

**EXAMINING A  
*COMMUNITIES OF RESPONSE*  
DEFINITION OF ART  
AND  
ESTABLISHING A RELEVANT PEDAGOGY**

by

Michael Saul  
B.Ed., Simon Fraser University, 1987

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## APPROVAL

**NAME** Michael Barry Saul  
**DEGREE** Master of Arts  
**TITLE** **Examining a *Communities of Response* Definition of Art and Establishing a Relevant Pedagogy**

### EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

**Chair** Lee Southern

---

Stuart Richmond, Professor  
Senior Supervisor

Geoff Madoc-Jones, Assistant Professor  
Member

---

Sharon Bailin, Professor, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser  
University  
Examiner

**Date** February 20, 2004

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Author:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

Mr. Michael Barry Saul

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name)

February 20, 2004

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## ABSTRACT

Art is often seen in Western aesthetic philosophical thought as fulfilling two very distinct yet related functions: the search for self, and as a means of communication that brings people together in community. A *communities of response* model of art links these ideas and is developed in the thesis. Much as we use language, we create or make works of art in a process of self-actualization, interacting with others in presenting or responding to art in a community-building exercise. An anthropological study of art distinguishes these functions served by art in different societies and times by providing evidence that art is a selected behaviour evolutionally, and that it is a universal activity. Arts' relationship with culture, play, ritual and communication is explored in the thesis. Other means of defining art, such as procedural, historical and institutional approaches are analysed and rejected, although the communities of response model integrates aspects of all of these. The relationship between aesthetic response and art is examined, and the conclusion drawn is that aesthetic response is a vital component of many works of art, but is not a necessary component of art. The practice of art education is discussed and today's classrooms are found strongly to reflect a *communities of response* model that supports art making and students' responses to art. Today's fragmented curriculum is discussed, and the more integrated holistic approach to art education practised traditionally by primary teachers is advocated.

## **DEDICATION**

This work owes its existence to the tremendous support I've received from my family. I dedicate it to my wife Megan and my daughters Catherine and Elisabeth.

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People often say that aesthetics is a branch of psychology. The idea is that once we are more advanced, everything – all the mysteries of Art – will be understood by psychological experiments. Exceedingly stupid as the idea is, this is roughly it. (Wittgenstein, Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, p. 17)

## INTRODUCTION

Why do we teach art? It's a question that has emerged frequently in classes during my last several years completing graduate work. It leads inevitably, for me, to far more personal questions. Why do *I* teach art? Why have I spent such vast amounts of time and energy, over the last number of years, advocating for the fine arts in my schools and school district and following graduate studies in the matter?

I graduated from Simon Fraser University in the fall of 1986 with my Bachelor of Education degree, and was one of those lucky few who fell right into a full-time position in a nearby school district teaching at the intermediate (grades six and seven) level. My degree was a general one, as I finished with minors in English, History and Education. I did not, during my initial degree take any fine arts courses with the exception of a 'History of Canadian Art' course through the history department.

During my first year of teaching in Maple Ridge, as a new teacher and as a member of a small-school staff under temporary contract, I felt some pressure to take on a share of extra-curricular duties, and so I began coaching basketball and volleyball teams. These were not onerous tasks for me, but they certainly didn't fire up my imagination and I was never particularly motivated to excel in the field of coaching.

Some time during my first summer break (1987) I decided, in consultation with my mother and sister, to mount a musical production as my extra-curricular activity during the next school year, and we chose Irving Berlin's "Annie Get Your Gun". Since that time, there has only been one school year where I have not directed a full-scale spring musical production, and I must say that the year in which there was no musical was the most disappointing and unmemorable year of my career.

I have often wondered why I seemed to fall randomly into the completely absorbing hobby of directing musical theatre for children. During reflections I have done for several courses within my masters program I have come to realize it wasn't that random a choice at all. Some of my best memories and most satisfying moments of childhood came through involvement in a community theatre production at the age of ten and work that I did in drama classes at the junior high school level.

In the course of directing fourteen musicals I have learned so much that I can scarcely imagine how I began. From flicking built in spotlights and fluorescents on an old gymnasium's proscenium stage on and off I have learned to use dimmer packs, control panels and many different types of theatrical lighting. Unenthusiastic about the idea of leaving all costuming decisions to the volunteer parents I have learned how to sew

and some of the tricks of stage costuming. I've played with sound boards, different types of microphones from handheld to wireless UHF and VHF and other complex sound components. I've built two storey sets with multiple stairways in elementary school gymnasiums and created canvas scrims that were the size of a gym wall.

Of course anyone who has ever been involved with productions will know that my consistent use of the first-person voice in the preceding paragraph is completely ridiculous. I haven't done any of these things alone. The mounting of a dramatic production is a team effort of immense complexity. The old adage that 'there are no small roles' is immediately apparent to anyone involved in such productions, and it applies to members of the cast as well as the vast team of volunteers who make everything that comes together in the production.

The letter to the editor of a local newspaper in Maple Ridge on the next page was written by a parent at my school in May 1995 (See full text in Appendix A). I was always impressed by the thoughts expressed, and have kept a copy around since. As I attempt to explain why I put such immense time and effort into the mounting of these productions I find that what I am looking for is nicely encapsulated in this piece of writing.

# Lessons learned on stage

Editor, *The News*:

On May 3, 4, 5 and 6, both my children at Fairview Elementary had the privilege of participating in the production of the musical *Oliver*, which was directed by an energetic teacher, Mike Saul.

Involvement in this production has been a fabulous learning experience for both my kids. They've made many friendships that come with a shared experience. They've learned the value of cooperation and teamwork in a way that classroom "cooperative learning" never has taught them, and never could. They have learned the value of commitment and hard work, and have experienced both the pain and the joy that it brings.

They've learned to take pointed criticism, and to rise above the hurt to accept responsibility and fix the situation. They have learned about setting goals, and about self-discipline, they now know that being tired is not the end of the world. They have both gained a tremendous amount of self-confidence.

They (and many other children) have learned that the school, and society, value other talents in addition to academic and athletic ability. Indeed, I've been very impressed with some of the "hidden talents" which have appeared. I'm quite certain that for some of these children, this experience will change their lives. All this, and they learned something about 18th century England too! What more could one ask from one production?

This has convinced me that there is far more to "education" than just the "three Rs." I sincerely hope that the school board continues to support this kind of project in the future.

Debra White  
Maple Ridge



BOAZ JOSEPH/News staff

Kenny Price and Katie Thomson in a scene from Fairview's production of *Oliver*.

Figure 1: Letter to the Editor, written by Debra White, appeared in The Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows News, May 1995. ©Copyright 1995, Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows News.

Debra White stressed aspects of involvement in a school production such as friendships, shared experiences, cooperation, teamwork, and self-confidence. To anyone who has ever been involved in mounting a production such thoughts are merely obvious. Ms. White was speaking of the children, but I have come to realize that it is for the exact same reasons that I direct these productions. I experience the same benefits, right down to the self-confidence building.

I have come to believe that teaching the fine arts isn't at all like teaching the other subject areas. Participating in the fine arts, as artist or audience, is likewise an experience that is unlike other activities in life. That working in a musical production is a social experience that contributes to community-building has long seemed obvious to me. I began to wonder whether this aspect of my experience in the fine arts was transferable to the other arts. Do painters in their studios experience some form of connection with community in what they do? Is it an important motivator in what they do? How about musicians, poets or photographers?

And yet, there is a complex multi-sided dimension to participating in the fine arts that seems to mirror the complex relationship that exists between ourselves and the communities in which we live. While I feel a deeper connection with community when I'm involved with productions, and make deeper connections with others than I otherwise would, I have also, through my experiences with art, explored and defined myself. I carried the review I received for my work in that theatre production as a ten year old for years. It was, to me, the first evidence that I was someone special. I could do great

things. My own experience seems to confirm Debra White's thoughts of finding hidden talents and students having experiences that will change their lives.

