CHAPTER 1

ART and ARTWORKS

THE CHIMPANZEE PAINTER

Betsy the Chimpanzee in the Baltimore Zoo is given some paints and some paper; with them she creates various products, some of which might be called paintings. Even if Betsy's works are not masterpieces, they are undeniably interesting and appealing in their own way. Selected pieces from Betsy's "oeuvre" are displayed for a month at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. Suppose that the next month the same pieces are exhibited at the Chicago Art Institute, and that at both exhibitions, Betsy's works are greatly admired by the viewing public.

Is Betsy's work art? Is it art only under certain conditions of display (e.g., at the art museum, but not at the natural history museum)?[1] If it is (at least sometimes) art, whose art is it?

When we are trying to decide whether something is an artwork, what sorts of considerations should we have in mind? Should it matter whether its creator is human? Should it matter whether its creator intended it to be received or understood as art? Should it matter whether the object in question is, in our judgment or in the judgment of others, an excellent one of its type? Should it matter where, when, and by whom it is seen, if by anyone? If by chance Betsy creates a

composition that is indistinguishable from a work universally acknowledged to be a work of art, would that make her work an artwork? What difference will it make whether we determine Betsy's compositions, or any other things, to be artworks? What changes, if any, are required in the way we deal with and think about such objects when we make this determination?

"CALL IT *DRIFTWOOD*"

Suppose a well-known artist happens to be vacationing in the small community where you are curator of the local museum. One day you see him walking along the beach, and you tell him that your museum—although it is almost without funds to purchase new works—would be greatly honored to be given a work by him. He pauses, smiles in an indecipherable way, and bends over to pick up a piece of driftwood that is lying on the beach. "Here," he says with a glint in his eye, "take this. Call it *Driftwood*."

As curator, do you exhibit the driftwood or not? (Your gallery would be greatly enhanced by acquiring a genuine work by this famous artist.)

When we say that something is art, or a work of art, do we mean to say at the same time that it should be understood or appreciated in a certain way, or taken seriously in a particular fashion? And if so, do we think that the seriousness in the audience's response is an acknowledgment of deliberation and creative concern on the part of the artist? How elastic are the boundaries of the concept "art"? Can effects that occur purely accidentally, like the ocean's polishing of the driftwood, become art? Or must there be some minimum infusion of the artist's special creative influence before the appellation "art" is warranted?

DON'T FORGET THE KETCHUP

In 1967, the Art Gallery of Ontario paid $10,000 for a work called *Giant Hamburger* (1962) by Claes Oldenburg: a hamburger complete with pickles on top, made of painted sailcloth and stuffed with foam rubber, about 52 inches high and 84 inches across. A group of local art students fabricated from cardboard a ketchup bottle on the same scale, and contrived to set it up alongside the hamburger, to the delight of the local newspapers and the annoyance of the museum management. The hamburger remains in the museum collection, but the bottle has not been seen since.*

This incident really happened. What are we to make of it? Should it be regarded as a gesture of disrespect to an eminent artist and a dignified institution, as a show of bad manners? Or should we see it as a satirical exposé of the facility and superficiality of the "pop" art of the time (as pop art sometimes was a comment on "serious" art of *its* time)? Was it a harmless joke, leaving things just as they were, with no aesthetic damage done? Or was something damaged, aesthetically or otherwise, by the prank? Was it simply a blunder? Did the students miss the point of Oldenburg's work and hence make the relation between their cardboard bottle and the Oldenburg mock-up aesthetically uninteresting? More to the point, should we say that the students had created a new artwork of their own, incorporating Oldenburg's work as part?

WHAT COUNTS TOWARD SOMETHING'S BEING ART?

There are cultures in which nothing is regarded as art; no object is spoken of as an artwork. This is said to be true of the Balinese, for example, who, according to one observer, claim, "We have no art; we do everything the best way we can."[2]

Possibly there is some advantage to this way of looking at things; for, by refraining from drawing a boundary around certain exclusive objects deemed worthy of the label "art," the Balinese may be more readily disposed to perceive and appreciate in all spheres of their activities those aesthetic values we find in artworks alone. In our culture we *do* draw such a line, and adult users of our language normally come to master the distinction between art and non-art for most practical purposes. We all can name a good number of standard examples of artworks—a Beethoven symphony, the *Mona Lisa*, Rodin's *Thinker*, and so on—even if we cannot say just what it is about these things that qualifies them as artworks. Usually we have no difficulty in determining whether a given object is an artwork because, in most cases, it will obviously fall within or outside of the class of objects that are, loosely speaking, "like" the standard examples. This familiar rough-and-ready management of the concept of art suffices perfectly well for most day-to-day uses. But now and then it becomes important for the average person to clarify or explain what it *means* to call something "art," or an "artwork." If, for example, some portion of public tax money is scheduled to be expended on art, the public will be

* Case by F. Sparshott.

interested to know whether an ice rink or a rose garden or a room full of dirt should be deemed art. Or if a high school art teacher were to devote a majority of class time to instruction in cooking, ice skating, or astrology (each of which has at times been spoken of as an art), the public might want to know whether the teacher should be disciplined for failing to teach *art*. It is this need to clarify the conceptual lines we have casually drawn and to make plain the basis of our classifications that motivates the philosopher's efforts to answer the deceptively simple question, "What is art?"

The somewhat outré candidates for the title "artwork" (or, equivalently, "work of art") mentioned in the preceding cases serve to highlight the utility of this question. For we cannot begin to decide whether a chimpanzee composition, a chunk of driftwood, or a giant ketchup bottle is a work of art without first making clear to ourselves what principles guide, or should guide, our considered use of the concept "art." Each of these items shares some features with paradigmatic artworks, that is, objects like the *Mona Lisa*, which we would insist are artworks if anything is. However, each of these items also differs from the paradigmatic artworks in unmistakable ways. Which are the telling ways and which the irrelevant ones?

The traditional philosophical method of answering this question has been to propose and defend one or another *real definition* of "art," or of "artwork." A real definition is a verbal formula that purports to identify features of a thing that are shared with all other things of the same title and that are, when taken together, peculiar to just those things. So, for example, if "female fox" is offered as a real definition of "vixen," the claim is thereby made that all and only things that are both foxes and females are vixens. A feature without which a thing cannot lay claim to a given title is called a "necessary condition," and a feature that, if enjoyed by a thing, ensures a given title, is called a "sufficient condition." In this definition, being a fox is a necessary condition of being a vixen.

