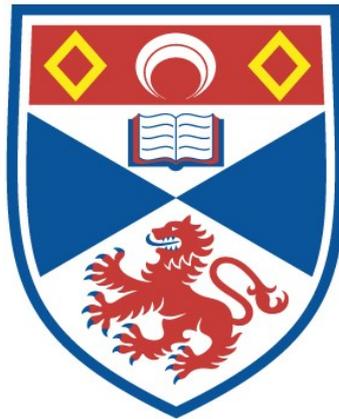


THE NATURE AND VALUE OF ART

Matthew Kieran

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



1995

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*The Nature and Value
of Art.*

Matthew Kieran

Ph.D. Thesis

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Abstract.

This thesis examines the nature and value of art. It is primarily concerned to advance an argument which makes sense of the significance we ordinarily afford art, rather than rendering it merely aesthetic and thus cognitively trivial. Contrary to philosophical orthodoxy, it is argued that 'art' does not have two distinct senses. Rather, we should understand art as an inherently evaluative, evolving cultural practice. Thus, I argue, 'art' is essentially a cluster concept.

I consider an account of art according to which it is in the pleasure art affords, that its value lies. However, though we derive pleasure even from apparently unpleasant artworks, the mark of art's value lies elsewhere. That is, the pleasure we derive from art is the result of an artwork's being of value in some other way. Through critically assessing the standard accounts of art's value, I argue that art's pleasures are primarily cognitive. Furthermore, I argue, the cognitive value of art arises primarily from the engagement of our imagination and interpretation of artworks. That is, we enjoy the imaginative activity of engaging with artworks and the promotion of particular imaginative understandings.

Furthermore, as imaginative understanding is of fundamental importance in grasping the nature of our world and others, art may have a distinctive significance. That is, art may afford insights into and thus promote our imaginative understandings of our world and others. Thus, through the promotion of imaginative understanding, art may cultivate our moral understanding. Therefore, art is of profound significance and import.

Declarations.

a) I, Matthew Laurence Kieran, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 100,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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b) I was admitted as a research student under Ordinance No. 12 in October, 1990 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. in August 1991; the higher study for which this is the record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 1990 and 1994.

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c) I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Ph.D in the University of St. Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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Introduction.

“The great instrument of moral good is the imagination..Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight...Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb.”

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*

This is a thesis about the nature and value of art: about how we ought to understand what constitutes art and thus why, if at all, art may truly be considered significant. This is an ambitious task. However, I cannot claim to offer an exhaustive analysis of art and its role in our lives. Rather, I shall be exploring certain key concerns which I take to be fundamentally illuminating in this regard. For some, the implicit assumption in the thesis title, that the nature and value of art are closely linked, will itself be highly questionable. Thus, the task of my first chapter is to establish that our concept of art is inherently evaluative.

It is typically presumed that ‘art’ has two senses: the classificatory and the evaluative. Philosophers interested in the definitional question, as to what constitutes ‘art’, have been engaged in the process of trying to articulate how, if at all, these two senses are linked. On the one hand, there are those who claim there is no link at all. That is, belonging to the category art bears no relation to the work’s value *qua* art. On the other hand, many have argued for just such a link. That is, knowing something is art involves a recognition that it should realise certain kinds of value.

However, I will argue, the very presumption that art has two distinct senses is itself flawed. This is not to revert back to a naive version of essentialism or functionalism regarding ‘art’. Rather, I will argue, art is an inherently evaluative cultural practice. Furthermore, ‘art’ is an inherently value-laden cluster concept. An object must be of a certain kind of artistic value before it can be classified as an artwork at all. Thus, what is art, and why, depends upon questions of value.

The rest of my thesis is an attempt to render my evaluative definition of art substantive and plausible. Moreover, through doing so, I hope to show why we rightly consider art to be of such great significance. The second chapter examines various possible values art may be concerned with. The first possibility examined concerns a direct link to pleasure. After all, the pleasures artworks afford is obviously a strong motivation and reward for our engagement with them. The pleasure artworks afford is typically both a consequent of the activity of engaging with the work and partly

constituted in the engagement itself. The problems 'unpleasant' art poses for an account of art's value, based on the pleasures it affords, are, I argue, only apparent. We can appreciate this if we recognise that we may enjoy experiencing feeling emotions which have a negative evaluative content. The thrill of fear may be enjoyable after all. Hence we can make sense of the complaint that a film was not horrific enough or the criticism that a tragedy left us untouched.

Nonetheless, although it seems that good art does afford us pleasure, its primary value lies elsewhere. That is, the mark of a work's value as art, which gives rise to pleasure, inheres in something more particular to art. I critically assess whether an artwork's primary value lies in its aesthetic, expressive or cognitive aspects. Ultimately, I conclude, art's value is primarily cognitive. This is based upon the recognition that we may properly value artworks, even where a work's aesthetic aspect is detrimentally effected. Furthermore, the inter-relationship between what is represented and the way it is represented also suggests that art's pleasures derive largely from cognitive value. In exploring the kind of cognitive value and pleasures art may afford, we are led to recognise that a work's significance seems to lie in the rendering of an aspect and a work's power to transfigure one's perceptions of oneself, others and the world. One's emotions, imagination or conception of the world may be altered or developed in our engagement with the work as art. This suggests that our engagement, and more specifically the imagination, may have a particular role to play in art.

The third chapter examines two important contemporary accounts of imagination's role in art. The first account considered is that articulated by Roger Scruton. For Scruton, the imagination irreducibly involves aspects of both thought and sensuous experience. However, Scruton argues, the imagination goes beyond mere belief and cannot concern what we know about the real world. Thus, Scruton suggests, it is a mistake to question whether what we imagine is true or not. However, Scruton fails to recognise that what we imagine can make essential reference to belief and what we know. That is, it may be a constitutive part of what I imagine, that I believe or know it to be true. I then consider Kendall Walton's account of imagination's role in our engagement with artworks. Walton provides a highly illuminating account of our spectatorial role in engaging with artworks. However, fundamentally, Walton's account is problematic. His conception of fiction, as constituted by artefacts whose function it is to prescribe our imaginings, threatens to fictionalise virtually every work we engage with. Fictionality does not follow from an object's properly prescribing imaginings. We can and do properly imaginatively engage with artworks which are essentially understood, in our engagement, as non-fiction. The imagination irreducibly involves elements of both thought and sensuous experience. Imagination cannot be reduced merely to entertained thought. Furthermore, it will become clear that we may also respond emotionally in and as a consequent of our imaginings. Nevertheless, any account of imagination hoping to claim adequacy, must recognise that we may essentially imagine what we know to be true.

The fourth chapter goes on to develop the idea that the role of the imagination in both art and our everyday lives enables us to understand, in a deep way, both ourselves and others. This, in turn, paves the way for the idea that art's primary significance lies in its peculiar capacity to

prescribe and enhance such deep understanding. Firstly, I argue that the imagination plays a fundamental role in our ordinary, everyday lives. In order to show exactly how this is so, I distinguish between two forms of understanding. Thin understanding is constituted by a theory drive model of explanation and prediction. Thus, a thin understanding of another involves postulating a theory or key set of propositions which are put forward to explain their behaviour. Here, imagination can be of instrumental value. For example, we may imagine what certain states of affairs are or could be like in order to achieve a better theoretical understanding of others and the world. What we imagine may prompt ideas which we can then subject to reasoned and reflective consideration, in the appropriate sphere of enquiry. However, my argument is not merely concerned to establish an important instrumental role for the imagination, in trying to understand various facts, possibilities and afford new insights. This is brought out by considering thick understanding. Rather than being theory driven, thick understanding typically involves an imaginative grasp of what something or someone would or could have been like. As life is lived from the inside, so thick understanding involves imagined experience. The imagined experience itself is irreducible: compatible with, but not reducible to, thinking what something is like. Here, imagining is of intrinsic value. Through imagining states of affairs, we can understand more fully the possibilities and nature of an action or another person. Thus, we can respond more appropriately to actual or projected states of affairs. This knowledge by acquaintance, whether actual or imaginative, is constitutive of one's thick understanding. Thus what we may imagine, may justify or manifest our full understanding of certain behaviour. Therefore, imagination may play a crucial role in our everyday deliberations and reflections.

The value of artworks in this regard lies in their engagement of the imagination. In considering the nature of our imaginative engagement with artworks, I conclude that divergence of interpretations may be blameless and ineliminable based upon two kinds of considerations. The first, and less controversial, is that artworks may justifiably be disambiguated by spectators in different ways. Thus, for example, one person may take the *Mona Lisa* to be smiling intimately and alluringly, whilst another may interpret her ambiguous expression as one of cold reticence. The second source of legitimate variation arises from the different understandings we may bring to bear upon a work in our imaginative engagement with it. Thus, for example, one may interpret Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* in terms of a psycho-analytic distrust of the narrator or, conversely, one may take the narrator as straightforwardly trustworthy. The insights of these distinct interpretations are based upon bringing distinct understandings, private and public, which enable us to engage imaginatively with the work in the first place. What we aim at in our imaginative engagement with an artwork is the promotion of our imaginative understanding of the possibilities, values and concerns open to us and how they may inter-relate.

The imaginings promoted by artworks may enhance and deepen our imaginative understanding. For example, imagining the rage of Othello's jealousy informs our understanding of jealousy, in a way in which our own paltry imaginings on their own would not. In complex ways, our imaginings concerning what is real, speculative or fictional, can enhance our understanding of the

world. The value of artworks in promoting imaginative understanding derives from the relationship between the states of affairs we are prescribed to imagine and the way they are represented. In imagining one considers, reflects and feels, both as a part of and in response to the state of affairs constructed. The point of an artwork is to constrain and guide what one imagines. What enables a work to do so rests upon the artist's manipulation of the raw materials, style, medium, conventions and genre constraints involved. It is through the various constraints and prescriptions of artworks, that one can imagine most vividly and fruitfully. For the imaginings are typically guided towards an appreciation of the possibilities, actualities, past and present, of aspects of the world and its people. The point of art relates both to imagination's place in our everyday lives and the imaginative insight art can afford. In short, the artwork attempts to convey in the imaginative experience a significant understanding of the world.

The last chapter develops an appreciation of the peculiar and powerful ways art may prescribe our imaginings. What is peculiar to our imaginative engagement with artworks, as distinct from our more everyday imaginative experience, is the artistic manipulation of the aspectual imaginings prescribed by the artwork. Thus it is that art can and does distinctively cultivate our thick understanding. Coupled with the claim that morality depends upon a thick understanding of others, in order to make sound moral decisions, we can articulate the close link between most art and morality. Through imaginative engagement, art may deepen, modify or alter our understandings of ourselves, others and the world. Thus artworks may manifest and promote a sound appreciation of aspects of the world and others. Their power, inexhaustibility, irreducibility and profundity lies in the insight they may afford into our and other imaginative understandings of the world. The primary value of art lies in its engagement and development of the imagination, in order to cultivate our imaginative understanding. If an artwork promotes an immoral imaginative understanding of the world, then it cultivates a false understanding of the world. A work which promotes a false imaginative understanding of others and the world is disvaluable as art. Since knowing what the morally right or good thing to do is, depends upon imaginative understanding, there is a necessary link between art and morality. Artworks may properly manifest and afford moral insight. Where an artwork promotes an immoral imaginative understanding, the work is disvaluable as art. A proper appreciation of how this is so, must, however, still allow that works which promote immoral imaginative understandings may nevertheless be artworks.

Thus I hope to establish that the pleasures we derive from art derive, in large part, from the engagement and cultivation of our imaginative understandings. Furthermore, it is a consequence of this, that art can develop our moral insight and sensibilities. Thus the core intuition behind the Victorian expansion of art galleries, concert halls and museums was a sound one. Though it was often construed far too crassly, the basic idea that exposure to and engagement with artworks may develop our moral sensibilities is right. To travel through the imaginative lands evoked by artworks is not just to broaden one's mind. It is, through imaginative experience, to extend and deepen one's imaginative understanding, and thus moral understanding, of ourselves, others and our world. Thus it is that we may rightly consider art to be of fundamental significance.

Chapter 1

The Nature Of Art: The Path To Be Taken.

“Since it is a joy to have the benefit of what is good, it
is a greater one to experience what is better,
and in art the best is good enough”
Goethe, *Italienische Reise*

Introduction.

In the last twenty years, philosophical orthodoxy has held that ‘art’ has two senses: the classificatory and the evaluative. Quite how they are to be linked, if at all, has been the matter for dispute. Many philosophers hold that the classificatory sense is wholly divorced from questions of value. Conversely, others argue there is a link between them; knowing what art is involves knowing what is valuable *qua* art. The presumption that ‘art’ has two senses arose from an attack upon essentialism. Essentialist theories typically held it was both a necessary and sufficient condition of an artefact being art that it had a particular value. However, it was argued, evaluative theories of art could only partially explain why various artefacts were art. For example, a theory which defined art in terms of aesthetic qualities could not account for ugly art. Although theories may usefully highlight previously neglected aspects of art, they cannot capture the value of art as a whole.¹ One response was to argue that defining art was a purely classificatory matter. For example, it has been argued that regarding an artefact in the light of the art world is sufficient for an object to be art.² Artwork status is thus considered to be independent of whether the artwork is any good or not *qua* art, therefore worthless art may properly accounted for.

The alternative response was to maintain the link between classifying and evaluating something as art along functionalist lines. For example, it may be the proper function of artworks to afford experiences of aesthetic value.³ Typically, functionalism also allows for worthless art because

¹ Morris Weitz, “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics” in J. Margolis (ed.), *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, 3rd ed., (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), pp. 121-131.

² Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), and *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

³ Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958), pp. 524-535.

an artefact may fail to fulfil its function as art. Thus functionalists also preserve the idea that there are two senses to the term 'art': after all, an object may fail to realise its proper value. In this chapter, through progressively examining the best arguments on both sides, we will find the fundamental assumption of the entire debate to be flawed. I am not denying that the term 'artwork' is used descriptively. But the concept which underwrites this use is one which requires the object to be of a certain artistic value before it can even be classified as a member of the class 'artwork'. 'Art' has only one sense, which is inherently evaluative. I will eventually argue that the most adequate recognition of art's inherently evaluative aspect involves conceiving of art as an evolving cultural practice and a cluster concept.

In one sense my definition is circular. Yet it is part of the task of my thesis to render the definition informatively so; to elucidate what constitutes artistic value. Nevertheless, crudely put, something must attain a certain threshold of artistic value in order to be art. The characteristics and values which are typical of art, and feature in the cluster concept are various, but, except for artefactuality, they are matters of artistic value. This is not to deny that an artwork may possess artistically disvaluable features, such as ugliness. Rather, its overall artistic value must outweigh or be promoted by the apparently artistically disvaluable features. Bad art is art which achieves the minimal standard for artwork status but affords little more. Bad artworks just about keep one interested in the same way bad comedians just about make one laugh. Jimmy Tarbuck is a bad comedian because although he raises a titter, he does so only occasionally and one has to put up with much that is patently unfunny. Good art, like good comedy, achieves the relevant values and features to a high degree. By contrast, something which lacks artistic value, or which just is not funny, cannot be art, or comedy, respectively. If one produced such work it would not just be bad art, one would have failed to produce art at all. There is no truly worthless art.

Section 1: The Evolution of The Institutional Theory of Art.

Morris Weitz's arguments against essentialist definitions of art are based upon an application of Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance to the concept of art. Wittgenstein famously elaborated this notion in relation to the concept of a game. Although the concept 'game' covers many cases, from chess to rugby, there is no underlying common essence. Rather, the relationship lies in the criss cross and overlapping resemblances of cases. Of course, not just any similarity is at stake, otherwise the point would be trivial. After all, almost anything can be made to resemble anything else: for example my shoe and the Space Shuttle are both artefacts. Rather, resemblance is a matter of saliency: which features are relevantly similar relative to our purpose in classing certain kinds of objects together. To

bring this out, Wittgenstein uses the image of short threads intertwining and overlapping to form a strong rope, with no one continuous thread running throughout.⁴

Weitz recognised significant core relations between art forms, rules of art making and thus artworks. However, he argued, the inter-relations are ones of family resemblance and do not hold across all cases.⁵ Weitz's argument rests upon the observation that, at various stages in art's development, all attempts to define what constitutes art, or a particular art form such as tragedy, have failed. Each time a definition has been proposed, the explicated rules have been broken and great art has resulted; for example, Shakespearean tragedy infringed the rules of Aristotelian tragedy. Therefore, he concludes, art has no essence. In terms of classification 'art' is an open concept with no essential criteria of recognition. 'Art' in its evaluative sense is honorific and inevitably partial: it is typically redefined by criteria chosen on the basis of value preference. Maurice Mandelbaum responded by suggesting that even the inter-relations of family resemblance depend upon some underlying continuous essence; for example, in a human family there must be a genetic commonality.⁶ The rope may be intertwining, but in the middle there must be a single continuous thread running throughout: a genetic tie.

In fact, neither Weitz's nor Mandelbaum's arguments achieve what their respective authors presume. Although great art may break with contemporarily established rules of production, this does not establish that art cannot have an underlying essence. Weitz's appeals to empirical considerations only show that the concept of art may be one of family resemblance, not that it is. Maybe we just haven't reached the point where we can, uncontroversially, pick out art's essence. Moreover, Weitz states it is a precondition of artistic creativity that 'art' is an open concept:

"the very expansive, adventurous character of art, its *ever-present* changes and novel creations, makes it logically impossible to ensure any set of defining properties."⁷

Does this not suggest that originality is required for something to be art? Weitz contradicts his own argument, condoning originality as a necessary, though not sufficient, value of art. Indeed, Weitz at one point states that "we can, of course, choose to close the concept. But to do this with 'art'...is

⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), Section 67, p. 32.

⁵ Morris Weitz, *The Opening Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), and "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" in J. Margolis (ed.), *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, 3rd ed., (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), pp. 121-131.

⁶ Maurice Mandelbaum, "Family Resemblances and Generalisations Concerning the Arts", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1965, pp. 219-228.

⁷ Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" in J. Margolis (ed.), *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, 3rd ed., (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), p. 127, (italics are my emphasis).

ludicrous since it forecloses on the very conditions of creativity in the arts.”⁸ So an essential definition of art is not really logically impossible, just pragmatically undesirable because it would, he thinks, exclude originality. Even if Weitz only meant that originality is a precondition of great art, he gives no grounds for explaining why this should be so only for great and not all art.

Similarly, Mandelbaum’s arguments are too weak to establish his claims. The required relevance depends upon the purposes for which we are categorising the objects concerned. Thus the relevant resemblance might be independent of any properties or features common between the objects picked out. Thus in a trial, a box may resemble a particular truck by virtue of its relational position to the wire that stands in for traffic lights. The resemblance here concerns the structural analogue and does not concern the nature of the two objects involved. Of course, the commonality Mandelbaum argues for needn’t be one of properties or even states of affairs. However, the analogy from the generative causal relation between father and son suggests only that art may have a generative essence, not that it does. We may give a complex story about artwork’s inter-relations, and the modifying principles which have held so far, without being able to pick out an essential nature. Furthermore, Mandelbaum does not provide any argument to show the supposed generative tie is relevant: we may agree all artworks are intended, yet deny this is relevant to distinguishing an artefact as art. In the trial case what the box was made for is irrelevant to its resemblance to the truck.

It was against this philosophical background that George Dickie proposed his institutional theory of art. Originally Dickie held that an artefact became art if a recognised representative of the artworld conferred arthood status upon it: an artefact blessed by the artworld is art.⁹ There are no intrinsic properties by virtue of which something is art, nor do the reasons for status conferral need to have anything in common. Rather, it is through their relational properties that artefacts are art. Since artwork status is a purely procedural matter, the institutional theory severs the link between the classificatory and evaluative senses of ‘art’. Whether something is art or not bears no relation to why we do, or do not, find it to be of value. The strength of Dickie’s account is obvious when one considers how, earlier this century, many anthropological artefacts came to be seen as artworks. Picasso’s interest in and use of such artefacts, coupled with his status in the artworld, can be seen as bringing them into art’s arena.¹⁰ Indeed, his disregard for the original point of these objects further supports the institutional theory: their status was acquired irrespective of the purpose for which they were intentionally designed.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic* (New York: Ithaca, 1974), p. 34

¹⁰ See J. B. Donne, “African Art and Paris Studios 1905-20” in M. Greenhalgh and V. Megaw (eds.), *Art in Society* (London: Duckworth, 1978), pp. 105-120, for a cursory attempt to determine the styles of African art directly available to artists, particularly Picasso and Braque, in Paris.

However, to fix art in terms of the contingent institutional development of the practice is grossly inadequate. Familiar problems with arthood status as a matter of conferral arise immediately.¹¹ An artist cannot christen a part of nature an artwork merely because of an act of conferral: it is patently false to claim that an artist who has walked the Lake District has thereby turned it into a work of art. It may be suggested that Dickie's precondition of artefactuality, for an object up for artwork status, blocks this objection. However, since Dickie's construal of artefactuality apparently consists in the act of status conferral itself, the objection holds good.

Furthermore, as Monroe Beardsley has pointed out, the artworld cannot direct who may or may not be able to confer arthood status.¹² It is not a formal and structured organisation with demarcated powers of status conferral. The closest arbiter of arthood status might then be the market: what designates art is whether it is sold as such. But which part of the market? Anyway, neither Dickie nor anyone else could seriously contemplate the idea that the market mechanism determines artwork status. The whole point of artwork status, or honours generally, being of significance, is that it is in recognition of something which merits the accord, otherwise the status would be hollow. It is also true that the artworld not only includes artists, critics and dealers, but also the public who visit the theatres, galleries and cinemas. Dickie could attempt to widen his notion of artworld representatives, from artists to anyone who enters the porous world of art. But the whole point of the institutional theory was to restrict the powers of status conferral to select representatives of artworld institutions. Not just anyone can decide what is art, otherwise the classification itself threatens to become meaningless. If the notion of the artworld is expanded to include everyone who engages with art, then the simplicity and power of the theory is severely diminished.

So who then, according to the institutional theory, can confer artwork status? If it is the artist, then problems re-emerge at a prior stage. The artist must have been recognised as such by a prior status conferrer, another artist presumably. Thus the very notions of artwork status and artist presuppose the existence of art and the artworld. Yet, prior to the first artwork there cannot have been an artworld, because there was no art. To require an artworld prior to any art is to put the cart before the horse. Dickie cannot explain how the first artworks came about; since artefacts only become art by virtue of the artworld's status conferral, there cannot be any art. Although the institutional theory attempts to explain 'art', it cannot even explain how we came to have any art to which the theory should be adequate. The institutional theory cannot allow for the obvious possibility that non-members of an artworld can make art. Furthermore, the institutional theory cannot even make sense of private art works. A work produced by unknown Frank Auerbach but never seen by anyone else is, on this account,

¹¹ See R. A. Sharpe, *Contemporary Aesthetics* (Brighton: Harvester, 1983), pp. 30-36, for a range of objections to the notion of art as conferred status.

¹² Monroe Beardsley, "Is Art Essentially Institutional?" in Lars Aagaard-Mogensen (ed.), *Culture and Art* (New Jersey: Atlantic Highlands, 1976), pp. 194-209.

rendered non-art. However, we would obviously consider it an undiscovered artwork, rather than an object waiting to be made into an artwork.

The institutional theory also fails to make sense of an artist failing to produce an artwork. Dickie holds that an artist who confers status upon his work has by definition produced art. Yet, artists can and do fail to produce artworks: an artist who has just written infantile prose should recognise that he has failed to produce art. In striving to make art one tries to realise particular goals and values, and trying entails the possibility of failure. An artist cannot alter the status of his work merely by an act of conferral. Indeed, Dickie's theory cannot allow for critical mistakes or fraud in relation to whether something is an artwork. Dickie's account cannot even make sense of artistic jokes, such as Duchamp's *Fountain*, which concern artwork status: if Dickie were right, there could be no joke to get. As Richard Wollheim suggests, it is what the artist does that matters, not what he or others call it.¹³ We judge an artwork, not confer status upon it. We consider something to be art precisely because it is of value and not the other way around. It is only when we fail to recognise the actual or possible value of a work that we seek institutional type explanations. This suggests that art is inherently evaluative.

Art has evolved as a cultural practice because it is valued as contributing to our lives. Now the fact that a cultural practice is of value to us does not automatically prove its value is part of its definition; consider science for example. Science is typically conceived of as a value independent methodology of enquiry. It aims at increasing our knowledge of the natural world and cannot be directly concerned with values. Yet science, like art, is a practice which aims at some good: it aims at truth via the mathematical description of the world. Relative to this evaluative aim we classify science as good or bad. Good science aims at the truth via a truth-promoting method. Conversely, bad science is indifferent to truth. For example, whether Cyril Burt was a good scientist or not depends upon whether claims concerning his fraudulent research and poor methodology are sound. If he faked results, then the truth was not sought. If his methodology was poor, then truth-promoting methods were abandoned. Both honesty and discipline are required to be a good scientist. Thus there is an inherently evaluative aspect to science; it aims at the value of truth.

Furthermore, the overall classification of science as good or bad is relative to our aims. Lysenko's science was bad *qua* science. He could not make wheat grow since his theories, though 'ideologically sound', were biologically incorrect.¹⁴ However, relative to Stalin's aims, Lysenko's science may have been good overall; in helping Stalin's subjugation of Russia. Similarly art aims at some good and relative to this evaluative aim we classify works as good or bad *qua* art. Moreover, we classify art overall as good or bad relative to our aims. Art evolves in relation to our interests and

¹³ Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), Chapter 1, p. 15.

¹⁴ Anthony O'Hear, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 214.

values. Hence art forms such as masonry and landscape gardening have virtually died out whilst film has developed exponentially. Thus the concept of art must have an inherently evaluative aspect.

However, Dickie may reply, the argument fails to establish that art's classificatory sense must involve art's evaluative aspect. It entails merely that the evaluative aspect depends upon the cultural practice of art as a whole. Why might 'art' not be merely descriptive but also relative to custom? Art would then be what we understand it to be. Thus, since we no longer think an artwork's status is related to questions of value, it cannot be. The strongest thread throughout the many fractured art movements of this century is the obsessive self-preoccupation with materials, techniques and methods. Taking Duchamp's work as paradigmatic, it would seem the practice has evolved so that merely calling or exhibiting an artefact as art is sufficient for it to be art. The cultural practice of art has itself severed the link between classification and evaluation.

Now although such a story has merit, it is far too simple. Of course, much art this century has been concerned with its own methods and materials. However, not all modern art has been thus preoccupied, as William Golding's novels and Stanley Spencer's paintings testify. Nor is such self-conscious preoccupation the preserve of modern art, as can be seen from Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Hogarth's *False Perspective*. Moreover, a concern with methods and materials often arises from a concern with the communication of something felt to be of value. For example, the point of futurism's attempt to foreground certain methods of construction was to convey the significance of motion, machines and technology for mankind. Most significantly though, if Dickie's story were sound, artists, critics and audiences, with no theory-driven axe to grind, would appreciate that whether something is art or not is unrelated to its value. This is distinctly not the case, as can be seen from interviews with artists, critics' reviews, and listening to ordinary spectators. How should we react to someone who suggests a work of modern art cannot be art because children or monkeys could do better? We do not point out that the work is in an art gallery. We may not even debate whether a child could have made those particular marks or not. Rather, we try to persuade and show him that the work can be seen to be and indeed is of value. The assumption is, if he could see this then he would understand why we treat it as a work of art. An artwork must have a certain value.¹⁵

If Dickie's more conceptual claim is sound, namely, art is as it is understood to be in the making of and engagement with it, the institutional theory must be false. Since we understand art to be intimately linked to questions of value, the ways of going on which constitute art as a practice must involve an evaluative aspect. If we came upon a culture where this was not so, then, despite the possible similarities, we would not call that practice art. Imagine coming across a strange new tribe; they too make artefacts which are put out for display and looked at by other members of the tribe.

¹⁵ Which is not the case with someone trying to show that a piece of theory is scientific, this being a question of methodology and appropriate form of explanation.

When asked, they inform us that these artefacts are their art. Then we ask if they could point out for us their best artworks. But they quite happily reply that none of their art is any good at all. On closer questioning it becomes obvious that this is not because they always fail to produce what they were aiming at. Indeed, the artists are usually perfectly satisfied with what they produce. They shake their heads and are bemused at our puzzlement. They explain that, for them, whether something is 'art' bears no relation to whether the object concerned is any good or not.

It's patently false to suggest this tribe has the practice of art, as their artefacts are displayed with no apparent point *qua* art. The tribe's purpose may be intelligible in ritualistic terms, the representation of particular deities is of wholly instrumental value. Their production of these objects for ritualistic purposes renders their value as art irrelevant. If the objects had no ritual point then the intelligibility of the practice would have to involve an historical link to value. The story would relate how questions of value came to be divorced from the practice, and how the practice was sustained as it became severed from its *raison d'être*. The explanation would require paradigm cases of what was of value as art in their practice at one time, to establish that this was a degeneration in the practice of art rather than another practice. Without this kind of story there would be no intelligible reasons to suggest why they confer honorific arthood status upon these artefacts in the first place. Thus it is unintelligible that they could have a concept of art without even some attenuated notion of the link to value. The practice of art can only exist residually, apart from its purpose, where it is artificially sustained: for example, art might be artificially sustained by state institutions for official propaganda or by investors as commodities to trade, just as religious rituals might be observed for their beauty alone. Where this happens the practice teeters on the brink of collapsing back into another. The term 'art' would no longer have any meaningful sense, leaving at best an attenuated institutional residue.

A comparison of our first tribe with the case of another imaginary tribe we meet should prove instructive. The second tribe also makes and displays various kinds of artefacts, though, by contrast, not everything made is displayed, some objects are discarded. However, when tribe members wander around looking at the displayed artefacts, they murmur and shake their heads in dismay. When asked, they confirm that these artefacts are art. Yet when we ask to be shown good artworks, they reply, unhappily, that none of their art is good. They have both a classificatory sense, which picks out certain artefacts as art, from others which are not, and a narrower evaluative sense, which, in this case, picks out nothing. Now we can make sense of this practice as, in some sense, art. Adherents to the institutional theory of art may try to claim this picture supports their conception: this tribe has no art which is any good and yet, nonetheless, artefacts are classed as art.

However, the institutional theory cannot explain why it is intelligible that this tribe has the practice of art, whereas the first one did not. The key difference is that here artefacts can fail to be art. This is attributable to their failure to attain a minimal standard. Artefacts must achieve a minimal standard in order to achieve artwork status at all. There is a purpose for which the artefacts are made,

one which an intentionally designed object can fail to achieve. In this context, the tribesmen's lack of good artworks means that they have no artefacts which are particularly good cases of the class of objects which have achieved the necessary standard for artwork status. Although it may not be a particularly brilliant instance, an artefact must be valuable as art to be classified as an artwork. So, though they do not have any good art, we can expect to be shown their best artworks which have attained a certain value. Although not good art, these artworks will be the best they have so far managed to produce. Unfortunately, their best artworks are only poor paradigms of art. Nevertheless, to distinguish between non-art, mere art and good art depends upon what art's purpose and value is taken to be.

Yet, it does seem strange that our second tribe do not consider themselves to have any good art. Of course, I am not denying one can have a goal in mind and consistently fail to realise it. Rather, the point is that the standards for artwork status, and thus for being a good artwork, cannot be fixed and absolute. Artwork status depends upon whether an artefact fulfils the aim and value of art. Whether an artwork is good or not depends upon whether it does this well. But how well an artefact fulfils the value of art is a relational matter: it is relative to how well other artefacts do. Consider an analogy to sprinting. The aim of sprinting is to run fast over short distances. Whether someone is a sprinter or not depends upon whether, typically, he runs reasonably fast, whether he is a good sprinter depends upon whether, typically, he runs very fast. But there is not some fixed absolute standard which determines what is fast and very fast, what determines this is how fast other people run. This explains why it would be ludicrous to say that no-one was a good sprinter until Carl Lewis, Linford Christie *et al* broke, legally, the ten second barrier for the 100 metres.

The relevant standard is relative to the actual achievements so far, which is why the standard may vary over time. So, of course, it was and remains true that Jesse Owen was a great sprinter. In the same way this explains why suggesting that no woman is a good sprinter is ludicrous. Women are not the fastest sprinters in the world overall, but, relative to their actual performances, there are both reasonable and great women sprinters. Increasingly fast performances have meant that over time the overall standard has picked up. Since more people can now run faster than before, to be a reasonable or good sprinter means one must run faster than would have been required in 1983. By definition, not everyone can be reasonably or extremely fast: what it is to be fast involves the exclusion of most other runners. To be a good sprinter cannot require one to achieve some ahistorical fixed standard.

The point is that art too is evaluatively relative: what is art and good art cannot be defined by some absolute standard but is relative to the artworks produced. Of course, the good art of one age may be poor in comparison to the good art of another. Thus, all things considered, art which was originally good may well come to be thought of as merely art, and some works which just made artwork status may fall out of the category altogether. Good art just is the best art produced. Therefore the case which

makes the most sense is, unsurprisingly, where our imaginary tribe can take us to see various artefacts which, they say, are good exemplars of the kind of thing we call 'art'. The objects shown to us are the best artefacts which have managed to achieve artwork status. Of course, I am not denying that although they think these objects are good, they may in fact be bad art. However, this will depend upon the overall standards or values realised in art more generally. Similarly, the fastest sprinter in Scotland may well, relative to the present overall world standards, be pretty slow.

Through pinning down the flaws in the institutional theory we have to come to see that art is necessarily an evaluative concept. Furthermore, our arguments have also suggested that to achieve arthood status an artefact must already have a certain kind of value, to be a good artwork is to have that value to a high degree. Thus one wants to speak of recognising, rather than conferring, arthood status. As Wollheim puts it, "it is hard to see how there could be reasons putatively for making an artifact a work of art which were not better thought of as reasons for it being one."¹⁶ Art, as it has evolved, is made precisely because it is found to be of value. For the cultural practice of art to survive and develop, it must be found to be purposeful; otherwise, lacking point, it will stagnate and die. Our appeals to consider something as art are grounded in an appeal to value; we do not first classify something as art and then evaluate it. Art cannot be a purely classificatory concept, detachable from an evaluative component. Of course, we consider objects, with which we have not had contact as artworks. But that is on the basis of many others having done so, finding them to be of value. Fundamental here is our trust in others' judgements, both present and past: we trust the judgements of others regarding what we take as scientifically true of the world. One should always remain open to the possibility that an artefact is of value as art, though one cannot recognise it; this may be because of prejudice, lack of cultivation or blameless personal constitution. As David Hume recognised:

"there still remain two sources of variation, which are not sufficient indeed to confound all the boundaries of beauty and deformity, but will often serve to produce a difference in the degrees of our approbation or blame. The one is the different humours of particular men; the other, the particular manners and opinions of our age and country."¹⁷

¹⁶ Richard Wollheim, "The Institutional Theory of Art" in his *Art and Its Objects* (Cambridge: Canto, Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 161-162.

¹⁷ David Hume, "Of The Standard of Taste" in G. Dickie, R. Sclafani and R. Roblin (eds.), *Aesthetics*, 2nd ed., (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 251.

Section 2: Functionalism.

One way of cashing out a value-driven conception of art is to argue that art is a functional concept: an artwork is made to fulfil a particular function and evaluated accordingly.¹⁸ M. W. Rowe has recently argued for a functionalist conception of art. Functionalism, as contrasted with the institutional theory, obviously allows for the possibility of artistic failure; one may fail to realise the value-driven goal that constitutes art's function. Rowe goes on to argue that 'art' cannot have two senses: it is not just that "the classificatory sense of 'art' does not fit our aesthetic practice and discourse, but that such a sense *could not* exist."¹⁹ Objects falling under the concept 'art' already have a particular kind of value. To attribute 'good artwork' to an artefact is to recognise that it realises art's function to a high degree. A bad artwork just manages to attain a minimal standard required for artwork status, realising art's function not particularly well. Thus Rowe's functionalism holds to the picture we emerged with when contemplating our primitive tribe with the practice of art: namely, that there is non-art, art, which must have achieved a certain value, and great art, which possesses that value to a high degree. Artefacts designed to be art which fail to fulfil art's function are art only in a derivative sense, they cannot really be art:

"Evaluation, in fact, is the key to aesthetic essence: it is necessary not only to determine which objects are good art, but which objects are art at all - the general principles that make something good art being *the same* as those which make it art in the first place. Thus, at the upper end of the artistic scale we find works which succeed to an eminent or outstanding degree, while towards the bottom we find works which only just manage to hold the interest of their audience. Below these are works which do not succeed in any respect but are still normally works of art in the sense that broken tin-openers are still tin-openers. Finally, we have the class of objects which are not works of art at all...where we cannot begin to understand how the maker or arranger hoped to hold the attention of his audience."²⁰

However, though an attractive option, the temptation to deploy Rowe's arguments in explicating how art is evaluative should be strongly resisted. Firstly, Rowe's arguments do not even entail functionalism. Rowe rightly recognises that we cannot learn how to classify artworks

¹⁸ M. W. Rowe, "Why 'Art' Doesn't Have Two Senses", *The British Journal of Aesthetics*. Vol. 31, No. 3, 1991. pp. 214-221.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 221.

²⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

independently of the evaluative sense of art. Yet neither this, nor the condition of artefactuality, entails that art is a functional concept. Of course, the function of knives is to cut, so we evaluate how good a knife is according to its sharpness: if a knife is too blunt, or too sharp, it cannot be a good knife.

However, not all concepts which have an inherently evaluative aspect work like this. For example, we evaluate drinks according to our purposes, but 'drink' is not a functional concept. A drink must be something in liquid form, though this cannot be a sufficient condition as poisonous sap or vinegar are not drinks: a drink is not just what one can drink. It might be thought that since most drinks are artefacts, for example Coke, it is a functional concept and the natural drinks, for example water, are such by analogy. Thus whether the liquid in my glass is a drink or not depends upon various criteria, for example, whether it quenches my thirst and replenishes the water in my body. However, this criterion cannot be identified as the function of the concept 'drink'. For example, although alcoholic drinks actually dehydrate us and may not be thirst quenching at all, we value certain of them as great drinks. One cannot claim that alcoholic drinks merely have a nominal status: a glass of wine may be a great drink because the taste, the dry fruity flavour, is immensely pleasurable. Even if 'drink' originally was a functional concept, the concept has obviously come apart from the original function.

Another inherently evaluative concept which is non-functional is nationality. What state you were born in does not determine your nationality, in the same way that artefactuality or being in an art gallery does not determine arthood status. Various factors may be involved ranging from ethnic origin, cultural grouping and form of life to questions of individual valuation. Learning to use the terms 'art' and 'nationality' appropriately requires an appreciation of their point, but this does not entail functionality. Thus fanatical nationalists are mistaken in presuming that a feature such as ethnic origin is an essential feature of nationhood. All that follows from a concept being inherently evaluative is that the values proper to the object are primary characteristics, not necessary conditions, of belonging to the relevant class. Therefore, 'art' may be an evaluative non-functional concept.

The same conclusion follows from the apparent requirement that artworks are artefacts, whether purposively made or not. I may purposefully make a drawing, which may be evaluated according to whether it represents something. But this does not entail that drawing has a function, namely to represent. After all, a doodle or abstract drawing may represent nothing and still be a good drawing; the colours may be nice, the lines expressive and so on. Rowe's argument gives no good reason to step from the weaker claim that art is inherently evaluative to the stronger claim that art is a functional concept. To evaluate an object's status according to certain criteria does not entail that the criteria must be identified with a particular function.

Secondly, it is not even clear that we only value one thing in artworks anyway. As Graham Oppy points out, even artefacts defined by a single function may be valued according to various criteria: in the case of tin-openers, features which are central may include safety and durability as well as

sharpness.²¹ Of course, we value aesthetic qualities in artworks, but we also seem to value the cognitive content, expressiveness and artistic skill of artworks. Rowe's argument does not establish that any one of these, aesthetic or not, is even a necessary master-quality for artworks. The aesthetic qualities of Barnett Newman's work seems to have little in common with the cognitive qualities of William Hogarth's work, yet we consider both to be art. That the question of value is fundamental to an artwork's status does not entail an artwork's qualities must be bound to the same value. Artworks may be valued appropriately for numerous reasons. After all, different styles and ages may encourage different kinds of artworks, emphasising distinct qualities, some of which may be mutually incompatible. Furthermore, the same aesthetic qualities which in one age are sufficient for an artefact to be considered art may be insufficient in another age. If it is the experience with the artwork which counts, rather than the artwork's intrinsic qualities, then we may value many qualities in art. That art is an inherently evaluative concept does not warrant the claim that artworks have an aesthetic essence

Lastly, although on the right lines, Rowe's functionalist conception fails to avoid all the old problems which motivated the institutional theory's debunking of value-laden theories in the first place. For Rowe, the object concerned must have attained a certain minimal standard to be classed as an artwork or a knife in the first place. If the artefact produced fails to attain the relevant standard then it just cannot be an artwork or a knife: at best it may be a failed work of art or knife. Yet the way his account is articulated, Rowe cannot circumnavigate the challenge that not only is there mere art and good art, but there is bad art: art which is disvaluable as such. The rise of the institutional theory was, in part, due to the incapacity of value-laden theories to account for bad art. Any adequate theory must explain why we seem to have both a classificatory sense and evaluative sense to the term 'art'. That there is bad art cannot be doubted. Critics may rubbish artworks as banal, artistically crass or disgusting without thereby thinking they have called into question their status. For example, Robert Hughes is in no doubt as to the artistic badness of Julian Schnabel, who "has never learned to draw: his growth was smothered by his impregnable self-esteem, through whose rhetoric one glimpses a mangled form of popular modernist cliché...The only paintings that carry any kind of conviction are those in which Schnabel makes no attempt to draw a figure or a motif, but contents himself with a murky, nostalgic sort of Abstract Expressionist splashing."²² Hughes does not challenge the status of Schnabel's work as art, but obviously regards most of it as appallingly bad art.

This would suggest that bad art and bad knives are not just artefacts which fail to perform their function well, they may hardly perform the relevant function at all. Thus an extremely blunt knife which cannot cut anything is still a knife. Rowe's conception holds that all those works which do

²¹ Graham Oppy, "On Functional Definitions of Art: A Response to Rowe", *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 1993, p. 68.

²² Robert Hughes, *Nothing If Not Critical* (London: Collins Harvill, 1990), pp. 306-307.

not partially realise art's putative function cannot really be artworks. Yet works such as Picasso's collage *Verre, Bouteille de Vin, Journal sur une table*, which lack aesthetic essence, knives which are blunt, and tin-openers which cannot open tins, are not just nominally members of their class. The tin-opener that cannot open a tin, though a very bad one, may be a tin-opener nonetheless. It may be the form in which the object is produced which determines its status, as distinct from how well it performs the function for which it was produced in such a form. After all, a blunt knife may not be a bad knife at all, it may just need sharpening: its status does not vary from actual to nominal knife as it becomes sharp and blunt by turns.

Artworks, such as Picasso's *Verre, Bouteille de Vin, Journal sur une table*, which fail to fulfil art's putative function, may not only undoubtedly be art, they may even be good art. In locating art's function in an aesthetic essence Rowe leaves out objects which are obviously, and not just parasitically, art, some of which are even good art. The inadequacy of such an account cannot be hidden by weakening the criteria to include problematic cases, ranging from Picasso's *Verre, Bouteille de Vin, Journal sur une table* to Duchamp's *Fountain*. Of course, the functionalist account would then include all artworks in the relevant class. However, it would also include many objects which should not be there at all: if an inverted urinal, scrap of urinal or blank white canvas all have the requisite aesthetic qualities to be art, then so too do airfix kits, meccano sets and Tonka toy trucks. Moreover, the account would still fail to allow that Picasso's *Verre, Bouteille de Vin, Journal sur une table* could be anything other than poor art.

A functionalist definition of art hoping to prove adequate should hold that bad artworks, though failing to fulfil their function, are nevertheless, indisputably artworks. Whether something is classified as an artwork would then depend upon whether it should fulfil art's function. Whether the object actually does so, and how well, determines whether the object is a good or bad artwork. Broken tin-openers and ugly artworks are properly classified as art and tin-openers respectively, they may just be worthless ones. As Oppy suggests, an entity can have something as its proper function even when it cannot carry it out: a heart is still a heart when it stops beating.²³ Identifying the proper function of objects does include a judgement about what the object is good for. However, this does not entail an object must partly fulfil that value to be considered a member of the relevant kind. Rather, anything with the proper function, realised or not, is a member of the relevant kind. If functionalism is to remain a plausible candidate for explaining the concept 'art', it is forced to allow for, rather than preclude, two senses to the term 'art'.

E. J. Bond has argued for a more sophisticated version of functionalism, urging us not to look at individual artworks but rather, art forms, at the highest level of generality, as paradigms of art.

²³ Graham Oppy, "On Functional Definitions of Art: A Response to Rowe", *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 1993, p. 70.

Basically, "a thing cannot be acknowledged as an art form unless the purpose or function of art can be served within the form, that is unless good or successful works can be produced within it."²⁴ This allows that artworks can fail to fulfil art's function and yet remain artworks by virtue of the form within which they are made:

"A work of art, on this account, becomes simply anything belonging to (any instantiation of) an art form, e.g., any piece of music, good or bad, and on such an account bad music can only be bad art."²⁵

Thus Bond endorses a two sense functionalist view of art: bad and worthless art is not excluded as non-art. The advantage to Bond's conception is that it not only retains the evaluative purpose of art, it also differentiates bad art from non-art. However, problems soon become apparent when he suggests that "the notion of something being *just* a work of art, but not belonging to any art form (any art) is an absurd one."²⁶ The obvious problem of logical impossibility looms large on the horizon; after all, not every artwork can have belonged to some pre-existent art form. Bond attempts to avoid this problem by stipulating that a work which isn't in an already existing art form itself introduces a new art form: to be an artwork just is to be in an art form. However, this move means Bond's theory either stretches the term 'art form' to the point of meaninglessness or it is straightforwardly false. If an art form may be any form in which any artwork is made, then anything which bears any kind of resemblance to the form of previous or future artworks is art. Since anything can be made to resemble anything else in some way, the notion is evacuated of meaning. The upshot is that everything may be art, only a tiny proportion of which can be any good. Yet part of the very point of the concept 'art' is to distinguish non-art objects, such as electric shavers or Peter and Jane books, from artworks, such as *Paradise Lost*. In trying to avoid the threat of logical impossibility Bond forgets that an art form requires significant artistic resemblance: an artefact in that art form must typically fulfil art's function.

Bond could respond by pointing to his seven core criteria required for something to be an art form. Essentially an art form is held to comprehend artefacts which are intended to, and usually do, have value as objects of an audience's experience, exhibiting skill, imagination and meaning, upon which critical discrimination can be exercised.²⁷ But then not every artwork can possibly be produced within an art form. Consider how something becomes an art form in the first place. For something to be

²⁴ E. J. Bond, "The Essential Nature of Art", *The American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1975, p. 182.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 180.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 182.

²⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 180-181.

an art form requires it to be a recognisable artistic pattern or medium. Thus the first artwork produced in a particular form is insufficient to establish it as an art form. Whether it becomes established as an art form depends upon whether other artworks can then be successfully produced, utilising elements recognisably drawn from or similar to the form suggested by the first artwork. The result can not be a foregone conclusion. The art work might have been an atypical result, produced only by the brilliant adeptness of a particular artist. In such a case, artworks can obviously be produced in the form concerned, but only rarely. If the artistic result was atypical of the form used then it will not be established as an art form. Hence artworks may be produced outside art forms.

The case of chairs constitutes a good example to focus upon. There are a few chairs which are artworks; ranging from chairs made in an *art nouveau* style to those made by Charles Rennie Mackintosh. However, this has proved insufficient to make chairs an art form. Virtually all chairs produced cannot even begin to strive for artwork status, nor are many made for that purpose. In fact, it is not the form of the chair which is responsible for these particular works being art, rather it is the *art nouveau* style or general *oeuvre* of Rennie Mackintosh that are primarily responsible. Similarly, only a few television adverts gain recognition as art, for example Tony Kaye's 80-second commercial for Dunlop tyres. Although we recognise that a few artworks have been produced in this form, we do not consider every advert, whether for washing powder or furniture stores, to be art. Yet another fitting example concerns established artists such as Hamish Fulton and Richard Long, who exhibit, as artworks, maps with the routes they have walked traced upon them. Although these works are established artworks, we do not consider every walk, every map with a route traced upon it, to be art. The general point all these cases bear out is that there are forms of artefacts, for example chairs, adverts, route traced maps, which typically do not have value as art. Therefore these forms cannot be art forms, though a few of their members may count as art for other reasons.

Bond's theory also fails to account for the fact that we do not consider everything produced within recognisable art forms to be artworks. An art form is one in which artefacts typically fulfil art's value. But it does not follow from this that all artefacts produced in an art form are art, though worthless or poor. As we have seen, Bond cannot claim an artwork is by definition in an art form. So why should we consider all artefacts produced within art forms to be artworks? If an art form is one which typically fulfils art's value, then why shouldn't the same be true of artworks? Our recognition of works as art is based upon seeing in what ways they are or may be seen as valuable. Artefacts which are made in a recognisable art form but cannot be seen as fulfilling art's value are not artworks. Consider one of the earliest and most established art forms; music. Although music is a recognised art form, we do not recognise everything which is music as an artwork: most radio jingles, computer game tunes or elevator music are not even remotely considered art. The newer artistic mediums of photography and film have become recognised as art forms, yet it would be ludicrous to suppose that every family holiday snap or home video were artworks.

A different kind of example might be that of the improvised comedy performed on *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* Recognised art forms from poetry and plays to musicals are mercilessly parodied at the suggestion of the audience. This often involves the juxtaposition of a particular art form with an incongruous style, for example a Julie Andrews musical in the style of Harold Pinter. It is essential, otherwise it would not be funny as a parody, that what is performed is recognisably within the relevant art form. However, though extremely funny, we do not consider the comics' performances to be art by virtue of their imitation of established art forms. After all, they are comically subverting the artistic value of the form being parodied. Parody itself may, of course, be an art form. But then, again, we do not recognise every parody as art. Making an artefact within an established art form cannot guarantee artwork status.

Bond's stipulation that all artworks are in art forms and that all works in art forms are art is false. Furthermore, since there cannot be pre-existent art forms, prior to the first artworks, his theory is crushed by the problem of logical impossibility. It is tempting to think that had Bond more fully appreciated the historical nature of art and its forms he could have produced a more plausible functionalist account, one which seeks to turn art's historical aspect to its advantage. This kind of functionalism will hold that once art has evolved as a distinct practice, with developing and established art forms, there can be bad and worthless art. Artefacts made within established artistic media, forms and genres may thus automatically be art by virtue of their being within stable, recognised and developing art forms.

A more historically aware functionalism can thus claim plausibility, on the grounds that it can account for bad and worthless art whilst, nevertheless, capturing the value driven nature of art. It would recognise what Oppy requires from a functionalist account, namely that "functional kinds have a two-stage definition. First, the proper function of objects of the kind is identified. And then the kind is defined to be anything which has that proper function...the definition of functionalist kinds does incorporate a judgement about what those kinds are good for - and yet it is not true that anything which belongs to the kind must exhibit the value in question."²⁸ This version of sophisticated functionalism still allows for a purely classificatory primary use, albeit a limited one, whilst grounding the concept of art on the recognition of art's value. If we take the relevant kind to be identified at the higher level of art forms then something may be an artwork whilst failing to deliver artistic value. Of course, artworks produced outside established art forms must be of a high artistic value. However, artworks produced within established art forms need not be of any artistic value in order to be art. The function of art is the delivery of artistic values. The second stage of the definition allows that works produced in art forms are automatically art, whether they have fulfilled their proper function or not.

²⁸ Graham Oppy, "On Functional Definitions of Art: A Response to Rowe", *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 1993 p. 70.

The historically aware functionalist may also refuse to define art in overly restrictive terms. A recognition of the historical aspect of art explains why art has been conceived and evolved in different ways. Thus the functionalist, as Robert Stecker has proposed, should wisely leave the list of putative functions open-ended. Essentially, to be an artwork an artefact must fulfil the functions of art in use when it was created or when the issue of classification is foregrounded. Artefacts within central art forms are art if they attain either intentional or success standards. Artefacts outwith central art forms can only be art if they attain the relevant standard of success.²⁹ Hence if an artefact is made within an established art form and fulfils an artist's intention it may be an artwork whilst failing to fulfil the relevant function.

The conception of historical functionalism being argued for may become clearer by analogy. The goal of weapons is to kill, that of art to produce what is of value as art. Artefacts may take established forms in order to fulfil their functions and, typically, artefacts produced in these forms achieve their respective goals reasonably well, sometimes brilliantly. Established forms of weaponry include knives, guns and bombs. Established art forms include paintings, the novel and film. There are also artefacts which, although not made in established forms, may still achieve the relevant goal well. Thus they become classed as weapons or art respectively, despite their lack of conventional form. For example, a macabre Roald Dahl short story describes how a woman murders her adulterous husband. Then, by following through her contrived alibi, she successfully invites the policemen to eat the murder weapon; a previously frozen and now cooked joint of lamb. A frozen joint of lamb is not a weapon unless it not only can be but is used as one to great effect. By contrast, a not very effective gun, whether it is ever used or not, is always a weapon. The same is true with art, a chair is not an artwork unless it not only can be but actually is of great artistic value.

By recognising the historical nature of art, the sophisticated functionalist can allow for the evolution of art in the first place, and, consequently, new art forms. The traditional objection against functionalism, which the institutional theory played upon, was that it could not account for how anthropological artefacts became art at the turn of the century. If the sophisticated functionalist holds that the function of a thing is not wholly given by its original or intended use, then he can apparently resolve the problem. It is not that anthropological artefacts fulfilled the function of art, and thus were art, even before the cultural practice existed. Rather, they could only become art when the practice evolved. Therefore, certain aspects, which were by-products of their original function, can now be seen to fulfil art's historically evolved function. Anthropological artefacts didn't have the function of art then, but they have it now because of how we use them. Picasso brought anthropological artefacts into the arena of art, by, through his work, either adding a new function to the open ended set or fulfilling an already established function through different representational means. Thus, when Picasso drew

²⁹ Robert Stecker, "The Boundaries of Art", *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 30, No. 3. 1990, p. 271.

upon such artefacts in his work, he brought those which could fulfil a similar function into the category of art.

One might be tempted to suggest functionalism must be inadequate because we do not just value artworks instrumentally. Whether the set of functions is left perpetually open or not, functionalism fails to recognise that we also value various properties and features of artworks, independently of whether a particular function is fulfilled or not. In particular, we value the means which achieve the given ends in a particular way, for their own sake. An art form is grounded upon formal, structural or conventional similarity in the realisation of certain values. Works produced within art forms typically realise the purpose of art in a way which is already valued, irrespective of what the particular artist has brought to it himself. However, put like this, the point does not threaten the functionalist. Indeed, functionalism can embrace the recognition that we value the means by which the end is achieved on the grounds of appropriateness. For example, the wildly different styles of Pugin's neo-gothic revival and Le Corbusier's modernist architecture were justified on the grounds that they were the most apt forms of expression for their respective ends. An artefact produced within established art forms will utilise conventions which fittingly achieve art's function, whether this be the satisfaction of human need or a religious reflection of the world. Thus the functionalist will claim to account for the greater likelihood of artwork status for an artefact produced within, as against one produced outwith, established art forms. After all, 'form follows function' was one of the primary slogans of modernist architectural theory.

Of course, it is a contingent worry with the adequacy of the functionalist response that the general principle allows so many different styles, when typically it is used to claim supremacy for one particular style over all others. However, the over-determinate claims made for an art form's universal or historical appropriateness is not the main problem here. Of course, the functionalist can allow that we value properties of artistic worth apart from their subservient relation to a particular intended goal. For example, we may value the texture and colours of a particular oil painting even where they work against the goal the artist is trying to achieve. We value more than the fulfilment of a particular end in art. Thus, in gothic architecture, we may appropriately value the adorned chevrons, columns and fanning leaf like struts, though they are superfluous to the practical end. Whether a work realises art's value, of affording a rich experience, is not necessarily equivalent to whether the intended goal with which the artefact is made was realised or not.

Nevertheless, it is a mistake to presume that giving a historical twist to functionalism renders it adequate. Firstly, the functionalist explanation as to how anthropological artefacts became art earlier this century is flawed. If functionalism were sound then it should follow from Picasso's bringing anthropological artefacts into the sphere of art, that all such artefacts now have the goal of fulfilling this function and are thus art. Yet, plainly, we only recognise a few anthropological artefacts as art. The functionalist account fails to explain why only a few anthropological artefacts are considered art

rather than all of them. Moreover, allowing any function the possibility of being plugged in to art's open set threatens to render the account either uninformative or non-functional. It is uninformative because, unless some further more general function is specified, there is no way of determining which functions may be plugged in to the set and why. Since it lacks criteria for deciding whether a particular function may be plugged into the open-ended set, the account is vacuous. If criteria are given, then we merely return to functionalism's unresolvable problems. For example, one may hold that one of art's functions is to be expressive, yet obviously not every expressive artefact is art. Thus, being an expressive artefact cannot be a sufficient condition for artwork status. The same will hold true for every putative function of art that one can think of. Therefore, though goal-directed, art cannot be a functional concept.

Secondly, functionalism is still committed to holding that a work intentionally created within an established art form cannot fail to be art. However, the production of an artefact within an established art form is insufficient for it to be art: not just any artefact made in an established art form is art. Similarly, not just every artefact made in the form of a weapon is one. This is why we do not consider *every* painting, novel, poem or film to be art. As Ruskin distinguished between architecture as an art and building, one must distinguish between painting as an art and painted pictures.³⁰ A framed painting in oils is not automatically art, nor is a novel automatically art because it consists of a narrated fictional story. The short stories in *People's Friend* or *Jackie* certainly fulfil a purpose, but we do not consider them to be art. Barbara Cartland romance novels, Chuck Norris war movies or most amateur water colours are not art. In both the case of the gun that cannot fire and the poem that merely rhymes, the artefact wholly fails to fulfil the value that grounds the established forms of, respectively, guns and poetry. Such artefacts are members of their forms only parasitically, for example through their formal or structural resemblance, and are not weapons and art respectively. Indeed, were most or all of the members of their form to fail so radically, then the form would become disestablished: it would no longer be considered one which typically produces weapons or art respectively. There are overall criteria of value as art which artefacts in established art forms must typically fulfil in order to be art. Artefacts outwith established art forms must be of a certain higher artistic value to qualify as artworks at all.

Furthermore, the sophisticated functionalist cannot adequately explain why artworks produced within established art forms may be of less value than that required for the artwork status of artefacts produced outside established art forms. The features of a particular art form, which typically belong to works made within it, may be of intrinsic value, independently of what a particular artist does with them. Therefore, artworks in art forms usually already possess a certain amount of artistic value just by virtue of being made within an established art form. Conversely, an artwork created outwith established art forms must fulfil art's purpose and possess artistic qualities to a high degree.

³⁰ John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 2nd ed., (London: Blackfriars), Chapter 1, pp. 8-30.