Charles Taylor, in Sources of the Self, notes that "There is a set of ideas and intuitions, still inadequately understood, which makes us admire the artist and creator more than any other civilization ever has; which convinces us that a life spent in artistic creation or performance is eminently worthwhile" (1989, p. 22). This is because, "artistic creation becomes the paradigm mode in which people can come to self-definition" in the modern world (1991, p. 62).

Taylor speaks about the powerful modern ideal of "being true to oneself" (1991, p. 15). This is the idea that we need to discover who we are, and that all of the previous scripts that we used to define ourselves in relation to community, historically, have been discarded (our place in relationship to God, the social order, etc.). Taylor names this search for self "authenticity" (1991, p. 16), giving credit for the term to Lionel Trilling. Taylor sees artistic creation, then, as being immensely important because he believes that it is through art more than any other avenue of human experience that we seek to find authenticity.

This in itself explains why art has moved, in the last few centuries, from its role of imitating nature to an ideal of creativity. Taylor explains that "If we become ourselves by expressing what we're about, and if what we become is by hypothesis original, not based on the pre-existing, then what we express is not an imitation of the pre-existing either, but a new creation" (1991, p. 62). In other words, as Taylor describes, "self-discovery requires *poiēsis*, making" (1991, p. 62).

Taylor explores, in Sources of the Self and The Malaise of Modernity, the history of our self-definition, and how the creative imagination has evolved to replace the falling away of other horizons of significance in our lives. He suggests that the creative imagination has virtually replaced religion in significance (Taylor, p. 422) as does Egan (1992, p. 23). It is, I believe, no coincidence that Taylor is able to trace this pre-eminence of the creative imagination in our lives to the expressive ideals of the Romantics. It is during this same time that our modern ideals of the 'fine arts' were formed.

And the arts make a fine vehicle for performing this function of self-discovery or making. As Richard Anderson notes in his intriguing cross-cultural study of arts, Calliope's Sisters, "the skills involved in the creation of art may be manual or conceptual; but in any case, to play a role in art, the skill must be differentially distributed. In essence, if everyone does it equally well (whatever 'it' may be), the activity is probably not considered to be art" (1990, p. 24). What interests me most, in this statement, is that the definition of doing something well, be it carving a piece of three-dimensional art, drawing a picture of a human face or creating a scarification pattern on a person's chest, is a cultural matter. Reading Anderson's book one is immediately impressed with the notion that what is aesthetically pleasing to a San person in South Africa is very different from what is regarded as beautiful by a Yoruba person in West Africa.

If it were possible to step outside of the mindset of a single or specific culture to examine art, what we considered to be good art versus what we considered to be poorly completed or bad art would probably be completely irrelevant, as what we regard as

beautiful is so culturally specific. Nevertheless, we could still state with conviction that in the making of art all individuals are unique, that each person brings a unique set of abilities and perspectives to the creation of what we call works of art. Even if we did ignore any criteria of what we might consider good or bad art, Anderson's idea that one of the aspects of art, namely 'artistic ability' is differentially distributed is valid. Further, this aspect of art helps to establish it as a prime tool for self-definition, as Taylor notes.

Here I need to discuss the idea of 'horizons of significance' introduced by Taylor, as it is a phrase I will use. Not to do so at this point would risk having the above idea of unique expression through art misinterpreted. The idea is not that everybody expresses herself artistically in different ways, and the important matter is this difference. Taylor argues against the idea that difference, choice or authentication for their own sake are valid ideals. In fact, such thoughts are a danger and anathema to our culture. As Taylor notes, "unless some options are more significant than others, the very idea of self-choice falls into triviality, and hence incoherence" (1991, p. 39).

Taylor speaks about how the things we do and the choices we make exist against the background of understanding and meaning we bring to our world. This whole backdrop, which is arguably our cultural construct, is called our "horizon" (1991, p. 37). Not all of the choices we make, or the ways we interact with our world are significant. Some of our choices in daily life are more important than others. It is a significant choice I make when I decide upon a spouse. It is far less significant whether I choose latté or mocha at the coffee bar. It is meaningless to argue, then, that we don't live our lives,



make our choices, communicate or adapt to our environment (thus creating culture) against intricate “horizons of significance” (1991, p. 39).

We use these horizons of significance, states Taylor, to frame our core ideas about who we are, to decide “what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose” (1989, p. 27). This is a powerful statement from one who, as already noted, has stated that artistic creation has become central to self-actualization in our culture. Some may be uneasy with the close association of ‘good’ and ‘art’, but Taylor has made the direct connection. Our horizons of significance name what we call the good or important, and art has risen to the task of helping to solve what is good.

Perhaps one clue as to why this may be the case is to be found in Taylor’s admission that “one is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it” (1989, p. 35). We can speak of a narcissistic self-actualized culture only to a certain extent. The ultimate truth of the matter is that, in so many ways, we can only find ourselves and our own way within a close-knit community of many others. Taylor notes,

This is the sense in which one cannot be a self on one’s own. I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of languages of self-understanding – and, of course, these classes may overlap (1989, p. 36).

Eagleton sees this overlapping of classes as leading to a social definition of the ideal of culture. He notes “cultivation is a matter of the harmonious, all-round development of the personality, but nobody can do this in isolation. Indeed, it is the dawning recognition

that they cannot which helps shift culture from its individual to its social meaning” (2000, p. 10).

We use, for instance, the game of language to begin exploring such matters.

Taylor notes:

Here a crucial feature of conversation is relevant, that in talking about something you and I make it an object for us together, that is, not just an object for me which happens also to be one for you, even if we add that I know that it’s an object for you, and you know, etc. The object is for us in a strong sense, which I have tried to describe elsewhere with the notion of ‘public’ or ‘common space’ (1989, p. 35).

Grayling speaks of Wittgenstein exploring this public or intersubjective aspect of language when he notes “language is woven into all human activities and behaviour, and accordingly our many different uses of it are given content and significance by our practical affairs, our work, our dealings with one another and with the world we inhabit – a language, in short, is part of the fabric of an inclusive ‘form of life’” (1996, p. 79).

The language game, then, that Wittgenstein considers is a complex intersubjective domain. In order for humans to communicate with one another we must arrive at mutual, comprehensible conclusions about the meanings of the statements made and the subtleties of other aspects of the communications such as body language or intonation. That we are ever successful in doing so is a testament to the fact that intersubjectivity is something other than subjective or non-rational. And if intersubjectivity lies at the heart of all of our communication systems, as can be argued, then this idea forms the core of a group of interrelated concepts such as culture, religion and art.

Stanley Cavell, in Must We Mean What We Say, explores the idea that subjective judgments are not rational. Speaking to the criticism that subjective judgments are not conclusive the way logical arguments are, or rational the way scientific arguments are, Cavell notes, “indeed they are not, and if they were there would be no such subject as art (or morality), and no such art as criticism. It does not follow, however, that such judgments are not conclusive and rational” (1969, p. 88).

What Cavell is alluding to is called “communities of response” by Stephen Mulhall (p. 28). Communities of response arise around matters of intersubjective agreement. In short, in all matters of intersubjective agreement, we seek freely to enter a community of people who agree with us in the judgment we make. Lyas notes that “These agreements need not be universal, can be changeable, can alter as our lives alter, can be affected by the lives we have had and will have. But that there are these agreements is all that underpins this language” (1997, p. 130). In this statement I believe Lyas is responding to the similarities that exist between the intersubjective agreements we arrive at concerning aesthetic encounters and language itself. Mulhall states,

It is this discovery which the structure of the practice of aesthetic debate makes possible; by committing myself to a set of procedures which do not guarantee agreement, I give myself the opportunity to explore the depth of the connection between my inner life and that of others, to assess the degree to which others inhabit my world-to reveal that in my subjectivity which is intersubjective (1994, pp. 28-29).