Real definitions are called "real," as opposed to "nominal," because they identify necessary and sufficient conditions for usage on the basis of *discovered*, rather than stipulated, traits of the things in question. That is, the proponents of a real definition maintain that all and only these things *actually* share certain features and that this shared set of real features—their essence—warrants our calling them by a common name. For example, we arrive at the real definition discussed above by noting that a common thread runs through all vixens and nothing else: it is the complex fact that they are both female and foxes. Where we find this thread we call things vixens, and where we don't, we don't. We cannot produce a real definition by arbitrarily "sewing things together," designating whatever things we wish "female" and "fox" in order to constitute a membership class for

"vixen." Instead, we must discover whatever it is that constitutes the essence of the thing. Philosophical theories of art from Plato's day forward often have sought to identify the essence of art and to use this discovery as the basis of clarifying and correcting discussions of art and its relation to other phenomena.

THE ESSENTIALIST TRADITION

Prior to the present century, from Plato's day forward, nearly all prominent art theories were alleged to have been based on discovery of the essence of art and to have captured it in a real definition. To be sure, Plato, the progenitor of this tendency, could not claim to have defined "art," for the simple reason that ancient Greek had no single term corresponding to our modern concept. But Plato did develop a metaphysics and theory of language, which hold that the meanings of terms, because they are abstracted from their referents, can be perfect and enduring in a way in which ordinary objects—the referents themselves—cannot. Plato thus held that the essences of particular things, such as beds or triangles, as well as abstract entities, such as beauty, are discoverable by a process of careful philosophical reflection. Art theorists since Plato have followed his metaphysical lead in attempting to discover the essence of art, and thus to formulate a definition of *art*.

Indeed, some later theorists have seized on the concept of the essence of art as an antidote to talking nonsense. Clive Bell, for instance, insists that

> either all works of . . . art have some common quality, or when we speak of "works of art" we gibber. Everyone speaks of "art," making a mental classification by which he distinguishes the class "works of art" from all other classes. What is the justification of this classification? What is the quality common and peculiar to all members of this class? Whatever it is, no doubt it is often found in company with other qualities; but they are adventitious—it is essential. There must be some one quality without which a work of art cannot exist; possessing which, in the least degree, no work is altogether worthless.[3]

Others seized on the concept of the essence of art as an antidote to the corruption of artforms in their time. Leo Tolstoy, for instance, complained that

> [a]rt, in our society, has been so perverted that not only has bad art come to be considered good, but even the very perception of what art really is has been lost. In order to speak about the art of our society, it is, therefore, first of all necessary to distinguish art from counterfeit art.[4]

And still others saw in it the prospects of uniting the fine and applied arts in the public consciousness and of recognizing the unity underlying art's enormous diversity of form. Thus, DeWitt Parker observed:

> Art is itself so complex a fact that a satisfying definition of it must also be complex, that is to say must involve many characteristics. As the mathematicians would say, the characteristics must be not only necessary but sufficient. They must penetrate deep enough into the roots of art to meet the challenge of the pluralists and show that there is, after all, a significant sameness in all the arts,—despite their differences in technique and media,—connecting the fine with the applied arts, so far as the latter are beautiful, and the realistic with the fanciful and the idyllic.[5]

The various rationales for aesthetic essentialism have, over the centuries, supported a tremendous profusion of definitions of "art" and of theories of art built upon them. Whole schools or movements of theory may be conveniently classified according to their acceptance of this or that feature or set of features as the defining characteristic of art. Thus, the so-called mimetic theorists of the Platonic tradition point to a relation of resemblance between the artwork and the object it imitates as the key to definition; the "expression" theorists of the more recent Romantic tradition point to the artist's emotion brought to one form of completion; the "aesthetic attitude" theorists point to a certain disinterested quality of mind the artwork invites; "formalists" point to "significant form"; "intuitionists" to some intuited quality or other; "hedonists" to objectified pleasure, and so on.

How is one to decide, in the midst of this confusing array of theories, which is most sound? It will not do simply to pick one's favorite feature of art or artworks and accept the theory that takes that feature to be a defining one. For it sometimes turns out that we are willing to acknowledge that some things are artworks although they lack the favored feature (we must conclude that this feature is not a necessary condition), or that some things that have it aren't art (we must conclude that the feature is not a sufficient condition). Historically, the battles among rival theories of art have been waged by capitalizing on the strategy of counterexamples these observations suggest. "Theory A can't be right," say the proponents of theory B, "because item X has the features theory A takes to be essential to art, but everyone will readily admit that X isn't art." And proponents of theory C may challenge theory D by saying, "Work Y is recognized by everyone as art, yet Y doesn't have some feature theory D takes to be essential." Recently, however, a more radical form of criticism has emerged. Some philosophers have argued that piecemeal attack on definition after definition of "art" is beside the point for the simple reason that art is, of its very nature, indefinable.

ANTIESSENTIALISM AND ANTI-ANTIESSENTIALISM

The immediate inspiration for the antiessentialist attack on traditional theories of art was the publication in 1953 of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations.* There, the argument is made that, for a good number of important terms, Plato's insight was wrong: there is no one feature or set of features that is common to all members of the group sharing the name. Take the word "game," for example. What is it that is common to all games? Plato would have thought there *must* be something, or we could not legitimately call them all by the same name, "game." However, for any definition that one might wish to propose, there appear to be counterexamples, activities that everyone thinks of as games but that do not fit the definition, or activities that fit the definition but that no one thinks of as games. Suppose, for example, one proposed to define "game" as "competitive contest." This proposal fails because there clearly are competitive contests, such as wars, which we would not call games, and games, such as solitaire, that are not competitive contests. Instead of some common feature or features, Wittgenstein points out, what we find when we look at the actual usage of a concept like "game" is a set of overlapping features. A partial set of these features is shared by one pair of subgroups and another partial set is shared by another pair: "The strength of the thread [i.e., the concept, or name] does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres." Wittgenstein called these nonessential bases for naming "family resemblances."[6]

