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# Contemplating Art

*Essays in Aesthetics*



JERROLD LEVINSON

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'Musical Thinking', *Midwest Studies* 27 (2003): 59–68.

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'Intrinsic Value and the Notion of a Life', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62 (2004): 319–29.

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## Introduction

*Contemplating Art* is the third of my essay collections in philosophy of art, following clearly in the line of *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (1990) and *The Pleasures of Aesthetics* (1996). All three volumes are situated in what may be called 'mainstream analytic aesthetics', or 'aesthetics in the tradition of analytic philosophy'.<sup>1</sup> The present volume brings together the bulk of my work in this vein in the past ten years, and contains twenty-four essays, making it considerably larger than its predecessors. That it covers a decade of work accounts in part for its size, but also relevant is the inclusion of one essay, 'Film Music and Narrative Agency', that is almost a small book in itself.<sup>2</sup>

I have grouped the essays into seven parts, on roughly thematic grounds. Part I contains four essays on art in general, raising issues in art theory not closely tied to a particular artform. Part II, the longest in the book, contains essays dealing with philosophical problems specific to music, the art that has always been my principal occupation as an aesthetician. Part III brings together three essays that concern pictorial art, while Part IV brings together three essays that concern interpretation, and more particularly, the interpretation of literature and literary language. Part V consists of two essays on the nature of aesthetic properties, the sort of properties exhibited prominently, if not exclusively, by works of art, while Part VI consists of two essays that address issues in historical aesthetics. Finally, Part VII contains essays on two topics, humor and intrinsic value, falling somewhat outside the scope of aesthetics as usually conceived, though their relevance to central issues in aesthetics should nevertheless be apparent.

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of that mainstream the reader is invited to consult J. Levinson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), though work outside the mainstream also receives extensive coverage.

<sup>2</sup> It was in fact published as such in France, under the title *La musique de film: fiction et narration* (Pau: Presses Universitaires de Pau, 1999).

In the opening essay, 'The Irreducible Historicality of the Concept of Art', I return once more to the intentional-historical theory of arthood I have championed since my first paper on the topic in 1979.<sup>3</sup> After succinctly restating the account, according to which, reduced to essentials, arthood is a matter of being projected for regard or treatment as some earlier artworks, or what are taken to be such, are or were correctly regarded or treated, I underline in particular the historical element in that account, which captures an inescapable aspect of the modern concept of art, and which dooms to inadequacy any purely formal or functional account of arthood. Most of the essay is devoted to responding to recent reservations about the intentional-historical theory, though since of the making of objections there is no end, I harbor no illusion of having responded to all the reservations in its regard to be found in the current literature.<sup>4</sup> The second essay, 'Artworks as Artifacts', is concerned with that same account of arthood, but here it is the nature of the artifactuality of artworks presupposed by the account that is the focus of attention. I develop my ideas on the artifactuality of artworks in counterpoint with recent contributions on the subject by Paul Bloom and Amie Thomasson. Against Bloom, who seeks to extend the intentional-historical account to all artifacts, I defend the claim that artworks remain a distinctive sort of artifact in possessing, perhaps alone of all artifact kinds, only intentional-historical necessary conditions. Against Thomasson, who maintains that artifact-making necessarily involves a substantive conception of what is being made, I defend the claim that the conception of artwork necessarily involved in art-making, although not without content, is about as insubstantive as an object concept can be.

'Emotion in Response to Art' is a survey essay on the range of philosophical problems that can be encompassed under that rubric. It details five such problems, according most of its attention to the first two of those, namely, the nature of the emotional responses had to art, and the puzzle of emotional responses to fictional entities known to be fictional (what is often labeled 'the

<sup>3</sup> 'Defining Art Historically', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 19 (1979): 232–50, reprinted in *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). This was followed by two further essays expounding and defending the theory: 'Refining Art Historically' (1989), reprinted in *Music, Art, and Metaphysics*, and 'Extending Art Historically' (1993), reprinted in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Two substantial critiques that appeared after the essay was published, to which I thus do not there respond, are Nigel Warburton, *The Art Question* (London: Routledge, 2003), ch. 4, and Victor Yelverton Haines, 'Recursive Chaos in Defining Art Recursively', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 44 (2004): 73–83.

paradox of fiction'). But attention is also given to the puzzle of how people derive satisfaction from art expressive or evocative of negative emotion (what is often labeled 'the paradox of tragedy'), and to the question of how abstract works of art manage to express or evoke emotions at all. 'Elster on Artistic Creativity' is a study of what of general import might be said about the processes or principles of creativity in art, conducted through an examination of a thought-provoking discussion of artistic creativity by the social theorist Jon Elster. I take issue with Elster's account of creativity in art as simply a matter of optimizing choice within constraints following an earlier stage of choice of constraints, and also take issue with some of the evaluative consequences, both general and specific, that Elster draws from his account.