An established art form may have *prima facie* value, whether great or small. Therefore a work produced within an established art form, but which fails to be art, may lack any other artistic value apart from that afforded by the form itself. Alternatively, a work may possess enough artistic disvalue to offset the *prima facie* value of the art form. An artefact produced in recognised art forms must still attain a certain artistic value, which is why something can be just a story and not art. Barbara Cartland's romances, *Neighbours* or *Three Men and a Baby*, although well made within established art forms, are not art. Conversely, *Twin Peaks*, *Eastenders*, or John Le Carre's novels may qualify for arthood status, though an artefact of their equivalent value produced outwith established art forms may not. Most contemporary art in any but an exceptional age will be unexceptional and of limited artistic value.

Section 3: The Intentional Modification

The failure of any form of a functionalist account might drive some toward a heavily revised version of the institutional theory. In an attempt to retain the purely classificatory notion of art, distinct from any evaluative aspect, Dickie has foregrounded the condition of artefactuality and revised his original theory.³¹ Previously Dickie's artefactual condition was quite trivial, the act of status conferral was itself considered sufficient to render an object an artefact. Now however, on his revised conception, the underlying generative mechanism is no longer the artworld, rather it is the artist: an artwork is an artefact intentionally made by an artist who intends it to be presented for appreciation as an artwork. Thus, for Dickie, it is the intention which determines whether an artefact is art, independently of whether it is of value or not.

However, this move is problematic for the very reason which underlay the institutional theory's plausibility in the first place. We now appreciate some anthropological, medieval and religious artefacts as art, although they couldn't have been created with that intention. At the time of their creation there wasn't a cultural practice of art, the objects were intentionally produced for use as religious or ritualistic symbols. Therefore, art cannot be fixed merely by the authorial intent to produce an artefact for appreciation *qua* artwork. Dickie's revision is viciously circular. If, for an artefact to be art, it must be intended by its creator for appreciation as art, what, then, does the latter consist in? Surely not its being appreciated as something put forward for appreciation by its creator as something to be appreciated!

Dickie might reply that those lacking the practice of art cannot intend to create an artefact for consideration *qua* artwork, yet, nevertheless, there may be a common broad intention. Thus, although

³¹ George Dickie, *The Art Circle* (New York: Haven, 1984), pp. 80-82.

certain artefacts were narrowly intended as objects for ritualistic appreciation and use, the broad intention is to create objects for a form of appreciation which is central to art, for example imaginative or aesthetic. On the basis of desires and beliefs the maker deliberates, forms a determinate intention and then acts upon it to fulfil his goal. If the action is carried out successfully the intention determines the nature of the action and thus what is produced. Therefore, Dickie may suggest, an object is art if and only if it is the result of actions which carry out the author's intention to produce an object for aesthetic, artistic or imaginative appreciation, independently of whether the object is found to be of value or not. Although it may be differently manifested through distinct cultural practices, the fundamental broad intention may be conceived to be the same.

Yet this makes artworks totally independent of our responses in engaging with them as art. As we have already seen, recognising something as art is grounded upon our reasons for doing so. These reasons are typically based upon the recognition of features and experiences afforded by the artefact in question as having particular kinds of value. Dickie's revised theory still abrogates the requirement to conform to or explain away art's value-laden grounding. Furthermore, broad intention can only fix the nature of the artefact as an object for appreciation if the intent is so diluted as to pick out a category far larger than that denoted by the term 'art'. Art is more than the production of artefacts with the broad intent to be offered up for any kind of appreciation. The notion of appreciation here has become virtually meaningless, including too many cases we would not consider art. For example, Jackie Collins intends to and does write books which her readers appreciate, yet they do not thus automatically qualify for status as artworks. To create something with the broad intention of engaging others no more makes it art than anything else.

Conversely, if the notion of intent is narrowed down, Dickie's revised account cannot pick out all artworks as such. This is particularly ironic since the case which now proves so troublesome was one which his original theory derived much plausibility from; namely, anthropological artefacts. Only in this century have we come to regard certain anthropological artefacts as artworks, but they were not art from the moment of their creation. It is not that no one recognised their nature. Indeed, their nature as objects for appreciation and engagement has virtually always been appreciated, most especially so when they were being used within the practices for which they were made. Presumably most of them were created with the narrow intention that they be used for ritualistic worship. Furthermore, even if some of them were not created with a particular intent in mind, they still could not be created as art: one cannot intend to create an object as art where the appropriate concept and practice has not arisen. Without a contemporary cultural practice and understanding of art, someone can not even intend an artefact to be an artwork. Thus Dickie's revised theory fails to account for such artworks.

Furthermore, if Dickie holds it is the narrow intention to produce art which counts, there could be no possibility of failure. Yet, despite one's best intentionally guided efforts to produce art, one can fail: not everything produced with the intention of making art qualifies for that status. It is not just

that the resultant art may be bad, it may fail to be art at all. That I can try, and thus fail, to produce art entails it cannot merely be the intention to make art that counts. I may intend to produce a ripped suit, which I intend to be appreciated as art. However, I may fulfil the former and not the latter part of my intent because the artefact itself is so unstructured. Its features and the experiences it affords are of no value as art, indeed we can't even look at it as if it were art. Finally, as certain unintended features of a work may add to its value, so, by analogy, an artefact which was not intended as an artwork may later be recognised as one, as the cultural practice of art develops. Indeed such cases are not as rare as might be assumed; for example, many films we now consider art were neither intended as, nor taken to be, art at the time of their production. Although early this century we had an entrenched cultural practice of art, film was initially taken as unrelated to, or parasitic upon, other art forms. By contrast, we now take it for granted that film is an established art form.

Similarly, the unintended artwork in already acknowledged forms of art is not so rare; for example, certain news photographs from the Magnum news agency, although clearly not intended as such, are appropriately recognised as artworks. It is because of the artefact's value that we recognise and engage with an artefact as art. The artist intending to create art is engaged in a particular task, medium, tradition and so on because he thinks it is of value. That the actual value of the work produced may diverge from the artist's assessment is obvious. An artist may think his crushed garbage cans are of value as art, though they may well not be. What is central to the artist is that what he has produced actually is of value, and not merely that he happens to think so. What counts is not the narrow intention with which the action was performed but whether the object produced is of artistic value.

An attempt to shore up Dickie's revised account might fall back upon Jerrold Levinson's attempts to define art.³² Essentially, Levinson's account plugs in the notion of an art-regard to Dickie's intentional requirement:

"An artwork is a thing (item, object, entity) 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."³³

Whether something is an artwork is held to depend upon whether the artist intended his work to be art or not. What this amounts to is cashed out by an historical account of the way artworks may be

³² Jerrold Levinson, "Defining Art Historically", *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1979, pp. 232-250, "Refining Art Historically", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 47, No. 1, 1989, pp. 21-33, and "A Refiner's Reply: Reply to Sartwell and Kolak", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 48, No. 3, 1990, pp. 231-235.

³³ Jerrold Levinson, "Refining Art Historically", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 47, No. 1, 1989, p. 21. I take Levinson's position to be the modified one articulated in this his later paper, where the problematic notion of a proprietary intent has dropped out.

correctly regarded. Levinson explicates the three forms he thinks an intention for art-regard may take.³⁴ A specific art-conscious intent is one where the work is intended to be regarded in a particular way in which previous art-works have been regarded. A non-specific art-conscious intent is one where the work is intended to be regarded in a way any previous artworks have been regarded. Lastly, an art-unconscious intent is where a work is intended for a regard characteristic of an object which possesses certain intrinsic features: where this is in fact a way in which some previous artworks have been regarded. In this way Levinson can allow for naive art making. In general, the art-regard that is possible obviously depends upon how past art was correctly regarded. Levinson's definition thus requires a story about how such an art-regard may come about in the first place. The objects of certain activities came to be treated in a certain manner, these being the objects which are retrospectively identified as ur-art. Increasingly, new activities arise whose objects are similarly intended to be treated as the objects of ur-art. These activities then become associated within the larger category of art. Now, other new objects of activities can then become art through an intentional connection with the established artworks.

Stephen Davies has falsely criticised Levinson's account on the grounds that the recursion in his definition to ur-arts is a matter of mere stipulation.³⁵ Yet, as Levinson points out, "one could substitute for the place-holder 'ur-arts'...a specification in *intrinsic* terms of the activities that archaeological investigation had revealed to be *in fact* the roots of Western Art. This would in effect 'complete' the recursive definition of art."³⁶ In attempting to rebut the criticism that his notion of an art-regard is too broad, Levinson specifies that it must be totally and substantively the same. Thus although we may attend to something as we might attend to an Impressionist work, it cannot be an art-regard unless, for instance, we also pay attention to the painterly detail in the same way. Thus a traffic light cannot be art-regarded, at least not as paintings are.³⁷ Furthermore, Levinson also allows the recognition that the reasons we consider something to be art may be fundamentally linked to considerations of value. Thus he concedes that the notion of an art-regard becomes "any way pre-existing artworks are or were correctly regarded, so that an experience of some value be thereby obtained."³⁸

³⁴ Jerrold Levinson, "Defining Art Historically", *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1979, pp. 237-238.

³⁵ Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), Chapter 7, p. 170.

³⁶ Jerrold Levinson, "Defining Art Historically", *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1979, p. 244.

³⁷ Jerrold Levinson, "Refining Art Historically", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 47, No. 1, 1989, p. 24. This is a point Stephen Davies misses when he emphasises how the Grand Canyon may be brought under the notion of an art-regard in his *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), Chapter 7, pp. 174-179.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 29.

Nevertheless, Levinson's theory, whether on its own or as support for the institutional theory, is inherently problematic.³⁹ The notion of an art-regard which does all the work, although tightened up, remains suspect. Remember, an artwork must be seriously intended to be properly regarded in a way which is totally and substantively the same regard in which other artworks are properly regarded. But is this requirement not now too narrow? Presumably, that the art-regard must be totally the same cannot be equivalent to a demand that it be exactly the same. After all, we do not regard two works by the same artist in the same period in exactly the same way, never mind works by two different artists in similar or radically different movements. An art-regard being substantively the same must allow for irrelevant differences across cases. But what then enables us to pick out whether the difference in our art-regard is irrelevant? Levinson's account is thus forced to rely upon criteria of relevancy for which he does not provide, apart from the uninformative and circular explanation that other art-works must have, in some sense, been substantively regarded in the same way.

Levinson might then be tempted to cash out the notion of an art-regard in terms of appreciating the intrinsic properties or features of an artwork. But this would defeat the point of his preferred definition: it would elevate what he has identified as the secondary, marginal sense of art into the primary sense. The story about how artworks got going in the first place and how works like Kafka's are to be identified, in terms of their intrinsic properties, would then prove typical rather than exceptional. The rationale for his proceduralism would then be lost. Alternatively, Levinson might be tempted to support the notion of an art-regard in terms of how it is intended the object be regarded. This too offers no solution. Firstly, the possibility of naive artmaking would be falsely precluded. Secondly, the position would effectively be only an alternative formulation of Dickie's revised theory, rather than one which offers bolstering support for it. After all, Levinson's account was supposed to be an improvement upon Dickie's theory. Lastly, Levinson might think the notion of an art-regard might be cashed out in terms of interpretation, giving a Dantoesque twist to his definition. An artwork would then have to be interpretable in ways in which previous artworks have been. Artworks would thus be construed as objects of meaning. Obviously there is a tension here, because the role of intention threatens to drop out altogether. But Levinson could argue that it is intention which fixes what constitutes a correct appreciation of an artwork. Yet, once again, this would return us to the familiar problems which plagued Dickie's revised definition.

Attempting to avoid these problems by stipulating that an artwork's interpretation must be linked to the interpretations of previous artworks would be inadequate. After all, artefacts which include Liberty's wallpaper, Boots porcelain vases and Impressionistic style painting by numbers kits

³⁹ See Graham Oppy, "On Defining Art Historically", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 1992, pp. 153-161, for some fairly devastating criticisms of Levinson's theory and Jerrold Levinson, "Art Historically Defined: Reply to Oppy", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 1993, pp. 380-385, for an unconvincing salvage operation.

can all be linked to interpretations of previous artworks: we would not consider any of them to be artworks. Thus not just anything that can be interpreted as an artwork in fact is one. Yet on Levinson's account we have no good grounds upon which to distinguish those objects which are correctly appreciated with an art-regard and those that are not. Those that do suggest themselves within his theory fail to improve upon Dickie's theory or only serve to undercut the point of his socio-historical account, for example by characterising an art-regard as one required to appreciate properties or features proper to an artwork. Levinson's reformulated definition allows that the notion of an art-regard may be linked to the valuable experiences artworks may properly afford. What Levinson fails to do is pursue the recognition that something's being art is linked to the particular kinds and value of experiences which artworks may afford. Perhaps this is because it might undercut the point of Levinson's socio-historical definition: by seeking to capture the notion of art in terms of certain central features and values. We should then, look to an account which places primacy upon the value of art works, rather than reducing them to their production within a socio-institutional context, whilst properly incorporating an appreciation of art's historical nature.

Section 4: Art as a Cultural Practice and Cluster Concept.

Richard Wollheim was the first philosopher within contemporary aesthetics to emphasise art's historical character. Wollheim, explicitly paralleling Wittgenstein's description of language, argued that art should be conceived as a distinct form of life. Wittgenstein disputed the assumption that meaning in language arises from independently identifiable relations to the world. Meaning cannot be reduced to a strictly denotative relation, the naming of the independently conceived world. Nor can meaning be reduced to our characteristic experiences of the world, understood apart from language. For Wittgenstein, our experiences are only identifiable and meaningful from within our language. To make sense of a language requires a grasp of the habits, customs and experiences with which it is bound. Conversely, these things cannot be properly identified apart from that very language.⁴⁰ Language mediates our perceptions of the world and in so doing partly shapes how we see it. Regarding art as a form of life is based upon the recognition of art as a vehicle of mediation. This, Wollheim suggests, means art must evolve with a life of its own before it can be subjected to other demands. Its own autonomous procedures must evolve before it can convey particular meanings. Questions concerning the nature and value of art only make sense as the context and development of art becomes considerably rich and distinct. The 'life of forms in art' is a precondition of art's value:

⁴⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), Sections 19, 23, 241. pp. 8-9, 11-12 and 88.

“In creating his forms the artist is operating inside a continuing activity or enterprise, and this enterprise has its own repertoire, imposes its own stringencies, offers its own opportunities, and thereby provides occasions, inconceivable outside it, for invention and audacity.”⁴¹

The possibility of artworks and their possessing meaning requires artistic practices. One consequence of this is that the artistic impulse cannot be identified independently of the institutions of art. Recognising artworks requires the prior recognition of artistic practices. The emerging, evolving practice mediates and thus shapes the motive; it is the practice which makes it artistic, as opposed to, say, religious. A distinct cultural practice such as art can only emerge and evolve as such where it is valued for particular reasons. One may give a simplified story about the emergence of art in Western civilisation from under religion’s shadow, but the driving engine of the practice’s evolution must concern art’s value. Art developed out of a recognition of what was being done, apart from its instrumental conception within the framework of religion: valued for its own sake or its entertainment rather than as an aid to devotion. Without this recognition there would have been no rationale for art to get going in the first place.⁴² Thus the context of the practice is required to make sense of the non-arbitrary nature of something being a medium or work of art. The historical precedents set the frame and partly determine the kind of order and artistic goals the artist aims for. An artist presupposes or reacts against what has gone before within the artistic practice. To see why something is art, or whether an artwork constitutes a significant development of the practice, requires an understanding of the work’s inter-relations to other artworks.

Noël Carroll has recently developed this line of thought, arguing for art as a cultural practice within a form of life.⁴³ Although Carroll himself gives no reason for adopting the term ‘cultural practice’, rather than ‘form of life’, his terminology is more appropriate. A form of life is constituted by our communal activities and ways of living in society. It is within this framework that the activities of art take up an important but partial place. As language-games are part of a form of life so too is art.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects* (Cambridge: Canto, Cambridge University Press, 1980), Section 53, pp. 124-125.

⁴² See John Sommerville, *The Secularization of Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), for a history of art’s secularisation in England where, for example, “a secular concert life developed earlier and more actively in London than in any other European city.” Chapter 7, p. 91.

⁴³ Noël Carroll, “Art, Practice and Narrative”, *The Monist*, Vol. 71, No. 2, 1988, pp. 140-156.

⁴⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), Section 23, pp. 11-12.

Whether something is an artwork depends upon whether it can be properly placed within the evolving traditions internal to art. Art conceived as a cultural practice is not just made up of customs or habit but;

“a complex body of interrelated human activities governed by reasons internal to those forms of activity and their co-ordination. Practices are aimed at achieving goods that are appropriate to the forms of activity that compromise them, and these reasons and goods, in part, situate the practice in the life of the culture. Such practices supply the frameworks in which human powers are developed and expanded.”⁴⁵

Integral parts of the cultural practice, such as custom, tradition and precedence, provide resources for its continual development. As art evolves and transforms itself in this manner so artworks are to be identified in terms of narrational strategies of reasoning; for example, those of repetition, amplification and repudiation. Through recognising the repetitions of forms or styles of previous art we may link a work to past art. For example, we may recognise Glynn Maxwell’s verse drama or Michael Nyman’s recycling of *leitmotifs* from Purcell as artworks in this way. Amplification involves developing the means for achieving the ends of art forms or genres; an instance of this could be Joseph Conrad’s development of adventure stories to allow for a self-conscious uncertainty in the actions of the heroic. Repudiation is a matter of opposing pre-existent styles or art forms. That a work stands in stark contrast to a particular style, whilst invoking the precedence of more temporally distant exemplars, establishes it as a participant in the practice. For example, Ezra Pound’s rejection of Victorian poetry from Browning to Tennyson invoked Dante and the poetry of the Italian Renaissance. Picasso’s use of primitive styles in his art was part of his repudiation of contemporary academic concerns and styles, whilst simultaneously invoking the art of past masters. In so doing Picasso helped to bring into the class art objects which previously had no place in the cultural practice. Carroll’s basic argument is that art can only be rendered coherent by the narrational construal of its development, explaining why and on what basis the practice evolved. The story of art constrains and enables its nature and value:

“the modes of identifying new objects as art make essential reference, though in different ways, to the history of the practice. New objects are identified as artworks through histories of art, rather than theories of art.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Noël Carroll, “Art, Practice and Narrative”. *The Monist*, Vol. 71, No. 2, 1988, p. 143.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 149.

To claim art is a cultural practice does not require necessary or sufficient conditions for something's being art: the narrational strategies need not converge on a single theory of art. Art is understood as a distinctive activity within our form of life, in relation to which it is appropriate to do and categorise various sorts of things. Without some sort of understanding of twentieth century art one couldn't even begin to make sense of the fact that Duchamp's *Fountain* has a place in our cultural practice of art. Identifying something as art is a matter of coming to appreciate it as such, even where it may be a poor instance. Art develops from what come to be seen as successfully produced paradigms of artistic value. Thus something made primarily as a religious artefact might retrospectively become art, it may even be considered a prime exemplar of good art.

Primary artworks anchor the practice, guiding subsequent art and helping to explain the transformations of art's practices over the ages. Similarly, various traditions and art forms emerge and modify themselves. Of course, where the works produced in distinctive art forms consistently lacks artistic value, the forms may mutate or die. Alternatively, the artistic value of an art form may be outweighed by other concerns, for example changing socio-economic factors promoted the death of landscape gardening. Emerging art forms usually establish themselves through the recognisable use of aspects of already established art forms. They are confirmed and become dominant through the consistent production of good artworks within them. Realist film, for example, established itself as an art form in this manner: using narrative techniques analogous to those developed within the novel. The films of D. W. Griffith are prime exemplars of works which helped to establish a new art form and confirm its status: their narrative structure owed much to Dickens and they were consistently highly valued.⁴⁷ Paradigmatic artworks and art forms are seen to have certain sorts of worthwhile artistic values, which promotes the making of and engaging with other artworks.

Robert Stecker is wrong to argue that the conception of art as a cultural practice cannot account for artworks produced within non-art practices.⁴⁸ Indeed, the conception explains the emergence of the practice through artworks which cannot have been produced within established artistic practices. How could the practice have got going otherwise? The evolution of art as a distinct practice is grounded upon its development of religious practices for different ends, only retrospectively can we recognise certain of these religious practices and works as artistic. The first artworks were not produced within the practice of art. Similarly, distinct art forms arise from the consistent production of works with a high value as art. The production of valuable artworks in a particular form establishes it as an art

⁴⁷ Dilys Powell drew attention to the similarities between the human narratives of Dickens and Griffith when reviewing *The Birth of a Nation* in 1945. See Christopher Cook (ed.), *The Dilys Powell Film Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 357-358. David Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London: Methuen, 1985), and John Fell's *Film and the Narrative Tradition* (Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press, 1974) also point up this fact.

⁴⁸ Robert Stecker, "The Boundaries of Art", *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 1990, p. 269.

form. Although not all works produced within the established form are art, typically most of them will be. Conversely, artefacts produced outside established art forms are unlikely to be artworks unless they possess artistic value to a high degree. In order to be art an artefact produced outwith established art forms must have greater artistic value than that required for one produced within an established art form. If artefacts produced in a particular form consistently achieve high artistic value then they will establish an art form. If not, though for various reasons of artistic value they are artworks, the form they are in is not an art form.

An example used earlier bears this out; there are a few chairs which are artworks but a chair is not an established art form. An *art nouveau* chair may be particularly beautiful and expressive, thus it may be considered an artwork. It is the established *art nouveau* style of the chair which acts here as an established art form might, rendering it more likely that it will be considered an artwork. Similarly, the *oeuvre* of an artist such as Charles Rennie Mackintosh may help to bring a chair, which would not otherwise be thus considered, into the class art. Where an artwork is produced within an established art form, style or genre an artwork may be good or bad. However, an artefact produced outwith an established art form, medium, style or *oeuvre* must be of high artistic value for it to be art. It must have the features central to the value of art to a high degree to be considered art at all. Thus such artworks cannot be bad or worthless as art. For example, though we may find an artist's oil paintings increasingly contrived, indiscriminately threatening and lacking humanity, his paintings may nevertheless be artworks. Figurative oil painting as an established art form allows for bad art. However, adverts which have little artistic value are not just bad artworks, they are not even artworks at all. The only adverts which can be artworks, for example Ridley Scott's Chanel advert, are those which have a high artistic value. Works in non-artistic forms, styles and genres must have a high artistic value to be considered artworks at all.

Conceiving of art as a cultural practice explains why artefacts produced outwith established art forms and so on must have the aspects we value in art to a high degree in order to qualify as artworks. If the relevant class of objects to which an artefact belongs is a non-art form, style or genre then it cannot be a bad artwork, but if it belongs within an established art form then it may be a good or bad artwork; a novel but not a chair may be bad art. It is important to realise that once established, an art form must continue to be constituted by valuable artworks if it is to survive. Thus film became established and survives as an art form because good artworks came and continue to be consistently produced in that medium. This explains why it is only when we perceive an art form to be of no or little artistic value that we seek an explanation concerning its survival. The explanation we usually look for in this regard concerns vested institutional interests. Thus Soviet socialist realism may be most appropriately explained in terms of its ideological promotion by Stalin and the simultaneous suppression of abstraction.

Conceiving of art as a cultural practice also serves to explain how various anthropological artefacts came to be recognised as art. Early this century Picasso made various artworks which drew upon the artefacts he had seen in the anthropological museum in Paris. By virtue of these artworks being of great artistic value both artists and the public at large came to look upon a few of these artefacts as art. Increasingly, as various aspects of primitivism and expressivism developed within art, certain anthropological artefacts were recognised as art. Now many, though by no means all, of these anthropological artefacts are considered artworks within particular art forms, hence there are both good and bad artworks of this sort. The ferocity of the dispute in Paris over which museum to put many of these artefacts in is testimony to the artistic status now accorded to artefacts which were, in the last century, most definitely not art.

Graham Oppy has criticised historical definitions of art on the grounds that they cannot account for "the fact that the painting of the fourteenth century was art at that time even though nothing like our concept of art had yet been developed."⁴⁹ But this is to miss the point of any historically adequate account, namely that such artworks became so retrospectively: the painting could only become art once the practice and thus notion of art had evolved. Just as one cannot be courageous where a society lacks the concept of courage so artworks cannot be made and engaged with as art where the cultural practice of art has not arisen. Furthermore, recognising an artefact's artistic value is dependent upon the artistic traditions and forms which have evolved. Indeed, understanding an artwork may require concepts which were unavailable to the artist at the time he created it. Thus anthropological artefacts can become artworks by virtue of events after their creation.

Similarly, how we properly regard already established artworks may be retrospectively modified by subsequent events. New reasons and thus new judgements of the same artwork may become open to us as a particular art form develops. It is not just a matter of retrospectively revealing features which the work possesses. Rather, certain features can only be seen to be relevant when seen under a particular aspect, or an aspect may only arise as a result of non-contemporary developments. For example, in the cinema of the 1940's and 1950's films were primarily construed in terms of the actors and actresses who had starring roles. Thus something was a Bette Davis, Joan Crawford or James Stewart film. However, in the light of a symbiotic shift in both cinematic theory and practice, films came to be construed predominantly in terms of their directors. As a result Alfred Hitchcock's films, which previously had not been seriously regarded, were re-evaluated as art. Similarly, since the form established itself as a serious artistic one, many Westerns have come to be re-evaluated as art.

⁴⁹ Graham Oppy, "On Defining Art Historically", *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 1992. pp. 153-161.

An apposite example, used by Graham McFee, bears this point out well. Bach and Handel are rightly regarded as the culmination of High Baroque.⁵⁰ Strictly speaking, McFee is wrong to suggest that only retrospectively could these works have been thus construed. Of course, a contemporary construal to that effect would lack the certainty of hindsight: it would have to involve a prediction concerning the future development of musical form. Nevertheless, it is the actual development of the form which confirms the legitimacy of such a construal. Whether an artefact is art and what features are relevant is retrospectively variable. The artistically relevant features of an artefact depend upon its inter-relations to other artworks. This is not to say that any reconstrual in the light of artistic developments is legitimate, it must be artistically relevant to the object concerned. For example, *Shane* may rightly be reconstrued in the light of subsequent Westerns such as *Unforgiven*. By contrast, however, a putative artwork which consists of an empty picture frame does not license the reconstrual of Impressionist works in this regard. The variable realisation of artistic aspects depends not just upon the subsequent evolution of the practice but also the object's potential openness to certain developments in the first place. If an object does not even potentially possess a particular aspect then any number of later works will be unable to make sense of it in that light. An artwork may 'create' its own precursors only in the way it may analogously 'create' its own audience.

Kendall Walton once argued, in relation to interpreting artworks, that the aesthetic and artistic properties a work has depends upon what categories it is correctly perceived as fitting into.⁵¹ Our argument suggests that this holds not merely in relation to interpreting an artwork but also applies to whether something is an artwork. To be an artwork an object must be correctly perceived as belonging to certain categories, and whether it does so may retrospectively change. Presumably such categories may range from the socio-institutional context of the object to the evaluative categories which concern the object's aesthetic, expressive qualities, the type of experience it affords and so on. However, even those categories which are not themselves evaluative are value-driven. The point of an artistic intent is, after all, to make something of artistic value. The reason an artwork is placed in the Whitechapel Gallery is because it is thought to afford an artistically valuable experience.

From the low level of fine brushwork to the higher level of belonging to a particular art form, the appropriate categories are driven relative to the evolving value of art. If an object falls within enough of the relevant categories, or within a few sufficiently well, it is an artwork. Whether we correctly place an artefact in the artistically relevant categories, depends both upon its constitution

⁵⁰ Graham McFee, "The Historical Character of Art: A Re-Appraisal". *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 1992, pp. 307-319.

⁵¹ Kendall Walton, "Categories of Art" in J. Margolis (ed.), *Philosophy Looks at the Arts* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), pp. 88-114. Walton's position developed in the aforementioned paper is distinct from the more radically conventionalised position argued for in his *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

and inter-relations with other artworks. It is the more particular categories which cash out the principle that an artefact must possess artistic value in order to be art. Of course, this is compatible with our claim that a work in an established art form requires less artistic value to be art than an artefact outwith established art forms. As distinct cultural practices arise, modify and die the nature of artefacts may change as they come under different categories. Thus whether an artefact is or will be art significantly depends upon the evolution and state of art as a cultural practice.

The relativity of art to a cultural practice suggests an artefact may be an artwork at one time and not at another. It might be objected that we are now not talking about different conceptions of the same thing, but different works. If changing cultural practices decide the nature of the artefact, then the essence of the artefact changes as the cultural practices do. If its essential nature is changing thus, in what respect can we say we are talking about and judging the same thing? Surely, we want to say that the primitive artefact moved from the anthropological museum to the art museum is the same object in a non-trivial sense. Of course, but the feature by virtue of which we do so is the object's history. The same object is individuated and identified across changes by reference to its origination and constitution, which holds both when it is and is not considered an artwork. The same anthropological artefact which was not art can now be recognised as being of great artistic value and thus incorporated into early twentieth century art. This does not license the projection of any categories upon a dreary work to enable us to see it as being of great artistic worth. That one can see how an object might be seen as an artistic masterpiece does not make it one. Typically, the intentionally guided action fixes the objective non-variant features of an artefact, constraining the potential supervenient features open to the cultural practice to realise as art. Artefactuality entails only that the intentionally guided action fixes the parameters within which the object is or potentially may be construed as art. A non-artefactual object's realisation as art is, of course, constrained by its constitution. The aspect of the object realised depends upon the interplay between the various categories under which it is appropriately construed and the present cultural practice of art. As the cultural practice changes so may an object's realised nature and status change. This returns us to the historical sense of tradition fundamental to art, which T. S. Eliot so keenly pointed to:

"No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism....what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it."⁵²

⁵² T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in F. Kermode (ed.), *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 38.

Artefacts may be open to various different categorisations and, as Anita Silvers has pointed out, works are often radically re-evaluated.⁵³ For example, although at one time El Greco's work was considered static, repetitious and lacking in invention, it is now considered symbolic, spiritual and profound.⁵⁴ The standard is relative to how the practice has thus far developed and is perhaps likely to. The art of the past also restricts the retrospective influence that future art may have. It is through its inter-relations with other artworks, past and future, that the artwork is characterised, from its physical features to where and why the object is best classified. Thus the very narratives which tell the stories of art also partly depend upon our interests and purposes with regard to the cultural practice. This may be a matter not just of how a particular artwork is to be construed, but of whether something is an artwork at all.

In this light consider Duchamp's *Fountain* which, at most stages in the cultural practice of art, could not have counted as an artwork. It could not have been valued as art by people of the seventeenth century, except perhaps as an object of novel shape and materials. But to appreciate its aesthetic qualities is to fail to see why it is art in the twentieth century, a point most aestheticians fail to grasp when dwelling on its supposed aesthetic qualities. If it were merely the urinal's aesthetic qualities at issue then there would be no reason why Duchamp's urinal, as distinct from all others, should be appropriately considered art. The point of Duchamp's actions is given within the context of art in the early twentieth century: that the urinal was inverted and signed R. Mutt, ironically enough, relates to the purported valueless nature of art. The point of *Fountain* would have been lost had it really been just any old object inverted.

Stephen Davies has argued that Carroll's narrational approach must collapse back into an institutional account. This is because, he argues, narrational strategies must rely upon an institutional basis to sort out which resemblances and repetitions are artistically significant rather than incidental. An artworld framework is required to account for the concept's unity.⁵⁵ Firstly, it is of interest to note that Davies' own inclination for a procedural approach to art masks a belief that art should maximise aesthetic interest and reward. Indeed, Davies actually states that, "the procedure can operate effectively (*for a time*) even if it becomes divorced from the function that once it was created to

⁵³ Anita Silvers, "The Story of Art Is the Test of Time", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 1991, pp. 211-224.

⁵⁴ Rudolf Wittkower, "El Greco's Language of Gesture" in *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), pp. 147-158.

⁵⁵ Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), Chapter 7, pp. 167-169.

serve."⁵⁶ That this can be so only for a time actually bears out rather than undercuts a narrative account.

However, Carroll's narrative approach, although identifying the specific generative process of historical development underlying all artworks, is inadequate on its own. A narrational construal of art is, by itself, insufficient to capture the evolving, underlying nature of the practice. The narrational strategies of repetition, amplification and repudiation are held to be internal to the practice itself and supposedly do not need to be underwritten by any definitional theory. Yet the development of the practice itself and the non-linear inclusion of objects previously excluded from the practice depend upon informative resemblances or aspects. For example, the significant repudiation of contemporary academic styles within the practice depends upon foregrounding something else found to be of artistic value. On the basis of what do we determine whether this new style, say, is of artistic value? Presumably in relation to whether it possesses or promotes the values of art. Yet Carroll's strategy gives us no substantive criteria according to which we can distinguish a new style which promotes artistic value from a new style which lacks it. An artefact made to reject contemporary art forms may well do so without being an artwork. We need some idea about what should be significant about the object's repudiation for it to count as an artwork, mere rejection is not enough.

Furthermore, movements such as primitivism did not just draw upon previous artworks but also ancient primitive artefacts, some of which were then brought into the category art: their conversation was not purely internal to the practice. Recognising new artworks cannot be just a matter of being familiar with the class of already established artworks, but must involve an appreciation of why they are so. Understanding the practice and inter-relations within it is not just a matter of setting the appropriate context. What orders the context, what determines which objects the narration is about, depends upon what are taken to be the key criteria. Therefore, underwriting the narrational approach to art there must be criteria according to which we can demarcate what ought relevantly to be considered art and why. Without them there would be no adequate basis upon which to explain why Duchamp's *Fountain* or anthropological artefacts may properly be considered art. Indeed, lacking such criteria, the narrational approach could not rule out any one story of art from another.

It might be thought that Carroll's approach must, at its core, rely upon functional foundations. This would indeed be a dire position to be in because, as we have seen, functionalist approaches prove woefully inadequate. However, the narrational strategy need not rest upon functionalism. Rather, it can be supported by conceiving of art as a cluster concept. Of course, the proto-system identified in relational terms is only recognised as the evolution of the distinct cultural practice of art retrospectively. Thus what counts as art is historically variable and the qualities and aspects a work

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, Chapter 9, p. 217 (italics are my emphasis).

possesses are partly context dependent. Nevertheless, it is the cluster of value driven features which identify the links in the chain.

The narrational account of art needn't collapse back into an institutional account since it may be underwritten by a recognition of its point and value, which provides the basis for making judgements about what is relevant and why. The narrational approach, recognising art as an historically evolving practice, requires criteria for judging the nature and thus value of the practice as a whole. Arts purpose and values are given by its evolution and history; the kinds of experiences artworks afford, what constitutes the practice. However, the historically contingent and defeasible nature of the practice so far is underwritten by the cluster of features and values which constitute the concept 'art'.

One particular challenge does remain. Paul Ziff has argued that whether something is art or not is contestable, as against whether something is a table; he thinks this precisely because art concerns questions of value, and which values these are is a contestable matter.⁵⁷ Disputes over the use of the term 'artwork' revolve around questions of the value of the practice of art (in our society). Thus Ziff brings us back full circle to Weitz's claim, that there can be no adequate theory of art:

"Art, as the logic of the concept shows, has no set of necessary and sufficient properties; hence a theory of it is logically impossible and not merely factually difficult."⁵⁸

Our arguments bear out the spirit of the first part of the assertion, the institutional and various functional accounts of art having failed. However, the conclusion is unwarranted. That 'artwork' is a contested term, without sufficient or necessary criteria, need not preclude us from constructing an adequate theory of art. If the concept or practice is to remain art, one should be able to pick out its primary characteristics and purpose. As we have established, paradigms of art are central in exemplifying the typical characteristics, values and purpose of art. Realising whether something is an artwork, as distinct from an interesting drawing or a mere text, usually concerns the recognition of value. However, to be an artwork is not a matter of possessing any kind of value, for example as an investment, but is a status attained in relation to a particular cluster of values. 'Art' is most appropriately conceived as a cluster concept: something is art, if it has certain features which are typical of ideal cases of art. There is not one particular feature or value that all artworks share. Rather, there is a cluster: being aesthetic, expressive, in an art form and so on.

⁵⁷ Paul Ziff, "The Task of Defining a Work of Art" in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 62, No. 1, 1953, pp. 58-78.

⁵⁸ Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" in J. Margolis (ed.), *Philosophy Looks at the Arts* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), p. 122.

Paradigmatic artworks possess all or most of these features and values to a high degree. However, many other good and ordinary artworks may lack one or several of them, whilst having a sufficient number of the other features to a sufficient extent that they qualify as artworks. It is not necessary for something to be art that it possess any feature or value in particular, nor that it possess all of them. An object is an artwork if it possesses at least some of the features and values which make up the concept of art. Thus there are sufficient conditions, an object possessing all of these features and values will undoubtedly be art. But the necessary conditions are disjoint: an object may possess any combination of a few of these features and be art. A cluster concept does not have necessary conditions as they are normally understood, that is, as a conjunction. So, although the claim that there are no necessary and sufficient conditions is, as normally interpreted, correct, the conclusion drawn, that there can be no theory of art, is false.

As we have established, there are certain value requirements an artefact must fulfil to become classified as art, even within an art form it must attain a certain level of value. Thus one can indeed have bad art, but no art that is utterly worthless. A worthless work may be mistaken for art by some curator, critic or artist, but it can only be bogus art. The possibility of mistaken critical recognition is an open one. Only this position can explain why artefacts produced within established art forms can fail to be artworks. The value required for such artefacts to be art is lower than the value required of an object produced outside established art forms and styles. Nevertheless, there remains a requisite value threshold for attaining arthood status. The only difference is that in established art forms the threshold is lower than that required for artefacts in non-art forms to be art. Therefore, it would appear, there can be only one inherently evaluative sense to the term 'art'.

Moreover, to look for a definition in terms of strict necessary and sufficient conditions appears a hopeless task. Artworks may be purposively made to achieve a particular goal, but that does not entail that 'art' is a functional concept. For example, Bellini's altarpiece *The Baptism of Christ* was designed for a religious purpose. Yet, the nature of the work is not reducible to the function it was supposed to perform. If it were to be exhibited in the National Gallery, we would not consider its function to be falsely abrogated. Rather, on the understanding that it was designed as an altarpiece, we would engage with it as art; we would look for it to fulfil a different purpose. Similarly, at the more general level, art's nature is not reducible to matters of functionality. Therefore, we should seek to characterise art as a goal-directed cultural practice, understood in terms of its primary characteristics. Such a characterisation of art need not collapse back into the inadequacies of a functionalist account. The acknowledgement of art as purposive and goal-directed does not commit us to holding that 'art' is a functional concept. Our characterisation of art suggests that 'art' is a cluster concept, a matter which needn't render our account uninformative: the circularity of the characterisation need not be vicious. Indeed, it is only if we know what art is through our experience with it that we can make sense of art's purpose.

One of the institutional theory's strengths was its simple explanation of how certain primitive artefacts came to acquire artwork status at the turn of the century. Yet this can be better explained by the inherently evaluative conception of art as a cultural practice. It is on the basis of artistic value, grounded upon the development of art, that we consider newly created or previously non-artistic artefacts as potentially up for artwork status. At the beginning of this century art had developed in such a way that certain anthropological artefacts could come to be seen as artworks. Particular developments in art allowed them to speak to our concerns regarding art and the world: Picasso, among other artists, made artistic use of his interest in various anthropological artefacts, especially African masks. Their influence upon Picasso's means of representation and the concerns of modern art brought some of these artefacts into the sphere of art. Although Picasso's use of these artefacts apparently disregarded their function, they became art because of the artistic features and value he drew attention to; something which could only be appreciated as artistic in the light of early twentieth century art.

This is not to say that prior to this century anthropological artefacts did not have any of the aesthetic qualities we now attribute to them. It may be that certain of their aesthetic qualities were always recognised. However, only post-1900 could we even consider some of them might be artworks. Bear in mind that something's having aesthetic qualities is not sufficient for it to constitute a work of art, after all nature is not an artwork. It is not even straightforwardly obvious that an aesthetic artefact is a work of art nor that an artwork should have aesthetic qualities, the two may pull apart. Primitive artefacts could not have been characterised as artworks prior to this century, but, given the way art developed, it became open for them to qualify for such status from the 1900's on. The inherently evaluative conception of art as a cultural practice explains more fully how and why this is so. As a cultural practice, art can and does valorise into other domains: it is not a hermetically sealed activity.

Section 5: Artefactuality, Practice and Value.

It has so far remained an unquestioned assumption that an artwork must be an artefact: that is, an object created or modified by an agent's intentionally guided action. It is important to realise that an artefact cannot merely be an object which we use or one of socio-cultural significance, as some apparently hold.⁵⁹ Furthermore, as an object we have created or modified, an artefact needn't be of a material nature.⁶⁰ For example, whether God is an artefact of our culture or not depends upon whether He exists, not upon the socio-cultural significance of Christianity. If God does not exist then he is, as a

⁵⁹ For example Joseph Margolis makes this assumption in his *Art and Philosophy* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), pp. 84-87.

⁶⁰ Many people assume an artefact must be a material object, see, for example, Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), Chapter 5, pp. 124-125 and 139-141.

creation of our thought, an artefact, despite being only a mental and not a material object. The main point here is that recognising 'art' as a cluster concept brings the assumed condition of artefactuality into question. Artefactuality itself, rather than being a precondition of art, may merely be one of the cluster of conditions which make up the concept of art. If this is the case then artworks are only typically, not necessarily, artefacts. This is supported by the consideration that a piece of driftwood picked up from the beach may be considered an artwork because it possesses or promotes artistic values to a high degree. The sea formed grooves may be beautifully expressive, the colour and tone delightful, the knots in the wood symbolic and so on.

Those who hold that artefactuality is a necessary condition of art may deny that pieces of driftwood are or could become artworks. For example, Monroe Beardsley denies that such objects could ever be artworks.⁶¹ The grounds for this claim are presumably that only artefacts could possibly fulfil art's function. As we have seen, the functionalist approach to defining art is inadequate, so the point should be modified in terms of artistic goals. Nevertheless, the point does not hold good. If we assume, as Beardsley does, that the primary goal of art is aesthetic value, then obviously natural objects may possess aesthetic features and fulfil the primary goal of art. Beardsley may deny this by suggesting that an object's purpose is fixed by or requires intentional activity or manipulation. But in certain cases the socio-cultural purpose of an object can come apart from the intended one. For example, a religious icon made to promote faith may now be established in the National Gallery as an artwork. We may legitimately go to see such an object in order to appreciate its aesthetic qualities. Just as, in this case, the purpose of an object may vary depending upon cultural practices, so too may the matter of whether an object has any purpose.

We can treat a non-intended object as if it had been created to achieve a particular goal. Of course, there must be good reason for doing so, namely, that it fulfils artistic goals well. Thus, a piece of driftwood may be an artwork but it cannot be bad art. A piece of driftwood may come to be art because, as a contingent matter, it happens to possess aesthetic features or promotes artistic values. We should not be overly surprised at this. That we are able to do so is, of course, parasitic upon our intentionally guided activities which constitute the main practice of art. That we are able to recognise non-artefactual objects as artworks is only possible against a background where artworks are understood to be typically artefactual.

It might be further suggested that artefactuality need not even be a typical requirement for artwork status. If pieces of driftwood may become artworks, it would seem to be only contingently true that non-artefactual objects promote artistic values to a lesser extent than intentionally produced objects. If certain kinds of non-artefactual objects, such as pieces of driftwood, were typically found to

⁶¹ See Monroe Beardsley, "Redefining Art" in M. Wreen and D. Callen (eds.), *The Aesthetic Point of View* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 298-315.

promote art's value well then they would establish an art form and perhaps could constitute the major part or all of the cultural practice. Whether the object is intentionally created or manipulated would then be irrelevant to the work's status as art. Michel Foucault's comments regarding the minimal significance of the medieval author point towards such a position.⁶² He holds that, as in medieval times, the regulative ideal of maximal value should guide our categorisation and assessment of books and artworks generally. The constraining conception of intentional action should not be seen as constituting the work's nature: we should be able to make of and value what we will in seeking to maximise the object's value for ourselves. This conclusion is thought to follow from the recognition that an author's intent cannot fully determine an object's nature. Therefore, artefactuality may not even be a typical condition of artwork status.

Now, that authorial intention cannot wholly fix an artwork's nature can be supported by argument. Firstly, where an artistic intention fails, an artwork may nevertheless be produced. Richard Wollheim is wrong to hold that if an artefact fails to conform to the artistic intent with which it was produced it cannot thus represent, be expressive or, by extension, be an artwork.⁶³ Although the work is other than it was intended to be it may, nevertheless, be expressive and of artistic value. Secondly, even where the artist's intention is successfully fulfilled, the nature of the artwork produced is not necessarily fixed. For an action may have accidental or non-intended features which are relevant to the artefact as art and affect its value. Hence it may be true that the broad expressive brush strokes of late Titian were unintended and can be explained in relation to his failing sight, yet they constitute part of the nature of the work: they add to its value, and the work would be essentially different without them. Thus it may be true of both the act and the resultant product that they have unintended features which are essential to the work as art. Although the intention, beliefs and action may explain why the action occurred, they are not identical with or wholly constitutive of the nature of the act and the work. Furthermore, not only may features of a work be independent of the intention with which the action was performed but some may vary across people, time and culture. This is because the relevant features are not just determined by authorial intent but also by the prevailing conventions of art. Therefore, independently of whether the object arises from a retrospectively identifiable successfully fulfilled intention or not, the cultural practice plays a significant role in fixing the nature of the artefact as art.

However, it does not follow from the truth of this claim that artefactuality is not a typical pre-condition of artwork status: i.e. that we can have a practice of art constituted for the most part by non-artefactual objects. The necessary conventionality of a cultural practice does not entail that the

⁶² See Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 101-120.

⁶³ Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), Chapter 2, pp. 46-51.

artefactual grounding of art is itself a matter of convention. This would only follow if the condition of artefactuality were shown to be radically contingent and not a necessarily typical conceptual relation. But artwork status cannot be so wholly severed from intentional human activity. Firstly, artefactuality is required as a typical condition to distinguish the practice of art from the parts of nature which may happen to be aesthetically valuable. Unless we conceive of the world as the intentional product of God's design, it makes no sense to conceive of the natural world as an artwork.

Of course we can conceive of parts of the world as if they were artworks, but only in a parasitic sense. However, this is not to make artefactuality a necessary condition of art. For example, consider a rock whose surface has been naturally eroded in a certain way. If read as if they were English words, they might read as a beautiful poem. Of course, the marks could be taken as meaning something else in a different language. Nonetheless, although not written by an intentional agent, we may take the marks as if they were meaningful words. They correspond to signs within one of our intentionally guided representational systems, in this case the language of English. The words in the rock could not be considered as words if it were not for the human intentionally guided, communal practice of linguistic communication. Just as we may parasitically consider the marks to be meaningful words, so too we may consider them to constitute a poem. We may parasitically consider a few non-artefactual objects to be art, but only by virtue of the practice itself being grounded upon human intentionally guided activity.

It is also important to realise that not just any aspect of nature which can be seen as artistically valuable can be parasitically regarded as art. For example, although an aesthetic piece of driftwood may be considered art, a sunset, no matter how beautiful, cannot be up for artwork status. This is because whereas the driftwood could have been intentionally produced by a human agent, a sunset could not. Only those non-artefactual objects which could have been humanly worked may parasitically be up for artwork status. It must be said that in the future sunsets may come to be up for artwork status, if we come to control and manipulate sunsets as we may landscape, cultivate and order gardens. Art as a cultural practice is grounded upon the intentionally guided production of artefacts of artistic value for appreciation. It is the typical artistic value of what is produced that makes the activity worthwhile and enables non-artefactual objects to be parasitically considered as art.

Artworks are not out there in nature, waiting for us to pluck them from the air. Rather, they rest upon the constructions of human activities and practice. Artworks can only parasitically be in nature, grounded upon the primary human intentionally guided activities which constitute the mainstream of the practice. A rock's markings may be taken as an artwork, but this does not mean the practice of art is divorcable from intentional activity. There could not be a practice where all the artworks, for example, were products of nature and non-intended. If someone were to call such objects art they might mean a different thing by the same word. Alternatively a special explanation would have to come in, explaining how artworks survived only in this special, parasitic sense. One might conceivably imagine such a situation in a state where all artefactual artworks were destroyed and all

art making activities banned. However, eventually, sundered from its primary sense, art could no longer survive and the practice would either die or transmute into something else.

The nature and value of an object may change whilst its identity, arising from its originating and causal history, remains. It would be a category mistake to conflate identity with class: the value of an object as art may be independent of what it was originally created for. Thus an artefact may be picked out consistently across physical erosion, conceptual change and cultural modification, independently of its class and value. Thus religious myths, primitive artefacts and medieval manuscripts may change in terms of their value and yet still remain the same artefacts. What is central to an object as art is the question of artistic value. Although the water left is continuous with the materials worked upon by the artist for his ice or water sculpture, the puddles he leaves behind may no longer constitute an artwork: they no longer retain the shape and form which made them valuable as art. To identify religious myths, ritualistic artefacts, medieval manuscripts or found objects as art is to assert that they are of value *qua* art. To identify a novel as art is to say that it is both in a particular established art form and that it has attained the minimal value threshold appropriate to being art within that particular art form.

The artist's purposive actions, the artefact itself and the evolution of the forms of art and the cultural practice in general all symbiotically work to determine the actual and potential nature, and thus value, of artworks. Indeed, these factors determine whether an object qualifies as art at all. The object's narrative and the practice of art thus explains why it has the qualities, value and artwork status it does at a particular time and place, as well as tentatively indicating possibilities to come. A better understanding of artworks and art must thus involve an appreciation of how and why the practice, form and object are shaped thus. Thus we can recognise both the basis upon which religious artefacts were made and how, despite this, they came to be properly valued as artworks.

However, as we saw earlier, our position should not be confused with the radical claim that if something can be construed as art then it ought to be and thus is art.⁶⁴ Stephen Davies has suggested that merely because a 'discoverer' works against a background of art history and conventions of art then her "works must be seen as referring to all the aesthetic techniques and properties that she has eschewed. The same is true of the 'beach artist'. Similarly, the Conceptual artist cannot but refer to the physical properties that are absent for their relevance in his work."⁶⁵ Thus whether something is art or not has been rendered a matter of complete contingency and luck. The art historical context is confused with the found object itself. The object is understood as necessarily referring to all the absent properties, and thus artistic values, that it does not actually have: from painted and carved media to ugly and beautiful qualities. Presumably, all other art objects thus construed must be the same. Yet we

⁶⁴ Arthur Danto's claims suggest something like this position: namely, if something can be interpreted in an artistically significant way then it is art.

⁶⁵ Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), Chapter 5, p. 141.

discriminate between artworks on the grounds that the relevant features and artistic values are in fact distinct: which is why our critical evaluations of them differ. It is also true that artworks may be other than how we construe them to be. The construal which maximises an object's artistic value may not be a legitimate one.

The point of the practice of art as a whole, and in which its value inheres, is the constraining and opening out of possibilities for our engagement. Found art can only be art if the object could have been made by human activity and if it is of a high artistic value. Our ability to treat such objects as art is parasitic upon our understanding of art and artworks as the result of purposive actions intentionally guided towards the goal and value of art. This is not equivalent to holding that something is an artwork only if a maker intended an artefact to have artistic value. Although we must regard something as if it were purposively made for it to be art, artefactuality is only a typical requirement of artworks. We can properly recognise accidentally or incidentally produced objects as artworks because of their high artistic value. Nevertheless, found art is parasitic upon our understanding of artworks as products of human purposive activity, created in order to realise certain values. Artefactuality is criterial of art in much the same way as pain behaviour is criterial of pain. That is, we could not have the concept of art without artefactuality. Yet there are parasitic, fringe cases which constitute non-artefactual art in much the same way as there is simulated or concealed pain. The link is not a matter of logical deduction, but it is certainly criterial.

The cultural practice and thus the concept of art is value-driven. Of course, since artefactuality is a typical condition, not all of the primary characteristics which make up the cluster concept of art are themselves evaluative. Nevertheless, the point and purpose of art fundamentally comes to rest upon artistic value. The value threshold for artwork status differs depending upon whether the object belongs within established art forms or not, a matter dependent upon the enduring nature of the practice and its constitutive works. Therefore something is an artwork if and only if, as a member of an established art form, it achieves a certain threshold of artistic value, or, if it is outwith established art forms, it is of exceptional value *qua* art.

It might be objected that my definition allows the use of drugs to promote otherwise worthless objects into artwork status. Similarly, it might allow artefacts such as Rorschach tests to become artworks since we may find them artistically valuable; our engagement here involves mere projection onto the pattern before us. Indeed, the objection goes, my definition as it is neither rules such cases in or out: it is circular and uninformative. My definition is indeed formally circular, but not viciously so. It is the task of the rest of this thesis to render the definition informative: that is, to explicate exactly what artistic value amounts to and upon what basis it rests. It is upon the following arguments then that my definitional thesis stands or falls. Thus we must move on to the substantive question of just what artistic value could or should be. Now the path is open for us to examine the primary characteristics and values of art, what the cultural practice is for.

Chapter 2

Art's Pleasures.

"The whole of the truth lies in the presentation; therefore the expression should be studied in the interest of veracity.
This is the only morality of *art* apart from *subject*."
Joseph Conrad.

Introduction.

Having found that 'art' is an inherently evaluative concept, we must now seek to find out what sort of value is involved. One of the strongest and most commonly intuitive understandings of the nature and value of art concerns a direct relation to pleasure. The pleasure we get in and through art is obviously a strong motivation for engaging with artworks. That we reach for the television switch, the bookcase or labour to reach the art gallery is typically motivated by the hope that we will enjoy and thus take pleasure in what we see or read. Thus Joseph Conrad's writings may be good because I am entertained by adventurous stories with dense descriptions of both the natural and social world. The pleasure artworks afford is typically both a consequent of the activity of engaging with the work and partly constituted in the engagement itself.

After articulating a broad characterisation of the possible relationship between art and pleasure I consider a fundamental objection. Namely, that there exists fundamentally unpleasant art. Various accounts are then considered, all of which explain the apparent unpleasantness as unfortunate by-products of what gives rise to pleasure. Thus, for example, Noël Carroll argues that feeling afraid is an unfortunate corollary of the violation of our categorial scheme, which is what affords us pleasure. However, all such accounts are flawed because they cannot make sense of a perfectly reasonable claim. Namely, that an artwork may not be horrific enough or evoke the apparently unpleasant tragic emotions within us. However, a variation of the pleasure account does prove adequate to the problem. This involves the recognition that we enjoy feeling the evaluatively negative emotions, the emotions being individuated according to their formal objects.

I then move on to consider if there are pleasures particular to art. The aesthetic features of art, although properly considered valuable, were found not to be art's primary value. What we mainly value is cognitive features in art, even where they detrimentally effect a work's aesthetic aspect. Furthermore, the importance in expression of what is expressed also suggests that art's pleasures derive largely from cognitive value. Thus I explore the kind of cognitive value which may be central to art. This intuition is supported by the recognition that art can affect the way we see what is around us,

encouraging new ways of perceiving and conceiving of the world. Engaging with Monet's *Banks of the Seine, Vétheuil*, highlights the shifting nature of our sensory perception, encountering Francis Bacon's work may suggest the potential distortion, corruption and decay inherent in people's physiognomy. Indeed, this might provide the basis for an even stronger claim, that art provides the perceptual and conceptual categories with which we perceive and conceive the world. This claim is made, for instance, by Kenneth Clark when he argues that the significance of landscape, its meanings and our relations to it are grounded and dependent upon the way the landscape has been worked and rendered in art, art creates meaning.¹ A work is of value as art if it affords certain kinds of cognitive pleasures. These pleasures include a work's significance.

Section 1: Pleasure

If art is connected to considerations of value, we must attempt to articulate what sort of value it is. One plausible candidate concerns the apparent pleasure artworks afford. Indeed, the similarity of many radically different kinds of artworks seems to lie precisely in the fact that they afford pleasure of some sort. From the entertainment of Disney's *Fantasia* to the chilly delight properly evoked in our response to Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, we derive some sort of pleasure from our engagement with them. But of what kind? The idea that the pleasures we derive in engaging with artworks should be distinct may seem puzzling. After all, it would be odd to think that the pleasures in art are peculiarly unrelated to the pleasures afforded in other spheres of our lives. It might be thought that though pleasure may arise from different sources, the pleasure afforded by particular things is general. Thus our pleasures may not themselves be conceived of as distinct in kind. Rather, it may be thought, their origin in particular sensations or activities, from eating ice-cream and watching movies to climbing mountains, is what differentiates the pleasure taken.

The basic idea here is that our pleasures are differentiated according to the particular objects they are intentionally directed toward. The pleasure I feel at the end of a game of football is of the same kind as I get from finding out that Manchester United cannot achieve the unique treble. Yet what I derive the pleasure from in each case is different. One is an activity and the other a piece of information about a certain state of affairs. Thus, on this view, for something to be good art it must both give pleasure and be understood to belong within the evolved practice of art. What delineates something as art, and precludes other things from being art, is whether the pleasure affording object or activity is justifiably conceived as belonging to the historically evolved practice. Whether the art is

¹ Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art* (London: John Murray, 1949).

good will depend upon whether general pleasure is taken in and resultant from engaging with it. The activity marks out the kind, the amount of pleasure its value.

However, this view renders the kind of pleasures afforded by art indistinguishable from those afforded by other activities. Thus any activity or object which affords pleasure is rendered a potential artwork. Yet this entails that there can be no justification for one particular pleasure affording artefact being art, and another not, apart from the contingent matter that one object falls within the historical remit of the practice. But any conception which fails to distinguish between the particular pleasures afforded by the *Mona Lisa* and my cousin's Fisher Price train set, is wholly inadequate to the value of art. Obviously the relevant kinds of pleasure cannot be differentiated merely by the objects to which they are intentionally directed towards. On this basis, every individual pleasure would have to be held to be distinctive in kind. Rather, we are interested in what is distinctive of the pleasure itself. Thus we should be able to distinguish whether pleasure taken in a different object is essentially the same or a different kind of pleasure.

Pleasure is not merely a matter of feeling brute internal sensations, triggered off by the outside world. Firstly, the particular kind of sensation we feel is intimately linked to certain behavioural responses. Secondly, we may derive pleasure from an activity which provokes typically unpleasant sensations. As Alasdair MacIntyre suggests, something's being pleasurable is "a property of certain activities and experiences which are treated as standard objects of desire, which help to define not merely the desired, but the desirable."² Pleasure is necessarily shaped, formed and given expression through and by the activity concerned: it is activity specific. The particular tasks engaged in the activity, shape the nature of the particular pleasure. Furthermore, the pleasure involved needn't be sensation-like, but may arise from the enjoyment taken in the very activity or process. In relation to art, pleasure typically involves enjoying doing something: enjoying oneself in listening to or engaging with an artwork, rather than passively waiting for some pleasurable sensation to arise.³ Thus pleasures are not just group relative, but activity relative. We take pleasure in and not merely consequent upon the process or particular activity. The physical exertion of stop and start running, tackling, leaping for the ball, striking it sweetly with the outside of the foot and team work are all constitutive parts of the pleasure we take in playing football. Take them away and there are general similarities to the pleasure taken in tennis. Yet, just as obviously, they cannot be the same as the pleasures afforded in the swing of the racket, the mental tussle with just one opponent and so on. Chess may afford certain pleasures similar to those taken in tennis, the psychological battle of wills, but unlike football and

² Alasdair MacIntyre, "Pleasure as a Reason for Action" in his *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (London: Duckworth, 1971), pp. 189-190.

