'Art' is most often used to refer to a set of forms, practices or institutions. However, when we ask: 'Is that art?' we are usually asking whether an individual item is a work of art. The project of defining art most commonly consists in the attempt to find necessary conditions and sufficient conditions for the truth of the statement that an item is an artwork. That is, the goal is normally to find a principle for classifying all artworks together while distinguishing them from all non-artworks. Sometimes the goal is set higher. Some look for a 'real' definition: that is, one in terms of necessary conditions that are jointly sufficient for being an artwork. Sometimes the aim is to identify a metaphysical essence that all artworks have in common.

A definition of art should be distinguished from a philosophical theory of art, which is invariably a broader project with vaguer boundaries. Such a theory may touch on many issues other that the issue of definition, or may even studiously avoid that issue in favour of others. A theory of art will typically concern itself centrally with questions of value, for example whether there is some unique value that only artworks offer. It may give attention to cognitive issues, such as what one must know to understand an artwork, and what it is for an interpretation of a work to be good, acceptable, or true. A theory of art may be interested in other sorts of responses or attitudes to artworks, such as emotional responses. It may focus on the fictionality characteristic of so many works of art, or on their formal, representational, or expressive properties. It may deal with the social, historical, institutional, or intentional characteristics of art. A theory of art will address several of these issues, display the connections among them, and sometimes, but only sometimes, attempt to formulate a definition either of art or of artistic value, or both on the basis of some of these other artistic properties.

This chapter will survey the main trends that mark the history of the project of defining art in the twentieth century before discussing the most important efforts in the past thirty years.

1. Historical Background

Even before turning to the twentieth century, something should be said about the historical roots of the attempt to define art. It is sometimes supposed that the earliest definitions of art are to be found in the writings of ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. In fact, one will not find, in these writers, a definition of art, in the sense of an item belonging to the fine arts or of art in its current sense, if that departs from the concept of the fine arts. It is now widely accepted that the former concept was not fully in place until some time in the eighteenth century, and hence it seems implausible that the ancients would think in terms of, or try to define, art in that sense. What is true is that they wrote about such things as poetry, painting, music, and architecture, which came to be classified as fine arts, and saw some common threads among them. Plato was very interested in the fact that poetry, like painting, was a representation or imitation of various objects and features of the world, including human beings and their actions, and that it had a powerful effect on the emotions. Aristotle also emphasized the idea of poetry as imitation and characterized other arts, such as music, in those terms.

This way of thinking of the arts wielded enormous influence in the Renaissance and Enlightenment, and so when the concept of the fine arts solidified the first definitions of art were cast in terms of representation, by such important figures as Hutcheson, Batteux, and Kant. It is not necessary to set out the exact content of all of these definitions here, since in the later period in which we are interested they were superseded by other approaches. Of those earlier definitions, Kant's is the one that has had truly lasting influence. Fine art, according to Kant, is one of two 'aesthetic arts', i.e. arts of representation where 'the feeling of pleasure is what is immediately in view'. The end of agreeable art is pleasurable sensation. The pleasure afforded by the representations of fine art, in contrast, is 'one of reflection', which is to say that it arises from the exercise of our imaginative and cognitive powers. Fine art is 'a mode of representation which is intrinsically final... and has the effect of advancing the culture of the mental powers in the interest of social communication' (Kant 1952: 165–6). There are elements in this conception that survive even after the idea that the essence of art is representation is abandoned.
One is a series of contrasts between (fine) art, properly understood, and entertainment (agreeable art). Art makes more demands on the intellect but offers deeper satisfactions. Art is 'intrinsically final'; i.e. appreciated for its own sake. Art has some essential connection with communication.

The struggle to replace the mimetic paradigm takes place in the nineteenth century. This occurs on many fronts, just as did the formation of the concept of the fine arts a century earlier. Artistic movements such as romanticism, impressionism, and art-for-art's sake challenge ideals associated with mimeticism and direct attention to other aspects of art, such as the expression of the artist and the experience of the audience. Debates among critics in response to these movements raise questions about the boundaries of art. The invention of photography challenges the mimetic ideal in painting, at least if that is regarded as the increasingly accurate, life-like representation of what we see. The increasing prestige of purely instrumental music provides at least one clear example of non-representational art. For some, such music provides a new paradigm captured by Walter Pater's claim that all the arts provide at least one clear example of non-representational art. For some, such music provides a new paradigm captured by Walter Pater's claim that all the arts

expression and representation co-occur, the real business of art is expression. Could find art without representation but not without expression. This might encourage the further thought, independently encouraged by various romantic and expressivist movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that, even when expression and representation co-occur, the real business of art is expression.

