

“Art” as a Cluster Concept

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The story of philosophers’ attempts to define the concept of art has not been a happy one. Theories we have in plenty: functionalist definitions, institutional definitions, historical definitions, and various hybrids of these have been proliferating of late.¹ Less evident is any agreement about which of these radically different analyses is the correct one. Some will see in this failure of convergence yet another sign of the bankruptcy of analytic philosophy, and indeed if it be the sole aim of analytic philosophy to produce definitions, then the enterprise is deeply insolvent and in imminent danger of foreclosure. The history of post-Gettier attempts to define “knowledge” amply illustrates the difficulty of securing correct analyses, and if analysis has foundered on the notion of knowledge, what hope is there of securing success with so disputed and amorphous a notion as that of art?

The thought that “art” cannot be defined is not of course a new one: it was the central claim of several aestheticians in the 1950s who drew in varying ways on Wittgenstein’s notion of family resemblance to support their case.² Yet their negative claim that art cannot be defined, in the sense of giving individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions that uniquely specify it, has with few exceptions been denied,³ while their positive claim that a correct characterization (rather than definition) of the concept is in family resemblance terms has been even more widely rejected.⁴ The reasons for this are familiar: if we characterize works of art as those which resemble certain paradigms, then, first, the account is incomplete (it needs to state which objects are paradigm works), and, second, the notion of resemblance is sufficiently vacuous (anything resembles anything in some respect or other, since it shares some property with it) that the characterization would count anything as art. Nor were the arguments the Wittgensteinians advanced for their position particularly compelling: the failure to find a definition might be explained by the attempt to define “art” in in-

trinsic, rather than relational, terms (hence the subsequent popularity of institutional and historical theories), while the claim that “art” resists definition because art is fundamentally creative fails because practices can be pursued in original ways yet be definable (chess and physics are examples), or it might be part of the definition of “art” that its products be original.⁵

Yet the subsequent failure of relational definitions to secure general assent ought to revivify the thought that “art” has not been defined because it cannot be defined, and a spirit of caution ought to encourage the thought that a view of art rooted in a philosophy as powerful as Wittgenstein’s cannot be so simply dismissed. I shall argue here that it is not a resemblance-to-paradigm construal, but a cluster concept construal, of family resemblance that gives the correct characterization of art, and that the argument for this construal rests not on the importance of originality in art, but chiefly on an inspection of what we would say about actual and counterfactual cases of putative art objects.

THE LOGICAL FORM OF THE ACCOUNT

Wittgenstein as part of his discussion of family resemblance develops a cluster account of the meaning of proper names: “By ‘Moses’ I understand the man who did what the Bible relates of Moses, or at any rate a good deal of it. But how much? Have I decided how much must be proved false for me to give up my proposition as false?” Based on this account, Searle also defended a more detailed and explicit cluster account of the sense of proper names.⁶ These examples bring out the main features of cluster accounts. There are multiple criteria for the application of such concepts, though none of them are necessary. There is also a great deal of indeterminacy in how many of these criteria must apply if an object is to fall under the concept, though at the extremes there are clear cases where it does and clear cases where it does not. We can formulate the view more carefully as follows.

A cluster account is true of a concept just in case there are properties whose instantiation by an object counts as a matter of conceptual necessity toward its falling under the concept. These properties are normally called *criteria*, but it is important not to associate all the connotations which this term has acquired with its use here: a criterion is simply to be understood as a property possession of which counts as a matter of conceptual necessity toward an object’s falling under a concept. (Nothing would be lost by referring to these properties as *characteristics*, giving a *characterization* of an object, rather than as criteria.)⁷ There are several criteria for a concept. How is the notion of their *counting toward* the application of a concept to

be understood? First, if all the properties are instantiated, then the object falls under the concept: that is, they are jointly sufficient for the application of the concept. More strongly, the cluster account also claims that if fewer than all the criteria are instantiated, this is sufficient for the application of the concept. Second, there are no properties that are individually necessary conditions for the object to fall under the concept: that is, there is no property which all objects falling under the concept must possess. These conditions together entail that though there are sufficient conditions for the application of a cluster concept, there are no *individually necessary and jointly sufficient* conditions. Third, though there are no *individually necessary* conditions for the application of such a concept, there are *disjunctively necessary* conditions: that is, it must be true that some of the criteria apply if an object falls under the concept. This clause is required, for otherwise we will merely have shown that there are sufficient conditions for a concept to obtain, rather than showing it to be a cluster concept.

Take the case of art. Suppose we can construct some set of properties, for instance, of being beautiful, being expressive, being original, and being complex and coherent. And suppose it can be shown that if various subsets of them obtain, then an object is art, that none of these properties has to be possessed by all artworks, but that all artworks must possess some of them. Then we cannot define "art" in the sense of giving individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for it, but we can offer a characterization of it—an account of what it is in terms of criteria or characteristics. Note that this account allows a great deal of indeterminacy in whether the obtaining of a particular subset of properties is sufficient for something to be art: there will be many cases where it is not clear whether this is so; what is important is that there are some subsets the obtaining of members of which is sufficient for something to be art.