All the essays in Part II concern principally the art of music, and most of them bear connections to earlier writings of mine. The first two essays are both concerned with the problem of musical expressiveness, how it is to be analyzed and what it is to perceive or experience it. 'Musical Expressiveness as Hearability-as-Expression' is continuous with an earlier essay entitled simply 'Musical Expressiveness',<sup>5</sup> and defends the analysis of that phenomenon reflected in its title, according to which music is expressive of an emotion or other mental state insofar as it induces us to hear it as the *personal* or *personlike* expression of that mental state. Along the way various competing theories of musical expressiveness, notably those of Malcolm Budd, Stephen Davies, Robert Stecker, and Roger Scruton, are submitted to critical examination. 'Sound, Gesture, Space, and the Expression of Emotion in Music', which in addition to drawing on 'Musical Expressiveness' also reworks material from an even earlier essay, 'Authentic Performance and Performance Means',<sup>6</sup> emphasizes first the role of grasp of *musical gesture* in the grasp of musical expressiveness, and second, the role of *spatial imagination* in the grasp of musical gesture.

'Nonexistent Artforms and the Case of Visual Music' is the oldest of the essays reprinted here, in terms of its date of composition, having been written for a conference on the future of art held in Lahti, Finland in 1990. The first, somewhat fanciful, half of the essay is not specifically concerned with music, but attempts rather to sketch a general framework for thinking about nonexistent yet possible artforms, issuing in a number of schematic formulas for generating such artforms in the abstract. The second, more concrete, half of the essay takes as a case study the relative nonexistence of visual music, despite

<sup>5</sup> In *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*.

<sup>6</sup> In *Music, Art, and Metaphysics*.

numerous attempts in that direction over the years, and proposes an explanation of visual music's stubborn failure to establish itself as a viable artform.

The next two essays deal, from different angles, with the relationship of music to narrative. 'Music as Narrative and Music as Drama' pointedly poses the question of whether music, especially as regards its succession of expressive properties or states, is fruitfully thought of as a narrative of some sort. The answer returned is guardedly negative, and the attractions of an alternate model, one owing to the musicologists Anthony Newcombe and Fred Maus, of expressive music as *dramatized* rather than *narrated* emotion, are touted instead. 'Film Music and Narrative Agency', which, as already noted, is the longest essay in this collection, is as much concerned with film as it is with music. It seeks to illuminate, on the basis of an account of making fictional along lines laid down by Kendall Walton, and through an extensive survey of examples, the ways and means by which extrinsic film music inflects the fictional content of a film, identifying two distinct modes in which that can occur, one in which such music is ascribed to the film's *cinematic narrator*, and one in which such music is ascribed, less commonly, to the film's *implied director*.

The next essay, 'Evaluating Music', is an attempt to identify plausible mid-level principles by reference to which one might conceivably justify an evaluation of some music as good, where by mid-level principles I mean principles whose specificity lies between the extremes of, on the one hand, music's being good if it affords appropriate listeners worthwhile experiences, and on the other hand, music's being good if it displays this or that set of technical features held to be productive of musical worth, such as monothematic structure or coherent harmony. The perspective of 'Evaluating Music' derives from that developed in an earlier essay, 'What Is Aesthetic Pleasure?',<sup>7</sup> where I propose that the distinctive mark of aesthetic satisfaction in art is that it is satisfaction deriving from attention that focuses, above all, on the relation of content to form and form to content in the given work of art. The mid-level principles of musical evaluation arrived at in light of that perspective on aesthetic satisfaction are then illustrated in connection with one of Schubert's piano sonatas, the Sonata in A major, D. 959.

The last two essays in Part II, 'Musical Thinking' and 'Musical Chills', like 'Nonexistent Artforms and the Case of Visual Music', tackle questions in musical aesthetics that have not been the focus of much, if any, discussion.

<sup>7</sup> In *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*.