The set of procedures that Mulhall is referring to are, of course, the procedures we use to discuss and criticize aesthetic objects.

Art, in this construct, serves as a link between the 'I' and the 'we' in society. Art is used to self-define or self-actualize, then to link the self to community. The link occurs in a complex, multi-faceted manner. As Taylor noted above, we use our creative imagination to explore who we are. But we use language to do this, and the meaning of this language is arrived at in a complex intersubjective manner within the community in which we exist. We create or make, but then we examine and consider meaning and we do this all through the lens of culture, a lens which is built through our interaction with community. As Mulhall notes, "Aesthetic debate is thus a way of constructing or discovering community through the articulation and development of individuality; it shows a way in which community can be founded upon the fuller expression, rather than the complete repression, of individuality" (1994, p. 29).

Perhaps a brief description, here, of how a community of response comes to exist will suffice to demonstrate how this works. I can listen to a piece of music such as "I Dreamed a Dream" from Les Miserables and describe the music as being stirring or emotional, perhaps expressive of a state of mind that I have come to label 'melancholy'. This is a subjective statement, as there is probably nothing intrinsic to the music that could be labelled as melancholic. Perhaps it is the way the notes comprise a musical language, in our culture, that is expressive of this emotion. Perhaps someone from a very different culture, for example, China, would be unlikely to find it emotional. My initial response to this piece of music is certainly subjective.

It is also, though, already intersubjective. I did not invent this term, 'melancholy', and I don't believe that I am the only owner of this emotional state. I have come to learn

the word from others I have communicated with in the past, and I have learned to apply it to a certain state of mind which I have discovered through personal introspection. There is, at the heart of the matter, a common conception that we understand what this word signifies, and that it refers to a state of mind or emotion which is common.

Now another person could listen to the same piece of music, given above, and also find that it is melancholic. The two of us agree that it is expressive of an emotional state that is common to the two of us, which we call 'melancholy'. We can voice this agreement, write it down, and use our various senses in multiple ways to verify this agreement, just as I can use my senses to verify the presence of the pen in my hand or the keyboard under my fingers.

The two of us have formed a sort of community of response. We have entered freely into an association examining a work of art for meaning, and have found a point of agreement. The interesting thing about this intersubjective agreement is that it rarely ends on a simple matter of liking or not liking something. Perhaps we form a community of response agreeing that the music is melancholic. Then we begin analyzing it more thoroughly. I state that the singer's voice is largely responsible for the feeling I get from the song. The other person doesn't like the singer's work at all, and in fact believes that the song would be better if sung by another artist. They believe that it is the minor notes brought into play within a particular scale that evokes the emotion. We may form a

community of response appreciating the music, but not in agreement as to why it works as it does.<sup>1</sup>

There may in fact be little point of agreement at all. As we debate the fine points of another piece of music my friend finds it to be extremely incomprehensible, and I find it to be a brilliant piece of music. My friend says that the singer's voice is too jarring, and I find that this jarring effect is effective given the subject of the lyrics. In a sense, without agreement, we have entered into a community of response anyway. We are engaged in aesthetic criticism of the piece of music, which involves the tacit understanding between the two of us that, appreciated or not appreciated, it is a piece of music and a work of art.

And these communities of response seem to exist at the very heart of what we define as or call art. An artist paints a canvas in a studio on their own and hides it in the cupboard as they don't wish to let anyone else see it. Arguments about whether this is a work of art seem as strained as arguments over whether a tree falling in a forest with

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<sup>1</sup> In Culture and Value Wittgenstein seems to be similarly describing the central place of a community of response in interacting with art. "Understanding & explaining a musical phrase. – The simplest explanation is sometimes a gesture; another might be a dance step, or words describing a dance. – But isn't our understanding of the phrase an experience we have while hearing it? & what function, in that case, has the explanation? Are we supposed to think of *it* while we hear the music? Are we supposed to imagine the dance, or whatever it may be, as we listen? And supposing we do, - why should *that* be called hearing the music with understanding?? If seeing the dance is what matters, it would be better *that*, rather than the music, were performed. But that is all a misunderstanding.

I give someone an explanation, say to him: "It's as though..."; then he says "Yes now I understand it" or "Yes now I know how it is to be played". Above all he did not have to accept the explanation; it is not after all as though I had given him compelling reasons for comparing this passage with this & that. I did not e.g. explain to him that remarks made by the composer show this passage is supposed to represent this & that" (1998, p. 79e).

nobody to hear it makes a sound. The fact of the matter, linguistically, is that what we call art involves this 'we'. And, as noted, this act of the 'we' naming art is at once self-actualizing and a linking of the self to community. Maxine Greene notes,

Postmodern thinking does not conceive the human subject as either predetermined or finally defined. It thinks of persons in process, in pursuit of themselves and, it is hoped, of possibilities for themselves. Some people have begun to speak of bringing to bear limited resistance to the workings of power in local spaces, rather than trying to fight against it in huge arenas (1995, p. 41).

Mulhall points out the democratic ideal inherent in this when he notes "The fact that such a community of response and thought is not guaranteed shows something about the sort of community it is – one in which membership is freely willed, elicited rather than compelled from each individual" (1994, p. 29).

I don't make the claim, then, that art is the only way that we explore ourselves and link to our communities. Nor do any of the other authors I've discussed here. Taylor does note above, however, that art has risen, in its horizon of significance, to this task in modern western culture. This is because other means which people have traditionally used to explore self and link to community have lessened in their significance within our culture. This explains art's links with other modes of human experience such as religion, ritual and play. While art, in and of itself, has not always been the primary mode by which we engaged in this exploration and community building, I will argue that it has always been a significant mode. We may not always have called it 'art', but art was always there bringing us together. And it is an immensely complex behaviour. Cultures, technologies and people have changed dramatically over time. The modes of

communication that bind us together must be complex enough to adapt readily to these changes. This, more than anything else, explains why Wittgenstein was correct in noting that “the idea that once we are more advanced, everything – all the mysteries of Art – will be understood by psychological experiments” is an “exceedingly stupid” idea (1966, p. 17).

For this reason, a look at the anthropological study of art as behaviour in the next chapter will help to confirm the foundation of some of the ideas presented in this thesis.

As Anderson notes:

If we seek to understand ourselves, perhaps trying to bring to conscious formulation a vague and unconscious feeling of dissatisfaction, the study of anthropology becomes a reflexive endeavor, an effort to find secure moorings for our own social or personal cosmos. In short, the study of the Other can foster a deeper and more critical understanding of Self (1990, p. 199).

Put this way, looking at how art was used in our society in the past, and in other societies today, probably does not offer something like proof that its attributes remain unchanged, but it can certainly help us to better understand what art is by widening our perspective.

An anthropological study of art, however, does not mean that a concept of what Anderson calls “evolutionary aesthetics” (1990, p. 230) is implied. One does not



examine modern primitive<sup>2</sup> societies with the idea that they represent a snapshot of our own society in the distant past. Such an idea would not only be badly ethnocentric (implying that our culture represents some logical ‘advancement’ on the other) but would also be quite badly incorrect.

Rather, in the true nature of an attempted objective (scientific? philosophical?) inquiry anthropology is used to simply diversify the inquiry. We can examine the art we are most familiar with, the art produced today, and form an idea or theory about why we make art and what it does for us. We can delve into our own history to discover whether the idea holds throughout a historical overview. We can examine other cultures to see if the idea is yet disproved. We can probably, objectively, never prove that the theory is ‘truth’, but a lack of evidence to disprove the theory is taken as convincing.

