

Class paper by Sandro Dernini
Aesthetic Inquiry Course E10.2137, Prof. David W. Ecker
New York University, Fall 1988

ART AS "ISM" **NAME IT AS "ART SLAVER-ISM"**

From the preface of Joseph Margolis:

"Certainly, the movement of the philosophy of art is dialectical in this sense, historicized before it becomes explicitly historical".

My first move on my move will be dialectic by intuition because I am Italian, and Benedetto Croce influenced my historical perception, for my socio-biological heritage, before I was born.

"What is Art? Art is what everybody knows it to be. And indeed, if it were not to some extent known what it is, it would be impossible even to ask that question, for every question implies a certain knowledge of what is asked about, designated in the question and therefore known and qualified" (From Benedetto Croce/ The essence of Aesthetics).

What is Aesthetics? According to the Encyclopedia of Philosophy, MacMillan Publisher: *"Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with the analysis of concepts and the solution of problems that arise when one contemplates aesthetic objects."* The word itself was coined by Alexander Baumbarten, Aesthetica (1750), from aisthesis: to perceive, to feel.

What is "Ism" in aesthetics?

FORMALISM by Bell and Fry: *"Art is a unique combination of certain elements in their relations"*.

VOLUNTARISM by Parker: *"Art is the provision of satisfaction through the A) Imagination; B) social significance; C) Harmony"*.

EMOTIONALISM by Tolstoy: *"the expression and projection of emotion into a medium"*.

INTUITIONISM by Croce: *"Art is a first stage of knowledge"*.

ORGANICISM by Bradley: *"Art is in its nature a unique complex of interrelated parts, all interacting upon one another"*.

Theory has been central In aesthetics.

"The determination of the nature of art which can be formulated into a definition of it. it construes definition as the statement of the necessary and sufficient properties of what is being defined, what characterizes and distinguishes it from everything else". (From the role of theory in Aesthetics by Morris Weitz).

Since Plato got us to distinguish between appearances and the really real, which is a way of saying that our experiences are senseless until our minds step back from them and compare them with something else. Plato, in distinguishing appearance from reality set off the longest unresolved quarrel In the history of never ending intellectual disputes. Among

the adversaries are the skeptics, who argue that we can never get beyond appearances, so reality can't be known at all. There are the phenomenologists, who argue that appearance is reality, so there is nothing else to know. There are the rationalists, and their soul mates the mystics, who argue that the reality real can be known directly without having to be bothered by appearances or experiences at all. Reality can be known, they argue, with logic, through intuition.

So we got back to intuitionism or idealism as Benedetto Croce defined "Art". In 1901 Croce wrote his book "the essence of aesthetics", translated in English only 1921 by Douglas Ainslie, where he introduces: *"Idealism as has also been called this character that distinguishes the intuition from the concept, art from history and from philosophy, from the affirmation of the universal and from the perception or narration of what has happened, It (Ideality) is the intimate virtue of art no sooner are reflection and judgment developed from that ideality than art is dissipated and dies: it dies in the artist, who becomes a critic; it dies in the contemplator who changes from an entranced enjoyer of art to a meditative observer or life"*.

Croce precised that the nature of art that have arisen down to that moment in the course of history, at a determined moment, yet it is limited by the history of that moment, and cannot pretend to have a value of totality, or what is called a definitive solution. *"A system is a house, which, as soon as it has been built and decorated, has need of continuous labor, more or less energetic, in order to keep it in repair (subject as it is to the corrosive action of the elements); and at a certain moment there is no longer any use in restoring and propping up the system, we must demolish and reconstruct it from top to bottom. But with this capital difference that in the work of thought, the perpetually new house is perpetually supported by the old one, which persists in it"*.

The intuition is certainly the production of an image, but not of an incoherent mass of images obtained by recalling former images and allowing them to succeed one another in a like capricious manner, but in an allied concept of unity in variety—that is to say, the multiplex images were to find their common centre and dissolve in a comprehensive image.

To amass/select/cut-up/combine images/presupposes the possession of particular images in the spirit. How does the pure image come into existence? Croce makes clear the difference between the intuition-image or NEXUS of Images, for what is called image is always a nexus of images, since image-ATOMS do not exist anymore than THOUGHT-ATOMS which constitute an organism, and as organism has its vital principle, which is the organism itself, between this which is true and proper intuition, and that false intuition which is a heap of image put together in play or in calculation or for some other practical purpose, the connection of which, being practical when considered from the aesthetic point of view, shows itself to be not organic but mechanically logically constructed.