'Musical Thinking', which begins with a commentary on Wittgenstein's scattered remarks on musical understanding, poses the question of whether there is a distinctive, non-verbal form of thinking that music, or alternatively, the composing or performing of music, might be said to exemplify. A positive answer is returned, and three candidates for such distinctively 'musical' thinking are sketched; these are illustrated with a number of musical examples, most notably, Beethoven's 'Tempest' Sonata and Stan Getz's rendition of 'The Girl from Ipanema'. 'Musical Chills', of all the essays in this collection, is the one that has undergone the most evolution since it was first drafted around 1998, having already been published twice, under different titles, and in truth my thinking on the subject remains in flux, despite my committing it to print once again. It is also the only essay I have written to date whose principal spur was an empirical study,<sup>8</sup> one concerned with a musical phenomenon that has always fascinated me, namely, the distinctive and usually pleasurable chills, shivers, or frissons that listening to certain passages of music produces in many listeners. At any rate, after describing the phenomenon and situating it in the field of musical pleasures as a whole, and after considering and finding wanting the explanations of the phenomenon and its value that have been offered by cognitive psychologists, I try to construct a more satisfactory explanation, one illustrated most fully in connection with a piano piece of Scriabin, his Etude in C# minor, op. 42, no. 5.

Part III initiates a shift of focus to the visual arts. 'Wollheim on Pictorial Representation' was written as a contribution to a symposium in honor of the distinguished aesthetician Richard Wollheim, and begins with a sympathetic summary of his highly influential account of depiction in terms of the successfully realized intention that viewers have a certain sort of *seeing-in* experience faced with a picture depicting a given subject. While agreeing with the basic thrust of Wollheim's account, which makes a certain sort of visual experience in appropriate viewers criteria of achieved depiction, I differ with Wollheim as to whether that experience is invariably one of *seeing-in*, given the twofold attention to subject and surface that that notion, as Wollheim conceives it, necessarily involves. I sketch an alternative account, Wollheimian in spirit, but closer than most recent proposals to the classic Gombrichian view of depiction as involving something akin to illusion. What I propose specifically is that a picture that depicts a subject is one fashioned so

<sup>8</sup> Conducted by the neuropsychologist Jaak Panksepp.

as to yield an experience of *as-if-seeing* of its subject, but not an experience that engenders the false beliefs typical of illusion.

As is evident, the next two essays in Part III have a common theme, namely, the erotic in art. 'What Is Erotic Art?', an expanded version of an encyclopedia article published in 1998, and my first foray into this domain, straightforwardly addresses the question of its title. The answer offered is not calculated to astonish: erotic art is, first, art, and second, erotic. In less sphinx-like terms, erotic art is art that aims to engage viewers sexually through explicit sexual content, and that succeeds at least to some extent in doing so. This answer is held up for confirmation to a range of examples of the category, some uncontroversial and some less so, and a number of useful subcategories of erotic art are identified. 'Erotic Art and Pornographic Pictures', which like its predecessor confines its attention to the visual, was written in response to a 2001 essay of Matthew Kieran, itself prompted in part by remarks on the distinction between the erotic and the pornographic offered at the end of 'What Is Erotic Art?'. Whereas Kieran holds that there is no incompatibility, and even precious little tension, between something's being pornography and something's being erotic art, I hold, and endeavor to demonstrate, that there is indeed such tension, and that the two statuses are in fact incompatible. That said, nothing is entailed as to whether pornography, though it is not art, may or may not be, for various reasons, of value.

Another shift of focus is effected in Part IV, whose three essays concern for the most part literature and literary language. The first essay, however, is of somewhat more general scope. 'Two Notions of Interpretation' brings into relief a distinction among semantic interpretations, or among activities of semantic interpreting, that cuts across verbal and non-verbal phenomena. The distinction is between interpretations that aim to answer the question 'What *does* such and such mean?' and those that aim to answer the question 'What *could* such and such mean?', the former exemplifying the *determinative* mode, and the latter the *exploratory* mode, of interpreting. In the rest of the essay I investigate, through a range of examples literary and non-literary, the relationship between determinative and exploratory interpretation in a given inquiry, and the varying, sometimes interlocking, motivations with which determinative and exploratory interpretations are undertaken.