³ See Jerrold Levinson's "Pleasure and the Value of Works of Art", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 1992, pp. 295-306.

tennis, it is not a physical game. Thus the pleasure taken in particular types of physical activity is unavailable to the chess player.

Famously Wittgenstein talked of family resemblance in relation to concepts like 'game'. The basic idea is that there are a criss cross of overlapping similar features but no necessary, let alone sufficient, conditions for something to be a game.⁴ This is true of the kinds of pleasures we take in particular activities. Indeed, it is a constitutive part of an activity being different that it provokes, in part, a distinctive kind of pleasure, from engaging with artworks to playing sport. Furthermore, this entails, that within the pleasures distinctive to art there will be pleasures distinctive of particular art forms and media. That is, art pleasures will be partly constituted and differentiated by the procedures and distinctive forms of engagement the artwork affords us. After all, a constituent part of the pleasure derived from a particular thing or activity inheres in the particular and distinct nature of that thing or activity.

Undeniably the pleasures afforded by art are themselves distinct and multifarious: ranging from the media utilised, the manipulation of genre constraints, the aesthetic features, the imaginative engagement afforded to the insight revealed. Indeed, it may seem, as Jerrold Levinson remarks, that art does not rate well in terms of hedonistic return when compared with many other activities.⁵ What we still require are criteria which enable us to explain which pleasures are irrelevant to the work as art and why. For example, I may derive a great amount of pleasure from the fact that I bought an artwork last year at half the amount for which it is now presently valued. Nevertheless, we want to be able to say that the pleasure afforded by the work as an investment is irrelevant. Rather than looking to quantify undifferentiated pleasure, we must recognise that the pleasures afforded must be linked to the nature of the work as art.

However, before we move on to consider the particular pleasures art may afford, we must deal with the standard objection to any pleasure account of art. That is, there can be and indeed are highly unpleasant and highly valuable artworks, from Francis Bacon's portraits, representing grotesque misshapen bodies, to David Cronenberg's films, with their violently explosive heads and horrifying, repulsive figures. Indeed various visual artists and performers even use the most unpleasant and disgusting material in their work, ranging from faeces, urine and sperm to a foetus. Thus, artworks which we properly value as such may be unpleasant. Therefore, any account which locates art's value in the pleasure it affords must be inadequate.

It might be thought that unpleasant artworks can be plausibly explained away. Thus, it might be suggested, it remains true that for an artefact to be considered art, it must afford certain kinds of

⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), Sections 67-75, pp. 32-35.

⁵ Jerrold Levinson, "Pleasure and the Value of Works of Art", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 1992, p. 301.

pleasure. This includes artefacts which may also involve distinctly unpleasant materials, emotions and thoughts. Firstly, although an artwork may be constituted from unpleasant materials or involve unpleasant scenes, it may still provoke pleasure in those who engage with it. This is because the manipulation and inter-action of materials or features used, may lead to overall pleasurable results. For example, something we would ordinarily find disgusting might afford pleasure if it is manipulated in a certain way and we are constrained to regard it in a certain light. The peculiar orange medium bathing the crucifix in Andre Serranno's *Piss Christ* constitutes a particularly pleasing, luminous aesthetically pleasing light, if looked at independently of the material's particular associations. Thus the contribution of materials we would normally consider unpleasant, such as various bodily fluids, may constitute valuable features of the artwork. That is, normally unpleasant features may afford us pleasure in our engagement with the work as art.

Secondly, even artworks which afford displeasure can be accounted for. The status of an artefact which affords certain kinds of pleasure is not necessarily invalidated by the fact that it involves unpleasantness in various respects. This is not to deny that things which afford displeasure in art are disvaluable. Rather, it is to recognise that an artwork which affords pleasure in one respect may afford displeasure in another. To the extent the work affords displeasure, it is of disvalue as art. Nonetheless, if the kind of pleasure afforded is great, delightful or highly artistic, it may outweigh the displeasure afforded. Thus, though its value is diminished by the unpleasantness involved, on balance, the artefact may be of value as art. Hence an artwork which involves unpleasantness or affords displeasure may justifiably be recognised as art. A pleasure account of the value of art may thus apparently cope adequately with the problem posed by unpleasant art. An artwork is not necessarily invalidated as such if it affords or involves displeasure. However, it is marred as art to the extent it does. Thus, a consequence of this account is that unpleasant art can never be truly great art. Displeasure and unpleasantness is still considered an unfortunate by-product or aspect of an artwork.

On this construal Francis Bacon's artistry in oils and manipulation of conventions and style, through affording pleasure, is what warrants his work status as art. However, given the fundamentally horrific, threatening and unpleasant content of the work, it is also artistically disvaluable in these respects. Where the former value outweighs the latter disvalue, his work is appropriately considered art. Where the disvalue of the unpleasant content outweighs the artistry displayed, and thus pleasure afforded, Bacon fails to make a good work or even, possibly, an artwork at all. Thus it is that the pleasure account can allow that something's being unpleasant does not necessarily preclude it from being art. Therefore, it can account for unpleasant art.

Yet, the account of unpleasant art as articulated above misses one crucial point. Namely, that in some artworks, the high degree of unpleasantness involved is central to them as art. That is, the displeasure afforded may not be just an unfortunate by-product. Rather, it may be fundamental to the work as art. For example, we miss the entire point of Serranno's *Piss Christ* if we fail to realise what

the medium is. If the account just given were sound, then our ignorance of the medium used would be an irrelevance to the work as art. Indeed, as the unpleasant associations might get in the way of the pleasure afforded by the colour, it would consider such ignorance a positive asset. Yet, the fact that the medium is highlighted in the work's title ought to indicate that it is centrally relevant to the work. If we were to engage with the work whilst remaining ignorant of the nature of the medium or whilst putting aside thoughts and associations concerned with the medium, we would not be attending to it properly. We would not think it appropriate to divest the work's symbolic imagery and the crucifix of all its associations in order to engage with the work. Indeed, even if this was possible, we would hardly derive much pleasure from the work by divesting it of all apparent content. The whole point of the work lies in the juxtaposition of meaning and associations of the medium used and the crucifix suspended in it. If this were not so, then everything bar the colour of the work would be redundant.

The repellent contrast of material and imagery is not an unfortunate side-effect of the pleasure afforded by some other aspect of the work. Rather, the use and foregrounding of the urine is central to the work as art. This may reduce the pleasure we might otherwise have derived from looking at the work. Nonetheless, this does not entail that the work is of lesser value as art. Indeed, the medium used, and the resultant juxtapositions, means the work is of greater value as art, not less. It is important to realise that this is not an isolated and exceptional case. Consider, for example, certain highly popular kinds of film. Feeling unpleasant emotions, such as fear and repulsion, and imagining horrific states of affairs are central to horror movies. Indeed, this is precisely what is constitutive of the genre. It would make little sense to claim that these aspects of horror movies are unfortunate features which render the films disvaluable as art. If this were so, then someone who claimed that *Hell Raiser* was not horrific or scary enough would be unintelligible. Alternatively, he could be thought of as being scary himself: since his complaint shows that he takes pleasure in what is intrinsically unpleasant, he must be unbalanced.

But the complaint that Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula* was a disappointment, precisely because it was neither horrific or scary, does make sense. This is because the state of affairs represented certainly ought to evoke unpleasant emotions as key constituents in our response to the work. Its failure to do so, diminishes rather than enhances its value as an artwork. Thus artworks whose whole point is to give rise to unpleasant associations, emotions and thoughts in the spectator are valued as art. Such artworks cannot be explained away on the grounds that they afford pleasure and are of value as art in other respects. The pleasure account cannot explain the value of artworks which repel us or prescribe us to imagine horrific states of affairs. Thus the pleasure account of art's value must be, the objector will claim, inadequate.

However, Noël Carroll has recently given an argument which, he claims, both upholds the pleasure account of art and, nevertheless, remains true to the value we place on works of horror as art.⁶

⁶ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (London: Routledge, 1990), Chapter 4, pp. 158-195.

Carroll's argument is, essentially, that our pleasure in such cases arises from the provocation and subsequent satiation of our curiosity. What we are concerned to provoke and explore in the case of horror films is our fascination with anomalies. That is, our curiosity with things which violate our categorial schemes. For example, monsters violate our standard categories in various ways. Thus they are taken to violate the natural order, the way the world is. It is for this very reason that they compel our interests, curiosity and thus attention. Yet, at the very same time, and for the very same reasons, we find them compelling, we find monsters disgusting, repulsive and horrific. The abrogation of our standard categories of thought is where Carroll locates both the centrally unpleasant nature of horror films and the fascination, interest and pleasure they afford. Thus Carroll's argument can explain why removing the unpleasant aspects of the work would not enhance its value as art but actually diminish it:

"The fascination of the horrific being comes *in tandem* with disturbance, and, in fact, I would submit that for those who are attracted to the genre, the fascination at least *compensates* for the disturbance."⁷

This explains, Carroll argues, how we may derive pleasure from our encounters with intrinsically unpleasant things in art. Furthermore, in engaging with a film, we can afford to explore horrific creatures and situations in a way we could not in the real world. This is because we cannot be threatened by an imaginary state of affairs in the way we could be if what we were imagining was actually happening. Hence we may enjoy contemplating the horrific in art, a matter which might not so readily give rise to pleasure if the monsters represented were part of our everyday world and constituted an actual threat to ourselves. After all, terrible threats or tragic events in our lives do not give rise to pleasure. Thus in art, we can experience what it might be like, what it would be appropriate to think and feel, without the potentially terrible cost which would follow in the real world. Therefore we can consider, provoke and satiate our curiosity about horrific states of affairs in art in ways we could or would not in our everyday life. So, Carroll argues, he can explain how we may gain pleasure from our experiences, through art, with what are disgusting or horrific creatures and events.

In ordinary contexts we may not be able to explore our curiosity about creatures and events which challenge the way we categorise the world. This may be due to social taboos or real emotional and physical threats. However, in art these constraints fall away and we can provoke, extend and indulge our curiosity. Carroll's attempt to resolve the paradox of horror still repudiates the idea that we enjoy or take pleasure in being scared, disgusted or repelled. The unpleasant thoughts, feelings and emotion are still conceived of as by-products. However, if we are to explore the ideas, concepts and

⁷ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (London: Routledge, 1990), Chapter 4, p. 189. The italics are my emphasis.

categorial violations which give rise to the pleasures distinctive of art-horror, the unfortunate by-products are necessary. Thus our interest in the genre of horror, and the Gothic novel from which it evolved, lies in the curious violation of the limited mechanistic norms of nature and our conceptual framework. The fact that they must scare us to do so, is the price we must pay. Our enjoyment of and fascination for art-horror is due to the curiosity it provokes in us and ultimately satiates. What both gives us pleasure and scares us is the categorial violations of our understanding of the world.

However, Carroll's argument is inadequate. It still cannot properly explain the delight we feel from experiencing unpleasant emotions. Firstly, Carroll's argument equates the demand that a film should be more scary to the demand that it should explore more fully the relevant categorial violation. But the assimilation is a false one. Imagine *Alien* had the section cut from it which portrayed the creature lunging at Dallas, the captain of the spacecraft. This would neither lessen the work's exploration of the monster as a creature violating our standard categories, nor would it diminish the narrative structure. However, it would significantly diminish the fright and fear we feel in engaging with the film. Therefore, on Carroll's account, *Alien* would be a better artwork with this scene cut out. Yet this is the exact opposite of what is the case. If the scene was cut from the film, we would think it of lesser value as art. This is precisely because we enjoy and value the unpleasant fear we feel, independently of whether it extends our curiosity about the monster violating our standard conceptualisation of the world.

Secondly, Carroll's account works far better for our appreciation of horror than it does in the case of tragedy. Whether a tragedy affords us pleasure or not does not seem to depend upon its violation of our categorial schemes at all. For example, Greek tragedy seems to have concerned and extended, rather than abrogated, their structured understanding of the world.⁸ Similarly, the value of *King Lear* lies not in its confronting us with disgusting violations of our standard concepts. Rather, its value lies centrally in its exploration of the way standard conceptions of the world, and various familial and human relationships, may be flawed with potentially savage consequences. Lastly, the pleasure we feel does not just derive from the fact that the object of fear is not a threat. For example, if one had been under the misapprehension that Welles' broadcast of *War of the Worlds* was a report, one might still have felt pleasure in relation to the fear evoked. Indeed, Carroll fails not only to recognise that we may enjoy feeling unpleasant emotions in art, but that we do so in our everyday lives too. For example, soldiers, mountaineers, racing drivers, divers, paragliders, circus performers and people who enjoy various fun fair rides all typically enjoy what are highly dangerous activities. Indeed, if these activities were rendered devoid of their danger and the 'thrill of fear' lost, then the enjoyment taken in the respective activities could hardly be the same at all.

⁸ See Aeschylus, *The Oresteian Trilogy*, tr. P. Vellacott, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959), Introduction, pp. 15-37 for a discussion of Aeschylus' work in these terms.

Now, we might think of tragedy as expressing or extending our own fears and anguish, thus "by means of pity and fear bringing about the purgation of such emotions."⁹ On this construal, tragedy takes us through a gamut of emotions, from joy to unpleasant emotions such as grief and sorrow. By the end, the audience should be left weary, emotionally drained and in a pleasurable state. One must be very careful here, since if we are merely concerned with the expression of the emotions, then art is being problematically conceived as an outlet for the emotionally constipated. Art is not reducible to the purging of pent up, unformed emotions. If this were so, the pleasure arising from art would be reduced to a form of relief, instrumentally derived from the therapy art is held to afford. On such an account we would be better off going to a psychotherapist or role-play encounter group rather than vicariously expressing our emotions through art.

However, as Susan Feagin and Jerrold Levinson have argued, the pleasure taken in tragedy, and thus from the expression of unpleasant emotions and thoughts, may derive from the nature of our response.¹⁰ The tragic expression of a character's plight in the face of fate renders apposite our anguished, sympathetic emotional reaction. Although the feelings that the tragedy gives rise to are themselves unpleasant, we derive overall pleasure because this is what we ought to feel when confronted with such a state of affairs. Indeed, this serves to confirm that we are the type of person who is outraged by injustice. What gives us pleasure concerns our attitude to our lower level responses to what is unpleasant. Thus what grounds our pleasure is the realisation that we too care for our fellow man as we should. Therefore, this account, as opposed to Carroll's, can make proper sense of the demand that a work was not scary enough. On this account, such a demand represents the claim that the work failed to evoke the appropriate response regarding what it prescribes us to imagine. The pleasure afforded by such artworks arises from our meta-response to what is portrayed. The unpleasant emotions and thoughts are ineliminably involved but, through their appositeness to the events portrayed, give rise to a higher order pleasure. For example Bacon's horrific, masked, stunted and smeared grotesque figures are unpleasant. The pleasure does not lie in his vision of people as inherently corrupted and rotten. Rather, we derive pleasure from the fact that we are repulsed by it. We do not take pleasure in what is intrinsically unpleasant, but we may take pleasure from the appropriateness of our reaction to what is represented.

However, yet again, the unpleasant emotions which are central to tragedy and horror stories are considered to be unfortunate pre-requisites for the real source of pleasure. If this were so, then presumably we would have to make sure we were in a psychologically robust state in order to undergo

⁹ Aristotle, *On The Art of Poetry*, in *Classical Literary Criticism*, tr. T.S. Dorsch, (London: Penguin, 1965), Chapter 6, p. 39.

¹⁰ Susan Feagin, "The Pleasures of Tragedy", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1983, pp. 95-104 and Jerrold Levinson, "Pleasure and the Value of Works of Art", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 1992, p. 300.

the unfortunate requirements which enable us to achieve such higher order pleasure. Yet, going to watch tragedies or horror movies requires no such steeling of one's self. Furthermore, we do not enjoy unpleasant thoughts and emotions just because they confirm our responses as appropriate. Moreover, as Berys Gaut argues, our delight cannot be explained away in terms of our being able to control where our thoughts and emotions are directed.¹¹ The racing car driver does not thrill to the bend he takes at 100 m.p.h. because it confirms to him that he is the kind of person who is afraid of dying. Indeed, the pleasure could not even derive, at least wholly, from the fact that he is in control and takes the bend well. After all, the racing car driver will still delight in his fear even when he thinks he may be losing control and slipping the curve. Rather, his delight consists precisely in his feeling the fear as he takes the curve. That is, his very feeling of fear is partly constitutive of his enjoyment of racing.¹² Similarly, our delight at the fear we feel does not arise because it confirms the kind of person we are. Moreover, it does not arise because we control the direction of our thoughts and feelings. Rather, it consists in the feeling of fear itself. This explains why it is that we often find it hardest to look away when the film or play is at its most horrific. The unpleasant emotions themselves actually afford us a peculiar kind of pleasure.

It is important to realise that the recognition that emotions such as fear may be pleasurable, need not involve the claim that their unpleasantness is merely a contingent matter.¹³ Rather, it is constitutive of feeling fear that it is typically an unpleasant feeling to have. One is typically afraid of something because it is threatening or nasty and this is usually enough for our appropriate emotional reactions regarding them to be themselves unpleasant.

There are certain ideal human standards by virtue of which we find certain things to be constitutively pleasurable or not and which thus, typically, give rise to enjoyable feelings or feelings of displeasure. Certain tastes or sensations are pleasurable as such under standard conditions. In normal cases where someone fails, say, to delight in quenching their thirst or in being reunited with a friend we look for an explanation. If the failure to derive pleasure from such cases is beyond the standard limits of taste or desire variation, then it must be explained in terms of the subject's divergence from our norms of desire. However, in secondary cases, where we can inhibit or modify the standard conditions through interference or convention, then sensations which are typically unpleasant may become pleasant and vice versa.¹⁴ Thus, as Berys Gaut suggests, our emotions, in this case negative ones, may constitutively

¹¹ Berys Gaut, "The Paradox of Horror", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 1993, pp. 333-345.

¹² See Joe Simpson, *Touching The Void* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988), for a description of the dangers of mountaineering in similar terms.

¹³ Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990). Chapter 7. pp. 251, 252, 256 makes this claim.

¹⁴ See Alasdair MacIntyre's "Pleasure as a Reason for Action" in his *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (London: Duckworth, 1971), pp. 173-190.

include negative evaluative thoughts, are individuated according to their formal objects and yet be experienced as enjoyable. One retains a negative evaluation of the emotion's object whilst experiencing it as pleasant.

The context of art enables unpleasant events and objects to be represented and contemplated in the knowledge that the rules which typically guide our behaviour towards such things can be suspended, allowing us to derive pleasure from our experience of them through art. This also holds true for multifarious other activities ranging from video games and roller coaster rides to mountaineering. One of the attractions of sadomasochism is that it involves controlled ritualistic role play enabling people to engage in and enjoy activities which, outside such a controlled artificial context, would both be highly dangerous and socially threatening. Thus we now have a sound explanation of how dangerous activities, works of horror and even works of tragedy can afford pleasurable experiences. That is, we may enjoy being scared witless by *Alien* or entertaining Bacon's brutal vision of the human condition. People who do all sorts of things, from fighting to motor racing, may enjoy the thrill of fear. Thus unpleasant features, characters or states of affairs may afford pleasure in art. They cannot be wholly explained away as unfortunate by-products of something else we take pleasure in. Rather they may give us pleasure directly in our engagement with the artwork. Therefore the pleasure account of art holds good. The question now is, what sort of pleasure?

To make an artwork usually involves skilfully crafting and constructing an object which affords pleasure both in and resultant from our engagement with it. The intuition that art should be linked with questions of skill arises from recognising that artworks are typically unique objects. Artistic skill goes above and beyond the merely rule governed activity, constructively adapting the material, conventions and subject matter to achieve an artistic purpose. Part of the pleasures an artwork may afford us lies in our appreciation of the artistry involved. Yet what is the skill for? After all, mass produced objects may give us more pleasure than contemplating the skill of a draughtsman. Moreover, objects which conspicuously lack artistic skill may be artworks. For example, Duchamp's *Fountain* is hardly a result of skilled craftsmanship. Rather, we may value it for its intellectual jokiness and bravado. Conversely, artistically produced objects may fail to qualify as artworks. Artistic skill is the versatile or keen manipulation of materials and conventions in order to make art. We value skill as a part of the goal directed activity, rather than as the end point of it. After all, one may enjoy the exercise of many skills, from the wizardry of a sober George Best to the intellectual dexterity of a great philosopher. What we need to know, is what the artistry, where it is used, is directed towards.

Section 2: The Cult Of The Aesthetic Attitude.

Perhaps the most immediate candidate for the pleasures of art concerns aesthetic qualities, the primary paradigm of which is beauty. Much is made of our experience with artworks being essentially aesthetic, the idea has both a strong intellectual pedigree and an intuitive hold over us. Thus art's pleasures may be thought to arise from the perception of aesthetic qualities, which provoke a peculiar delight in us. One way of making sense of this idea, is in terms of an aesthetic attitude. That is, in order to appreciate a work's aesthetic features, we should take up a particular, appropriate attitude toward it. Thus, an object is conceived to be of value as art if and only if it affords pleasure in our engagement with it, where we bring an aesthetic attitude to bear upon it.

So what is distinctive of an aesthetic attitude? It cannot be mere detachment. We may distance ourselves from artworks in the sense that we do not conceive of ourselves as moving in the same world or spatio-temporal framework as those who are represented. Thus one does not attempt the impossible by intruding upon a performance of *Othello*. There may be some truth to Coleridge's 'willing suspension of disbelief', but this will concern our understanding of the structural status and constraints of storytelling. A matter which seems fundamentally unrelated to a distinctive attitude concerning the aesthetic.

Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* has spawned many conceptions of the aesthetic attitude, which is typically taken to be a disinterested delight in a work's aesthetic features. For Kant, the subject's feeling of pleasure in a judgement of taste is not linked determinately to a concept. The judgement of taste is non-cognitive and based upon the free play between the faculties of imagination and understanding in the experience, unsubordinated by a determinate concept. Thus one's contemplation of beauty in a pure judgement of taste, does not refer to conceptualised reality. Hence our pleasure and delight in a pure aesthetic judgement is disinterested with regard to the real existence of the object concerned. This is in contrast to our delight in what is merely agreeable, which is linked to desire and thus interest in the object's existence. Thus, Kant claims in the second moment, since the aesthetic experience does not result from an appeal to our particular interests, the judgement of taste grounds a universal claim.¹⁵

Disinterested delight legitimises one to claim similar assent from others with respect to the experience and judgement of beauty. The judgement is singular because there must be no reference to basic categories or general concepts. If one's judgement is influenced by particular inclinations and desires, then one has brought the object under a determinate concept and it cannot be a judgement of taste. For Kant, any personal interest in the delight deprives the judgement of taste of its impartiality and thus universality. Hence, it is confused to muddle charm or emotion with beauty. The pure judgement of taste

¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique Of Judgement*, tr. J. C. Meredith, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), Book I Analytic of the Beautiful, Second Moment: Of The Judgement Of Taste; Moment of Quantity, Section 9, p. 58.

is one where the pleasure lies in an object's finality of form.¹⁶ That is, our experience with the object, which gives rise to the judgement of taste, relates to its formal qualities. If the work is aesthetically pleasing, this is because its qualities promotes the harmonious inter-play of imagination and understanding.

Thus in appreciating a Degas' nude, if the judgement is to be pure, one must disengage oneself from concerns which involve lustful desires and an interest in the existence of what is portrayed. Kant reinforces the necessity of such disinterest by affirming that beauty, and thus the pure judgement of taste, has no concern with what is useful.¹⁷ Where judging the beauty of something involves bringing the object under a determinate concept, then the beauty is dependent and thus the judgement impure:

"the beauty of a man...presupposes a concept of the end that defines what the thing has to be, and consequently a concept of its perfection; and is therefore merely appendant beauty."¹⁸

However, it is by virtue of the judgement being disinterested and thus presupposing our common sense, grounded upon our human faculties of imagination and understanding, that we may claim that everyone ought to agree with our judgement of taste.¹⁹ This is, for Kant, what constitutes a judgement being aesthetic and an object beautiful. The strong aesthetic conception of Kant's thesis stems from aspects of German Romanticism and was most strongly advocated this century by Edward Bullough, in terms of psychical distance. Bullough argues that, by a strong effort of will, one must abstract from the stimulus object our associated personal practical ends or needs. Hence the threatening terror of a sea fog can become a source of enjoyment or delight. Psychical distance is thought of as akin to a new illuminating light upon familiar objects:

"an impression which we experience sometimes in instants of direst extremity, when our practical interest snaps like a wire from sheer over-tension, and we watch the consummation of some impending catastrophe with the marvelling concern of a mere spectator."²⁰

¹⁶ *ibid.*, Third Moment: Of Judgements Of Taste: Moment Of The *Relation* Of The Ends Brought Under Review In Such Judgements, Section 13, p. 65.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, Section 15, pp. 69 - 71.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, Section 16, p. 73.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, Fourth Moment, Of The Judgement of Taste: Moment Of The Modality Of The Delight In The Object, pp. 81-85.

²⁰ Edward Bullough, "Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle" in P. A. Werhane (ed.), *Philosophical Issues in Art* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1984), p. 393.

Bullough allows that personal experience and associations may enhance one's appreciation of the object. However, this is only so where psychological distance is maintained and not broken down under the weight of personal resonances, as may be the case with a jealous husband watching *Othello*. Similarly, Bullough argues, the practical activities of criticism are incompatible with the requisite distanced attitude. It is only by switching between the demands of the two, that the critic can hope to both appreciate and criticise the artwork.

What then is there to the notion of distance which is distinctive and aesthetically significant? Perhaps the key lies in a proper understanding of the notion of disinterestedness. Kant held that to be disinterested is to be unconcerned with the use, purpose or end of the object which is regarded aesthetically. Thus aesthetic contemplation of the object and its form is independent of any concerns, other than with its phenomenal qualities or appearance. Therefore any interest in the existence of what is portrayed in a work of art is precluded in an aesthetic judgement. The point of aesthetic engagement is the appreciation of sensible form unconstrained by determinate cognitive, moral or other concerns. The aesthetic attitude, being disinterested, is a particular form of attending which makes this possible. Hence it is unreasonable, because impossible, to engage with a particular work for the sake of improved historical understanding and, concomitantly, to expect an aesthetic reward. To use an artwork for some ulterior non-aesthetic purpose, is to fail to treat the work as art. An artwork cannot be engaged with aesthetically, whilst one has an ulterior interest foregrounded in one's engagement with it.

Gestalt psychology may be adduced to support the case for an aesthetic attitude. The core idea is that there are different modes of attending to things. For example, the famous duck-rabbit drawing can be seen either as a rabbit's head or a duck's. Thus, the dawning of different aspects may be subject to the influence of one's will.²¹ Similarly, taking up an aesthetic attitude toward something, distancing oneself from one's interests and concerns, may similarly be a matter of will. The aesthetic attitude is thus a particular and peculiar way of regarding the world, applicable to virtually everything. Furthermore, as a distinct mode of attending, it may be switched on and off at will. One may be able to aesthetically appreciate appearances as diverse as the beauty of Snowdonia, the colour and pattern of a dying accident victim's blood or the works of Kandinsky and Klee.

One might be tempted to suppose the aesthetic attitude is concerned with form alone, uninterested in the work's or world's content. Indeed, just such an assumption underlies Clive Bell's dismissal of a work's cognitive content as irrelevant. Bell proudly coined the term 'significant form', for which he gave no sustained argument, and presumed aesthetic engagement must be understood as solely

²¹ See Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), IIxi, pp. 194-195.

sensible. Thus Bell managed to add a normative drive to twentieth century visual art's abstraction from content toward purity of form. For Bell aspects of form constitute a work's aesthetic features, which can only be appreciated by taking up the appropriate aesthetic stance. That is, disinterested with regard to the purpose or content of the work.²² Thus one is free to be absorbed by and enjoy the positive aesthetic features of the artwork.

However, such a crude account of the aesthetic attitude sails past Kant's subtleties only to founder upon stock objections. Firstly, if we are supposed to respond to 'significant form', separable from content, it is unclear how beautiful aspects of, for example, nature are distinct from artworks. If the mode of aesthetic attention can be brought to bear fruitfully upon other aspects of the world, then what is so peculiarly delightful about artworks? Indeed, why, in order to appreciate an artwork, must one be disinterested in such a radical manner? After all, do we not usually engage with artworks or derive pleasure from them in part because of what they depict. Their various characters, themes and stories are surely of proper interest to us? It is precisely in their representation of aspects of the world, that artworks typically differ from nature. We typically attend to artworks because of what and how a work represents something may capture our imagination, involve our emotions or stimulate thought about the object with which it is concerned.

Conversely, an artist such as Renoir may paint a particular model precisely because he desires her. Yet his portrait of may be immensely aesthetically rewarding. Indeed, it is impossible to be wholly disinterested in Bell's coarse sense, when engaging with and judging artworks. The claims of the strong thesis falsely presuppose that the aesthetic attitude involves a complete separation of form and content, engaging solely with form, and the false separation of art from life. Aesthetic features and form cannot be apprehended or cognised independently of their content and embodiment. As Gombrich has argued, a picture cannot merely be 'read off' the surface, abstracting form from content, for the spectator must necessarily make a cognitive or imaginative contribution.²³ In perceiving and engaging with an object, one is already necessarily conceptualising and categorising reality.²⁴ Therefore, we cannot be so radically disinterested as to wholly disregard a work's content.

Michael Baxandall's study of fifteenth century Italy, through showing how Renaissance man matched his concepts with pictorial style, emphasises the centrality of cognitive style.²⁵ Form is necessarily not independent of content, they are inseparable. The particular way colours have been worked and juxtaposed is significant for what the work is doing, the shaping partly constitutes the

²² Clive Bell, *Art*, 2nd ed., (London: Chatto and Windus, 1915), p. 12.

²³ E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1977), Part III: The Beholder's Share pp. 154 - 244.

²⁴ R. L. Gregory, *Eye and Brain*, 3rd ed., (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), Chapter 10

²⁵ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), Chapter II, Section 3, pp. 36-40.

content and the content guides the shaping. Thus our conceptual categories are significant even with regard to perceptual representation. Far from abstracting away all our human interests, artworks typically concern and engage with them. Furthermore, if we respond with delight to the way something has been represented, part of our response depends upon what it is we take to be represented. For example, the delight Turner's *Burial at Sea* affords is not merely a matter of the arrangement of lines and colours. It arises, in part, from our recognition that the way the colours and lines are manipulated intimate the shifting reflections, depths, luminous light and threat that one might encounter at sea. Our aesthetic appreciation involves understanding that Turner's particular working of line, colour and texture is appropriate to the content: representing a ship burning out at sea. It is a fallacy to think the pursuit of aesthetic pleasure involves formal purity, divested of content. The aesthetic attitude cannot consist in abstracting the 'superfluities' of content from a work to engage with the underlying 'significant form.' The search for pure form might be historically useful in explaining the attempt to strip bare the methods of construction, but it is necessarily inadequate to the very value and point of such construction in the first place.

A more sophisticated conception, whilst still holding the aesthetic attitude is a distinct mode of engagement required to appreciate aesthetic features, can allow an informing interest in the work's content. That is, what is depicted may inter-relate with and thus effect the value of the work's aesthetic features.²⁶ Thus one can aesthetically appreciate the curve of a tree trunk and its branches, seeing in it the lean curve of a lithe body and arms. Yet, all the while, one is conscious of it as a swaying tree and the respective thoughts or feelings in one's contemplation shape and modify each other. Our aesthetic appreciation depends upon the recognition that the object concerned is a tree and the thought that it is body like. Even in the most impressionistic cases, we necessarily bring our concepts and categorisations of the world into play. Yet, if this is so, how is the distinction to be drawn between the aesthetic mode of attending and other modes?

The fundamental problem, as George Dickie has pointed out, is that typically the distinction is drawn along motivational lines.²⁷ Dickie argues that the aesthetic attitude is essentially a myth that has outplayed its theoretical usefulness. Of course, we may distinguish the ways we may approach an artwork. Thus the purpose appears to define the attitude. Namely, to engage with the object for its aesthetic value without any other ulterior motive, such as study for examinations, historical interest or one's personal curiosity regarding a particular actress. Therefore, Dickie argues, the aesthetic attitude is merely an ordinary act of attending done on a particular basis. It is a motivational distinction, rather than a perceptual one grounded upon a distinctive type of interest.

²⁶ Jerome Stolnitz, "The Actualities of Non-Aesthetic Experience" in M. Mitias (ed.), *Possibility of the Aesthetic Experience* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), pp. 27-46.

²⁷ George Dickie, "The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1964, pp. 56-65.

This, Dickie claims, explains why we can appropriately treat and enjoy something as art, independently of our motivation for engaging with it in the first place. For example, consider two people who both go to a music concert. One of them goes because he is studying the piece being performed for an examination. Both people can still enjoy the piece as music, independently of the reasons they came to sit in their seats. Thus studying a particular play for A-level does not preclude one from appropriately engaging with and enjoying a performance. Indeed the study may aid one's understanding and appreciation of the play, whilst the enhanced enjoyment may make sense of and spur one on to further study. Coming to an artwork for particular reasons need not adversely influence one's engagement and may even serve to enhance it. Another interesting case is that of film. Many people go to see films without presuming a particular attitude or even motivation is required in order to properly enjoy them. Indeed, the most vital art forms are often those which pervade everyday life and are treated with robustness, as the novel was in the nineteenth century.

If the aesthetic attitude is distinguished by the purpose of our engagement with a work, then it cannot go through to the engagement itself. Divergent reasons for a particular action or regard do not entail qualitatively different acts or forms of regard. The metaphorical requirement to take up an aesthetic attitude can only signify that we must focus our attention upon the work in question, and the inter-relation of the parts to the whole, if we are to enjoy it as art. Thus for an object to qualify as an artwork it must only repay focused attention. Although the object of attention may possess distinctively aesthetic features, the attention itself is not distinctively aesthetic. Indeed, one's absorption in attending to a particular work, suggests that a close concern with cognitive, moral and other concerns serves to heighten our interest and engagement. To be disinterested is only to attend from a certain kind of motive. For Dickie, whatever the motive, the form of attending itself remains the same. Thus a critic may be attending to a work in order to produce his newspaper piece the next day. His motivation, and perhaps his search for reasons for his evaluation, may be different from that of the average gallery goer. However, the form of his attending is not. The only difference there could be is the degree or closeness with which he is attending. The aesthetic attitude cannot refer to a distinct way of attending, Dickie claims, but is merely elliptical for ordinary attending done for a particular reason. Although grounded in one's interest in aesthetic features, the aesthetic attitude can only amount to focused attention.

Denying the distinctness of the aesthetic attitude undercuts arguments which suggest art's aesthetic value is independent of cognitive values and concerns. However, Dickie goes too far in suggesting there is nothing at all distinctive about the aesthetic attitude. The cult of the aesthetic attitude arose, in part, because of the recognition that there may be a right and wrong way of looking at something as art. A glimpse of Dickie's mistake lies in his complete separation between the nature of the act and the motive, purpose or intention in engaging with the artwork. One only needs to look at certain cases of focused attending to realise that something distinctive may be going on after all.

Take three examples of attention concerning a production of Richard III; a) attending for its historical context, to extract historical information and understanding. b) attending to the production for its entertaining narrative, wondering what will happen next, who will triumph and so on. c) attending to the production for its aesthetic value and reward, an appreciation of the structure of the set, the musicality of the language and so on. I am not saying that these three cases are mutually incompatible. Indeed, they typically inter-relate. However, it is possible to have the first two cases without the third. Therefore focused attention must be insufficient to pick out the form of attending to a work required to find it aesthetically rewarding. Thus there is something in the aesthetic attitude to be salvaged. Although the difference is more a question of degree than type, nonetheless one can attend in a manner which foregrounds aesthetic features. If we turn our minds back to Kant's conception of disinterestedness, the delight taken in the object was not a form of attention constrained by purpose or motive. Thus, though our engagement may be motivated by interested desires, we may still take disinterested pleasure in it. Independently of the connection between the object and what we desire or strive for, we can take pleasure from our engagement with the work alone.²⁸

However, though there may be a weak form of aesthetic attention, its satisfaction cannot provide the primary value of art. What is often forgotten when arguing about the aesthetic attitude is that, at least for Kant and the early German Romantics, the paradigm case for rewarding aesthetic attention was nature. Thus, as a general form of attention brought to bear upon the world, everything, from aspects of nature to artworks and everyday objects, may repay aesthetic attention. Though it may explain certain pleasures in art, the aesthetic attitude is not particular to or distinctive of art.

Yet surely the practice of art evolved through its paradigmatic concern with beauty and aesthetic features? What may be distinctive of art is how it promotes aesthetic value, in ways which nature could not. Thus instead of relying upon the aesthetic attitude, the aesthetic thesis may be better construed in terms of artistically worked aesthetic properties. Thus Monroe Beardsley has argued from the artwork as an autonomous object to the conclusion that only the non-referential features of a work are significant in terms of value. His three primary criteria of formal unity, complexity and intensity are all positively evaluative in a weak sense and constitute the aesthetic value of the work. These general principles are further filled out by lower level properties, such as delicacy or elegance.²⁹ Thus art's value is rendered distinct.

The possible media, shaping and content of artworks provides a proliferation of distinct aesthetic pleasures, which nature or everyday objects cannot afford. For example, at a simple level

²⁸ According to Kant, this would derive from the free play of the imagination and understanding that occurs in relation to the object. See Michael McGhee, "A Fat Worm of Error?", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1991, pp. 222-229, and Nick Zangwill, "UnKantian Notions of Disinterest", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 1992, pp. 149-152.

²⁹ Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958), Section 24, pp. 456-470.

Barnett Newman's flatly applied colours gain in aesthetic power when entitled *Adam*. At a more complicated level, the beauty of Michelangelo's *The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise* is enhanced by the work's imagery. Furthermore, the aesthetic power of a work depends, in part, upon what the work is being used to represent. After all, the artistically appropriate rendering of a whim will prove less aesthetically valuable than the appropriate artistic representation of a fundamental desire, interest or value. The inter-relation between how something is expressed and what is expressed can promote or diminish a work's aesthetic value. Thus Beardsley does not exclude cognitive content as necessarily superfluous to the work as art. Nevertheless, cognitive significance is held to be valuable only to the extent it promotes the value of the work's aesthetic features. that is, it is only of instrumental value in so far as it promotes the primary aesthetic criteria of unity, complexity and intensity.

Beardsley's attempt to allow for the contextual variance of a feature's value, whilst striving to maintain that unity, complexity and intensity are objectively valuable, general and unvarying is problematic. Beardsley claims that only the secondary evaluative principles are contextually dependent. Yet, these secondary principles are always to be explained and subsumed by the general and strongly objective primary criteria. Whilst the secondary critical criteria are subordinate and conditional, the primary criteria "always contribute positively to the value of a work, in so far as they are present. And their absence is always a deficiency, however it may be made up in other ways."³⁰ The basic explanation then is that in a work, such as *King Lear*, a comic scene may add value or detract from it. However, this depends upon the comic scene's relation to some primary feature, such as dramatic intensity, to which it is detracting from or adding to.

However, the specific, context variant value of Beardsley's secondary features, from the more general features, such as gracefulness, elegance and comedic aspects, to highly specific features, such as the fine brushwork, striking imagery or tonal structure, serves only to highlight the necessary inter-relations between what is represented, the way it is represented and the work's resultant value. The application and value of the various secondary features may rival each other. For example, whether a work is graceful or not may compete with whether it possess a vital power or intensity. Competition, conflict and trade-offs at the level of secondary principles suggests this may be true at the primary level. If raw power conflicts with gracefulness or comedy then it seems that a work's intensity can only be increased at the expense of a work's complexity. If conflict at the primary level is due to conflict at the secondary level, then it is likely that the contextual variation of features and value seeps upwards too. thus, for example, a work which possesses intensity may do so at the expense of unity and complexity. Thus, it may be, that the intensity the work possesses is even disvaluable. That is, the

³⁰ Monroe Beardsley, "On The Generality of Critical Reasons", *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LIX, No. 18, 1962, pp. 477-486.

ugliness, power and lack of subtlety may all add up to the work's intensity and constitute its disvalue as art.

As substantive principles, the three primary criteria are cashed out in terms of secondary principles, which themselves conflict, trade-off each other and are thus contextually variant. This contextual variation rises upward, necessarily infecting his primary criteria. Given this, the automatic ascription of positive value to his primary aesthetic criteria looks highly dubious. Indeed, incoherence, simplicity or ugliness of expression or conception (as opposed to unity, intensity and complexity), may be of positive value in certain cases. Hence works as various as *Last Year at Marienbad*, *Gorecki's 3rd Symphony* and Francis Bacon's *Crucifixion Triptych* are valued as art primarily for these very reasons. Frank Sibley's attempt to argue for and list positive aesthetic qualities is a trivial escape for Beardsley.³¹ The mere fact that certain properties have inherent aesthetic merit does not entail that the addition of such a property to a work will improve its value as a whole. The resultant interaction of aesthetic features may detract from the work's value as art. As Sibley points out, one good making feature can undermine others.

Even more problematic for Beardsley is his conception of the value of cognitive elements in art. Beardsley argues they only matter in so far as they contribute to his primary aesthetic qualities of unity, complexity and intensity. Effectively, Beardsley's is an error theory regarding cognitive elements in art. They are an unfortunate by-product in artworks and we do not, properly speaking, respond to cognitive value in art. Essentially on this conception we have a strong divide between art, concerned with artistically worked aesthetic features, and commercial or propagandist products which serve merely to entertain or communicate a given message.

The artistic maximisation of aesthetic worth is, *qua* art, an end in itself. As art a work may have cognitive content, but can only be relevant to the extent it maximises aesthetic features. For example, the simplicity of encapsulation may be aesthetically valuable, whether in an equation, philosophical axiom or artwork. Furthermore, cognitive content may maximise the aesthetic value of a non-cognitive aesthetic feature. Thus relevant knowledge or symbolism may enhance aesthetic features. For example, religious symbolism may enhance the aesthetic value of a portrait or our knowledge of chaos theory may lend significance to the aesthetic beauty of the Mandelbrot set. Nevertheless, the realm of the aesthetic is conceived as fundamentally separate from and autonomous with regard to other spheres of life, whether commercial, moral or political. By contrast, everyday, commercial culture may be regarded as primarily concerned with the communication of something. Where cognitive concerns predominate, whether it be to communicate a particular message or merely to entertain, everyday culture cannot hope to rise to the level of art.³² It is on this basis, Roger Scruton

³¹ Frank Sibley, "General Criteria and Reasons in Aesthetics" in J. Fisher (ed.), *Essays on Aesthetics: Perspectives on the Work of Monroe Beardsley* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), pp. 3-20.

³² See "Art, Education and Politics: An Interview with Roger Scruton", *Cogito*, Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 1-5.

argues, that modernist art was bound to fail. Modernism's failure, on this conception, lies in its promotion of function above form. That is, it placed the goal and purpose of building above the promotion of aesthetic features.³³ Art has as its autonomous goal the promotion of aesthetic values, to which all other considerations are subservient.

However, an inkling of the problems here arises when one considers how such a strict divide is out of step with the actual development of art. Far from being independent of non-aesthetic purposes, art has typically been produced to serve a variety of purposes, whether the form of patronage be religious, public, private or commercial. After all the flattery, propaganda and materialism which they served did not prevent Reynolds, Eisenstein or Hollywood from producing art. Typically Greek, Gothic and Georgian architecture all had an end or goal of serving practical needs such as housing, places for worship, civic monuments and so on. Thus whether a work of art is produced or not need not depend upon whether the primary purpose of creation is the promotion of artistically worked aesthetic features or the promotion of moral insight, religious worship or housing Lloyd's Insurance Brokers.

More significantly, we sometimes value cognitive aspects of artworks even where they do not maximise, and might even diminish, the work's aesthetic value. The value of *Last Year at Marienbad* lies in the very frustration of one's attempt to engage with it, serving to foreground cognitive significance through narrative incoherence. Another example is Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. The whole point is dependent upon the spectator realising both that the thing represented is a pipe and yet, since it is a painting, that it is not. If it were just a question of aesthetic effect, the title would be irrelevant. In actuality, it is a constitutive part of the necessary cognitive content of the work. Similarly, the value of Duchamp's work lies principally in the idea or thought at work, rather than how the object looks.³⁴ To conceive of them as artworks because of their incidental aesthetic features is to miss their point and value as art. This is not to suggest that an artwork is thus equivalent to every other form of discourse which includes cognitive content. This would be to assimilate, falsely, artworks to mere illustrations, sermons or works of philosophy. Art manipulates content in order to promote our pleasure in engaging with it. Thus whether a work is of value as art is not merely dependent upon cognitive features but upon the way in which these cognitive aspects are manifested. Hence much propaganda, though attempting to be art, fails.

³³ See Roger Scruton, "Aesthetic Education and Design", *The Aesthetic Understanding* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1983), pp. 189-221.

³⁴ Timothy Binkley, "Piece: Contra Aesthetics" in J. Margolis (ed.), *Philosophy Looks At The Arts* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), pp. 25-44. Recognition of this point, however, does not entail, as Binkley thinks it does, that arthood is determined by cultural context or institutionally.

Ideas cannot be wholly assimilated to aesthetic features, if the term 'aesthetic' is not to be rendered vacuous.³⁵ To say that anything and everything which is of value in artworks is aesthetic is to evacuate all meaning from the term. The term 'aesthetic' has come to us from Baumgarten, refracted through German Romanticism, to delineate features which sensibly please us independently of, or aside from, cognitive and moral properties. To stipulate cognitive properties are aesthetic is to emasculate the term, falsely conflating it with the artistically worked features of artworks. Moreover, nature would then have to be conceived as being deprived of the main 'aesthetic' features in art. It would make no sense under such a radically revised notion to describe nature as aesthetic, a travesty given that nature was originally the paradigmatic case of the aesthetic. It is surely better to keep the evolved use of the term which has definite, meaningful application to both nature and art, and recognise that artistic features are not wholly reducible to aesthetic ones.

Furthermore, the dominance of an aesthetic response to an artwork may also be singularly inappropriate and inadequate to the nature of what is depicted. For example, the aesthetic contemplation of Andrea Mantegna's *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* with its piercing arrows and gushing blood is aesthetically rewarding. Yet, without the horror, wonder and sympathy constitutive of our moral and perhaps religious reaction to what is portrayed, our engagement with the work remains inadequate. The aesthetic enjoyment derived from John Singer Sargent's representation of a configuration of gassed humans is an inadequate response to their deaths as depicted. Similarly, the ugly brutality of Francis Bacon's *Reclining Person with Hypodermic Syringe* may be highly aesthetically disvaluable. If someone were to say the cognitive aspects of *The Accused* were irrelevant to the film's value as art, we would rightly think they were missing the point. It is not merely that the cognitive content of artworks may be central to them as art. Rather, the value of an artwork's content is not reducible to the extent it promotes aesthetic value. The value of an artwork may lie in its meaningful engagement with significant questions about the way the world is and the way we are or could be.

Beardsley's argument that art cannot have cognitive value because good artworks often manifest contradictory and incompatible world views is flawed.³⁶ Of course, Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things* explicate and manifest opposed metaphysical understandings of the world, Christian and pagan respectively. Furthermore, their presumed understandings of the world cannot both be sound, at least in all respects. Yet, we respond to cognitive features in their own right and appreciate them as valuable to a work *qua* art, even where this may detract from a work's aesthetic value. Moreover, truth is only one aspect or part of cognitive value. Thus although the nature

³⁵ Classic cases of this elision are to be found in George Dickie's *Evaluating Art* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), and Ron Bontekoe and Jamie Crooks' "The Inter-relationship of Moral and Aesthetic Excellence", *British Journal of Aesthetics* Vol. 32, No. 3, 1992 pp. 209-220.

³⁶ Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958), Section 23, pp. 426-429.

of the flaw may justifiably detract from the work's value as art, we can and do value works we think are plainly wrong in their understanding of the world. Cognitive value is not straightforwardly determined by or a function of truth narrowly construed. If something is interesting or original, that also contributes to cognitive excellence. After all, most philosophical works we value may be contradictory in various respects. Yet, nevertheless, they may be of great value as philosophical works.

The aesthetic is not an autonomous realm, subordinating all other considerations. Most art does not merely aim at the artistic working and production of aesthetic features but usually has some other goal; to communicate something, entertain, engage the imagination. It may be as simple and as difficult as attempting to stretch our understanding of an artistic medium. For example, we may value originality independently of aesthetic concerns. Thus a work may be valued because of its relation to a particular artistic tradition in opening up new possibilities and even great art can be aesthetically disvaluable. Aesthetic value contributes to the value of art but art is not exhausted by it. With different works and forms of art, focusing primarily upon a work's aesthetic features may be more or less appropriate. Thus an openness to possible aesthetic features and their import is required. The seed of truth in the aesthetic account is that it is a primary characteristic of art that it possesses positive aesthetic features. After all, a chair or tapestry is not usually considered art unless it has positive aesthetic features to a high degree. But in art far more is involved than mere concern with aesthetic properties. There is also a direct concern with and for cognitive content. Aesthetic properties, although properly valued in art, are not what this cultural practice is primarily about. Hence, to treat a work appropriately as art may not involve taking up an aesthetic attitude toward it at all.

Section 3: Expressivism.

The recognition that the way something is represented is as important as what is represented, may suggest that art's primary pleasures are afforded through a work's expressive aspects. Art as expression has a distinguished pedigree from Kant through Romanticism to the twentieth century, typically conceiving of art as giving expressive form to our ideas or the venting of our emotions. Leo Tolstoy argued that art aims instrumentally to produce a sense of spiritual union, based upon the artist's intentional arousal of his felt emotions in the spectators:

"Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings and also experience them."³⁷

³⁷ Leo Tolstoy, tr. A. Maude, *What is Art?* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), Chapter 5, p. 51.

Although for Tolstoy only a few moral and religious emotions are worthy of communication, we will consider his argument as one generally concerned with instrumental expression. Expression here is not conceived merely as an emotional outpouring, but is intentionally directed toward someone. Tolstoy's instrumentalist conception tends to disregard the artworks themselves. His concern with art is only as an expressive means of communicating the artist's feelings to the spectator. Art as expressive communication certainly seems plausible, providing an explanation of both the artist's guiding purpose and the point of spectatorial engagement. However, Tolstoy's crude causalism entails, falsely, that a spectator must be moved by the artist's felt emotions. Yet, artworks do not always move the spectator. We may contemplate an artwork, recognise what is expressed and move on unaffected, without laughing or bursting into tears. We can see sadness is expressed, without ourselves feeling sad.

However, the recognition of a work's expressive aspect apart from one's particular emotional reaction does not entail there is no conceptual link. For this kind of case cannot generalise out across our engagement with art. To know in a particular individual case that what is expressed is sad, one must know that it is typically appropriate to react to such a state of affairs or portrayal in a certain way, for example with sympathy. That is, I must know vicariously that I ought to be sad, by virtue of my typical and apt responses to other such states of affairs or expressive features. Yet even where we do feel in our response to the artwork, we do not necessarily manifest the relevant emotions while engaging with the artwork. After all, our understanding of art, the relevant conventions and the social context in the gallery may inhibit the evidencing of one's inner emotional states.

Furthermore, the emotion appropriately aroused may not be identical with the emotional state of the artist. The spectator's emotions may respond to and thus be different from those expressed in the work. For example, the sense of utter loneliness and melancholic isolation expressed in Mario Sironi's *Solitude* may not appropriately evoke these feelings in ourselves, but, rather, evoke feelings of sympathy. Conversely, the artist may himself have been in a different emotional state from the one expressed in the work. For example, Sironi may have been joyful and contented when he painted *Solitude*. That is, what is being expressed may be distinct from what is felt by either the artist or the spectator. The point is that though I make a recognisably brutal gesture or work, it is not a necessary condition of the gesture or work's being violent that I am, though this may add to its force and piquancy.³⁸ Thus an artwork cannot be a neutral, transparent vehicle for accessing the artist's feelings. Rather, the various media, styles, conventions and way they are manipulated constitute and shape what the artwork expresses in particular and distinct ways.

³⁸ Presumably it was the recognition of this fact which underlay Olivier's comment to Dustin Hoffman, to the effect that Hoffman could always try acting. Indeed, being a method actor may not just facilitate but can also hinder an expressive performance, as Daniel Day-Lewis discovered when his lead role in *Hamlet* induced a nervous breakdown.

R. G. Collingwood has articulated a more sophisticated variation of the Romantic paradigm, distinguishing the expression of emotion from its arousal.³⁹ He dismisses the idea that art proper has the function of generating emotions, as it does on Tolstoy's crude arousal theory. Rather, he argues, art is not to be conceived as a means to any end, whether that of arousing emotion or any other. For Collingwood, the artwork, as a creation of the artist's imagination, inheres in his mind. It is an idea which is wholly independent of the object through which it is to be communicated. Thus the artefact produced is only a material springboard for the audience to recreate the same imaginative object. Producing an artwork, Collingwood argues, is not a matter of manipulating various materials. Art, unlike craft, should not be conceived as a skill by virtue of which certain desired states are produced in the audience. The question of usefulness or psychological reaction is considered irrelevant to whether something is art.⁴⁰

The work takes shape only in its imaginative creation in the artist's mind, it is not pre-guided toward a particular end. This, Collingwood argues, shows why art and representation cannot be identified: representation is always conceived as a means to the end of re-evoking certain emotions for amusement's sake.⁴¹ Yet in Collingwood's general theory, both the material object and what is identified as the true artwork, what the artist has imagined, *are* a means to an end. The purpose of artistic creation and spectatorial engagement is, according to Collingwood, the expression of our feelings. Thus Collingwood is disingenuous: the grounds upon which he dismisses religious art, as having an overriding end, apply to his own conception.⁴² Thus, for Collingwood, art's significance lies in the creative expression of emotion.

Now, obviously, internal inconsistency in Collingwood's overall theory renders it problematic. Yet Collingwood's essential point, namely that art is primarily concerned with the expression of our emotions, may remain sound. Yet, his conception of artworks as essentially produced internal to the artist's mind is problematic. This renders the material object incidental and subsidiary.⁴³ The artefact is a work only in a secondary sense, by virtue of its relation to the mental work, and Collingwood's analogy to engineering plans is meant to illustrate how this can be so. The plans themselves are, he says, in the engineer's head, and the specifications serve merely to communicate the plan. The plans themselves do not require embodiment in order to be plans. When thinking about music as paradigmatic,

³⁹ R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938).

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, Book I, Chapter II, pp. 32-36.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, Chapter III, pp. 42-56.

⁴² *ibid.*, Chapters IV and V, pp. 57-104 and Book III, Chapter XV, p. 336, where Collingwood identifies the true end of art proper as the creative expression of our emotions.

⁴³ *ibid.*, Chapter VII, p. 130.

this may seem plausible enough, but transferred to painting the claim looks ridiculous. As Richard Wollheim argues, Collingwood fails to appreciate the type/token distinction:

“Works of art fall into two very different categories. Some, like poems or pieces of music, are types: others, like paintings, are particulars. This distinction is not explicitly recognised by Collingwood, and I should like to suggest that his indifference to it is responsible for some of the unjustified plausibility that attaches to it on a cursory reading.”⁴⁴

Artworks can't be appropriately conceived as mental scores prior to and independent of notation, i.e. merely as a means for the audience to reconstruct their own performance of the artwork. Firstly, Collingwood's recognition of the collaborative role of the audience in reconstructing the imaginative work renders his theory problematic.⁴⁵ If the true imagined artwork really is in the artist's head, how can what is imagined by the audience be the same artwork, given the various inevitable individual discrepancies in each one's imaginings? Indeed, surely they must then all be different works. Presumably the audience may strive, but cannot know, whether it is the artist's work they are engaging with or whether they are just making up their own. Secondly, Collingwood's analogy between artworks and plans fails even in the case of music. Musical harmonies, sound, cannot exist in one's head, rather it must be perceived. One's mind is not an internal processing room, containing five inner senses waiting for the imaginative reconstruction. What Collingwood fails to appreciate is that the artwork is constituted by the particular materials, forms and media out of which it is constructively fashioned by the artist. This entails that what the artist is attempting to express, will be given shape by and constituted in particular ways. Thus, contrary to Collingwood's conception, it is not wholly arbitrary that the sadness an artist expresses is expressed in paint rather than music, in an expressionist genre and so on. The form of expression, even the mere materiality of the paint, and the conventions manipulated, necessarily make a difference to what is expressed. As Peter Fuller suggests:

⁴⁴ Richard Wollheim, "On An Alleged Inconsistency in Collingwood's Aesthetic" in his *On Art and the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 256. For further explication of the type/token distinction see Richard Wollheim's *Art and its Objects* (Cambridge: Canto, Cambridge University Press, 1992), Sections 35-37, pp. 74-84.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, Book III, Chapter XIV, Section 5, pp. 311 - 314.

"Expression through painting is thus in itself a *specific material process*: indeed, it is only through this process that the artist's way of seeing, and beyond that of course his whole imaginative conception of his world, is made concretely visible to us."⁴⁶

What guides and constrains our imagination is the work itself, the performance or particular embodiment partly constitutes and shapes the nature of what is to be imagined. Thus a work cannot be completed in the artist's head. Moreover, the artist's original conception may progress or modify as he draws upon and develops his original idea. The artist himself may not know what ultimate shape the work will take until he himself comes to a stop, then, retrospectively, he will be able to see which elements led where, what he reacted to and why. The artist may have been capable of foreseeing all this, but not necessarily so. It is only in retrospect that the artist knows whether the work has turned out as he thought it would. The words on paper, the marks on canvas, are responded to and developed by the artist in the light of his idea. Thus, Collingwood wrongly severs expression from its material manifestation, which is partly constitutive of what is expressed. The expressive capacity of sound or movement depends upon the conventionalisation of everyday sound and movement. An understanding of how and why something expresses sadness, necessarily shapes our understanding of that sadness. Our imagination engages with, and the artist's transforms, the constituted artefact. Collingwood's idealism ultimately denies the significance of one's experience with the artwork itself.

Furthermore, Collingwood's theory renders every imagined expressive act, in principle, a work of art. Yet, we do not always take pleasure in or value as art the mere expression of emotions, thoughts and sensibilities. After all, what is expressed may itself be highly disvaluable. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* may be violently expressive, producing strong emotional reactions. Yet we do not necessarily take pleasure in having our emotional range extended in this way. Similarly, the 'V' sign may be forcefully expressive and clearly understood by all. Yet, its mere expressiveness does not qualify it for artwork status. Pleasure is not afforded by any expression or evocation of any emotion. Indeed, an intensely expressive work may be of disvalue as art precisely because of what is expressed or the way it is expressed.