Further, the anthropological evidence that names artmaking or engaging (viewing, discussing, participating) as a behaviour helps establish this idea that art fulfils a function, and can in part be defined functionally. There is another reason why using a functional definition for art avoids problems that often arise when more procedural, historical or intentional (see Chapter Three) definitions are used or accepted. Anderson points out “the hazards of attempting to use a closed definition of art cross-culturally,

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<sup>2</sup> I feel almost apologetic having to use this term to be adequately descriptive, but will quote Anderson’s excellent footnote on the term here. Anderson notes, “When contemporary cultural anthropologists use the term primitive to refer to small-scale societies, they only mean ones that (a) have a relatively small and sparse population, (b) rely upon a relatively simple technology that lacks metallurgy, ceramics, writing, and such, and (c) display a relatively low degree of economic specialization. The term is absolutely not meant to suggest that these societies or their members are backward, crude, or otherwise inferior to nonprimitive societies” (1990, p. 4).

especially if the proffered definitive trait is art's being non-utilitarian or prompting a qualitatively unique affective response in the percipient or person who perceives the art work" (1990, p. 5). If art is a purely Western phenomenon, then what we've done in other times, or what other cultures do today, or have done in the past is irrelevant to a working definition. If art is a world-wide or universal phenomenon, then we cannot discuss and define what art is if such definitions appear to be contradicted by the things that others make and that we or they would call art. If we decide that other cultures make art, anthropological study of these cultures and their art becomes invaluable to any assessment of a definition or concept of art.

In our eternal drive to create meaning, we have generated social structure, systems of myth and religion – and art. And, by all accounts, culture is a human imperative. To paraphrase the previously quoted remark by the Netsilik Eskimo, Orpingalik, culture is as necessary for us as our breath (Richard L. Anderson, *Calliope's Sisters*, p. 240).

## INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND SURVIVAL

Ellen Dissanayake offers three observations that suggest that art is a selected behaviour evolutionarily (Dissanayake, 1988, p. 6 and 1992, p. 33). The first of these attributes is the universal nature of art; peoples and cultures around the world and throughout time engage in multiple forms of artistic pursuit.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that it is a necessary and selected behaviour. Secondly, she points out that people put a great deal of time and effort into making and participating in art activities. Ethnologists believe that

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<sup>3</sup> Anderson, in *Calliope's Sisters*, notes “Anthropologists often claim that all societies have art, but this is generally presented as an article of faith, not a proven fact. Of course, sweeping generalizations of the sort, ‘All societies have X’ can only be conclusively substantiated by evidence that X exists in every single society, a task that, for art, lies far beyond our current capabilities. An easier, if less conclusive, alternative is to examine the least likely cases – cultures about which one might say that if any society is without art, it surely must be this one” (1990, p. 22) Anderson, in his book, goes on to examine the San culture, one which seems to fulfill the above criteria, and concludes that this society does indeed appear to have art. His careful conclusion (given his unwillingness to make the sweeping statement that all cultures have art) is that “We cannot claim to have shown that all humans inhabit the same conceptual world and experience existence in the same way. But we can conclude that the San are kindred spirits to us. They are people who view art in terms similar to our own, a folk whose imaginative and psychic worlds are much in tune with ours. I, for one, find this a reassuring conclusion” (1990, p. 33).

behaviours that consume such amounts of energy have a purpose. Thirdly, making and engaging in art gives pleasure. Dissanayake notes that “Nature does not generally leave advantageous behaviour to chance; instead, it makes many kinds of advantageous behaviour pleasurable” (1988, p. 6).

Of course, the idea that art is an important activity for humans would not generate much serious debate. The study of anthropology is inextricably bound with the study of human culture. Art, of course, plays an important role in defining culture and culture, in turn, can define art. What interests me, though, in the work of Dissanayake is the answer she arrives at as to ‘why’ we make art, which may help to explain why art and culture are so intertwined.

To describe art as being a selected behaviour evolutionarily is to describe art as being needed. Monroe Beardsley plays with the idea that art serves a human need. Dickie notes that “Beardsley speaks of needs rather than of a single need, so that he may have in mind that there is an aesthetic need plus one or more other needs which ‘it is the peculiar role of art to serve’” (1984, p. 85). Anderson also notes, in concluding his cross-cultural study of art, that the aesthetic systems of theories of a number of the cultures he studied “contain the premise that human well-being depends upon artistic activity” (1990, p. 232). This idea of art serving a basic need is one that is established in a number of cultural aesthetic ideals around the world, then.

If, as noted above, art defines culture and culture defines art we are left with a chicken and egg thesis. Which comes first? Beardsley notes that “there is a function that is essential to human culture, and that appears in some guise in any society that has a

culture, and that works of art fulfill, or at least aspire to purport to fulfill” (1976, p. 209).

Dickie wonders what such a function might be when he notes:

Finally, what does it mean to say that the envisaged needs are *basic*? Are they like the need for air, water, and food, i.e., necessary for life? Or are they like the need for social structure which is necessary for there to be a human culture? If the answer to this last question is in the affirmative, then perhaps we are back to the first thesis, namely, that art is essential for a society with a culture (1984, p. 86).

Many have noted that there is a communicative role of art, and perhaps art is a precursor to culture because of this role.

Communication between prehistoric humans was vital for survival. Compared to other prey in the environment we didn't possess the ability to run very quickly, fly away, or withstand fierce attack. The tools we possessed were the ability to reason and make more intricate tools from our environment, and an unprecedented ability to work cooperatively in groups to hunt and survive. “The foraging-hunting way of life of our hominid ancestors required not only resourceful, competitive individuals but also strongly bonded social groups that could work together with confidence and loyalty, convinced of the efficacy of their joint actions” (Dissanayake, 2000, p. 9).

This extremely strong sense of the group experienced by early people has been called *communitas*. Mansell notes that “Turner developed the notion of ‘communitas.’ This goes beyond the idea of community, which has connotations of specific territorial membership. Rather, the concept of *communitas* fits the sense of belonging with a group in unified participation, as opposed to existing socially side by side” (Mansell, p. 50).

Dissanayake, referring to *communitas* as the human act of self-transcendence, notes that

“it (communitas) would enable unquestioning adherence to the values of one’s society, thus promoting solidarity in communal enterprise” (1992, p. 133).

Dissanayake speaks of artmaking, linked to ritual, as ‘behaviour’. She is linking human engagement in art and the aesthetic to other evolutionary traits. Evolution is a long and complex process, taking millennia to change aspects of our species. We have only been discussing matters of the aesthetic for the last several hundred years. We have, however, been “making special” (1992, p. 42) as Dissanayake calls it, or creating art, as long as we’ve been walking upright. Our earliest evidence of humans comes in the form of ancient bone carvings or paintings on the walls of caverns.

It is outside the scope of this paper for me to write about how evolution, over time, changes the form of animals through the process of natural selection. The process is fairly well known anyway. It is interesting to note that evolutionary change can be a two-edged sword. Attributes that better aid the survival of a species are selected for and built onto in that species over millions of years. These attributes can become, through rapid environmental change, detrimental to the survival of the species. In discussing art as a behaviour programmed into us through just such a process, we will need to address whether it is still a beneficial behaviour.