2. ART AS EXPRESSION

The ostensible difference between expression and representation is that, while the latter looks outward and attempts to re-present nature, society, and human form and action, the former looks inward in an attempt to convey moods, emotions, or attitudes. We seem to find instances of expressive art where representation is de-emphasized or absent. It is very common to think of instrumental music, or at least many pieces of music, in these terms. As the visual arts moved towards greater abstraction, they too often seem to de-emphasize, or abandon representation for the sake of expression. One can even extend this to literature, which pursued expressivist goals from the advent of romantic poetry through the invention of 'stream of consciousness' and other techniques to express interiority. So it might seem that one is feeling not merely as a general type, such as anger or remorse, but with as much particularity as possible. Collingwood does not deny that one can rephrase this definition in terms of a work of art rather than an activity, but he believes that the work exists primarily in the minds of artist and audience, rather than in one of the more usual artistic media. However, he seems to think of the job of the medium as enabling the communication of the emotion to the audience who then have the same clarified emotion in their minds, which is to say, for Collingwood, the work of art itself.

The definition has well-known problems. First, even if expressiveness, in some sense, is a widespread phenomenon in the arts, it is far too narrowly circumscribed by Collingwood. He prescribes a certain process by which a work of art must come about, whereas it is in fact a contingent matter whether works are created in the way he recognizes. Not unexpectedly, the definition rules out many items normally accepted as art works, including some of the greatest in the Western tradition, such as the plays of Shakespeare, which by Collingwood's lights are entertainment rather than art. The definition assumes that the emotion expressed in a work is always the artist's emotion, but it is not at all clear why a work cannot express, or be expressive of, an emotion not felt by the artist when creating the work. In recent years, the idea that art expresses an actual person's emotion has given way to the idea that art is expressive of emotion in virtue of possessing expressive properties, such as the property of being sad, joyful, or anxious, however such properties are analysed. Such properties can be perceived in the work, and their presence in a work does not require any specific process of creation.

Traditional expression theories like Collingwood's have been widely rejected, even if some still believe they point towards one of the central functions of art. However, the idea that art is expression, qualified by a number of additional conditions, lives on in the work of Arthur Danto. Though properly regarded as an expression theory of art, I would claim that Danto's version of this theory arises within a sufficiently different intellectual and artistic context as to be best treated at a later stage of this discussion. So, putting it on hold for now, we turn to other simple functionalist conceptions of art.

3. FORMALISM

Developing alongside expression theories of art were formalist theories. If one stops thinking that art is all about representation, a natural further thought, if one is thinking in simple functionalist terms, is that what art is all about is form rather...
than representational content. This thought gained support from various developments in the arts during the time of high modernism, a long, exciting period roughly between 1880 and 1960. Though many artforms contain modernist masterpieces, the work of painters were the paradigm and inspiration for many of the most influential formalist theories. Cézanne in particular was the darling of the early formalists Clive Bell (1914) and Roger Fry (1920). Cézanne’s paintings contain perfectly traditional representational subjects—landscape, portrait, still life—but his innovations could be seen as formal, with virtually no concern, furthermore, to express anything inner other than Cézanne’s eye making features of visual reality salient. These innovations involved the use of an wide-ranging palette, a handling of line, and an interest in the three-dimensional geometry of his subjects, which give his figures a ’solidity’ not found in his impressionist predecessors, while at the same time ’flattening’ the planes of the pictorial surface. Taking such formal features as the raison d’être for these paintings became the typical formalist strategy for understanding the increasingly abstract works of twentieth-century modernism, as well as for reconceiving the history of art. Like the other simple functionalist theories under discussion here, formalism is not just an attempt to define art. It is a philosophical theory of art in the sense indicated above. It also attempts to identify the value of art, and what needs to be understood in order to appreciate an artwork.

A formalist attempt to define art faces several initial tasks. They all have to do with figuring out how to deploy the notion of form in a definition. One can’t just say: art is form or art is what has form, because everything has form in some sense. The first task is thus to identify a relevant sense of ‘form’ or, in other words, to identify which properties give a work form. Second, if objects other than artworks can have form in the relevant sense, one has to find something special about the way artworks possess such form.

The best known and most explicit formalist definition of art is Clive Bell’s. According to Bell, art is what has significant form. Significant form is form that imbues what possesses it with a special sort of value that consists in the affect produced in those who perceive it. Bell calls the affect ‘the aesthetic emotion’, though, as Carol Gould (1994) has pointed out, this is probably a misnomer since what he has in mind is more likely a positive, pleasurable reaction to a perceptual experience. So Bell performs the second task mentioned above by claiming that what is special about form in art is that it is valuable in a special way.