In 'Who's Afraid of a Paraphrase?' I turn specifically to the interpretation of metaphors. My principal claim, in opposition to the well-known stance of Donald Davidson, is that metaphors, however much their force or imagery

outstrips their semantic content, in fact usually possess relatively definite meanings, meanings which deserve the label of 'metaphorical', and which paraphrases can to a large extent express. The key to the stance on metaphors adopted is the conception of them as *utterances* in specific linguistic contexts, which acquire meanings in such contexts despite there being no rules of a semantic sort for the projection of such meanings. Examples of metaphors from both literary and non-literary contexts come in for examination. The conception of literary meaning as centrally a species of *utterance meaning* is the foundation stone of the view of literary interpretation dubbed 'hypothetical intentionalism' that I have argued for in two earlier essays.<sup>9</sup> In 'Hypothetical Intentionalism: Statement, Objections, and Replies' I briefly restate the view, which locates the meaning of a literary text not in what its author intended it to mean (what one can call 'utterer's meaning'), nor in what the text might be said to mean as a piece of language in the abstract (what one can call 'textual meaning'), but roughly in what an appropriate audience would most reasonably hypothesize the contextually situated author to have meant by composing precisely the text that he or she did. I then proceed to consider a fair number of objections to the view in the literature and attempt to respond to them. But as this is currently a very active area of research I am, as with my replies to objections to the intentional-historical account of arthood, under no misapprehension that these will constitute the last words on the subject.<sup>10</sup>

The concerns of the two essays in Part V, which are continuous with those in my earlier 'Aesthetic Supervenience',<sup>11</sup> are as much metaphysical as aesthetic. The central issue is the nature and objectivity of aesthetic properties, especially those belonging to works of art. In both essays I defend *aesthetic realism*, by which is meant the claim that aesthetic properties exist, that they are bona fide properties, and that their possession constitutes the truth condition of true aesthetic attributions. In the first part of 'Aesthetic Properties, Evaluative Force, and Differences of Sensibility', written for a 1997 conference in honor of the influential British aesthetician Frank Sibley, I sketch a largely Sibleyan view of aesthetic attributions, though a more metaphysically

<sup>9</sup> 'Intention and Interpretation in Literature' and 'Messages in Art', both in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*.

<sup>10</sup> An important recent set of words on the subject, for instance, of which no account is taken here, is Paisley Livingston's *Art and Intention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> In *Music, Art, and Metaphysics*.



committed one than Sibley was inclined to hold, underlining the extent to which a descriptive core can be located in almost all such attributions, whatever evaluative force they may carry, and however implicitly relativized they may be to perceivers of certain sorts. I then proceed to formulate and respond to a number of concerns one might have about this brand of aesthetic realism. In ‘What Are Aesthetic Properties?’ I extend my defense of aesthetic realism, devoting most of my attention to the issue of how we should conceive of properties in general and of aesthetic properties in particular. What I propose is that at least paradigm cases of the latter are to be understood as *higher-order perceptual ways of appearing*. In the course of developing this proposal I address the vexed issue of whether or not aesthetic properties are *response-dependent*, or such that they cannot be conceived or analyzed except in terms of kinds of responses in relevant perceivers,<sup>12</sup> and conclude by suggesting that there is a spectrum, among properties usually thought of as aesthetic, from ones that are clearly response-dependent to ones that are clearly non-response-dependent, with many gradations in-between.

The two essays in Part VI take up themes from the history of aesthetics. My aim in ‘Schopenhauer’s Aesthetics’, written as an encyclopedia article, is largely expository. I begin with Schopenhauer’s relationship to Kant, and the extent to which the great pessimist’s aesthetic philosophy relies on Kant’s metaphysics even more than it does on Kant’s aesthetics, and then go on to highlight the breadth of Schopenhauer’s vision of the role of art and of the liberating aesthetic experiences it makes possible. At the end I address the puzzle of how the art of music, which according to Schopenhauer presents us with blind, ceaseless, and hateful willing in its most unvarnished form, can yet provide aesthetic experience of the highest order, justifying Schopenhauer’s according to music the foremost position among the arts. My aim in ‘Hume’s *Standard of Taste*: The Real Problem’, on the other hand, is more polemical than scholarly. I there formulate a persisting problem about the authority of art criticism, one that should concern anyone for whom the arts occupy an important place in life, and situate this problem in relation to Hume’s search for the standard of taste in his famous essay of that name. I then sketch a complex solution to this problem, somewhat provocatively labeled the *real* problem left us by Hume, a solution whose complexity is justified by the thorniness of the problem in question.

<sup>12</sup> As seems to be the case, say, for properties like nauseatingness or disgustingness.