A recent article in [aq magazine](#) detailed why diabetes has become a modern problem. Our pancreas, it seems, is adapted to a way of life we led several hundred years ago. Sharon Proctor notes that,

According to scientists we are built exactly like the Paleolithic hunter-gatherers who lived 100,000 years ago. Indeed, 99 percent of human

existence has involved being physically active and eating little food – and then only wild foods. In other words, our bodies aren't designed for a life of remote controls, video games, Internet, cars, greasy burgers, French fries, soft drinks, pasta, and other conveniences. Too much food and lack of exercise are major contributors to the modern epidemic of Type 2 diabetes (2003, p. 16).

We accept readily that it takes more than even a few thousand years to get our physical forms to adapt to the life we live now. We are less apt to accept that we have behaviours, programmed into us as surely as our pancreas is formed, that are adaptations to a life we no longer live. Part of our reluctance to admit to selected behaviour stems from a deep belief in personal responsibility and control as opposed to some claim of predestination. We require some agreement vis-à-vis self-control for a healthy, functioning society. In understanding how behaviours are selected, one need not harbour the fear that people will be acquitted en-masse in court over criminal infractions pleading that their behaviours were 'programmed in by evolution'. As Dissanayake notes, "a behaviour-like attachment, aggression, reproduction, play (and art, if it is to be regarded ethologically)-is *an inherited tendency to act in a certain way, given appropriate circumstances*" (Dissanayake, 1992, p. 37).

This is not quite as concrete or substantial, then, as the pancreas that we have thanks to our ancient wandering ways. What we have, behaviourally, is a fallback option, as it were. When confronted with danger my first, programmed option is to flee. I can always choose to ignore that primal impulse and commit to another course of action, and life is replete with stories of people who do so every day. In short, we possess a set of behaviours some of which are programmed into us to help us survive in an environment

in which we no longer live. Many of these behaviours continue to be beneficial to our survival today.

And yet the violence, greed and warfare we witness on a daily basis all attest to how some of our behaviours don't seem at all well adapted to urban life in the modern world. But even with changing environmental factors and lifestyles, many of our behaviours remain perfectly well adapted. The fact that I crave sugar and eat too much in a world where it has become readily available is a maladaptation. The fact that I seek to make connections with others in my community in order to form bonds of *communitas* is a more complex matter. It may be maladaptive in some aspects, and quite beneficial in others.

No doubt, when Turner and Dissanayake discuss the idea of *communitas*, the communities amongst which such bonds were shared were historically quite limited and small. The word 'Inuit', for example, means 'the people'. To the Inuit, historically, those who were members of their group were the people. Those from other First Nations groups to the south were not. Examples of such exclusionary thinking are common in the past, and sad to say, not entirely extinct today.

The formation of *communitas* was an important way of bonding a small group together and helping them to survive within the environment in which they were placed and against the other groups with whom they came into violent contact. Those groups which had a firm sense of this bond were far better equipped to survive in the world.



It could be easily argued that in today's world a strong but group-limited sense of *communitas* can be extremely maladaptive. One need look no further than the fragmentation of Yugoslavia over the past decades and the acts of genocide that occurred between the various ethnic groups to see how this is the case. Sadly, similar acts of interethnic conflict are not rare or hard to find. The continent of Africa is particularly disrupted today by such conflicts. A sense of *communitas* that allows us to see those outside our group as other than human and to seek to eliminate them for the good of our own kind in a world where the technology has dramatically increased our ability to kill is clearly maladaptive. The ultimate scenarios available to us in the age of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons all lead to our complete self-destruction as a species.

And yet there remains a more optimistic picture of the role of *communitas* in our society. Perhaps we are drawn, through our biological makeup, to seek community as a species, but it need not be of the exclusionary type addressed above. Many people today have come to accept the idea of a global village, and see all of humanity as falling within their community. Modern communication and transportation technologies have facilitated this movement. Indeed, the environmental movement links all life and the physical environment on the planet within a common framework of community. It makes much sense to expand on the notion of community when the AIDS crisis in Africa endangers world stability, or a breach of a nuclear power plant's reactor in the Ukraine causes Laplanders to lose their livelihood of reindeer herding for generations.

If *communitas* was particularly important to small groups, it was not built into us exclusively in order to survive in relation to other tribes of people. It is, instead, a

behaviour which helps us to survive in our environment. Our environment contains other groups, but more importantly is the entire ecological niche in which we live.

Communitas is not an automated, limited, push-button defensive mechanism. It is the mutual response of a community, a joining together of people to counter that in the environment which most imperils them individually and collectively.

When I contemplate some of the turns in world history through which I have lived, it is easy to point out the power of this large-scale communitas. The cold war, through to the 1980's, saw two world super powers facing off against each other with nuclear arsenals that could have reportedly destroyed the world many times over. I grew up in a generation that went to school each day wondering if someone somewhere was going to pull the trigger that ended it all. Many popular movies, songs and artworks played upon these fears. When I started university in the spring of 1983 one popular pop artist was selling prints of nuclear explosions decimating cities around the world on campus as a form of protest. A group of influential scientists published a yearly magazine with a cover adorned by a clock that indicated how close to 'nuclear midnight' the world had come, and that clock ticked down to 11:59 p.m. one year.

Around the world, against such an awesome and immediate threat, communitas linked millions of people in a powerful movement that knew no boundaries. Millions marched in cities around Europe and North America where such protests were part of the culture, but mass protests were also held in cities where the potential consequences of such behaviour were dire. Our world today has a fraction of the nuclear weapons left, and though diligence remains important to our well-being, we certainly turned a corner. I

would argue that a powerful world-wide community that was born out of the dire threat is responsible for the turn of events. The environmental movement, and the change of attitude that has come since I was in grade school, is equally dramatic in scope and cause.

As I've noted, Dissanayake links the behaviour of art with ritual. It is not mere coincidence that Taylor speaks, as mentioned in the introduction to this paper, about the ascension of art to the place of religion in modern society. Religion, ritual, play and art can be linked through the idea of *communitas*. Try as they might to battle the power of scientific objectivity and to 'prove' their belief system to others, the entire work of any theologian comes down to the intersubjective community of response called faith.

Ritual and art have been particularly connected historically. Dissanayake notes that:

In traditional and primitive societies, ritual ceremonies are often the chief occasions for exhibiting the objects and activities that we call art. Greek tragedy – to us a high form of dramatic art – was originally a ritual of cleansing and atonement: Athenian drama festivals were preceded by ritual sacrifices (Figs, 1976). The development of music in the West has been inseparable from Christian liturgy and from the fourth to the sixteenth century pictorial art was almost exclusively in the service of Christian worship (1988, p. 80).

Dissanayake's description of ritual, where "objects or words taken out of their everyday context may acquire a potency not ordinarily evident. Metaphorical and symbolic uses of words and objects are the essence of ritual" (1988, p. 84) approaches the definition of art created using a communities of response model that will be discussed in this paper. It is no wonder. Given that art has in many ways replaced religion in function, ritual (closely tied with religion) will bear similarities to art.

And consider the list of activities above. Certainly, all seem to involve a strong sense of *communitas*. Religion, ritual, play and art offer unique ways of drawing people together in a form of communication, common mood or shared behaviour that supersedes language and takes participants out of 'the normal' mode of daily operations. All are engaged in by people in all cultures for their own sake, usually without great extrinsic reward. All are activities explored by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) in his book *Flow* for these commonalities, with the purpose of discovering what these realms of human experience offer us to cause us to engage in them so willingly, commonly and with such fervent abandon.

Dissanayake notes that "It is important to understand that the notion of art as a behavior does not refer to a specific artistic activity or behavior like drawing or dancing...but to a *general behavioral complex* that underlies these specifics" (1992, p. 37). Dissanayake concludes that the core activity of art is something she will name "making special" (1992, p. 42). Making special is the creation of objects for special or extra-ordinary occasion or cause. It is important to note that what Dissanayake labels crucial is "the 'behavior' or activity...rather than, as other art theorists have done, the results: the things and activities themselves as 'works of art'" (1992, p. 51). This goes beyond what I wish to delineate as important. I believe Dewey would agree when I state that the behavioural complex is much more complex than the isolated act of making special; it encompasses the behaviour of making, the thing made and the communication with audience and between audience or community of response that results. This will become clearer in the next chapter.

