

DOING JUSTICE TO TRADITIONAL AESTHETIC THEORIES: WEITZ RECONSIDERED

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Abstract. In the very first lines of his famous article – ‘The Role of Theory in Aesthetics’ – Morris Weitz tells us that each of the great art theories (Emotionalism, Voluntarism, Formalism, Intuitionism, Organicism) converges in a logically vain attempt to provide the defining properties of art. He tries to examine some of the aesthetic theories in order to see if they include adequate statements about the nature of art. But instead of giving us exact descriptions of these theories, he provided us with only a very scant summary. Thus, even if Weitz were correct in thinking that all theories converged in an essential definition of art, he does not provide any further arguments for his conviction.

Some aestheticians (Diffey, Tilghman, Matthews, Snoeyenbos) have tried to do justice to the traditional theories by suggesting that aesthetic theories were not attempting to offer essentialist definitions of art. Unfortunately, those critics left untouched the aesthetic theories offered by Weitz. Therefore, in order to evaluate (1) Weitz’s account of aesthetic theories and (2) to see if the criticisms concerning his account strike home, it is necessary to consider just theories mentioned by Weitz.

My paper confirms a view that within aesthetic theories a variety of purposes can be recognised. For instance, the explanation and re-evaluation of art, and the completion of metaphysical system.

I. Weitz and his critics

The famous article of Morris Weitz (1968) – ‘The Role of Theory in Aesthetics’ – has raised many objections since it was published.¹ Perhaps the chief objection is that Weitz did not take into account the possibility that art can be defined in terms of non-manifest properties. The second objection is that ‘family resemblance’ fails as a means for the identification of art. The third is that ‘art’ can be an open concept in two or three different ways. The final objection that is commonly heard is that a

¹ Actually, Weitz’ paper has been frequently anthologised. It first appeared in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15, 1, 27–35, September, 1956.

closed concept of art (or some sub-concepts of art) does not preclude artistic novelty and creativity (Margolis 1958, Mandelbaum 1965, Dickie 1971:98–108, Sclafani 1971, Diffey 1973, Kamber 1998).

I do not undertake to evaluate these objections raised against Weitz. Interestingly, however, what these criticisms neglect is his conception of the nature of aesthetic theory.

In the very first lines of his article, Weitz (1968) tells us that each of the great art theories (Formalism, Voluntarism, Emotionalism, Intellectualism, Intuitionism, Organicism) converges in a logically vain attempt to provide the defining properties of art. In addition, he suggests that all these theories are supposed to be factual reports on art. Weitz tries to survey some of the aesthetic theories in order to see if they include adequate statements about the nature of art. But instead of giving us exact descriptions of these theories, he provided us with only a very scant summary. Thus, even if Weitz were correct in thinking that all theories converged in an essential definition of art, he does not provide any further arguments for his conviction.

Some aestheticians have tried to do justice to the traditional theories by suggesting that aesthetic theories were not attempting to offer essentialist definitions of art (Brown 1971, Bywater 1972, Diffey 1973, Snoeyenbos 1978, Matthews 1979, Tilghman 1989). Considering such thinkers as Bosanquet, Hume, Kant, Collingwood, T. M. Greene, Dewey, Herbert Read and Thomas Munro, they came to a conclusion that discussions of art occur in response to a variety of questions, for instance, the elucidation of the current concept of art, the justification and re-evaluation of art, and the ranking of the arts in a hierarchy of importance. It has even been argued that anti-essentialists themselves make an essentialist mistake in supposing that traditional theories of aesthetics share a common property.

No one can doubt that those thinkers (in particular, Hume, Kant, and Dewey) are the most distinguished figures in the history of aesthetics. Furthermore, I am inclined to think that the observations concerning their aesthetic theories made by aestheticians are mainly correct and instructive. Most critics have unfortunately not considered the aesthetic theories offered by Weitz. Therefore, in order to evaluate (1) Weitz's account of aesthetic theories and (2) to see if the criticisms concerning his account strike home, it is necessary to consider the theories (of Tolstoy, Bell, Bradley, Croce, etc.) mentioned by Weitz. This is my purpose in this paper.