'The Concept of Humor', also written as an encyclopedia article, surveys the main theories of humor in the philosophical tradition, and then proposes a novel account of the essence of humorousness, often regarded as an aesthetic property. This essence is held to lie not in perceived incongruity, nor in perceived superiority, nor in the power to trigger experiences of relief, but in the disposition to produce *affect* of a sort tied identifyingly to *laughter*. This account is dubbed the 'affective theory of humor', and some recent objections to it are discussed and defused. So far as the causes or mechanisms through which humorousness is achieved are concerned, I discuss the pros and cons of the leading theory in that vein, the so-called 'incongruity theory of humor', and side in conclusion with those who hold that *resolution* of incongruity is perhaps closer to the heart of the matter than incongruity *per se*.

Finally, in 'Intrinsic Value and the Notion of a Life', I address a problem in the general theory of value that goes beyond the concerns of aesthetics as such, though aesthetic issues at one point serve to bring into relief the nature of the thesis about intrinsic value ultimately arrived at. That thesis concerns the *form* that defensible judgments of intrinsic value—roughly, what is of value in itself or for its own sake—must take, or equivalently, the *sort of thing* that may defensibly be claimed to have intrinsic value. The thesis defended, which tries to mediate between object-based and experience-based conceptions of the intrinsically valuable, is that *a richly sentient life being a certain way* is the only possible subject of a defensible judgment of intrinsic value. One consequence of this thesis is a disagreement with G. E. Moore regarding the intrinsic value of a beautiful world devoid of sentience, a famous thought experiment from his *Principia Ethica*. But a more important consequence is the suggestion, if I am right, of an intimate connection between the notion of a richly sentient life and the very idea of intrinsic value.

Thanks are owed to all the following for helpful comments on the essays collected here at various stages in their evolution: Lars-Olaf Ahlberg, Jose Bermudez, Paul Boghossian, Malcolm Budd, Noël Carroll, David Chalmers, Ted Cohen, Jean-Pierre Cometti, Jack Copeland, Gregory Currie, David Davies, Stephen Davies, Rafael De Clercq, Sabine Döring, John Doris, Hubert Eiholzer, John Fisher, Berys Gaut, Alessandro Giovannelli, Stan Godlovitch, Mitchell Green, Arto Haapala, Garry Hagberg, Robert Hatten, Peter Lamarque, Keith Lehrer, Paisley Livingston, Mike Martin, Derek Matravers, Fred Maus, Aaron Meskin, Daniel Nathan, Alex Neill, David Novitz,

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PART I

ART

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# 1

## The Irreducible Historicality of the Concept of Art

### I INTRODUCTION

I claim that our present concept of art is *minimally historical* in the following sense: whether something is art now depends, and ineliminably, on what has been art in the past. I claim, in other words, that the concrete history of art is logically implicated in the way the concept of art operates, and that some part of that history is involved, either opaquely or transparently, in the claim to arthood made by any work of art.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the concepts ⟨square⟩, ⟨red⟩, ⟨pig⟩, ⟨mountain⟩, and so on are not obviously historical in this sense: whether something falls under them does not seem to depend in the same way on what specifically fell under them in the past, and to operate those concepts correctly you do not need to invoke the concrete history of their correct application.

The gist of the intentional-historical conception of art that I advocate is this: something is art iff it is or was intended or projected for overall regard as some prior art is or was correctly regarded. As is evident, such a conception attributes to art, and centrally, the property of minimal historicality sketched above.<sup>2</sup> In this brief essay I will forgo defense of the sort of complete definition of art I am inclined to favor, and that I have tried to articulate in three

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<sup>1</sup> It has even been argued recently that this may be true of all artifact concepts, artistic and nonartistic alike. See Paul Bloom, ‘Intention, History, and Artifact Concepts’, *Cognition* 60 (1996): 1–29. I comment briefly on Bloom’s intriguing suggestion at the end of this essay, and again in the following essay.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Pierre Cometti’s essay, ‘Misère—ou grandeur—de l’historicisme?’, in Jean-Pierre Cometti (ed.), *Definitions de l’art* (Brussels: La lettre volée, 2002) has helped me to see the importance of dissociating the minimal historicism of art claimed by my theory from more robust historicisms of a Hegelian or Dantesque sort, such as ascribe to the development of art an inherent goal, or view the development of art as governed by inherent laws of stylistic evolution. In that light, it might have been better to denominate my theory of art a *retrospectivist* or *auto-referentialist* one, rather than a *historicist* one, in order to avoid such unwanted associations.

previous essays.<sup>3</sup> I will also largely ignore questions regarding the sufficiency of an intentional-historical condition for arthood,<sup>4</sup> and questions as to the necessity of the intentional component of such a condition,<sup>5</sup> in order to focus on the necessity, in some guise or other, of the historical component.