In her book Art and Intimacy, Dissanayake shows that in terms of human evolution the ideas of love or intimacy and the arts are related. Emotional attachment originates through “rhythms and modes that are jointly created and sustained by mothers and their infants in ritualized, evolved interactions. From these rudimentary and unlikely beginnings grow adult expressions of love, both sexual and generally affiliative, *and the arts*. That is to say, in their origins in ourselves and in our species, love and art are, I suggest, inherently related” (2000, p. xi). Dissanayake suggests that this is good reason to take the arts seriously, as they have evolved, or come to exist, “not for their own sake” (2000, p. xv), but to serve a need in human beings that continues to exist. For if art and intimacy are thusly related, to argue we no longer need art is to argue that we no longer need love or intimacy. This is not an argument that I will pursue further in this thesis.

If the selected behaviour is ‘making special’, as Dissanayake proposes, one is left to hypothesize what aspects of such behaviour may have provided those who inherited such traits with a competitive edge. Of course, it is impossible to do more than speculate on the matter, but it is frequently done. Dissanayake posits that “making special (as, say, embellishing, repeating, or performing a particular act with virtuosity) might well have originated as a demonstration of the wish or need to persuade others (and oneself) of the efficacy or desirability of what was being done...the fact of one’s taking pains convinces others and oneself that the activity is worth doing: it is reinforcing. When allied to life-serving activities-tool manufacture, weaponry, ceremony-elaboration (as reinforcement) would enhance survivorship” (1988, p. 104).

Again, the position is taken in relation to Dissanayake's limited system of making special. If the complex behaviour encompasses more than the act of making and includes object and audience activity, and the intercommunications between the three, then the behaviour would be better called 'art engaging' and it is much more directly related to a sense of *communitas* through a communities of response model.

Art engaging is behaviour, then, that we are predisposed to engage in. I agree with Dissanayake that the subroutine of 'making special' or making art is also an activity that is likewise a selected behaviour, but I think the evidence supports the point that participating in any aspect of art engaging, such as making, viewing or discussing fulfils the same need.

This ideal helps to explain many aspects of art's varied existence throughout human history. Art is commonly tied to communication; stories of hunts on the walls of caverns, stories of pharaohs' conquests on the walls of tombs and recorded faces of American presidents on the side of a mountain. If the need for people to form *communitas* and bond is as important as has been suggested, it makes sense that the systems to manifest this will be redundant. We will have multiple methods of coming together programmed into us. Little wonder that these methods can become so intertwined as to be indistinguishable. Thus is art often called a language, or a way of communicating that is extra linguistic, for language itself is a tool for *communitas* building.

When theorists such as those known as the Cambridge School of Anthropology<sup>4</sup>, including Sir James Frazer, Jane Harrison, and Francis M. Cornford suggested that what we know as drama originated as Athenian ritual they were perhaps confusing the issue for the same reason. Plenty of opposition to the theses of the Cambridge school was mounted. Ronald Vince (1984) points out that other theorists postulated that the various forms of Greek drama developed separately and were only later united in the Dionysian festivals. Other writers point to even more ancient forms of ‘drama’ that precede the ritual form. When we see religion as another means for humans to build *communitas*, as it certainly is, we can understand how religion and art have been so closely intertwined as to confuse those searching for roots to art or religion.

It is a simple matter to argue that engaging in art is an important, even vital human experience. The difficulty in evaluating why this is true is partially due to the changing and shifting definitions of art. It would be fair to state that there is in fact no widely accepted definition of what art is today. There certainly exist readily identifiable pieces of work that we consider to be ‘art’ that would, by general agreement, not have been considered to be ‘art’ a mere fifty years ago. The very word ‘art’ is a Western philosophical construct less than three hundred years old.

Dickie points to this disjunction between the early emergence of art and a term to describe it as he notes about the early emergence of art in our species:

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<sup>4</sup> One of the basic theses of the group was that ancient Greek (Athenian) drama developed originally from songs and hymns to Dionysius, thus had ritualistic origin. Ronald Vince notes the opposition to this thesis, pointing out alternate theories that various forms of Greek drama developed separately and were later united in the Dionysiac festivals. For this discussion about the Cambridge school, see Vince (1984).

Art may have emerged (and no doubt did emerge) in an evolutionary way out of the techniques originally associated with religious, magical, or other activities. In the beginning these techniques would have been no doubt minimal and their products (diagrams, chants, and the like) crude and in themselves uninteresting. With the passage of time the techniques would have become more polished and specialists have come to exist and their products would have come to have characteristics of some interest (to their creators and others) over and above the interest they had as elements in the religious or whatever other kind of activity in which they were embedded. At about this point it becomes meaningful to say that primitive art had begun to exist, although the people who had the art might not yet have had a word for its art (1984, p. 56).

The first thing that we must accept is that what we call art certainly predates the word. As Wittgenstein notes, “The origin & the primitive form of the language game is a reaction – only from this can the more complicated forms grow. Language – I want to say – is a refinement ‘in the beginning was the deed’” (1998, p. 36e). Today we can study a vast span of work dating back to prehistoric time as art, though when it was made it was never given such a label.

The matter of what we call art is further mystified by the complex relationship that exists between art and culture. As I noted at the start of this chapter, art defines culture, and culture defines art. In Lectures on Aesthetics Wittgenstein notes “The words we call expressions of aesthetic judgement play a very complicated rôle, but a very definite rôle, in what we call a culture of a period. To describe their use or to describe what you mean by a cultured taste, you have to describe a culture. What we now call a cultured taste perhaps didn’t exist in the Middle Ages. An entirely different game is played in different ages” (1966, p. 8). Wittgenstein sums up this complex relationship



when he notes “In order to get clear about aesthetic words you have to describe ways of living” (1966, p. 11).

In describing the way we use art, and how art interlinks with other complex human experiences such as play, ritual, religion and communication I find that the idea that art is a behaviour that we are predisposed to helps to focus my inquiry. That this behaviour is beneficial because it helps to foster an important connection that we can name *communitas* or community building between people is also engaging. Such ideas lead inevitably to a working functional definition of art that will be discussed in the next chapter.

That this behaviour is not a given, merely a predisposition, is an equally important point. This places the role that art plays in the middle, between ideals of predetermination and freedom of choice. Eagleton, noting a similar path followed by our idea of culture, states “The idea of culture, then, signifies a double refusal: of organic determinism on the one hand, and of the autonomy of spirit on the other. It is a rebuff to both naturalism and idealism, insisting against the former that there is that within nature which exceeds and undoes it, and against idealism that even the most high-minded human agency has its humble roots in our biology and natural environment” (2000, p. 5).

As I stated in the introduction, I think that the ways we define ourselves and seek our own authenticity, as written about by Charles Taylor, are interrelated in a complex manner to the multiple communities and cultures in which we are immersed. The very language we use to consider and reason about such matters is a construct of community

and culture. This is, of course, a large part of what Wittgenstein explores in his philosophy.

Because of the complexity of these realms we name art and culture, I need to take some care not to overextend my thesis. I do not wish to claim that this behaviour, linked to community building, is all that art is. To do so would be analogous to stating that an automobile is no more than a piston and an exothermic chemical reaction that occurs beneath it. Art is, as will be explored in the next chapter, a complex phenomenon that has many dimensions, purposes and meanings that are all constantly changing. My goal is to examine this corner that interests me, this aspect of art's origin as adapted behaviour, and determine whether this attribute of art can explain and describe what we observe today, and whether it can further help to describe what we teach and should be teaching in our schools.