Philosophers of art were quick to draw implications from Wittgenstein's theory of language. First Paul Ziff and then Morris Weitz applied the notions of conceptual overlap and family resemblance to the concept "art." Ziff observed that "so long as there are artistic revolutions, the phrase 'work of art,' or some equivalent locution, will continue to be used in many ways."[7] And Weitz carried the point farther:

> The problem of the nature of art is like that of the nature of games, at least in these respects: If we actually look and see what it is that we call "art," we will also find no common properties—only strands of similarities. Knowing what art is is not apprehending some manifest or latent essence but being able to recognize, describe, and explain those things we call "art" in virtue of these similarities.[8]

The point Ziff and Weitz were making is at once a claim about language and about the world. They argued that the historical diversity of artforms—radical changes in style, medium, material, critical vision, taste, and so on—makes it inappropriate to use the words "art" and "artwork" as though the concepts for which they stood were

closed. An open concept is one for which the conditions of application are always emendable and corrigible. And art, as these antiessentialists saw it, is and ought to be such an open concept, for its openness is a precondition of creativity and novelty in the field.

More recently, antiessentialism itself has come under attack. George Dickie and others have argued that "art" is not indefinable after all. Indeed Dickie has proposed an irreverently new definition, one that has been hotly contested. Dickie's original version of this definition, known as the Institutional Theory of Art, went like this:

> A work of art in the classificatory sense (1) is an artifact (2) a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld).[9]

Dickie has revised this definition into a "small dictionary" of the philosophy of art, a set of five deliberately circular definitions which, he says, reveals the "inflected" nature of art:

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

Dickie's point, put as simply and uncontroversially as possible, is that a dynamic social institution—the artworld—rather than a static conceptual formula, is given the job of distinguishing things that are properly to be called art from those that aren't. As an institution, the artworld consists of more or less established practices and a more or less loosely organized core of personnel: artists, reporters, critics, art historians, philosophers of art, and others. Thus, what counts toward a thing's being an artwork is, in this view, a function of practices and decisions within the ever-changing context of the social institution that provides for art's continuing existence. No fixed conceptual formula is necessary; art is what the artworld takes to be art. Thus, Dickie's account will not tell us directly whether Betsy the chimpanzee's painting is art, or what perceptual features the driftwood must have, or, for that matter, what makes the *Mona Lisa* or a Beethoven symphony art; but it does tell us whom to ask—the members of the artworld. If *they* take these things to be art, then they are; if they do not, they are not. Furthermore, presumably, an object might cease to be an artwork if the artworld no longer regards it as one.

WHAT IS THE ARTWORK?

In the course of trying to answer the question "What is art?" we may find ourselves facing an equally challenging companion question: "What is the artwork?" A determination that an object or event passes the test by which we judge things to be art does not, by itself, tell us what feature, facet, or aspect of it is the appropriate focus of critical appraisal or appreciation. Strange as this may seem, we may well decide that a given work is art in advance of deciding just what the work *is*. After all, everything in the world can be described in countless ways, some of which are invariably more apt for certain purposes than others. A smile, for example, may be described by referring to the muscles it involves, the joke that provoked it, the amused reaction the smiler wishes the observer to see, and so on. Some of these descriptions, and not others, will be pertinent to determining whether the smile was sincere. Likewise, only some of the possible descriptions of art objects are the ones that fit those objects as *artworks*.

In Advance of the Broken Arm is the title of a composition by Marcel Duchamp, a twentieth-century artist particularly well known for his "ready-mades." The snow shovel so prominent in it is a real shovel, just like one that you might purchase at a hardware store. Consequently, many, perhaps most, correct descriptions of Duchamp's snow shovel fit your snow shovel as well. But it certainly does not follow that judging Duchamp's "ready-made" to be art requires judging your snow shovel to be art too. For, here the descriptions that count—the ones that identify *In Advance of the Broken Arm* as an *artwork*—have to do with such features as the gesture of mockery involved in its display, the significance imputed to the snow shovel by the title, the receptivity of a certain audience to this kind of display, and so on.

The problem of deciding which descriptions characterize a thing as an artwork is no less severe for art objects that few people would confuse with everyday objects. Music critics overwhelmingly agree that Bach's last work, *Die Kunst der Fuge*, is art but disagree widely as to what exactly it is about this monumental composition that is the *work* of art. Is it the creative idea in Bach's mind as he composed the piece? If so, the artwork happened only once, centuries ago, and every rendition of it, even Bach's own manuscript notation, may only imperfectly express it. Is it instead the notation itself—the original, autographic musical manuscript? If so, ironically, this famous work can never be heard; for marks on paper are by their very nature silent. Is it the set of instructions those marks are conventionally taken to provide to performing artists? If so, the identity of the work will

change over time as those conventions change, so that Bach, were he to reappear today or sometime in the future, might not recognize the work as his own. Worse still, because the conventions could change radically, any sounds could come to constitute a performance of any work. Finally, perhaps the work of art here is the set of its peformances, or the performances together with audience responses to them. But this view leads to especially awkward and unsettling results: Bach did not indicate instrumentation for this piece; consequently, it has been performed by an unusually wide variety of instrumental ensembles (solo organ, duo pianos, woodwind quintet, string orchestra, and so on). Are all of these quite different-sounding performances performances of the same *work*? (We will return to questions of performance in Chapter 4.)

Puzzles of this kind concern the *ontology* of art. Ontology is that branch of metaphysics concerned with the systematic characterization of the stuff, or ingredients, constituting all of reality. The chief aims of ontological reflection are the delineation of *kinds* of thing, and the general description of the spatial and temporal situation of things of a given kind. The ontology of art thus aims to determine what kind of thing an artwork is and to provide the means of judging when and where artworks occur. Historically, these issues have proved to be every bit as controversial as the issue of the definability of "art."