However, until Bell dispatches the first of the tasks mentioned above, i.e. until we know what he means by form, his claims about significant form are unilluminating. Unfortunately, regarding this task, Bell is remarkably cavalier. Being concerned primarily with the visual arts, he sometimes suggests that the building blocks of form are line and colour combined in a certain way. But this is not adequate to his examples, which include: St Sophia, the windows at Chartres, Mexican sculpture, a Persian bowl, Chinese carpets, and the masterpieces of Poussin. Perhaps even three-dimensional works such as buildings, bowls, and sculptures in some abstract sense are ‘built’ out of line and colour. A more straightforward way to itemize the formal properties of a bowl would be colour, three-dimensional shape, and the patterns, if any, that mark its surfaces. Notice that any three-dimensional object has formal properties so characterized, and those that have significant form are a subclass of those that have form. Essentially the same is true in the cases of buildings and sculptures, though these are typically far more complex in having many parts or sub-forms that interact with each other and with a wider environment. But a similar complexity can be found in many three-dimensional objects, both manufactured and natural.

In the case of pictures in general, and paintings in particular, which is the sort of visual art in which Bell was most interested, speaking of form as arising from line and colour is, if anything, more unilluminating because all sorts of its properties, including the representational properties so arise. Further, it gives no indication of the complexity of the concept as it applies to a two-dimensional medium capable of depicting three dimensions. The fact is that the form of a painting includes, but is hardly confined to, the two-dimensional array of lines and colour patches that mark its surface. As Malcolm Budd (1995) has pointed out in one of the most sensitive treatments of the topic, it also includes the way objects, abstractly conceived, are laid out in the represented three-dimensional space of the work and the interaction of these two-dimensional and three-dimensional aspects.

If we can pin down the sense of form as it applies across the various art media, can we then go on to assert that something is an artwork just in case it has significant form? Bell’s definition hinges on his ability to identify not just form, but significant form, and many have questioned whether he is able to do this in a non-circular fashion. His most explicit attempts on this score are plainly circular or empty, involving the interdefinition of two technical terms, significant form being what and only what produces the aesthetic emotion, and the aesthetic emotion being what is produced by and only by significant form. Others (Gould 1994), however, have claimed that a substantive understanding of when form is significant can be recovered from formalist descriptions of artworks purportedly in possession of it.

Even if Bell can successfully identify significant form, his definition is not satisfactory. It misfires in a number of respects that are typical of the simple functionalist approach. First, it rules out the possibility of bad art, since significant form is always something to be valued highly. Perhaps there can be degrees of it, but it is not something that can occur to a very small degree unless one can say that a work has negligible significant form. Second, it displays the common vice of picking out one important property for which we value art, while ignoring others at the cost of excluding not just bad works but many great works. Thus, someone who defines art as significant form has little use for artists like Breughel whose paintings, many of which teem with vast numbers of tiny human figures, give a rich sense of many aspects of human life but lack art’s defining feature as Bell would understand it.
Perhaps there is a better way to deploy the notion of form or formal value in a definition of art. This is a possibility that, whatever its merits, has gone largely unexplored. Instead, those who remained attached to the simple functionalist model turned to an alternative approach using a more flexible concept, that of the aesthetic. So, rather than exploring hypothetical formalisms, we turn to this new approach.

4. Aesthetic Definitions

The concept of the aesthetic is both ambiguous and contested, but there are other chapters in this volume devoted to the explication of those issues, and so little will be said about them here. For our purposes, we can stipulate that the aesthetic refers in the first instance to intrinsically valuable experience that results from close attention to the sensuous features of an object or to an imaginary world it projects. Aesthetic properties of objects are those that have inherent value in virtue of the aesthetic experience they afford. Aesthetic interest is an interest in such experiences and properties. Aesthetic definitions—attempts to define art in terms of such experiences, properties, or interest—have been, with only a few exceptions, the definitions of choice among those pursuing the simple functionalist project during the last thirty years. The brief exposition above of definitions of art in terms of representational, expressive, and formal value suggests why this is the case. Each of the previous attempts to define art do so by picking out a valuable feature of art and claiming that all and only things that have that feature are artworks. One of the objections to each of the definitions was that they excluded some works of art, even those possessing considerable value, but not in virtue of the feature preferred by the definition. Hence such definitions are not extensionally adequate.

By contrast, aesthetic definitions seem, at first glance, to be free of this problem. Form and representation can both afford intrinsically valuable experience, and, typically, such experience does not exclude one aspect in favour of the other. The same is true for the experience afforded by the expressive properties of works. All such experience can be regarded under the umbrella of aesthetic experience.