The recognition of the important inter-relations between what is meant and the way it is expressed dictates that it is just as important that what is expressed is valuable. If how something is expressed is inseparable from and partly constitutive of what is expressed, then the worth of the work as art appears to rest just as much upon the value of what is said. For example, the expression of naive emotions mars the value of *David Copperfield* as art, rather than enhancing it. Some of Dickens' passages are almost unbearable in their sentimentality, giving expression to the crassest 'poor but

⁴⁶ Peter Fuller, *Seeing Through Berger* (London: The Claridge Press, 1988), p. 25. For a more philosophically sophisticated articulation of the same point see Michael Podro's "On Depiction And The Golden Calf" in A. Harrison (ed.), *Philosophy and the Visual Arts* (Boston: D. Reidel, 1987), pp. 3-22.

honest folk' sentiments. It is despite these expressive aspects, rather than because of them, that one enjoys Dickens' novel as art. These sentiments are disvaluable merely because they are expressed. If, however, these sentiments were meant as a reflection of how a particular character in the novel views the world, thus reflecting his simplistic outlook, then it would be a different matter. Thus in *Hard Times* the cold calculative and simplistic world view of Mr. Gradgrind is aptly expressed and revealed to be inadequate, thus enhancing the value of the novel as art. But in *David Copperfield* the sentimental, patronising view of the suffering and therefore virtuous poor is given expression as a sound appreciation of the world. Thus it is a key manifestation of the understanding motivating the work. In such a case, where the expression is inadequate to or at odds with what such people would be like, then rather than enhancing the value of the work as art the expression mars it.

It is a necessary part of an artwork being expressive that in the creation, engagement with and reaction to artworks our feelings are typically engaged. Emotions are not merely consequent upon but a constitutive part of our experience with artworks, and it is here, the expressivist argues, that the value of art lies. Thus art can be distinguished from philosophy or scientific theory, which are a matter of non-expressive propositional content. The semi-opaque nature of the particular art forms, genres and conventions necessarily shape the nature of the expression, some being more open to the expression of certain features than others. How something is expressed transforms, modifies and partly constitutes what is expressed and it is through the manipulation of the media, forms and genres of art that the nature of expression develops in art. Hence an expressive artwork constitutes much more than the propositional or cognitive content communicable in a paraphrase. Thus the expressive theorist claims to make sense of the fact that, in art, the way something is portrayed is as important as what is represented. That is, artworks, properly speaking, afford pleasure through their expressive shaping and communication of the object portrayed. Remove the expressive features of art and what was communicated is immediately impoverished and emasculated, reduced to mere cognitive paraphrase.

Yet, even then the expressivist can only capture an attenuated conception of art. Good artworks, ranging from Brechtian theatre to cubist portraits, may preclude the involvement of our emotions in engaging with them as art. It is not just that the cognitive content of artworks is central to them as art. Rather, the value of a work's cognitive content does not rest wholly upon the extent to which it enhances a work's expressive value. The appropriateness of the way something is expressed is not just a matter of harmony with what is being expressed. Rather, it is crucial to the pleasure we derive not only that concerns of expression and coherence are considered, but that the meaning and significance of what is portrayed is considered. A work's value cannot depend wholly upon the extent to which what is expressed coheres with the way it is expressed. For example, the artistic value of Marinetti's work, and futurism generally, is promoted by the inter-twining of their original pictorial style, expressing rapid, dynamic movement and their vision of the machine led future. Nevertheless, the pleasure we derive from these works as art is marred to the extent they express a Fascistic understanding of the

world: that is, a glorification of machines, technology, speed and a false aestheticization of war. The cognitive content of a work, as such, may mar or promote the delight we may properly take in it. This suggests, that we should look to the kind of cognitive value artworks afford, in order to explain the pleasures we take in art.

Section 4: Cognitivism.

Naturally enough, Monroe Beardsley has argued that any form of cognitivism must be false because either a work tells us about things, the world, which entails a referential function, or it does not, in which case the work cannot be about anything. If reference is a necessary condition for cognition, how can abstract works be art? For abstract art cannot refer to, let alone inform our perception of, the world.⁴⁷ Nelson Goodman responded by arguing reference is essential in art and that abstract art does so, at least by virtue of exemplification.⁴⁸ It may be protested that Goodman does not commit himself to an account of art's value. However, as Dickie has pointed out, Goodman in fact suggests an instrumentalist theory, for which art's value lies in the production of an experience based upon cognitive efficacy.⁴⁹

Goodman explicates the notion of exemplification using a swatch as an example. A swatch is a sample of cloth one would be shown in a tailor's outfitters. The sample is itself, and thus it exemplifies, the cloth from which a suit can be made. However, only certain properties of the suit material are exemplified. After all, not every property of the swatch is relevant to it as a sample. For example, the size and edging of the sample are redundant in terms of reference: they tell us nothing about the properties the suit will have. Conversely, the colour, pattern and constitution of the material do refer. Thus, Goodman argues, certain things can refer to others through exemplification, i.e. by virtue of possessing the self same properties. Abstract artworks are, he suggests, cases of self-exemplification. They exemplify the properties they themselves possess: that is, they are self-referring, both swatch and cloth. Indeed one of the defining features of a much wider range of post-modern art is often taken to be a high degree of playful self-awareness. Artworks are supposedly constantly engaged in self-referral at various levels. This is, of course, not a feature unique to postmodernism, as can be seen from

⁴⁷ Monroe Beardsley, "Languages of Art and Art Criticism", *Erkenntnis*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1978, pp. 95-118.

⁴⁸ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), and his "Reply to Beardsley", *Erkenntnis*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1978, pp. 169 - 173.

⁴⁹ George Dickie's observation is made in *Evaluating Art* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), Chapter 6, pp. 101-113. However, Dickie falsely attributes the notion that this is an aesthetic experience to Goodman. Nelson Goodman's remarks on value can be found in his *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), pp. 255-265, and "When is Art?" in *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), pp. 57-70.

Tristram Shandy or *Northanger Abbey*. Thus it is, that the cognitive features of a work, and self-exemplification in particular, are, it is argued by Goodman, constitutive of art's status and value.

But Goodman doesn't tell us how to establish which properties are self-exemplifying. Say one is looking at three indistinct rectangles of blue from the opposite end of an art gallery; a colour sample, a canvas, and a patch where the decorator has started to paint the wall.⁵⁰ Goodman's criteria don't explain why we should regard the painting as exemplifying the properties it possesses and thus referring whilst the painted wall does not. Exemplification cannot provide sufficient information to discriminate between these objects appropriately, thus it cannot be the central value of art. Goodman could reply that the relevant information depends upon appropriately understanding the context and practices of art. The conventions of art-making and art-reception establish which properties are self-exemplifying. Thus the context determines which properties are relevant or not, such as the weight of the frame, and thus the value of the work.

More significantly though, as Dickie goes on to argue, exemplification cannot be the only or ultimate arbiter of value. This is because over and above the process of exemplification, we value certain features more than others. Two abstracts similar in all respects except their colour may be valued differently: we have good reason to think that a work in meridian blue is of greater aesthetic value than one in drab, muddy brown.⁵¹ On Goodman's flawed analysis, both artworks would be accorded the same value. Yet though both works may self-exemplify, we would actually value one as art more because of the difference in aesthetic value. There is nothing in the nature of being a symbol and having reference, that precludes an artwork being of value independently of its referential relation. Beauty may be incidental to an icon's religious function, as a referent for contemplation. Yet its aesthetic features would certainly enhance its value as art. Furthermore, the aesthetic features may add to the cognitive value of the work, through symbolising and manifesting virtue in beauty. Thus, it may be disvaluable for an icon to render someone morally admirable aesthetically displeasing. Therefore, the mere process of reference does not exhaust cognitive value. After all, what is actually referred to and the way this is done so can and does affect the value of the work.

It might be thought that Goodman's cognitivism insufficiently captures the role of the emotions in art. Indeed, it seems unable to make any sense at all in our ascribing emotional predicates to artworks. However, it is typical of our discourse regarding art that we talk in terms of emotions, feelings and moods. For example, the pleasure afforded by horror films and tragedy is appropriately explained by our experiencing of fear, sadness or despair as pleasurable. However, Goodman would defend his claim by arguing that the emotions function cognitively. Thus, his cognitivist view actually

⁵⁰ See George Dickie, *Evaluating Art* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), Chapter 6, pp.107-109. The example here is an adapted and simplified version of one Dickie discusses with more Danto-esque objects.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

embraces the emotions. Thus our fear is directed toward the formal object, the fearful: in coming to appreciate an object as fearful we come to fear it. Hence our emotions arise in relation to and thus as a constitutive part of what we imagine. That we are scared of or horrified by what is depicted is because of the threatening or horrific nature of what is represented, whether we are dealing with the actual invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union in 1968 or the fictional *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.⁵²

Thus the cognitivist can account for cases where we criticise an artwork because it fails to evoke the feelings which are or would be appropriate to the represented state of affairs. Thus, for example, although Peter Greenaway's films are clever, cognitively dense and aesthetically pleasing, they fail as great art precisely because they fail to engage the appropriate emotions. For the same reason, if a review stated that the critic had remained wholly unmoved by a production of *King Lear*, one would naturally infer that either the production or the critic was appalling. If one justifiably esteemed the critic's judgement, one would bet on the former. This is not to say that all artworks must engage or arouse our emotions. For example, Brechtian theatre's value lies in the very fact that it works against our emotional engagement. However, in Brecht's work, the emotional distance serves to heighten the work's cognitive value. It foregrounds the constructed nature of both the work itself and of ourselves as socio-political animals. Thus, by precluding our emotional engagement, Brecht's work explores particular interests and concerns, thus enhancing the work's overall cognitive value as art. By contrast, the emotional numbness of much of Greenaway's work serves only to highlight his failure to explore our interests and concerns. Thus Greenaway's films, though aesthetically beautiful, fail to evoke an appropriate response. Therefore, the lack of an emotional response in Greenaway's work diminishes the work's cognitive value as art.

If what is expressed is as significant than the way something is expressed, perhaps then the cognitive value of art lies in its representation or expression of truth, i.e. the way the world is or should be. The value of the work's aesthetic and expressive features may then depend, at least in part, upon the work's representation of the way the world is or ought to be. After all we do take pleasure in the representation of appearances and what we take to be reality, so the pleasure we take in art may arise from its representation of the world. To dismiss this thesis on the grounds that we appreciate artworks with opposed understandings of the world, or by citing Dante's *Divine Comedy* as great art, though its theological understanding of the world is untenable, is too quick. Still, there would seem to be something to it, because we would seem to value artworks less as art where they manifest a flawed understanding of the world. Thus one might suggest, as Peter Adams does, that Nazi art is incapable of

⁵² See Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), Chapter VI.4, pp. 245-252.

being great precisely because of its moral corruption: its inability to represent true moral ideals whilst glorifying or manifesting as good fundamentally evil ones.⁵³

When we talk of representing the truth or the real world in relation to art, we often think of particular styles and genres in various media which are typically grouped under the headings of realism or naturalism. Realism brings to mind figurative painting in classical three point perspective, the novels of Dickens or Zola and the films of Renoir or David Lean. Now, critics are often dismissive of particular realist styles and tend to make exaggerated claims, on this basis, that realism, the idea that art may truly represent the world, is a myth. Twentieth century art is often seen as valuably breaking with the self-imposed constraints of realism, to explore freer, more artistic forms. As an argument, as distinct from polemic in favour of particular styles, this is hopeless. That *Ulysses* radically breaks with a particular realist style and tradition in novels does not preclude Joyce's work from representing the way the world is. Indeed, Joyce's stream of consciousness writing is often praised on this basis when contrasted with the 'artificial' conventions of pre-modern novelists. Yet, realism cannot be such *tout court*, but only in virtue of some respect or other. For example, since it is necessarily in two dimensions, a painting cannot be wholly realistic. Nonetheless, it may aim at veridical representation in some respect.

It is often assumed, falsely, that Nelson Goodman exploded the 'myth' of realism. Yet *Languages of Art* does not deny the possibility of realism. Rather, it locates our sense of realism in our habituation to certain representational styles, as opposed to some absolute correspondence to reality. The touchstone of realism is not some natural fidelity to or quantity of information about the world. Rather, for Goodman, it is a matter of how easily the conceptual scheme used is comprehended as a representation. This is dependent upon how stereotyped the mode of representation is and how commonplace the use of its labels are. Thus, for Goodman, realism is relative because it is "determined by the system of representation standard for a given culture or person at a given time."⁵⁴ Despite the failure of certain semioticians and deconstructionists to grasp the point, it does not follow from the necessary conventionalisation of our perception and representation of reality that all ways of perceiving are equally sound.⁵⁵ Even given radical conventionalisation, it is still possible for art to represent truths concerning our world. For truth, on Goodman's conception, is now relative to a world, the latter being fixed by our perceptions, cognitions and desires.⁵⁶ Thus we may get pleasure from having

⁵³ See Stuart Hampshire, *Innocence and Evil* (London: Penguin, 1989), pp. 66-78, for an argument to suggest the world understanding promoted by Nazism has not one one redeeming feature.

⁵⁴ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), Chapter I.8, p. 37.

⁵⁵ The leading figures of the respective schools both make this assumption, see Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, tr. G. Spivak, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), and Umberto Eco's *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

⁵⁶ See Nelson Goodman, "When is Art?" in *Ways of World Making* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), pp. 57-70.

the way we perceive confirmed or extended by art, which could partly explain the outrage at and then glorification of cubism. It was only when people became habituated to the shifting, fragmentary representations of cubism, that they could derive pleasure and thus value from the works as art. Thus Picasso was right to tell Gertrude Stein that although her portrait didn't look like her at the time he finished it, in time it would come to do so.

Certain perceptual systems and artistic styles will prove to be better, more appropriate and fruitful than others in various respects. So perhaps, as Gombrich suggests, our pleasure in art lies in the perceptual cognitive fit between the conceptual scheme the viewer brings to bear, that of the artist and the way the world is represented.⁵⁷ However, the cognitive pleasures of art do not merely concern the world's appearances but, furthermore, the expression or representation of more profound truths. Thus, not only is pleasure afforded in art by confirming the way we perceive but by opening out new ways of perceiving and representing our worlds. Thus the displacement of one's normal categorisations of the world may be of value, through developing sounder ways of perceiving and understanding the world. It must be realised that the mere subversion of our normal categorisations and understandings of the world may afford little pleasure, no significance and great disvalue. Empty meaningless subversions, from defaecation to wild dadaist or expressionist rantings, are more likely to provoke displeasure and disgust rather than appreciation. Categorical displacement is only of value in art if it promotes insight into our world.

But what kind of truth could art possibly lay claim to? It might be thought that any claims to truth on the part of art must be trivial. If artworks are merely particular representations of possible and impossible worlds, then whether they are significant or not will depend upon their theoretical relation to the actual world. How useful artworks are, will thus depend upon the relation of the claims made to fields of enquiry such as philosophy, psychology or natural science. Only reflective enquiry can render meaningful and consider the status of claims that may contingently be made in artworks. Thus the meaningful claims put forward, for example, within Sartre's novels should more properly be considered as such within the sphere of philosophy. The notions of radical freedom, bad faith and so on should be subjected to rigorous philosophical analysis in order to test their possible truth. How they are represented in a novel can have no bearing on their truth.

Philosophical claims can certainly be represented in artworks: for example, how Mathieu acts in his particular dilemmas, whether to marry, whether to look after his mother or go off to fight for France, represents a particular vision of existentialism. The way Sartre represents this vision may afford us great pleasure, but its significance cannot lie in the work as art. The propositions expressed in art are better and more appropriately articulated in the relevant practice or activity to which the

⁵⁷ E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1977), especially Part III, pp. 154-245.

hypothetical claim relates. Therefore, although they may enhance a work's aesthetic value, the meaningful propositions art offers us cannot properly belong to art *per se*. This picture underlies the aesthetic conception of art. Art cannot be properly concerned with meaning or truth, therefore it is an autonomous, hermetically sealed activity which is cognitively trivial and concerned only with aesthetic features.⁵⁸ When engaging with artworks we properly delight only in their beautiful or skilful representation of various states of affairs.

Indeed, it is on the basis of this understanding of art that both the aesthete and the puritan rest upon common ground. At best, works which contingently put forward meaningful claims may be valuable by virtue of their expression. At worst, they may be positively disvaluable, to the extent they are deceptive. Hence Plato suggested both art and artists should be escorted from his city state.⁵⁹ For a puritanical Platonist:

"poetry has no serious value or claim to truth, and we shall warn its hearers to fear its effects on the constitution of their inner selves, and tell them to adopt the view of poetry we have described."⁶⁰

Plato might perhaps allow a certain kind of art for reasons akin to the point and purpose of religious icons. Through beauty and representation, art may focus the mind of the devoted spectator upon the significance of what is portrayed. Art may thus, for Plato, have an instrumental value by pointing us toward the good. However, to allow any other kind of art would be to allow the baser elements in us to dominate, overriding the proper control of reason.⁶¹ Certain kinds of art are deceptive and thus dangerous because they promote the false assumption that the artwork affords privileged knowledge about what is true and good.⁶² Moreover, Plato suggests, art panders to our basest instincts and lower, non-rational part of our nature, perhaps in the form of immediate, vicarious gratification. Indeed, it encourages the identification of wisdom or knowledge with what pleases. The only thing which would warrant our pleasure in art is precisely what it lacks, a significant relation to truth.

⁵⁸ See Jerome Stolnitz's "On the Cognitive Triviality of Art", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 1992. 191-200, for an argument of this kind.

⁵⁹ See Plato's *Republic*, tr. D. Lee, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), Part III, Section 1, p. 157, l. 398, where he states certain poets or artists are to be honoured, but firmly escorted beyond the walls of the city state.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, Part X, Section 3, pp. 438-439, l. 608.

⁶¹ For an idiosyncratic interpretation of Plato on art see Iris Murdoch, *The Fire and The Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1977), where it is argued that good art, for Plato, involves the contemplation of that which is eternal and not subject to the subjection of our wanton human self.

⁶² Plato, *The Republic*, tr. D. Lee, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), Part X, Section 1, pp. 426-431, l. 598d-602b.

Hence, for Plato, art's false charm can only mislead. The puritanical disreputability of art derives from its capacity to move and engage audiences regarding non-existent or false events and characters. Therefore art serves only to fan our base emotions and desires, watering "them when they ought to be left to wither, and makes them control us when we ought, in the interests of our own greater welfare and happiness, to control them."⁶³

The aesthete's diagnosis of art's nature is identical to the puritanical conception, but with inverse consequences. Rather than holding art is a worrying vehicle of deception, the aestheticist argues that it renders art no more than an innocent and pleasant distraction. Art's 'truth' is indeed without significance, but this realisation is considered sufficient to render art harmless. Thus art's proper value can only derive from the pleasure afforded by the work's expression or representation. Art has no rightful claim to a form of knowledge and cannot be subjugated to the service of truth, morals or political ideals. Hence, for Jerome Stolnitz, it is how the message is conveyed, the methods, procedures and autonomous activities of art itself, that matters in art.⁶⁴ Stolnitz suggests that even in the most likely historical cases, art's influence cannot be shown to have had a significant impact upon people's thoughts and actions. Art may contingently be a conveyer or facilitator of ideas and understanding. But these are not the proper concern of art, which can only be a form of transient relief from life. Art cannot, for Stolnitz, be an edifying force which effects life.

As with the puritans, so too with Stolnitz; there can be no significant artistic truth. For because artworks we value highly may contradict each other, and confirmation or refutation is precluded as relevant, art is reduced to trading in communal platitudes. Art is an end and of value in itself aside and isolable from the use and application to which it is put. As Oscar Wilde would have us believe, 'art is useless and that is its point'. The lack of a driving purpose is thus conceived as art's glory. Even where significant truths are revealed in art, they are not truths proper to art *per se*:

"None of its truths are peculiar to art. All are proper to some extra artistic sphere of the great world. So considered, there are no artistic truths. Not one."⁶⁵

The polarisation between the puritan and aesthete results from opposite evaluations of the pleasure involved. For the puritan all pleasure is *prima facie* bad, unless rendered subservient to the promotion of truth. For the aestheticist, pleasure is *prima facie* good and necessarily innocent if there is

⁶³ *ibid.*, Section 3, p. 437, l. 606d.

⁶⁴ Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Historical Triviality of Art", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1991, pp. 195-202, and "On the Cognitive Triviality of Art", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 1992, pp. 191-200.

⁶⁵ Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Cognitive Triviality of Art", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 1992, p. 198.

no significant relation to truth or falsehood. But both conceptions of the value of art rest upon the same diagnosis, that what is said is separable from and not properly related to the way it is said. Only the means of representation or expression are thus held to be the true province of art *per se*. Fundamentally art is thought to bear no particular relationship to truth or significance and that is held to be its virtue or vice respectively.

Stolnitz's argument partly trades upon a crude invocation of historical explanation. In order to argue that history shows art has no significant cognitive or edifying influence, Stolnitz challenges us to point to a case where engagement with an artwork directly caused certain actions to take place. Art can, he suggests, be explained as deriving from and thus confirming ideas of the day. However, it cannot produce any distinctive ideas of its own. Therefore, he concludes, art must be devoid of any significant relation to truth and action. Yet, we can object, no cultural practice centrally related to understanding, including religious or philosophical argument, bears such a straightforward relation to action. The relationship of any given cultural practice to action in part depends upon how it is understood both as a practice consisting of various activities and in relation to the culture at large. The practice of philosophy or art more generally feed off and in turn modify and alter perceptions, sentiments and ideas. The relation is symbiotic, thus the causal arrow cannot just run one way. Just as a philosophical world view may filter down and modify an accepted understanding of the world, so too with insights revealed in artworks.

Furthermore, it is not so obvious that cases of art influencing the general culture and thought of a form of life are hard to come by. For example, in the Renaissance, where art first began to flower outside the walls of religion, key ideas were put forward by poets as well as theologians. The new architecture changed the scale of building, the landscape, to a human size, manifesting the guiding ideal of man's moral dignity. Through Alberti, and more importantly Michelangelo, the body became transfigured from a vessel of shame to an expression of noble, human and thus Godly perfection. Indeed, it might be argued, as Kenneth Clark puts it, that "the most profound thought of the time was not expressed in words, but in visual imagery."⁶⁶ Art's valuation of the poetic, pictorial space, and freeing of the subject in relation to the object depicted, modified and developed a new culture, a new understanding of man and of his relationship to the world. Stolnitz forgets that it is the understanding, developed through artistic, religious, moral and other cultural practices, which frames and gives point to enquiry and questioning. The responses, aspirations and ends of people must be understood within a cultural framework, which may itself be partly constituted and modified by people's engagement with art.

Underlying Stolnitz's accusations of the historical and moral triviality of art is the presumption that it is only ideas, understood in terms of propositional truth and falsity, which effect

⁶⁶ Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation* (London: BBC and John Murray, 1969), Chapter 5, p. 126.

human action. Ideas may contingently appear in artworks, thus art may accidentally affect human understanding. But it is not proper to the realm and purpose of art that it give rise to such ideas. Understanding is conceived as fundamentally separable from the practice of art and subject to the enquiry and questioning of disciplines such as psychology or philosophy which empirically or conceptually test, confirm or refute relevant ideas. Since art allows contradictory ideas and world views embodied in its works irrespective of their truth or falsity, then ideas must be irrelevant to and separable from the point and purpose of art.

At one level this crude claim is a reformulation of Beardsley's misplaced objection to cognitivism, and on the same grounds will not do. Not only do we value cognitive features in art in a way which is irreducible to the merely aesthetic, but cognitive value itself is not reducible to truth. Just as we value philosophical works which contradict each other, so too in art; interest, originality, density and thematic development are all partly constitutive of something's overall cognitive value. We may think Kant's philosophy profoundly mistaken, whilst consistently holding him to be a great philosopher. Similarly, we can value artworks which afford distinct understandings of the world and are illuminating in different ways. Furthermore, as argued in relation to expression, the representation of people and ideas in art is in a significant sense inseparable from the characters or ideas themselves. The rendering forms a constitutive part of what is to be imagined in one's engagement with the artwork. What is depicted in art bears a particular and distinctive inter-relation to the way it is depicted. Through representing human dramas, conflicts and triumphs, art engages our emotions, interest and entertains us. Moreover, artworks may thus represent concrete situations and persons in terms of which we can view the world. The views of the world thus afforded may themselves be productive of new insights into it. Therefore, it would seem, art can teach us truths about the world. They may engage, refine or modify our understanding of the human world. As Roger Scruton argues, (though the emphasis upon redemptive experience seems misplaced):

"To possess a culture is not only to possess a body of knowledge or expertise; it is not simply to have accumulated facts, references and theories. It is to possess a sensibility, a response, a way of seeing things, which is in some special way redemptive. Culture is not a matter of academic knowledge but of participation. And participation changes not merely your thoughts and beliefs but your perceptions and emotions."⁶⁷

One's sensibilities, the sentiments and values from which action springs constitute an understanding of life. This may both modify and be modified by, but is not reducible to, theoretical knowledge, which involves propositional truth claims. Understanding others requires not merely

⁶⁷ Roger Scruton, *Essays on Dover Beach* (Manchester: Carcanct, 1992), p. 106.

knowledge of the collection of truth claims they make about the world. Rather, more importantly, it involves grasping their concepts, emotions and values. Without this form of understanding appropriate to the human world, as distinct from the understanding appropriate to scientific understanding,, we cannot see the point and purpose of other people's actions. Understanding from within a person's reasons for acting, her beliefs, desires, affections and so on, is what enables us to see the kind of person she is and her conception of the world she lives in. In art the material, media and conventions manipulated to represent or express an object, form a constitutive part of the nature of that object, as it understood to be in our engagement with it. Thus the pleasure appropriate to art must bear some relation to the nature of our engagement with it as art.

The real question then, is whether art bears a significant, distinctive relation to our understanding and the claims such a form of understanding may be entitled to make. This suggests that an artwork may be of value to the extent it engages and deepens one's cognitive and emotional sensibilities, and the pleasure afforded is related to or invested in our human interests and concerns. That is, art's distinctive pleasures and value may lie in the imaginative understandings of others lives, ourselves and our world that artworks may afford. For, it would seem, art may intimate or reveal important insights about the world, others and oneself. An artwork may afford us a glimpse of what a particular world is or would be like, what it does or would feel like to move within this or that kind of universe. Such an awareness might encourage us to see the actual world in a different, more adequate light and consequently effect our thoughts and actions. Retrospectively, we may perhaps see and be able to give reasons as to why the understanding afforded by the artwork is sounder than our prior understanding. Yet we may, perhaps, only have arrived at this understanding through engaging with an artwork.

This suggests that what is central to art concerns the imagination. For through engaging the imagination, a work may enable us to grasp, through the imaginary experience, what the world represented would be like. If this is true, then art may promote understanding in a way more fundamental than propositional knowledge or theories of truth could. Stolnitz's challenge would then be rendered redundant and art may be proved to be of the profoundest human import. The imagination in art may deepen the nuances of our emotional lives and understanding and its value may lie in this as much as it lies in the pleasure the engagement of our imagination itself may afford. The skilful and knowing construction of the work itself, its aesthetic, cognitive and expressive qualities and features are all characteristically valued in art. Yet the primary value of art seems to lie elsewhere: the pleasures which arise from the deepening of our emotional and cognitive sensibilities. Art may, it is suggested, extend our sensibilities and understanding through its engagement of our imagination. Thus it is to an investigation of the concept of imagination, what is involved when we imagine, that we must now turn.

Chapter 3

Imagination.

“Only in men’s imagination does every truth find an effective
and undeniable existence. Imagination, not invention,
is the supreme master of art, as of life.”

Joseph Conrad

Introduction.

Historically imagination has been thought to play a central role in human experience and judgement.¹ It has been both lauded and derided; praised as a guide or contributor to truth and denigrated as a bewitching distraction away from it. The first account of imagination’s role in art I consider is that advanced by Roger Scruton. For Scruton, the imagination, significantly conceived, is not required to unify our ordinary perception, experience and thought. Rather, Scruton argues, the imagination goes beyond mere belief and cannot concern what we know about the real world. For Scruton, it is inappropriate to ask whether what is imagined is true or not. The appeal here lies in the distinction between the real, what is true of the actual world, and what is imagined. For Scruton, what we actually experience and know ought not to be confused with the merely imaginary. A great virtue of Scruton’s account is that it captures the irreducible conjunction of elements in imagination; aspects of both thought and sensuous experience. However, Scruton’s account is ultimately flawed. Scruton fails to allow that what one imagines may make essential reference to belief and what we know. After all, it may be a constitutive part of what I imagine, that I believe or know it to be true.

I then move on to consider Kendall Walton’s conception of imagination’s role in our engagement with artworks and representations generally. Walton distinguishes imagining propositions, imagining that *p*, from imagining things or experiencing something. The significance of Walton’s account lies in the analysis he provides of our spectatorial role in engaging with artworks and representations generally. However, a fundamental flaw of Walton’s account lies in his insistence that our emotional responses in engaging with artworks must themselves be make-believe. We will see that, in fact, we may feel genuine emotions not only consequent upon, but as a constitutive part of, our imaginings. Nevertheless, Walton’s general account can accommodate this modification. A more problematic

¹ See J. M. Cocking’s *Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1991), and James Engell, *The Creative Imagination* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), which trace the history and evolution of the concept. See Richard Kearney’s *The Wake of Imagination* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), for a pessimistic assessment of the place of imagination in the modern world and postmodern culture.

assumption for his general theory, is the claim that all imaginings are necessarily *de se*. As we shall see, we can and do imagine things without having to imagine that we are internal to the world imagined. Furthermore, Walton construes fiction in terms of artefacts whose job it is to engage and prescribe our imaginings. However, fictionality does not flow automatically from an object's proper function being to prescribe imaginings. Rather, it flows from whether what is imagined is to be properly understood as asserted or treated merely *as if* it were asserted.

The results of this critical survey will go much of the way to helping us develop a sound account of imagination and its role in art. We will find that the imagination irreducibly involves elements of both thought and sensuous experience. Imagination cannot be reduced merely to entertained thought. Furthermore, it will become clear that we may also respond emotionally in and as a consequent of our imaginings. It is also true that any account of imagination hoping to claim adequacy, must recognise that we may essentially imagine what we know to be true. This chapter paves the way for the idea that the role of the imagination in both art and our everyday lives enables us to understand, in a deep way, both ourselves and others. Thus, paving the way for the idea that art's primary significance lies in its peculiar capacity to prescribe and enhance such deep understanding.

Section 1: Basic Distinctions.

Firstly, we must recognise some basic distinctions that any account of imagination must remain adequate to. We need to distinguish and account for different senses of imagination; in relation to perception, perceptual imagining, imagining states of affairs and creativity. Indeed if 'imagination' is more than a loose association of uses, contrary to what Strawson suggests, then what we identify as its primary sense had better adequately explain them all.² We must be careful to distinguish ordinary perception from perceptually imagining. One could be tempted to think this is equivalent to a distinction between ordinary and highly interpretative perception. The basic thought would be something like the following: since seeing a mirage or having an hallucination involves perceiving something which is not there, it must be a case of imagining. However, this must be wrong. Perceptual experiences which involve mistaking illusions, or one thing for something else, are actually cases of misperception. We should not endorse a conception which, through equating every case of misperception with imagining, precludes the possibility of misperceiving.

Consider a common enough case of misperception: you walk into a dark room and see a shape in the corner. Looking closer, on the basis of various discernible features, you perceive it to be a crouching

² P. F. Strawson, "Imagination and Perception", in his *Freedom and Resentment* (London: Methuen, 1974), pp. 45-65.

figure. Yet, when you bravely switch the light on, fearing the worst, the shape is revealed to be the stool that is always there. Based upon the minimal perceptual cues afforded by the dim light, you misperceived the stool as a thief. A rarer case of false perceptual belief, might be the amputee who vividly 'feels' his toe itching. Before he remembers what has happened, he may try to scratch his non-existent foot. He misinterprets, and is thus deceived by, the perceptual sensations he felt. As we have seen, ordinary perception involves construing perceptual cues under a particular form. It involves making hypotheses about what exactly the perceived evidence is evidence for. Thus, perception just is the constructive interpretation of our experience. Therefore, even cases where the world's perceptual clues are radically indeterminate, or misconstrued, are still cases of ordinary perception. Highly interpretative perception is still the constructive interpretation of perceptual cues; there are just more gaps to fill in. Ordinary perception itself goes beyond what is given, to render our experience of the world as coherent and intelligible as possible.

Now, although the mechanism involved may be the same, perceptually imagining something is a different kind of case. This is because the objects of imagining are created in a way in which ordinary sensations are not. In the imagined case there may be nothing we actually perceive to discriminate between. This is why one's own description of what one imagines may be privileged in a way in which one's description of what one sees is not.³ My report that I imagine Churchill is true just because of what I imagine seeing. Contrastingly, whether I actually see a tree or not depends not just upon what I perceive the object as, but upon what it actually is. Perceptual imagining does not involve asserting one's perceptual experience to be true of the world. Rather, one merely entertains visual images as if they were. I might look up and imagine I see a face in a cloud.

This is not to deny that perceptual imagining may be based upon perceptual cues afforded by the world. I might look at a picture and imagine that I see Gertrude Stein before me. Of course, I might have misperceived the picture marks. Perceptual imagining may be grounded upon perceptual cues, which can be subject to misinterpretation. However, I am denying that the question of misperception arises in relation to what is imagined. If I perceptually imagine a face in the cloud, unless I am sadly confused, I do not think that there is a question about whether there really is a face there or not. I see the cloud as if it were a face, I entertain the image, without asserting that the image's content holds of the world. Nevertheless, the image's content does have a relation to the world, hence we 'see' the content in the picture. Thus, what I perceptually imagine may depend upon what I perceive. Therefore I may 'see' Gertrude Stein in the picture, and that does depend upon actual relations to the world: namely the paint marks and conventions involved. Perceptual imagining then is intimately linked to, though not identifiable with, imagistic imagining.

³ See Anthony Kenny, *Metaphysics of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.118.

It might, of course, be denied that there is imagistic imagining in any significant sense. For example, Dennett has argued that all imagining is equivalent to non-pictorial description.⁴ There are, according to such views, no mental images. Incompleteness is thus a matter of the amount of information afforded by the relevant description. But why, then, is imagistic imagining perspectival in the way ordinary perception is? I may see and perceptually imagine the moral philosophy department from a particular viewpoint. Thus, because of the mental imagery involved, my description of the philosophy department may be limited to this particular viewpoint. But if perceptual imagining was really reducible to description, unhindered by mental imagery, it would be hard to see why this should be so.

A related point, is that we may imagine something better than we are able to describe it. Thus, when trying to remember something, we may have to bring the image to mind. In order to relate what a particular sign said, I may have to visualise it. I may well be able to imagine my favourite painting much better than I am able to describe it. Indeed, both perceptual imagining and imagistic imagining appear to be similar to knowledge by acquaintance in certain ways. Conversely, my highly informative description of how a computer works may well outstrip my capacity to visualise the various processes involved. An account which assimilates all imagining to linguistic description can not account for these salient aspects of perceptual imaginings. Indeed, it is hard to see how anyone could account for the perceptual feel of this kind of imagining without thereby accepting mental images. Imagistic imagining would seem to involve entertaining sensory presentations by virtue of mental images. It should also be noted that since one is imagining seeing an image, rather than perceptually imagining it, imagistic imagining is free of perceptual constraints. The essential contrast though, remains between ordinary perception and perceptual imagining. Our ordinary perceptual schemata mediate the basic sense data of our experience: all perception is guided by hypothesis-making about the world, based upon perceptual cues. By contrast, perceptual imagining involves going beyond what one asserts to be there. Thus, perceptually entertaining the face in the clouds cannot be open to the possibility of misperception.

We must also be able to distinguish perceptual imagining from imaginings which concern or conceive of different states of affairs. The distinction should not preclude imagining what something or someone is like from involving perceptual imagining, indeed it may be a crucial constituent part of it. However, this sense of imagining would seem to involve a descriptive form of thought. Thus it may be akin to, though not reducible to, knowledge by description. What it would be like to be a particular person obviously involves imagining over and above merely perceptual imagining or imagining seeing. For example, it may include feelings and emotions, as a constitutive part of the imagined experience. Furthermore, imagining possible and impossible states of affairs must be intimately linked to our

⁴ D. C. Dennett, "Mental Imagery", *Content and Consciousness*, 2nd ed., (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), Chapter 6, pp. 132-146.

understanding. For example, what we imagine it would be like to have been Napoleon or Raskolnikov depends upon our understanding of both them and their worlds.

It should also be recognised, that imagining states of affairs is compatible with imagining states of affairs we believe or know to be true. Thus, provided I am not perceiving it now, I can imagine that my dog is asleep, the street lights are on and that my car is in the drive. This sense of imagination should not be equated with the merely imaginary; what necessarily cannot be true. We may imagine states of affairs which could, in principle, never be true. However, that is not a matter of the imagination's involvement as such. Rather, it is the status of what is imagined which is then at issue: whether something is either logically impossible or fictional. Logically impossible or fictional entities are in principle false (though a fictional work about a putative future could, incidentally, turn out to be true). What we imagine is far broader than states of affairs which are, in principle, not open to the question of truth or falsity. We can imagine what was, is, or could be, the case. A good historian may actually imagine what it was like when the Roman Empire collapsed. In trying to understand our own situation, we may imagine what other people do or might think of us. In trying to decide what to do, whether to keep a secret, skip work or make defence cuts, we may have to imagine what the effect of our actions may be, in order to appreciate fully their nature

Thus, it seems, the primary sense of imagination should be identified with entertaining states of affairs. Perceptual and imagistic imagining are distinctive kinds of entertaining states of affairs, as they involve entertaining perceptual images. By contrast, being imaginative is not a distinctive kind of imagining but, rather, is parasitic upon this sense. To be imaginative is to be creative and original. The intuition underlying this usage, is the idea that someone who is creative must have entertained many possibilities. In order to come to this original solution, she must have imagined the effects of this and other possibilities open to him. Thus, one might display a leap of creative thought in response to a scientific problem, a chess manoeuvre or a philosophical challenge. A problem may be imaginatively solved by dissolving standard categories and reconstructing them in the light of new insights. Alternatively, an imaginative solution might involve creatively extrapolating from aspects of the problem usually thought of as irrelevant. An artist's drawing can be imaginative in this sense, and thus distinct from the mass of others, in uniquely solving or posing an artistic problem. Having sketched some fundamental distinctions, we must look to an account which builds upon these insights. One theory which promises to develop more fully our understanding of imagination has been articulated by Roger Scruton. It is to his account we must now turn.

Section 2: Scruton on Imagination.

Roger Scruton's *Art and Imagination* offers us a carefully delineated conception of the imagination. Scruton emphasises that there are pre-conceptual inter-sense modalities out of which the mind builds up its ideas. Imagination is possible only given the prior basic cognisance of the world, and is thus dependent upon our distinct but inter-penetrating sense modalities. The key to Scruton's theory involves a distinction between belief and other modes of thought: all belief, but not all thought, is asserted. In judging something, we must believe and thus assert certain things to be true. By contrast, we sometimes entertain thoughts which are unasserted. In Kantian terms one could talk of the 'free play' of concepts. One is only entertaining thoughts about, rather than asserting thoughts to be true of, the world. We have before our minds propositions which are merely thought of as possibilities or suppositions. It is this kind of process which *partly* constitutes imagination. The process itself, whether the proposition is asserted or not, is independent of the thought content:

"when we imagine something, or tell a story, while being indifferent to its truth, the content of our thought is the content of a belief; but the thought process itself is independent of this belief."⁵

The thought process involved in imagination is distinct from that involved in acquiring beliefs and knowledge about the world. In imagining, one thinks of an object as something else in a manner which is indifferent to the truth value of what is imagined. Thinking of something may involve entertaining thoughts about it. For example, one may think of a particular friend as a witch. In this sense, 'thinking of' involves no essential reference to belief and is truth indifferent. However, the mere thinking of possibilities is insufficient to distinguish imagination. After all, one can speculate or conceive of possibilities without imagining them. So, Scruton argues, the 'thinking of' involved in imagination should be conceived in a manner analogous to the way we conceive of 'seeing as'. Thinking of my friend as a witch, in one sense, obviously involves more than entertaining a proposition. It has the characteristic of a disposition, rather than an act, in being subject to the will and, though unasserted, properly strikes me as particularly apt. Thus, Scruton suggests, conceiving of imagination as *just* unasserted thought, a mere proposition which is entertained as 'fitting' its subject, is too simplistic. We should look for an account which is more adequate to the subtle relationship between imaginative thoughts and their objects. Nevertheless, it is the core insight of this crude idea that Scruton develops. Ultimately, for Scruton, our experience of reality and our imaginary experiences are distinguished in terms of whether the experience's sensual, conceptual and emotional content is asserted or known to be

⁵ Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination* (Methuen: London, 1974), Chapter 7, p. 89.

true of the world or not. Scruton conceives of imagining and belief as necessarily involving two distinct processes.

Scruton starts by countering the phenomenological refutation of imagery as private mental pictures. The standard objections to this line are threefold: it cannot distinguish imagery from sensation, it renders the image a private object about which nothing can be said, and, lastly, it cannot account for imagery's intentionality. However, the recognition that imagination is akin to thought, in the way suggested above, rebuts these criticisms. The element of thought in imagination allows us to distinguish sensation from imagery and allows for public criteria, so one can determine whether something is being pictured. Furthermore, both thought and imagination are mental activities, though doing something imaginatively is not. Thus, since the acts or activities are voluntary, the aspect of intentionality can be captured. This is in contrast to belief, which is not voluntary. As with a kind of 'seeing as', imagination has the characteristic of a disposition or inclination in being subject to the will. Whether I see the arc of a tree branch as the curvature of a human arm, the snout of some mythical beast or anything else is up to me: I can change what I see it as at will. We can ask someone to imagine a particular scene, and it is in this respect that imagination is like, but not identical with, unasserted thought:

"Images, like imagination generally, share this feature of subjection to the will. Forming an image is something I can do: it is not always something I suffer or undergo."⁶

The close relation to unasserted thought, Scruton argues, suggests imagination involves going beyond what is believed. Of course, Scruton allows, one may believe something is as it is imagined to be. However, Scruton asserts, one cannot know or justifiably think something, which is a matter of definite assertion, and imagine it, which is a speculative thought. Imagining something is conceived to be a special case of 'thinking of x as y'. Thus it involves two objects: both what is to be imagined, and how, under what description, it is to be described. Furthermore, the descriptions must be, in some way, appropriate to the object which is to be imagined. As a rational activity, there must be a relation between what and how something is to be imagined. After all, the reason we entertain a proposition fundamentally concerns the subject matter.

Having sketched a distinction between imagination and other thought processes, Scruton then considers the nature and place of imagery in relation to imagination. Four features of imagery, as with imagination generally, place it firmly within the realm of thought. Firstly, it has the intentionality characteristic of thought. Hence an image is always of an object seen as something. This is why what

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 97.

can be imagined can also be thought of. Secondly, images are objects of immediate knowledge: what image we have before us is immediately known. Thirdly, imagery is subject to the will. Thus, Scruton distinguishes the element of thought in imagination from what is involved in dreaming or eidetic after images. Lastly, we identify and ascribe imagery in a similar way to thoughts. The primary criteria for saying someone is imagining or thinking something is verbal: consisting mainly in descriptions offered of the relevant thought or image. Conversely, two characteristically sensuous features distinguish imagery and imagination from merely unasserted thought. The irreducible analogy between imagination and sensation involves the recognition that both have an intensity and exact duration. Imagery is also publicly describable in the way sensation is. Indeed, we talk about images in ways we talk about our genuine sense experiences. If imagery were reducible to mere thought, we could not hope to make sense of such talk. The way in which an image is like an experience cannot be given by a description of the experience itself.

The imaginative experience itself is irreducible and irreplaceable by description, otherwise its point would be otiose. Imagining, which involves imagery, is what is involved when one conjures up a putative experience. However, Scruton argues, imagining an experience is essentially distinct from knowing what an experience is like. For example, imagery and imagining is held, by Scruton, to be essentially distinct from the images of memory. To know what an experience is like, one must have had the experience. Only imagery not afforded by experience can be entertained, rather than asserted, of the world. As Scruton argued that belief is necessarily distinguished from imagination, so he argues that imagery, when it is not a form of remembering, is to be distinguished from knowledge by acquaintance. Imagining, by definition, *must* involve going beyond what one has experienced. Of course, one may experience something as it was imagined to be. However, one cannot both experience something and imagine it or experience it and then imagine it as something one experienced. Whereas I previously suggested imagination may, in certain cases, be akin to knowledge by acquaintance, Scruton wants to distinguish them sharply from each other. Imagination, for Scruton, must involve going beyond what is taken to be true of the world. Knowledge by acquaintance, however, concerns some kind of experience of just what is taken to be true. As we shall see, the way Scruton opposes them will cause fundamental problems for his theory.

Scruton rightly recognises the two senses involved in our talk of imagination in perception. Firstly, we talk of imagination as the forming of hypotheses for perceptual judgement. Imagination in this trivial sense concerns the thought laden nature of ordinary perception. Ordinary sense experience involves asserted thought and is related to belief, hence it is involuntary and independent of control by our thoughts. However, Scruton argues, the distinct and significant sense is unrelated to judgement. This kind of perception possesses the mixture of characteristics from thought and sensation which he identified in imagery, and is a form of 'seeing as'. The element of unasserted thought in 'seeing as' is intentional, an object of knowledge, publicly describable, unasserted and subject to the will.

'Seeing as' also has the sensuous aspects of duration and experience, though it perhaps lacks the attribute of vividness. This metaphorical sense, distinct from perceptual hypothesising, involves noticing an aspect in a way which is not directly related to judgement. This is not a case of merely seeing resemblances, which does not involve seeing under an aspect. Conversely, it is not a case of a change in aspect. Rather, where previously there was no aspect at all, an aspect dawns and thus illuminates. This kind of 'seeing as' goes beyond both what is perceptually given and what is asserted or believed. Furthermore, the unasserted thought entertained in what is imagined is open to the question of 'fittingness'. Reason guides and determines whether what is seen in the object is appropriate to it. Imagination, for Scruton, involves a species of thought whose distinctive features are liable to embodiment in this kind of experience. In 'seeing as', the thought is not isolable from or describable independently of the experience itself. The essential contrast here is, once again, the relation between imagination and belief:

"the relation between 'seeing as' and perception mirrors the relation between imagination and belief. 'Seeing as' is like an 'unasserted' visual experience: it is the embodiment of a thought which, if 'asserted', would amount to a genuine perception, just as imagination, if 'asserted', amounts to a genuine belief."⁷

The thought in imagination is irreducibly sensuous and *sui generis*. Nevertheless, it is the unasserted nature of imagination, in particular 'seeing as', which is essential, and, for Scruton, dictates the structure of aesthetic experience. This is borne out by the fact that one can give partial descriptions of the thought, distinguishable from genuine belief, embodied in the experience. One can hear and should be able to describe the sadness in the music, just as one can see and describe a man in a picture. However, there is no fact of the matter in the way there is when we describe a person as sad. For example, two aspects and rival interpretations may be perceived in the first order features of a work, both of which may be equally supported by identical descriptions of the work. There can be no question here as to which is the right aspect or interpretation:

"In other words, the judgement is wholly unlike the interpretation of the feelings and emotions of another man, where, however many rival opinions there may be, not more than one of them can be right. In the case of the aesthetic judgement, the phenomenon of a double aspect may endure with just the same degree of tenacity as the double aspect of an ambiguous figure."⁸

⁷ *ibid.*, Chapter 8, p. 120.

⁸ *ibid.*, Chapter 9, p. 126.

This is precisely because, as Kant held, Scruton conceives of aesthetic judgement as necessarily subjective. Since we do not actually ascribe qualities to the object, the judgement concerns the perceiver's response. Scruton's position involves the denial that the sadness we hear in a piece of music is actually a property of it: the sadness is unattributed. Of course, we could imagine a subject for the sadness. But it could not be present in the way it could be in a picture: the sadness freely floats in the music. So, if there is no literal sadness, no subject to be sad, what thought is embodied in the music? As with 'seeing as', the thought is to be defined in terms of the experience, it is an "unasserted auditory perception of sadness.....It is not that the music is analogous to the emotion, but rather that the experience of hearing music is analogous to the experience of hearing the emotion."⁹

The thought element involved in imagination, unasserted thought, is distinct from the thought involved in belief and judgement, asserted thought. Furthermore, the emotions involved in aesthetic experience are founded upon imagination. Our response to a sad person is grounded upon belief, my response to a sad work is grounded upon unasserted thought. Now, normally emotions are, in part, identified in terms of belief: to fear *x* involves believing that *x* is threatening. How is this comparable with an emotion based upon entertaining unasserted propositions? Well, we can and do imagine what we would feel and think if a situation were as portrayed. We feel in the same way, and the feeling is classed by reference to what we would feel in the portrayed situation. Of course, our emotional intensity in art is usually less than in real life. However, this is not so much a question of whether the thought and emotion is asserted or not. Rather, it concerns how vivid the imaginative experience is. Imagination and aesthetic experience is more than unasserted thought, though grounded upon it. It involves unasserted emotion, divorced from belief and desire. Indeed, this is testable by the behaviour which would normally be taken as expressing an actual asserted emotion. After all, emotions, whether asserted or not, cannot be described wholly independently of their expression.

On this basis, Scruton goes on to argue that understanding is a prerequisite of experiencing art. Art is not properly understood as an instrument for promoting knowledge. Rather, it is the object of an aesthetic experience. Art should be understood in terms of the capacity for felt experience. The auditory experience itself is essential to understanding music, allowing for a sense of auditory rational development. To hear the notes as a melody and as a string of notes respectively, differs with regard to the respective experiences, not the material object. It is not just a matter of bringing a concept to bear. Hence the experience is not describable in terms of the application of an independently specifiable concept. Concept application is dependent upon, rather than prior to, experience. 'Perceiving as' is the sensory embodiment of an unasserted thought. One which, Scruton argues, cannot be specified independently of the perception:

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 127.

“such thought-impregnated perceptions seem to lie at the heart of our understanding of art. It is because we can see patterns and figures that we can see representation in painting, and it is because we can hear melodies and sequences that we can hear expression in music. In other words, the media of painting and music are of their nature open to just the kind of imaginative interpretation that we have placed at the heart of the aesthetic attitude: the possibility of aesthetic appreciation is intrinsic to the media themselves.”¹⁰

Although the aspect can change as one’s understanding of a particular work or tradition develops, the process of comparison still, ultimately, rests upon experience. Indeed, understanding the different art forms, for Scruton, involves certain *sui generis* capacities for experience. Interpretation is of significance only when “it leads to experience in the sense that, only when knowledge alters the experience of a work of art does it become part of one’s understanding.”¹¹

Scruton’s account is fundamentally opposed to the romantic notion that imagination is the font of all knowledge. Since they are asserted, facts and beliefs are about the real world. For something to be asserted means it is proposed as true of the actual world, hence its relation to belief, sense experience and its non-voluntary character. Conversely, it is irrelevant for the entertained unasserted thought in imagination whether it is true or not of the actual world. One cannot understand what is being entertained in this manner as open to that sort of question. Since the thought in what is imagined is unasserted, imagination cannot concern the real world. Imagination’s characteristically voluntary nature follows from its indifference to the question of truth. Both belief and imagination involve the inter-action between thought and sense impression, but they do so on a different basis. Thus, Scruton argues, affording distinct kinds of experiences. The two fundamentally different processes, for Scruton, entail fundamentally different activities. Listening to establish facts about the world is to be contrasted with listening for aesthetic experience and reward.

Now, some might argue, Scruton’s account is wrong to hold that all imaginings are necessarily subject to the wholesale guidance and direction of the will. Ordinarily, some imaginings occur and reoccur independently of the will. Thus these imaginings are not wholly subject to the will. Therefore they are not, properly speaking, voluntary. For example, imaginings which occur in day dreams, nightmares and unprompted memories are, typically, not subject to the guidance of one’s will. This is not to deny that in moments of semi-consciousness, one may be able to control and guide, in some way, what is being imagined. Nevertheless, in many dreams and when engaging with art, our imaginings are not

¹⁰ *ibid.*, Chapter 12, p. 181.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 187.

wholly subject to the will. Indeed, the point of engaging with artworks revolves around the fact that the work itself vividly constrains, prescribes and promotes what we should imagine. What we should imagine when watching *Othello*, may be independent of what we might will to happen. We may will Othello not to kill Desdemona, yet, if we are to engage properly with the play, we must imagine that he does so. Moreover, the emotions within our imaginary experiences, especially regarding artworks, are similarly not wholly subject to the will. Even in our everyday imaginings and thoughts, emotions often occur and reoccur independently of the will.

In our dreams and nightmares, we may feel enthralled, frightened or angry independently of what we would will. Our conscious, everyday imaginings may also involve involuntary feelings within and in response to what is imagined. For example, for some unknown, subliminal reason I may imagine that I'm giving a simple lecture, in front of hundreds of students. I imagine that I suddenly forget absolutely everything, and, stranded without my notes, I feel chronically embarrassed. The actual feeling is not a result of my willing myself to feel embarrassed and ashamed. Rather, it is a natural response arising from spontaneously imagining myself in such a position. Moreover, my feelings arise independently of how I would like to respond or appear. Since, in art, our imaginative engagement is prescribed, our responses arising from artworks are, apparently, even less subject to the will. Whether I'm imagining Dracula preying upon Lucy Harker, or believing the asserted thought that I'm about to fall from the cliff face, the fear I feel cannot be turned on and off at will.

However, the objection that not all imaginings are subject to the will is too quick. Scruton could reply, to the suggested counter examples, that dreams and memories cannot be cases of imagining. In dreams one usually believes that what one is dreaming is happening. In the case of memories, one believes that what one is remembering is what has happened. As dreams and memories involve belief, for Scruton, they necessarily cannot be imaginings. Furthermore, Scruton's account does not deny that what we imagine is constrained by the artwork. The fact that what we imagine may be spontaneous or prescribed by an artwork, does not entail that it they cannot be subject to the will. Rather, whether what is imagined is subject to the will or not, depends upon whether it is asserted of the world or not. Thus, whether there is an actual fact of the matter or not is recognised to be irrelevant. Imagining the face in the cloud, or Othello's jealousy, is subject to what we would will, as opposed to some fact about the world. This should not be confused with the fact that within the play *Othello* there are certain facts about various events, actions and characters: we may assert certain facts about the world of the work. However, this is within a context of understanding the work's world itself as unasserted. The asserted truth claims about what Othello does are understood as operational only within the imaginary world. The imaginary world itself is understood as unasserted in relation to the actual world. Thus, within the imaginary world of *Othello*, it is true that Othello is a Moor, a renowned general, manipulated by Iago and believes that Desdemona has been unfaithful to him. However, viewed externally, the imaginary world of *Othello* necessarily concerns only unasserted propositions.

Presumably, Scruton would suggest, the emotions we feel in what we imagine are voluntary on the same basis. Admittedly, one's responses to an imagined situation may not be wholly voluntary in one sense. Our imaginative engagement with a work is subject to the situation, events and characters described. We are prescribed to imagine particular things when engaging with an artwork. Similarly, the situation, events and people in the real world constrain and prescribe certain beliefs and emotional responses. Although our possible range of actions is wider, because the causal relations are radically different, our emotional responses to *Othello* are, in one sense, no more voluntary than they are in the real world. They both depend upon what we take to be happening in the real and imagined world respectively. However, whether we carry on imagining what the work prescribes or not is a voluntary matter. What we imagine is voluntary in a way in which what we believe about the world is not: we may walk out of *Othello* in a way in which we cannot walk out upon the world. The difference lies not in the voluntary, as opposed to non-voluntary, nature of the emotional responses which arise. Rather, it is the status of what is being responded to that matters.

In the case of imagination, we are responding to a world which is non-assertorally entertained. By contrast, Scruton would suggest, emotion proper arises from dealing with what is asserted or what we believe to be true of the actual world. In imagination there is no fact of the matter we are responding to: our feelings arise from what we will, rather than what we take, to be true of the world. A statement prescribing us to imagine certain things is an assertion regarding an imaginary world, but the imaginary world itself must, by definition, remain unasserted. Thus, Scruton would suggest, we should be careful to distinguish between what the fact of the matter is about; the actual world or an imaginary one. If it is of an imaginary one, such as *Othello*, then it is something created by will rather than constituted by the way the world is. The truth of this claim in no way involves the denial that artworks may prescribe particular, vivid imaginings.

However, endemic to Scruton's theory, and the defence offered against the objection just discussed, is a fundamental flaw. It lies in Scruton's contrast between belief, which involves asserted thought, and imagination, which involves unasserted thought. What is imagined, for Scruton, cannot be understood as open to the question of truth or falsity. This does not mean that Scruton thus renders the perceptions, emotions and thoughts in what one imagines as necessarily fictional or necessarily concerning fictional objects. If this were so, then, Scruton would be defining imagination in terms of what is understood to be fictional. But, if I cannot imagine what I know to be true, then imagination cannot be wholly separated from belief. Whether I can imagine the events described in Genesis and John's gospel, on this construal, would depend upon whether I believe them to be true or not. Imagination would thus require reference to belief. Furthermore, it is obviously wrong to hold that only beliefs, and not imaginings, can be mistaken. We can and do imagine things we believe to be true: for example, that Caesar crossed the Rubicon. Since we often consider various of our imaginings to be true, fictionality fails to capture what is imagined. Imagination is not merely coextensive with fictionality.

However, Scruton's account may appear undamaged by such a charge. After all, as I was careful to point out, Scruton allows that one can believe something to be as it was imagined. Scruton's account holds that when I imagine something, whether there is a fact of the matter or not is wholly irrelevant. This is very different from the suggestion that imagining something commits one to holding that there can not be a fact of the matter. Scruton's account does not entail that what is imagined is thereby rendered fictional. Rather, for Scruton, the question as to the truth, falsity or fictionality of what is imagined cannot arise. This is not because he holds one cannot imagine what one believes to be true. Rather, imagining necessarily involves going beyond what one believes, thus we cannot imagine what we know to be true:

"imagination goes beyond what is given in ordinary prediction and belief. This is not to say that one cannot believe that X is as one imagines it to be. But one cannot imagine X to be as one knows or has good reason to think it to be. In imagination one is engaging in speculation, and one is not typically aiming at a definite assertion as to how things are. In imagination, therefore, one goes beyond what is strictly given."¹²

It is this which, for Scruton, underlies the recognition that imagining something does not entail any commitment to believing in its existence. Therefore, imagination cannot involve any essential reference to belief.

Nevertheless, the key thought underlying the objection is sound. It is not true that all imagination necessarily goes beyond belief. After all, it can be a significant part of the content of what is imagined that it is true. One can imagine what is outside the room or who is knocking on the door. It can be central to the content of what one imagines, that what one imagines is true of the world. For example, I may imagine that the person who has just knocked upon my door is my girlfriend. I imagine her beautiful, impatient and I call out 'just coming darling'. I grab my coat, and open the door ready to go; but I find that, unfortunately, it is the window cleaner. This is not just a case of false belief. Of course I believed the wrong person was at the door. But, significantly, I imagined her standing at the door, looking a certain way, with a certain attitude. Since it is central to what I imagined that I took it to be true of the world, it is not merely a contingent coincidence or an irrelevancy as to whether it is true or not.