My ambition in the present outing is thus modest. I aim to do only two things. One is to underline the necessity of a historical dimension in any acceptable account of arthood. Two is to sketch answers to certain objections that have been recently raised for an intentional-historical account of art, most of which offer a challenge to its insistence on an ineliminable historical element in any such account. In addition, in the course of underlining the historical character of the concept of art I hope to show that certain non-historical considerations appealed to by some theorists, for instance, institutional or functional ones, which appear to weigh importantly in some cases of arthood, in fact have an underlying or reinforcing rationale of a history-involving sort.

## II OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

I now consider a number of objections that have been lodged against the intentional-historical theory of art, and offer replies to them.

### The Objection from the Implausibility of a Recursive Definition of Art<sup>6</sup>

Some writers have objected to the intentional-historical definition of art on the grounds that it is a recursive definition, or else entails that art can be defined

<sup>3</sup> See 'Defining Art Historically', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 19 (1979): 232–50, and 'Refining Art Historically', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47 (1989): 21–33, reprinted in *Music, Art, and Metaphysics*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), and 'Extending Art Historically', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 (1993): 21–33, reprinted in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). I have also replied to criticisms of my theory in some shorter pieces: 'A Refiner's Fire: Reply to Sartwell and Kolak', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 48 (1990): 231–5; 'Further Fire: Reply to Haines', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 48 (1991): 76–7; and 'Art Historically Defined: Reply to Oppy', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 33 (1993): 380–5. See also Robert Stecker, *Artworks: Definition, Meaning, Value* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 88–98, for a critical reconstruction of the intentional-historical theory of art.

<sup>4</sup> These were queried vigorously by Noël Carroll in his 'Identifying Art', in Robert Yanal (ed.), *Institutions of Art* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 3–39.

<sup>5</sup> See Graham Oppy, 'On Defining Art Historically', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 32 (1992): 153–61. Some of Oppy's criticisms are anticipated in Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Tom Leddy, 'The Socratic Quest in Art and Philosophy', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 (1993): 399–410

recursively, neither of which strikes those writers as a happy result. But strictly speaking, the charge is mistaken. My basic definition of art is a one-step affair, as is evident even in Stecker's reconstruction of it. What I have proposed is that the full *extension* of art in a given tradition might be displayed by a recursive definition, but not that our present *concept* of art is to be explicated by such a recursion. Again, it's true that my definition implies that the totality of art in a given tradition has a recursive *structure*, but that is not tantamount to my having *defined* art recursively. In underlining that the intentional-historical definition of art is not as such a recursive one I am thus denying that the notions of *first art* and *ur-art*, with which such recursions can be thought to begin, are elements in our concept of art, and that what we mean by an artwork is something that either is or stands in the appropriate relation to instances of first art or ur-art. This is, of course, all to the good, since it would be implausible to maintain that such notions are a part of the ordinary grasp of what arthood is.

### The Objection from Unwanted Descendants of the Ur-Arts<sup>7</sup>

Ancestors of art activities, such as ritual cave paintings, may also turn out to be ancestors of present-day activities that are clearly non-art, such as deer hunting with high-caliber rifles. But then my definition, it seems, will wrongly count these latter activities as art.

My reply to this is as follows. Though that sort of misfiring of the definition is conceivable, it is arguable that in presumed cases of this sort the links from remote to present-day activities are *not* precisely of the right sort, that is, of the backward-looking-intentional-invocation-of-regard sort. In other words, the generating principle of these other sequences, ones that begin with some ur-art and issue in clearly non-art activities, is likely not precisely of the sort involved in the generation of artistic chains. One would have to examine closely a putative concrete aberrant chain, leading from unequivocal ur-art to unequivocal non-art, to assess fairly the strength of this objection. But it is unclear that any such chains survive scrutiny.

### The Objection from the Obsolescence of Art-Regards

Here is a forceful statement of this objection, as put by Noël Carroll:

Levinson supposes that something might be art now just in case it supports *any* type of regard, treatment, or mode of appreciation that was appropriate to at least some

<sup>7</sup> See Noël Carroll, 'Historical Narratives and the Philosophy of Art', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 (1993): 313–26



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