There is an important difference in logical form between cluster accounts and resemblance-to-paradigm accounts. Whereas the latter specify the relevant features in terms of resemblance to some particulars, the former specify them by general properties. In the case of art, a cluster account refers to properties such as those referred to above, whereas a resemblance-to-paradigm view would hold that something is a work of art if and only if it resembles at least one of some specified paradigmatic works of art. Cluster theories thus avoid the first difficulty with the resemblance-to-paradigm view, there being no incompleteness in the account, since no appeal is made to paradigms. And they also avoid the second objection. Resemblance is a matter of properties being possessed in common, and is consequently vacuous without further specification: cluster theories make substantial claims by specifying *what* the properties are that are relevant to determining

whether something is art. Failure to distinguish these two distinct construals of the family resemblance approach—a failure of which even some of its supporters have been guilty⁸—has led to a too swift dismissal of the view.

How do we decide what properties are part of the cluster? Wittgenstein says, “Don’t think, but look!”⁹ This is *not* an injunction to count only visible or intrinsic properties as part of the cluster, as has sometimes been supposed by critics of the family resemblance approach: it is a plea to see how the concept in question is used in the language. Thus, we make a distinction between art and entertainment; so art must give more than just pleasure, must be in some way challenging or exploratory. We tend to regard things in certain genres such as painting or music as artworks, because these art genres are well established. On the other hand, if an object, even if outside these genres, excels in beauty or creative originality, then that gives us reason to judge it to be art (“that dress is a work of art”). And, conversely, we tend to regard the absence of features such as skill as counting against something’s being art (“my child could do that!”). Many of these criteria have been adopted by the would-be definers of art (in terms for instance of the expression of emotion, or of creative imagination), and are thus familiar in aesthetics. The novel point about the cluster theory is that it accepts them as criteria, without holding them exhaustively to specify the notion of art. A particularly useful source for discovering what are the criteria for art springs from examination of disputes about whether objects (for instance, Duchamp’s readymades) are works of art, since in such cases disputants are most explicit in giving their reasons for judging something to be art or not.

Here are some properties the presence of which ordinary judgment counts toward something’s being a work of art, and the absence of which counts against its being art: (1) possessing positive aesthetic properties, such as being beautiful, graceful, or elegant (properties which ground a capacity to give sensuous pleasure);¹⁰ (2) being expressive of emotion; (3) being intellectually challenging (i.e., questioning received views and modes of thought); (4) being formally complex and coherent; (5) having a capacity to convey complex meanings; (6) exhibiting an individual point of view; (7) being an exercise of creative imagination (being original); (8) being an artifact or performance which is the product of a high degree of skill; (9) belonging to an established artistic form (music, painting, film, etc.); and (10) being the product of an intention to make a work of art. Some of these properties are themselves specified in terms of art, and the account thus exhibits a degree of circularity. But there is nothing amiss with circular accounts (nor even with circular definitions),¹¹ provided they are informative, and the account is informative not only because of the presence of noncircularly specified properties, but also because there are substantive constraints on the application of the circular criteria—we can

know whether someone intends to make a work of art by consulting him, and if he does not, that counts against the object's being art.

Clearly, one may wish to dispute these particular criteria, or add others. My main aim here is to defend the cluster account of art *per se*, rather than any particular theory about which properties should be part of the cluster. However, these criteria are good *prima facie* candidates for those which should appear in a cluster account, and I will defend the form of the account in terms of these specific features.

The form of the account requires one modification. An artwork is the product of an action, preeminently of a making (an artifact), or a performing (a performance). It is *artworks* that are involved here, since something is in each case done. Hence being the product of an action is the genus of the artwork and is thus a necessary condition for something's being art. It might be thought that this is denied by those who acknowledge the existence of found art, but in fact it is not. Such art is selected, and selection is an action. Selection adds to the range of properties that can be possessed by objects, and thus alters them, even if not physically. A piece of driftwood in nature cannot express despair, nor can it be about anything (since it lacks even derived intentionality), but when selected for display in a gallery it can express desuetude and be about failure and decay. Being the product of an action is, however, a very thin generic condition, which does not distinguish artworks from any of the other products of action (philosophy papers, chairs, pay freezes, angry words, etc.). Thus the modified cluster account holds that there is one necessary condition for something's being an artwork, but that is because of the notion of a work (the product of action), rather than because of the notion of art. I shall take this modification to be understood in all subsequent references to "art" as a cluster concept.

It might be supposed that the substantiality of the generic condition can be enhanced: the action must be part of a social practice, such a practice being a kind of complex cooperative activity, employing skills and knowledge, characterized by an evolving and developing tradition, with its own internal goods, reasons, goals, and evaluative standards.¹² It is certainly true that all art-actions known to us are undertaken as part of a cultural practice. And this is an important truth about art, from which we can hope to learn a great deal, by seeing to what extent it shares features in common with other cultural practices, in respect of their openness or resistance to multiple interpretations, the ontological peculiarities of their products, their relationship with the associated practices of using their products, and so forth. But for the notion of a cultural practice to be part of the generic condition, it must be not merely a contingent truth but a necessary one that any action of producing an artwork is undertaken as part of a practice. And that is not so: consider a possible world in which there is no art, except one

day an individual goes off on her own and models in wood an elephant, paying attention to the beauty, elegance, and grace of the work, using her creative imagination to enhance the complexity and coherence of the design, skillfully putting in details to create interesting textural and color effects. She tells no one of this, and neither she nor anyone else ever does this kind of thing again. Has she produced art? It seems so; and if so, it is not necessary that an art-action be part of a cultural practice (unless we trivialize the notion by holding that one action can constitute a cultural practice). So while it is an important fact about the activity of art that it is part of some cultural practice or other, it is a contingent, not a necessary fact.¹³

One final point should be noted about the theory. "Art" has two distinct, but related, meanings: it is used as a mass noun for artworks ("there is a lot of art in this room") and also to refer to a kind of activity ("art is a demanding career"). The cluster account proposes that artworks are the products of actions, which products possess some indeterminately large number of the listed properties. And it holds that art as an activity is the producing of such artworks.¹⁴

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

So far I have merely explicated the cluster account and argued that it avoids the problems to which the resemblance-to-paradigm account succumbs. But why should one believe it? To answer this question, we need to determine first what are the constraints on the adequacy of an account, that is, a purported definition or characterization, of some concept; then we can determine whether the cluster characterization meets these constraints.