II. Some introductory remarks

Let me make some introductory remarks. Firstly, at the beginning of his article, Weitz seems to speak in the name of the history of aesthetics: 'For, in spite of the many theories, we seem no nearer our goal today than we were in Plato's time'. But his examples of theories are derived from only the last two hundred years. Tolstoy presented his view in 1898, Croce and Bradley about two or three years later, Bell in 1914, and Parker in 1939. What is the 'tradition' constituted by those

theories? What about theories offered by Aristotle, Bataille, Kant, Lessing and Maritain? Even if it is true that all the theories he mentioned have the purpose Weitz ascribes to them, he neglected many others. In addition, in the first list of theories Weitz did indicate a theory he called Intellectualism. Unfortunately, he says nothing at all about this theory in the following parts of his article, nor does he mention the proponents of this theory.

Secondly, Weitz pointed out that theories are inadequate in many different ways: some theories are circular (Bell-Fry), some emphasize too few properties (Bell-Fry, Croce), some are too general (organicism), and some rest on dubious principles (Parker). It is worth noting that all these alleged fallacies concern the rules for definition by genus and difference. In spite of this, it is reasonable to ask whether the variety of mistakes mentioned suggest that these theories do not have a common purpose. Moreover, it should be noticed that even if a theory attempts to state the defining properties of art, it does not follow that the theory is attempting to give an empirical or factual report on art, and vice versa.

Thirdly, the greater part of these theories tend to have the same grammatical form, being generalizations about either art as a whole or one of the arts. But the fact that expressions share a common surface grammar does not necessarily indicate how they were actually used and how they ought to be understood (Tilghman 1989:162). Weitz's views are clearly Wittgensteinian, but it would be more consistently Wittgensteinian to think that aesthetic theories do not share the common property suggested by Weitz.

III. Tolstoy's emotionalism

Let me draw your attention to a couple of shortcomings in Weitz's account. As we know, Weitz did not give any analysis of Tolstoy's theory in his article. Nevertheless, Weitz did give the impression that Tolstoy allied himself to an emotionalist position which opposed formalist conceptions of art. He argued that 'Tolstoy, Ducasse, or any of the advocates of this theory find that the requisite defining property is not significant form but rather the expression of emotion in some sensuous public medium. Without projection of emotion in some piece of stone or words or sounds, etc., there can be no art. Art is really such embodiment.' The reference to a formalist like Bell is anachronistic, as Bell presented his views almost twenty years later than Tolstoy. Besides, as it is evident in Chapters 2 and 5, Tolstoy (1994) was criticizing the theories such as the Beauty theory, the physiological-evolutionary definition, the experimental definition, and that of Scully. Roughly speaking, these theories have nothing to do with the formalism.

Furthermore, I think that to attach the term 'emotionalist' to Tolstoy can be highly misleading. According to Weitz emotionalism is the view that art is a sensuous embodiment of emotions. But it cannot be Tolstoy's view since this is exactly the view Tolstoy attached to Veron (that is, the experimental definition of art) which was a target of Tolstoy's criticism.

When we scrutinize how Tolstoy actually carried out his ‘defining’ of art, the Weitzian interpretation of Tolstoy is revealed as inadequate.

Firstly, consider how Tolstoy (1997:169) argued against the beauty theory of art: ‘[W]hat is considered the definition of art is no definition at all, but only a shuffle to justify existing art.’ Tolstoy’s statement is interesting for it indicates a specific criterion, which a proper definition of art must possess. According to Tolstoy the definition should not only be concerned with existing art. I think that if Tolstoy’s purpose were a factual report on the essence of art, then he would not have stipulated this normative criterion. We can assume that all classificatory theories of art concern only existing art.

Secondly, Tolstoy declares that many well-known works of art (such as Wagner’s new operas and Baudelaire’s verses) are not art. It is commonly believed that Tolstoy even denies artistic status of his own writings saying that only *A Prisoner of the Caucasus* and *God Sees the Truth but Waits* are works of art (Robinson 1965:168). This opinion is not, however, correct. Tolstoy (1994:106) explicitly says in a footnote how he evaluated his own works: ‘I consign my own artistic productions to the category of bad art, excepting the story ‘God sees the Truth’, which seeks a place in the first class, and ‘The Prisoner of the Caucasus’, which belongs to the second.’