The practice of aesthetic debate thus contributes to the self-knowledge of all who participate and holds out the possibility of creating a freely willed community (Stephen Mulhall, Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary, p. 33).

## **DEFINING ART: IS ART WHAT ART IS FOR?**

Ellen Dissanayake writes about the connections that exist between art, ritual and play. John Dewey considers and supports these connections. In the second chapter of Art as Experience, Dewey expresses his own belief that there is a connection when he protests the modern compartmentalization of human experience into separate categories such as religion, morals, politics, business and art. He asks, “why is the attempt to connect the higher and ideal things of experience with basic vital roots so often regarded as betrayal of their nature and denial of their value?” (1934, p. 20). Dewey goes on to discuss the roots of artistic and aesthetic experience in ritual. “Incense, stained glass, the chiming of unseen bells, embroidered robes accompany the approach to what is regarded as divine. The connection of the origin of many arts with primitive rituals becomes more evident with every excursion of the anthropologist into the past” (1934, p. 29).

If intersubjective agreement and the formation of communities of response form the foundation of what we call art, it makes some sense to see these actions of community

forming today as having evolved from these more ancient forms of *communitas*, ritual, religion and intersubjective communication mentioned by Dewey above, and in the last chapter.

Despite the manner in which art changes over time, what art has become, today, can link to vital means of *communitas* in the past and, perhaps, other modes of intersubjective communication in the future. Our changing ideal of art, in itself, highlights the intersubjectivity of the domain.

Dissanayake states, in discussing the modern Western notion of art, that, “no other society or group of human beings has ever held the view (one could call it an ideology) of art that now prevails, rarely completely articulated but everywhere presumed, in most of educated, cultured, modern European and European-influenced society” (1988, p. 40). Many critics, Dewey included, note that the objects that rest in our art museums, particularly those that date from ancient times, were not created as ‘art’ but we label them as such today. In a similar manner, Danto notes that “It would, I should think, never have occurred to the painters of Lascaux that they were producing *art* on those [cave] walls. Not unless there were neolithic aestheticians” (1976, p. 18). Again, Dissanayake notes that “until the nineteenth century, beauty (at least in the man-made world) was not its own excuse for being (1988, p. 41). It is also interesting to note that art has now distanced itself from the notion that beauty is necessary.

If what we call art today has not always been known as art, then how has it come to be known as such? And will we be calling something art in the future that isn’t known

as art today? Given the historical record, it seems very likely. What, in short, is it that ties all these diverse modes of expression together under the category of 'art'?

The first thing that we must establish is that definition of a concept or phenomenon generally proceeds from the concept or phenomenon's existence. In the case of an object, it is a simple enough demonstration. Bell invents a device with which one communicates over distances and subsequently names it (or others name it) the telephone. The telephone is, by definition, a device used for voice communication over distances. And yet the device preceded its name and definition. In the same manner, I must reject claims that what ancient peoples produced automatically cannot be art as they had no concept or definition of 'art'. As Dickie notes, "It seems safe enough, however, to say that artworks were being produced in more recent times long before art theories were being produced by aestheticians" (1984, p.20). In a sense, this provides a ready argument against Danto's point that "To see something as art requires something the eye cannot deny – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld" (1976, p. 16). If one always needed an artworld to see something as art, how and why would such a world have come into existence (as art could not have preceded the artworld)?

Stephen Davies categorizes approaches to defining art as "the functional, the procedural, and the historical/intentional" (1991, p. 218). In order to determine how the use of a communities of response model to define art would interact with these approaches, a further look at how aesthetic theorists have dealt with definitions of art is required.

A procedural definition of art examines the work itself, and the rules and procedures that are followed in the creation of the work. To be succinct, a proceduralist believes that a work of art can be defined as a piece created following certain stated rules and procedures. In other words, if the proceduralist definition in question determines that 'artworks are green and triangular', then any work which is green and triangular fulfils the requirement of art and is deemed to be an artwork. It should be noted that, under such rule-bound definition, what is and is not art can change, and sometimes rather radically and quickly. It is this kind of shift Arthur Danto speaks of when he notes, "As a result of the new theory's acceptance, not only were post-impressionist paintings taken up as art, but numbers of objects (masks, weapons, etc.) were transferred from anthropological museums (and heterogeneous other places) to *musées des beaux arts*..." (1976, p. 11).

George Dickie's institutional theory of art is a different type of procedural definition that looks not at the art so much as the procedure through which it is labelled as art. According to Dickie's institutional theory of art, "A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) 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) (1974, p. 34).

A functional definition, on the other hand, defines art by the function that it fulfils. Often the function chosen in traditional definitions of this sort are variations on the aesthetic theme. In other words, if art's task is to enhance or create an aesthetic experience, and the work gives one such an experience, it is art. Beardsley, for example, states that art is "either an arrangement of conditions intended to be capable of affording

an experience with marked aesthetic character or (incidentally) an arrangement belonging to a class or type of arrangements that is typically intended to have this capacity” (1982, p. 299). Art as imitation or art as emotional expression would be other examples of functional definition.

Those who define art along historical/intentional lines, as Davies calls it, point to the importance of separating aesthetic theory from a definition of art. Art is seen as being necessarily artifactual, or created by people, and the definition of what art is proceeds along the lines of tracing what has historically been called art and what falls into this tradition. Such definitions often stress the importance of symbol in naming art, or the presence of interpretation of objects. Further theories stress the importance of artists’ intentions or the importance of an informal ‘institution’ of art.

These are certainly not extremely rigid or exclusive definitions as I read them. There appears to be a fair degree of overlapping and flexibility between the categories. Dickie’s institutional theory may be, for example, procedural. Despite this, Dickie is very careful to stress in his writings the importance of artifactuality.

There are obvious difficulties inherent with each approach to defining art. The procedural definition acts, somewhat, like a recipe. If one creates a work that contains this and that, it is art. This does not, at first glance, appear to match the complexity of art and art creation that we experience. Davies argues that “A definition of art would foreclose on future creativity. If art has some immutable essence, then the art of the future could not, in its essential respects, challenge, alter, subvert, or depart from the art of the past. But the history of art is the history of such a process, of an exercise of

revolutionary creativity which time and again has turned the prevailing conception of art on its head and back-to-front” (1991, p. 6).

Dickie, I think, best points out the problem of defining art procedurally when he points out “What seems to have happened when philosophers of art sought the essence of art is that they have simply taken a feature of art which is prominent or had seized the imagination at a particular historical time to be the essence of art. Thus have transient features of art been frozen into definitions and passed off as essences” (1984, p. 5). Artists appear to resist such a recipe. Any attempt to pass off a procedural definition has been greeted by a movement or style or art that seems designed to challenge or subvert said recipe.

Morris Weitz argued that the “main contention that ‘art’ is amenable to real or any kind of true definition is false. Its (aesthetics) attempt to discover the necessary and sufficient properties of art is logically misbegotten for the very simple reason that such a set and, consequently, such a formula about it, is never forthcoming. Art, as the logic of the concept shows, has no set of necessary and sufficient properties, hence a theory of it is logically impossible and not merely factually difficult” (1956, p. 28). Consider, for example, the vast array of things that we classify as art: dance, theatre, sculpture, painting, music and conceptual art can be numbered in a vastly incomplete list. It seems incredible that even a single attribute could be found that is common to all of these forms of expression, but is also not present in forms of expression or things that we do not call art.