First and most obvious, the account of the concept should be *adequate to intuition*. That is, it must agree with our intuitions about what we would say about actual and counterfactual cases: if the account claims that some object satisfies the concept, but it intuitively doesn't (or vice versa), then that is one strike against the account. Particularly important test cases here are those that are problematic for rival accounts of the concept, since a proposed account should at least be an improvement on its rivals. And if there are some objects to which the application of the concept is genuinely, irresolubly, indeterminate, then the account should reflect this too, rather than simply stipulating that the concept applies, or stipulating that it does not.

Second, and related to the first constraint, the account must be *normatively adequate*. The process of matching the account to intuitions is unlikely simply to leave all intuitions as they stand. Our linguistic intuitions about particular cases may be flawed in resting on confusions, on ignorance about the language, or on many other factors. Thus some intuitions

that do not fit the proposed account may be rejected: there will be a reflective equilibrium between the account and intuitions, just as there is between principles and intuitions in moral and political philosophy. To avoid begging the question, this normative dimension must include a *theory of error*: some account must be offered of why people have the mistaken intuitions they do, of why these intuitions seem plausible to them. Ideally, this theory of error should also explain why rival accounts of the concept have enjoyed some popularity. This normative dimension is particularly important when there is a degree of interpersonal disagreement about whether a concept applies to particular cases, since the price of failing to adjudicate the dispute is likely to be that each disputant has to be ascribed a different idiolect, and hence it would follow that, contrary to their understanding of the dispute, they are not really disagreeing.

Finally, any proposed account should have *heuristic utility*: that is, it should be such as to figure in true or at least promising theories about the object to which the concept applies. This is particularly evident for scientific concepts, where definitions are formulated so as to figure in true theories of the relevant phenomena. In such cases it is often stipulative definitions that are at issue. But the claims of heuristic utility also apply, though less demandingly, to concepts in common usage, since these will also figure in explanations in the relevant domain. Hence any account of a concept should ideally fit into a larger heuristic package about the domain concerned.

ADEQUACY TO INTUITION

The simplest and most direct way to argue for the cluster account is to show that our candidate properties do indeed count toward an object's being art, that is, that they are adequate to our linguistic intuitions. Recall, however, that these properties are offered only as candidates: if objections are raised to what follows it may be possible to substitute other criteria for the ones offered in order to circumvent them. What mainly matters here is to give the cluster account itself some plausibility, rather than to defend an account of which particular criteria are involved.

Earlier we saw that three conditions must be satisfied for a concept to be a cluster one. I begin with a defense of the second condition, that the criteria are not individually necessary for something to be art. (1) Not all works of art are beautiful, elegant, or graceful: some twentieth-century art pursues "anti-aesthetic" policies, uninterested in sensuously pleasing, but deeply interested in challenging, provoking, scandalizing, using ugliness and discord as a disruptive strategy (Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, I would argue, such a painting). (2) Not all art is expressive of emotion:

1960s hard-edged abstraction is interested in formal relations between color properties (e.g., Josef Albers's *Homage to the Square* series), not in the expression of emotion, and an interest in the combinatorial possibilities of patterns of movement characterizes much of Merce Cunningham's work, rather than a striving after emotional effect. (3) Not all art is intellectually challenging: traditional religious art is chiefly concerned, for instance, with representing well-known religious views, rather than with seeking to probe, question, or extend them. (4) Not all art has a complex and coherent form: some of Malevich's paintings, for instance, *Black Square on a White Ground*, have an extremely simple form, as do some Cycladic sculptures; some modernist films pursue a deliberate strategy of incoherence (e.g., Buñuel and Dalí's *Un Chien Andalou*), and art has been at times concerned with a movement toward greater simplicity (e.g., early Baroque music with respect to Renaissance polyphony). (5) Not all art has a complex meaning: Aesop's fables and the allegorical structure of *A Pilgrim's Progress* come to mind here. (6) Not all art has been concerned with originality: most artworks are derivative, and if a tradition is to continue most *have* to be fairly derivative; and some traditions, such as the ancient Egyptian, eschew originality. (7) Not all artworks express an individual point of view: the ancient Egyptian case is relevant here too. (8) Not all artworks are the products of a high degree of skill: Duchamp's readymades were not a product of such skill (certainly not on his part, at least), nor are Alfred Wallis's pictures the products of great pictorial skill. (9) Not all artworks are in established art genres: indeed, they could not be, for if they were, no new art genres could have emerged. (10) Last, not all artworks are the products of an intention to make art: "primitive" societies tend not to have anything like our concept of art, but we accept some of their products as art, and probably much that we now accept as "folk art" was never intended by its makers as art.