Croce defended the a-logical character of Art against any utilitarianism, as the first level of knowledge, and since this indication of the a-logical character of art is the most difficult and important of the negations included in the formula of art-intuition of Croce, he denied that the theories that attempt to explain Art as Philosophy as Religion as History as or a science can occupy the greater part of the history of aesthetics.

My second move will be the move of Morris Weitz that was to open the closed question of **"What is Art as definition" to the "What sort of concept is Art"**. Weitz gave to the concept of art the value of an open game defined by a criterion of evaluation and of recognition with the meaning to give some recommendations for a criteria of excellence. It is not important the formula=definition but what lies behind it. Art, as the logic of the

concept shows, for its open nature, has no set to necessary and sufficient properties. Aesthetic theory is a logically vain attempt to define what cannot be defined, to state the necessary and sufficient properties of that which has no necessary and sufficient properties, to conceive the concept of Art as closed when its very use reveals and demands its openness. The problem that Weitz showed was not "what is Art" but "What sort of concept is Art?". The historical context of "Art" has never been of more crucial importance in the understanding and making "Art".

As Gadamer pointed out that no method can transcend the interpreter's own historicity. Interpretation does not require the neutralization of one's personal horizon but involves a process of "Horizontverschmelzung". The history of Interpretation is a history of application and it is rather as a function of spiritual conservation and tradition, and carries into every present its hidden history. The changing substance of a text is determined by the widespread cultural effects and manifestations it has passed through, and that this wider significance is commonly understood and accepted within any present culture.

The idea of tradition is essential to Gadamer. In the process of understanding there always occurs a true fusion of perspectives in which the projection of the historical perspective really brings about a sublation of the same. Thus, the perspective and idiom of the interpreter are always partly constitutive of this understanding.

For the hermeneutical circle, we cannot understand a part as such until we have a sense of the whole, because a genuine dialectic always occurs between our idea of the whole and our perception of the parts that constitute it.

Once the dialectic has begun, neither side is totally determined by the other. Understanding has been part of the nature of object and is an aspect of the nature of the object. The hermeneutical experience by Gadamer is that the historic human sciences, as they emerged from German Romanticism and became imbued with the spirit of modern science, maintained a humanistic heritage which distinguished them from all other kinds of modern research and brings them close to others, quite different, extra-scientific experiences and especially those proper to "Art".

Heidegger's temporal analytics or human existence has shown convincingly that understanding is not just one of the various possible behaviors of the subject, but the mode of being of There-being itself.

Hermeneutics denotes the basic being-in-motion of There-being which constitutes its finiteness and historicity, and hence includes the whole of its experience of the world. The art work has its constantly renewed reality of being experienced. New conditions have constantly arisen and structured "Art" in a frame of theories. Language that for Barthes and the structuralism was expressed by the text, to arrive to the point that "Art" and text became the same. Structuralism has its theoretical roots in "structural linguistics", an approach to language analysis based on the bivalence of the sign: the signifier and the signified. Semiology, the study of signs, has emerged in the last 20 years as one of the most important ways of studying art in its largest social context. Is "Art" a sign and what does it signify?

But after came the most extensive attack on the possibility of "Art" as a language system by Umberto Eco's Theory of Semiotics. Eco levels a barrage of arguments against what he considered the naive assumptions of those in the field of semiotics who insist that iconic signs are similar to, analogous to, or visually motivated by the objects they represent. Eco rejects the possibility that the so-called iconic signs, whether arbitrary or not, are analyzable into pertinent coded units and may be subject to multiple articulations, as are

verbal signs. In other words. Eco insists that in no way can visual phenomena be interpreted as a natural language system.

As Croce said the idea does not stand itself in the symbol, thinkable separately from the symbolising representation, nor does the symbol stand by itself, representable in a lively manner without the idea symbolized. The idea is all dissolved in the representation like a lump of sugar, melted in a glass of water, which exists and acts in every molecule of water, but is no longer to be found as a lump of sugar.

But the idea that has disappeared, the idea that has become entirely representative the idea that we can no longer succeed in seizing as idea (save by extracting it, like sugar from sugared water), is no longer idea, and is only the sign that the unity of the artistic image has not yet been achieved. Certainly art is symbol, all symbol that is, all significant; but symbol of what? what does it mean?

The Intuition is truly artistic/It is truly Intuition, and not a chaotic mass of Images, only when it has a vital principle that animates it, making it all one with itself, but what is this principle? The descriptive use of "Art", the criteria of recognition of works of art is made by strands of similarity conditions, bundles of properties. None of the criteria of recognition is a defining one, either necessary or sufficient.

For the elucidation of the evaluative use of "Art", its conditions of utterance, therefore include certain preferred properties or characteristics of art. Weitz called these "criteria of evaluation", in which the criterion of evaluation is converted into a criterion of recognition.