When philosophers differ over the kind of thing an artwork is, their differences are sometimes traceable to divergent convictions regarding the nature of reality in general. Materialists, for example, will take the work of art to be something physical, perhaps a brain state in the mind of the artist, or a configuration of molecules, or patches of pigment on a canvas. Idealists will take an opposing view, maintaining that the work of art is a pattern of thought or emotion, perhaps a pattern shared in some way by artist and audience. Not all differences over kind are differences in background metaphysics, however. Two idealists might, for example, differ markedly in their views as to whether the art students' *joke* in juxtaposing the ketchup bottle with the Oldenburg *Giant Hamburger* was part of the artwork (if the resultant whole were taken to be art). Or they might differ as to whether the *juxtaposition*—that is the relation itself, apart from the things related—was part of the artwork. And again, they might differ as to whether *audience response* to the juxtaposed hamburger and ketchup bottle helped constitute the artwork or whether the artwork was complete in the minds of the pranksters.

In asking what an artwork is, we are sometimes asking more than what kind of a thing it is; we may also be trying to determine its boundaries—what it should and should not be taken to include. Questions of when and where the artwork occurs can be no less thorny than the ontological questions considered above. Even should we come

to agree that *Driftwood* is art, we may differ as to *when* the artwork came into being. Was it with the glint in the artist's eye? Or when he said, "Call it *Driftwood*"? Or when the curator accepted it for exhibition? Or when he exhibited it, and it was actually viewed as art by gallery visitors? Or has the idea of such an artwork always existed, though it has only recently been actualized?

The same kinds of questions may reappear if we ask when the artwork is completed. If, years after first exhibiting it, the curator were to paint *Driftwood* black (following the artist's telephoned instructions), would he have created a new work, destroyed the old work, completed an unfinished work, or done something else? Similarly, we may differ as to *where* the artwork is, what its spatial limits are. If it is art, is the *Driftwood* artwork coextensive with the piece of driftwood, or does it take in the gesture of its presentation, its setting in the gallery, the range of reactions to it, and so on? Ontological questions such as these command our attention because their answers are preconditions to consistent communication about art. People who have in mind different kinds of things, or things in different places or occurring at different times, when they speak of artworks, will inevitably talk past one another. However acute their observations, they simply cannot mesh, and this will lead to nothing but confusion and frustration. No simple or sweeping policy seems likely to settle all such questions. Philosophers of art have held widely divergent views as to ontological policy, views so numerous and varied that we cannot hope to review and adjudicate them here. It is tempting to suppose that different ontological policies will reflect and accommodate differences among genres, styles, epochs, cultures, and so on. If this conclusion is sound, the distinctions we draw will, as much as anything else, reveal the people we are and the times we live in.

BEYOND DEFINITION: ART AND SOCIETY

Sometimes, the questions "What is art?" and "What is the artwork?" are not aimed at establishing credentials for these concepts. The questions may be seen as invitations to provide accounts not of the essence and ontology of art, but of the peculiar effects art has on us, the phenomena that surround and incorporate it, the value assigned to it, and the relations artworks bear to other elements in our experience. A good many theories of art are, in fact, less concerned ultimately with the definitional than with the contextual.

Once again the source of speculation in this direction may be traced to Plato. Plato held that the primary issues facing human beings concerned relations between the individual and what might be called the personality of the state. Art's role in human affairs was, as Plato saw it, both determined by the correct adjustment of these relations

and subject to them. So, it was not only possible, but entirely appropriate, that certain forms of art should be subject to political control or suppression wherever they could be shown to disturb the correct relations between the individual and the state. Plato thus introduced the philosophical discussion of censorship as a practice to be employed wherever aesthetic values conflicted with political and ethical ideals. This issue (which will be considered more fully in Chapter 5) continues to arise wherever the possibility is raised that the effect of art on the individual or on human social life may be destructive as well as constructive.

We may not entirely agree with the way in which Plato and other theorists chose to delimit the social experience of art, yet we may wish to reach beyond the definitions proposed in traditional theories of art to find out what it is about art that makes it important enough in our lives to be worth theorizing about. A good many philosophers (e.g., Friedrich Nietzsche, John Dewey, Karl Marx, Susanne Langer) have addressed this theme at some length. So have a number of social scientists (e.g., Max Weber, Bronislaw Malinowski, Thorstein Veblen, Clifford Geertz). Although we cannot attempt to summarize here their widely disparate views, it is perhaps worth remarking that efforts to describe the social setting in which art exists may prove to be as useful as any definition in helping us to decide what to say about giant ketchup bottles, chimpanzee works, driftwood, and the *Mona Lisa* as well.

CASES

What Is Art?

1-1. WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS AND THE ICEBOX

The following is one of William Carlos Williams's best-known and most often anthologized poems:

THIS IS JUST TO SAY

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold[11]

What, if any, difference should it make if someone discovered that Williams had not written this as a poem, that he had never intended it for publication, and that, in fact, it was just a note he had left on the door of a friend's refrigerator after eating all the plums?—J.B.

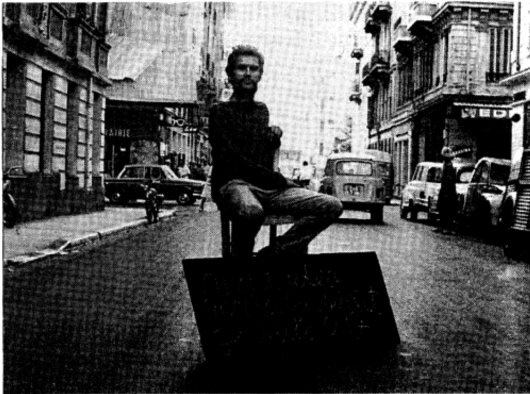
1-2. *PILE OF BRICKS*

Consider the following possibility, based on an exhibit at the Tate Gallery in 1976.[12] A person already known, perhaps even famous, as a "minimalist" sculptor buys 120 bricks and, on the floor of a well-known art museum, arranges them in a rectangular pile, 2 bricks high, 6 across, and 10 lengthwise. He labels it *Pile of Bricks.* Across town, a bricklayer's assistant at a building site takes 120 bricks of the very same kind and arranges them in the very same way, wholly unaware of what has happened in the museum—he is just a tidy bricklayer's assistant. Can the first pile of bricks be a work of art while the second pile is not, even though the two piles are seemingly identical in all observable respects? Why, or why not?—W.E.K.

1-3. MAN BECOMES ART (?)