It may be objected in general to these claims that if none of these conditions are necessary, that is only because they are irrelevant to an object's being art: it would be as if I should list as a criterion, "being a granite block," and then triumphantly proclaim that this is not a necessary condition, since not all artworks are granite blocks. Perhaps the irrelevance of some of the criteria might be argued for: but could they *all* be irrelevant—could there be a work of art lacking all of these properties? Inspection of possible cases strongly suggests that there could not be: we can make sense, for instance, of a piece of minimalist painting as art, even though it lacks expressive content, because we recognize it as being in an established artistic genre (painting), as being the product of artistic intention, perhaps as being beautiful. There is no evident way that an object lacking all of the criteria could be a work of art; and even if a plausible counterexample could be produced, the friend of the cluster account could respond by adding what-

ever seems the relevant criterion to the cluster—that is, she can respond by modifying the content of the account, rather than its form. Hence there is reason to think that the listed criteria, or some extension of them, are disjunctively necessary for an object to be an artwork—that is, that the third condition for the application of the cluster account to art is true. Far from undermining the cluster account, this objection to the second condition actually provides the basis for considerations favoring the third condition.

A more pressing objection is that some of the criteria really are necessary. Many of the examples given were drawn from modernist art, or from early art. But many lay people object to counting the more hyperventilating modernist efforts as art, and some anthropologists reject talk of the products of the societies they study as art. Some philosophers, such as Beardsley and Hanfling, have similar objections or doubts about counting conceptual works as art.¹⁵ If these kinds of examples were disallowed, several of the criteria would be converted into necessary conditions, and we would be striding confidently toward a definition of art.

This objection is interesting, since it throws into relief the extent to which developments in the twentieth century have rendered a cluster account of art plausible: the acceptance of anthropological objects as works of art, and the wide variety of art-making practices in the twentieth century have created an explosion of diversity in art objects that glaringly illuminates the problematic status of definitions. However, modernist and "primitive" examples are not needed to show that the conditions are not necessary, as can be seen by reconsidering those criteria where such examples alone were given. So, (1) an ugly nineteenth-century painting may still be a work of art, though likely not a very good one; (2) much of architecture and music is not concerned with the expression of emotion; (7) the lack of an individual point of view is evident in much of the great mass of derivative art that languishes in museum basements and some of that which glowers on their walls; (8) consider the possibility of a fluke masterpiece, that is, a work of great value produced by an artist of little skill, who happened to strike it lucky; and (10) an artist might do some practice sketches, in order to keep up his skills or record a view, with no intention to make art, but they may be of sufficient merit for us to count them as art;¹⁶ or consider early pioneers of a new medium, who may not intend to produce art, but merely think of their work as technical experiment or entertainment, but who produce work of sufficient merit that we judge it art (Georges Méliès's work in cinema seems to be of this kind).

There are also other reasons to think that a criterial approach was needed well before this century to capture the notion of art. In a classic article Paul Kristeller argued that the notion of the fine arts, covering the arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry, and music, coalesced only

in the early part of the eighteenth century, receiving its first unequivocal statement by Charles Batteux in 1746.¹⁷ What before had been regarded as very diverse kinds of art were now separated off from the other arts and grouped together as the fine arts. But while Batteux's grouping was widely accepted, it was not at all obvious what all these different objects had in common that made them art. Certainly, Batteux's test of the imitation of beautiful nature is inadequate, signally failing to cover much of music and architecture. And it should be evident that appeal to beauty on its own can not differentiate the fine arts from the others, since there are beautiful craft products. Appeal to their function of giving pleasure and not being useful won't do either, since the arts have many uses (for instruction, for ethical improvement, for conveying a sense of dignity and civilization, for swelling national pride, for helping people to work in time together, simply for living in, and so on). The cluster account can explain this state of affairs easily: different arts were grouped together as fine arts on the grounds of several overlapping considerations, rather than by one principle which could be formulated in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Hence it came to seem obvious to most that the fine arts belonged together, although it was mysterious what grounded this commonalty. The history of the concept of art after this period, with its various inflections in the hands of the Romantic movement and later theorists, deposited more conceptual residues, further extending the criteria for counting something as art.¹⁸

Finally, does the first condition apply—is the instantiation of fewer than all the listed criteria by an object sufficient for it to be a work of art, that is, is obtaining the members of a proper subset of the complete set of properties sufficient for an object to be art? Certainly, it is not true that the obtaining of any subset of the complete set is sufficient: a philosophy paper may be intellectually challenging, have a complex and coherent form, a complex meaning, and be original, but it is not (sadly) thereby a work of art. But the cluster account does not claim that the obtaining of simply any subset is sufficient for something to be art. Yet there are several subsets that are sufficient, as should be made evident by considering objects that lack only one of the criteria mentioned. To take just one example, a painting which lacked a complex meaning, being a simple celebration of a country scene, but which was the product of an artistic intention, was graceful and elegant, and possessed the other criteria mentioned, would be a solid example of a work of art. There are even plausible examples of sufficient subsets which lack several criteria. Consider again ancient Egyptian art: it lacked a concern with individuality and originality, was not the product of an artistic intention in the modern sense of "artistic," nor was it intellectually challenging (that would have been political or religious subversion), but we count it as art because of its great beauty, its use of forms that are like our artistic

forms (painting, sculpture, architecture, etc.), its considerable expressive force, complex and coherent form, complex meaning, and the great degree of skill involved. And, on reflection, the obtaining of these last-mentioned six criteria seems sufficient for making an object art. If we came across objects which had these six properties on some alien planet, it would be hard to see why one should deny that we had discovered that the aliens had art. But suppose that we did find a case where the obtaining of the criteria was insufficient to make something art; then we could again change the content of the account, rather than abandon it: we could add to our present criteria the criteria which were sufficient to make the object art. The expanded set would still have a subset lacking at least four criteria, a subset which would be sufficient to make something art. (Note that challenging the content of the account [the particular criteria used] need not show that the form of the account [the appeal to criteria per se] is incorrect.)