Consider the case of historical works. History obviously concerns asserting and justifying propositions about the past, and thus involves beliefs about that past. Nevertheless, we can and do imagine things we take to be true about the historical past. Indeed one might want to say that the imaginative aspect is what marks out say Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* from more

¹² *ibid.*, p. 98.

contemporary and, academically speaking, accurate descriptions. To imagine what the historical work prescribes is *not* necessarily to suspend or go beyond one's belief concerning events which actually happened, as Scruton would have us believe. It is central to imagining what Gibbon prescribes that one understands, as one imagines it, what one imagines to be true of the ancient Roman world. Indeed, what one imagines in such cases may modify or deepen our understanding of the facts. Thus we may imagine what we know and what we imagine may even effect our beliefs.

Of course, Scruton's theory does not deny that Gibbon asserts something about the Roman world which I may believe. Similarly, Scruton's theory does not deny that I can also imagine or non-assertorically entertain what Gibbon says about the Roman world. Indeed, Scruton does not even deny that I can imagine the Roman world prescribed by Gibbon, and then believe it was as I imagined it to be. I can imagine what is asserted and what I believe. But, Scruton holds, I can do so *only* if I treat what is asserted or believed *as if* it were unasserted. Thus, for example, Scruton might reply that Gibbon's writing is imaginative precisely because he gets us to imagine images of, say, Roman processions. This is to go beyond what we believe to be true because we aren't committed to the claim that everything looked as we imagine it.

Of course, Gibbon may well get us to imagine colourful aspects of Roman life, without thereby committing us to believing that things were as we imagine them. However, what Scruton's theory denies, falsely, is that I can imagine the Roman world prescribed by Gibbon, and believe it was thus, *as I imagine it*. Imagination, for Scruton, is truth indifferent because what I imagine, as I imagine it, cannot be considered open to the question of truth or falsity. Imagining something, for Scruton, means I can neither believe nor disbelieve it: the question cannot, of necessity, arise. Whether I believe what I imagine can only be resolved once we take the thought or perception to be asserted. Assertion makes essential reference to belief, and thus cannot, for Scruton, ever incorporate a case of imagination.

Yet, as I have suggested, I can take what I imagine, as I imagine it, to be true. The object of our imagining and of our belief may rightly be understood as one and the same. It may be an essential part of what I am imagining that this is what things are really like. For example, I can imagine that the grass is green on the other side of the hill, and it is a constituent part of that imagining that I take what I imagine to be true. Thus when I reach the brow of the hill, and find the grass is parched and brown, it makes sense to say that what I imagined, not just what I thought, was mistaken. In this kind of case, *contra* Scruton, what I imagine makes essential reference to belief. Since, by Scruton's definition, there can be nothing about which imaginings could be mistaken, Scruton's theory cannot ever make sense of the claim that our imaginings can be mistaken.

Scruton's theory holds that if I imagine something, I necessarily cannot believe or know it to be true: this is false. Imagination can involve reference to belief. If it is a significant part of the content that what I imagine is true, then, in this case, what I imagine depends upon, rather than being essentially contrasted with, what I believe. Perhaps Scruton's failure arises from a failure to

distinguish the basis of a certain kind of knowledge from actually knowing and believing something. To know something, is to know reasons why something is so. It involves an appreciation of what follows from what, a recognition that the definiens and defined are co-extensive, recognising that all the various instances are covered, and an informed grasp of why this is so. Of course, one may have a true belief without knowing why it holds good. Imagination may make essential reference to belief but it need not require recourse to reasons which justify that belief. Nevertheless, it may be essential to what I imagine, that what I imagine is what I know to be true.

Of course, in the case of imagining a roman procession, as prescribed by Gibbon, we may take certain propositions as assertions and other aspects as mere imaginative evocations. The imaginative evocation may only provide a context within which to make sense of the facts. Thus, these aspects may not be appropriately understood as open to the question of truth. They may just provide an imaginative framework to be entertained, whilst enabling one to assimilate the actual history of Rome. Thus, although it would be detrimental to the work as history if Gibbon's dates and names were wrong, it would not matter if the imaginative evocation of the procession was flawed. However, such a response is far too crude. When I imagined the grass was green on the other side of the hill, the colour I imagined it to be was not superfluous to what I took to be true. The response fails to take account of the possible inter-relations between what is imagined, the evocation, and the facts. For what is imagined may not only provide the framework within which the facts make sense, it may concern the very facts themselves.

Consider the imaginings Gibbon prescribes not merely in relation to processions but in promoting an understanding of Roman life itself. The imaginings prescribed may constitute an essential part of what we should take from that historical work and understand as true of that period. Indeed, the point of the work, as history, is to achieve a fit between what is imagined and the facts; in order to promote a reasonable historical understanding. What we imagine in such cases may be, as we suggested earlier but was denied by Scruton, akin to knowledge by acquaintance. That we imagine Rome in a certain way, imagine certain things under particular descriptions may justifiably lead us to modify our beliefs. It is a false dichotomy, to oppose, as a matter of principle, the imaginative aspects of such a work with the propositions it puts forward. The imaginative enhancement or vivification of the work's content may merely render the proposition's more immediate and plausible. However, what we are prescribed to imagine may also essentially constitute what we are to take as true: for example, that Julius Caesar looked a certain way. Furthermore, in other cases, what we imagine may well undercut the plausibility of what is asserted. For example, as David Pole has suggested, to read the Bible merely as literature would fundamentally alter one's response to it, where it was also conceived as something to be believed:

"one's response, whatever fullness it may achieve, can never be the same as the response of either a reader persuaded as he reads or a reader who wants no persuading."¹³

All of which may be effected by the imaginative representation of the work's content. Where we take the nature of what is asserted to be crass or implausible, our response to the work's content necessarily alters. For example, how we imagine what Swift suggests in solving the Irish problem, depends upon whether we take it in full seriousness or not. Furthermore, whether we take it correctly or not does not just depend upon our response, but also depends upon truths about the work itself. What we may imagine about the world may wholly depend upon what we believe of the world, in a way which is not reducible to a matter of our projective, subjective responses. Scruton is forced to concede that what we imagine may be properly understood, in our imaginings, as true of the world. This suggests an adequate account of our engagement with works, and the imaginings prescribed by them, may be better understood in terms of make-believe. Thus, independently of whether what we imagine is properly understood as asserted of the world or not, what we are doing is making believe that it is so. After all, we can make-believe what is understood to be true of the world; but it is not required for make-believe that this is so.

Whether what we make-believe is held to be true of the world or not bears no relation to the distinctive processes involved. Rather, it concerns the status of the work itself: whether we should take it as asserted or not. Believing something involves a commitment to holding it as true of the world. We may essentially imagine what we believe to be true. Conversely, what we may imagine may also leave the question, as to its truth or falsity, open. Imagination is not truth indifferent in Scruton's sense: imagining something does not entail, as Scruton held, that its truth value is necessarily left an open matter. It is not nonsensical to ask whether what one imagines is also true or sound. The element of thought in imagination is not necessarily equivalent to non-asserted thought. We can imagine something and, as a constituent part of the imagining, justifiably believe it to be true of the world. Imagination is truth indifferent because it allows us to imagine true, false and fictional things; all of which we can recognise as such. What imagination cannot apparently do, is provide grounds other than the experience itself, for appreciating why something may be true or not. A Scrutonian account fundamentally modified along these lines, suggests something like the position developed over many years by Kendall Walton. It is to Walton's theory we must now turn.

¹³ David Pole, "Art, Imagination and Mr. Scruton", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1976, p. 203.

Section 3: A Make-Believe Solution

Kendall Walton has most recently and comprehensively articulated his theory in *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, specifically in relation to the representational arts. The key analogy upon which Walton's edifice is built is, literally, child's play. Central to a child's game, and participation within it, is the capacity to make-believe. For example, a child makes-believe that daddy is a monster and thus, appropriately, the child shrieks when he lumbers towards her. Thus the child actively participates in the game of make-believe: her making believe makes it true, within the world of the game, that the father is a monster and she is threatened. Walton is careful to recognise the difference between voluntary and involuntary imaginings, delineated in terms of deliberateness and spontaneity. For example, involuntary spontaneous imaginings may occur in dreams, unsuppressable hallucinations, memories or may merely spring up uncalled for.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the key to Walton's theory lies in children's games of make-believe. One such game he discusses, involves pretending that mud lumps are in fact pies. The children imagine certain propositions, which they understand to be licensed by the rules of the game. In this game of make-believe, the lumps of mud are props and act as a boon to the imagination. The defining characteristic of a prop is that it generates fictional truths.¹⁵ The mud lumps are used as props to aid and promote various imaginings, which help to make the game more interesting. Another case Walton takes as paradigmatic is one where tree stumps are imagined to be bears. The shape of the stumps themselves may add to the vividness and character of the children's imaginings: this stump may look like a nice, peaceful bear, whereas the dark, large one may look fierce and evil. Of course, it is crucial to the game that everyone agrees and understands that, within the world of the game, all tree stumps are bears. If this convention is sufficiently internalised, then tree stumps may provoke imaginings automatically in the participating children. Thus, whilst playing the game, a child may turn around and be surprised by a 'bear' hiding behind a bush.¹⁶

Walton's idea is that appreciators of representational art similarly participate within the fictional worlds prescribed by the artworks. The representational work, like the tree stump, is a prop in a game of make-believe. Although they may not be the object of imaginings, props constrain and license what we imagine. Proper representations direct how and in what ways one's imaginings, as a participant in a game of make-believe, are to be prescribed. We make-believe what it would be like to do or be something or someone. In the bear game, what is make-believedly true depends upon what the

¹⁴ Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), Chapter 1, pp. 13-16.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 35-43.

group of children have decided: the conventions they have explicitly agreed upon or implicitly understood as operative. Representational works prescribe and license our imaginings via principles of generation.¹⁷ The principles of generation are taken to constrain and prescribe what is to be imagined and under what circumstances. Of course, from a given cluster of directly generated fictional truths, other fictional truths are indirectly implied. These indirectly generated fictional truths, which may or may not actually be imagined, may themselves modify the originally generated set. A prop becomes a representation when its proper function is to prescribe imaginings. So, a representation is something properly used by an appreciator as a prop in a game of make-believe. It prescribes the participator's imaginings as he engages with the prop in playing the game.¹⁸

Representations, then, are better than merely stipulated props or verbal instructions. This is because imaginers using props require less reflective deliberation. Their participation is more spontaneous in response to the constructed resemblance. Indeed, representations promote the vivacity of our imaginings in a way in which, typically, we could not achieve for ourselves. Moreover, representations enhance the richness of our imaginings, mandating particular imaginings, as the spectators participate in the relevant game of make-believe with it. An artwork visually represents an object if and only if it is make-believe of one's seeing of the work that it is a seeing of the object and, concomitantly, that the work prescribes or licenses one to imagine particular things according to its proper function.¹⁹ Indeed, Walton seems to hold that the representational function itself determines fictionality. For Walton, representations are to be distinguished from works of non-fiction:

"to be fictional is, at bottom, to possess the function of serving as a prop in games of make-believe."²⁰

For Walton, the imaginings prescribed by a work are fixed by the prop's authorised function and features. Whether and what one is to imagine is not merely a question of individual whim but is constrained by, because grounded upon, what is identified as the object's relevant function. The possible legitimate games one may play with a work are delineated according to what the object's function is taken to be. Similarly, within the game of make-believe, what the prop prescribes and licenses one to imagine depends upon the rules and conventions appropriately understood as operative. Indeed, this suggests that, for Walton, fiction itself is to be understood as society relative. Whether something is

¹⁷ *ibid.*, Chapter 4, pp. 144-161.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 51-54.

¹⁹ Function for Walton is a loose and relative notion; to the extent it allows a radical severance from the typical condition of artefactuality, it must be inherently flawed for the reasons articulated in Chapter 1.

²⁰ *ibid.*, Chapter 2, p. 102.

fictional or not flows from what the function of the work in question is relevantly taken to be. Thus, what was non-fiction for the ancient Greeks may well be fiction for us.²¹

The basic role of the spectator consists, as in the children's game, of participating in a game of make-believe. A representation is properly used within the game as a prop prescribing certain imaginings. One is minimally constrained to imagine the propositions prescribed as fictional by the representation in the game of make-believe. Now, the child is a reflexive prop in his game of make-believe, as both imaginer and object of what is imagined. Similarly, Walton argues, the appreciator is a reflexive prop in the game of make-believe that he plays using the representation. The role of the appreciator, for Walton, can only involve *de se* imaginings. The imagination is essentially self-concerning and experienced from the inside. Minimally, then:

"all imagining involves a kind of self-imagining (imagining *de se*), of which imagining from the inside is the most common variety. Specifically, the minimal self-imagining that seems to accompany all imagining is that of being aware of whatever else it is that one imagines."²²

The spectator is a self-reflexive prop in his game of make-believe. Thus, part of his imaginings will necessarily involve fictional propositions, beliefs and knowledge about himself. For Walton, imagining something necessarily involves imagining oneself believing or knowing that.²³ In our imaginings we must, at least, conceive of ourselves as an observer of the characters and events in the imaginary world. Therefore in engaging with a picture, one's imaginings must involve an imaginary self who is looking at whatever is portrayed. It is a necessary and constitutive part of what one imagines, that one imagines oneself to be in the make-believe world. In engaging with Georges Clarin's portrait *Sarah Bernhardt*, it must be make-believedly true that I am looking at and thus in the presence of Sarah Bernhardt. If I point to the picture and say 'this is Sarah Bernhardt', this is part of my make-believing this is so. Since it can only be a fictional truth, this is a form of verbal participation in my game of make-believe.

However, the assumption that our spectatorial imaginative engagement *requires* us to be internal to the imaginary world is problematic. A case Walton focuses on is Michelangelo's ceiling panels in the Sistine Chapel. Prior to the existence of anyone else, God creates the planets, earth and Adam.²⁴ For Walton, what spectators do is make-believe of their seeing of the representation that it is

²¹ *ibid.*, Chapter 1, pp. 51-53, 59-62 and Chapter 2, pp. 91-92.

²² *ibid.*, Chapter 1, p. 29.

²³ *ibid.*, Chapter 1, pp. 28-35 and Chapter 6, pp. 213-220.

²⁴ *ibid.*, Chapter 6, pp. 237-239.

actually a seeing of the creation. On his account, this *must* involve spectators imagining themselves to be there in order to see the creation.²⁵ What kind of non-human entities distinct from God the spectators must imagine themselves to be, Walton suggests, is a backgrounded question.²⁶ Since it is irrelevant to the point of what is being imagined, it is obviously a silly question to raise.

Yet, surely, such questions are silly precisely because we don't need to make-believe that our seeing is a personal seeing-of something at all. As Gregory Currie has argued, Walton's account is open to the spectre of endless background regression and the pointless postulation of possible entities. By contrast, any adequate account would not allow the possibility of such questions in the first place.²⁷ Consider the opening sequence of Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, when the camera shoots over, down and around the landscape. In our imaginative engagement with it, we don't typically make-believe that we are somehow flying; whether in a helicopter, as a bird or some other flying entity. Imagining a bird's eye view of a landscape need not involve supposing that, internal to the imaginary world, one is a bird. Similarly, when we watch interspliced two person dialogues, the camera shots switch from one person to the other. Yet we do not make-believe that there is a third invisible person hovering around the place; turning his, her or its head this way and that.

Walton assumes that to imagine seeing *x* is equivalent to imagining oneself seeing *x*. Thus to imagine seeing an oak tree's contours, height and surroundings just is to have imagined that 'I', as a make-believe entity, am in the imagined world. But when one imagines particular events, objects and people, one may imagine only seeing them. It doesn't follow from this, that one must imagine that oneself is there doing the seeing as an onlooker. We make-believe upon the basis of the objects and images which are visually presented to us, and it is perhaps their peculiarly perceptual presentation or determination of the content of what we are to make-believe which explains cinema's immediacy.

An oft imagined case of vertigo, with metaphysical associations, shows this to be so. We may imagine looking down from some great height, the top of some impossibly high building perhaps. Down below we see tiny figures scurrying backwards and forwards, like so many insignificant, trivial ants. We also imagine that we are down there somewhere, a tiny insignificant part of some insignificant, trivial whole. Now, it is not true that we imagine ourselves to be both at the top of the tower and down there at the bottom. It is essential to such an imagining that we are at the bottom somewhere. If this were not so, what we would be imagining, its very nature, would change. For then we would be

²⁵ See Kendall Walton's "Seeing-In and Seeing Fictionally", in J. Hopkins and A. Savile (eds.), *Psychoanalysis, Mind and Art: Perspectives on Richard Wollheim* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 281-291, for his most recent position on representation, where depiction is held to involve a perceptual game of make-believe.

²⁶ Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), Chapter 4, pp. 174-182.

²⁷ Gregory Currie, "Visual Fictions", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 163, 1991, pp. 129-143.

imagining ourselves to be above and beyond the trivial lives of others; a Nietzschean superman. But it is essential to the imagining I am describing, that we imagine ourselves to be as insignificant as everyone else. This particular imagining, the very sense of metaphysical vertigo and absurdity, depends precisely upon the very impersonal nature of the imagining concerned. Imaginings need not presuppose a particular make-believe person or entity from whose epistemological perspective one is make-believedly seeing the imagined world. Even perceptual imaginings do not straightforwardly entail ontological commitments about the imaginary existence of a perceiver in the same world.

This objection is reinforced if we consider it in another way. One's responses to a particular character represented in a work are grounded upon entertaining thoughts about him and the situation he is in. Thus our attitude to the character depicted depends upon understanding his actions and responses as grounded upon certain beliefs. However, it is not necessary to this process that one imagines oneself to be perceiving his actions or situation. Of course, where one is identifying with the character involved, one may imagine oneself to be that character. In identifying with Othello, I imagine things from his point of view. Thus I might feel sorry for and angry toward Othello on the basis of what I felt. Of course, I would not then feel sorry for and angry with myself: this would involve mistakenly taking myself to be Othello. But, not all imaginings involve such character identification. We may well imagine Othello without make-believedly being or even seeing him.

As Bernard Williams pointed out many years ago, in relation to visualising an unseen object, it may be intensionally contained in the imagining that the object is not seen by anyone.²⁸ As a spectator, I am not necessarily in the imaginary world of the work itself: hence I may 'see' an unseen murder. Walton's inability to recognise that not all imaginings are essentially personal derives from the false assumption that our spectatorial imaginative engagement must be internal to the imaginary world. Of course, imaginatively engaging with a work presupposes a distinction between what is internal to the imaginary world and the external actual world. In the external world, the representation constrains and prescribes what we are to imagine. However, Walton's assumption that there must be a personal entity or floating Cartesian 'I' internal to the imaginary world, in order for us to imagine anything at all, is false. Walton's model of participants in a child's game of make-believe begins to look less compelling.

The most controversial aspect of Walton's theory, has proved to concern the nature of the emotions in our imaginings.²⁹ The problem arises because it seems paradoxical to say that we genuinely feel for fictional characters we know do not exist. Walton argues that our actual emotions cannot be

²⁸ Bernard Williams, "Imagination and the Self" in his *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 34-35.

²⁹ The amount of literature on this subject is now almost overwhelming. See Alex Neill, "Fiction and the Emotions", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1993, pp. 1-13, for most of the relevant contemporary references.

involved as part of our imaginings at all. Rather, our emotions can only be fictional: they are imagined within the make-believe world of the game. We may only feel, what he terms, quasi-fear, in response to what we are authorised to make-believe. As the child recoils in make-believe fear from her father, so we may only make-believely fear the daleks in *Dr. Who*. The picture of emotion Walton presupposes, is essentially cognitive. Our emotions are partly defined by our appraisal of the relevant object. Thus to feel fear, involves not only feeling adrenaline course through my veins, my palms going sweaty and my heart racing. It must also involve my evaluation of the object of my emotion as threatening. The process of cognitive evaluation and distinct appraisal, serves to determine both the felt quality and emotional state.³⁰ Furthermore, real emotions, Walton holds, *require* the belief that what the emotion is directed towards actually exists.³¹ Thus we can only make-believely fear and pity fictional characters.³²

Although many of the criticisms directed at Walton's account fail to hit the mark, the most fundamental objection to this aspect of Walton's account has been pressed by Peter Lamarque and, subsequently, Noël Carroll.³³ The key to their objection is their challenge to Walton's belief-existence claim. They claim that genuine emotion does *not* require belief in the existence of its intentional object. Thus, they argue, we can and do have genuine emotional responses to works of fiction as a constituent part of our imaginings. For example, one can be afraid of Dracula independently of whether one actually believes he exists or not. It is the *content* of the thought that we react to, quite apart from whether the entities or states of affairs in question exist or not. Walton has responded by arguing that if we were afraid of the mere thought, then either we would simply stop imagining those states of affairs, or we would run from the cinema.³⁴ Existence, or non-existence, Walton claims, is a constituent part of the nature of a character or state of affairs. It is a necessary constituent part of feeling fear, that we act in certain ways; by running from what we are scared of. Since we know the monster is make-

³⁰ For a critical survey of contemporary psychological research, which accords with such a conception, see both B. Parkinson and A. S. R. Manstead, "Appraisal as a Cause of Emotion", and J. D. Laird and C. Bresler, "The Process of Emotional Experience", in M. S. Clark (ed.), *Emotion: Review of Personality and Social Psychology* (Newbury Park, California: S.A.G.E., 1992), pp. 213-234.

³¹ Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), Chapter 5, pp. 195-204.

³² *ibid.*, Chapter 7, pp. 240-255.

³³ See Peter Lamarque, "How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1981, Peter Lamarque, *Philosophy and Fiction* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1983), pp. 52-72, and Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (New York: Routledge, 1990), Chapter 2, pp. 77-88. Both were responding primarily to Kendall Walton's "Fearing Fictions", *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 75, No. 1, 1978, pp. 5-27.

³⁴ Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), Chapter 5, pp. 202-203 and Kendall Walton, "Reply to Reviewers", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 1991.

believe, we do not run from the cinema. Thus, Walton argues, we cannot really be afraid. Therefore, genuine fear must rest upon the belief that what we are afraid of exists.

However, it is Walton's reply here that is misdirected. Lamarque and Carroll's argument is not that it is the mere thought itself that one is afraid of. Rather, it is the thought content: the nature of the character or state of affairs. For example, when watching *Dr. Who* we are not afraid of our thinking of the daleks, but of the daleks themselves. Now, it is obviously true that our actions may differ in encountering a real and a make-believe threat: in one case we may flee and in the other we remain seated, though trembling. However, this does not show that we're not afraid. Walton's requirement, of a necessary causal link between emotion and action, is too strong. I am not denying that particular emotions typically lead to certain kinds of actions. An emotion arises in response to, or involves some kind of appraisal of, a particular situation. Thus my fear of the guy who's pulled a knife is partly constitutive of my disposition to fight or run. But in particular cases, genuine emotions may not result in their typical actions. This is, presumably, because they arise in response to cases where acting would not or could not make a difference. These cases, presumably, would include those where what we are responding to is make-believe. Therefore, the fact that we do not run from the cinema, does not establish that we cannot really be feeling true fear.

We can be afraid of something, even though what we are afraid of is a non-existent entity. We imagine we are threatened and this is an adequate object of fear. Now there may be particular emotions which we cannot genuinely feel for non-existent or unknown characters. For example, it would seem quixotic to claim we could feel true love for an imaginary character, such as Anna Karenin. Similarly, it would be odd to claim love for someone who exists, but of whom we've only ever heard. The only difference is that in the fictional case, it is in principle impossible to meet the person. By contrast, in the real world, it is merely a contingent matter. However, all this merely points up the fact that particular emotions depend upon knowledge of, and reciprocal relations with, a particular person. It does not entail that we cannot feel certain genuine emotions with regard to fictional, historical or contemporary but distant states of affairs and the characters caught up in them. We fear not just actual states of affairs, but possible and imagined ones. This explains why we can be afraid of what was, what is, what might be, what could have been and what could never be.

We can be afraid of a possible state of affairs, such as that depicted in *1984*, independently of a concern as to whether it is realised or not. Similarly, we may be afraid of a fictional, logically impossible character, such as a time travelling vampire. We couldn't be afraid of such a creation if existence, or even its possibility, was a necessary requirement for genuine emotion. Dracula is horrific because, fictionally, he has certain powers over and evil designs upon other characters: we both fear Dracula ourselves and may be genuinely concerned for the characters he threatens. We fear the collection of properties that go to make up Dracula, independently of whether the statement about their combination in this character has truth value or not. It is Dracula's properties, both presumed and

explicit, that one is genuinely repulsed by and frightened of in one's imaginings. The very notion of an entity that preys upon the sexually innocent at will, has powers to transport himself as a vapour through walls, windows and doors, and remains invulnerable to the actions of the virtuous is itself horrifying. My enchantment with, or repulsion at, a description of a state of affairs may be quite independent of whether they are imaginary or real. This also serves to explain more plausibly why artworks may fail to engage us emotionally. What we are prescribed to imagine, or the way we are prescribed to imagine it, may not actually move us to feel anything. Thus we can see why *Wild Palms* is flawed as an artwork. What we are prescribed to imagine is horrifying, but the way it is done precludes our proper emotional responses to it. What one imagines thus involves entertaining thought content, and one may be actually, rather than make-believedly, moved by what one imagines. This chimes in far better with our ordinary understanding of the sensations and responses we typically have when engaging with works than Walton's make-believe conception.

Perhaps Walton's insistent clinging to the false belief-existence claim results from his preoccupation with the child's game of make-believe. But even his conception of this model should include not just actors playing within the game, but onlookers too. If his model is thus widened, then there remains no apparent reason which explains why he should seek to retain the claim. For example, in filming *Silence of the Lambs* Jodie Foster may well only have felt quasi-fear when Anthony Hopkins snapped at her. However, within the world of the work, what is make-believedly true is that Starling is afraid. In engaging with the work, in make-believedly seeing Hannibal Lecter leer at Starling, we should feel genuinely afraid. Our fear is a response to Starling's encounter with Lecter's caged but evil presence. This fear partly concerns a fear for Starling, but we are also afraid of the nature of Lecter himself. Although we do not take ourselves to be internal to the imaginary world, we are genuinely afraid. We are not pretending to respond to what is make-believedly true, rather we are actually responding to what is make-believedly true. Since we understand perfectly well that we're watching a film, we do not flee.

Walton's theory may thus actually misdescribe even his paradigmatic case, that of Charles.³⁵ Charles is described as make-believedly afraid for himself in his game of make-believe with the film. He is make-believedly threatened as the monster looms up. Although he has quasi-fear sensations, he cannot be genuinely afraid and thus feels no urge to run. Of course, his emotions may arise in response to the plight of those imagined characters who are threatened within the fictional world. He's afraid for the running crowd, and, in particular, for the film's heroine who has fallen over in her attempt to escape. What he may fear is what, make-believedly, the monster will do to various characters. He may actually fear for the heroine's make-believe life. Therefore, it is the content of the thought which

³⁵ Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), Chapter 7, pp. 240-255.

provokes fear for the fictional characters involved. Furthermore, as we have argued, Charles may be afraid for himself just by virtue of the thought content of what is imagined. Just as someone afraid of heights can be afraid of the (content of the) thought that they might fall, so Charles may be afraid of the monster. Indeed, although Charles is afraid of something in particular, the fictional monster, he may not be afraid for anyone in particular at all. Contrary to Walton's model, our emotional engagement does not require us to be internal to the imaginary world. Fearing a monster is not necessarily equivalent to fearing for either oneself or other particular people, fictional or otherwise.

Walton's misdescription arises, in part, from an attempt to emphasise that all imaginings are *de se*. Thus, in describing Charles, he talks of how Charles feels as someone internal to the game of make-believe. This lends a false plausibility to the idea that Charles, sitting in the cinema seat, is only make-believing that he is feeling scared. However, as we saw earlier, Charles imaginings needn't be *de se*. Since he needn't be a part of that imaginary world, we more naturally talk of Charles actually being afraid for the fictional characters. We needn't be fictional characters in an imaginary game world to imagine and feel for fictional characters and states of affairs. Indeed, we needn't be imaginary characters in the world to feel afraid for ourselves. The emotional responses within our imaginings are thus not merely make-believe emotions, to be contrasted with emotions directed toward the real world. Rather, they are genuine emotions which are directed toward objects which may be either asserted or make-believe. It is the content of what we imagine which naturally gives rise to real emotion. Walton is forced to concede that we can genuinely emotionally respond in our engagement with artworks and his model again looks even less compelling.

Section 4: Walton Modified.

However, Walton's theory can be modified, whilst leaving his fundamental insight apparently intact. That we actually feel emotions in our engagement with artworks, is quite compatible with Walton's conception of our engagement. We use the work as a prop, in our game of make-believe, to prescribe our imaginings, which may include feeling genuine emotions. Furthermore, if Walton's model is widened to encompass the onlooker's role and allow that not all imaginings are *de se*, it looks stronger than ever. Of fundamental import, however, is the fact that Walton's account construes our imaginings as truth indifferent. Hence we can make-believe that something is the case and consistently hold that it may or may not be true. As we saw earlier, Walton is careful to recognise from the outset, "imagining something is entirely compatible with knowing it to be true."³⁶ Making-believe concerns the

³⁶ Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), Chapter 1, p. 13.

imaginative process involved. Whether something is open to the question of truth or falsity concerns the proper status of the work itself, whether it is to be externally understood as asserted or not. Thus we can make-believe that the person knocking on my door is a particular friend of mine, and be right or wrong.

Walton's theory thus modified is obviously compatible with what we discovered when examining Scruton's account. It is not the process of imagining or making-believe that renders something fictional, as Scruton's theory would have had us believe. Rather, it is the status of what we are supposed to be making believe about. As we saw, one can be prescribed to imagine both fiction and what is actually true. Furthermore, rather than pretending to attribute properties and characteristics to a pretended character, we actually attribute properties and characteristics in our imaginings. The question of whether the character is pretended or not, then concerns whether we take him to be fictional or not. The content of the work concerns what is to be imagined, whereas whether the work is fictional or not concerns the work's status. If one understands the world one is prescribed to imagine as fictional, one still actually asserts of that world certain properties. However, externally to what is imagined, the world is understood as fictional. It is part of the engagement of our imagination with the artwork, that internally we take these characters and events to be true of the world. Imagination explains fictionality rather than, effectively, being defined in terms of it. Thus imagining, in contrast to Scruton's unadulterated account, may make essential reference to belief.

However, our modification of Walton's theory remains incomplete. Walton's theory is still rendered problematic by its delineation of fiction in terms of what is imagined. Walton assimilates, falsely, artefactual representations with the category of fictionality. Man made objects whose proper function it is to prescribe imaginings, as props in a game of make-believe are, necessarily, for Walton, fictions. A prop is anything which, by virtue of principles of generation, prescribes and prompts imaginings. The crucial assumption Walton makes is that:

"Propositions whose imaginings are mandated are *fictional*, and the fact that a given proposition is fictional is a *fictional truth*. *Fictional worlds* are associated with collections of fictional truths; what is fictional is fictional in a given world - the world of a game of make-believe, for example, or that of a representational work of art."³⁷

Walton's conception of spectators participating in games of make-believe, using the work as a prop, entails that what is fictional is, for Walton, defined in terms of what is imagined. A fictional proposition just is a proposition we are prescribed or permitted to imagine in a game of make-believe:

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 69.

what we make-believe in our game with this kind of prop is necessarily fictional. By contrast, it is not the function of non-fiction to serve as props in games of make-believe. Non-fictional works are used to claim truth for certain propositions, rather than to make propositions fictional. Thus non-fictional assertions must be justified: we only consider them to the extent we have good reason to think they may be true. However, in fictional works, the mere prescription is sufficient warrant. The primary function of representations is to serve as props in games of make-believe, in which we imagine fictional truths. Contrastingly, non-fiction is essentially concerned with communicating something about the actual world. At the heart of the matter is Walton's core intuition:

"fictionality has nothing essentially to do with what is or is not real or true or factual; that it is perfectly compatible with assertion and communication, including straightforward reporting of the most ordinary matters of fact, yet entirely independent of them...to be fictional is, at bottom, to possess the function of serving as a prop in games of make-believe."³⁸

Walton explicitly claims that fictions, as cultural constructs, are society relative. The primary function of a fiction is to prescribe imaginings as a part of one's game of make-believe. However, whether something actually has that function or not may vary across cultures. This is not to equate, straightforwardly, the way something is used with its relevant function. After all, Walton presumably wants to allow that we can mistakenly misuse an object for the wrong function. Nevertheless, the claim of functional relativity amounts to the idea that myths which were once non-fiction, for the Greeks say, may appropriately be considered as fiction by ourselves today. Their function has essentially changed from one of communicating meaning and information about the world, to one of prescribing imaginings in a game of make-believe. Now, many works appear to be mixtures of both fiction and non-fiction. For example, in reading Berkeley's *Dialogues* we are prescribed to imagine a certain fictional conversation. Conversely, in Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, one may take as true his descriptions of Baker Street. Nevertheless, Walton states it is the essential, rather than the contingent, function of the object which determines its status. The fictional element in Berkeley's *Dialogues* is peripheral, as is the informative content about Baker Street in Conan Doyle's stories. The status of these particular elements are thus unrelated to the essential, overall function of the respective works within which they are contained.

However, Walton's conception is confronted by certain puzzling cases. For example, in the case of the New Journalism, what we are prescribed to imagine is not a merely contingent matter. Rather, it is an essential means to conveying the relevant information or understanding about the world. New

³⁸ *ibid.*, Chapter 2, p. 102.

Journalism's function is both to convey information or promote understanding, and to serve as a prop to prescribe imaginings in games of make-believe. Walton rightly goes so far as to recognise here, as he also does in relation to history, that the one may indeed inform and help the other.³⁹ Nevertheless, Walton keeps the two functions separate: the one must be subservient to the other. If the cognitive dimension of a work properly serves to contribute to its role in our games of make-believe, then the work is a representation and thus fiction. If the imaginings prescribed properly serve to convey information, then the work is non-fictional.

Yet, in the case of New Journalism, the works can apparently be properly construed as either fiction or non-fiction. Walton then suggests we should not seek to pin down one function or the other as primary. After all, many fictional and historical works seek both to promote understanding about the world and prescribe imaginings. So, Walton suggests, a game of make-believe with a novel may be as good as a game of make-believe with a work of history. Henry Treece's fictional *Eagle of the Ninth*, may promote a sound understanding of what it was like for Roman soldiers in a hostile, savage Britain. Similarly, Gibbon's non-fictional *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* may, through its prescriptions to imagine certain things, promote a sound historical understanding.

All this is quite true. But, the dichotomy Walton suggests is a false one. When reading the New Journalism, we do not either treat it as non-fiction or a prop prescribing imaginings. Rather, the imaginings prescribed are taken to be a constitutive element of the information or understanding it actually seeks to convey about actual states of affairs. Similarly, it may be essential to particular historical works that certain imaginings are mandated. In these cases, in order to know or understand what it is we are being told about the world, we must first of all imagine certain things. The function of the work to prescribe certain imaginings in a game of make-believe cannot, here, be separated from its function to communicate meaningfully about the world. The fact that what we are to imagine is grounded upon experiences, evidence or arguments about the world, does not entail that we are not or cannot be imagining in a game of make-believe. To believe that Caesar was great it may be necessary for me to imagine just what he thought, felt and did. Walton rightly allows that these functions can happily co-exist. Where he goes wrong is in assuming that all works with which we may legitimately play games of make-believe are thus fictions. A work whose job it is to prescribe imaginings is not automatically fiction, precisely because what we are prescribed to make-believe may be asserted as true of the world. In such a case, the work must be non-fiction. It is not the fact that we are prescribed to imagine something in a game of make-believe that determines fictionality. Rather, it is a matter of whether the status of what we are prescribed to make-believe is asserted or not.

A challenge, on Walton's behalf, might focus upon cases such as myths, intended to be literal accounts of the world's beginnings. Though they were intended as, and are false as, assertions about the

³⁹ *ibid.*, Chapter 2, pp. 80-81, 93, 95.

beginnings of the universe, we nevertheless use them as representations; i.e. in our games of make-believe. What the myth prescribes us to imagine should not be taken literally, as actually referring to persons or corresponding to the world. Thus they are to be properly regarded as fiction. Thus it would seem we can appropriately consider falsified myths as fiction despite, rather than being a matter independent of, the originating performer's intention in telling the tale. This is because the function of the myth can change, from claims about the nature of the universe, to being a proper subject for our games of make-believe. The point and purpose of fictions is to engage the imagination in games of make-believe. Therefore stories which are imaginatively valuable, though originally asserted as true of and later falsified in regard to certain events in the world, may come to be properly regarded as fictions. A Homeric myth, such as the tale of Troy, originally asserted as true, may prove to be false. Yet it may be so imaginatively fruitful, that it still compels and engages the imagination. Thus on the grounds of imaginative value, we come to recognise it appropriately as fiction.

This objection does not not straightforwardly involve conflating fact with fiction, rendering the distinction itself a matter of cultural relativity. The Waltonian point should be distinguished from the superficially similar position of C. G. Prado and Edward Branigan. Prado and Branigan move from the merely organisational role of narrative, to the claim that there is no such thing as fictional discourse. Their grounds for doing so involve the claim that there are only integral value-laden narratives. But to think it follows from this that the fact fiction distinction itself is merely a fiction, is intellectual confusion at its crassest.⁴⁰ Rather, Walton wants to allow that a representation of great imaginative value whose assertions have been falsified, for example mythic stories, may properly come to be regarded as fiction, despite the authorial intent with which they were uttered. Someone in a society without art may create an artefact which later, within the context of the evolved practice of art, may properly be recognised as art. Similarly, Walton claims, a story teller may narrate a tale which he takes to be literally true about the origins of the universe or the gods and later it may come to be appropriately regarded as fiction, resulting from its imaginative value.

The point is a good one and sound, except for what is at issue. For the imaginative value of the representation does not arise *after* its falsification as a myth, which claims to reveal knowledge about the world. Of course, we must recognise that the myth's relation to the world, from knowledge claims to fiction, is thereby radically transformed. The limitations inherent to fictionality, upon the kinds of truth claims available to it, entail that the story's possible relation to the world changes if it comes to be properly regarded as fiction. Hence the intuition expressed by the phrase 'mere fiction'. If a work is a fiction, it cannot refer to and correspond with the nature of the world and events in it in the way

⁴⁰ They both manage to conflate indeterminacy of representation with indeterminacy of truth, which is then identified with fiction. The distinction between fiction and non-fiction is thus reduced to, as Branigan puts it, "our understanding of the *specificity* of the references being made to the world of a given community." See C. G. Prado, *Making Believe* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984), Chapter 6, and Edward Branigan, *Narrative, Comprehension and Film* (London: Routledge, 1992), Chapter 7, p. 204.

assertions claim to do so. Therefore, a Christian may justifiably be hurt if the Bible is dismissed as merely a beautiful or utopian fiction. What is in dispute here is precisely whether the Bible, properly construed, does make truth claims about the nature of certain events, the world and the divinity.⁴¹ But even if the Bible is properly construed as making such truth claims, it still prescribes us to make-believe certain things. That is, non-fictional works may still prescribe us to imagine certain things within a game of make-believe. Thus a work's or myth's status is not wholly determined by whether we make-believe in relation to it or not. Rather, it concerns how we are properly to understand the status of what we make-believe.

Scruton's account too narrowly limited the range of the imagined to the realm of fiction, precluding the possibility of imagining non-fictional assertions. Conversely, Walton's conception threatens to fictionalise virtually everything. For Walton, the proper engagement of our imagination in a game of make-believe, with an artefactual representation, is what it is for a work to be fictional. Furthermore, what is fictional is relativised to the societally appropriate understanding of the work involved. Whether an object can legitimately be used as a prop to prescribe imaginings in a game of make-believe, depends upon what the relevant community takes its function to be. Thus all history books, biographies, science books, philosophical treatises, portraits, photographs and so on which engage the imagination are potentially or actually fiction. What is history for the Greeks may be fiction for us, what is science for us may constitute science fiction for another culture.

Walton recognises that truthful assertion or belief is compatible with what is imagined. I may be told what to believe through what I am prescribed to imagine. Thus the propositions I may imagine may be properly understood as open to the question of truth or falsity, even where there is no other way of getting at the truth. However, Walton fails to recognise that a work's fictional status depends not upon whether we play a game of make-believe with it. Rather, it depends upon whether what we are prescribed to imagine in the game of make-believe, is asserted as true of the world or not. Thus *New Journalism* or Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* are not either fiction or non-fiction, depending upon whether one engages with them in a game of make-believe or not. Rather, they are works of non-fiction, which essentially involve imaginings within games of make-believe.

The flaws we have identified with Walton's account flow from Walton's misconstrual of his own model: that of the child participating in a game of make-believe. It is true that when the child runs from daddy or the tree stump she doesn't actually take them to be a monster or a bear respectively. Rather, she takes her father or the tree stump to stand for the relevant entities in the game she is playing. It is indeed make-believedly true that the monster is coming to get her: it is actually true that her father is walking towards her and they are playing a certain kind of game. This is what leads

⁴¹ This is precisely the kind of worry that works against claims of the Iris Murdoch or Don Cupitt type; that mere religious sentiment, or the mere striving for transcendence, is all that is essential to Christianity.

Walton to think that as spectators “we participate in the appropriate games [of make-believe], we pretend to attribute properties by means of them, but there are no properties that we thus pretend to attribute to anything.”⁴² What legitimises the child’s imaginings are their assertion, or principle governed generation, in the game. Now although beliefs are not held because we may imagine or assert them, nevertheless, we may imagine things which we do believe or in order to believe them. A representation prescribes certain things to be imagined. However, as Walton recognised, what we make-believable see, may well be asserted as true. Thus, his model should incorporate the position of not just participants but the role of onlooker. For the onlooker may make-believe of what he sees, that it is what actually happened. Thus it does not follow that a work, whose proper function is to prescribe imaginings in a game of make-believe, is a work of fiction: Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall* is undoubtedly a work of non-fiction.

A spectator’s appreciation is grounded upon the thoughts and feelings entertained in response to the make-believe world of the game. The thoughts and feelings we entertain about Caesar may not only result from, but result in, certain beliefs about Caesar. Of course, the grounds for what we imagine and believe here are not their mere assertion. What we believe and imagine is grounded not just upon what we imagine, but propositions, evidence and argument about the way the Roman world was. However, we may well imagine in a game of make-believe, with a historical work or a piece of New Journalism, what we may essentially believe or come to believe. Whether a work is fictional or not, does not just depend upon whether its function is to prescribe imaginings. Rather, fictionality relates to whether what one is prescribed to imagine should be taken as a matter of pretended rather than actual assertion: *as if* what one imagines were true of the world.⁴³ Thus we may imagine the prescriptions mandated by a work, within a game of make-believe, and believe its assertions: such works are unambiguously works of non-fiction. We may make-believe, prescribed by representations, both what we may historically believe to be true and what is fictional respectively: that Rome really was as Gibbon prescribes us to imagine it and that Los Angeles is as it is shown to be in *Blade Runner*. Thus it cannot be true, that a work’s function to prescribe imaginings in a game of make-believe, determines its status as fiction.

⁴² Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), Chapter 11, p. 429. The insertion in brackets is mine for purposes of clarification.

⁴³ See John Searle’s “The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse”, *New Literary History*, Vol. 6, 1975, pp. 319-322 for the seminal articulation of this view and Peter Lamarque’s “Narrative and Invention: The Limits of Fictionality” in C. Nash (ed.), *Narrative in Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 131-153. My point does not require an argument to determine whether or not the fictional status of a work is wholly determined by the artist’s actions or whether it requires reference to an audience. It only needs the recognition that fictional status must be narrower than works which prescribe imaginings in games of make-believe.

Section 5: Imagination; A Summary.

Imagination in art, and more generally, is not to be straightforwardly equated with conceivability. Conceivability, as a function of thought, involves merely considering states of affairs and examining counterfactual propositions. Imagination, by contrast, constitutively involves both entertaining thought content and an irreducible element of sensuous experience. Furthermore our imaginings also typically involve the emotions, both as a part of the state of affairs imagined and in response to them. Central to the imaginative activity is the experience itself. Imagination does not itself determine what is fictional or open to the question of truth or falsity. Our imaginings may be prescribed independently of both the status of what one is guided to imagine, and whether we would will ourselves to imagine these things.

Nevertheless, it may also be a constitutive part of what we are prescribed to imagine that we know what we imagine to be true. Furthermore, that a work's function may be to prescribe imaginings in our game of make-believe, does not automatically entail that the work itself must be fiction. Thus the primary sense of imagination is to entertain thought content, typically conjoined with a sense of what it would feel like; to imagine something is to imagine what it was, is, could or would be like, including what one would, could or should feel, if a certain state of affairs obtained. Imagining typically involves both entertaining thought content and feeling, both in terms of experiences and emotions, about a certain state of affairs. The thoughts, sensuous experience and feelings which constitute what is imagined will typically have a developmental and modificatory effect on each other, as thoughts, experience and feelings do in our everyday lives.

It may be objected that feelings and emotions are not essential to my imagining something. For example, I may well imagine Mount Etna exploding, but it is surely not necessarily true that I imagine what I would feel like if I saw it. Similarly, I might imagine the tree outside or even that I am dead without actually feeling anything toward the imagined state of affairs. However, the objection fails to appreciate that imagination only typically involves our feelings and emotions. Of course, I may imagine Mount Etna exploding and thus the fear I would feel were I present in the state of affairs imagined. Similarly, I may look at a painting and perceptually imagine the volcanic lava shooting skyward in beautiful, searing arcs and falling to trace its deadly, golden way below. Thus I may feel a certain dread in my imagining, which perhaps enhances the terrifying beauty of the image. Thus I may feel a certain kind of pleasure or sublime delight. However, it is not strictly necessary that I have a felt response in my imagining toward the imagined state of affairs. It is, however, necessarily, typically true that felt responses are involved in what I imagine.

For example, when we engage with works which concern various characters, we may imagine what they would feel were the state of affairs as represented. Conversely, the aspect under which I imagine Mount Etna may well not be one which essentially takes a character's viewpoint at all, within

the represented state of affairs. Of course, it may be appropriate that I fully imagine what a certain character feels in response to this state of affairs. In which case, I should also imagine the feelings and emotions of fear he would feel. But this is not necessarily true and would depend upon the aim of and the way in which our imaginings are being guided. We may be prescribed to imagine perceptually what the explosion would look like without any feeling whatsoever. Nevertheless, that emotional involvement is a typical condition explains why it is a strong criticism of a work like Oliver Stone's *Wild Palms* that our imaginative engagement with it is emotionally poor. We are supposed to care for and sympathise with certain characters in this futuristic retro world of conspiracies. Yet, and this is the problem, they hardly engage our feelings and sympathy at all. Their lack of depth as believable human characters renders our imaginative engagement much the poorer. By contrast, though David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* was far more idiosyncratic, the emotional engagement within our prescribed imaginings could be so great that it was, at times, compulsive viewing.

It might be objected specifically in relation to art, that works such as Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* preclude the involvement of our emotions in our imaginative engagement and yet are still regarded as good art. However, *Last Year at Marienbad* actually undercuts the whole process of imaginative engagement, not just the element of our feelings within it. Thus it artistically highlights both the fragility of imaginative engagement and the very nature of the process itself: this is precisely why it is a good artwork. It engages the imagination and then proceeds to undercut the just established imaginative understanding of what is happening. Nevertheless, it must still engage the imagination, if only to undercut it, in order to be the kind of film it is: one which concerns the nature of imaginative engagement and understanding. Thus whilst *Last Year at Marienbad's* undercutting of our feeling, and imaginative engagement as a whole, adds to its value, the failure of *Wild Palms* to engage our feelings as an essential part of the imaginative engagement it prescribes, shows it to be a poor artwork.

I am not claiming that it is a *necessary* part of perceptually imagining something like Mount Etna exploding that we feel anything. In our entertainment of the appropriate visual images it may be inappropriate to highlight a particular emotional response or indeed any emotional response at all. This might, for example, be true if we were aiming to realise the elegant, formal beauty of such a majestic sight of nature. Nevertheless, our emotions typically do play a central part in our imaginings of certain states of affairs. Imagining what it would be like to live in a particular world will usually include the emotions, as a constituent part of the imagined experience. Indeed, if the emotions are lacking this is usually because the relevant character or state of affairs dictates a response of emotional numbness or frigidity.

The distinction between thought and imagination is then to be grounded upon the realisation that thought is abstracted from, though it may reflect upon, experience and feelings. By contrast, the imagination involves characteristics of both thought and sensuous experience, whilst also typically involving the emotions. That imagination concerns the realisation of what a certain state of affairs

could be, or would have been, like, serves to explain imagination's indifference to fictionality. It is not that imagination is truth indifferent in the way Scruton conceived it, what we imagine may be what we know. Rather, whether we imagine something or not bears no distinctive relation to the status of what is imagined, whether it should properly be regarded as fictional or asserted as true of the world. After all, what is imagined may be properly taken as true of the world and enhance our understanding of it: what is imagined may be understood as how things are known to be.

We are necessarily constrained by what we can properly take up a fictional stance toward. But there are no kinds of imaginings precluded by or peculiar to fictional states of affairs, as opposed to the kinds of imaginings possible regarding asserted or known states of affairs. In imaginatively engaging with a work, say *Hard Times*, the propositional content or sense remains constant, and open to true or false statements about it, independently of whether its status is that of fiction or assertion. In historical or scientific discourse and speculation one is typically concerned with knowledge and beliefs about the world. Contrastingly, in fiction we acquire beliefs and knowledge about the characters, events and states of affairs within the story. Although the events and characters portrayed within the story stipulated as fiction do not exist, we can make sense of something being fictionally true. Thus one may assert propositions assessable as true or false about particular fictional states of affairs: our beliefs regarding what is fictionally true of *Hard Times* may be justified or not.

Of course, fiction may mistakenly be read as history and vice versa. However, on our account, the reader will be mistaken because misinformed or uninformed about the work's status, regarding whether it portrays a pretend or asserted state of affairs. So we should distinguish the internal perspective from within the stories in which people are referred to via their particular properties and characteristics and the external perspective which concerns their relation to the real world, whether the set of properties are definitive of a fictional or actual character. It is from the external perspective that the story itself may either be fictional or asserted. Of course we should recognise that the characters and states of affairs we imagine which are fictional are inherently incomplete or indeterminate. Imaginative description *per se* may be inherently indeterminate and open to multifarious different imaginative constructions. However, fictional characters are necessarily more radically indeterminate than past or actual persons. Although the salient primary properties of the character Sherlock Holmes are given in the relevant works of fiction by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, there will be various innumerable properties for which it is neither true nor false that Sherlock Holmes has them. This is obviously not the case regarding actual people such as myself, historical persons such as Julius Caesar, or possible individuals; otherwise they would be different people. Thus my picture of Sherlock Holmes may justifiably and blamelessly differ from yours. Fictional character identity, then,

may be relative to interpretation. However, the possibilities themselves are nevertheless anchored to how the character was presented and thus the original primary properties identified.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, what we imagine can be directly concerned with how we relate to the world and each other. Furthermore, since even imagining impossible and fictional states of affairs is intimately linked to our understanding, what we imagine may, at least indirectly, concern our relations to the world and others. For example, what we imagine a friend or Mr. Gradgrind is like, depends upon our understanding of both them and their worlds. In what we imagine, as in everyday life, our feelings and emotions typically play a significant part in our appraisal, attitude and understanding of the relevant states of affairs. Indeed not only can what we imagine incorporate both particular and general truths about the world but it must presuppose a background of assertions, beliefs and understandings concerning the world. To make sense of what we imagine, we must be able to find intelligible, even if they are not shared, various background assumptions made about the nature of the world. Since the characters and events are themselves subject to and the creation of artistic control and invention, prescribed imaginings more readily lend themselves to the thematic interpretation and understanding of the tensions, possibilities and significances regarding human life. A matter which is far harder to manifest in the mere description of or reflection upon actual events.

Our account of imagination as irreducibly combining the entertainment of thought content with characteristics of sensuous experience and, typically, responding emotionally, suggests that the phenomenology of imagination spreads over all areas of our lives and activities. Our account however does not render the concept trivial. For example reading Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* does not involve the imagination: I reflectively try to make out and follow the argument, entertain propositions, and feel variously puzzled, elated and despairing in my failure or otherwise to apprehend what is going on. If imagination is identified with the speculative thinking involved in the construction of possible worlds, as Sabina Lovibond also suggests, then far from being distinct, imagination would be merely a form of thought.⁴⁵ Similarly Alan White suggests that imagination is envisaged possibility, so believing "p is to think *that* p is the case. To imagine that p is to think *of* p as possibly being the case."⁴⁶ Imagination then is identified with the speculative thought involved in thinking that..., or conceiving of possible states of affairs. But the charge of triviality, though it holds against these notions, fails to hold against our account. Imagination is to be distinguished from thought and conceivability, rather than identified with them. Thought involves the utilisation and application of

⁴⁴ Although we are anchored to these original primary characteristics, it also seems possible that these may themselves come to be modified through our interpretations. See Hartley Slater, "Fictions", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1987, pp. 145-155, for a recognition of the distinctive kind of inherent indeterminacy of fictional reference.

⁴⁵ Sabina Lovibond, *Realism and Imagination in Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 198.

⁴⁶ Alan R. White, *The Language of Imagination* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), Chapter 16, p. 148.

concepts in categorising the world around us. It can be imaginative in the sense of being inventive: developing concepts and their application in innovative ways, as contrasted with their ordinary use and implementation. Conceiving of something involves thinking about what would constitute a possible or probable state of affairs.

White fails to appreciate that imagining typically involves sensuous, emotional aspects of experience as constitutive of or in response to impossible, possible, or actual states of affairs.⁴⁷ Imagination cannot be reduced to mere thought: this would be to ignore the primary nature of the imaginative experience. The thought 'I desire ice-cream' makes essential reference to desire. The desire is part of the thought content. However, in imagining what we desire we not only entertain the relevant thought content but also the look or feel of the ice-cream: the 99 flake it would come with, the cardboard feel of the cone, the cold soft taste and so on. Our imagining what we desire typically includes irreducibly what, under some description, it would feel like. Thus, what we may imagine may well serve as a sounding board when deliberating about our action. I might imagine the ice-cream to help me decide whether I want a Wall's Feast or a Magnum, or even whether I want an ice-cream at all. Imagining is thus, at least potentially, a key element in our deliberation about what we should do. Of course I may prove to have incorrectly imagined what it would be like, but then what is imagined is not the actual experience. Yet if one's memory, skill and understanding is reasonable then it should give a pretty good idea. Imagination allows for the possibility of knowledge by acquaintance regarding what something might be like or what someone may be feeling, as opposed to knowledge by description and deduction.

This is not to say that the typical conjunction of sense, feeling and thought is sufficient for imagining. After all, if the monster bursts through the screen, Charles is definitely not imagining the monster. Rather it is in the irreducible conjunction of sentiment and thought in projected experiences, as distinct from what is immediately taken to be the case, that one imagines. One may thus imagine that one's friend is studying next door, that Napoleon looked like this or how Raskolnikov felt. Whether the status of what is imagined is personal memory, history or fiction, one may imagine it. Conversely, merely to reflect upon what was or is true, or upon fiction, is not necessarily to imagine. One can also imagine what one may speculate to be possibly true, though there may be no way of knowing whether what one speculates and imagines is indeed true or not because of present evidential indeterminacy. For example, we may not be able to know whether Henry gave a St. Crispin's Day speech before Agincourt or whether my friend is under emotional pressure, as he wouldn't admit to it even if he was.

In everyday life our imagination is usually concerned with what we and others do, would do or would think and feel under certain states of affairs. We commonly rely on our imagination to inform our

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, Chapter 20, p. 184, where, though White states that imagining "something is to think of it as possibly being so... to think of it in a certain way. Thus...what we are imagining is what it is or would be like", he still insists on conceiving of imagination as merely involving thinking *of* possible experiences and feelings, rather than typically including imaginatively having them.

understanding and thus actions. What I imagine my friends feel like and what I would feel like if I stayed in tonight informs my deliberation about what I should do. The engagement of our imagination with works of art is similarly concerned with states of affairs, actual, possible, impossible and fictional. Quite what this may mean for the primary nature and value of art, is, however, a task for the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Imagination, Interpretation and Art.

"Fine art is that in which the hand, the head
and the heart of man go together."

John Ruskin *The Two Paths*

Introduction.

Imagining in art, and more generally, is not to be conceived as a hermetically sealed activity. Rather, it typically relates to our everyday lives. We commonly imagine what certain states of affairs are or would be like. Of course, the state of affairs one imagines may be fairly minimal, say for the sake of a philosophy example. Nevertheless, imagining can play a crucial role in trying to understand various facts, possibilities and afford new insights. For example, imagining what it is like to undergo harsh examinations, be jobless or mugged, may enhance our understanding of such predicaments and those placed in them. In particular, the imaginings promoted by artworks may enhance and deepen our understanding. For example, imagining the rage of Othello's jealousy informs our understanding of jealousy, in a way in which our own paltry imaginings on their own would not. Even imagining impossible states of affairs, for example what life would have been like without computers or communism, can inform our understanding. Thus, in complex ways, our imaginings concerning what is real, speculative or fictional, can enhance our understanding of the world.

In order to articulate more precisely how imagination may contribute to understanding, I will distinguish two types of understanding. Firstly, there is thin understanding. Essentially, this is constituted by theoretical explanation, whether implicit or explicit. Thus, a thin understanding of trial by ordeal, and why it seemed rational from a medieval viewpoint, involves forming a theory which strives to make coherent, consistent sense of the relevant behaviour. What we imagine in this regard, may help us instrumentally: in articulating or modifying the appropriate theoretical model for explaining such behaviour. Secondly, there is thick understanding, which does not require a determinate theory. Essentially, this is constituted by our imaginative grasp of what something would or could have been like. As life is lived from the inside, so thick understanding involves imagined experience. The imagined experience itself is irreducible: compatible with, but not reducible to, thinking what something is like. Through imagining states of affairs, we can understand more fully the possibilities and nature of an action. Thus we can respond more appropriately to actual or projected states of affairs. For example, our thick understanding of trial by ordeal arises from imagining what it

was like to experience and feel approval for it. This knowledge by acquaintance, whether actual or imaginative, is constitutive of one's thick understanding. Thus what we may imagine, may justify or manifest our full understanding of certain behaviour. Therefore, imagination plays a crucial role in our everyday deliberations and reflections, from how one understands a situation to whether one should act to avoid or bring about various possibilities.