In addition to this, Tolstoy (1994:23–29) claims that many works taken to be non-art are, in fact, art. His example of artistic activity is of a boy talking about his encounter with a wolf. According to Tolstoy all our life is surrounded by works of art of every kind from cradlesong, mimicry, jest, the ornamentation of houses, dress, and utensils up to church services, buildings, monuments, and triumphal processions. He next goes on to say that by ‘art we do not mean all human activity transmitting feelings, but only that part which we for some reason select from it and to which we attach special importance’.

Briefly, if Tolstoy had intended to define art in the way Weitz attributes to him, then he could not have possibly presupposed that cradlesongs, the ornamentation of utensils, triumphal processions and the ‘wolf story’ are examples of art, but not Wagner’s operas and Baudelaire’s verses. I think that neither an occasional mistake nor an artistic (or philosophic) shortsightedness led Tolstoy to say these strange things about art. Rather he was discontent with ‘existing art (of the upper class)’.² For Tolstoy art was a thing of vital importance. Declaring wittingly his ‘inadequate’ convictions about art he tried to re-evaluate and to reform the artistic principles of high art.³

It has been argued (Khatchadourian 1971:282) that Tolstoy confuses an evaluative and a classificatory sense of ‘art’. Building on this point it has been

² It is noted by Stanley Bates (1989) that these peculiarities of his theory do not trouble Tolstoy, who *decries* the assumption that only the fine arts are art, *denouncing* the claim that artistic activity is the exclusive province of the professional artist. Italics are mine.

³ Clearly enough, Tolstoy was not worried about the philosophical details of ‘essence’, ‘definition’, etc., but it may be that he meant by real definition the adoption and recommendation of *ideal* definitions (Robinson 1965:165–168).

assumed that Tolstoy's work has to be classificatory. However, any confusion here does not imply that Tolstoy's work had to have a classificatory or descriptive aim. We could agree with the previous accusation even if Tolstoy's explicit purpose was to present a wholly evaluative theory. Further, it is sheer nonsense to claim that Tolstoy's definition of art is too broad (or too narrow), that is, that Tolstoy's definition covers more (or less) than is traditionally considered *les beaux-arts*. Rebukes of that kind presume (without argument) that Tolstoy attempted a definition of art in the sense claimed by Weitz, otherwise the question of the extensional adequacy of definition will not arise.

I am not arguing that there is something fundamentally wrong with evaluative (or revisionary) theories. But we should not stop thinking about a theory simply because it has evaluative ambitions. In criticizing evaluative theories we need a different approach. What could it be? When a theory implies that 'art ought to be X' it rests on at least three relevant assumptions. Firstly, it assumes that 'art, or a large part of it, does not possess that property X. Secondly, it assumes that art can and will possess this property in the future. Notice that none of the assumptions is in itself an evaluative one. On the contrary, they are factual assumptions.

In addition, such a theory also involves some evaluative components, i.e. a theory probably giving some reasons why 'art ought to be X'.

In brief, we have found here a way to deal with evaluative theories. We can challenge their factual and evaluative components. It is important to notice that Weitz did not consider any of the given aspects of aesthetic theories.

IV. Croce's intuitionism

I believe that if Weitz had asked Croce whether he searched for the essence of art in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, Croce's answer would have been clearly negative. Or maybe 'I beg your pardon?' But let me make some more substantial observations.

There are four reasons that imply that Weitz's interpretation of Croce is not well grounded. My first point derives from some considerations concerning Collingwood. As we know Brown, Diffey and Snoeyenbos criticized the idea that Collingwood's account of art could be identified as an essentialist (Brown 1971: 347–350, Diffey 1996, Snoeyenbos 1978:119). I agree with this criticism. Clearly, Collingwood (1965) wrote that the business of his book is to answer the question, What is art? However, as a passage in the Preface of his book shows, he does not think of aesthetic theory as an attempt to seek or reveal everlasting truths concerning Art. Instead, he hopes that his views will have some positive influence in the practical sphere of the art of his day.