In 1964, the Parisian performance artist Ben Vautier sat down in the middle of a street in Nice with a placard on his lap. The placard read, "Regardez moi cela suffit je suis art." ["Look at me. That's all it takes; I'm art."] He then had himself photographed in this position.

Was Ben right? Can a person be an artwork? If so, was Ben an artwork when he went home to shower? Would he remain an artwork were he to be drafted into the French army? Could he have been an artwork without his placard? Is asking whether Ben is art the best way of looking at his performance, and if not, in what alternative way could the placard and the performance be understood?—J.L.



Ben Vautier, 1964, Nice.
Photo: Copyright Ad Petersen.

1-4. PULLING POETRY OUT OF A HAT

In Tom Stoppard's play *Travesties,* Tristan Tzara, the well-known Dada poet, creates poetry by cutting up Shakespeare's sonnets, dropping the individual words in a hat, and then selecting and arranging the words drawn from the hat at random. In one scene, Tzara begins with the Eighteenth Sonnet:

> Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
> Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
> Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
> And summer's lease hath all too short a date;
> Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines
> And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
> And every fair from fair sometimes declines,
> By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed;
> But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
> Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
> Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
> When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
> So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
> So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

According to Stoppard, Tzara came up with:

> shake thou thy gold buds
> the untrimm'd but short fair shade
> shines—
> see, this lovely hot possession growest
> so long
> by nature's courses—
> so . . . long—heaven!
> and declines,
> summer changing, more temporate complexion. . . .[13]

My seven-year-old daughter recently imitated Stoppard's Tzara, also by randomly selecting cut-up words from the Eighteenth Sonnet. Her work began as follows:

> Death complexion see, declines,
> summer's this as Rough changing eye course thee
> more sometime not hot lives long fade
> dimm'd; often eternal growest: May
> Nor date. wander'st lines this temperate. lease
> When eyes too is that his can brag to.

Is this poetry? Is Tzara's "creation" poetry, as Stoppard portrays it? Is either work original?—P.W.

1-5. MODERN MASTERPIECE JUST DUCKY

In Liverpool, England, late in 1983, a wine merchant named Maureen Gledhill bought an abstract painting from Ernest Cleverley, a sculptor who also runs a pet shop. When Ms. Gledhill walked into the shop, the sculptor had been discussing the picture with Brian Burgess, an artist, and she believed it was one of Burgess's works. She paid $105 for the painting, thinking it a bargain, and displayed it prominently in her home.

But it turned out that the painting was the work of a duck named Pablo, who had escaped from his cage while Cleverley, the sculptor, was doing some painting, and had got his feet in the paint.

"I noticed that it made an interesting pattern, and it just developed from there," said Cleverley. "I tried him on canvas with different colors. He has a real eye for composition and flair for color."

Gledhill no longer displays the painting at her home, but she remarks, "I know it sounds corny. I don't know much about art, but I know what I like, and this was a painting I liked."

"The duck," said Cleverley, "is a natural."[14]

What would it help Ms. Gledhill to know about art in deciding what to think about the painting? Given that she has already acknowl-

edged that she likes the painting, what plausible alternative reasons might she have for removing the painting from her home?—G.I.

1-6. MALLARMÉ'S BLANK SHEET

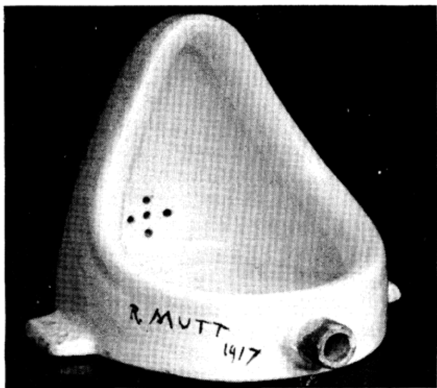
In his essay "Minimal Art," Richard Wollheim writes:

> In a historic passage Mallarmé describes the terror, the sense of sterility, that the poet experiences when he sits down to his desk, confronts the sheet of paper before him on which his poem is supposed to be composed, and no words come to him. But we might ask, Why could not Mallarmé, after an interval of time, have simply got up from his chair and produced the blank sheet of paper as the poem that he sat down to write? Indeed, in support of this, could one imagine anything that was more expressive of, or would be held to exhibit more precisely the poet's feelings of inner devastation than the virginal paper?[15]

Wollheim claims that Mallarmé could not have produced a poem in this way, "For there is no structure here on the basis of which we could identify later occurrences as occurrences of that poem."[16] Is Wollheim right that *le vide papier* could not have served as Mallarmé's poem, could not itself have been a work of art?—R.M.M.

1-7. DUCHAMP'S *FOUNTAIN*

In 1917, for the first annual exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York City, French artist-in-exile Marcel Duchamp submitted a work entitled *Fountain.* The work, a simple porcelain



Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain,* 1917. Ready-made urinal. 24" high. Courtesy Sidney Janis Gallery, N.Y. Photo: Otto E. Nelson.

urinal purchased by the artist, hung at a 90° angle, and signed with the pseudonym "R. Mutt," was rejected by the society because it was judged to be not art but an immoral display.

Duchamp, Beatrice Wood, and H. P. Roche responded to this judgment in an article in *The Blind Man* of May 1917, saying:

> Now Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral; that is absurd, no more than a bathtub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' show windows. . . . Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.[17]

Should *Fountain*'s offensiveness to current moral sensibilities have counted against its being recognized as art? Do the facts that Duchamp *chose* this particular urinal and presented it in a certain way with a certain title constitute sufficient grounds for recognizing it as art? If you were a judge at the 1917 SIA exhibition, what would you have decided to do with this work? If you were a judge for an annual show of new works in a major American art museum *today,* what would you do with it, assuming it had never been displayed before?—H.R.