The value of artworks in this regard, lies not merely in imagination's engagement. Rather, through engaging the imagination, artworks may manifest, prescribe and promote imaginative understanding. It is not just the state of affairs that one imagines which is crucial, but the way they are represented and thus imagined. In imagining one considers, reflects and feels, both as a part of and in response to the state of affairs constructed. The point of an artwork is to constrain and guide what one imagines. What enables a work to do so rests upon the artist's manipulation of the raw materials, style, medium, conventions and genre constraints involved. It is through the various constraints and prescriptions of artworks, that one can imagine most vividly and fruitfully. For the imaginings are typically guided towards an appreciation of the possibilities, actualities, past and present, of aspects of the world and its people. Art affords pleasure, but this is because of art's value. The point of art relates both to imagination's place in our everyday lives and the imaginative insight art can afford. In short, the artwork attempts to convey in the imaginative experience a significant, thick understanding.

To say that all art is a lie is to betray a fundamental misconception about the nature of imagination and art. Good art may, through imaginative engagement, deepen, modify or alter our private and common understandings of ourselves, others and the world. Artworks may manifest and promote a sound appreciation of aspects of the world and others. Their power, inexhaustibility, irreducibility and profundity may also afford new insight into our imaginative understanding of the world. The pity we feel for Winston and the sad horror directed toward the world of *1984*, may serve to elicit a deeper understanding of the nature of totalitarian states.

Imaginative understanding fundamentally concerns how we perceive, experience, react to, and thus value, the world and others in various ways. Artworks constrain the imagination to engage with particular expressions or depictions of events which prescribe certain imaginative understandings. The imaginative engagement with art affords a primary and distinct opportunity to learn from one's experience, through the imaginative understanding promoted by the work, concerning our social practices and forms of life. This is of great importance. After all, the cultural practice of art, and the paradigmatic works within it, constitute, explore and create a constitutive part of our imaginative understanding of the world. That is, art informs and partially constitutes interpretations of ourselves, others and the world.

Section 1: Theoretical and Imaginative Understanding.

Understanding is usually conceived as the background against which we can construe and value aspects and events within the world. It provides the framework for knowledge, from which the light of reason projects onto and makes sense of the world. Thus, it might be thought, imagination's importance and contribution to understanding may lie in aiding our hypothesising about the world. Imagining may just be a more vivid way of speculating about what the world was, is, will be or indeed would otherwise be like. So the imagination may help us to conceive of various possibilities, given various basic beliefs about the world. A hypothesis may then be formed and tested against the postulated understanding of the world, hopefully helping us to predict what is likely to be or have been true. Thus the imagination may be thought of as an optional aid in forming possible understandings of the world.

The implications of this view are clear. The imagination cannot itself be significantly related to understanding. Of course, our imaginings may vivify or provoke speculations about the world. Indeed, they can suggest to us various propositions or even theories about the world. These are themselves assessable as true or false. However, this cannot be properly considered imagination's concern. If what we imagine is to enhance our understanding, it must concern propositions and theories about the world, whether implicitly or explicitly held. If the propositions implicit within our imaginings are not trivial, then they are more properly a matter for forms of reasoned enquiry. The significant content of what we imagine is wholly independent of whether we imagine it or not. Thus, though our imaginings may enhance our speculations, what we imagine is itself subject to the reasoned demands of the relevant discipline, whether philosophy, psychology or the natural sciences. On this picture of understanding, the imagination can be nothing but trivial. This is not to deny that our imaginings may have some value. However, truth and knowledge fundamentally concern how our categories and concepts may soundly represent the world. Imagination's possible enhancement of our speculations about the world can only be of instrumental value. Thus our imagination may contingently promote the sound modification of a scientific theory, enabling the scientist to predict more accurately what is likely to or will happen. Through imagining possibilities, the scientist may be able to extrapolate more justifiably from established facts. Yet whether the extrapolation actually is more justifiable or not does not concern the imagination. Rather, it rests upon theoretical considerations and the relevant mode of enquiry.

Now, one might be impressed by the role imagination plays in our day to day lives. Thus, whilst accepting that imagination plays no significant role in an absolute conception of the world, one may suggest it may play a substantive role in relation to the human social world.¹ The basic idea relates to the marked contrast between the scientific understanding of the natural world and, given the

¹ See Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985), pp. 111-112, 138-140.

intentionality of human action, the hermeneutic understanding appropriate to man and his social world. An absolute conception of the world is one which contains all those entities and characteristics of the world which exist independently of human perception or conception. The basic materials or substances studied by science exist independently of human conception and understanding, from chemical elements to gravity and the solar system. Thus, whether the earth is round or not is objective in a full blooded sense: it is a matter which is true or false independently of how we happen to conceive it. However, conceiving of and understanding the human social world is different in kind. This is because the intentionality of human action entails an ineliminable element of subjectivity, concerning the nature and interpretation of our actions.

Consider what it is we do when we walk through the park. Obviously, in one sense, we are doing many things at once. Under descriptions appropriate to an absolute conception of the world; various chemicals are inter-acting in our brains, movement is being stimulated, oxygen is circulating, cells are growing and decaying and the rubber on the soles of my shoes is wearing out. However, under descriptions appropriate to the human social world, we are also doing various other things; watching people pass by, idly loitering, expanding our territorial identity and so on. What distinguishes human action is the fact that we perform our actions under an intentional description. In performing the actions I do, I have a particular intention; whether it is merely to walk in the park or to fetch some more cigarettes. This is precisely why various kinds of things, ranging from manners and taste to morals, could not be captured in an absolute conception of the world. Understanding human action involves grasping an agent's or culture's self-interpretation of their actions and form of life. Hence it must involve an ineliminably subjective element. This, however, does not preclude the recognition of objectivity in the sense that one may be right or wrong about how an action is to be understood. After all, we want to allow that even our own self-understandings may, in some sense, turn out to be mistaken.

The idea being put forward is that our imaginings may significantly figure in our self-interpretations and understandings of others.² Thus, the imagination may be substantively concerned with our human inter-relations within the world, in a way in which it cannot be regarding scientific understanding. What we imagine may not only reflect who we are, but shape what we become, in a way in which what we imagine cannot effect what is scientifically true of the world. What we imagine typically relates to predictions and hypotheses about the human world. For example, my present imaginings might revolve around meeting various different types of people under various circumstances. Effectively, they might be exploring how a coarse, class based categorisation of others is inadequate to a proper concern for understanding others. Conversely, I might be preoccupied with imagining various different kinds of life for myself. I might imagine what it would be like to be living a cosmopolitan life

² See Charles Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals", in his *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers Volume I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 45-76, where it is argued that our self-interpretations are constitutive of what we are. Taylor, however, makes no mention of the imagination.

in London, dropping in on friends living in Notting Hill, hanging out in Soho, talking about art and mixing with media types from *The Late Show*. I might also imagine myself settling down to live in a substantial provincial city, getting married to the woman I love, working away worthily but insignificantly in the recesses of academe and so on. Through my imaginings the attractions of both possibilities may be more vividly realised and thus articulated. Furthermore, based upon my imaginings, I may opt to strive for one rather than the other possibility, even whilst wistfully recognising the attractions of the possibility rejected. Thus what I have imagined has not only contributed to my self-understanding, but it has also constructively helped to shape the person I will become. Thus, in contrast to the scientific world, it seems our imaginings can significantly and substantially contribute to the nature and understanding of our human private and public worlds. Furthermore, the imagination is not just invoked to aid deliberations over fundamental matters. We use it all the time. For example, I may think I'd like my hair cutting in a particular way or I may think I want a particular ice-cream. But, through imagining what the hair cut or ice-cream would actually be like, I find I want no such thing.

However, as yet, this conception of the role of our imagination is inadequate. We must presuppose some sort of understanding to sort out what is essentially relevant from what is not. If our imaginings are merely particular representations of possible and impossible worlds, then whether they are significant or not may still depend upon their theoretical relation to the actual world. How useful what we imagine is, may still depend upon its relation to anthropology, psychology, sociology or other appropriate kinds of theoretical explanations of our social world. Imagination may thus remain a helpful but optional tool for disciplines properly concerned with explaining the propositions and beliefs involved in the predictive understanding of human beings. The imagination may aid the formulations of theoretical understanding, as it may in the case of the natural sciences, by suggesting possibilities. The imagined possibilities can then be disambiguated into predictive assertions, which may be tested under controlled conditions or looked for in their ordinary environment.

Whether a class driven conception of the world is sound or not is, properly speaking, a matter for normative moral psychology and not my imagination. Only theoretical reflection, it is presumed, can help us to understand and make predictions about the human world. Imagination is insignificant and trivial on its own terms. Any significance it does have is contingent, i.e. parasitic upon theoretical understanding. At best, imaginings may be entertaining, internally coherent and of instrumental value. Thus, on this conception, one can fully and soundly understand something independently of any relation to the imagination at all. Of course, such a conception of understanding needn't involve the commitment that human agents themselves acted explicitly on the basis of the theory taken to be explanatory. After all, Freudianism attempts to explain behaviour in terms of the unconscious. Nonetheless, the presumption is, one cannot have an understanding of something without thereby having a theory which seeks to explain it.

Yet, at an everyday level, it seems false to suggest that we bring even a tacit theory to bear: this is why we find the idea that everyone has their own 'philosophy' ludicrous. For example, Mother Theresa may well know what is good without being able to articulate or commit herself to a particular moral theory. Consider an everyday case where someone's behaviour might be puzzling. For example, a good friend's wife leaves him and he carries on acting as if nothing more than a trivial inconvenience has occurred. We find this puzzling because we know that despite various difficulties, this friend had seemed a devoted husband. On the face of it, the inference we may draw is that he wasn't so committed to his marriage as we had thought. Indeed, his behaviour may theoretically be taken as symptomatic of the reason the marriage failed. However, we may also imaginatively put ourselves in his shoes. It is important to realise that here we are not interested in what I would have done and felt under those conditions. Rather, we want to imagine what he would or is feeling and thinking in his position. In imagining the way the break up happened and all the rest of it, we may come to appreciate what he was and is going through. Thus, through such imaginative acquaintance, we may come to appreciate that, despite his outward lack of feeling, he is actually enraged, bereft and distraught.

In attempting to understand what is going on, we may imaginatively construct some sense of what the relevant state of affairs was like, what the person involved thought and felt. Thus, through a vivid imaginative experience, we may come to understand someone better and the way they're acting. Although compatible with theoretical understanding, imagining in this way is essentially linked to a non-theoretical form of understanding. This involves, for example, imagining what the other did, might or would think and feel in the case as represented. Since 'understanding from the inside' is constituted by experience, actual or imagined, it is irreducible to theoretical propositions, of whatever discipline.

Thin understanding rests upon propositional assumptions or theories, whether explicit or tacit. Thus, thinly making sense of something involves constructing the best theory or explanation conceivable. Therefore one aims for theoretical consistency, coherence, an error theory to explain away ordinary intuitions which don't accord with the proposed explanation, and predictiveness. Essentially, thin or non-imaginative understanding is constituted by theoretical assumptions and presuppositions, dependent upon and placeable within a general presumed theory. Thus, in thinly understanding something, one has grasped a theory or key set of propositions, on the basis of which one can predict what is or will be the case.

Thin understanding, thus conceived, applies both to a scientific understanding of the natural world and the human social world. The predictiveness of a scientific understanding of the natural world arises from theories concerning the activities of the natural world which are not peculiar products of human consciousness and action. The thin understanding of human behaviour and institutions is a matter of normative social explanation and prediction, grounded upon the intentionality of human behaviour. Thinly understanding another, for example, may thus utilise the classification of

individuals into types, according to what are taken to be the relevant features and characteristics. A developmental psychology theory may then both provide an explanation as to why certain characteristics develop as they do, are taken to be relevant, have the force they are accorded and allow for or explain the individual variation within the personal type categories.

The contrast between thin and thick understanding should not be thought of as equivalent to a contrast between the purely descriptive and the normative. Thin understanding, at least of the human world, inevitably embodies a normative notion of what it concerns. Thus classical economics theory seeks to explain choices of economic goods based upon a conception of what constitutes truly rational decision making. Hence, if a person's choices do not match up to those dictated by the application of the economist's model, then the economist will usually conclude that the person choosing has misunderstood their situation, is a faulty deliberator or is acting akratically. The fundamental assumptions of the theory, that the economist is operating with a sound conception of human nature, will only rarely be examined when the anomalies produced by applying the relevant theory become particularly puzzling or overwhelming.³ Similarly, many historians take it as axiomatic that trial by ordeal is and thus was irrational, as contrasted with our enlightened and progressive ideas. Therefore, they typically presume, those who believed and took part in trial by ordeal were either rationally defective or akratic. The 'weakness' of those presumed to be sufficiently rational is usually explained away by references to the relations of power and the oppressive function of the Church.⁴

Recently in the philosophy of mind, there has been a direct challenge to the idea that predicting and explaining the behaviour of others requires the possession of a tacit theory about the propositional attitudes of folk psychology.⁵ Rather, it is claimed, we understand others via our simulation of the states, practical reasoning and actions of others. Hence no theory, tacit or otherwise, is required. It is the simulation process which enables us to explain and predict the behaviour of others, independently of any theoretical considerations. This position is strengthened if we understand properly the contrast between thin and thick understanding. Thin understanding involves theoretical propositions which must themselves be seen in terms of a normative theory. Thick understanding, however, essentially involves a typically felt grasp of what intuitions, feelings, desires, emotions,

³ T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) is the classic statement of this conception of theoretical development and change.

⁴ A rare and informative exception being Robert Bartlett's *Trial By Fire and Water* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

⁵ R. M. Gordon's "Folk Psychology as Simulation", *Mind and Language*, Vol. 1, pp. 158-171, first proposed the simulation theory and was followed by A. I. Goldman's "Interpretation Psychologized", *Mind and Language*, Vol. 4, pp. 161-185. For a thorough overview of the current state of dispute see *Mind and Language*, Vol. 7, Nos. 1 and 2. See in particular Simon Blackburn, "Theory, Observation and Drama", pp. 187-203, where Collingwood's emphasis upon the importance of dramatic understanding is discussed in this light.

concerns, purposes and people are significant.⁶ That is, we can only be understood properly by those who can imaginatively reconstruct the nature of our particular sentiments, thoughts and actions.⁷ Thus how we imagine a situation might be or a character might feel, based upon the information we possess, is of crucial importance. If our imaginings are sound, we will know what the person we are imaginatively empathising with is thinking and feeling or what the situation would really be like. Thus, we may have a deeper appreciation of how another conceives of themselves and their actions. Therefore our imaginings can afford insight into what actions another is inclined towards and why, enabling us to predict and more fully appreciate their behaviour.

It is important to emphasise that understanding another in this sense is not truly a matter of what I would feel if I were in their shoes. Rather, we are interested in what they are thinking and feeling in the situation. That is how, given their character, they conceive of their situation and are thus predisposed to act. For example, we may be interested in taking our flirtation with another a step further. What we want to know is whether the other person has the same interest or not. We do not then refer to some psychological theory about sexuality, desire and behaviour. Rather, we try to imagine what they are thinking and feeling concomitant with their actual behaviour. Thus we should be, if our imaginings are sensitive and sound, in a better position to know what her likely desires and beliefs and probable actions will be. We might carry on flirting in ways to test whether her actual behaviour is consistent with what we imagine to be true. Then, presumably, we are in a better position to know whether to make advances or not and how to frame them. On the basis of what we imagine, in relation to her behaviour, we judge how she will act and thus how we ought to act.

Of course, propositions which could be taken as support for various theories can be extracted. Indeed, what we should not be claiming is that imaginative understanding somehow rules out or precludes theoretical understanding. However, we do not require a theory in order to understand others. Our theoretically indeterminate imaginative understanding is not reducible to theoretical abstraction. Imaginative understanding is an appreciation, achieved through actual or imaginative experience, of what the world was, is or could be like. As such, it typically includes what it would or does feel like to be or act thus. Therefore one can imaginatively understand another without presupposing or being committed to a particular theory. Imagination and imaginative understanding are thus essential to and

⁶ I have adapted the terminology of Bernard Williams' contrast between thin and thick concepts, for my contrast between the two distinct kinds of understanding. Williams argues that our everyday, specific, substantive, thick ethical notions have both specific criteria of application and express judgements of value, for example concepts such as courage, generosity and kindness. The application of these concepts to people constitutively includes an evaluation of them. See Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985), pp. 129-130, 143-145.

⁷ There are similarities here to the thought of Giambattista Vico, shorn of his commitment to the idea of a cyclically ordered socio-cultural progress. See Giambattista Vico, *Selected Writings*, (ed.) L. Pompa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

below abstracted theoretical thought. The critical theories developed by reason may have a modificatory effect upon our imaginative understanding. The relationship must be a symbiotic one. Nevertheless, it is the imaginative understanding which grounds theory. In one sense then theory, whether psychological or moral, is an abstracted guide book of rules which rests upon our humanly vital imaginative understanding. Thus it should be no surprise that ordinarily we can make perfectly good claims to understand ourselves and others, without committing ourselves to a particular theory, whether explicitly or implicitly held.

The contrast can be articulated more clearly if we consider a particular example. We may form a theory about, say, the behaviour of a certain group without imaginative understanding. That is, we may deduce various propositions, belief systems and theoretical constructs which underlie their practices. This enables us to predict, explain and thus thinly understand their behaviour. Yet, even where the predictions and explanations seem sound, we may lack a full understanding of why it is these people behave the way they do. For, just as one may conceive without imagining, so too one may provide a theoretical explanation without imaginatively understanding what one is seeking to explain. Imaginative understanding, however, more fully concerns experiences afforded by the nature of the practice for the participants. In this case, imaginative understanding should not be identified with what we would think or feel in the given situation. One's own imaginative understanding of the practice itself may well be radically different from those one is trying imaginatively to understand. Rather, it will involve trying imaginatively to understand the practice in terms of how the participants themselves think and feel in and with regard to it. How they make sense of the defining events in these terms is not reducible to theoretical understanding.

Thus, far from presuming trial by ordeal is reducible to faulty deliberation or *akrasia*, a true grasp of the practice may be grounded upon appreciating the participants' own imaginative understanding of it. Those who condoned trial by ordeal, took part in it, institutionalised it, sought to modify it and finally did away with it, stood in distinctive relations to it in their imaginative understanding. This can be significantly explained by, but is not reducible to, their attitudes to the natural world as subject to the will of a just, benevolent God and to clerics, as representatives of that higher order, who possess superior understanding. The imaginative understanding, and thus the nature of trial by ordeal, came to be modified by the evolving critical understanding of the Church. Of course, if we cannot imagine ever having the relevant beliefs and feelings, then we will fail to understand participants in trial by ordeal. That is, unless one grasps how trial by ordeal was seen as a fitting ordeal with just results, then one will be unable to fully grasp how contemporaries understood the nature of the practice, which the theory is purportedly about.

Of course, what we can imagine and thus imaginatively understand is dependent upon, and thus to some extent limited by, our own experience. This is not to say that our experience determines what we can imagine. Only to recognise that though we can imagine states of affairs and characters radically

different from our own, there must be key aspects which are relatable to aspects of our own experience. Where this is not so, the intelligibility of what we imagine increasingly comes into question and may eventually break down. Hence, without great imaginative effort, those who participated in trial by ordeal and felt approval for it may seem distinctly alien to us, even where we possess a theory which explains their behaviour. It is also important to realise that I am not denying that the imaginative understanding of those internal to a practice may be mistaken. In which case, though what we would feel in their position may not be relevant to what they thought and felt, it may be directly relevant to a sound imaginative understanding of the practice itself. Nevertheless, we must at least seek to account for why the participants possessed the imaginative understanding, or misunderstanding, that they did. For normally, we take it that practices are in part constituted by the imaginative understandings participants have of them.

The value of theoretical understanding lies in its critical modification of and inter-relation with our imaginative understanding. After all, our imagination may fail; one might be unable to grasp what it would be like to see and experience the world in a particular way. Nevertheless, we aim to achieve a deep appreciation of what is the case. Thus a theory concerning the nature and value of art should fruitfully inform our imaginative understanding and appreciation of art. For example, the theory may emphasise essentially relevant information, which we lacked before. Understanding as a whole is concerned not just with how the world might or could have been, but how it is; whether people did understand trial by ordeal in that way, whether God is, whether my friend does need help and support. Nevertheless, it is imaginative understanding which fundamentally grounds the possibility of seeing things aright.

It might be objected that my argument merely shows that imagination may help in reconstructing why something looked rational from someone's viewpoint, i.e. how it made sense to them. Of course, how we grasp the structure, the relation of the whole to the parts, may be through imagining. Nevertheless, what I imagine only reveals the person's implicit theory about the world. That is, understanding something only depends upon grasping the theoretical structure which renders it intelligible. Hence experience, whether actual or imaginative, is not required for a distinct form of understanding. Admittedly, the imaginative reconstruction may have modified our understanding. For example, through imagining myself giving up a football ticket to stay with an ill friend, I may be forced to change my previous understanding of human nature: it cannot now be psychological egoism. However, this only shows that it is the normativity of thin understanding which does any substantive work. That is, it is the constraints of conceptual thinking and cognitive concepts which render psychological egoism false, not what I contingently happen to imagine in relation to it. After all, the same conclusion could have been reached without reference to imaginative reconstruction. Indeed, imagination, it may be suggested, can only bear a contingent or accidental relation to what is sound. What I happen to imagine and its relation to egoism is a matter of speculation and, if sound, a matter of

luck. For what I imagine is dictated by me, what is sound is dictated by logic and the nature of the concepts involved. Hence the attempt to say what it was like to experience trial by ordeal, and feel approval for it, is instrumental in so far as it promotes, and is measured in accordance with, thin understanding. Thus we may only allow an instrumental role for the imagination, in understanding the world and deliberating about it.

Of course our understanding of another may come apart in one sense. We may be able to predict another's actions, based upon a theory we possess. Yet, at the same time, we may be unable to understand, imaginatively, the reasoning, concerns, intuitions or feelings the other has, in order to behave the way he does and we have theoretically predicted. That is, we cannot imagine who or what he is and understands himself to be doing. This is something like the problems encountered in trying to properly understand those who took part in trial by ordeal. What this shows is the importance of the imagination in cultivating our understanding of others. Moreover, by the same token, it may play an essential part in cultivating our imaginative understanding of ourselves. Imaginings, prompted by desires or motivations, may be contemplated in the light of beliefs concerning what I want, should want and the options open me. My imaginings may help me to clarify which reasons for acting are stronger or better than other reasons I may have, and even how they might be combined. Indeed, even in my acting, I may imagine various possibilities. These may lead me to re-evaluate my action in the light of features or considerations I could not foresee in my prior deliberation about action. For an agent may discover, by deliberating as he acts, that a relevant belief may have been wrong, or there are features of the situation or action he had not previously foreseen.⁸ Therefore, the imagination can be allowed a significant role in the deliberative process, whilst still involving the recognition that it is an instrumental, contingent aid to our theoretical understanding.

What one imagines may lead to a more crystallised cognitive appraisal of the situation or dilemma one is placed in. Nevertheless, the idea goes, it is the cognitive appraisal which determines what action one will carry out. What one has imagined, by itself, cannot warrant any particular act. We do not need to postulate or afford significance to a distinctive imaginative understanding. In our ordinary, everyday carryings on, we do presuppose a certain understanding and on that basis pursue our projects, goals and interests. Furthermore, how to achieve our goals, and the understanding itself, may be subject to alteration resulting both from our imaginative engagement with the world and our critical reflection. Nevertheless, the objector will argue, it still remains true that it is the theoretical understanding that is modified by such deliberation. Whether what I have imagined is significant or not depends wholly upon its relation to our theoretical understanding.

⁸ See Andrew Harrison, *Making and Thinking* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), Chapter 2, pp. 34-59, for a narrower contrast between thought about and thought in action.

Section 2: The Primacy of Imaginative Understanding

However, the recognition that deliberation is not, and should not be, just a matter of thought but, typically, constitutively includes imagination, which also embraces not just thoughts but intuitions, feelings and emotions, is a significant concession. Thus what we imagine may enable us to make sense of our situation and the relevant state of affairs. Furthermore, the results of our deliberations are grounded upon our imaginative understanding of the relevant possible state of affairs. Our action in the inter-play between the world and ourselves is mediated and modified by the imaginative understanding we bring to bear. The aim of the deliberative process is to guide our actions according to what we should do, a matter which is dependent upon a sound imaginative understanding of the actual and thus potential states of affairs. Therefore thought, both about and in action, can only be a part of the deliberative process. Deliberation necessarily typically involves the imagination.

Imaginatively understanding the nature of a situation and what one both could and should do typically involves imagining how things could and would be. Thus one must imagine how things might be if one were to act according to the various options being considered or, even, upon other possibilities. Only in our imaginative acquaintance could we come across, appropriately evaluate, respond to and thus modify our action in the light of relevant features. For example, certain reasons for acting may only emerge through imaginative experience and thus only through imaginative acquaintance with the act may it be retrospectively clear. Thus only after having imagined what becoming an academic would be like, may I properly appreciate the point and value of academic disciplines, traditions and so on. Thus we can come to recognise qualities which we perhaps could not have done before. Therefore, what we imagine may enable us to articulate and capture qualities and considerations we previously had not had any acquaintance with, possibly leading to the redescription of academia in the light of an aspect not previously considered. Hence the process is an ongoing one which continually clarifies the inter-relations, importance and deepens our imaginative understanding of ourselves others and the world.

Imaginative acquaintance may be explainable by, but is not constituted by or reducible to, theoretical explanation. Of course, inadequate understanding may be due to our lack of imaginative sensitivity or lack of experience. Since our imaginative understanding of the possible states of affairs may be faulty or insufficiently determinate, we may fail to appreciate reasons for acting or relevant aspects of the actual state of affairs. We may misunderstand how things are through imaginatively misunderstanding how things will be. But the possibility of failure does not alter the fact that imagination may afford insight into the significance or otherwise of possible states of affairs and their relation to our imaginative understanding.

Our imaginative experience of and with regard to the world, and thus in art, is of primary importance, enabling us to appreciate and imaginatively understand possibilities in a way otherwise not be available to us. Thus if, as an atheist, one's deliberations concerning Christianity were limited to

considering the philosophical arguments and theories given for theism, one might fail to understand at all how anyone could justifiably be a Christian. Yet, if one were to imagine richly the kind of world a Christian takes it to be, the kind of world he aims at, the kind of person he strives to be as manifested by Christ, then one might understand. Through imagining what it would be like to be a Christian, including what one would feel in response to others and the world, the possibility of understanding why people are Christian may be afforded, even though one may still take Christianity to be philosophically flawed.

In Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov originally thinks that he murdered on the understanding that he was setting out to promote the interests of himself, his mother, his sister and to benefit society at large. Yet in acting on this basis he comes to find that, far from acting rightly, he has contravened all that makes man a moral human being. He has acted against the common human sentiments of fellow feeling which, far from being peripheral or reactionary, are the well spring of the moral life. Through the consequent alienation from his fellow man, juxtaposed with actions of spontaneous generosity, Raskolnikov comes to question why he really acted as he did. It is in the light of his modifying imaginative understanding that he, in part, comes to appreciate the nature of what he has done and thus the need to repent. Thus, it may be the case that only after an action is done can the nature of an agent's act be identified. Thus his very experience changes, due to the modification of his imaginative understanding of the world. Our thought about and in action concerns the principles we infer ought to be followed, and the considerations that arise in our acting which influence their application. Yet in deliberation, our imagination is primary in promoting a sound imaginative understanding of the particular nature of the situation, experience and action. It is not merely a question of being sensitive to the imagined possibilities, but of being sensitive to and looking for a sound imaginative understanding of what one is and should be doing. It is this which grounds our theoretical reasoning and logical inferences, which themselves may modify and be modified. Our experience and a sound imaginative understanding of it and the world is primary.

Furthermore, the significance of what we imagine is not reducible to the assent or rejection of it by our theoretical understanding. For the significance of what we imagine lies in the imaginative *experience* afforded and how we understand its relation to our actual experience and situation to be.⁹ Thus it is of fundamental importance that we can imagine how the relevant state of affairs are, from the relevant perspective. This is because, as David Lewis has argued:

⁹ David Mellor, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. XCIII, No. 1, 1993, pp. 1-17, argues not only that knowing what an experience is like is essential to deliberation, but that the ability to recognise experiences includes the capacity to know how to imagine that experience.

“to find out whether something is a value requires a difficult imaginative exercise. And if you are to be sure of your answer, you need to be sure that you have gained the fullest imaginative acquaintance that is humanly possible.”¹⁰

That is, it is our experiencing a situation in a certain way, whether actual or imaginative, that enables us to make sense of it, an essential part of which involves ascribing value and significance to it. Thus something's significance depends upon its relevance and relation to our desires, purposes and understanding. Of course, what we imagine may be mistaken, just as our propositional knowledge may turn out to be false. But the fallibility of knowledge by imaginative acquaintance does not damage the claim that imaginative acquaintance may warrant particular judgements. The core idea is that the nature, quality and value of certain kinds of things cannot be discovered independently of any relation to experience. From whether we would like a 99 flake ice-cream to which life we should choose, our imaginative experience is the primary way of discovering the nature and value of the choices open to us.

Of course, we could rely upon merely extrapolating from previous experiences or depend upon the advice of others. Nevertheless, our imaginative acquaintance carries the burden of discovery and thus justification for a particular understanding and choice of action. The concrete, perspectival grasp embodied in what we imagine, may afford a fuller knowledge of what we may do: knowledge which is otherwise unavailable. Hence the more significant our deliberations are, the more recourse we may make to what we imagine. Imagination is a prerequisite for a thick understanding of others. What we imagine in this regard aims to capture the essential, defining characteristics of the state of affairs. Although, the interpretations are typically perspectival, they may be more or less sound. Thus our imaginative experience can help us to have the appropriate imaginative understanding, directing our emotions in the right context toward the right objects. Thus we may know what we should fear, admire or recognise what we ought to do.

Our deliberations concerning the nature of a situation, and what we should do, are not reducible to theoretical propositions concerning our beliefs and desires, from which one makes logical inferences. Theorising can still be done without any imaginative understanding or feel for what one is dealing with. But in deliberating, we depend upon our attempts to imagine what it would be like if we performed a particular action and thus realised a particular value. In doing so we do not depend upon or refer back to a normative theory of rationality. Rather, we are being rational in our imaginative

¹⁰ David Lewis, "Dispositional Theories of Value", *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, Vol. LXIII, 1989, pp. 113-137. Lewis' argument for a dispositional theory of value amounts to the claim that what is valuable is a matter of what we desire to desire under certain ideal conditions. One can agree with Lewis both in this regard and regarding the necessity of imaginative acquaintance, without being committed to his particular understanding of the reality of possible worlds.

deliberations. The imagination enables a concrete realisation of the nature and significance of particular people, actions or values. This is of crucial importance as our beliefs are grounded upon our imaginative understanding of the world and others. The thought in our deliberation often slides over the surface of reality, from the too familiar to the previously unencountered. Contrastingly, through our imaginings, we can hope to capture the sense in which things have a certain significance for us. Thought may tell us something, but without the apt vivification by the imagination, our apprehension of it remains poor and attenuated. Thus, merely to know that smoking is bad for you or that one should tolerate others does not, of itself, lead to stopping smoking or toleration. Knowing a fact cannot be equated with the understanding afforded by the appropriate imaginative experience. ^e

Rather than providing only primitive fantasy and illusion, as contrasted with theoretical reasoning and logical deduction, imagination is required for a genuine proper understanding of the human world, others, and ourselves. Critically reflective theoretical reasoning is grounded upon what we take to be the appropriate way of responding to others, what it is appropriate to think, feel and do. Imagination mediates and partly constitutes our understanding of just who we are, the nature of others and the world in general. In other words, there must be an imaginative understanding of the world and others in the first place in order for theoretical thought to have something to reflect critically upon and modify. Therefore imagination, far from being relegated to some marginalised, independent sphere of the aesthetic, is central to human understanding.

Our imaginative understanding of the world arises from the engagement of our biologically grounded faculties, in particular our imagination, with the world and what our parents or teachers encourage us to understand. Thus our imaginative understanding is promoted, developed and built up in an incrementally modificatory process. Our engagement with the world requires the imagination, modifies our evolved and evolving imaginative understanding. It is the imagination which grounds critical theories we may develop and which themselves have a two way modificatory relationship to our full understanding. We should always remain open to the possibility that both our imaginative and theoretical understandings of others and the world are inadequate or mistaken. Hence it is important to remain open to different imaginative understandings of the world and others. Through imagining and the development of one's imaginative understanding one may have reason to think that the world differs from how one previously took it to be. Thus one may re-examine one's theoretical understanding in a different light. It enables us to understand more deeply a potential self, actual friend or possible world.

The primacy of imaginative understanding reveals the fundamental importance and pervasiveness of imagining, from children's games of make-believe to day dreaming or going to the movies.¹¹ Indeed, as we shall see, Schiller was right to compare playing games with art in this

¹¹ See P. L. Harris, "From Simulation to Folk Psychology: The Case for Development", *Mind and Language*, Vol. 7, Nos. 1 and 2, pp. 120-144, where it is argued that what is crucial to children's social interaction is the

regard.¹² Of course, as Frances Berenson has intimated, our personal attitudes play a primary part in our understanding of others.¹³ What I am suggesting is that what underwrites our personal attitudes is our capacity to imaginatively understand others. It is also what enables us to inter-act and communicate meaningfully with others. Indeed, without this capacity it is doubtful we could form many of our most significant kinds of relationships, from parental love or friendship to being lovers. It is fundamental to these kinds of relationships that we exercise our capacity to imagine how others do and would think and feel. Thus it is that we can take their interests, as distinct from what would be our interests, into account. Therefore it is this capacity which, at least in part, enables us to widen our circle of concern from ourselves to others in their own right.

Furthermore, the primacy of imaginative understanding also serves to explain just why it is that we should be so affected by the suffering of others. Those who imagine themselves in the position of those who are suffering, rather than those who avoid doing so, are typically moved to a much greater extent. Their imaginings will promote a far deeper understanding of what is going on. Of course, a truly evil person may have such an understanding through imagining and yet react with glee. Nevertheless, imagining another's suffering, the sensations, aches, feelings and desires, will typically promote our imaginative understanding and thus sympathy. This is probably why in the Milgram experiments, the most infamous psychology experiment of the 1950's, most of the test subjects ended up suffering severe shock, trauma and in some case breakdowns.¹⁴ Under the duress of authority, they had knowingly committed actions which, so they thought, directly led to the death of another subject. Of course, part of the shock arises from the mere thought that they had done something which, under normal circumstances, would have constituted directly killing another human being. But a significant part of the stress during the experiment and in the post-experiment reports, concerns what they had imagined the subject in the 'electric' chair to have been going through, as they pushed the electricity voltage way past the danger level. No doubt it was those who had most vividly imagined what the other person was supposedly going through, who went through the greatest stress and trauma. For what they imagined brought vividly home to them the nature of what they were doing. Of course, the

development of their imaginative capacity: to imagine that others may have beliefs at odds with their own. This is something which, it is claimed, autistic children do not develop, hence their incapacity to understand others.

¹² Friedrich Schiller, *Letters On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, (tr.) E. M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957).

¹³ Frances Berenson, "Understanding Art and Understanding Persons", in S. C. Brown (ed.), *Objectivity and Cultural Divergence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 43-60. Berenson argues that personal knowledge, as distinct from scientific knowledge, involves our reflections, feelings and personal attitudes toward things.

¹⁴ See Eddy Van Avermaet, "Social Influence in Small Groups" in Miles Hewstone (ed.), *Social Psychology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), pp. 372-380, for a discussion of Milgram's experiments.

resultant effect depended upon them having a moral understanding of what they were doing in the first place.

The importance of imaginative understanding also reveals to us how art in particular may be significant. As we saw in the last chapter, the imagination may be prescribed and promoted in our engagement with artworks in peculiarly vivid, subtle and powerful ways. It is because of this, that artworks may extend our imaginative experience in ways in which our imaginations, left on their own would not be able to do. That is, artworks may enable us to transcend imaginatively the otherwise imaginatively limiting constraints of our actual experience. Artworks enhance the imagination's capacity to cultivate our thick understanding of events, including ones we have not lived through. Artistic materials, conventions and genres are shaped purposively by artists to engage our imagination and promote our imaginative understanding. Of course, it is true that merely imagining allows our actual and theoretical understandings to remain open to the possibility that things are not as we conceive them to be. For example, imagining black swans shows us that it is not essential to being a swan that it should be white.

However, artworks can cultivate our openness and develop our understanding in far more complex and subtle ways. They can cultivate our imaginings and possible imaginative understandings with regard to interests and concerns radically different from our own. Hence we may learn more deeply from works which shed light upon the world, conceived under different aspects or imaginative understandings. For example, we might be predisposed toward an understanding of the world which demands that people ought to receive their 'just' deserts. Yet, through reading *Crime and Punishment*, we may come to see how one might understand the world in a different light, one which does not make such a demand, at least of this world. Whether one goes on to take it as an adequate understanding of our world will depend not only upon the imaginative understanding evoked by the artwork, but also upon how one conceives of the relation between the world of the work and our world. We may, for example, accept the relation suggested by the author or we may take the relation to be otherwise.

The importance of imaginative understanding enables us to refute the view that art, properly speaking, cannot be significant.¹⁵ If understanding were merely a matter of propositional theories, then an artwork's significance would be contingent and rest upon the relevant area of enquiry, whether philosophy, psychology or the natural sciences. And shorn of such subject matter, what could art be but a matter of aesthetic beauty and disinterested delight? Yet, as we have seen, the meaning of a work of art plays a central role in what we normally take much art to be about. From *The Divine Comedy* to *Blade Runner*, art meaningfully engages with significant questions about the way the world is, the way we are or could be. But this is to forget that what is primary is our experience with the artwork itself.

¹⁵ Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Cognitive Triviality of Art", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 1992, pp. 191-200.

Such amnesia inevitably results in a pointing away from what the theories are supposed to be about, but cannot themselves replace.¹⁶ That is, the nature of the object concerned as manifested in our experience with it. The following example, used by Peter Winch, from George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, points up the inadequacies of such a conception of understanding.¹⁷ The following extract arises when the emotionally arid Mr. Causaubon has taken Dorothea to see the wonders of Rome for their honeymoon:

"What was fresh to her mind was worn out to his; and such capacity of thought and feeling as had ever been stimulated in him by the general life of mankind had long shrunk to a sort of dried preparation, a lifeless embalment of knowledge.

When he said 'Does this interest you Dorothea? Shall we stay a little longer? I am ready to stay if you wish it,' - it seemed to her as if going or staying were alike dreary. Or, 'Should you like to go to the Farnesina, Dorothea? It contains celebrated frescoes designed or painted by Raphael, which most persons think worth while to visit.'

'But do you care about them?' was always Dorothea's question.

'They are, I believe, highly esteemed. Some of them represent the fable of Cupid and Psyche, which is probably the romantic invention of a literary period, and cannot I think be reckoned as a genuine mythical product. But if you like these wall-paintings, we can easily drive thither; and you will then, I think, have seen the chief work of Raphael, any of which it were a pity to omit in a visit to Rome. He is the painter who has been held to combine the most complete grace of form with sublimity of expression. Such at least I have gathered to be the opinion of the cognoscenti.'

There is hardly any contact more depressing to a young ardent creature than that of a mind in which years full of knowledge seem to have issued in a blank absence of interest or sympathy."¹⁸

What Causaubon and all those with a theory driven model of understanding fail to appreciate is that what ought to be primary is what Dorothea is attending to: namely, the work itself and the

¹⁶ See Matthew Kieran, "The Impoverishment of Art", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, (forthcoming), for a more detailed development of this thought.

¹⁷ Peter Winch used the example to illustrate the related point that one should judge based on one's own experience, rather than that of others. See Peter Winch, "Text and Context", *Trying To Make Sense* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 18-32.

¹⁸ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), Chapter 20, pp. 228-229.

experience properly afforded by it. Significance in art relates to human understanding in the full blooded imaginative sense. That is, appreciating through one's imaginative engagement with the artwork, how the world as it is represented may be, and thus, in such a world, what one would or should think and feel. Our imaginative engagement with an artwork may promote an imaginative understanding, which itself may bear a complex relationship to our actual world. For how an impossible, possible or actual world is represented and what the imaginative understanding promoted is, may not straightforwardly be the imaginative understanding of our world that the artist seeks to promote. For example, Dostoevsky's *Notes From The Underground* manifests an understanding of the world which suggests people are evil, mean and irrational because of, and not despite, their humanity. Yet this is only a partial aspect of the imaginative understanding which Dostoevsky and the work ultimately promotes concerning our world. One is supposed to see, through the underground character, a possibility he seeks to deny; namely, that it is in this condition that humanity's moral worth and greatness lies, which allows for the possibility of redemption.

The engagement and prescription of our imagination by the artwork aims to promote the imaginative understanding of the world portrayed, whether fictional or not, and thus, depending upon its relation to this world, shed some light on our form of life, whether in its more parochial or transcendent aspects. Historical work though factually faulty, may still evoke a better imaginative understanding than other more factually accurate historical works. Hence Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* may yet guide us to a deeper appreciation of Roman civilisation. It is the primacy of experience, whether imagined or not, which grounds deep understanding. It is the imagination which allows us the possibility of properly understanding others in a way which cannot be grasped by theoretical explanation. Moreover, imaginative openness to the world and others is essential to prevent the concretisation of thin understanding. Theoretical understanding severed from the imaginative understanding will inevitably end up bypassing or short circuiting the very thing it was supposed to explain in the first place. Indeed, the possible intrusion of reality, the way the world is as distinct from the way it is theoretically taken to be may then be precluded. If our imaginations are not cultivated and continually exercised in their openness to the world and others, then we may become like the utilitarian Mr. Gradgrind or the critically obsessed Mr. Causaubon. For example, for one who cannot even imagine the point of art, let alone understand it, art must be nebulous and at best trivial. Art may then be falsely conceived as just a matter of social ostentation or elitism. Such a failure to appreciate the point of attending to artworks itself displays a patent lack of imagination. The imagination can help us to look at the world and others in new lights.

If one's experience is not merely the self-confirmation of our theoretical understanding, if there is to be true, genuine, inter-action with others and the world, then imaginative understanding is requisite. Theoretical understanding presupposes a symbiotic relationship with our imaginative understanding. Imaginative understanding opens up the possibility of discovering that our theoretical

understanding may be flawed and vice versa. Hence neither properly operates in a circular, self-confirmatory way. Moreover, the imagination allows us to understand fully what we may only thinly understand, in terms of theory and predictive accuracy. If we imagine what the world would be like under the relevant construal, what the practice is like for those who take part in it, and our imagination does not fail us, then we will be able more fully to understand the point and purpose of the particular activity involved. Where the faculty of imagination is sustained, developed and promoted, we can and do notice things which do not confirm, or may even suggest there is something fundamentally wrong with, our present privileged understanding of the world, others and ourselves.

Imagining how things could be promotes our imaginative understanding, which may lead one to look at things differently. Thus new horizons may open up through noticing things which are contrary to one's general understanding of life. Openness to life, the demands the world and others make upon us, requires imagination. Imagination is required for a full understanding of a potential self, actual friend or possible world whereas, for example, a psychological theory is not, except in a trivial, uninteresting way. The imaginative understanding of another is not a matter of what I would think in his position, but rather what is it that he would think and feel. The better I understand another, based upon such imaginative experience, the more I can imagine what he is likely to do or how he is likely to react, independently of theory.

It is through the cultivation and promotion of imagination and imaginative understanding, in helping us to remain imaginatively open, that art has a great and significant role to play. Our interest in stories, or past and potential futures, is not merely based upon entertainment or whimsy. In engaging our imagination, art promotes particular imaginative understandings of the world, others and ourselves. Central to art is the peculiarly powerful engagement of the imagination. What distinguishes great literature from a hypothetical philosophy example or a Barbara Cartland novel is not a matter of fictionality or predictiveness, but the vivid imaginative experience with and deep understanding of a possible world. Thus art is concerned with and fundamentally relates to our relationships regarding the world and others. The relationship the imagined characters have to their world, to the other characters, is prescribed and promoted by the artwork to deepen our understanding of that possible world. Since the artistically postulated world bears a complex relation to our world, it deepens our imaginative understanding of ourselves and others. George Eliot in *Middlemarch*, through the description of Causaubon and Dorothea in Venice, shows how one who mistakes truth for what others, especially critics, say, misses the point that it is ultimately the experience our understanding should be faithful to. Thus the process of imagining and engaging with art ought to be continuous. Art fuels the symbiotic interplay between our imaginative and thin understanding and thus it is that art may serve to educate.

Now the relationship between postulated imaginative understandings and their relevance to our world is not peculiar to art. It is central to our attempts to understand things in our everyday lives.

But the artwork engages the imagination and promotes our imaginative understanding of the world in particularly powerful and vivid ways. This is the very point of artistic conventions and genres; to prescribe better imaginings. It is this which allows art to be peculiarly and distinctively significant. The imaginative understanding promoted by a work, which may be indeterminate, interacts with one's own imaginative understanding of what such a world or the people within it would be like. Thus we may criticise an artist on the grounds that he lacks a sound understanding of human action, which is revealing both about the writer and those who make the criticism. Art can be true to life. It can manifest a false or a sound imaginative understanding of the world and others: how, given a certain situation, certain people and their inter-relations would work out.

Moreover, the relation of a represented world to ours may itself betray a better or worse understanding. It may be, on one end of the scale, fantastical or, on the other, faithful to what we are actually like. Art can thus capture or be false to the nature and reality of our human world, whether in a highly parochial or more transcendent regard. At its best, art, whether fictional or not, is faithful to and expresses a sound imaginative understanding of the human world. Art's significance involves a powerful experiential relation through what is imagined, which promotes our imaginative understanding. Thus art is neither merely cognitively trivial nor potentially equivalent to all other forms of discourse. The imaginative understanding and its relation to our world may be subjected to questions of truth or falsity. Thus, in relation to the imagined experience, art can be potentially more, rather than less faithful to how the world is, than theories which seek to explain human behaviour. Indeed without imaginative understanding, there would be nothing for theoretical understanding to get to grips with.

Section 3: Imaginative Engagement and Interpretation.

Having established the importance of imagination to deliberation and understanding, we can now move on to consider, more specifically, its role in relation to art. The imagination is central to the interpreting process in our engagement with art. Our imaginative acquaintance with characters and states of affairs, fictional or not, may be significantly cultivated through engaging with artworks.¹⁹ What is distinctive of artworks is their representation of the state of affairs to be imagined and the evocation they afford. Imaginative understanding emerges from the process of interpreting, that is, actively playing with how the world might be. Hence we can and do develop new ways of

¹⁹ Frank Palmer's *Literature and Moral Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) seems to confuse fictionality with literary significance along these lines, see especially pp. 174-180. But Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* can be artistically significant, cultivate our imaginative understanding and be true regarding actual states of affairs. Conversely, a fictional story may neither promote understanding or be artistically significant.

understanding the world. The imagination enables us to understand imaginatively our experience and the demands of the world, offering increased potential and possibilities. Our imaginings test the imaginative possibilities within the world, even potentialities not directly open to us. Thus they may develop and promote distinct imaginative understandings. As I have shown, this is far from being distinctive of art. However, it is certainly characteristic of our experience with artworks that we look for and are concerned with interpreting them.

From reading *Thomas The Tank Engine* as children and studying *King Lear* for A-level to watching *Blade Runner* on Saturday night at the cinema, we typically look to make sense of what we are confronted with. We look for possible meanings, allegories, allusions, all of which may enable us to make sense of our imaginative experience. When we do so, the pleasure is often immense. Sometimes, when we fail to do so, the disappointment and frustration can be great. The distinctiveness of art in this regard lies in the manipulation of media, conventions and genres to vivify our imaginings. Thus it is, that creating and engaging with artworks is perhaps the most powerful means we have of enhancing our imaginative understandings. Our imaginings are prescribed in order to promote alternative imaginative understandings which may jar, modify and develop our own understanding of the world and others. Artworks may vividly convey the sense of a potential world and its possible relations to our own. Thus, for example, Wordsworth may enhance our particular understanding and appreciation of the Lakes and landscape in general.

Of course, an artist may bring private associations and meanings to bear in his creation of an artwork: associations which may not be available to the wider public. Yet, if the poem is successful, the artwork will prove imaginatively valuable to even those readers unaware of the poet's private associations. Artworks, an artist's *oeuvre* or an artistic genre may modify and contribute significantly to our own imaginative understanding. Thus, for example, the art of a civilisation may critically reflect its particular nature, self-understandings and form of life.

However, the question now is, what is involved in interpreting an artwork? Detectivists hold that what the work prescribes one to imagine, usually taken as identical with the authorially intended prescriptions, is to be discovered. That is, what we are prescribed to imagine is determined wholly independently of the audience. However, I will argue, spectatorial imaginative engagement with art is also, in a significant sense, constructivist.²⁰ The imaginative understandings promoted in artworks through our imaginings are both engaged with and, in that engagement, constructively constituted. Conversely, the recognition that interpretation is in one sense constructivist does not, as many typically assume, rule out the recognition that part of our imaginative engagement and

²⁰ See Berys Gaut, "Making Sense of Films: Neoformalism and its Limits", *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, (forthcoming), which is the source for the terminology of constructivism and detectivism. The latter term Gaut adapted from Mark Johnston. Gaut's position is more strongly detectivist than my own and says little explicitly concerned with the imagination.

interpretation is inherently detectivist. That is, the artwork itself constitutes a framework around which one's imaginings are constructed. Thus, full blooded constructivism cannot be sound. That is, what should be imagined is not wholly determined by or reducible to what the audience imagine. Hence, we can misinterpret an artwork. The dichotomy between detectivism and constructivism is unhelpful. Rather, we should recognise that the sense in which our engagement is constructive enables the work to prescribe, to a significant extent, our imaginings.

One way we may bring this out, is by considering the development of shared artistic conventions. The construction of conventions is itself a collaborative process, where the imaginative engagement of spectators helps to create meaning, evolving over time and artistic development. Yet the point of developing artistic conventions, is to facilitate and guide our imaginative engagement. For example, understanding genre conventions involves an awareness of their construction, development and modification. Such an understanding enables the artist to manipulate and develop genre conventions in order to prescribe certain spectatorial imaginings. The very nature of the artistic medium is, in part, constituted through its artistic development and manipulation. The artistic history of a medium, and the cultural practice of art, influences the potential range and nature of expression, representation or imaginative possibilities open to a medium at a given time. For example, the newly evolving artistic medium of film, at the turn of the century, adapted genre and artistic conventions from more established media, such as literature.²¹ Thus, once established, it could develop more distinct means of expression and representation.

The artistic medium is constituted by the raw materials, physical and conventional, open to artistic manipulation. It is a pool of artistic resources available to the artist to dip into to create, modify and develop his work. Physically distinct materials which are worked, from oil paints to water colours to film, contribute different aspects to the nature of the work. The physical materials manipulated partly constitute, and thus bring distinct particular features to, the nature of the work created. Thus a water colour, oil or photograph of Mont Sainte-Victoire will distinctly shape what we are prescribed to imagine. The horizons of our imaginative engagement will in each case be different. The same is true of more conventionally constitutive aspects of a medium: the conventions themselves shape the very nature of what it is we are to imagine. For example, the constraints of the Gothic genre have several constitutive features; the self-conscious narrative, the struggle between rational and emotional forces, between virtue and evil amidst dark neo-medieval settings. These conventions are

²¹ Dilys Powell drew attention to D. W. Griffith's use of literary narrative in her review of *The Birth of a Nation*. See Christopher Cook (ed.), *The Dilys Powell Film Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 357-358. David Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London: Methuen, 1985), and John Fell's *Film and the Narrative Tradition* (Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press, 1974), also point up this fact. D. J. Wenden, *The Birth of The Movies* (London: MacDonald, 1974), Chapter 2, pp. 50-51 explicitly states that Griffith himself professed a debt for his 'cut back' techniques to Dickens.

grounded upon the construction and development of particular works, as the medium or form of art evolves and develops.

Typically, an artist will treat the medium and genre conventions as raw materials which he can work up and develop in a particular way. The frame of the spectator is assumed in order for the artwork to be intelligible and imaginatively engaging. Spectators are presumed capable of detecting or recognising the basic constructed tools. This enables the confident imaginative manipulation and development of the medium, conventions and genre by the artist. The artist and audience are dependent upon their understanding of the medium and conventions which are treated as given, so they may be manipulated and engaged with. On this basis our imaginative understanding of particular artistic media, narratives, *oeuvres* and so on may not only be engaged but developed.

Consider Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands*; a filmic fable set within a recognisable Gothic genre, but located in middle-town America. The central premise to the whole film is a trope of the Gothic genre, namely the monster-as-innocent. Edward, a creation unfinished by his deceased inventor, is not a malevolent outside force bringing irrational, corrupting forces into a small town community. Rather, he is an innocent who is persecuted by these very forces, present within everyday middle America. It is Edward who brings out the potential innocence or evil in others. In our imaginative engagement we become more aware of the nature of the Gothic genre. Similarly, Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* deconstructs the genre of the Western. Central to this genre is the strong, autonomous, and courageous frontiersman whose moral authority is his own. Yet in *Unforgiven*, he is represented as degenerating into a brutalised nihilist. The vanity of conceiving of the individual will as the only locus of value and authority is subverted. Thus, the Western's delusions of heroism and virtue are stripped away. One is left only with indifference to savage violence and the annihilation of life. By subverting the genre in this way, not only is our understanding of the western enhanced, but our imaginative grasp of a particular way of conceiving the world is itself promoted.

Nevertheless, though the manipulation of materials and conventions means our imaginations are prescribed by the artwork, our imaginative engagement is also constructive. That is, far from being told everything, the imagination is engaged and prescribed to imagine in an open-ended way. Indeed, for there to be genre constructions to be detected at all, there must have been imaginatively constructive engagement. For example, in the early cinema, audiences could not assume that the shot of a train going in, followed by a shot of a train coming out of a tunnel, involved the same train. Quickly though, linear narrative came to be generally understood as arising from juxtaposed camera shots.²² Thus something we presume to be basic and naturally obvious is, in fact, a constructed cinematic convention, which, as part of our general understanding of cinema, is now unthinkingly detected by us as spectators.

²² See D. J. Wenden, *The Birth of The Movies* (London: MacDonald, 1974), Chapter 1, pp. 20-22 for an account of the development of narrative shots by Edward Porter.

Once constructed, conventions may only be pointed up when manipulated to frustrate our conventional expectations. For example, in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, one character flies and drives back through blizzards to get to the possessed house. We follow his dogged progress, as the terrorised wife and child are pursued by the evil husband, Jack. Conventionally such a character would of course 'save the day' once he arrives. But our expectations are jolted, and our awareness of this as a genre convention highlighted, when he is killed upon arrival by Jack. Without constructive imaginative engagement and experience in the first place, there could be no general understanding of these conventions to be developed or jolted. Indeed, there could be no meaning which could be assumed to be generally understood by the audience. Imaginative engagement, interpretation and understanding is what grounds the shared, constructed frame upon which an artist depends to manipulate and prescribe our imaginings.

The Kuleshov effect shows just how constructive our imaginative engagement with films can be. Kuleshov intersplined the neutral and fixed expression of a matinee idol with pictures of various objects, ranging from a bowl of soup to a coffin. Yet the spectators thought the actor's subtlety of expression was amazing.²³ Similarly, montage can vividly demonstrate one of the ways imagination is engaged with and central to our appreciation of film. As V. F. Perkins suggests, in relation to Fritz Lang's *M*, rather than showing murders, it is far more effective to leave viewers' imaginations to settle what went on since, cued by the film, the spectator's imaginings will be more terrifying than what can be shown.²⁴ For example, Ridley Scott's *Alien* imaginatively engages us more than James Cameron's sequel, by allowing our imagination a more constructive role. When Dallas is killed, we see only a montage of the alien lunging forward, followed by blood splattering onto Dallas' white space suit. Conversely Cameron, by showing everything gratuitously, over-determines and thus precludes our imaginative engagement. In imaginatively engaging with a work there is a necessary and symbiotic inter-play as the work provokes, engages and guides the spectatorial imaginative understanding. We must treat our understanding of the medium, conventions, public associations and so on as given. We also bring our own stock of private meanings, associations and imaginative understandings to bear. Thus, in various ways, we may legitimately imagine different things. That is, in constructively imagining beyond what is given, there may be an ineliminable, blameless variety in legitimate interpretation.

I am not claiming that an artist's intentions are straightforwardly irrelevant. After all, it is on the very basis of personal and intentional inferences that one can see artistic development and growth. Thus, in many cases, we can relate one work to another in order to see where the artist is trying to take us. An artwork is never wholly atomistically developed, conceived or engaged with. However, the recognition that artistic intention typically has a significant role in constituting the artwork does not

²³ V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film* (London: Penguin, 1972), Chapter 5, p. 106.

²⁴ *ibid.*, Chapter 7, p. 141.

entail that it is the sole determinant of interpretation. Of course, we may have good reasons for assuming, in our imaginative engagement, that authorial intent has a privileged place. Good artists typically know what they are doing. Yet, nevertheless, even where we may legitimately take an artist's intentions to be relevant, and where what they were is clear, there may be different legitimate interpretations.

Firstly, even where we may only be concerned with the intended meaning, there may be an ineliminable plurality of interpretations. These may arise from a work's ambiguity, which may be intentionally created by the artist. Thus an artist may intend to allow for a number of incompatible interpretations, which are all equally open to the spectator. This, as David Hume recognised, may lead to justifiably different evaluations of the work based upon differences of interests and values:

"where there is such a diversity in the internal frame or external situation as is entirely blameless on both sides, and leaves no room to give one the preference above the other; in that case a certain degree of diversity in judgement is unavoidable, and we seek in vain for a standard, by which we can reconcile the contrary sentiments."²⁵

The plurality of possible interpretations are not merely partial interpretations, subsumable under a minimal, coherent interpretation.²⁶ For example, Turner's *Hannibal Crossing the Alps* may manifest an understanding of nature as both cruel and kind. What is significant and paradoxical in the artistic form used is the particular imaginative understanding of nature which, in guiding our imagination, attempts to make sense of the cruelty, beauty and goodness of nature. The ambiguities inherent in the artwork may be interpreted distinctly by different spectators. Another example, perhaps more clearly cut, comes at the end of Robert Hamer's *Kind Hearts and Coronets*. It is plainly left ambiguous as to whether Alec Guinness' character is discovered to have committed the murders or not. It is perfectly consistent with the entire film, to interpret it either way.²⁷

Of course, an intentionalist may claim that such ambiguities may be intended by the artist. That is, though there may be more than one legitimate interpretation, the artist's intention delimits the possible interpretations.²⁸ To treat the work as art, our engagement as adequately sensitive

²⁵ David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste" in S. Copley and A. Edgar (eds.), *David Hume: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 149-150.

²⁶ Compare this with the way Simon Blackburn misconstrues Hume, as arguing for a convergence conception of truth, in his *Spreading The Word* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 196-202.

²⁷ This point only counts against those who think intentionalism entails that there can only be one legitimate, all-consuming interpretation. For example E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 218-219.