Aesthetic definitions of art are numerous and new ones are constantly on offer. I mention here a few of the better known or better constructed definitions:

- An artwork is something produced with the intention of giving it the capacity to satisfy aesthetic interest (Beardsley 1983).
- A work of art is an artefact which under standard conditions provides its percipient with aesthetic experience (Schlejstenger 1979).
- An 'artwork' is any creative arrangement of one or more media whose principal function is to communicate a significant aesthetic object (Lind 1992).

Despite the fact that the notion of the aesthetic better serves the simple functionalist than the notions of representation, expression, or form, such definitions are still far from satisfactory. To bring this out, consider two basic requirements on the definition of any kind (class, property, concept) K: (i) that it provide necessary conditions for belonging to (being, falling under) K, and (ii) that they provide sufficient conditions for belonging to (being, falling under) K. To be an artwork, is it necessary that it provide aesthetic experience or even that it be made with the intention that it satisfy an interest in such experience? Many have thought not. Those who deny it are impressed with art movements like Dadaism, conceptual art, and performance art. These movements are concerned, in one way or another, with conveying ideas seemingly stripped of aesthetic interest. Dadaist works, such as Duchamp's readymades, appear to be precisely aimed at questioning the necessary connection between art and the aesthetic by selecting objects with little or no aesthetic interest, such as urinals, snow shovels, and bottle racks. Some instances of performance art appear to be based on the premise that political ideas can be conveyed more effectively without the veneer of aesthetic interest. Conceptual works seem to forgo or sideline sensory embodiment entirely.

Defenders of aesthetic definitions take two approaches to replying to this objection. Some (Beardsley 1983) attempt to deny that the apparent counter-examples are artworks, but this seems to be a losing battle as the number of ostensible counter-examples increase and gain critical and popular acceptance as artworks. What has recently come to be the more common tack in replying to the objection is to claim that the apparent counter-examples do have aesthetic properties. The readymades, for example, have such properties on more than one level. Simply regarded as objects, they have features that to a greater or lesser degree reward contemplation. As artworks, they powerfully express Duchamp's ironic posture towards art.

Can we deploy the notion of the aesthetic to provide a sufficient condition for being an artwork? As the previous paragraph already begins to suggest, any object has the potential to be of aesthetic interest and so providing aesthetic experience is hardly unique to art. Beardsley's definition rules out natural objects, since they are not made with the requisite intention, but it seems to rule in many artefacts that are not artworks, but are made with aesthetically pleasing features.

There are three ways in which a defender of aesthetic definitions of art might try to cope with the pervasiveness of the aesthetic outside of art per se. One way is to redefine what counts as art as any artefact with aesthetic interest. (Zangwill 2000 suggests this approach.) The problem with this move is that it just changes the subject from an attempt to figure out why we classify objects as art to a mere stipulation that something is art if it is an aesthetic object. A definition that includes doughnut boxes, ceiling fans, and toasters, even when not put forward as readymades, is simply not a definition of art in a sense others have attempted to capture. Second, one can attempt to rule out non-art artefacts by claiming that artworks have a 'significant' aesthetic interest that distinguishes them from the 'mere'
aesthetic interest possessed by other artefacts (see Lind 1992). But this line is equally unlikely to succeed. The more one requires such 'significance', the less likely it is that all artworks will possess it, for we have seen that many recent works are not concerned primarily with creating a rich aesthetic experience. The last strategy is to claim that, despite intuitions to the contrary, aesthetic experience is something that is either uniquely or primarily provided by art. This strategy faces the daunting task of specifying an experience common to all artworks, and one that art uniquely or primarily provides, but without making essential reference to the concept of art. Though some, such as Beardsley (1969), have attempted such a specification, the consensus is that no proposal has been successful.

5. Anti-Essentialism

Although aesthetic definitions of art continue to have adherents, the dominant trend within this topic since the 1950s has been to reject simple functionalism in all of its forms. This rejection began with the more sweeping thought that the attempt to define art is misguided because necessary and sufficient conditions do not exist capable of supporting a real definition of art. The most influential proponents of this anti-essentialism were Morris Weitz (1956) and Paul Ziff (1953). Guided by Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, they claimed that it was atypical for ordinary language empirical concepts to operate on the basis of such conditions. Rather, as Weitz put it, most such concepts were 'open-textured', meaning that the criteria by which we apply the concept do not determine its application in every possible situation. While the concept of art is by no means unique in being open-textured for Weitz and Ziff, the concept still stands apart from many other empirical concepts in one respect. For many empirical concepts, open texture merely factors explicated in terms of an open-ended set of similarities differentially shared among the family's members; for people outside the family may also possess the exhibited features without these thereby bearing a family resemblance to the original set of people. Rather, what is needed to capture the idea of family resemblance is a non-exhibited relation, namely that of resemblance among those with a common ancestry. Without proposing a specific definition, Mandelbaum suggested that in attempting to define art we may fill in the gap left to us by the family resemblance view by appealing to some non-exhibited relational property—perhaps one involving intention, use, or origin.