1-8. TATARKIEWICZ'S DEFINITION OF ART

The literature of aesthetics contains an embarrassment of riches when it comes to definitions of art. In "What is Art? The Problem of Definition Today," Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz defines a work of art as follows: "A work of art is either a reproduction of things, or a construction of forms, or an expression of experiences such that it is capable of evoking delight, or emotion, or shock."[18]

Note that this sentence defines art *disjunctively* ("Anything is a work of art just in case it is A *or* B *or* C"), whereas most definitions are *conjunctive* ("Anything is a work of art just in case it is A *and* B *and* C"). Tatarkiewicz regards this as an advantage. But what this means is that there are three things (reproductions, constructions, expressions) and three reactions or responses they are capable of evoking (delight, emotion, shock), any one or more of which from each set is a logically *sufficient* condition for something's being a work of art. The only *necessary* condition is that a work of art must be at least one of the three things and must be capable of evoking at least one of the three responses.

Is this an adequate definition of art? Do some works of art fail to satisfy Tatarkiewicz's definition? Is there anything that is not a work of art that satisfies his definition?—W.E.K.

1-9. SONFIST'S *TIME LANDSCAPE*

Alan Sonfist is a contemporary artist who to some extent models himself on Marcel Duchamp, but with an important difference—Sonfist's "ready-mades" are natural objects. Sonfist, whom *New York Times* art critic Grace Glueck calls "nature's boy," says he is "not trying to alter" nature but is "trying to present it"; he wants to create art that makes nature "visible" and "directs" people to look at it. He claims: "I think nature is art and people have to realize this" and compares himself to Duchamp, saying: "He claimed man-made objects as works of art—I claim natural phenomena."[19]

Sonfist gives this basic idea extensive treatment in such works as *Time Landscape* (1965–1978), which consists of a network of sites throughout New York City where areas of land have been restored to the way they might have appeared before urbanization. Depending on the particular site, the land has been replanted with different varieties of trees, shrubs, and grasses in an attempt to recreate precolonial landscapes. As one art critic put it: "*Time Landscape* presents nature in an unadulterated, unmodified state as the fundamental content of the work."[20] Another critic claimed that in Sonfist's works, "Nature asserts itself as itself."[21]

If what these critics say about Sonfist's works is correct, why should any of them be considered works of art? If Sonfist's landscapes have been replanted, are they really "natural ready-mades"? What would be the difference between one of Sonfist's artworks and a garden, a botanical museum, or a historical arboretum?—A.C.

Alan Sonfist, *Time Landscape of New York, 1965–78.*
Courtesy of Alan Sonfist © 1978.

1-10. BAD ART OR NOT ART AT ALL?

In 1943, Theodore Adorno argued that we blunt our own critical weapons if we claim that Hollywood does not create works of art. Movie industrialists, he said, may wish to evade criticism on the grounds that they are engaged in a business, not in creating art, and that their only goals are profit and success; hence, they may try to claim that they are not subject to aesthetic criticism. But aesthetic criticism, Adorno continues, is criticism these movie makers richly deserve. Since they are using artistic means, they are creating art, even if it is *bad* art.

In 1969, Adorno argued that there is no bad art, and that the claim that a given artwork is "unsuccessful" is self-defeating. He claimed that although the notions of normal and revolutionary science make sense, it does not make sense to speak about "normal" art: either artworks are successful and revolutionary, or they are not art.

Did Adorno contradict himself in claiming, first, that there is such a thing as bad art and then that there is not? Does his 1969 view involve a rejection, a modification, or merely an elaboration of his 1943 view? Or could it be that Adorno did not change his mind but that the world changed between 1943 and 1969?—L.S.

What Is the Artwork?

1-11. THE CAPTIVE CAT

At Columbia University, a bronze statue of a cat stands on the floor at the head of a staircase. Presumably it is of some value, for university officials have fixed a chain around its neck and fastened the chain to the stair railing.[22]

Should the artwork be appreciated as a statue of a chained cat, or is it simply a chained statue of a cat? Because the chain is visible, is it possible to exclude it from one's aesthetic appreciation of the work? —A.S.

1-12. BIX BEIDERBECKE'S SOLO

In 1927, Bix Beiderbecke played a cornet solo for a recording of "Singin' the Blues," and it became one of the most famous and emulated solos in jazz for decades afterward. But the record was, alas, only a record, so in some sense no one after 1927 quite heard the solo. Musicologist S. L. Mismo decided to remedy this defect of time by notating Bix's solo in the smallest detail: pitch, rhythm, intonational nuance, vol-

ume. Then he got the classical conductor Gerard Schwarz, who also plays the cornet, to play from his music, and Schwarz got every detail right.

Mismo was there. Did he hear Bix's solo, unheard since 1927? Did he hear the same solo that everybody who listened to the record since 1927 had heard? Did Schwarz express what Bix expressed? Did Mismo, in notating the solo, express what Bix expressed? Would your answers to these questions be different if the record were by Wynton Marsalis, who plays both classical and jazz trumpet, and the artist whom Mismo used in the enterprise were also Wynton Marsalis? Would it make a difference if the solo had been notated in the same detail *before* Bix (or Wynton) played it the first time and Mismo's version (coincidentally) turned out to be identical to the original version?—B.V.

1-13. SOL LEWITT'S WALL DRAWING

The Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh owns a large wall drawing by Sol LeWitt. LeWitt provided instructions, indicating what lines were to be drawn, and the work was executed by local artists.

The museum plans at some future time to "move" the drawing, that is, to have it redrawn in another location. Can it justifiably claim that it will have the same work of art in its possession?

The drawing is beautiful; I would love to have it in my dining room. Suppose I have a second drawing made, using LeWitt's original instructions, but without his authorization. Would that work be a forgery? How would it differ from the first, given that it followed the same instructions? Suppose I hire the very artists and students who made the first drawing. Would that change the situation?—D.E.C.

1-14. THE PAINTER AND THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Suppose an artist recognized both as a painter (of the photo-realist variety) and a photographer takes a photograph of a street scene. The artist then paints a picture of the photograph using an opaque projector to ensure that the painting is as accurate as possible. Finally, the artist photographs the painting. The three "works" are exhibited together. To the naive eye they all look alike, they all are exactly the same size, and they all appear to be photographs.

How many artworks, or kinds of artwork, do we have? Why? Should all these works be understood to convey the same meaning?