Weitz does not refer to Collingwood's theory in his paper. For that reason it is doubtful that Brown and Snoeyenbos' views can be taken directly as a successful criticism of Weitz. What then are the consequences of Brown and Snoeyenbos' view for Weitz's account of aesthetic theory and for my thesis? The conclusions

are indirect in nature, bearing as they do on the similarities of the views of Croce and Collingwood. It is suggested that although the two theories diverge on some points they are substantially alike in all-important aspects (Hospers 1956). Thus, the significance of Snoeyenbos' suggestion about Collingwood is that it adds some additional light to the Croce theory. If Collingwood is not correctly interpreted as engaging in the essentialist project then the same may be true of Croce.

Secondly, it is usual in our tradition of aesthetics that in an introductory part of a paper or book an author explicitly outlines his (her) main purposes. Of course this is not restricted only to analytic tradition of philosophy. To know a philosopher's main purpose in his writing is an inevitable presupposition of any sensible criticism of his views. When one looks at the introduction of Croce's *Estetica* one is surprised by the fact that he says nothing about the (classificatory) purpose of his work. He only says that after the concept of aesthetic activity is specified, he will address himself to a correction of some other philosophic concepts, otherwise we cannot settle many further problems.

Of course one can argue that the introduction of the book is not conclusive evidence for ascertaining the real purpose of his book. Perhaps this is true. But if at the first chapter of the book, one sees that Croce seems only to disclose his epistemic position and nothing more: 'Knowledge has two forms: it is either intuitive knowledge or logical knowledge; knowledge obtained through the imagination or knowledge obtained through the intellect.' Therefore, one is forced to ask why Weitz thought that Croce had attempted to define an essence of art in terms of necessary and sufficient properties.

Thirdly, Croce (1965) presents his art theory in terms of 'intuition', 'expression', 'knowledge', 'imagination', and 'intellect'. This indicates that an aesthetic theory can be founded on some epistemic, metaphysic, or psychological conception. The essence of art can be explained in postulates and conceptual settings of fundamental theory. Indeed, it has been argued that expressionism (e.g. Croce and Collingwood) presupposes an entire philosophical psychology, philosophy of language and communication (Tilghman 1989:165).

It has been suggested that one aim of these theories is supposed to be explanatory; i.e. theories try to relate artistic phenomenon to other aspects of the world and to explain the nature of artistic (or, aesthetic) value (Tilghman 1989, Matthews 1978). Thus, we have a reason to think that Croce tried to re-describe or re-explain artistic activity in terms of some fundamental (fashionable) theory.

Furthermore, Weitz mistakenly assumed that all aesthetic theories are epistemic in nature. He presupposes these theories to be closely connected with the identification of art. But this is not the case. We can recognize some clearly metaphysical theories.⁴ This is an important distinction since compared to the epistemic (descriptive) theories the explanatory and metaphysical ones require different criteria of adequacy.

My final argument concerns the alleged open nature of art. According to Weitz 'art' is an open concept. But it is interesting that neither Weitz nor his critics

⁴ See the distinction, in Anderson (2000) and Tilghman (1984).

(exceptions may be Colin Lyas and Richard Shusterman) realize that Croce seems to adhere to this view as well. Consider a passage from Croce (1965:78) where he examines the distinction between artistic and ordinary intuition.

The intuition of the simplest popular love-song, which says the same thing, or very nearly, as any declaration of love that issues at every moment from the lips of thousands of ordinary men, may be intensively perfect in its poor simplicity, although it be extensively so much more limited than the complex intuition of a love-song by Leopardi.

The whole difference, then, is quantitative, and as such is indifferent to philosophy, scientia qualitatum [science of qualities]. Certain men have a greater aptitude, a more frequent inclination fully to express certain complex states of the soul. These men are known in ordinary language as artists. Some very complicated and difficult expressions are not often achieved, and these are called works of art. The limits of the expression-intuitions that are called art, as opposed to those that are vulgarly called non-art, are empirical and impossible to define. If an epigram can be art, why not a simple word? If a story, why not the news-jottings of the journalist? If a landscape, why not a topographical sketch?

This passage indicates that Croce is quite directly an anti-essentialist. He denies that there are entrenched ontological-essential distinctions between art(ist) and non-art(ist).⁵ This is the reason why Croce does not attempt a definition of art in the sense supposed by Weitz.