Among the first to explore the possibility of defining art in these terms, and certainly the most influential proponents of this approach, were Arthur Danto and George Dickie. In part because both cast their thought about art in terms of 'the art-world', in part because Danto was not explicit about his proposed definition, for some it was thought that they were advancing similar definitions of art. However, it is now understood that each was developing quite different theories, Danto's being historical and functional and Dickie's, radically afunctional and institutional.

In some early papers, Danto (1964, 1973) outlines desiderata to which a definition of art must conform without yet setting forth a definition that satisfactorily meets...
the desiderata. The first point, illustrated by the readymades as well as by such works as Warhol's Brillo Boxes, is that art and non-art can be perceptually indistinguishable and so cannot be marked off from each other by 'exhibited' properties. (A corollary to this is that one artwork cannot always be distinguished from another by appeal to exhibited properties.) Second, an artwork always exists in an art historical context, and this is a crucial condition for it to be art. Art historical context relates a given work to the history of art. It also provides 'an atmosphere of artistic theory', art being 'the kind of thing that depends for its existence on theories' (Danto 1981: 135). Third, 'Nothing is an artwork without an interpretation which constitutes it as such' (p. 135). Every work of art is about something, but, equally, invariably expresses an attitude of the artist towards the work's subject or 'way of seeing' the same. An interpretation, then, tells us what the work is about and how it is seen by its maker; further, it expresses the artist's intention on this score.

Danto's most important work in the philosophy of art, and his most sustained attempt to discern the essence of art, is his book The Transfiguration of the Commonplace (1981), in which he elaborates on the considerations stated above and adds others. However, it was left to commentators to fashion an explicitly stated definition of art from this material. The best statement, and one endorsed by Danto, is provided by Noel Carroll (1993: 86) as follows. X is a work of art if and only if (a) X has a subject (b) about which X projects an attitude or point of view (c) by means of rhetorical (usually metaphorical) ellipsis (d), which ellipsis requires audience participation to fill in what is missing (interpretation) (e), where both the work and the interpretation require an art-historical context.

To a considerable extent, this definition follows the pattern of traditional simple functionalist definitions of art. Basically, conditions (a) and (b) give to art the function of projecting a point of view or attitude of the artist about a subject, and this puts it in the broad class of attempts to define art in terms of expression. That this function is accomplished in a special way (c), and requires a certain response from the audience (d), are not uncommon features of expression theories. If anything sets Danto's definition apart from other simple functionalist proposals, it is the final condition, (e), which requires that a work and its interpretation stand in a historical relation to other artworks.

It is this last feature that has made Danto's definition influential, but it is not clear that it helps very much to save it from the fate of other simple functionalist definitions. Many believe that there are works of art that fail to meet all of the first four conditions. For example, aren't many works of music, architecture, or ceramics, and even some abstract or decorative works, which are arguably not about anything, nevertheless instances of works of art?

George Dickie's artworld is different from Danto's. Rather than consisting in historically related works, styles, and theories, it is an institution. In attempting to define art in terms of an institution, Dickie abandons the attempt to offer a definition not only in terms of exhibited features, but in terms of functions of any sort. Dickie originally conceived of this institution as one that exists to confer an official status, even if it does so through informal procedures. Increasingly, however, he came to view it differently, as one geared to the production of a class of artefacts and to their presentation to a public.

As might be guessed from his changing understanding of the institution of art, Dickie has proposed two distinct institutional definitions of art, the second being based on his own rejection of the first. Both, however, have received a great deal of attention and exercised considerable influence, so each deserves some discussion here. The first definition goes as follows:

Something is a work of art if and only if (1) it is an artifact, and (2) a set of aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of the Artworld. (Dickie 1974: 34)

Notice that the status conferred that makes some artefact an artwork is the status not of being art (at least, not straightforwardly that), but of being a candidate for appreciation, and this status is conferred on a set of aspects of the item rather than on the item itself. Dickie's definition itself does not tell us who in the artworld typically confers status. One might think it would be people like critics, art gallery owners, or museum directors, because they are the ones who select and make salient to a broader public aspects of a work for appreciation. However, Dickie's commentary on the definition makes clear that he thinks artists are the exclusive agents of status conferral. Since conferring would seem to be an action, one might wonder what an artist does to bring it about. It can't just be making something with properties capable of being considered for appreciation. Stephen Davies (1991: 85) has suggested that conferral consists in someone with the appropriate authority making, or putting forward, such an object.

For many, the crucial idea that makes this definition of art institutional is that being an artwork consists of possessing a status conferred on it by someone with the authority to do so. However, this is precisely the idea that Dickie eventually rejected. Rightly or wrongly, he came to view status conferral as implying a formal process, but felt that no such process need occur—not, typically, does it occur—in bringing artworks into existence.

