just a portrait? What kind of smile is it that we see? Can we classify the smile in any normal category? It seems clear that the interest of this painting comes through its departures from the purely formulaic. But my “agrammatical theory of art” is not merely a pluralism that holds that art varies; it is rather a theory that states that art often aims at provoking a rupture in the system. Again, this is not necessarily the truth of all art throughout the ages, but it seems to be the truth of art...
for our times. This is why I think it is important to go beyond alterity in the ethnic sense to reach the alterity at the heart of our artistic practices.

But does the Other exist? In a sense, one might be tempted to answer that it does not. Donald Davidson once remarked that “all similes are true and most metaphors are false” (Davidson 257). All similes are true insofar as there will always be something that the items compared have in common. In obvious examples, this common characteristic is easy to perceive, but it can also be postulated in more extravagant comparisons as long as one is willing to broaden the notion of similarity. Thus the Taj Mahal is like the Mona Lisa since both are gazed upon by hordes of tourists. Lewis Carroll may have already been hinting at this infinite potentiality of true comparison with his famous unanswered riddle, “Why is a raven like a writing desk?” Carrollians have locked on to this and there are entire websites providing ingenious answers to the question, my own favourite being Why is a raven like a writing desk? Because “neither” has an “h”. Since the mind works by classification, there will always be some similarity there to be perceived. But if this is the case, then there is no room left for alterity. If everything is like everything else, then nothing is irrevocably Other. Now my goal is not to argue for or against this proposition, but simply to point out that it is sometimes the role of literature and of art to counter this tendency to erase alterity. By breaking down our perception of classifiable similarities (or, indeed, by introducing such extravagant comparisons that the very concept of classification appears artificial), art encourages a vision of difference. The Analytic philosopher Gilbert Ryle spoke disparagingly of what he calls the “category mistake” (Ryle 16). To adapt his own example, we can imagine someone who spends a day being guided around Oxford and says, “You’ve shown me the Library and the lecture halls, the offices and the colleges, but where is the University itself?” Ryle’s point is that there is no “Other” thing that is the university, and to ask for it is to make a category mistake; it is to misunderstand the concept involved. My argument is that the purpose of art is, in one sense, to encourage such “mistakes” – not to get us to misunderstand concepts, but to rearrange them in novel ways. In the case of art, the misuse of concepts is inten-

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11 For an analysis, see Martin Gardner, The Annotated Alice (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970) 44.
tional, since the artwork is seeking alterity via the breaking of boundaries and the confusion of objects.

Alterity points out the aporia of classification and all sorts of artists have joined in this task. Let me take as my final example the following Gary Larson cartoon:

![Figure 4](http://perryhooker.blogspot.fr/2011_05_01_archive.html)

**Figure 4.**

We see here the solitary chicken poised at the point of departure, the whole thing illustrating a rather silly joke that every American youngster

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12http://perryhooker.blogspot.fr/2011_05_01_archive.html
learned as a child: Why did the chicken cross the road? To get to the other side. Larson’s interest in sides and in alterity runs deep, since his series of comics was entitled *The Far Side*. Notice the way the cartoon captures the moment of (in)decision, the hesitation, perhaps indeed the infinite deferral of choice, as Derrida might have put it, and yet how powerfully it illustrates the call of the Other Side. Now you may think I am being facetious, but I quite seriously offer this image as a picture of the role of art, as an emblem of its agrammaticality, of its urge towards the Other. Perhaps, indeed, there is some ingrained necessity of movement in us all; we have to cross the road, just as, from a Levinasian perspective and unlike the Infinite Sponge, we need the Other in order to define ourselves. But to come back to art, I do not mean that artists don’t have reasons for doing what they do, only that “having a reason” doesn’t involve here following a predictable logic or some recognisable algorithm.

Now by mentioning alterity and agrammaticality, am I really adding two more concepts to my metadefinition, or are these two ideas already implied in the concept of anti-entropy that was presented earlier? If I were an artist, I’d probably want to claim that I’m creating something new. As a theorist, however, I need to recognise that they are deeply interrelated. If art is anti-entropic, it is because it is agrammatical, and if it is agrammatical, it is because it is free to seek the other side. There are realms where any interest in alterity, singularity and all the rest would be a handicap. If my wife asks me for one of the Ikea teaspoons we’ve had since our marriage, I probably shouldn’t spend too much time trying to get her to describe which particular teaspoon she wants. I certainly do not wish to argue that all classification is intrinsically aporetic. In other contexts, or from a vaster perspective, our categories are essential to all that we do and all that we are. But art as we know it exists to question these categories, and to question its own traditional practices. Of course, if some work were completely “Other”, totally beyond all of our normal categories and expectations, then it would not be perceived at all. It would not be processed, and thus could not be art. But to get to that limited Other which we can indeed see, the Other which is just across the road, we do not need a reason, for the journey, the crossing, is a value in itself.
References