Weitz argued that Croce listed as essential too few properties of art. However, as Croce was not giving a strict definition of art, it makes no sense to criticize his theory in the way Weitz did. Of course, I would admit that Croce did emphasize too few properties of art. But I would then agree with a view that suggests that Croce's view is a result of the desire to emphasize one fact about artworks to the exclusion of others (Lake 1967).

My contentions raise a question about the proper criticism of that kind of theory. Discussing this is not, however, my purpose here. For this reason I confine myself to only two general aspects of similar theories. Firstly I would like to ask whether these theories enlighten us as to new and important aspects of art; or as a pragmatist would ask, what are the main consequences of these theories? Or, following B. R. Tilghman, if the major aim of a theory is to relate art to other aspects of the world and human life and to explain the nature of artistic value, then we are justified in asking whether a theory really helps us to understand the phenomena of art. The second kind of criticism is Cartesian in nature. Is a fundamental theory itself feasible? It could be possible that an aesthetic theory inherits all the conceptual confusions and obscurities involved in the metaphysical thinking of its fundamental theory.

⁵ See also Richard Shusterman (1986) and Lyas (1997).

V. Bell's formalism

Noël Carroll (1989) disputes the claim that all theories of art are concerned with giving an essential definition. But he shares with Weitz a conviction that one aesthete, who was explicitly committed to this kind of essentialism, was Clive Bell. This interpretation could be derived from Bell's (1969:87) wholehearted declaration of what he saw as the central problem of aesthetics:

The starting-point for all systems of aesthetics must be the personal experience of a peculiar emotion. The objects that provoke this emotion we call works of art. ... and if we can discover some quality common and peculiar to all the objects that provoke it, we shall have solved what I take to be central problem of aesthetics. We shall have discovered the essential quality in a work of art, the quality that distinguishes works of art from all other classes of objects.

This entire passage could give the impression that Bell was striving for a definition of art. Despite this impression, it is not clear that Bell intended to offer a general definition of art. Before the quoted passage he refers only to visual art (pictures, sculptures, buildings, pots, carvings, textiles, etc.). Hence, Weitz's thesis that Bell was engaged in a general theory of art needs some additional evidence.

Furthermore, there is a view which holds that explanatory aims of aesthetic theories have always predominated over definitional aims. Robert Matthews (1978:49) has pointed out that the opening paragraph of Bell's Preface to Art clearly shows that Bell has an explanatory idea in mind:

In this little book I have tried to develop a complete theory of visual art. I have put forward a hypothesis by reference, to which the respectability, though not the validity, of all aesthetic judgement can be tested, in the light of which the history of art from paleolithic days to the present becomes intelligible [...]. Everyone in his heart believes that there is a real distinction between works of art and all other objects; this belief my hypothesis justifies. We all feel that art is immensely important; my hypothesis affords reason for thinking it so. In fact, the great merit of this hypothesis is that it seems to explain what we know to be true. Anyone who is curious to discover why we call a Persian carpet or a fresco by Piero della Francesca a work of art, and a portrait-bust of Hadrian or a popular problem-picture rubbish, will here find satisfaction. He will find, too, that to the familiar counters of criticism – e.g., 'good drawing,' 'magnificent design,' 'mechanical,' 'unfelt,' 'ill-organised,' 'sensitive' – is given, what such terms sometimes lack, a definite meaning' (pp. v–vi). (Matthews 1978:50)

I conclude that instead of evaluating Bell's theory solely in terms of its extensional adequacy, relevant criticism would have to demonstrate that these explanatory ambitions are misconceived.

There is a further problem with Weitz's interpretation of Bell. Weitz and Kennick both suggested that Bell was looking for the common denominator of art. They also thought that when Bell saw the paintings of Cezanne, Picasso, and Matisse, he was quick to realize that subject matter was not of prime importance in them. It is well known that Bell was strongly influenced by modern French art. But it does not follow that modern French art revealed to him what art is. I think

Bell was a good art *connoisseur* before he saw the paintings of Cézanne, Picasso, and Matisse. In a sense, these works of art did not make him smarter. He did not think that ‘academic’ art is not art, but that the taste of the Edwardian Englishmen was out of date. If this is true, it is difficult to see why Bell should be committed to the purpose Weitz ascribes to him.