²⁸ I take this to be the position of Richard Wollheim's *Painting as an Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), pp. 13-100.

spectators must still seek to discover the possible meanings intended by the artist. After all, an artist can intend a number of incompatible interpretations, which are thus open to the spectator. However, intentionalism entails that the artist must know the work's full meaning and the possible permutations therein. Yet, the nature of an artist's action may sometimes only come to be fully known retrospectively. Of course, an artist's action may be performed under the intention to create a particular work of art. However, this does not entail that the artist actually creates what he had in mind. Firstly, the artist's response as he acts, his deliberation about and in acting, may modify the original intention itself and thus the action. For example, Francis Bacon's professed method of working involved 'controlled accidents'.²⁹ Similarly, Maya Deren has described her realist film making practice, according to which, photography should be "understood as an art of the 'controlled accident.'" The cinematographer "should refrain from over controlling the aspect if he is to retain the authority of reality."³⁰ The thought is that the artificial scene being filmed will seem real, because it occurs against a background of spontaneous, unintended and uncontrolled reality.

Secondly, in acting on his guiding intention, the artist may do something which has unintended results. Furthermore, the unintended feature may constitute an artistically significant part of the finished artwork. Thus, an artist might produce an unintended, artistically relevant ambiguity. Indeed, the artwork's unintended, artistically relevant features may not even be recognised by the artist. Therefore, the artist may create an artwork different from the one he'd intended. Hence, it could be said, the expressiveness of late Van Gogh partly resulted from an increasing visual disorder. Van Gogh's visual handicap, rather than his artistic intent, might explain broader brush strokes or luminous, striking colours. Indeed, Van Gogh might not even have been able to recognise the brilliance of colour he applied. Going even further, it is possible that, parasitic upon an artist's other work or the practice of art as a whole, an artwork may be wholly unintentionally made, a glorious mistake perhaps. This is why an artistic expression of anger may be divorced from the intent or feeling of the artist. It is the evolution of artistic conventions which enables meaning, apart from a particular artistic intent. Indeed, it is precisely because of the evolving construction of artistic practices and conventions that there can be something to interpret at all.

Thirdly, the artist may, despite his intention, fail to create his intended artwork at all. I may intend to write a literary novel and fail to do so because my book is a different kind of artwork from the one I intended. Contrastingly, it may be because the end product lacks artistic worth of any kind. More significantly, the imaginative understandings we often bring to bear in our engagement, and which may

²⁹ See David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987).

³⁰ Maya Deren, "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality" in G. Mast and M. Cohen (eds.), *Film, Theory and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 58.

cohere with the artwork, often were not or could not have been known about by the artist.³¹ For example, Henry James may have definitely intended readers to take the narrator of *Turn of the Screw* to be reliable. Yet it may be more imaginatively engaging and enlightening to engage with the work on the basis of a Freudian understanding of human motivation and action.³² Thus, independently of how James intended his work, it seems we may imaginatively engage with it on a Freudian basis. This may now seem to leave the door wide open to full blooded constructivism. Namely, that the legitimacy of an interpretation makes no reference to the work itself, but is determined by the audience. However, that is to take too many steps at once.

Unintended interpretations may be legitimate as long as our engagement is constrained by and coheres with the nature and conventions of the work and is imaginatively valuable. Thus we may interpret *Turn of the Screw* in a Freudian light if the story and events can be taken as manifesting, developing and exploring Freudian themes. One consideration for the attempt to do so may be if one normally takes a Freudian understanding of human affairs to be imaginatively valuable. But this, of itself, does not determine the legitimacy of the interpretation. For if it cannot cohere with the prescriptions of the work in an imaginatively valuable way, then it cannot constitute a legitimate interpretation of the work. Thus, a radical performance of a play, such as Stephen Daldry's direction of J. B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*, may be sound. In this case, the performance constituted an imaginatively valuable and coherent expressionist interpretation of what was previously considered a prime exemplar of naturalistic drama. Although an artwork may be intended in a particular way, it may justifiably be imaginatively engaged with and interpreted in other ways. We are not interested in the intention of the artist for its own sake, except for historical or biographical reasons. Rather, we are interested in the artwork itself. Herein lies the glimmer of truth distorted by those who would decry intentional inference in art as a fallacy.³³

Artistic intent is typically taken as one of the most significant variables guiding interpretation. This is because it is the artistic imagination which enables the imaginative world of the artwork to be open to us. We take it that, typically, the artist knows best what he is doing and thus

³¹ This objection even applies to Alexander Nehamas' intentionalism, where the notion of the postulated author is argued for as a regulative ideal. See Alexander Nehamas, "The Postulated Author: Critical Monism as a Regulative Ideal", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1981, pp. 133-149, and his "Writer, Text, Work, Author" in A. J. Cascardi (ed.), *Literature and the Question of Philosophy* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 265-291.

³² See G. Willen (ed.), *A Casebook on Henry James's The Turn of the Screw and Other Tales*, 2nd ed., (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), which includes, amongst other interpretations, Edmund Wilson's "The Ambiguity of Henry James", pp. 115-153.

³³ The crass claim that artistic intentions cannot ever be relevant is made in W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy" in G. Dickie, R. Sclafani and R. Roblin (eds.), *Aesthetics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 431-441. Unfortunately, Wimsatt and Beardsley conflate explanation, motivation and intention. Furthermore, that a particular artwork may be made or interpreted apart from the guiding intent with which it was made, does not entail that intention may never fruitfully guide our interpretation.

that their construal is probably the most valuable. We trust that the artist is attempting to prescribe and guide our imaginings in a valuable way, one which promotes a particular imaginative understanding. Yet the artist can be mistaken in this regard or he can fail to achieve what he intended. Furthermore, later developments in the practice of art and ways of understanding the world, might alter the most fruitful basis upon which to engage with the artwork. Therefore, the presumption in favour of artistic intent as a significant variable is a defeasible one. Furthermore, with regard to collaborative cases, the *prima facie* presumption in favour of artistic intent is much weaker. The conventions, genres and media of art partly constitute and shape the nature of what is communicated, the way we imaginatively understand the imagined world. Thus, particularly in collaborative cases, unintended or non-intended meanings can arise from what is created. For our imaginative engagement is with and constrained by the artwork itself and not the artist.

Although intentions may play a significant part in the work's constitution, they cannot wholly fix the work's meaning. This will hold especially true for media which, like architecture or film, are typically collaborative. Similarly, intention will tend to be of lesser potential significance where the form of artistic production is collaboratively organised, as in the hierarchically ordered artistic schools of Renaissance Italy.³⁴ An extreme and classic cinematic case of the clash of differing intentions and conventions, which cut across each other, is *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. The original political allegory was subverted by Wiene's direction and Wierle's expressionist design. Thus the originally intended radicalism was transformed into a justification of conservative power.³⁵

The nature and purpose of interpretation is informed by and subject to the dictates of imaginative value, constrained by the work which guides and shapes our imaginative engagement. Imaginative engagement is not an instrumental means of accessing the artistic mind. Rather, the artistic mind and its creations are there to engage the imagination and promote imaginative understanding. Therefore, neither the authorial intention which guided the artwork's construction nor the artwork's formal features alone can wholly fix the work's meaning. Rather, the artwork's possible interpretations are dependent upon and fixed by various potentially significant variables. These range from considerations of authorial intent, the work's formal features, media, conventions and genres to aspects of what the work is taken to be a representation of and aspects of the audience's imaginative understandings. How significant the variables actually are will depend upon the particular artwork

³⁴ See Maya Deren's "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality" and Erwin Panofsky's "Style and Medium in the Moving Picture" in G. Mast and M. Cohen (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 51-65 and 215-233 respectively, for cogent arguments concerning the inherently collaborative nature of film as an artistic medium.

³⁵ Bruce Murray, *Film and the German Left in The Weimar Republic* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 26-27.

being engaged with and what categories it is most relevantly seen under.³⁶ To perceive an artwork through the appropriate categories is a matter of training, skill and understanding. After all, what is lively in Mondrian is almost static or mournful in the work of Miro.

Section 4: Interpretative Pluralism

It might now be thought that, though we should recognise a work is open to the viewer's constructive, imaginative engagement, our interpretation remains constrained by a detectivist core. As Gombrich was the first to recognise, the beholder's share, the viewer's imaginative contribution, is central.³⁷ Thus we can allow for, and in certain cases prescribe, plural legitimate interpretations. Yet these are dependent upon an overarching absolute interpretation. The minimal, absolute interpretation should explain the various possible legitimate options available to the spectator, in engaging with and interpreting the artwork. Thus it should pick out the imaginative gaps left for the spectator to fill in. Of course, all artworks are indeterminate in innumerable, artistically irrelevant respects: for example, what King Lear's wife was like or where Cezanne's *A Murder* took place. However, what we are interested in, is whether an aspect of the story which is artistically relevant is indeterminate or not. Of course this is a matter of degree. It may matter only slightly that Antonio, in *the Merchant of Venice*, is a middle-aged rather than an elderly gentleman. But it matters a great deal whether his affection for Bassanio is fatherly or erotic or whether Portia's lines to Shylock are ironically spoken or not. E. H. Gombrich discusses the ambiguous smile of the *Mona Lisa* in this vein: it is open to the spectator, in his imaginative engagement, to construct and contribute within the fixed frame provided by the artwork.³⁸ This is so independently of whether Leonardo intended it to be taken thus or not.

We might conceive of our imaginative engagement with artworks in a manner akin to colouring by numbers: certain demarcated patches are deliberately left without a number so the viewer may fill them in. Therefore, though there is an absolute interpretation to be detected and worked within, it cannot fully determine our particular interpretations. This conception of interpretation properly allows room for our interests, preferences and judgement within the frame determined by the artwork. Thus, we can allow incompatible interpretations as to whether the *Mona Lisa* intimates an understated, alluring

³⁶ See Kendall Walton's "Categories of Art" in J. Margolis (ed.), *Philosophy Looks at the Arts* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), pp. 88-114, and Annette Barnes' *On Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), for whom there are a multiplicity of criteria for interpretation.

³⁷ See E. H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1977), Ch. VI, especially pp. 167-169, where he discusses Reynolds' comments on the indistinctness required to allow for the viewer's imaginative contribution.

³⁸ E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 14th ed., (Oxford: Phaidon, 1984), pp. 227-229, where he talks of Leonardo's use of *sfumato* to leave something for the spectator's imagination.

familiarity or a frosty, distanced impersonality. It is important to realise that I do not mean incompatible in the following sense: it is a fact of the matter that the *Mona Lisa* both is and is not smiling. After all, contradictions are never true.³⁹ Rather, I mean incompatible in the sense that one cannot hold both interpretations in relation to the *Mona Lisa* at the same time. This is because our interpretation is underdetermined by the artwork in this highly significant regard. Note that the ambiguity is inherent in the artwork, independently of whether Leonardo intended it to be taken thus or not. In constructively engaging with the *Mona Lisa*, we may imaginatively realise one of the possibilities or even fruitfully oscillate between them. The imaginative richness and value of the *Mona Lisa* lies in its very ambiguity. However, we cannot hold these distinct interpretations as applicable at the same time. Furthermore, through allowing for the constructive contributions of spectators, this view can allow for a certain kind of ineliminable, blameless individual, historical and cultural relativity of interpretation.

However, I want to argue, this position remains inadequate to another way different legitimate interpretations arise. In order to imaginatively engage with an artwork, the viewer must bring to bear his own understanding, assumptions and associations. As Gombrich has most cogently argued, there is no such thing as an innocent eye.⁴⁰ Interpreting an artwork cannot merely be a case of detecting the constraints imposed by the work upon our imaginative engagement. For one cannot wholly separate the process of detecting the frame from our imaginative engagement and constructive contribution. In order to detect aspects of a work, one must already be constructing and contributing as one imaginatively engages. In our imagining, there is a symbiotic inter-action between our constructive imaginings and what we take the structure of the artwork to be and thus prescribe. The aim is to make the experience with the artwork, and the imaginative understanding it affords, as coherent, rewarding and comprehensive as possible. As we saw above, what is relevant here is not so much the actual artistic intent but rather what presumptions enable us to make best sense of the artwork. Thus, the way the spectator constructively engages with aspects of the work, affects his interpretation of the artwork as a whole.

However, the presumptions and understanding we bring to the work radically differ across individuals, cultures and historical epochs. This makes a crucial difference to what is taken to constitute a good interpretation. Of course, certain descriptions are obviously true: for example, that Bligh was the captain of the *Bounty*. But the nature of the events, characters' motives, actions or

³⁹ See Robert Stecker, "Incompatible Interpretations", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 1992, pp. 291-298, for an argument against *logically* incompatible interpretations.

⁴⁰ See E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1977), Ch. IX, pp. 250-254, and R. L. Gregory, *Eye and Brain*, 3rd ed., (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990). Gregory argues that the visual system seeks to organise our sensate experience into a meaningful whole by constructing and testing hypotheses, based on probability, against the thus apparent structure of the world.

allegories represented are often far from clear. Thus, as was suggested above, one may bring radically distinct concerns to bear upon Henry James's *Turn of the Screw*. Thus a reader who values psycho-analytic explanation may look for an imaginative experience which itself reveals the complexities and unfolding force of the unconscious and sexual motivation. Conversely, another reader may set no store by psycho-analytic explanations at all. Thus, lacking an interest in and positive evaluation of psycho-analytic understanding, he takes the narrator's claims at face value, as, incidentally, James himself intended.

An example of a less theoretically driven divergence in interpretation is *Jacob's Ladder*. All the cinematic cues and events portrayed are consistent with two distinct interpretations. One can imagine quite consistently that the Vietnam soldiers were subjected to deceptive and disastrous experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs, to enhance their fighting capacity. Conversely, one could imagine that all the events portrayed were in fact the hallucination of a man dying in the battlefield in Vietnam. Each interpretation differs not only as to the significance of certain events portrayed, but differs as to core features of what is happening at the most basic level. Of course, both interpretations are comprehensive, simple and coherent, at least in their own terms. Which one constitutes a better interpretation thus depends upon the presumptions and imaginative understanding one brings to bear upon the film in the first place. Thus, if one brought to bear a Beckett like understanding of the futility of human existence, meaning and knowledge, one would prefer the second interpretation. However, if one brought to bear an understanding of and concern for life as purposive, one would tend toward the former interpretation. In the case of both works discussed, the resultant differing interpretations diverge over both the significance of certain events and over how under-determined aspects of the work are to be imagined. Different interpretations tend to place different emphases upon distinct passages or features of the work.⁴¹

However, it might still be objected, from the fact that different people bring different understandings to bear, it doesn't follow that any interpretation is sound. The different assumptions may be of socio-cultural interest. But the fact that they are brought to bear cannot, of itself, legitimise their application. Thus, someone might argue, we should seek to demarcate what the legitimate understanding is that we can bring to bear. How else could we make sense of the fact that we may be mistaken in applying a certain understanding or bringing certain assumptions to bear upon a particular artwork? Typically, this is thought to entail that the understanding the original or intended audience would have possessed should be privileged. Hence, it is sometimes claimed, to appreciate an artwork

⁴¹ See Matthew Kieran, "Relative Values in Art", *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Spring, 1992, pp. 95-102, for a development of the argument, based upon Humean considerations, to the effect that a work's value as art may be relative to the outlook we bring to bear upon it.

properly, we should seek to get ourselves into the mind set of those whom the work was made for.⁴² However, this reverts back to an appeal to the artist's intentions as fixing the sound interpretation of the artwork. But, as we saw, the whole point of the artwork is not merely to find our way back to the artist's intentions.

Furthermore, as we saw, an artist's intentions may be undercut by unintended features, the contribution of others or evolving artistic conventions. On the same basis, an artist's intentions may be undercut by the imaginative understanding brought to bear in one's engagement with the work. The point of our engagement with an artwork is not to understand the original audience of the artwork. Rather, it is to engage and cultivate our imaginative understanding, through prescribing imaginings. Furthermore, we do not require reference to the original intended audience in order to discriminate between legitimate and illegitimate interpretations. Legitimate interpretations must be those which are the simplest, most coherent, comprehensive, non-contradictory and plausible interpretations of the artwork. If the background assumptions are relevantly different, what constitutes coherence, comprehensiveness, plausibility and makes sense of the work's value will be relative.

The first kind of relativity allowed for the possibility of an overarching explanation. An absolute interpretation which could include any two or more partial or contradictory readings, in the light of which they would no longer be seen to be contradictory. However, relativity of interpretation and evaluation arising from bringing relevantly different associations and understandings to bear, cannot admit of such an overarching interpretation. Even assuming different understandings agree about the salient features of a work, the insights of feminist, Freudian, Marxist or Leavisite interpretations of D. H. Lawrence, for example, cannot all be incorporated into one minimal absolute interpretation. The fundamental insights of one interpretation may be incompatible with and negated by the fundamental insights of another. Thus one may not even be able to argue as to whether the women in *The Fox* are both lesbians or not, or perhaps not even come to an agreement as to whether the question is relevant or not. The spectator's constructive imaginative engagement does not just supervene upon and grip onto the fundamental structure prescribed and wholly determined by the artwork. That is, spectatorial imaginative engagement does not merely flesh out the artist's work. For our imaginative engagement necessarily brings to bear our own understandings, private and public, which enable us to engage with the work in the first place.

Fundamentally different understandings brought to bear may lead to a relativity of what is to be imagined. Of course, mere difference does not entail divergence. The presumed understandings brought to bear must be relevantly different, before what are taken to be the centrally relevant features or under-determined aspects of the artwork may radically differ. Thus there may be a multiplicity of

⁴² See Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), especially the claims in Chapter 2, Section 3, pp. 36-40, for a sustained attempt to do just that and Anthony Savile's *The Test of Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 64, for a similar claim.

legitimate interpretations, depending upon the different relevant assumptions that may be brought to bear upon a work *and* cohere with it. It is important to realise that, again, I am not using incompatibility in the sense that the interpretations contradict one another. Indeed, interpretations which are divergent in this more radical sense are, strictly speaking, compatible. This is because, effectively, the validity of the interpretations are relativised to the background assumptions brought to bear. Thus the psychoanalytic interpretation and the Jamesian one are not even rivals. There is no common standard by which we can compare them, thus they cannot meaningfully disagree with each other. Therefore, there can be no contradiction. This is obviously a different kind of interpretative pluralism than that which arises from one's imaginings being under-determined by the work, even where the same background assumptions are brought to bear.

Once the spectator's particular, constructive contribution is admitted, it cannot be wholly restricted to pools of ambiguity, autonomously framed by the artwork itself. Our imaginative engagement does not merely reveal a work's core structure. Rather, the very nature of the work's core structure may itself partly depend upon the assumptions and imaginative understandings we bring to bear upon it. Thus, where the pools of ambiguity in a work collect depends not just upon the structure of the work itself, but also upon the spectator. Of course, it does not follow from this that one cannot misinterpret an artwork. We may hold both that different understandings may legitimise different interpretations and, nonetheless, that a work may determinately prescribe us to imagine something. If we imagine otherwise, then we are simply misinterpreting what we are prescribed by the work to imagine.

For some, the realisation of the constructive nature of our engagement with artworks has led to full blooded constructivism. That is, the idea that the spectator wholly creates what is imaginatively 'there'. Thus all interpretations are taken to be reader response relative, subjective and equally valid. Interpretation is conceived as a form of spectatorial projectivism, whether grounded upon individual, cultural or critical groups.⁴³ Typically, claims are made about the shattering of the detectivist illusion: how we can no longer conceive of artworks as translucent windows, looking out upon an independently meaningful world. Thus, it is suggested, artworks can only be opaque sheets of glass, mirrors which reflect back what is imaginatively projected by the spectator. The underlying basis of this conception is the Derridean thought that meaning is inherently unstable.⁴⁴ Indeed, one cannot undermine or subvert a work's meaning as such. The text's meaning itself is taken to be created by spectatorial engagement, thus one can only subvert the meaning, and thus the work, created by others.

⁴³ See David Bordwell, *Making Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), Stanley Fish, *Is There A Text In This Class?* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), and Joseph Margolis, *Art and Philosophy* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), Chapter 6, pp. 107-144.

⁴⁴ See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. G. Spivak, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

The work's meaning is understood to be constituted by the understanding and imaginative resources one brings to engage with a work. Thus there exists an infinity of possible interpretations.

The archetypal radical constructivist is Stanley Fish. Fish argues that a work's meanings are made in the process of reading or, generalising the point, engagement. Thus meaning emerges from an event. That is, the interaction of a text with "the reader's expectations, projections, conclusions, judgements, and assumptions."⁴⁵ Fish goes on to argue from this, that, in fact, "it is the reader who *makes* literature."⁴⁶ This is because, he holds, the artwork cannot have any determinate meaning, considered apart from any context of interpretation. Thus it is that the community of interpreters produce meaning and thus fix the possible interpretations of a work. Even the most basic features of a work are held to be the product of interpretative strategies, rather than features to be discovered by interpretation.

The thesis is then radicalised even further by emphasising that the assumptions, individual and cultural, we bring to bear in our engagement will be different. That is, every person's socio-cultural and epistemic background may differ significantly. Therefore, he argues, meaning is determined by the interpretative community within which the reader belongs. Thus, the interpretative context determines the meaning of the work and what may count as a legitimate interpretation. Meaning is relative to the lights of the institutional practice of interpretation. Thus the interpretative practices licensed by the particular community one belongs to, determine what may count as a sound interpretation and why. An artwork's meaning is constituted by the activities of the particular interpretative community which the spectator is a constituent of. It is important to note that Fish is not claiming that at any given time an infinity of interpretations is possible. This is because the limits of interpretation are determined by the socio-culturally determined constraints upon meaning. Hence Fish does not claim, as some would suggest, that 'anything goes.'

Interestingly this self-proclaimed radical thesis actually lends itself to a highly conservative stance. The dominant interpretation and practice defines what the legitimate interpretation may be, justified by reference to the agreement of peers. Thus, the status quo in any given interpretative community defines what is acceptable. One may not even be able to question the fundamentals of a dominant interpretative practice which must, by definition, be sound. Fish cannot even make sense of the possibility that an interpretation, thus legitimised, may be inappropriate to a particular work. If a critic uses the norms of a particular interpretative community correctly and suggests that the film means P, then the film does so. The plurality of interpretations is conceived as arising straightforwardly from the plurality of interpretative schools or cultural communities. Where conflict

⁴⁵ See Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 2.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 11.

between the differing interpretations of distinct communities arises, there can be no means of settling the disputes. Indeed, whether they can ever conflict at all is debatable. Disputes can only be settled by reference to the community's own internal standards of interpretation and cannot be inter-communal. Thus particular communities are apparently free to engage imaginatively as they will. Artworks are conceived as imaginative springboards for communal fantasies.

However, if we bear in mind what we argued earlier, the problems with such an argument become clear. Radical constructivism admits of no real constraints on our imaginings by the artwork itself. After all, a particular interpretative community could develop the convention of reading books upside down or engaging with and judging novels by virtue of their covers. If such conventions were to develop and become dominant in a particular interpretative community, we could not say, according to Fish, that their engagement, interpretations and judgements are wrong. That one has to read in order to engage with a book is reduced to the interpretative criteria of a particular community. A different community might think otherwise. For Fish, there can be no possible mistake, except by the lights internal to a reader's own community.

However, the idea that the established dominant interpretative practice is by definition always right is patently false. One could give a story about how a community evolved a particular interpretative practice. For example, how books came to be judged by their covers: novels became tedious whilst book covers became increasingly valuable as art. Nevertheless, if one judged the book by its cover, one could not be engaging with and evaluating Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. *Crime and Punishment* is not reducible to a matter of communal interpretative construction. As we saw, the point and purpose of evolving artistic conventions, genres and practice is to enable the constraint and prescription of our constructive imaginings. The whole point of an artistic manipulation of materials and forms is to engage the spectator. But the radical constructivist construes all artworks as if they are like the poet's work in Cocteau's *Orphée*: blank sheets upon which we can project what we will. But this is to forget that the whole point of the exercise is to engage with the artwork itself, not to bypass it.

Constructivism shares certain problems with Collingwood's conception of art. Collingwood conceives of the artist as producing an internal or mental experience, which is, essentially, the artwork. The perceptible object, the material object produced, is seen as wholly subsidiary and incidental to this. The artwork itself is thus conceived as an imaginary object. So, for example, in music, the sound is merely the means by which the audience can imaginatively reconstruct the work. What is to be imagined is not identical with what is heard or seen. Rather, the artwork proper is the imagined harmony or picture. Since the perceptible object itself is not the artwork, it is not the activity by virtue of which someone is an artist. Rather, it is only by virtue of the artist's relation to the aesthetic, mental experience. The aim of the artwork, this mental imagined object, is to express emotion and

thereby promote understanding.⁴⁷ What is essential in art, for Collingwood, is both the possession of unexpressed emotions and the wherewithal in one's imagination to express them. A good poet will make a poet of his reader because the reader is required to recreate, in his imagination, the poet's creative act. As spectators, our engagement with the artwork is necessarily collaborative: we follow, by imaginative reconstruction, the expressive path suggested by the artist.

However, for both Collingwood and constructivism, the identification of the artwork becomes wholly problematic. Each spectator supposedly reconstructs the imagined work. Yet, the task itself seems impossible. Each spectator brings to the material object different assumptions, backgrounds and associations. Therefore, all the imaginative objects internal to each spectator and the artist will differ, no matter how detailed and prescriptive the guiding material object is. Only the artist can have access to the particular artwork he created, so the audience must literally make their own artwork from the cues provided. But then, if the artwork is as it is constituted in interpretation, then we must be dealing with many different artworks.

Artworks are not to be identified with an individual's or interpretative community's authorised consciousness. The artwork is identifiable apart from what it is taken to be. The artwork gives rise to but is not identifiable with the experience of our imaginative engagement. It is produced or exists prior to our experience with it and is what guides our imaginative experience. If our imaginative experience, which gives rise to interpretation, is to be guided, then the artwork must exist apart from our interpretations of it. If this were not so, what would be the point of the practice of art? Spectators engage in order to have their imaginings prescribed and constrained, in order to promote a particular imaginative understanding. If artworks could do no such thing, and if the context and spectators do all the work, then it would be easier all round to do so without bothering to refer to artworks. But this is belied by the fact that if we change aspects of a work, then the imaginative horizons open to the spectator similarly change. For example, changing the chorus of Beethoven's *Choral Symphony* to 'Freedom' in 1989 brought out aspects at the edge of the work's horizon. Conversely, Duchamp's 'defacing' of the *Mona Lisa* could only have the effect it did, given its relation to the prescriptions the work itself makes in our engagement with it. A different kind of case serves to make the same point. Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* can only have the effect it does, given that the work itself prescribes us to imagine that there is in fact a pipe before us. The horizon of an artwork must, at least, be partly determined by the work itself and, furthermore, the horizon is not necessarily coextensive with what the dominant interpretative practice takes it to be.

The essential failure of constructivism, is the inability to recognise that what is primary is our engagement with the artwork itself. Recognising the constructive role of the imagination in our

⁴⁷ R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), Book I, Chapter VII, Section 6, p. 151.

engagement with art in no way entails that the work's meaning is wholly constituted by the context or community of interpreters. It is the artwork itself which constrains and guides the nature of our imaginative engagement and experience. As spectators we are not free, either individually or as part of an interpretative group, to project anything onto the work. The recognition of this fact is quite compatible with the recognition that the different understandings we bring to bear upon an artwork may lead to a plurality of imaginative interpretations. Just as an artwork's creation may depend upon artistic intention and action, without its meaning being reducible to them, so too in the reverse direction. That our imaginative engagement, and resultant interpretation of an artwork, depends upon the understanding we bring to bear, does not entail that the work's meaning is reducible to the context of the work and spectator.

Meaning does depend upon and presuppose certain epistemic, cultural and imaginative backgrounds and resources. But it does not follow that context is the sole determinant of meaning. The evolving conventions of art and the artistic shaping of the work itself puts constraints and determinants upon our interpretations. The very point of constituting a particular artwork is that it serves to guide and constrain our imaginative engagement. It is for the rich enhancement of our imaginative engagement that the artist manipulates the media, forms, conventions and genres of art. This is why we have the practice and evolving conventions of art in the first place. Thus particular genres and conventions evolve to be typical of certain kinds of works, imposing certain kinds of meaning and constraints which are there independently of whether a particular community's interpretative practice recognises them or not. Thus an interpretative community cannot, by definition, constitute what the sound interpretation is. A convention's meaning is not reducible to its context, whatever the relevant context is construed as. The conventions, genre constraints and forms of art are themselves grounded upon but not wholly determined by their emergence from autonomous intentional human activity. The evolved meaning of artistic conventions are neither reducible to the intention with which they were produced nor their context of production or reception.

Interpretation depends upon how the spectator imaginatively builds up from the substructure provided by the artwork. This is why our interpretations and evaluations say something both about the work and ourselves. To appreciate the artwork we must, in a symbiotic relation with the work, engage with and imaginatively construct in order to find. An interpretation of an artwork grounded in a particular imaginative engagement is the construction of one of the multifarious possibilities contained within the horizon of the work. Our particular imaginative engagement and experience with an artwork is one of many possibilities, thus pluralism holds with regard to meaning and interpretation. The horizon of an artwork is not fixed across time, cultures and people. Different presuppositions and the evolution of artistic conventions may vary the very nature of the horizon offered to a spectator in his imaginative engagement. For artworks themselves, and artistic creation, depend upon both previous and future possible artistic development. The present meaning of an artwork is grounded upon its inter-

relation to pre-existent conventions, traditions and the understanding we bring to bear upon it. The aspects or imaginative horizon of a work may alter, given its shifting relations to past and future artworks. Understanding art as an evolving cultural practice allows that the development of art, may retroactively affect aspects of a particular artwork.

Nevertheless, the spectator is still constrained and guided by the artwork itself. The very point of artworks is that we are not free to imagine whatever we fancy, rather we are proscribed and proscribed in our imaginings by the artwork. For an artwork is not a mere springboard for the imagination. Rather, it guides and shapes our imaginings in our interlocking engagement with it. To be wholly taken up with one's own experiences and understanding in engagement with an artwork is to disregard what one is supposed to be imaginatively engaging with. It is to preclude the work's promotion of a particular imaginative understanding, which may be distinct from the general understanding one brings to bear. In our imaginative engagement with art, imaginings are proscribed which promote a rich, deep and possibly alternative imaginative understanding of oneself, others and the world. Imaginative engagement is a constant inter-play, and often tussle, between the understanding brought to bear and the imaginings proscribed and guided by the artwork, leading to the development and promotion of a particular imaginative understanding.

We often experiment in our engagement with artworks, leading to a more developed understanding of the possibilities and values open to us in our imaginative engagement. What we aim at, is the most rewarding imaginative experience. Thus we seek those interpretations which afford maximal imaginative value and which develop one's imaginative understanding. This, of course, may mean various different and evolving interpretations across one's engagements with a particular work. Thus it is that there can be better and worse interpretations on the grounds of imaginative value. Whether the imaginings and the imaginative understandings are themselves valuable will depend both upon what one is proscribed to imagine and the way this is done. This will partly depend upon the way the conventions have been manipulated or the brushwork handled, to manifest an idea and prescribe what should be imagined. Similarly, the value of the rendering itself, depends upon its inter-relations with and the value of what one is being proscribed to imagine. A crass idea can ruin an exquisite artistic rendering.

A proper recognition of how our engagement is constructive does not entail that the best work of art is the one which allows for the greatest number of imaginative possibilities. The horizon provided by an imaginatively rich artwork, should not be equated with one which allows for the greatest number of imaginative constructions. Nothing is, after all, less constraining and limiting for the imagination, in the sense of an infinity of possible imaginative constructions, than a Rorschach test. But that does not make it an artwork. This ridiculous conclusion would be tempting only if we allow ourselves to forget that constraints and conventions evolved and developed in art in order to aid, prescribe and constrain the imagination. The best and most valuable artworks will be ones whose proscribed imaginings

promote a rich and profound imaginative understanding. Thus William Golding is to be preferred to Jeffrey Archer, Klee to Rothko or Paul Berry's *The Sandman* to Disney's lesser animation.

A limited imaginative understanding may bring into operation the law of diminishing returns rather early on in one's imaginative exploration with a particular artwork, even though the artistic skill may be great. Yet this should not surprise us. The value of great artworks lies precisely in their potency and profundity: the horizons a work opens up largely determines its value. Imaginative richness fundamentally concerns the quality of imaginative engagement afforded by the artwork and the kind of imaginative understanding it promotes. The quality of the artwork concerns the overall nature of the imaginative experience and understanding, not merely the number of different possible imaginative constructions available to the spectator. It is the quest to engage with and deepen our imaginative understandings which drives the evolution of the cultural practice of art. The development of particular art forms, genres and conventions speak to particular concerns, values and interests we may have.

A good artwork, in its imaginative richness, opens and develops our sensibilities to the possibilities and actualities of the world, people around us and ourselves. In engaging, prescribing and promoting imaginings concerned with how and why people are motivated, think, feel and act as they do, artworks may afford us particular insights into the world. For example, the narrative of Neil Jordan's film *The Crying Game* is constructed so one's imaginings and sympathies are prescribed in a particular way. Our imaginative sympathies are engaged, crucially, before one of the central features of the situation is revealed. Namely, that the 'girl' Stephen Rea has fallen for, Dil, is in fact a male transsexual. Had this been revealed earlier, the imaginative sympathy and understanding of many spectators would not have been extended and engaged as deeply, if at all. But, through such engagement, one is forced to question one's general understanding about the nature of such 'deviants'. Here, the prescribed sympathetic identification promotes a respect which could be at odds with our prior imaginative understanding. Thus it may lead to reflection upon the ambiguous nature of sexuality, love and personal identity. All of this may also help to promote one's own self understanding, realising more what it is that does and should move one, make one feel, and act in relation to others. Thus it is that art may significantly enable us to make imaginative sense of our world.

Thus we can argue that the view of humanity promoted in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, given the valued framework and conventions of science fiction and film noir, is a profound though pessimistic vision. By contrast one may object that Pedro Almadovar's *Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down* promotes a flawed imaginative understanding of reality: the characters are superficial, their motivations and feelings simplistic, and the development from pornographic obsession to love is facile. That is, it fails to vivify the central characters as driven by imaginatively understandable and complex human desires. Hence, we may imaginatively understand a work, but reject it on the grounds that the prescribed imaginings

and understanding are fantastical or inadequate to possible human life.⁴⁸ Good art should play a part both in opening out and deepening our imaginative understanding. Where previously we might have imaginatively understood a transsexual as not properly deserving of human concern, after *The Crying Game* we should feel otherwise. This change is brought about through art in a way in which no amount of theoretical argument or assent can achieve. This is because art encourages and promotes valuable imaginative understandings of the world, which may modify one's own imaginative understanding of life. This in part depends upon the skill and convincing nature of the work of art itself and how it engages with the understanding the spectator brings with him. How the adequacy of one's own feelings, values and imaginative understanding is explored, through what is expressed and represented, gives rise to our evaluation of the artwork. Thus the value of a work of art is both a reflection of the work itself and a reflection upon the spectator.

Ruskin appreciated that art sought properly to promote true understanding. At times this led him to denigrate aesthetic or sensual pleasure, which he conceived as the operation of mere sense and custom. However, our very real pleasure in engaging with artworks does derive from their value as art. Thus, art should not be conceived of as aesthetically sealed from the sphere of life. Rather, art's pleasures derive from the imaginative way art engages us and enables us to interpret and understand the world, others and ourselves. As we shall see, Ruskin was right to argue that art concerned and demanded the response of one's whole moral being. What Ruskin mistakenly presumed was that this rendered all beauty moral, just as many now render aesthetic the moral and cognitive aspects in art. Yet, in *Modern Painters*, Ruskin so nearly captured the truth of the matter. If only we conceive of art's significance not in terms of literal truth, but in terms of imaginative understanding then, indeed, "the duty of an artist is not only to address and awaken, but to *guide* the imagination."⁴⁹ Artworks can enlarge our imaginative experience, whether by showing the familiar in a new light or intensifying an aspect to extremes. Hence art can promote our imaginative understanding of our world. Thus, it seems plausible to suppose, art may develop our moral sensibilities and understanding. However, quite what the relationship is remains unclear. Therefore, navigating the tempestuous waters which concern the relationship between art and morality is the task of the final chapter.

⁴⁸ See R. W. Beardsmore, "The Limits of Imagination", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1980, pp. 99-114, where Orwell's complete failure to understand Graham Greene's vision of the world, as manifested in *The Heart of the Matter*, is discussed in a similar light.

⁴⁹ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters Vol. 3*, D. Barrie (ed.), (London: André Deutsch, 1987), Chapter X, p. 350.

Chapter 5

Art, Imagination and the Cultivation of Morals.

“The true purpose of art was not to create beautiful objects, he discovered. It was a method of understanding, a way of penetrating the world and finding one's place in it, and whatever aesthetic qualities an individual canvas might have were almost an incidental by-product of the effort to engage oneself in this struggle, to enter into the thick of things.”

Paul Auster, *Moon Palace*

Introduction.

It is through what we imagine and the promotion of imaginative understanding, in engaging with artworks, that art may make claim to the cultivation of our moral sensibilities. Our responses to the various characters or perceptions of the world portrayed are typically aspectival. Firstly, this amounts to the claim that the form of what we imagine cannot be wholly separated off from the content of what we imagine. Since the manipulation of media, conventions and associations distinctively constrain what we imagine, the content of our imaginings cannot be divorced from the work's form. Thus it is, that we also typically imagine what we do from a particular point of view. This is often to be taken as the viewpoint of a particular subject, for example the narrating subject, such as Nick in *The Great Gatsby*. At other times, the viewpoint concerned requires us to respond directly to the state of affairs represented. Furthermore, our imaginings from a particular viewpoint typically involves not merely thought but feeling and emotion. Of course, in our engagement, things are often more complicated than suggested. For example, the imaginative understanding promoted by the work as a whole, may run against that suggested through imagining the relevant state of affairs from one of the represented subject's viewpoints. Hence, the ability, enjoyment and insight afforded by oscillating between various of these aspectival possibilities may be exploited to great effect by an artist.

It is not merely the content of the proposition that is significant for our imaginative engagement with artworks. Rather, the ways of telling are of crucial importance here. What is peculiar to our imaginative engagement with artworks, as distinct from our more everyday imaginative experience, is the artistic manipulation of the aspectival imaginings prescribed by the artwork. Thus it is that art can and does distinctively cultivate our thick understanding. Of course, the thick understanding of actual, possible and impossible worlds promoted may well bear complex relations to our world. Furthermore, quite what those relations are may depend upon the understanding we bring to bear and the resultant construal of the work in our imaginings. Nonetheless, art's peculiar promotion of our thick

understanding enables it to constitute a distinct form of understanding. Art is to thicken understanding what philosophy is to thin understanding. Coupled with the claim that morality depends upon a thick understanding of others, in order to make sound moral decisions, we can articulate the close link between most art and morality.

Section 1: The Aesthetic Challenge

The nature of the artwork's prescribed imaginative content is partly determined by the way it is shaped and manipulated to guide one's imaginings; the lyrical description, the jagged, painted expression or the drawn out harmony. The artwork, by virtue of the way it guides our imaginative engagement, shapes and determines the nature of the prescribed imaginative content. The content is partly constituted by the description. Thus we are constrained to imagine a situation presented to us as manifested in and through the work's artistically manipulated medium. This, of course, may well be distinct from how the artist or spectator might otherwise have chosen to represent it. For example, in Paul Berry's expressionistic animated film *The Sandman*, we are not licensed to imagine the sandman as a playful mischievous fairy, as he is usually portrayed. The telescoping shots, angular sets and razor sharp face of the sandman himself prescribes the imaginative understanding that he is, in fact, a deeply malevolent, evil threat to the innocent, sleeping child.

The point can be emphasised in another way if one considers two works concerning the same subject matter in distinct media. *Le château de Chillon* was photographed by Adolphe Braun in 1867 and painted by Courbet in 1874. Both treat the same scene from precisely the same viewpoint, but in different media.¹ The imaginative content, in terms of the basic pictorial narrative and conceptual material, is the same. That is, precisely the same objects, parts of the world, are being represented from the same viewpoint, within the same artistic tradition and genre. Nevertheless, the works are different and distinct in the imaginings they prescribe. The manipulation of oils to portray the particular scene necessarily prescribes visual imaginings distinct from those prescribed through the photographic medium. The nature of the visual descriptions in the two cases are necessarily different, deriving almost solely from the distinct and different natures of the media utilised. The handling of the paint, as contrasted with the chemical processing of an exposed image, presents imaginatively different aspects.

The same point applies in relation to works in the same medium. The distinct gestural marks upon a painting may have expressive characteristics of their own. But what the marks are expressive of, and prescribe us to perceptually imagine, also depends upon their relationship to each other and to

¹ See Aaron Scharf's *Art and Photography* (London: Penguin, 1983), Chapter 5, pp. 134-136.

the way other pictorial conventions are used. The way the paint is applied, evoking a flat surface as in Dali or prescribing the thick, visceral, layered textures of Auerbach, aspectually effects what we are to imagine. They not only prescribe perceptual imaginings but also significantly preclude the possibility of others. Thus, just by virtue of the differences of the marked, painterly surface, Dali's beautifully, sensuously finished portrayal of the crucifixion in *The Christ of Saint Jean de la Croix* cannot prescribe the same imaginings as the scratched, worked, disfigured surface of Nolde's *Life of Jesus*. Dali's painterly rendering puts Christ at a distance from us, inviting us to perceptually imagine and contemplate the event as if from another sphere or dimension. Nolde's technique and rough finish, by contrast, prescribes our imaginings as very much a part of the rough, raw world which is very much of this earth. Of course, this is further enhanced by the distinct spatial relations and conventions manipulated in the paintings. The space from which Dali's Christ hangs is ambiguous. The delineation between the world below Christ's feet and the space from which he hangs is unclear. Thus Christ seems to free float above the world in an undefined space. By contrast, Nolde's perspective is flatter, more emphatically compressing Christ's place in our world of clay. Thus, Nolde prescribes us to imagine Christ's drama as played out amongst our earthly cares and woes.

Of course, we can come to see the world as if it were as it is manifestly characterised in a particular artwork. Thus, in this sense, the imaginative understanding promoted by a work is divorceable from it. So after a vivid experience with a Francis Bacon portrait in the Tate, I may wander around, imaginatively perceiving others as distorted, corrupting and diseased. But the material smeared nature of Bacon's paint work clearly constrained and guided us towards this imaginative understanding of humanity, in our engagement with the artwork. That is, the imaginings the work itself prescribes, which give rise to the understanding, are anchored to the distinctive nature of the artwork concerned. The point is that the features of the work, the way they are shaped and constituted, prescribe our imaginings in a particular way. Through doing so, they thereby shape the possibility of a particular imaginative understanding. Hence the form and content of the artwork, and what it prescribes us to imagine, cannot be wholly separated off from each other.²

It follows from the inseparability of form and content, that what we imagine in engaging with an artwork is from a particular point of view. The most straightforward case is where the artist is representing how and in what way a represented subject thickly understands a particular state of affairs. First person confessions or reports are often the most straightforward cases in this regard. For example, in *The Great Gatsby* we imagine the state of affairs as prescribed through Nick's own portrayed understanding of events and his inter-action with the other characters. Our imaginative understanding of Gatsby himself is shaped through this representation, one which we understand to

² See Michael Podro's "Depiction and The Golden Calf" in N. Bryson, M. A. Holly and K. Moxey (eds.), *Visual Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), pp. 163-189, for a more detailed philosophical treatment of how the material nature of paint shapes our particular engagement with paintings.

express Nick's own developing understanding. A more complicated example is *Crime and Punishment*. Our perception of the world throughout the novel is tense and often confused. This is, of course, a reflection of Raskolnikov's own subjective uncertainty. Yet there are incidents in the novel where we are to take the events represented as not witnessed either by Raskolnikov or anyone else. In such cases we typically refer to an omniscient author. Indeed, the great realist novelists of the nineteenth century often relied almost wholly on this method of representation. But even in these cases, what is being represented is nonetheless done so from a particular viewpoint. We cannot but imagine Sonya praying in anguish except in a range of possible ways. We imagine her facing a particular way, we imagine the tears running down her left cheek, her face turned inward toward the wall. Where she prays alone, we are not prescribed to take the way we imagine her to be as constitutive of the way another character in *Crime and Punishment* sees her. If what we are prescribed to imagine can be taken as reliable, we are to take it as the way she is actually praying and we should thus feel for her appropriately.

Of course, such impersonal authorial representation may well turn out to be unreliable. Indeed, artists often provoke tension, pace and enrich our imaginings by oscillating between the impersonal viewpoints and those of different characters. Thus questions concerning the reliability of the viewpoints we are prescribed to imagine may come to the fore. An extreme example is Kurosawa's film *Rashomon*. It is the story of a single violent occurrence as retold by four narrators, three of them on trial in a courtroom. Each time, we are prescribed to imagine what each narrator suggests actually happened. Each narrator tells a story apparently consistent with the facts, which does credit to themselves in some way or other. All agree to the basic facts, that there was an attack, a rape and a murder. The point of the film is that there is a truth of the matter which, for various reasons, is being covered up by three of them. The point is not that what is true is wholly relativised to the viewpoints we are prescribed to imagine. Rather, it is that though any representation is from a particular viewpoint, nonetheless one character's representation may be sound whilst the others may be false. Hence it may be part of the state of affairs we are prescribed to imagine, to wonder as to the reliability or otherwise of the representation afforded. Furthermore, though what we are prescribed to imagine is from a particular viewpoint, it needn't be the viewpoint of a particular character within the state of affairs to be imagined.

Typically, artworks prescribe us to imagine states of affairs and characters with certain feelings. That is, it is often a constitutive part of our imaginings that we feel in certain ways with regard to what we are imagining. Our perspectival imaginings are shaped in order to prescribe our attitudes and feelings toward the imagined state of affairs. That is, the aspectual nature of the artwork promotes a particular imaginative understanding. Thus it is that artworks can afford insight, reveal significances or re-examine the familiar in fruitful ways. For example, in *The Crying Game*, we are encouraged to identify with Stephen Rea's character. Moreover, he is portrayed as at a loss in the face of his feelings for the transsexual Dil, at a stage when both his and the audience's sympathies

have already been skilfully engaged in a particular way. The way our imaginings are guided through the film's narrative construction, the way our sentiments are engaged and deepened through our imaginings, already preclude certain responses prior to the shock revelation that Dil is a man. Thus it is, that through engaging our imaginative understanding and deepening it in this way, the film can provoke questions about personal identity, sexuality and love which we might otherwise leave unasked. The engagement of our imaginative sympathies for the characters, as fitting objects of concern and compassion, enables the development of certain possible imaginative understandings.

A very different example is the way Francis Bacon represents distorted individuals in particular ways, as isolated, frightened and rotten, fitting objects of both fear and pity. Our perceptual imaginings with Bacon's work gives rise to the imaginative understanding of the human condition as corrosive, searing and brutal. Indeed, after engaging with artworks, we may still feel the significance of the imaginative understanding prescribed by the artwork. Thus when we leave the cinema, say, we may still be reflecting upon our imaginative understanding of those we may consider deviant. When we leave the art gallery, we may walk round somehow perceiving the corruption, decay and brutalisation of humanity in those we meet on the way home. Of course, quite how this imaginative experience relates to our own imaginative understanding, will effect both how plausible and profound we take the understanding prescribed by the artwork to be. Hence the relationship between art and action is a complex one. Nonetheless, if the work is valuable as art, the imaginative understanding promoted will be both significant and bear certain possible relations to our world.

Of course, a thick understanding of others and the world is not itself distinctive of art. However, what is, is the manipulation of media and conventions to prescribe our imaginings, in a way which enables us to entertain imaginative understandings we otherwise could not achieve. Artworks are constitutively aspectival, rather than clear windows through to a separable imagined content. In part, the artworks constitute the nature of what is to be imagined. The aspectival manipulation of our imaginings by artistry cultivates our imaginative understanding of certain states of affairs, which may be taken to bear a significant relation to our actual situation. Art's manipulation of media, conventions and techniques to portray worlds and characters in certain ways, for example Dil as a fitting object of compassion, or Bacon's characterisations of butchered figures, is distinctive of art. Their aspectival nature means that form and content cannot be separated. Furthermore, it means that art's peculiar relation to cultivating imaginative understanding allows for the possibility that art may develop our moral sensibilities.

Yet, the committed aestheticist may argue, how could art bear a significant relation to our moral sensibilities? The mere fact that imagination is involved in our engagement with artworks does not entail that art cultivates our moral aspect. For, the aestheticist claims, the mode of experience afforded by art is necessarily of a different order from that we encounter in the real world. An artwork is constructed in order to engage our imagination. Thus we get pleasure from the delight artworks afford

and they serve to distract us from the vagaries of the real world. Contrastingly, the aestheticist argues, the real world is not imaginatively constructed. This is not straightforwardly to deny that the imagination plays a significant role in our everyday life. As we saw in the last chapter, the imagination enables us to understand and respond appropriately to the world and others. Rather, the claim is, what the imagination does in art is unrelated to the imaginative experience arising from the real world.

But this cannot be true. For example, consider Picasso's *Weeping Woman*.³ This, if anything could be, is a paradigmatic example for the aestheticist. There is little, if anything, in the way of context or narrative to place the expression of grief against. Our imagination is not even prescribed to imagine a particular type of event as giving rise to this grief. Furthermore, the techniques of abstraction used involve destroying, re-ordering and thus reconstituting the human features. The cubist concerns under which this process falls are driven by a concern with the nature of sight in particular. We do not have to feel such anguish ourselves to recognise the feelings expressed in the work. But the fact that the techniques and formal features of the work give rise to its expressive qualities, does not entail art's autonomy from our imaginative experience of life. The very reason the work's formal qualities are so expressive is precisely because they vivify aspects of suffering we can recognise from our own actual and imaginative experience. The acid tears eat into the face, the jagged features are gouged by despairing fingers, the whole physiognomy of the face is distorted. The content of the work cannot be wholly divorced from its formal features. The imaginative force of these features arise from our experiences and thick understanding of various things: of grief, of crying, of things ripped apart, of grasping for something. Thus it is that the work's formal features can hope to show us something significant about a particular form and understanding of grief. Indeed, it is only because there is this inter-relation between our imaginative understanding of the real world and what the work expresses, that it can hope to shape our response and understanding of a particular form of grief.

It also follows that art cannot even be held to be wholly parasitic upon our understanding of the world and our place in it. Now the puritan about art recognises what the aestheticist could not: namely, that our understanding of the world feeds, preoccupies and makes intelligible our imaginings in art. Nonetheless, the puritan concludes, we would be better off if we wasted less time on art. Rather, he suggests, we should preoccupy ourselves with the nature and problems of the real world. This is because the puritan holds that though our understanding is engaged by art, what we imagine in art aims at pleasure rather than truth. Indeed, he suggests, though art cannot improve understanding, it may perniciously degrade or confuse true understanding. Yet this argument cannot be sound. The value of artworks as such, does not rest upon ideological evaluation. Of course, it may be true that the value of

³ My discussion of Picasso's *Weeping Woman* is indebted to Carolyn Wilde's "Painting, Expression, Abstraction" in A. Harrison (ed.), *Philosophy and the Visual Arts* (Boston: D. Reidel, 1987), pp. 29-50.

an artwork depends upon the imaginative understanding and insight it promotes. However, this does not entail that our imaginative engagement is automatically marred by any association judged immoral by the moral theory we take to be true. If this were so, then Ridley Scott's *1492* would be judged a bad artwork because of the imaginative sympathy it prescribes for the morally impure European founders of North America. But the value of *1492* lies precisely in the insight it affords into the men, conditions and events upon which civilisations are founded. Such imaginative depth would be lost, to the disvalue of the work as art, if the imaginative understanding prescribed were so overly simplistic as to suggest that such men were either wholly good or bad. Thus it is that we are concerned with whether the artwork relevantly constrains our imaginative engagement and in doing so conveys and promotes a particular, significant imaginative understanding.

Moreover, we are concerned with whether the imaginative understanding promoted is adequate to that which it concerns. Thus, the significance of the imaginative understanding promoted must also concern whether the work advocates an immoral imaginative understanding or not. Hence the value of an artwork may be marred to the extent it glorifies or advocates what is morally flawed or evil. For example, where the overall imaginative understanding promoted by a work involves inciting racism, then the work's value as art is diminished. This is not to declare that art should correspond to one particular moral theory or imaginative understanding of the world. However, if an artwork is to be significant and offer us insight, it must enable us to recognise, understand and discriminate more closely and deeply in the world within which we live. Thus there is a necessary link between art and the cultivation of our moral sensibilities.

Imaginative understanding anchors the requirement to imagine not just in relation to artworks but in our ordinary, everyday, moral dealings in the world. What concerns us as moral agents is how we ought to act, what rational considerations and the nature of our world suggests. Our appreciation of how we, others and the world are, is strongly rooted in our imaginative understanding. By engaging our imagination and enhancing our imaginative understanding, for example of a form of grief, art can cultivate our understanding of the real world. Art is not parasitic upon our understanding of life, rather the relationship is a symbiotic one. An artwork engages, develops and shows us a possible imaginative understanding, in this case of grief and, perhaps, women. Thus, engagement with art may have a modificatory effect upon our own imaginative understanding of the world and others. We may come to see, through the insight afforded by an artwork, a certain kind of grief where before our understanding had been thin and indiscriminating.

Section 2: Art and Immoral Pleasures

Imagining how others might perceive a situation, contrasting different possibilities with what one takes the appropriate description to be, can enhance our imaginative understanding. So one might imagine how a friend or mentor would understand one's situation. This may enhance our own understanding and the basis upon which it is grounded. Imaginings can also help to promote one's understandings of others. For example, to understand another imaginatively, we must be able to imagine their situation from their viewpoint. Thus, in our imaginings, we seek to grasp what they would think of as an appropriate description of the possible alternatives open to them and what their understanding of the course of action they took is. In the quest to understand another, we may also imagine how they would react in different situations, or if various roles were reversed. For example, how they would react if they were in our position. Imaginings can range widely in their scope, from imagining one relevant feature is different to imagining an entirely new situation. Imagining under what imaginative understanding of the world a certain act is rendered intelligible, can lead to an increased understanding of both the action and the person who performed it. Thus what we imagine can deepen our understanding and appreciation of the nature of ourselves and others.

New worlds, creatures, situations can be imagined and we can consider how they may relate to our actual world and its possibilities. How we categorise and experience the world can be broadened through our imagination. Hence imagination can enhance our understanding of our situation within it. Thus at a low level one may imagine something to be the case, that one has been betrayed by a friend for instance, and through imaginative reflection learn from one's feelings of betrayal. Thus one's imaginative understanding about the nature of friendship, trust and the relevance of betrayal may be deepened. Similarly, through imaginative reflection upon the story of Adam and Eve, we may learn something about our nature and the purpose of life. Indeed, such imaginings may deeply affect our conceptions and experience of the world. The imaginative understanding promoted may come to constitute part of our own understanding, part of what enables us to grasp the nature of ourselves, others and the world.

Imagination is fundamental to our ordinary day to day lives. In our need to understand the nature of situations and how we ought to act, we require recourse to our imagination. Of course, our thoughts, feelings, intuitions and perceptions inter-act in various complex ways. But in attempting to make sense of them, we ordinarily use our imagination. Independently of our engagement with artworks, our imagination is central to our everyday, moral lives. It informs and enhances our deliberation about how and for what we ought to act. It enables us to reflect upon, reaffirm, extend or modify our imaginative understanding. For example, we use our imagination to test our moral intuitions and principles. If we imagine a certain situation, we can see if they are adequate regarding potential situations and thus whether they should be modified in responding to actual dilemmas. The level such

imaginings may operate on can obviously vary. For example, from highly hypothetical and abstract examples, such as possible world cases typical of philosophical enquiry, down to more basic low level imaginings, regarding the particular nature of a person's character, i.e. what they would be likely to do if you broke their promise and so on. Such imaginings help us to pick out and consider which intuitions or principles ought to carry across cases, what they are constrained by and whether or not, in the light of such imaginings, they ought to be modified, refined or considered appropriate at all.

Thus imagination can help us to develop our grasp of the nature of moral situations. We can test our moral intuitions and principles through our imaginings, extending our imaginative understandings to different situations. Alternatively we may develop alternative imaginative understandings through our imaginings. In complex ways, they may inform and modify the imaginative understanding we hold to be appropriate to our world. For example, through my imaginings, I may come to understand that there are dilemmas where every possible course of action carries with it some immoral consequence or aspect. This may be a matter which, without such imaginative experience, I would have been unable to appreciate. Similarly, imagination may play a significant role in developing our self-knowledge. Imaginings often involve musing upon possible situations one might be in, how one would think, feel and react to particular people in certain circumstances. Moreover, we often imagine what our life would be like if we had continued with or commenced certain interests and projects rather than others. Such imaginings help us to learn more about ourselves, what we understand to be worthwhile aiming at or should be avoided. Thus I may imagine what it would be like were I to enlist in the police force rather than attempt to forge a career in academic philosophy. What I imagine will guide and inform the course of action I choose to pursue. This also serves to show the importance of developing a discriminating imagination, rather than indulging in mere fantasising. The imagination can only be a sound guide if it bears a significant relation to how, in fact, things may be.

Of course, quite what the relation is, or is taken to be, may depend upon the imaginative understanding one brings to bear. For example, Picasso's *Weeping Woman* may be taken as discriminating a particular kind of possessive, vicious grief. Conversely, it might be taken as prescribing an imaginative understanding of women generally as vicious, possessive and thus vulnerable. We might tend to give more credence to the former imaginative understanding than the latter. Thus the former imaginative understanding promoted by the artwork may well effect our imaginative understanding of the world and others in a way in which the latter will not. What is a potentially significant imaginative understanding runs along a continuum, from the plausible to the implausible to the fantastical. The further along the continuum an artwork is, toward the fantastical, the less value we think it has as art. Thus, we may think, the imaginative understanding promoted by *Weeping Women* is more significant in the first interpretation than in the second.

An artwork may appropriately taken to be insignificant, precisely because it does not develop our imaginative understanding. For example, we may criticise the work of Peter Howson on the grounds

of artistic paucity. The imaginative understanding of the world he prescribes is a crude and facile construal of the brutishness of everyday life. His work represents the world as only containing thugs and their victims, who are merely weaker thugs. It fails to discriminate between different people, actions and motivations. The world, except in the pages of comic books, is far more complex than that. Howson's work, far from affording insight, actually prescribes a wholly inadequate imaginative understanding. The same may be true of our more everyday fantastical imaginings. For example, it is of no use if, when I imagine my possible career in the police force, I imagine myself as a glamorous detective solving all the crimes. If I am contrasting a police career with an academic one, then what I imagine should seek to promote a sound imaginative understanding of what is involved. Thus my imaginings should relevantly capture the nature of an active, often tedious, community service. Hence I will grasp the fact that it will often involve frustration at being unable to catch petty criminals, trying to comfort victims of crime and living within the framework of an institutionalised militia. Then I would be able to compare, meaningfully, my imaginative understanding of life in the police force with my imaginative understanding of life within a university as an institutionalised thinker and teacher. Thus it is that both art and our ordinary imaginings may develop our appreciation of our world and its possibilities. Furthermore, an artwork, if it is of significance and value, will deepen our imaginative understanding in a particularly distinctive and powerful way.