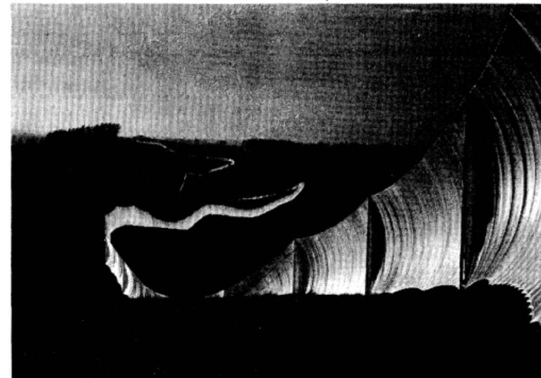
Suppose now that a West German art critic who is writing a book called *Photo-Realism in Painting* requests a photograph of the painting. By mistake the New York gallery that exhibited the three works sends him a photograph of the original photograph on which the painting is based, and this is used as a basis for discussion in the art critic's book. Realizing its mistake, the gallery sends the critic a photograph of the painting, but when the critic looks at the new photograph, he finds that everything he has said in interpreting the work is still applicable. The criticism appears unchanged in his book.

Has the critic been dishonest? How serious is the gallery's error? Should the critic acknowledge what has happened in his book?—A.B.

1-15. CHRISTO'S CONSTRUCTIONS

The recent projects of the contemporary artist Christo, such as *Running Fence, Valley Curtain, Surrounded Islands,* and *Pont Neuf Wrapped,* which consist of hundreds of thousands of yards of fabric or plastic draped or hung over natural features of the earth, have taken many years from conception to realization. To some extent this is because the projects are controversial and have required permission from various government and private agencies for their construction. But Christo is fully aware that his projects will raise these issues and insists that "the work of art is not merely the physical object finally attained, but the whole process—the surveys, the engineering, the leasing, the fabricating, the assembling, the hearings and the rest of it."[23]

Every complex work of art, from Michelangelo's sculptures to Steven Spielberg's films, requires a long process of planning and realization. Suppose Michelangelo had said that his sculptures were not merely the physical object finally attained but the whole process—



Christo, *Running Fence, Sonoma and Marin Counties, California, 1972–76.* Steel poles, steel cables, and 2½ million square ft. of woven nylon. Height: 18 ft. overall. Length: 24½ miles.
© Christo 1976. Photo: Wolfgang Volz.

cutting the marble blocks at Carrara, shipping them to Florence, and settling the controversies over the final location of the statue? Or suppose that Spielberg insisted that even a delay in filming due to a severe storm or a strike by the electrical workers was part of the work of art, part of the film he was making. Are these three cases essentially similar? Or can a case be made that Christo's work, unlike traditional art or even contemporary art in established media, "ceases to be the mere physical construction on a natural site, but a project with extended temporal boundaries, whereby the social context of its realization takes on aesthetic import"?[24]—D.W.C.

1-16. WHAT DO YOU READ?

> Polonius: What do you read, my lord?
> Hamlet: Words, words, words.[25]

A literary critic seems to disagree:

> A literary text, after all, in an objective sense consists only of a certain configuration of specks of carbon black on dried wood pulp. When these marks become words, when those words become images or metaphors or characters or events, they do so because the reader plays the part of a prince to the sleeping beauty.[26]

Do you read words, or marks on paper, or neither of these? What does the play *Hamlet* consist of—words, marks on paper, or something else?—L.S.

1-17. JOHN CAGE'S *4′ 33″*

Among the most famous works of John Cage, a well-known contemporary composer, is his piece for piano entitled *4′ 33″*. To perform that work the pianist goes on stage, sits at the piano, opens the keyboard, and remains seated for exactly 4 minutes and 33 seconds. At the end of that time the pianist closes the keyboard and leaves the stage.

Is *4′ 33″* a work of art? Is it a piece of music? What if Cage insisted that *4′ 33″* is a "listening experience" in which the audience is supposed to hear background noises—would your answer to the last question be different?

Suppose that during a recent concert of Cage's works, the pianist hired to perform *4′ 33″* became ill at the last moment and had to withdraw. In desperation the stage manager himself performed the work.

Would this be a performance of Cage's work? Would it be a musical performance?—P.W.

1-18. THE CASE OF THE MOTIONLESS DANCE

Suppose a choreographer composes a piece that consists in its entirety of the following:

> The curtain rises on three dancers standing immobile on the stage. The dancers remain immobile for exactly four and a half minutes. The lights play over them, rising and dimming, changing color slightly so that there are variations in shadows and in the perceived colors of the bodies and costumes.
>
> At the end of the specified time period, the curtain falls.[27]

Has this choreographer composed a *dance*? What if even the lights do not move? Does it make a difference whether the performers are actually dancers, or could the stagehands perform this piece just as well? Is this (almost) the same work as John Cage's *4′ 33″* in a different medium? Exactly what *is* the medium of each of these works?—M.P.B.

1-19. "I PAINT WHAT I SEE" (see p. 24)

What is the connection between art and the real world? What are the snakes and spiders the artist has painted paintings of? What about the trees? Do artists who "paint what they see" imitate nature as it is, as it should be, as they wish it were, or as their artistic vision presents it to them?—M.M.E.

1-20. AESTHETIC EQUIVALENCE

"I've got it. Exactly. After five years of trying different chords, motifs, and textures, a precise musical equivalent of my favorite Kandinsky watercolor: It's a short fantasy for string trio."

Could this composer be justified in his claim? Suppose a poet were to make a similar claim about the same Kandinsky watercolor: "I've got it. I've finally struck on *just* the right words. My sonnet and that Kandinsky are just the same as artworks." Is there any reason to think this claim is more (or less) justifiable than the composer's? If both claims were justifiable, would that mean that the string trio and the sonnet would in turn be exact equivalents? If these claims were unjustifiable, would there be *any* circumstances under which one artwork might be aesthetically identical to another, might fully substitute for it artistically?—J.L.

1-21. *ERASED DE KOONING*

In 1959, Robert Rauschenberg, a young though not inconsequential artist, asked Willem de Kooning to participate in an art project. De

"I paint what I see, child."

© Gahan Wilson 1971.