Thus I believe that although Bell framed his statements in terms of descriptive language he also gave his texts a revisionary and explanatory purpose. Even if Bell proclaims in his work that his purpose is to reveal the essence of art, it is not sufficient to ascribe to him only this stated purpose (as Weitz has done).

VI. Bradley’s organicism

Weitz did not say in his article where exactly Bradley has formulated his idea of organicism.⁶ It is also unclear why he called the view ‘organicism’ as Bradley (1961) does not use the term ‘organicism’ anywhere in his *Poetry for Poetry’s Sake*.

As the title of his article shows, he was attending to poetry, not art as a whole. The following passage speaks in support of this.

We are to consider poetry in its essence, and apart from the flaws which in most poems accompany their poetry. We are to include in the idea of poetry the metrical form, and not to regard this as a mere accident or a mere vehicle. And, finally, poetry being poems, we are to think of a poem as it actually exists; and, without aiming here at accuracy, we may say that an actual poem is the succession of experiences – sounds, images, thoughts, emotions – through which we pass when we are reading as poetically as we can. (Bradley 1961:4)

While admitting that Bradley’s purpose was not a definition of art, one could maintain that Bradley was attempting to offer a definition of the essence of poetry. I doubt this would succeed, however, since in the very first footnote Bradley (1961:28) says explicitly that the purpose of the latter sentence was not to give a definition of art. In addition, even if one is interested in an essence of X it does not follow that he is interested in a definition of X as well. The idea of a distinction between definition and essence goes back to Hume (Diffey 1973).

As you will remember, Weitz indicated that organicism was his own view in *Philosophy of the Arts* (Weitz 1968:86). Nevertheless, we cannot identify this with Bradley’s view. It may be true that as an analytic aesthetician Weitz searched for the classificatory definition of art, but I doubt this was also Bradley’s intention. Bradley was a literary critic and he is known to be a proponent of the art for art’s

⁶ I rest here on Graham McFee’s observations included in a personal message to me. McFee indicated that in his article, Weitz is explicit that he is discussing A. C. Bradley. Secondly, Weitz doesn’t use these ideas in ‘The Opening Mind’, in which there is a discussion of aesthetics. Nevertheless, Weitz does ascribe this doctrine to A. C. Bradley in his *Hamlet and the Philosophy of Literary Criticism*, p. 15, and he also refers to the essay ‘Poetry for Poetry’s Sake’ without being more specific.

sake-theory. Although he did not agree completely with this view, he nevertheless insisted on the autonomy and intrinsic value of art (in fact, he said it about poetry) (Bradley 1961:4–5). It is important to notice that any insisting is always insisting on the importance of something. This brings us to a relevant conclusion. Supposing that insisting on the importance of something reflects artistic preferences, no formulated theory can be a purely descriptive one.

In addition, we know that terms such as '(organic) unity' and 'coherence' have always been used as artistic principles and not as defining features of art. The terms are used in connection with the analysis and interpretation of particular artworks. Therefore, given these observations, I doubt that Weitz's interpretation of Bradley can be correct.

VII. Parker's voluntarism

In the very first words of his paper Parker (1965) disclosed his conviction about the history of aesthetic theories: 'The assumption underlying every philosophy of art is the existence of some common nature present in all the arts.' Parker's convictions may be correct. But even if it is true that every philosophy of art shares this assumption, it does not follow that every philosophy of art is attempting to provide a definition of art in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Firstly, it seems that concepts such as 'common nature' or 'common denominator' deserve some clarification. Parker (1965), Bell (1969) and Kennick (1968) presuppose that the 'common denominator' and 'essence' of art are identical concepts. But in my opinion a 'common denominator (nature)' implies a necessary and not a sufficient condition for art. Secondly, it may be true that the assumption in question (whatever it means) is an implicit or tacit presupposition of philosophy of art, and the great part of theories are not engaged in making this assumption explicit.

It is worth noting how Parker (1965:92–93) interprets the relations among the theories. His short review of aesthetic theories is presented in terms of 'reactions', 'opposite attitudes towards art', 'protesting' and 'opposite motive'. This seems to imply (contrary to Parker and Weitz) that the history of defining art is anything but an attempt to provide a definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions; it seems to imply that aesthetics is a battle of several artistic ideologies. To emphasize, there seems to be an inconsistency between Parker's convictions about the main assumption of aesthetics and his account of the actual history of aesthetics.