As Weitz point out the definitions of the necessary and sufficient properties of art are honorific definitions, pure and simple, in which "art" has been redefined in terms of chosen criteria. If we take the aesthetic theories literally they all fail.

Definition, reconstruction, patterns of analysis are out of place here since they distort and add nothing to our understanding of "Art".

Recently Deconstruction-ism came to attack the philosophical structuralism to reduce everything to just a text, attacking the privilege of the Western philosophers to hold the control of the knowledge. But it is always the logic of human sciences to inquiry all these theories and concepts, producing new isms, like a serpent eating its own tail.

Aesthetics is a fairly recent invention in our evaluation of the significance of "Art". A reflection of eighteenth century concept of "Art". Napoleon and the Kings of France understood and used "Art" for their political image and glory, and the Louvre Museum in Paris- is a very clear display of it. Art expresses society at all levels.

But what is "Art"? For Dickie's Art definition is *"A work of art in the descriptive sense is an artifact upon which some society or some sub-group or a society has conferred the status of candidate for appreciation."*

How ? Why? Where? When? and Who gives this status of candidate for appreciation? Arthur Danto very clearly precised who is giving this status in his definition of "The ArtWorld".

Danto defines a work of "Art" only by its artistic identification- *THE "IS" OF ARTISTIC IDENTIFICATION IS TO BELONG TO THE ARTWORLD*. For Danto to see something as "Art" requires something the eye cannot describe: an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an ArtWorld. The Andy Warhol's Brillo cans, Danto reported (and I thought to my Plexus Campbell soup cans), because were made by a person with an artistic identification of belonging to that ArtWorld.

Danto wrote: *"So we may forget question of Intrinsic value, and ask why the Brillo people cannot manufacture art ? Is Warhol a kind of Midas/turning whatever he touches into the*

gold of pure art? Why are not art the indiscernible Brillo boxes that are in the stockroom? Or has the whole distinction between art and reality broken down? But a stockroom is not an art gallery, and we cannot readily separate the Brillo cartons from the gallery they are in, any more than we can separate the Rauschenberg bed from the paint upon it. He has produced an artwork, his use of real Brillo cartons being but an expansion of the resources available to artists, a contribution to artists's materials, as oil paint. A Brillo box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo Box is a certain theory of art.

It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is (in a sense of "is" other than that of artistic identification). Of course, without theory, one is unlikely to see it as art and in order to see it as part of the artworld, one must have mastered a good deal of artistic theory as well as a considerable amount of the history of recent New York painting".

That terrain, for Danto, is artistic in virtue of artistic theories so that one use of theories, in addition to helping us discriminate "Art" from the rest, consists in making "Art" possible. I use the discriminative value of "Art" given by the "ArtWorld" as my move to discriminate "Art" from Arthur Danto's ArtWorld and from its consequently "Art Slaver-ism".

"ART" IS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE EXISTING ARTISTIC THEORIES.

The fact is that this artist has returned to belong to a physicality of point through an atmosphere compounded of artistic theories and the history of recent and remote painting. As a consequence of this a work of "Art" belongs in this atmosphere and is part of this history.

Following my Italian idealist attack against the "Art Slaver-ism" from the political control of this capitalist ArtWorld / for the FREEDOM of Art, my next move will be to use as support the emotionalism of "The Slavery of our Times", wrote by Leo Tolstoy on July 1900, to answer to the question "Who is the ArtWorld and from where comes from?".

"The ArtWorld" is a social activity which, like all social activities, concerns the political body, which is the basis of the political power and control. "Art" has through the ages been closely connected with political power, where political and economic power were identical or closely linked, and still remained closely allied to the bourgeois values of these days. The Art Market reports the economic and political truth that "Art" becomes a commodity symbol like just a merchandise, where for this transformation of value, from "Art" into "Money" the definitions, the "ISMS", are essential. In this sense Arthur Danto's ArtWorld is labelling the property of "Art".

In the "Art" Into money" Aesthetics supplies the labels necessary to the Art Market Strategy as I show in fig.1/ and these definitions, theories, or labels are fundamentals and important as Art collecting, which supplies the customers to the Market.

This Money/Art commodity symbol to be traded for speculative money is a recent culture-bound effect of the World economy debts that obliged the International Market to find a new commodity symbol to be traded in the new World political and economic context. In an age of conflicts and attempts of worldwide cultural homogenization for markets control. This idea suggests that "Art", "ArtWorld" and its institutions are imbued and self-justifying in ways that are hard to untangle.

Art possesses the amazing quality of being able to "communicate" over thousands of

years outside of historical and social contexts, the function of art differs from society to society and civilization to civilization. But apparently everywhere, art communicates this communication may range from simple signification to the far more complex conferring of value.