An important part of showing adequacy to linguistic intuition is showing that a proposed account of a concept can avoid the problems to which its rivals succumb. The cluster account easily sidesteps pitfalls into which functional, institutional, and historical definitions stagger and stumble. To simplify greatly, a leading problem with functionalist definitions is that the functions of art are of too great a variety and too open-ended to be captured by a definition. Functionalists have generally responded by seeking to identify one master function, normally in terms of the provision of aesthetic experience, pleasure, or interest.¹⁹ But these terms have themselves proved notoriously resistant to definition, and however much one weakens their content, it will not cover Duchamp's readymades. The cluster account, in contrast, actually stresses the plurality of factors that make something art, so is unembarrassed by the variety of art's functions. Institutional definitions of art hold (roughly) that what makes something art is its having its status as art conferred on it by some member of the artworld, a concrete social institution.²⁰ Besides the problem of whether there really is such an institution with appropriate powers, such definitions face a crippling dilemma: if representatives of the artworld have good reasons for conferring art status on some object, then it is whatever grounds those reasons— notably, the object's having certain properties— that justifies the claims of the object to be art, and hence the institutional conferring of status drops out as irrelevant. Or, alternatively, if representatives of the artworld have no good reasons for conferring the status on the object, then we have no good reason to recognize this conferral, in which case their conferral powers are also irrelevant.²¹ The cluster account avoids these problems by avoiding use of the notion of an artworld institution, and also by citing criteria giving grounds for the object's being art. Historical definitions, again very roughly, define art objects in terms of some art-historical relation to

some epistemically privileged art objects. They thus are structurally similar to resemblance-to-paradigm accounts, in having to account for how we identify the epistemically privileged art objects, and thus are subject to similar challenges. More pressingly, their account of an art-historical relation is insufficiently projectable: there could be art objects which are recognizable as such, but which stand in no art-historically significant relation at all to any of our art. On a distant planet we could dig up objects which looked very much like our art and had similar functions, but which were produced by a long-dead civilization that never interacted with our own. Depending on how the art-historical relation is specified, historical definitions have either to count them not as art, or to hold that the aliens could not know that they were making art.²² The cluster account allows us to count such objects as art, since it does not appeal to the notion of an art-historically significant relation. (And even if it did, since such a relation would be just one criterion, we could still count the alien objects as art.) Hence the cluster account avoids with ease the problems that the current leading candidates for definitions encounter.

Finally, it is worth noting one further support for the linguistic adequacy of the account: the cluster account explains why some activities (such as cookery) seem to lie somewhere near the borders of art without being clearly art, since they share several properties of art (being the exercise of individual creativity, having a capacity to give sensuous pleasure), while also lacking other relevant criteria (since they have difficulty in expressing emotion and conveying complex meanings, and are not generally the product of an artistic intention). It is a signal advantage of the cluster account over the more straightforward definitions of art that it can preserve the hardness of such cases, and allow us to explain what it is that makes them hard; such cases can be shown to be genuinely borderline and indeterminate.

NORMATIVE ADEQUACY

The second condition for adequacy is the normative dimension. The appeal to linguistic intuition has already involved reflective equilibrium, testing principles against intuitions, and rejecting those intuitions possessed by some people that modernist and "primitive" art are not really art. Such rejections, if they are not to be question-begging, must be grounded, as we saw, on an adequate theory of error.

As noted already, one role of a theory of error is to explain why rival definitions are attractive. The cluster account can explain very simply why many definitions of art have enjoyed their appeal: they fasten onto a par-

ticular criterion and inflate it into a necessary and sufficient condition. Expressivist definitions treat the criterion of the expression of emotion in this manner; formalist definitions so treat the criterion of complex and coherent form; functionalist definitions that appeal to aesthetic experience draw upon the first criterion. More indirectly, the cluster account can explain the appeal of the institutional and historical definitions as arising out of a perception of the inadequacy of previous attempted definitions, and trying to make room for the greater variety of factors that the cluster account directly acknowledges.