Dickie's second definition of art is part of a set of five definitions that present the 'leanest possible description of the essential framework of art':

1. An artist is a person who participates with understanding in making a work of art.
2. A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.
3. A public is a set of persons whose members are prepared in some degree to understand an object that is presented to them.
4. The artworld is the totality of all artworld systems.
5. An artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public. (Dickie 1984: 10–1)

The basic idea here is that the status of being art is not something that is conferred by some agent's authority, but instead derives from a work being properly situated in a system of relations. Pre- eminent in this system is the relation of the work to the artist.
and to an artworld public. It is the work's being created by the artist against the 'background of the artworld' (Dickie 1984: 12) that establishes it as a artefact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public, i.e. an artwork.

If we abstract from the particulars of Dickie's two definitions, one can discern a common strategy that gives rise to a set of common problems for his approach. In both definitions, Dickie set out a structure that is shared with other institutions or practices beyond the 'artworld'. Conferral of status occurs in many settings, and even the conferral of the status of candidate of appreciation frequently occurs outside the artworld (whether or not it occurs within it). For example, an 'official' tourist brochure issued by a tourism board confers the status of candidate for appreciation on some particular place. So does official recognition that a building is 'historical'. (Remember that Dickie self-consciously refuses to say what kind of appreciation is conferred by agents of the artworld.) Even advertising might be thought to confer such status, as is certainly its aim.

How does Dickie's first definition distinguish between these conferrals of candidacy for appreciation from art-making conferrals? Only by referring to the artworld, i.e. gesturing towards artforms and their making, distribution, and presentation, without explaining what marks these off from other status-conferring practices. Similarly, regarding the second definition, there are many artefact production and presentations systems outside the artworld. Wherever a product is produced for consumers, there is such a system. How does Dickie distinguish artworld systems from other artefact presentation systems? He does so only by naming the artworld systems 'artworld systems', i.e. by gesturing towards the relevant systems without explaining what marks them off.

This strategy gives rise to the problems of circularity and incompleteness (see Walton 1977; Levinson 1987; Davies 1991; Stecker 1986, 1997). Dickie acknowledges that his definitions are circular, but denies that this is a problem. It is clearly a problem, however, when a definition is insufficiently informative to mark off the extension of what it is attempting to define. Because Dickie's definitions simply gesture towards the artworld without marking it off from similar systems, it is incomplete for lack of informativeness. Dickie (1989) replies that it is ultimately arbitrary whether or not a system is part of the artworld, but such a claim seems to be an admission that the definition cannot be completed.

7. Historical Approaches and the Revival of Functionalism

Others have proposed that the situation is not as hopeless as Dickie (inadvertently) suggests. Kendall Walton (1977) was among the first to suggest that the artworld

systems that Dickie gestures towards might be defined historically. Walton's suggestion is that the artworld consists of a limited number of proto-systems plus other systems that develop historically from these in a certain manner (1977: 98). Dickie (1984: 76) has pointed out that this leaves unsettled the issue of why the proto-systems belong to the artworld in the first place, and has expressed the belief that no real explanation is possible. This assessment may again be over-hasty. One possible place to look for the set of original proto-systems would be the formation of the system of the fine arts in the eighteenth century, with poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture, and music (possibly confined to vocal music) being the paradigmatic proto-artforms. Surely, there is an explanation of why these forms comprised an important category at this time. This explanation might refer to a common functional property, or, it might itself be historical. A residual problem with this approach is whether it accounts for all items classified as artworks. The view appears to imply that to be art it is necessary and sufficient that it belong to an artform or art system, and not everyone would accept both parts of that claim (Levinson 1979; Stecker 1997). The view, even rehabilitated along quasi-historical lines, may also fail to account for artworks and artforms from non-western and earlier western cultures that are conceptually but not historically linked in the right way to the eighteenth-century prototypes.

Stephen Davies is the most important defender of the institutional approach since Dickie. Davies does not actually offer a definition of art, but sketches lines along which it should develop. First, it should reinstate the idea that the artworld is structured according to roles defined by the authority they give to those who occupy them. Art status is conferred on works by artists in virtue of the authority of the role they occupy. Second, artworld institutions should be understood historically. Davies's discussions of the historical roots of art have come to focus more on individual artworks than on artworld systems. Consider very early artworks. Did such works exist in an institutional setting? If so, what gave rise to these institutions? Surely, it was even earlier works around which the institutions grew. Davies initially attempted to give an institutional analysis to cases like this as well as cases of isolated artists whose work is disconnected from art institutions as we know them (Davies 1991). His current view, however, is that the earliest art, the prototypes from which art and its institutions arose, are to be understood functionally. Such items are art because their aesthetic value is essential to their function. However, once art institutions become established, art can develop in ways that no longer require an aesthetic—or any other—function (Davies 1997, 2000).