Parker draws two conclusions (in his terms 'deductions') from his consideration of history of defining art. There are two conditions that a successful definition of art must satisfy. Firstly, since art is a complex phenomenon, a definition of art must be complex and involve many characteristics. Secondly, he (Parker 1965:93–94) argued that a definition of art must reveal a deep connection between art and life.

There is no trouble with the first condition. The shortcoming of the second one is that it is incompatible with the aim that Weitz ascribes to aesthetic theories. It seems that Parker's view concerning the definition of art does not involve a value-neutral factual report on art. He provides a criterion for good art not a good definition of art.

However, this is not a successful argument against Weitz's account of Parker since it does not challenge that account. Nevertheless, Lee Brown (1971:347) has indicated that Parker openly admitted in his earlier book that he considers himself to be presenting his own preferences and trying to persuade his readers of the soundness of those preferences.

VIII. Some objections

So far I have tried to argue that Weitz is mistaken about the descriptive definitional orientation of all the theories he mentions.⁷

There could be three objections to my arguments. Do I want to argue that no (or no great part of) theory since Plato has had the aim at defining art? This criticism is not justified because 'defining', as used in this objection, refers to all kinds of activities that claim something illuminating about art. I think that we certainly can use the concept of defining in this broad sense, but my purpose here has been to consider only the very restricted notion of defining art given by Weitz.

Even if all traditional theories have searched for the definition of art, it is still not clear what exactly they have searched for. The precise characterization of theories and their purposes tends to elude us, since the term 'definition' is a tricky concept. There are many types of definitions: stipulative, lexical, precisising, theoretical, nominal, recursive, real, ostensive, and definitions of relative terms (Robinson 1965, Geach 1976, Copi and Burgess-Jackson 1995:132–162, Copi and Cohen 2001:99–135). The reason why I pay attention to this trivial fact is that every type of definition intended by theories implies its own criteria of evaluation. It is important to insist that definitions serve different purposes: they are used to increase the vocabulary, to reduce vagueness, to explain theoretically, and to influence attitudes (Copi and Jackson-Burgess 1995:132–137). In addition, the problem of defining arises only on some special occasions (for example, in debates, or discussions) (Geach 1976). So, if we have a reason to think that we do not always need a definition of the artworld, then it makes no sense to argue that this is what all aesthetic theories are striving for.

Notice that I do not deny that the theories I have described are fallacious if we take them as projects that aim at definition of art in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. In this sense Weitz could be correct. But Weitz omitted a conditional approach to these theories of art. Theories may be classificatory,

⁷ If you are not convinced by my re-consideration of those theories, notice that not all proponents of the theories are professional philosophers. None but Parker and Croce are philosophers. The others are either art critics (Bell, Bradley) or artists (Tolstoy).

descriptive, reformatory, evaluative, explanatory, normative, etc. It is not my purpose here to consider all differences among these theories but as an analytic aesthetician I would like to analyze them systematically.

Secondly, someone might object that nothing depends on my criticism of Weitz; i.e. even if my observations are correct they have only the slightest impact on the rest of Weitz's view, for example that art has no definable essence (Davies 1991:11).

This is a serious challenge to my views. But even if my arguments have not the slightest weight in relation to the rest of Weitz's views, it remains true that there is a misconception in Weitz's famous paper.

Thirdly, one might object that my criticism of Weitz rests on a misinterpretation of his views. It could be argued that, at the end of his article, Weitz tried to rehabilitate aesthetic theories suggesting that their worth lies in trying to justify and to correct criteria for evaluating art that previous theories have neglected or distorted. Therefore, Weitz did suppose that definitions provided by the theories should be understood as honorific ones.

But if the greater part of the theories are not involved in the project of defining art in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions (as my arguments suggest), then the Weitzian rehabilitation of traditional theories loses its point. What is needed is to rescue theories from the Weitzian interpretation. Moreover, if the latter interpretation of Weitz is true, then we are forced to conclude that Weitz commits himself to another suspicious generalization: that is, that all definitions of art proposed by aesthetic theories are honorific definitions.⁸

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