I noted earlier that there is a fair amount of disagreement over what things are art: the claims of "primitive" art, of conceptual art, and of popular music, for instance, are disputed. The cluster account can give a simple explanation of this fact of disagreement: at least one side in the dispute is misapplying the concept of art by converting criteria into necessary conditions. (Compare someone denying that *solitaire* is a game—to use Wittgenstein's original example—because all games involve at least two participants: here what is perhaps a criterion for gamehood is incorrectly converted into a necessary condition.) The cluster account can also explain the particular nature of the disagreements in each case. Because there is a plurality of criteria, conversion of different criteria into necessary condition yields conflicting judgments about what objects are artworks. Those who deny the claim of readymades or found objects to be art may claim as a necessary condition the use of great skill, or the obtaining of significant aesthetic properties. Those who deny that "primitive" art is art may claim the necessity of the intentionality criterion, noting that tribal cultures lack the concept of art. Those who deny that rock or dance music is art may also stress intentionality as a necessary condition (many of these objects are meant simply as disposable accompaniments to dancing), or formal complexity and coherence. In all three cases, supporters of the arthood of these objects deny that the features mentioned are individually necessary conditions, and can hold them to be merely criterial. Thus the cluster account can explain both the existence and the structure of disagreements in such cases. Perhaps sufficiently complex and open-ended definitions of art, such as historical ones, may also be able to explain these disagreements, but they would have to do so in more indirect ways, such as by appealing to different ways in which to understand a narrative thread in the history of art. But in any case, the cluster account passes this test.

Besides explaining why the different sides disagree, an adequate theory of error must be able to show that at least one of the sides is wrong (that is, it has to be a theory of *error*, not merely of disagreement). Yet it may be thought that a cluster account cannot possess this normative dimension:

for in countenancing a plurality of criteria, must it not render each side to the dispute unassailable, able to rest its judgments on some of the criteria in the set?

The cluster theory does, however, have adequate normative bite.²³ The opponents of conceptual art, “primitive” art, and popular music, as we saw, hold that the relevant criteria are really necessary conditions. This assumption can be challenged by appeal to other, less contentious examples. To take some of the examples given earlier, those who insist on the necessity of the skill criterion can be challenged by the case of the fluke masterpiece, those who support intentionality as a necessary condition can be challenged by consideration of the artistic status of an artist’s practice sketches, of the case of Méliès, and so forth. Thus the cluster account has the resources to argue that in certain cases one side in disputes about art is in error.

SOME OBJECTIONS

First, any account that draws on Wittgenstein’s and Searle’s cluster account of the sense of proper names faces an obvious worry: since Kripke is widely regarded as having demolished these accounts, do the same arguments undermine a cluster theory when applied to art?²⁴

The answer is a firm negative. “Art” is not a proper name, nor does it name a natural kind (indeed art may be the preeminent example of something that is *not* a natural kind). So Kripke’s arguments about proper names and natural kinds do not directly apply. Nor can analogues of his arguments be applied successfully to art. Thus, it is true that Aristotle might not have been the teacher of Plato, nor have been born in Stagira, nor have had any of the other identifying characteristics which a cluster account of the sense of his name might draw on. And it is also true that gold might not have been yellow, and so forth. But we have already seen that it isn’t clearly imaginable that an object could lack all the criteria of art mentioned above and still be art; and as also noted, if some plausible counterexample might be made out, the cluster account could respond simply by augmenting the criteria.

Second, there are two senses in which one can talk of art: the evaluative and classificatory senses. Distinguish these senses, and it seems that the sense of “art” we have been considering must be the classificatory sense, since some of the examples used against the claim that “art” can be defined are instances of bad art (e.g., the ugly Victorian painting). As used in the evaluative sense, “art” is a term of commendation, so in this sense all art is good. Perhaps defining “art” in the classificatory sense is hopeless: but for all that has been shown so far, defining “art” in the evaluative sense isn’t.

However, the assumption that there are two senses of “art” is badly

grounded. Consider the notion of health: someone may be in good or bad health, just as art may be good or bad, but "health" is still an evaluative concept. So the mere fact that we can call some art good, and some bad, does not show that there is a distinct, classificatory sense of "art." We can thus hold that the only notion of "art" is an evaluative one. The cluster theory is consistent with this, since the cluster of properties relevant to establishing something as art includes evaluative properties, such as being beautiful, and being the exercise of creative imagination. For instance, an artwork can be bad, but still be art, since it possesses the other criteria relevant to establishing whether it is an artwork. But the notion of art is evaluative, since the question of whether these good-making features are possessed is always relevant to the question of whether something is art. So the cluster theory, far from being challenged on this point, helps to free us from the illusion that there are two distinct senses of "art."

Third, it may be held that the cluster account is vacuous. For I have said that if objections are advanced to the particular criteria put forward, then the cluster account has the option of substituting others in their place to render it more adequate to intuition. But if this is so, then there are no possible counterexamples to the account, so it is empty of content.²⁵

This is not so. There are possible counterexamples to cluster accounts: they are successful definitions of art. By giving a set of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for something to be art, one could show that the cluster account is mistaken: if successful, institutional, historical, or functionalist definitions are counterexamples to the cluster account. So the cluster account is not vacuous. Further, the point of the earlier remarks about the flexibility of the cluster account was to distinguish between the form of the account, and the particular distinct contents it may possess. The form is given by the existence of criteria for a concept, construed in the way laid out in the second paragraph of the first section. The content proposed involved ten particular criteria: the important point is that rejecting this particular account of content need not undermine the correctness of the form of the cluster account. Of course, I have also suggested that these ten criteria are correct, and in so doing I have made a further substantive claim about content, as well as a substantive point about form.

Finally, it may be objected that the cluster account is in fact a definition. Not all definitions are given in terms of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions: there are disjunctive definitions too. For instance, Robert Stecker has given a historical functionalist account of art that involves disjunctive conditions, and he calls this account a definition.²⁶ This being so, it may seem that at best I am sailing under false colors, having in

fact given a definition while claiming I am not, or at worst that the entire cluster account is based on a contradiction, since it holds that one cannot define art, even though it itself is a definition of art.