Kooning, who was not only older and much more established than Rauschenberg, but whose works sold for considerable sums of money, agreed to participate and gave Rauschenberg what he considered to be an important drawing. The drawing de Kooning selected was executed in heavy crayon, grease pencil, ink, and graphite. Rauschenberg spent a month on the work, erasing it completely. Then he placed the de Kooning drawing in a gold leaf frame and hand-lettered the date and title on the drawing: *Erased de Kooning Drawing,* 1953. Rauschenberg had not only erased de Kooning's work, but he had also exhibited the "erasure" as his work of art.

Had Rauschenberg created a work of art, or destroyed one, or perhaps both?—H.R.

1-22. SCULPTURE SOUND

Webster's defines "sculpture" as (1) "the action or art of processing (as by carving, modeling or welding) plastic or hard materials into works of art"; (2) "work produced by sculpture"; (3) "a three-dimensional work of art (as a statue)?"[29]

Michael Brewster, a well-recognized and frequently commissioned artist, has created a series of works that he, and those who commission and review him, consider sculpture. These works typically consist of two or more speakers that emit tones designed to interact so as to produce different sounds in different parts of the space in which they are installed. For example, one such installation produces sounds heard as a uniform, unbroken hum from some positions, and as a series of discrete beeps from others. Although both Brewster and his students say the important thing about such works is how they sound, the works are never presented as music, for example, in a concert. Some have been commissioned in connection with music festivals, but they are exhibited in galleries, not included in the festivals' musical events.

Is *Webster's* wrong? Or have Brewster and his patrons been making a mistake? And what does this tell us about the nature of sculpture or the nature of music? How important is it to differentiate between the different arts?—J.B.

1-23. SUPPRESSING ART

Imagine a tyrant who controls the land in which there lives a very skilled, famous painter. The tyrant is extremely cruel. He also hates art. His cruelty is focused on the painter, among others, because he believes that the painter once caricatured him in a portrait. Thus he wishes to torture the painter in the most vicious ways he can imagine—not stooping to ordinary physical torture but interfering more subtly with the painter's art.

The tyrant is considering two plans. First, he might order the painter never to paint again and have this order enforced by his ruthlessly efficient secret police. Or, second, he might supply the painter with canvas, paints, and a well-lit studio but require that every single canvas the painter paints be brought to him (by the ruthlessly efficient secret police) and destroyed immediately, before any critic or lover of art ever sees it.

Which method of torture would be worse for the artist? Which for the artworld? Can these answers be different? Would the ontological furniture of the world be different if artworks were created that were

never seen or if they were never created at all? Would the artworld gain anything from having these works created, even if no one could ever appreciate them? Or if the tyrant decided to prevent the painter from painting altogether, would the paintings that the painter forms "in his mind's eye" be equivalent to paintings that he actually painted but that no one but him ever saw?—S.G.

1-24. THE CASE OF THE ZEALOUS BOOKBURNERS

Suppose that in a wave of new moralism, zealous bookburners attempt to rid the country—indeed, the world—of pernicious literary works. Libraries are purged, private collections are searched, and bounties are offered for individual copies. A couple of copies survive here and there for most of the works on the list, but every single copy of J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* is destroyed.

Has *Catcher in the Rye* itself been destroyed? There are still a few old people around who can remember reading it, although they no longer have copies of the text. Will the work die when these old people do? Or will the work continue to exist, even though there are no longer any copies of it and no one will ever be able to read it again?—R.D.

NOTES

1. This comparison is suggested by George Dickie in *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 45–46.
2. Preston McClanaham, "To Prove the Fact of Existence," *Arts Magazine*, 45 (Summer 1971), 37.
3. Clive Bell, *Art*, 4th ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1920), pp. 7–8.
4. Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?*, trans. A. Maude (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), p. 139.
5. DeWitt Parker, "The Nature of Art," *Revue Internationale De Philosophie*, 1, no. 4 (1939), 688.
6. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 32e.
7. Paul Ziff, "The Task of Defining a Work of Art," *Philosophical Review*, 62 (1953), 532.
8. Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism*, 15 (1956), 31.
9. Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic*, p. 34.
10. George Dickie, *The Art Circle: A Theory of Art* (New York: Haven Publications, 1984), pp. 80–82.
11. William Carlos Williams, *Collected Poems 1909–1939*, vol. 1. Copyright 1938 by New Directions Publishing Corporation. Reprinted by permission of New Directions.
12. See Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Tate Gallery Buys Pile of Bricks—Or Is It Art?" *New York Times*, February 20, 1976, p. 31, cited in W. E. Kennick, *Art and Philosophy: Readings in Aesthetics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), p. 116.

13. Tom Stoppard, *Travesties* (New York: Grove Press, 1975), pp. 84–85.
14. Based on a story in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Thursday, October 6, 1983.
15. Richard Wollheim, "Minimal Art," in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 388.
16. Wollheim, "Minimal Art," p. 388.
17. *Marcel Duchamp* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), pp. 16, 283.
18. Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, "What Is Art? The Problem of Definition Today," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 1 (1971), 34ff.
19. Grace Glueck, "Art Notes: Auction Where the Action Is," *New York Times*, November 15, 1970, p. D26.
20. Mark Rosenthal, "Some Attitudes of Earth Art: From Competition to Adoration," in *Art in the Land: A Critical Anthology of Environmental Art*, ed. Alan Sonfist (New York: Dutton, 1983), p. 68.
21. Jonathan Carpenter, "Alan Sonfist's Public Sculptures," in *Art in the Land*, p. 151.
22. Arthur Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 102.
23. Alfred Frankenstein, "Christo's 'Fence,' Beauty or Betrayal?" *Art in America*, 64 (1976), 58.
24. D. Crawford, "Nature and Art: Some Dialectical Relationships," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 42 (1983), 56.
25. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 2, sc. 2, lines 191–192.
26. Norman N. Holland, *5 Readers Reading* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 12.
27. Based on a case by Paul Ziff, *Antiaesthetics: An Appreciation of the Cow with the Subtile Nose* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: D. Reidel, 1984), pp. 84–85.
28. See John Elderfield, *The Drawings of Matisse* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), illustration 79, p. 194.
29. *Webster's Ninth New Dictionary*, s.v. "Sculpture."

Puzzles About Art: An Aesthetics Casebook, Margaret P. Battin, John Fisher, Ronald Moore, Anita Silvers. Boston, Ma: St. Marlin's Press, 1989.