However, the argument thus far remains open to a highly significant challenge. Namely, the claim that art may instrumentally aid our understanding, but there can be no inherently significant relation between art and moral understanding. This objection to the connection between art and morality is based upon the recognition that immoral artworks may afford us great pleasure. Of course, that artworks may promote distinctly immoral imaginings and understandings does not, of itself, disprove the link drawn. After all, we can admit that an evil person can imaginatively understand the nature of a situation and thus, to greater effect, pursue his evil ends. For example, a particularly effective torturer may imagine and appreciate the immense amount of gratuitous pain he would cause if he were to cut out the toenails of his victim. Thus, being the evil man he is, he goes ahead and does so. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that we should not properly judge the torturer to be an evil man. Similarly, the mere fact that an artwork may promote imagining such events with pleasure, rather than disgust, does not show that we should not evaluate the work as artistically disvaluable.

Nevertheless, it may be claimed, an artwork should not be evaluated according to moral criteria at all. This may not be to deny that what is of significant value is the insight an artwork affords. Rather, it is to deny that the insight afforded by artworks is properly subjected to moral evaluation. The basic claim is that any conception which evaluates artworks on the basis of the moral understanding promoted, cannot remain adequate to the value we properly place on certain artworks. That is, the artistic value of an artwork does not always correlate to the moral value of the imaginative understanding promoted. As has already been argued, form and content cannot be wholly

separated from each other. On the one hand, works of propaganda or moralising tracts may promote a sound imaginative understanding but lack artistic value. Yet, on the other hand, sadistic, brutal works may promote a distinctly immoral imaginative understanding whilst nevertheless being of artistic value. This is to be explained in terms of the pleasures proper to art. Whether something is good art or not concerns the vivid, pleasurable imaginings and imaginative understanding afforded. A work promoting a sound, moral understanding may of little value as art. This is because the work affords little imaginative pleasure. Conversely, a work which promotes an immoral imaginative understanding may be of great artistic value. This is because the prescribed imaginings are pleasurable. Hence it is not the morality of the imaginative understanding promoted, which determines whether an artwork is valuable as art. Rather, it is whether the understanding promoted is imaginative or not and thus affords pleasurable imaginings.

For example, it could be argued that *The Merchant of Venice* promotes an imaginative understanding of Jews as falling outside the remit of our normal moral concern. This is because it intimates that Jews are, by their very nature, sly, untrustworthy and materialistic. A clearer example may be Martin Scorsese's *Good Fellas*. The work promotes a casual disregard of violence and ultimately glorifies the almost compulsive violence of its central Mafioso characters. In his imaginings, the spectator is constrained to short circuit any qualms they may have, in order to appreciate the central characters as admirable. Art is concerned only to engage the imagination and promote pleasurable, interesting or significant imaginative understandings. Whether the understanding promoted is of moral worth or not is irrelevant to the value of the work as art. Indeed, artworks which glorify people, ideologies and imaginative understandings which are evil may be artistically valuable or even masterpieces. If the Marquis de Sade's writings promote pleasurable imaginings and an imaginative understanding not previously entertained, then his work is valuable as art. Similarly, Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, though a record of the 1934 Nuremberg rally, is of value as art. The striking images, innovative camera work and tracking shots all prescribe and constrain our imaginings in peculiarly powerful and pleasurable ways. What they promote, is an imaginative understanding of the Third Reich as a force of moral and historical greatness. Yet, the work is, nonetheless, of artistic value.

Furthermore, it might be claimed, since art does not automatically make people more moral, there cannot be a tight link between art and morality. For example, someone might be deeply affected by an artwork such as *The Crying Game*. They imaginatively understand and sympathise with the transsexual Dil, as prescribed by the film. Yet, when they walk out of the cinema, they may be just as dismissive of such people as before. Similarly, someone who tends to regard people in merely utilitarian terms might read *Crime and Punishment* and still retain their utilitarian outlook. Similarly, a sincere Nazi may have a profound respect for and enjoyment of art. His imagination is engaged and stretched through engaging with artworks. Yet, his moral understanding may remain

impervious to the imaginative experience afforded through art. For example, a Nazi might watch *Schindler's List* and still retain an imaginative understanding of Jews as people of lesser moral worth, corrupters of society and so on. Perhaps the most challenging counter-example to the link between art and morality is itself given in an artwork: Alex in Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*. The two most important things in Alex's life are the thrill of violence and Beethoven's *Choral Symphony*. If there really was a tight link between art and morality, then surely the frightening immediacy and plausibility of Burgess' work would be lacking. Yet, Alex's attitude and actions would seem to be all too believable. Conversely, artists who produce highly imaginative artworks may themselves lack sound moral understanding. For example, Picasso seems to have glorified in his satyr like nature. Indeed, Picasso conceived of himself as justifiably amoral, on the grounds that great artists are beyond the concerns of ordinary morality. Therefore, it might seem, there cannot be any necessary or typical relationship between good art and the moral development of our sensibilities.

It may be true that the deepest form of imaginative pleasures come from combining the playful with what is profoundly significant for our world conceptions. To travel in the country of one's mind, through imaginative experience, broadens one's experiences and imaginative understanding significantly. The pleasures in art range from the entertaining and distracting imaginings it may provide to the fuller imaginative appreciation of our world. The objection articulated need not deny that an artwork may contingently cultivate ethical insight. However, it does deny any necessary link between art's promotion of imaginative pleasures and the cultivation of moral understanding. Artistic value, it claims, is morally neutral. A work which gets us to imagine torturing another with pleasure may be just as valuable as art, as one which gets us to imagine the same event with disgust. This explains, it may be claimed, the evaluative fallacy committed by those who would assess art on ideological grounds. The artistic value of the imaginative understanding promoted, may be at odds with its moral value. Hence, politically or morally correct art may be no good artistically and politically or morally incorrect art may be great. To think otherwise, it will be suggested, is to conceive of the pleasures art affords as being of only instrumental value. That is, valuable to the extent they evoke morally sound responses and understandings within us. Whereas, the aestheticist claims, the truth is that the pleasures afforded by art are of value themselves. That is, independently of any relation to the appropriate moral understanding of the events portrayed.

Section 3: The Instrumentalist Reply

We have seen how artworks properly shape our imaginings, to promote imaginative understanding. Thus the putative link between art and morality does not wrongly entail that artworks which tell us what is good must be good artworks. Nonetheless, the challenge is a substantial one. One possible response is to take up an argument that has been most succinctly put forward by R. M. Hare. Hare was, perhaps, the first contemporary philosopher to see that the primary point of art lies in its exercise of the imagination. Indeed, Hare argues, it is through fulfilling this purpose that art can thus contribute to our moral thinking.[†] Art engages one's sympathetic imagination with regard to various types of people in possible situations. Thus, it may encourage one to consider and become open to people and dilemmas which might otherwise have been dismissed out of hand. The imaginings prescribed by a particular artwork are, as Hare recognises, open to the question of truth not in terms of facticity but of verisimilitude. That is, whether what is represented as happening would really be so and whether the morally relevant features have been highlighted or suppressed. This explains however, he suggests, why art can only be, at best, a weak defence against immoral thought and fanaticism. This in itself is no small feat. That art may play such a role is demonstrated by the importance we typically attach to art and the sympathetic imagination. Furthermore, the recognition of art's instrumental role is also recognised in the attempt to suppress or subjugate art for the purposes of state propaganda or for multifarious socio-political causes and institutions.

Yet, despite according art such a potentially important role, Hare's argument establishes only a weak link between our imaginings and our moral sense. This is due to the way Hare thinks we learn from artworks. Artworks, in addressing particular concerns and interests, will speak only to certain people and preclude others from engaging with them. The most one can expect is that an artwork may engage with a particular understanding of the world. This may engage with and relate to our own experiences and understanding. Nonetheless, if we are to learn anything at all, it cannot be confined to the particularities of what it is we are prescribed to imagine. That is, what we learn must be relevantly similar to our own experience. It must be something that can be brought under the operation of a moral rule or principle.

Of course, artworks are not themselves articulations of principles and their groundings. This is, for example, what philosophy involves. Rather, artworks prescribe us to imagine particular characters, situations, dilemmas and consequences. Thus we can learn from the imaginative experience they afford, but only in so far as they throw light upon new features or principles. For example, through reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, one might come to see the inhumanity of slave laws. Thus an artwork might cause one to reflect upon one's moral principles in a new light. A different way one might learn from

[†] R.M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), Chapter 9, pp.180-185.

artworks in this regard concerns the way principles might be applied. All moral principles, if they are to be useful, must be indeterminate. If this was not so, they would be infinitely complex, allow no room for judgement and be of little use. Thus an artwork may effect our understanding of how a moral principle should be applied. Lastly, an artwork might help us to learn through vivifying probable consequences of applying certain principles. For example, *1984* might be thought to show us the inevitable consequences of a communist or authoritarian commitment to centrally control everything in the name of equality. Nonetheless, artworks which stimulate the imagination cannot themselves help us to separate what is morally relevant or likely from what is not. This, Hare holds, could only be a matter proper to thought. Thus any truly significant development of our moral understanding and sensibilities can only come from the realm of moral thought. Therefore, Hare concludes, art can only provide a small instrumental aid for developing one's moral sensibilities. Art cannot, Hare claims, bear any inherently significant relation to our moral sensibilities.

One indication of the problematic nature of Hare's view is that it suggests we can only learn from artworks if they are relevantly similar to our own experience and worlds. Yet, it seems, we can learn from works like H. G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* which prescribe us to imagine experiences which we are never likely to or even could have. Of course, Hare will claim that in order to recognise what is portrayed as bearing any relevance to ourselves, we must be able to bring certain aspects of what is portrayed under principles we hold ourselves or, at least, can conceive of holding. But how might we learn from artworks where the application of principles in the portrayed regard will never have any bearing upon our lives?

Hare's argument entails that we will only learn from artworks where they represent what is likely to happen to us or represent types of people we are likely to be or recognise.⁵ It is this kind of view which, unsurprisingly, lay behind the foisting of moralising tales upon Victorian children. But then why should we bother to learn from artworks at all? Presumably it would be better to reflect upon the relevant moral principles themselves or learn from the appropriate field of enquiry. Even given imagination's significance and importance in our ordinary lives, the relevance of artworks to our moral sensibilities still appears questionable. The point of artworks is to engage our imagination, whereas in the everyday world we imagine in order to understand it. For example, it is typically true that the empirical knowledge required to gain imaginative acquaintance with a particular value is under specified. Hence it may be filled out by the imagination, grounded upon one's prior knowledge of the world. But this still does not explain why engaging with an artwork should peculiarly promote our

⁵ There are strong parallels here to much contemporary literary criticism. A classic example is Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s, "Talking Black" in C. Ricks and L. Michaels (eds.), *The State of the Language* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 42 - 50, which argues on these and political grounds for the defense and promotion of a peculiarly 'Black' literature. Conversely, Frank Palmer, *Literature and Moral Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 170, suggests that to think art has a moral or social purpose is to reduce, wrongly, artworks to mere vehicles of propaganda.

understanding. It might be better to search for more information, rather than allowing the imagination to be an unreliable substitute for it.

Indeed, it might be thought, we should be wary of the power of the imaginings promoted by artworks. We might be tempted to mistake their vivacity for justification. After all, art mediates our imaginative experience in complex ways, through constructed authorial, media, genre and conventional constraints. Since the way something is represented necessarily influences what we are to imagine, we should be, if anything, more sceptical about the supposed insights art may afford. Understanding the world aright is tricky enough without having to deal with the complexities of the possible relationships between what we imagine in our engagement with an artwork and the way the world is. Moreover, the possible relationships between the imagined and actual worlds are determined by theoretical considerations anyway. Therefore, whether an artwork is of moral significance or not depends upon the relationship of what it portrays to moral principles and their application in our world.

Hare's argument opens up the gap between artistic value and what we may learn from art. Indeed, what we learn from art for Hare can only bear a contingent relation to artistic value. Thus we may learn far more, on his view, from an artistic failure than from an artistic masterpiece. After all, the bad artwork may bring our attention to a particular moral principle we had failed to recognise whereas an artistic masterpiece may be concerned with a moral principle we had already recognised. Thus artworks are only considered as significant to the extent they are taken to be illustrations of moral principles. That is, an artwork is morally significant in precisely the same way an example in moral philosophy is. Presumably, the only difference is that the artwork may make us attend to a morally relevant feature in a more pleasurable and diverting manner. Although, given Hare's severance of artistic value and significance, the instrumentally, morally significant work may not even be particularly pleasurable or diverting anyway.

However, the inevitable partiality of experiences represented in an artwork do not entail that only those with those kind of experiences can engage with the artwork concerned. The whole point of imagining in our everyday lives, and engaging with artworks, involves the appreciation of experiences, identifications and situations we have not or previously could not have imaginatively understood. This is true whether the imaginings themselves are extrapolations from our own experiences and identifications or not. Through engaging with artworks we may come to learn and imaginatively understand aspects of the world which we might otherwise have remained blind to. Thus one may learn to attend to aspects of the world which, prior to one's imaginative engagement with a particular artwork, one would have been dismissive of. This is true of good artworks, whether they are of apparent, immediate relevance to our everyday experience or not. Hence we may learn from works which represent events far removed from the nature of our world. Thus, for example, one who denigrates the role of the emotions and conceives of them as something we should seek to abstract ourselves from,

may well learn from engaging with, at its best, the science fiction film trilogy *Alien*. For the films manage to evoke an imaginative understanding of what it is to be human which constitutively includes the emotions, as contrasted with a scientific faith in the powers of autonomous, isolated reason. Through Ripley's act of self-sacrifice in the final scene, the last film also manifests, against the threat of a nihilistic universe, the potential goodness and value of humanity.

What we must appreciate, is that what we learn from good artworks is distinctive in kind from, say, what we learn by using counter-examples in philosophy, from merely finding out about historical events or from reading moralising tracts dressed up as stories. We can see this properly only if, as R. W. Beardsmore has argued, we appreciate that not all moral learning and understanding is reducible to matters of general principle:

"morality is not a skill, and though a man cannot learn anything without being taught some principles, without his being taught that some actions are good, others evil, he will not have learned much if this is *all* that he learns."⁶

Beardsmore brings the point out via a discussion of Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*. The essential point is that to conceive of morality as reducible to adherence to moral principles is to remain blind to the real demands that the world and others may justifiably make upon us. It is to regard people, dilemmas and situations as always falling under the application of some principle or other. It is to act as if what makes an action right concerns whether the action was dictated by or in accordance with a particular principle. As Beardsmore suggests, what is lacking here is moral understanding. What I am claiming, is that this amounts to a lack of imaginative understanding and concern for others.

Martha Nussbaum has argued in a similar vein, that literature enables us to better understand moral reality. Nussbaum's argument is, however, somewhat different from my own. It is, at least in part, based upon the claim that moral reality is necessarily context variable and thus particular. Literature, she claims, enables our faculty of moral perception to become more richly differentiated and discriminating. Thus, literature enables us to see more clearly what is actually the case. This is because, she argues, peculiar to literature is the ability to realise the particular, concrete nature of experience, a matter reflective enquiry passes over as a matter of irrelevant indeterminacy. Therefore, Nussbaum argues, literature is a richer, more inclusive and thus superior form of moral enquiry, than that afforded through merely abstract or philosophical reflection.⁷ However, I want to suggest, the distinctive moral understanding promoted in art does not merely arise because it is a more particular,

⁶ R. W. Beardsmore, *Art and Understanding* (London: Macmillan, 1971), Chapter 6, p. 66.

⁷ See Martha Nussbaum, "Finely Aware and Richly Responsible: Literature and the Moral Imagination" in her *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 148-167.

discriminating form of discourse. Rather, something of a different kind is involved and this concerns the centrality of imaginative understanding to moral understanding.

Section 4: Art and Imaginative Understanding

The importance of imaginative understanding for our moral understanding can be brought out if we think once more about the nature of our ordinary moral thinking. As we argued in the last chapter, we should distinguish thick from thin understanding. Thin understanding typically involves the kind of reflection Hare suggests is constitutive of moral deliberation, justification and understanding. That is, a concern with explicating and critically assessing the nature of moral principles, their relationship to a given moral theory and how they should be properly applied. Indeed, this is a typical picture of what is involved in doing moral philosophy. Contrastingly, thick understanding typically involves striving to imagine, grasp and appreciate what the appropriate way of looking at and acting in the world is. This typically includes matters such as the appropriate way to feel for, regard and respond to others. We imagine and imaginatively assess the ways we think of and feel about another under certain possible circumstances, how we might feel in their situation and how that should effect what we might do. Indeed, this is precisely what we typically do in our engagement with and interpretation of artworks. Based upon the way the contrast was drawn, it was also argued that imagining plays a central, essential role in our everyday, moral deliberations. This is because, it was claimed, imaginative acquaintance is required in order to fully, imaginatively understand aspects of ourselves, others and the world. Therefore, if we are to understand what another is likely to do or what it is right for us to do and why, the imagination, far from being useless, is of crucial importance. If we imaginatively understand another, then we will not need recourse to principles or theoretical reflection in order to know what he is likely to do. To know what is likely or what it is good to do depends upon a sound imaginative understanding of others and the world.

Our moral thinking cannot be reducible to questions purely concerned with matters of moral theory, principle and their application. This explains why merely learning a set of moral principles, and doing moral philosophy, is insufficient for moral understanding. Consider how we encourage moral learning. We do not just lay down principles and theories as appropriate explanations and guides for action. Rather, we typically point to paradigmatic examples of the thing in question. For example, imagine your child comes home crying because he's been bullied. He's crying his eyes out and says that if he was strong enough, he'd squash the boys concerned to a pulp. Of course, we'd comfort him but nevertheless suggest that what he wants to do is wrong. When he asks why, we don't reply that this is because harm to others is wrong except under circumstances requiring proportional self-defence. This would both fail to promote his understanding and serve only to distress him at our apparent lack of

sympathy. Rather, we would tend to cite what exemplary people would do. Thus, we might say, it is wrong because Jesus wouldn't do it.

Now I am not denying that principles have any role to play in moral justification, deliberation or learning. After all, if we tell the child not to take the cream egg and he asks why, we might rightly reply 'because stealing is wrong'. But cases where we refer to such crude principles tend to be prohibitive. That is, we are telling children what not to do. But moral understanding is not arrived at merely by thinking we know what we should not be doing. Rather, we require an understanding of what it is we should be aspiring to be and how we should see the world. To cite principles as relevant, presupposes an imaginative understanding. For example, the fact that something is wrong can only be appreciated as wrong given an imaginative understanding which sees the point of doing the right thing in the first place. Our moral principles are formed on the basis of our imaginative understanding, which may be cultivated. It is cultivated through developing the capacity to imagine and appreciate what exemplary, wise and kind people would do under various circumstances. This is, after all, why setting an example is of such crucial importance in bringing up children.

One of the primary ways children learn is by imitation, by emulating those who are taken as good paradigms. Furthermore, children typically learn much more from stories than from the explication of principles. This is because people, exemplars and stories afford an imaginative understanding of the world which cannot be conveyed merely by citing or blindly applying moral principles. The thick concepts of everyday moral discourse and discrimination can only be grasped through the promotion of imaginative understanding. Of course, we may later come to thinly understand their fairly specific criteria of applicability. Nonetheless, to grasp thick concepts, such as courage, kindness, tolerance and generosity, we must imaginatively understand something about the nature of what they are being applied to. Thus, we may be told that tolerance is listening to the opinion of others and respecting their right to having them. However, a grasp of what it is to be a truly tolerant person may require imaginative acquaintance of what can be involved. For example, we may imagine the position of, say, Martin Luther King when he defended the right of racists to speak freely.

This conception of moral learning accords with the way I suggested, in chapter 1, that we understand and talk about art. That is, we do not learn what constitutes good art primarily through developing or possessing a theory about art. Rather, we learn about art by being pointed toward and engaging with good examples of it. We try to see what it is that is worthy of such attention, value and description. We try to appreciate why it is that the brush strokes should be valued or how the line of the face might be seen as being particularly expressive. As our exposure to examples increases, we tend to compare and contrast differing aspects and imaginative understandings. Eventually, we are able more and more to come to our own conclusions about what the appropriate descriptions and interpretations are. Often much of our disagreements with others rests upon disputes as to what

constitutes the appropriate description: a matter which may well rest upon distinct imaginative understandings.

It is important to realise that I am not claiming that theoretical reflection and principles cannot deepen our understanding of morality and art. Indeed, if I were, then this work would either be redundant or a counter-example. However, what I am claiming is that such reflection is significant in so far as it appropriately modifies our imaginative understanding. That is, theoretical understanding is significant because it arises from and may modify imaginative understanding. Thus a morality based purely upon principles, allowing no room for imaginative understanding and judgement can never hope to be adequate to the moral demands of the world. Morality depends upon an imaginative understanding of ourselves and others, in order to make correct moral decisions. Art as such typically stimulates and engages the imagination in order to promote a sound appreciation of what the imaginings concern and thus serves to promote imaginative understanding. This concerns the quality of our thinking about and understanding of the world. It is through the imaginative understanding that art is necessarily linked to our moral aspect. Our moral perception and sensibilities are themselves dependent upon our imaginative understanding of the world, people and forms of life.

It is imaginative understanding which is primarily constitutive of moral understanding. Our understanding of others arises from our capacity to place ourselves imaginatively in their position, imagine how they perceive their position to be, what they feel and thus how they are likely to act. Of course, it is easier to imaginatively understand others who are similar to ourselves. It takes a minimal effort for me to imaginatively understand another who's struggling to finish their thesis, precisely because I am experiencing similar difficulties myself. In order to understand the other person, I can assimilate much of my own situation to theirs. However, it is far more difficult to understand, imaginatively, radically different worlds or those taken to be widely variant from ourselves. For example, it may be hard to understand imaginatively those used to living within an authoritarian regime. Our imaginative understandings of the proper attitudes towards authority, for example, may be widely at odds. Understanding others taken to be widely at odds in an essential regard may, it is thought, normally be a task beyond our ordinary imaginings. Our prejudices, say, may ordinarily preclude us from imaginatively understanding transsexuals as people deserving a certain kind of respect and compassion. This is, it may be thought, where artworks can contribute to our imaginative understanding. Through the power and vivacity of the imaginings they promote, artworks may engage our imaginings about subjects and people to which our imaginings, on their own, would be inadequate to. Hence *The Crying Game* can cultivate our imaginative understanding, where our more ordinary imaginings may have failed us. Thus artworks can extend our imaginative understanding in a way our ordinary imaginings could not. Art distinctively cultivates our imaginative understanding and moral sensibilities.

However, though this conception recognises the primacy of imaginative understanding to moral understanding, it still leaves unclear how artworks may be just as insightful about ordinary, familiar aspects of our lives. After all, the painting of everyday subjects by artists seeks to illuminate rather than merely illustrate the banal and obvious. Think of Millet's portrayals of everyday, working peasant life, Rodin's *The Kiss*, Degas' depiction of prostitutes, Constable's evocation of the English countryside and so on. The techniques, viewpoints and aspects manipulated in all these artworks aim to promote imaginative understanding and insight. The insight afforded is not merely concerned with strange and foreign worlds. Rather, it is typically related, often directly, to our own world. Artworks often touch upon features, values and concerns which are of immediate concern to our own lives. Indeed, most artworks deal with aspects of human life which have immediate contact with aspects of our own: representations of life, birth, lust, death, love, work, home, the countryside, urban society, war, religion and so on. Their point is to evoke a particular imaginative understanding in relation to the subject portrayed and thus deepen our imaginative understanding of our own world. If artworks only illuminated aspects of life radically different from our own, then most of the art which is of artistic value would have to be considered otherwise. Yet the artistic value of Dickens' or George Eliot's novels does not depend upon whether one is familiar with their time, events and settings. If this were so, then their work would hardly have been of value to many of their contemporaries. The value of their work lies in the illumination of what were then familiar, everyday aspects of ordinary life. Moreover, their work remains of relevance to our own values, concerns and world. This is precisely because though they concern the everyday events of their world, the insight promoted sheds light upon our own world. Artworks aim to illuminate our worlds, whether through dealing with the familiar or radically different, rather than merely illustrate the banal and obvious.

So how can art illuminate what we are already familiar with? As I have argued, artworks seek to prescribe and shape our imaginings in particular ways. They do so by seeking the right way to convey what it is they seek to represent. That is, artworks attempt to find the right description. The right description can develop, through our imaginings, a deepened imaginative understanding of the nature of our world and possibilities. Artworks do not function as mere vehicles of information. Of course, the choice of subject itself indicates that something is to be taken as worthy of our attention. However, they do not merely repeat the familiar or tell us about the unfamiliar. Rather, they seek to bring home a particular imaginative understanding of a world. Thus the way our imaginings are prescribed and shaped, distinctively effects the nature of what we are to imaginatively understand. This is precisely what makes our imaginative engagement with artworks distinct from the flux of ordinary experience. Art utilises and provides a common pool of imaginative resources and techniques from stock myths and stories through to perceptual categories or feelings. But it is precisely in drawing upon, extending, constructing and developing these resources that art can draw our attention to aspects of our world which we had previously missed. For example, Angela Carter's exploration of standard fairy

tales in *The Company of Wolves* draws our attention to themes of sexuality underlying apparent innocence, in both the genre as a whole and the real world.

Good artworks, as distinct from typical pieces of journalism or sociology, do not merely draw our attention to features of the world or imagined worlds. In journalism, sociology or bad science fiction what we react to are the features, events or possibilities to which our attention is drawn, independently of the way they are represented. However, in art we react to the way the features, characters and events are portrayed. What the artwork cultivates in our imaginings is a possible way of imaginatively understanding the state of affairs represented. The artwork directs us toward how certain things are to be seen and imaginatively understood, as opposed to merely stating that 'they are or might be' or even how they are to be theoretically explained. The work, its manipulation of conventions, style and associations prescribes particular imaginative experiences and, possibly, the re-ordering of our expectations. It develops a possible way of thickly understanding our natural and social world. As we saw, this is even true of such apparently abstracted works as Picasso's *Weeping Woman*. However, the point can be emphasised if we consider another example, Van Gogh's *Potato Eaters*. At the time it was painted, the details and features of everyday peasant life would have been familiar to all. Although it may be of sociological interest to us now, it is not here that the artistic value of the work lies. What Van Gogh sought was a way of representing his subjects which evoked an imaginative understanding of the harsh living and working conditions of his subjects. He does this through a particular labouring and abstraction of style, attempting to bring home the rough, coarse, hard aspects of their lives:

"I personally am convinced I get better results by painting them in their roughness than by giving them a conventional charm...If a peasant picture smells of bacon, smoke, potato, steam - all right, that's not unhealthy...if the field has an odour of ripe corn or potatoes or of guano or manure - that's healthy, especially for city people. Such pictures may *teach* them something. But to be perfumed is not what a peasant picture needs."⁸

What the work may teach us does not lie so much in knowing about the conditions of the peasants. This is something most city people would have known about and is something we can easily find out about from our history books. The work is not a substitute for or a paraphrase of such information. If this were so, then the point of engaging with the work would be lost as soon as one found a more detailed source of information about the conditions of the peasantry. What the picture may

⁸ Quoted from Rosemary Treble, *Vincent: The Paintings of Van Gogh* (London: Hamlyn, 1989), p. 32, which is, in turn, quoted from *The Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1958), No. 404, 30 April 1885.

teach us, is that a particular imaginative understanding of the peasant's lives is appropriate. That despite, or perhaps because of, their harsh conditions, their lives contain an earth bound simplicity and goodness to be recognised and cherished. Van Gogh is concerned to present us with what he takes to be an appropriate understanding of these people, through prescribing our imaginings in certain ways. The way the peasants are represented as unthinkingly sharing their meagre sustenance. The way their gazes are directed and show concern for others, rather than being merely focused upon their share, manifests this imaginative understanding. Of course, we might criticise Van Gogh for such a sentimental, quasi-religious reverence of peasants. What would be at issue here, is whether the imaginative understanding promoted by the work is the appropriate one. It is important to emphasise that this criticism would not arise because the work may be fictional. Rather, it arises because the claim is that, if Van Gogh was to really deepen our imaginative understanding of peasants, then he should have represented them in a slightly different way.

Nevertheless, we may acknowledge both that the imaginative understanding of *The Potato Eaters* is partially inadequate and, nevertheless, that it is of artistic value. This is because it still affords a significant possible light by which we may look upon the world and others, one which may deepen our own imaginative understanding. For example, the way we imagine the peasants' attention as directed toward others, even whilst in deprived circumstances themselves, may enhance our understanding of generosity of spirit and compassion, of altruism's relationship to love, fear and death. Thus, through engaging with such a work, we may come to see new aspects to the poor, the downtrodden and to our relationships with others. Indeed, we may come to cultivate a greater concern for others, through the modificatory affect the work has upon our own imaginative understanding. We may become more aware and appreciate more closely certain aspects of our world, others and ourselves. Art is itself a form of understanding precisely because the way something is represented in part prescribes and shapes the very content of what is to be imagined and the understanding promoted. Art cultivates our imaginative understanding in a distinctive way, a way in which our ordinary imaginings cannot.

This account of the link between art and morality allows us to explain the status of works such as Leni Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will*. What Riefenstahl's work attempts to show us, is that a particular imaginative understanding of the Nazis and their Führer is appropriate. That Hitler is a beneficent, modest, saintly man impelled by a vision: a vision to protect the good and cleanse the world of all evil. The work cultivates in us the imaginative understanding that the destiny to which the Nazis march is one of a glorious, righteous, victorious crusade against the impure forces of the world. Now, we can recognise the innovative and artistic way our imaginings are prescribed toward this understanding by the film. Furthermore, we may take great pleasure from some of the unusual and striking images we perceptually imagine. All of these things are of artistic value and render the work valuable. However, the imaginative understanding these imaginings are directed toward promoting is itself radically flawed.

The imaginative understanding promoted is not just inappropriate in the sense that it is over partial, sentimental or naive, in the way we might think of Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters* is. Rather, it is fundamentally at odds with virtually every significant aspect of the true nature of Nazism. That is, the imaginative understanding promoted constitutes a fundamental and radical misunderstanding of what it represents. Far from being an appropriate description, it cultivates a radically unsound imaginative understanding. It does not promote true insight but only the admiration of a viciously immoral creed. The imaginative understanding prescribed is false in virtually every fundamental aspect. Therefore, though it is of artistic value, *The Triumph of the Will* cannot be a truly great artwork. It is of artistic value because of the way it prescribes particular imaginings. Nevertheless, it is of artistic disvalue to the extent it promotes a fundamentally false imaginative understanding of its subject. Similarly, *Good Fellas* is flawed as an artwork to the extent it promotes the imaginative understanding it does: namely, that we can casually disregard and dispose of, at will, the lives of those outside our particular communities. The insight and imaginative understanding art aims to promote constitutively includes moral understanding. Therefore, to the extent a work promotes immoral imaginative understandings of the world, it is deeply flawed and thus disvaluable as an artwork.

However, it must also be recognised that even where a work promotes an imaginative understanding which is immoral in certain respects, it may still have aspects which promote a deep insight into the world. For example, Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, at various stages, explicitly promotes a crude and vicious form of anti-semitism:

"And those who had lied for hire;
the perverts, the perverters of language,
the perverts, who have set money-lust
Before the pleasures of the senses."⁹

Although this mars the value of the work, it does not render it wholly disvaluable as a work of art. Despite the confusions and repellent aspects of the imaginative understanding Pound promotes, there still remain artistically valuable aspects to the work. This is because, fused with Pound's brutal anti-semitism, there is a significant grasp of the possible requirements of intellectual and emotional honesty. Pound's use, development and modification of various poetic conventions and devices also serve to develop a finer imaginative appreciation of the world in this respect. For example, Pound intimates how a concern with the poetic element of language may betoken intellectual and emotional honesty: a concern passed over by those who disregard the senses or by those whose senses are easily lulled into contentment. Of course, the irretrievably immoral aspect of Pound's *Cantos* may make our imaginative

⁹ Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), Canto XIV, p. 61.

engagement with it extremely difficult. Given, that is, that we are moral people ourselves and do not possess the immoral, fascistic understanding of Jews that the *Cantos* advocates. On balance, the disvalue of the work as art in this regard may outweigh the possible value of the other aspects of imaginative understanding the *Cantos* has to offer us. Thus, though of some value as art, Pound's *Cantos* may not truly be considered as good art.

It is quite compatible with holding that artworks are disvaluable as art to the extent they promote immoral imaginative understandings of the world, that works such as *The Triumph of the Will* and *Good Fellas* may even be good artworks. This is, however, despite the overall imaginative understanding they promote. It is only because of the prodigious artistry, the pleasure the imaginings themselves afford and the glimpses they afford into how those who constitute the subjects of the work might imaginatively understand themselves and misunderstand the world, that they may be considered as artworks. Whether the imaginative understanding promoted is of moral value or not is centrally relevant to the work as art. Artworks which engage the imagination are concerned not merely to entertain and promote pleasurable imaginings. They aim to intimate through these imaginings, particular imaginative understandings of what they represent and thus, though the relations are complex, our world. As imaginative understanding includes moral understanding, there is a necessary link between art promoting imaginative understanding and cultivating moral insight. If the Marquis de Sade's work merely promotes pleasurable imaginings but promotes an inadequate, immoral imaginative understanding of human relations, then his writings cannot be good art. Indeed, if de Sade's writings lack even artistry, they can hardly qualify as art at all. This is even more true of Bret Easton Ellis. At least de Sade, despite the brutality and immorality of the imaginative understanding prescribed, may perhaps provide a small insight into how sexual relations may be understood in terms of power and the assertion of the individual will. Ellis' work is so crude and banal as to lack even that small possible contribution to our imaginative understanding.¹⁰

We are now also in a position to reply to the second kind of case cited against the necessary link between art and morality. That is, cases where someone engages with an artwork, yet, afterwards, remains apparently impervious to the imaginative understanding and insight promoted by the artwork. Firstly, it is quite possible that the person concerned has not grasped the imaginative understanding prescribed by the artwork. Obviously, this may be due to misinterpreting the artwork. In this case, we would attempt to show them that their appreciation of the work rested upon a false basis. For example, we would try to show them that their interpretation was at odds with various key features of the work and why certain aspects were to be taken in particular ways. This is not to deny

¹⁰ Compare, for example, the Marquis de Sade's *Juliette*, tr. A. Wainhouse, (London: Arrow, 1968) with Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* (London: Picador, 1991).

interpretative pluralism. Rather, it is to recognise that one may misunderstand the possible interpretations open to one in one's engagement with an artwork.

However, the more significant case is where the possible imaginative understandings prescribed by the work are apparently agreed upon but not acted upon. This depends upon the prior imaginative understanding brought to bear upon the work and how it is taken to inter-relate with the imaginative understanding promoted by the artwork. An artwork which promotes a particular imaginative understanding may be dismissed by someone on the grounds that it does not promote any ethical insight. Thus a Nazi may watch *Schindler's List* and admire Spielberg's artistry, take pleasure in the imaginings prescribed and yet, at the end, dismiss the imaginative understanding promoted. Of course, such responses are more or less justifiable. In this case, the Nazi's response serves only to show how inadequate his imaginative understanding of others and the world really is. If he cannot even appreciate the basic insight that Jews, *qua* human beings, are deserving of the same kind of respect and humanity that we expect from others, then that only goes to show how morally blind he really is. If he can appreciate that basic imaginative insight, as shown in the film, then the work will develop, to some extent, his imaginative understanding of the world. If he both recognises the imaginative understanding promoted as holding in this regard and remains impervious to it, then one must say that this shows he is, in fact, truly evil. After all, art cannot be expected to redeem even those who would knowingly spurn the requirement to be moral.

A less extreme case is the criticism George Orwell makes of Graham Green's *The Heart of the Matter*. Orwell criticises the work on the grounds that its fundamental imaginative understanding is not only deeply flawed but unintelligible. Therefore, if Orwell is right, Greene's book cannot but promote an inadequate imaginative understanding of the world, our place in it and our relations with and obligations to others. Thus it is that our evaluation of the value of an artwork not only constitutes a judgement upon the work of art, it also substantially reflects our own concerns, goals, values and imaginative appreciation of the world. It might be thought that this kind of explanation cannot account for the plausibility of Alex's actions in *A Clockwork Orange*. Yet, consider what happens at the end of the novel, when Alex has broken free from the effects of 'Ludovico's Technique'. He goes back to his old ways, but comes to appreciate that such brutally, violent, animalistic ways are wrong. Hence his enthusiasm for it wanes and the pleasure he derives from it is marred and diminishes. Alex's imaginative understanding of the world develops and, he sees, he will try to explain this to his son. Of course, Alex knows his son will not understand from his explanation, but, rather, have to find out for himself. Yet, this understanding is precisely what constitutes Alex's growing up. Hence, even his taste in music changes.

Of course, things are typically much more complex than the hard cases we've discussed would suggest. Nonetheless, there are three basic reasons why one who grasps the imaginative understanding promoted by an artwork may not act thereafter on the basis of that imaginative understanding. Firstly,

one may fail to appreciate the relationship between the imaginative understanding promoted in an artwork and its possible bearing upon the world. A crude instance of this would be the man who walked out of *The Crying Game*, apparently interpreted the film properly, and still viewed transsexuals with inhumanity. He might do this because he thinks of the film as merely a piece of fiction. What he fails to understand, is that the whole point of the film is to prescribe a particular imaginative understanding of people as appropriate not just within the fictional world but as holding good in our world. We would think that he failed to see the point of the film. Thus, though he may seem to have interpreted the film properly, he has not appreciated its full significance. After all, if true, it would be a significant criticism of the film to suggest that its portrayal of transsexuals was wholly implausible.

Secondly, one may fully appreciate an artwork's imaginative understanding of the world and agree with it, yet fail to act accordingly because one may act akratically. That is, mere insight is not enough, of itself, to determine ethical behaviour. Thus we may believe something to be wrong or imprudent and, nevertheless, go ahead and do it. An artwork may intimate and thus lead us to believe that a certain regard for others is morally sound. Yet, when we actually meet a transsexual we may react with repulsion and horror because our ingrained prejudices remain at odds with our imaginative understanding. After all, the cultivation of our moral sentiments toward inappropriate objects of opprobrium, blame or admiration may not be easily undone. But, if we recognise the imaginative understanding concerned as holding good, we will at least feel a sense of shame at such a reaction, where previously we might not have done. The cultivation of harmony between our imaginative understanding, theoretical understanding and our ingrained prejudices and sentiments is, as Plato recognised, a difficult, temporal process.¹¹

Thirdly, we may not act in accord with the imaginative understanding promoted by an artwork because we think its insight is only partial. A relevant example, discussed above, is Van Gogh's *Potato Eaters*. Imagine we came to the work with the prior imaginative understanding that poor, peasantry tend to be particularly greedy, selfish creatures. Through engaging with the work, we grasp the imaginative understanding promoted. Namely, that peasants' necessarily embody an anti-materialistic, quasi-religious concern for the individual and communal well-being of others. However, we might not take the imaginative understanding promoted on board as our own. Rather, through our imaginative acquaintance with the sensitivity toward others portrayed, we may come to a more modified understanding. For example, that certain harsh, peasant lives may embody an altruistic concern for others, often hard to find amongst those who are well off. This, though, is quite compatible with holding that a more Hobbesian picture may still be true of some peasants.

¹¹ See Plato, *The Republic*, tr. W. K. C. Guthrie, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956), Book IV, 434c-441c, pp. 206-217, for Plato's account of akrasia. Plato recognised, as Socrates could not, that our irrational elements may at times override what it is we judge best to do and would therefore, rationally speaking, desire to do.

Similar kinds of considerations also explain why even good or great artists may themselves possess an inadequate imaginative understanding of others and the world. This is complicated by the fact that the imaginative understanding promoted by an artwork may be distinct from the imaginative understanding an artist intended to intimate. However, even in cases where they may be one and the same, an artist's work may promote ethical insight despite the apparent lie given to this by the artist's actions. An artist's work may promote a sound imaginative understanding in one regard and yet not in another. This may be because he regards the understanding he has promoted as itself partial or because, though it affords insight, it is flawed in some respect. For example, Dickens' *Hard Times* affords us insight into the nature of men like Gradgrind and how a utilitarian understanding is inadequate to a proper understanding of our reciprocal relations with others. Nevertheless, it promotes a flawed understanding to the extent it crudely represents the poor as, necessarily, people of simple, honest sentiment.

This suggests how it is that an artist may possess and thus act on the basis of a sound imaginative understanding in one respect, whilst failing to do so in another. Picasso's *Weeping Woman* may promote our imaginative insight into a certain kind of female grief. Nevertheless, it may also reflect Picasso's inadequate understanding and behaviour toward women as a whole. Furthermore, an artist may fail to appreciate the relation the imaginative understanding he promotes stands in relation to his or our world. For example, Giacomo Balla may have under appreciated that the glorification of technology, speed and domination in his works actually promoted a morally inadequate aestheticisation of war.¹² Lastly, the artist may himself promote an imaginative understanding that he himself fails to live up to or does not himself hold as good. Essentially, these considerations are similar to those which show why an artwork which promotes a significant imaginative understanding may apparently fail to effect those who engage with it.

The common imaginative pool our art provides for us, reveals much about our times and society. It reflects our concerns, aspirations and preoccupations. Our access to the imaginative pool of art may serve to expand not only our imaginative resources, emotions and conceptual tools but our understanding of ourselves, others and the world. Artworks provide a representation of the imaginative wanderings of others. Our imaginative engagement with art may thus prove to be of benefit or, perhaps, detriment in various ways. Ideally, artworks promote the originality, inventiveness and vivacity of our own imaginings, guiding us towards a sounder imaginative understanding. We can go over our own imaginative development, use and engagement of artworks as contrasted with others. This process may itself lead to the development of the imagination and promote common intelligibility and understanding. The point and purpose of imaginative artworks is to engage and guide us to better

¹² It would seem, however, that other futurist artists, such as Marinetti, fully appreciated and revelled in the nature of the imaginative understanding they sought to promote. See Robert Hughes, "Futurism" in *Nothing If Not Critical* (London: Collins Harvill, 1990), pp. 173-176.

imaginings than those we could otherwise manage, in terms of both vivacity and profundity. An artwork which enables us to see more in the imaginative representation of a church or pastoral scene, may deepen our imaginative discrimination and understanding of the natural world.

I have argued that peculiar to good art is the capacity to prescribe and shape our imaginative experience in various ways. What distinguishes art from our everyday imaginings is the constraint and guidance afforded by the various media, art forms, genres and conventions. An artwork is not just a launching pad for the imagination. Rather, it promotes and shapes our engagement and imaginative understanding. The medium, style and conventions partly constitute the nature of what is to be imagined: the way something is represented, in part, determines the work's content. It is not just what is being represented in an artwork that moves us, it is the way it is done so. The imagination is powerfully stimulated by the necessarily aspectival nature of artworks. Hence it may contribute distinctively to our imaginative understanding of others. Engagement with good artworks does not automatically guarantee an increase in our imaginative understanding and our moral sensibilities. Nevertheless, art may distinctively manifest and cultivate imaginative understandings of human experience and values. Morality depends upon imaginatively understanding others and the world, in order to make correct moral decisions. Thus, through promoting imaginative understanding, art may distinctively cultivate ethical insight. This is distinctive in kind from the understanding promoted by mere reflection or philosophical enquiry. Therefore, art constitutes a distinct form of moral understanding. Art can widen, develop and deepen our imaginative understandings of ourselves, others and our world. Good artworks will do so for most people, across time and cultures, far better than mediocre ones. Great artworks are those which may promote the imaginative understanding of many people, across many times and cultures.

Section 5: Final Objections.

Despite the arguments put forward above, there still remain two possible sources of counter-examples to the account I have given. Firstly, certain artworks deliberately preclude our imaginative engagement and sympathies, yet they are apparently of great value as art. For example, Brecht's plays try to disengage our imaginative sympathies and, because they do so in a certain way, they are recognised to be of value as art. As I will show, this objection is not too serious. However, of greater importance is the second kind of objection, namely that certain artworks do not promote our imaginative understanding at all. Yet, they may be of great value as art. For example, most classical music and abstract art lacks imaginative content, and thus imaginative understanding. Yet, no-one would claim that works such as Beethoven's *Eroica*, *The Third Symphony*, Kandinsky's *Last Judgement* and Barnett Newmann's *Eve* are not good artworks. Thus, it may be thought, though I have shown that the

promotion of imaginative understanding is of value in certain art forms, I have failed to show it constitutes the primary value of art *per se*.

The first thing to recognise is that the distancing of our imaginative sympathies by an artwork does not entail that the work precludes imaginative understanding. This is particularly apposite in the case of Brechtian theatre. Brecht's work aims to achieve and highlight the kind of distance and imaginative engagement we are involved in, in the very act of watching a play. Nevertheless, the whole point of doing so, is in order to prescribe a particular imaginative understanding. That is, typically, an appreciation of our own manipulation by hidden powers and an emphasis upon the inseparability of the aesthetic sphere from the moral and political arena of our everyday lives. Of course, certain artworks may distance us imaginatively from the subjects of the work without promoting this kind of imaginative understanding. For example, Picasso's *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard*. Yet it engages our imaginings and promotes our imaginative understanding in other ways. It focuses upon the very process and nature of our imaginative engagement itself. Thus enhancing our imaginative understanding of the nature and value of art itself. Therefore, it would be wrong to think that my account of art's imaginative value entails that reflexive strategies in art must be of disvalue.

Of course, cubism typically does not allow full imaginative engagement with the objects and people it represents. Indeed, the whole point of cubism lies in its subverting of one's attempts to do so, forcing one to oscillate between various different viewpoints. Similarly, films such as Alain Resnais' *Last Year in Marienbad* or Godard's *La Chinoise* are highly reflexive. Resnais deliberately undercuts our every attempt to interpret and continuously engage with the film. Contrastingly, Godard shows us in a different way that what we are watching is, after all, just a film, constituted by various material processes and conventions. Indeed, many valued artworks, ranging from *Tristram Shandy* to Buster Keaton's *Sherlock, Jr.*, foreground the nature of their construction by blocking our imaginative engagement in various ways, thus highlighting the means by which they are constructed.

Yet such works are of value as art precisely because they promote our imaginative understanding of the nature and value of art itself. The flip side of this coin is that to the extent reflexive strategies do not even promote, or mar, our imaginative understanding of art, they are of disvalue. But this too seems to accord with our evaluation of artworks. For example, contrast the artistic value of self-reflexive strategies in two of Godard's films. In *Week-End*, they enhance the work's artistic value greatly because they both promote our imaginative understanding of the construction of art and the possible destruction of bourgeois society. Yet in *La Chinoise*, the self-reflexive strategies are of artistic disvalue. Here they fail to enhance our imaginative understanding of art. Indeed, they serve only to reinforce the tiresome number of times, and the tedious length of time, that we are subjected to ideological, Maoist preaching. Highly reflexive artworks may be of artistic value, but only to the extent they enhance our imaginative understanding of the world at large or our appreciation of the nature of our engagement with art and its value. If a self-reflexive work does not

even achieve this much, then the strategies of reflexivity are otiose and of disvalue to the work as art. Thus my thesis is more than adequate to the first kind of objection, and the supposed counter-examples are nothing of the kind.

However, the second kind of objection and source of counter-examples poses a much greater threat and cannot be dealt with so quickly. The objection amounts to the claim that my account is necessarily partial. My account applies well to art forms such as literature and the representational arts more generally. In such cases, we are dealing with artworks which are decidedly about something. That is, the works have content. Where this is so, it is obviously crucial that the content should both be significant and treated in a way appropriate to it. The form and content of the imaginings prescribed by such works promote our imaginative understanding. Therefore, in such cases, there is a definite link between art and morality. However, the objection goes, both in abstract art and most classical music, there is no significant content.¹³ That is, such works only have significant form. Where this is so, our imaginings obviously cannot be prescribed to imagine anything at all in our engagement with the work. Hence, these works cannot promote a particular imaginative understanding. Thus, in such cases, there is no link between art and morality. In the cases of pure music and abstract art, imaginative understanding cannot be promoted and thus cannot be of any value. Therefore, imagining and imaginative understanding can only constitute the primary value of certain forms of art.

Firstly, I should make it clear that not as much rests upon this objection as might be thought. After all, I have not argued for an essentialist definition of art. As I argued in the very first chapter, art is a cluster concept. I am not claiming that there is any strictly necessary condition an artwork must fulfil in order to be art. Thus, for example, a highly beautiful artwork may not manifest any particular imaginative understanding at all. Therefore, it would of be no great surprise if certain art forms differed distinctly in terms of certain features or values of the cluster concept 'art': in this case in terms of the promotion of imaginative understanding. Rather, all that is essential to my argument is the claim that imaginative engagement is a typical feature of art. Furthermore, that where our imaginings are appropriately engaged, they aim to promote particular imaginative understandings. Thus, such artworks may be appropriately evaluated in terms of the imaginative understanding they promote. Where artworks do not engage our imaginings or promote imaginative understanding, this obviously cannot apply. Therefore, my general thesis stands, independently of this particular issue.

Nonetheless, I think that the imagination and imaginative understanding is typically involved even in the most abstract art and music. Quite how this is so is very difficult to articulate, especially in such a short space. What follows are a few tentative suggestions as to how this may be so. Whether these suggestions are accepted or not, I have succeeded in establishing that imaginative

¹³ See Peter Kivy, "A new music criticism?" and "The fine art of repetition" in his *The Fine Art of Repetition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 296-323 and 327-359 for a succinct articulation and defense of this view of music.

engagement and the promotion of imaginative understanding is typically central to our appreciation of most art. Given that moral understanding depends upon a sound imaginative understanding of others and our world, I have established that there is a necessary link between most art and morality.

One way to think about the problem posed, is to turn the question on its head. If classical music and abstract art really are without any significant content, then it is surely a puzzling matter as to why we think they may be so significant as artworks. One might be tempted to suggest, though this would be far more plausible for abstract art than music, that most works in these forms can only be of secondary value as art. Yet this patently fails to do justice to the fundamental significance of many artworks in both forms. Furthermore, given my emphasis upon 'art' as a cluster concept, and as a historically evolving cultural practice, I am hardly in a position to declare this to be so by fiat. After all, the value of music and abstract art could lie in some ineffable, indescribable, irreducible experience. Since the problem is so puzzling, it is perhaps important to take the two cases cited, classical music and abstract art, separately.

Let us first consider the case of abstract art. Presumably what we are presented with in abstract art must be of significance in some distinctive regard. If this were not so, then it is hard to see how we could properly regard abstract art to be artistically valuable in a way in which we do not regard Rorschach tests, colour swatches or ape's drawings. What abstract art has in common with representational art, and what distinguishes it from non-art, is the utilisation of materials, media, conventions and style for a purpose. These are manipulated in order to constrain and guide our spectatorial attention. But if there is no significant content, to what is our attention being guided towards? It must be the formal elements of the work itself: the marks on the canvas, the colours, the shapes, the spatial juxtaposition and the various inter-relations of these parts and how they form the work as a whole. Although there is no apparent content to such works, nonetheless the formal elements are constructed in a certain way in order to shape our spectatorial engagement.

But how can purely formal features shape our attention and response in a particular way? They can do so precisely because the features themselves may be meaningful and expressive. That this is so, is, as we have already seen, what explains why the way something is prescribed makes a difference to the content of our imaginings, when we engage with representational art. What the formal features are expressive of depends upon various factors. In abstract art, it principally depends upon three factors. Firstly, the inter-relations of the work's formal parts to each other and the work as a whole. For example, a particular line in a work by Miro may come across as sombre and sedate. By contrast, the same line in a Mondrian would come across as joyful and vivacious. This is because the same line, standing in different relations to other features, takes on different aspects. Secondly, what a feature is expressive of also depends upon the conventions of art. For example, because of the history of art, particular textures or spatial relations of bulk may express a certain corporeality or certain colours may suggest ethereal associations. Lastly, our own experience figures in the way an abstract artwork

prescribes and guides our attention. This must be so, because without it there would be nothing from which we could hope to make sense of the work as art. More precisely, the marks of paint may evoke the feel or look of other objects, visceral surfaces, and so on. Thus formal features may express and be meaningful independently of any significant representational content.

The very surface of the painting, its colour, tones, variegated textures, the various spatial relations and tensions are what holds our attention. Furthermore, our imagination is involved in our attending to abstract art in this way. When we engage with an abstract work, we perceptually imagine the spatial relations in which the formal features are taken to stand. We may imagine that a black mark is expressive of something menacing and threatening, perhaps emotionally reacting in our imagining with fear and loathing. Whether the work is any good or not depends upon whether it can sustain and prescribe the imaginative attention I bring to bear upon it. If it can, then the work may promote my imaginative understanding.

Abstract art may promote our imaginative understanding in ways similar to self-reflexive art. Firstly, it may promote my imaginative understanding of art by deepening my understanding of the significance of artistic style, conventions and spatial structuring. Secondly, the sensations, feelings, spatial relations and associations an abstract work may imaginatively prescribe may be more or less significant when related to an appropriate imaginative understanding of the world. For example, a work which intimates that our spatial relations are claustrophobic, amidst sensually repulsive surfaces, may promote a flawed imaginative understanding of the spatial, sensual relations we stand in relation to each other and the world. It might be claimed, that I am now surreptitiously slipping content into abstract art through the back door. Yet I do not think I am bestowing upon abstract art any more than the minimal formal significance and meaning it requires in order for it to be art at all. This is, I think, supported by the following consideration. The worry many people typically have about abstract art is, precisely, that it often fails to engage even with significant concerns of formal meaning. This may be due to various reasons. On the one hand it may be because an artist's work increasingly veers into an all too private train of association and symbolism. Conversely, it may be because the putative artist lacks an imaginative understanding of the significance of formal meaning and artistic conventions and styles in the first place. In such cases we can quite properly suggest that anyone could do just as well. After all, what we look for, even in abstract art, is the point of our imaginatively engaging with and attending to the work concerned. In abstract art, this may primarily concern promoting an imaginative understanding of art's conditions of formal meaning and significance. Namely, an understanding of the material, conventional and perceptual base which meaningfully allows artworks to prescribe and constrain our imaginings. Abstract art may also, perhaps less typically, promote imaginative understandings of our spatio-temporal, perceptual and emotional relations with others and the world around us.

I now want to move on to suggest that what I have argued is true of abstract art is, similarly, true of music. Firstly, it should be realised that to appreciate music we must hear the notes as such. That is, our experience of the sound emitted from the various instruments must be of a certain kind if we are to hear it as music, rather than merely a noisy assemblage of noises. As with abstract art, the formal features of a musical work may possess particular expressive qualities due not only to the quality of a particular phrase but also to the spatio-temporal inter-relation of parts, the evolved conventions of music and their relation to our own experiences. In engaging with the formal development and expressive aspects of a harmony, the musical work promotes a particular imaginative understanding. Firstly, this understanding is of the music itself. We have a sense of how the music will unfold, of how the parts will develop and relate over time. Secondly, particularly through its expressive aspects, a musical work may promote a particular imaginative understanding. Through the inter-relation and development of particular musical structures and expressive features, the work may intimate that certain feelings, emotions, commitments and values are central both to our imaginative experience with the work and imaginatively understanding our world.

If music is to be experienced as profound, it must be related to our experience and imaginative understanding of the world. The structural and expressive aspects of a work are embodied in the inter-relation of the work's parts to its whole. Thus in our imaginative engagement with the work, we may be constantly interpreting and re-interpreting the significance of the parts, as our expectations are prescribed, challenged, modified and promoted. The significance of the purely formal features in music, as in abstract art, cannot be separated from their expressive capacity. Hence music may guide and promote our imaginative engagement in particular ways. Thus, I would suggest, musical works may promote imaginative understandings of both music itself and of the world. A piece of music may, for example, develop the relations between certain experiences, feelings and associations in certain ways. Thus, it may promote an imaginative understanding of the relations between distinct emotions in ways which may be more or less sound. On the one hand, it might evoke powerful emotions and feelings in inappropriate relations to one another. On the other hand, it may deepen our imaginative understanding of the fine discriminations there may be between feeling sad, mournful and despairing. This is precisely why, in *A Clockwork Orange*, it is so apposite that as Alex's imaginative understanding of the world changes, so too should his taste in music. If music bore no relation to our imaginative understanding, then our imaginative understandings and taste in music would remain impervious to each other.

Our imaginings in abstract art and music are a response to and prescribed by the formal shape and expressive aspects of the work attended to. We imagine particular perceptual, emotional and cognitive relations and, by so doing, take up a particular imaginative understanding. Such an imaginative understanding may intimate and manifest a way of seeing, conceiving of and responding in relation to the world and others which is more or less sound. Thus, it would seem, even abstract art and

music may promote better or worse imaginative understandings. To the extent the imaginative understanding promoted is flawed, then so too is the artwork. For example, Mark Rothko's work seems to degenerate into an essentially overblown, hyperbolic imaginative understanding of numbing vacuity. Furthermore, given that a sound imaginative understanding of others and the world is intimately related to our moral understanding, even abstract art and music may be subject to the demands of moral understanding. Thus, if my tentative suggestions hold good, the link between art and morality remains even in the case of abstract art and music.

Conclusion

One of the things that distinguishes us as human moral agents is our imagination. It is through our ordinary imaginings that we can achieve an imaginative understanding of ourselves, others and the world. Furthermore, it is through at least much of the cultural practice of art that we can develop our imaginative understandings in peculiarly significant and powerful ways. The aspectual nature of art entails that the way we are prescribed to imagine something partly constitutes the nature of what we are to imagine. Our imaginings are constrained and guided in particular ways. Thus we may be encouraged to imaginatively acquaint ourselves with features or aspects of the world we would or could not otherwise have imagined. Thus it is that artworks may distinctively promote our imaginative understanding. One of the primary values of art lies in its engagement and development of the imagination, in order to cultivate our imaginative understanding. Imaginative understandings of life are always normative, even if this merely inheres in their negativity, and are always open to normative judgement. Thus a work which promotes a false imaginative understanding of others and the world is disvaluable as art. Since knowing what the morally right or good thing to do is, depends upon imaginative understanding, there is a necessary link between art and morality. Artworks may properly manifest and afford moral insight. Where an artwork promotes an immoral imaginative understanding, the work is disvaluable as art. Art may properly engage our imagination, it can promote, cultivate and deepen our ethical insight.

Art thus allows for a distinctive and fuller exploration of possible imaginative understandings of the world and others than can be afforded in our ordinary imaginings. It is in the cultivation of our imaginative understanding that art provides a more rounded quest in moral enquiry than mere reflection can provide. But, and this is where Nussbaum's perception fails her, art cannot replace or occlude philosophical enquiry. For the distance afforded by philosophical reflection enables us to become clearer about the nature of our relations within and imaginative understanding of the world. Nonetheless, imaginatively engaging art constitutes an irreplaceable and distinctive form of moral understanding. Of course, it is through imaginatively engaging with a truly great artwork, that one

will experience what it is that makes art such a central human cultural practice. Yet still, it is through philosophical argumentation and rigour, through the form of enquiry and questioning we have been pursuing, that we can come to understand theoretically how and why this is so. That is, because art may cultivate and afford a truly deep, imaginative understanding of ourselves, others and the world.

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