What is at issue here is partly merely a verbal dispute. If one wants to call disjunctive accounts, as well as conjunctive accounts, “definitions,” then there is perhaps no great point in insisting that only the latter are really definitions. The substantive point for which I have argued here would, however, be left untouched by such a concession: the substantive point is that one cannot give a definition of art in terms of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions, and one must instead use a disjunctive account of the form specified (whether or not one decides to call this cluster account a definition). Thus one could recast the main contentions of the chapter without settling the dispute about what is correctly called a definition, and certainly there is no contradiction involved in holding that conjunctive accounts of art are inadequate and only cluster accounts are successful.

However, in a somewhat less concessive spirit let me add that a conjunctive account seems to be what philosophers generally have in mind when they are after a definition (think for instance of the dispute about the third conjunct required to define “knowledge” that dominated epistemology in the immediate aftermath of Gettier’s paper). And further, as the number of disjuncts required in a cluster account increases, the plausibility of thinking of the account as a definition decreases. The general discussion in the third section, and particularly the examples sketched or suggested of sufficient conditions involving fewer than all the criteria, give reasons to think that an adequate cluster account of art will be highly disjunctive. So the intuitive pull of claiming that the result is a definition is it seems to me weak. Hence even on the largely verbal point, there is reason to think that the cluster account is not aptly classified as a definition.

CONCLUSION: HEURISTIC UTILITY

What I have attempted to show here is not that art is beyond all doubt a cluster concept, but rather that by distinguishing the cluster account from the resemblance-to-paradigm account one can sidestep the established objections to Weitz’s position, and also that the cluster account is adequate to our linguistic intuitions, subject to some degree of normative critique. Since the cluster account can cope with some central counterexamples to the currently most influential definitions of art, it is a promising characterization of art.

Since all claims that one cannot define “art” invariably produce a flurry of would-be definitions in response,²⁷ it would be well to close by pointing out the attractions a cluster account possesses as a guide for philosophical

aesthetics. In other words, we need briefly to consider the question of heuristic utility to round out the defense of the cluster account.

Much of the best work in aesthetics has not been concerned with the question of definition, but has attempted to understand the diverse capacities that art possesses: we have several important studies of representation, of expression, of symbolic systems, for instance.²⁸ Representational, expressive, and symbolic capacities are possessed not just by artworks, but by language, by bodily gestures, and by mental states. Thus a great deal of the best work in aesthetics has been concerned not with what uniquely specifies art, but with exploring what art has in common with other human domains and with examining the connections between aesthetics and the philosophies of mind, action, and language. The cluster theory both explains why this approach should be fruitful, and also fosters it, for what makes something an artwork is a matter of its possessing a range of properties that are shared with other human domains. The theory also naturally fosters greater attention to the diversity of properties that go toward making something an artwork, and so renders plausible a view of interpretation as comprising a diverse set of activities, concerned with ascribing a wide variety of properties to objects, where these properties may have different criteria of ascription. I think on independent grounds that such a patchwork theory of interpretation is correct, and the cluster account here fits smoothly with that theory of interpretation.²⁹ And it also sits naturally with a view of the value of art as consisting in a set of diverse values, rather than one single kind of excellence, a view in favor of which there is also much to be said.

The cluster account of art, then, encourages aestheticians to examine connections between philosophical aesthetics and other branches of philosophy, and at the same time justifies a greater sensitivity to the diversity of art forms and artistically relevant properties. Both of these research programs for aesthetics are independently attractive and promising; the cluster theory explains why this should be so, and also justifies the view that both are likely to continue to be fruitful.

The failure to give a definition of "art" is indeed a failure for that myopic view of analytic philosophy which takes it to be concerned largely with the giving of definitions, in the sense of giving individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for the application of concepts. But the contrasting view of analytic philosophy that sees it as an attempt at high-level theorizing is not called into question by that failure, and the cluster theory is an example of how analytic philosophy of art can still be fruitful, even when it forswears the pursuit of definitions. If the cluster account offered here is correct, the project of definition that has been a central concern of recent philosophical aesthetics is doomed to failure. And that project has been pursued, even though an attractive alternative to it has been available

since the early 1950s, an alternative whose power was overlooked because of a failure to distinguish between two distinct forms it could take. Once we distinguish those forms, we can see the true power of the cluster view. In the early 1950s the philosophical fly was given its chance to get out of the fly bottle, but didn't take it. Maybe this time it will.³⁰

NOTES

1. Functionalist definitions include: Monroe Beardsley, "Redefining Art" in his *The Aesthetic Point of View: Selected Essays*, ed. Michael J. Wreen and Donald M. Callen (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982); M. W. Rowe, "The Definition of 'Art,'" *Philosophical Quarterly* 41 (1991): 271–86; and Oswald Hanfling, "Art, Artifact and Function," *Philosophical Investigations* 18 (1995): 31–48. Institutional definitions include: George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974); and T. J. Diffey, "The Republic of Art" in his *The Republic of Art and Other Essays* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991). Historical definitions include: Jerrold Levinson, "Defining Art Historically" in his *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990); and James Carney, "The Style Theory of Art," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1991): 272–89. An example of a hybrid theory is the historical functionalism defended in Robert Stecker, *Artworks: Definition, Meaning, Value* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), part 1.

2. Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," in *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, ed. Joseph Margolis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); Paul Ziff, "The Task of Defining a Work of Art," *Philosophical Review* 62 (1953): 58–78; and W. E. Kennick, "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?" *Mind* 67 (1958): 317–34.

3. The exceptions include, for the case of music, Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), chap. 4; and for art in general, Noël Carroll, "Historical Narratives and the Philosophy of Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 (1993): 313–26. Goehr holds that "musical work" is an "open" concept, i.e., not susceptible to definition in the sense specified above, and Carroll holds the same for "artwork."

4. Carroll for instance claims that it "was subjected to a number of decisive criticisms." "Historical Narratives," 315.

5. For a useful discussion of the standard criticisms, see Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), chap. 1.

6. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), part 1, 79; and John Searle, "Proper Names," in P. F. Strawson, ed., *Philosophical Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

7. "Criterion" has acquired several additional, vaguely specified, and perhaps inconsistent meanings, and worries about these are not relevant to the cluster ac-

count. For an attempt to sort out some of the vagueness in the idea of a criterion as used by philosophers in other contexts, see William G. Lycan, "Noninductive Evidence: Recent Work on Wittgenstein's 'Criteria,'" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (1971): 109–25.

8. Weitz, "Role of Theory," seems largely to have the resemblance-to-paradigm approach in mind on p. 149, and the cluster approach in mind on pp. 150–51. The main thrust of Weitz's position seems to be toward the latter, and if this is correct, then the standard attacks on him are based on a misconstrual. Wittgenstein also seems largely to support the cluster construal of family resemblance. Note that the resemblance-to-paradigm view if further worked out collapses into the cluster view, for if we are asked to say *in what respect* something resembles the paradigm, then we have to refer to a general property, and when we do so, there is no further need to refer to the paradigm.

9. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, part 1, 66.

10. Note that the concept of the aesthetic appealed to here is a narrow one: roughly, beauty and its subspecies.

11. For instance, subjectivist definitions of color (e.g., necessarily, something is red iff it looks red to normal observers under normal conditions) are circular but informative, provided one can specify the conditions and observers other than simply as those under which or to whom red things look red.

12. Compare Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981), 175f.; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Philosophy of Art after Analysis and Romanticism," section 5, in *Analytic Aesthetics*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); and Noël Carroll, "Art, Practice, and Narrative," *Monist* 71 (1988): 140–56, at section 2. Note that a practice should not be characterized as an *established* kind of activity, as MacIntyre defines it, since then the first artworks cannot be counted as artworks, for they are not part of a practice that is established at that point.

13. The contingency claim seems to be held by Wolterstorff ("Philosophy of Art," 52), but both Carroll and MacIntyre seem to think that being a part of a cultural practice is a necessary condition for an action to be an art-action.

14. Note that "product" here has to be construed in a broader sense than normal not just to include an entity that can logically survive the termination of the actions that originate or alter it (artifacts and selected objects), but also to cover the totality of those actions themselves (the case of performances). "Producing" has also to be construed in a similarly broad fashion.

15. See Beardsley, "Redefining Art," 313, for his doubts about some conceptual art; Hanfling, "Art, Artifact and Function," 45, denies that "'way out' objects and performances" are art. He correctly notes that many people do not recognize such objects as art—but there again, of course, many people do.

16. There are similar real-life cases: the oil sketches of Neapolitan buildings made in the 1780s by the Welsh painter Thomas Jones appear not to have been considered by either the artist or his audience as artworks, but in the last forty years the sketches have been hailed as some of the most original artworks of the late eighteenth century.

17. Paul O. Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts," *Journal of the History of*

Ideas 12 (1951): 496–527, and 13 (1952): 17–46. For recent support for the thesis, see Paul Mattick, Jr., ed. *Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics and the Reconstruction of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), especially the introduction.

18. The concept of art has therefore changed over its history; but note this does not commit us to a historical definition of art, since the task is to characterize the concept as it is *now*.

19. See in particular Beardsley, “Redefining Art.”

20. See Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic*.

21. Compare Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 14–16.

22. See Gregory Currie, “Aliens, Too,” *Analysis* 53 (1993): 116–18.

23. It is not in general true that pluralistic theories are normatively impotent: for an argument showing that there is adequate room for normative improvement in the case of pluralistic moral theories, see my “Moral Pluralism,” *Philosophical Papers* 22 (1993): 17–40, and “Rag Bags, Disputes and Moral Pluralism,” *Utilitas* 11 (1999): 37–48.

24. Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), lecture 1.

25. The objection is due to Crispin Sartwell.

26. Stecker, *Artworks*, part 1. At pp. 24–25, n. 10, Stecker says that, given what I mean by a cluster account, he has no objection to the classification of his own view as such an account.

27. This was the result of Weitz’s attack, as noted by Davies, *Definitions of Art*, 9.

28. For instance, Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), and Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), are studies of the nature of representation, but their results are not limited to artistic representation.

29. For a working-out of such a view of interpretation, see my “Interpreting the Arts: The Patchwork Theory,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 (1993): 597–609, and “Metaphor and the Understanding of Art,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 97 (1997), 223–41.

30. A shorter version of this chapter was delivered to the national American Society for Aesthetics conference in 1995. I am grateful to the participants at the session, and in particular to my commentator, Crispin Sartwell, for their comments. The chapter has also benefited greatly from comments by Oswald Hanfling, Alex Neill, and Robert Stecker.