In addition to attempts to historicize the institutional approach to defining art, a number of philosophers have explored other forms of historical definition. Jerrold Levinson has proposed that an historical relation holding among the intentions of artists and prior artworks is definitive of art (Levinson 1979, 1989, 1993); James Carney claims that the relation is one holding among historically evolving styles (1991, 1994); while Noel Carroll, though not offering a definition, has put
forward the suggestion that art is identified by historical narratives which link later works to earlier ones (Carroll 1994). Robert Stecker asserts that art is defined in terms of historically evolving functions (1997).

Levinson's proposal is one of the best worked out and most carefully defended. It is that 'an artwork is a thing that has been seriously intended for regard-as-a-work-of-art, i.e., regard in any way pre-existing artworks are or were correctly regarded' (Levinson 1989: 21).

One wants to know more about what it is to intend a thing for regard-as-a-work-of-art, and why this core aspect of Levinson's definition does not make it as tightly circular as Dickie's. It turns out there can be two relevant types of intention. On the 'intrinsic' type, one intends a work for a complex of regards for features found in earlier artworks without having any specific artwork, genre, movement, or tradition in mind. One might intend it for regard for its form, expressiveness, verisimilitude, and so on. Alternatively, there is the 'relational' type of intention, in which one intends an object for regard as some particular artwork, genre, etc. is or was correctly regarded. When one fills in these possible regards, in theory, one eliminates the expression 'as-a-work-of-art,' which is the basis of Levinson's defence against the charge of circularity.

As with some other historical accounts (such as Carney's and Carroll's), Levinson's main idea is that something is a work of art because of a relation it bears to earlier artworks, which are in turn art because of a relation they bear to still earlier works, and so on. Once this is clear, it becomes obvious that, as one moves back along the relational chain, one will come across artworks for which there are none earlier. These earliest artworks have come to be called 'first art.' We need a separate account of what makes first artworks art, and a reason for thinking that this separate account won't serve to explain why all artworks are art, obviating the need for a historical approach. Davies now gives an essentially functional account of first art in his historicized institutional approach (1997, 2000), and would claim that this won't explain why all artworks are art because, within an art institution, objects can acquire art status while lacking the original function of art.

Levinson prefers to avoid this straightforwardly functionalist approach to first art. For him, what makes something first art is that it is 'the ultimate causal source and intentional reference of later activities we take as paradigmatically art.' Furthermore, first art aims at 'many of the same effects and values, that later, paradigmatic art has enshrined' (Levinson 1993: 421). These remarks come close to a functional approach similar to that of Davies, but substitute causal and intentional relations to functions for direct reference to the functions themselves.

There are a number of objections to Levinson's definition. Against taking it as a sufficient condition for being art, various examples have been offered where the requisite intention is purportedly present, but the item in question is arguably not an artwork. In 1915, Duchamp attempted to transform the Woolworth Building into a readymade. He was not successful, but not for lack of an appropriate intention (Carney 1994). A forger of a Rembrandt self-portrait may intend that his work be regarded in many ways as the original is correctly regarded, without thereby creating another artwork (Sartwell 1990: 157). There are also objections questioning whether the definition provides a necessary condition for being art. There can be objects that achieve functional success as art, in that they reward a complex set of intrinsic regards, but lack the required intention. They may spring from an artistic intention based on a misunderstanding of earlier works, or from a utilitarian intention that adventitiously results in an object with artistically valuable properties. For example, one might set out just to make a vessel that holds water and end up with a remarkably beautiful pot.

Levinson has replies to all of these counter-examples (see Levinson 1990, 1993). Duchamp failed because he lacked the relevant 'proprietary right' to the building. The forger does not create an artwork because, though he intends the forgery to receive many of the regards correctly directed to the Rembrandt, they are not correctly directly to his own painting. Levinson seems to admit that there can be art that lacks the intentions he ordinarily requires for art, but holds that this points to further, less central, senses of art. All these replies, as well as the above remarks on first art, add new conditions to, and hence considerably complicate, Levinson's original definition. Sometimes, too many qualifications can kill a proposal. In this case, though, the patient is arguably still alive and attempting to recuperate.