How can art as-communication be studied both inside and outside? In art-as-communication, who communicates, what is communicated and to whom is it communicated. Art criticism has moved beyond an analysis of the work of art and the intention of the artist to works of art which reflect upon themselves art-as-criticism, art-about-art.

As well, the idea of the creator has been expanded to include the viewer who completes the work of art. In order to avoid a common mistake of aestheticians drawing a conclusion about one kind of art and assuming it holds for all the arts.

The notion of aesthetic attitude has turned out to have no theoretical value for aesthetics. But what is appreciation? For Dickie is social property: that part of what makes a thing a work of "Art" is an institutionalized property. There are two broad areas for questions about how a thing acquires the social property which makes it "Art".

In what circumstances and by whom can this property be bestowed and what qualifies a thing to receive this bestowal? Lines of authority in the political-legal world are by and large explicitly defined and incorporated into law while lines of authority in the ArtWorld are nowhere codified.

But from structure of the ArtMarket it is possible to see that these lines of authority are very clearly expressed by its hierarchical structure of the STAR SYSTEM of the artists.

The artists are controlled by the artists belong to the ArtWorld. In this sense the artist is forced to accept the rules of it.

THE ARTWORLD CARRIES ON ITS BUSINESS AT THE LEVEL OF CUSTOMARY PRACTICE.

It all depends on the institutional setting. An artifact can acquire the status of a candidate for appreciation within the system that Danto has explained why because is Duchamp that "Fountain" is not just a misplaced urinal. In logic concepts are constructed and completely defined.

"Art" itself is an open concept/ it is possible to affirm the a-logical nature of "Art", and to see in the recent predominance of logical philosophy on "Art" a form of Art-imprisonment or Art-slavery-ism.

"Art" seems to have not moved beyond "schools" and "isms" to a new pluralism which is far more involved with art as a gesture and far less with intellectualization. A major part of this change will be a result of the switch of the ArtWorld from New York to a far more international base with far more tendencies and influence.

In his Philosophical Investigation/ Wittgenstein raises as an illustrative question What is a game? The traditional philosophical, theoretical answer would be in terms of some exhaustive set of properties common to all games. What Wittgenstein found in the games was that no necessary and sufficient properties/ only a complicated network of similarities overlapping and overlapping such that Wittgenstein said of games that they form a family

with family resemblances and no common trait. The basic resemblance between Art and game concepts is their open texture.

A concept is open if its conditions of application are emendable and corrigible. If necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of a concept can be stated. New conditions(cases) have constantly arisen and will undoubtedly constantly arise; new art forms, new movements will emerge:

My move was to move the Plexus stage from the NYC Art World to Africa, in the House of the Slaves of Goree/ Dakar and to play an Intercontinental game for an International Call for Freedom in Art against Slaver-ism/ and any other discrimination/ dedicated to the life of Vincent Van Gogh and to the right of expression of Mr.Nelson Mandela, in a institutional setting as required by the new International ArtScene, produced and created in order to survive "Art.

My move was articulated by moves starting with my Italian Intuitionism, going to the Morris Weitz's move to open the closed Arthur Danto's ArtWorld through Leo Tolstoy's emotionalist "Slavery disappeared, the idea that has become entirely representative the idea that we can no longer succeed in seizing an idea (save by extracting it, like sugar from sugared water), is no longer an idea, and is only the sign that the unity of the artistic image has not yet been achieved. Certainly art is symbol, all symbol that is, all significant; but symbol of what? what does it mean? The Intuition is truly artistic/It is truly Intuition, and not a chaotic mass of Images, only when it has a vital principle that animates it, making it all one with itself, but what is this principle?

The descriptive use of "Art", the criteria of recognition of works of art is made by strands of similarity conditions, bundles of properties. None of the criteria of recognition is a defining one, either necessary or sufficient.

For the elucidation of the evaluative use of "Art", its conditions of utterance, therefore include certain preferred properties or characteristics of art. Weitz called these "criteria of evaluation", in which the criterion of evaluation is converted into a criterion of recognition.

As Weitz pointed out the definitions of the necessary and sufficient properties of art are honorific definitions, pure and simple, in which "art" has been redefined in terms of chosen criteria. If we take the aesthetic theories literally they all fail.

Definition, reconstruction, patterns of analysis are out of place here since they distort and add nothing to our understanding of "Art".

Recently Deconstruction-ism came to attack the philosophical structuralism to reduce everything to just a text, attacking the privilege of the Western philosophers to hold the control of the knowledge.

But it is always the western logic of rational sciences to inquiry art theories and concepts, therefore, continuing in producing new "isms", like a serpent eating its own tail.