Still, at a number of junctures it appears that Levinson might have achieved a simpler definition by appealing directly to functions or regards rather than intentions. Robert Stecker (1997) formulates a definition of art that appeals more directly to an historically evolving set of functions, without completely dispensing with a reference to artistic intentions. (For another such attempt, see Graves 1998.) Stecker does not define art explicitly in terms of an historical relation linking the art of one time with the art of an earlier time. Rather, his definition proceeds by reference to time-relative artforms and functions. At any given time, art has a finite set of functions that range from genre-specific values to those widespread representational, expressive, formal, and aesthetic values enshrined in the simple functional definitions considered earlier. The functions of art at a given time are to be identified through an understanding of the artforms central to that time. However, that does not mean that items that don't belong to a central artform are never art. According to Stecker, almost anything can be art, but artefacts outside the central artforms have to meet a higher standard. This motivates a disjunctive definition of art: an item is an artwork at time t, where t is not earlier than the time at which the item is made, if and only if (a) it is in one of the central artforms at t and is made with the intention of fulfilling a function that art has at t, or (b) it is an artefact that achieves excellence in achieving such a function.

With this definition too there are various problems. The appearance of circularity is handled in much the same way as with Levinson's definition: by eliminating
reference to art by enumerating central forms and functions. However, this requires that Stecker provide some account of these items. What makes something a central artform? How are genuine functions of art distinguished from accidental functions (e.g., using sculptures as a doorstop) or extrinsic functions (e.g., using art as an investment)? Further, not every function is appropriate to every candidate artwork, so functions have to be coordinated with their appropriate forms. Finally, there are things that appear to fulfill functions of art to a high degree, but no one would call them artworks. Suppose there were a pill that induced a fine aesthetic experience. The pill is not a work of art even though it appears to fulfill a function of art with excellence. (For replies to these and other objections see Stecker 1997: 51–65.)

Views like those of Davies, Levinson, and Stecker suggest that a consensus is developing about how art should be defined (see Stecker 2000; Matravers 2000). Though each at first appears to represent a different approach (institutional, intentional, functional), the similarities among these views are more striking than the differences. All accept Danto’s view that art must be defined historically; and all, in the end, are committed to a definition that consists of a disjunction of sufficient conditions rather than a set of necessary conditions that are jointly sufficient (so-called real definitions). Further, unlike simple functionalist definitions, these definitions do not form the kernel of a larger, normatively aimed theory of art, but are compatible with many different theories. In particular, these definitions, like Dickie’s definitions, distinguish an understanding of what art is from a conception of the value of art. In fact, the disjunctive character of recent definitions suggests not only that there is no one value or function essential to art, but that there is no essence of art at all.

Whatever the extent of this consensus, it excludes two parties to the debate. One comprises those who are still interested in pursuing a simple functionalist definition, typically in terms of aesthetic experience or properties (see Anderson 2000; Zangwill 2000). The other comprises those who are sceptical of the possibility of any definition of art (Tilghman 1984; Novitz 1996).

It is an interesting question just where future work in this area should direct its efforts (see Stecker 2000). On one side of the issue, those in the sceptical camp might do more to develop their arguments. On the other side of the issue, instead of developing more proposals of the sort we have just been considering, it would be worthwhile for the non-sceptical to step back to ask more basic questions. What is it that we are trying to define? Is it the concept of art, the property of being art, or a classificatory (or possibly evaluative) social practice, or something else? Suppose we say we are trying to define a concept. There is an interesting general literature on this question (Peacocke 1992; Fodor 1998) which it might be useful to bring to the issue of defining art. What should we hope to achieve with such a definition? The traditional goal was to identify the essence of art. If we follow recent definitions in abandoning that goal, what are we doing instead—describing or idealizing, for instance? Should we even continue to assume that we are looking for a single correct definition, or should we now accept the possibility that there can be several equally useful definitions of art, several equally good solutions to the same problem—or perhaps several problems calling for different solutions?

See also: Value in Art; Ontology of Art; Aesthetics of Popular Art; Aesthetic Experience.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Ontology is the study of the kinds of things there are in the world. The ontology of art considers the matter, form, and mode in which art exists. Works of art are social constructs in the sense that they are not natural kinds but human creations. The way we categorize them depends on our interests, and to that extent ontology is not easily separated from sociology and ideology. Nevertheless, some classifications and interests are likely to be more revealing of why and how art is created and appreciated. It is these that our ontology should reflect.

There are a number of traditional classifications of the arts, for instance in terms of their media (stone, words, sounds, paint, etc.), their species (sculpture, literature, music, drama, ballet, etc.), or their styles or contents (tragedy, comedy, surrealism, impressionism, etc.). The ontology of works of art does not map neatly on to these classifications, however. In the plastic arts, a wide variety of media and structures are used. In music and drama, not all works are for performance; for instance, tape compositions and theatrical films are not. Not all works of a kind are organized at the same levels, and higher levels cannot generally be analysed in terms of lower ones. Not all literary works are reducible to word sequences, and not all share a