In order to tie these many disciplines together, aesthetic philosophers have often turned to Ludwig Wittgenstein's 'family resemblance' idea. Wittgenstein, in Philosophical Investigations, discusses the vast array of 'games' we play and struggles to draw them into a single category, as there is no common attribute within the grouping. "And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail. I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way.-And I shall say: 'games' form a family" (1953, p. 32e).

At first glance, this idea of family resemblance seems to be an attractive way of explaining how such diverse things end up grouped under a single category. 'Art' seems to be very much like 'game'. The problems with this definition, though, quickly overwhelm the idea. Davies points out in his abbreviated version of "Definitions of Art" in The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics, "everything resembles or can be made to resemble every other thing, so the invocation to resemblances cannot explain the unity and integrity of any concept" (2001, p. 171). George Dickie explains how family resemblance cannot, of itself, describe what is and is not art. A definition of art must have factors independent of resemblance or the reasoning of resemblance forms an endless chain that leads nowhere.

For example, according to the new conception of art, today's sunset (Saturday's) could be a work of art in part because it resembles Friday's sunset which was a work of art. But why was Friday's sunset a work of

art? Because it resembled Thursday's sunset which was a work of art. And why was Thursday's sunset a work of art? Because it resembled a painting of a sunset which in turn resembled an earlier painting or an earlier sunset, and so on, and so on. The new conception has no way to block the regress, but if it could not be blocked there could be no works of art. The point of the regress argument is that if the new conception of art were all there is to the notion of art, it would have been impossible for there ever to have been any art at all (1984, p. 32-33).

Lastly, family resemblance does not seem to address the complexity of art either. Davies asks how family resemblance would apply to Duchamp's fountain-how could inclusion of this work as art not, by family resemblance, name all other urinals to also be art? (1991, p. 13).

Functional definitions, on the other hand, lead to their own version of endless conundrums. If the function of art is, for example, to provide an aesthetic experience one has only, in order to complete the definition, to define what the aesthetic experience is. This is an immense and perhaps endless task which leads to its own brutally circular definition. Perhaps art is that which provides an aesthetic experience, and an aesthetic experience is the type of experience that one might expect art to provide. In fact, in studying the history of the term aesthetic one gets a definite sense of how the definition has moved and changed over time, arguably in an attempt to get it to match our concept of what we call art.<sup>5</sup>

As mentioned above, George Dickie's institutional theory of art is considered, by Davies, to be a proceduralist definition. As it is often summed up, this definition states

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<sup>5</sup> See Alan Goldman's "The Aesthetic" in The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics.

that art is what the art world says is art. This has been a very popular theory, and Dickie writes two books refining his thoughts. I'd like to spend a little time here going over some of the criticisms of this definition, as I believe it wanders quite close to a communities of response definition without quite getting there. To be succinct, Dickie's definition remains proceduralist, while a communities of response model looks somewhat like the institutional theory, but falls into a functionalist mode.

Dickie, in his second book on the institutional theory, The Art Circle, further refines his system. His definition is reworked into a series of short statements:

I. An artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art.

II. A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.

III. 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.

IV. The artworld is the totality of all artworld systems

And

V. An artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public. (1984, pp. 80-82)

Some have found this theory to be elitist, arguing that it gives the power to define objects as art to a few intellectual, often self-placed important figures overseeing major art or academic institutions in big cities. In The Art Circle, I believe that Dickie addresses this concern in reworking his definitions as stated above. The artworld is definitely not

presented as a single 'institutional' organization, or even a cabal, but as a loose set of groups coupled with the myriad of ways in which art has traditionally been made and displayed. Davies, though, criticizes Dickie with the opposite of an elitist charge.

“Accordingly he (Dickie) fails to characterize the structure of the informal institution that is the Artworld, he fails to consider the factors limiting and defining the boundaries of the roles that compromise that structure, and he pays insufficient heed to the history of the institution as affecting that structure and those rules” (1991, p. 84). I am unsure why Davies demands structure, here, from an informal institution. Not only does Dickie stress that the institution is informal, but the history, structure and rules of artmaking in society as well as the roles occupied by artist and public are all integrated into his view of the artworld.

Most criticism of the institutional theory, then, circles around themes of who is in this artworld that defines what is and is not art. The more serious flaw in the definition, though, seems to come out of the description of how the artworld performs this function. To summarize, members of the artworld consider works for appreciation as art and inclusion in what we call art. And yet the act of naming something as art is purely an institutional function; there is not supposed to be anything inherent in the work that one can define as being appreciable. “If we reject, as Dickie does, any psychological or phenomenological account of the appreciation standardly invited by artworks, how can we characterize the type of appreciation/understanding mentioned in Dickie’s definition without presupposing what is supposed to be defined-what an artwork is?” (1991, p. 109).

The problem, then, with this definition is that it begins to argue circularly.

Without some function for art on which to pin a reason for its consideration in a procedural manner, the consideration of art status appears to become far too arbitrary and meaningless. Dickie himself admits that his definition is circular when he states “admittedly, in a sense the definition is circular, but it is not viciously so” (1974, p. 43). He goes on to defend his definition by stating “It is not, however, viciously so, because the whole account in which the definition is embedded contains a great deal of information about the artworld” (1974, p. 44). Dickie continues the argument in The Art Circle when he speaks of flaunting the circularity of his definition (1984, p. 12 and p. 79). This does not make Dickie’s theory wrong or flawed. He is merely looking at an aspect, in a sense, outside of the definition of art. It may be wrong to call Dickie’s theory a definition, in fact. Perhaps Dickie’s description of how art is ‘named’ is either viciously or moderately circular because his description of an artworld naming art seems to handle explaining the ‘how’ of art naming without touching upon the ‘why’. Given the vast history of art in human experience and the horizon of significance we place on it today, a ‘why’ seems incredibly important.

In his earlier work, Davies argues strongly against the idea that functional and procedural approaches to defining art can be combined in any way.

The question of whether or not items of the type in question are to be defined functionally or procedurally is crucial. It will not do to say that, in some respects, the concept operates functionally and, in other respects, is procedural. If the procedures are at odds with the function, then the definition must settle on one or the other as giving the essence of the concept’s instances. If the two are in conflict and the concept is essentially functional, then only those things which meet the function

instantiate the concept, and items produced in accordance with the standard procedures but which do not meet that function do not instantiate the concept. On the other hand, if the concept is essentially procedural, then all those things produced in accordance with the given procedure instantiate the concept, whether or not they also serve the function that those procedures originally were set up to meet (1991, p. 37).

In his later work, Davies appears to soften his stance on this matter. “I observed earlier that functionalism and proceduralism need not be exclusive. Also, either approach might be combined with historical reflexiveness. For instance, it could be held that art is functional and that the function of art changes through time, depending on how it has been realized in the past” (2001, p. 175). Such statements merely confound the issue. According to this thought, we are to define a concept by the function that it performs, but this function changes over time. It is the same as saying a definition is not possible.

A ‘communities of response’ definition or model of art appears to act as a hybrid theory. It begins with a functional approach to the issue. We use art as a formal means of exploring intersubjective agreement. Artworks are works which invite us to look for understanding, find deeper meaning. Artworks invite us to examine them critically and communicate our findings with others.

As I stated in the introduction to this paper, we can form intersubjective agreement over issues that are not ‘art’. I think that the Vancouver Canucks will win the Stanley Cup this year, and are the best hockey team ever. You feel the same way. We discuss our opinions and find the specific points and ideas that we share. We find a form of intersubjective agreement, but this is not art. I like crème caramel. You do too. We

discuss the nuances and subtleties of our mutual love, and we seek intersubjective agreement. But this is not art either.

And yet these matters do appear to hover at the edges of art. Is it coincidence that refined cooking is often referred to as the 'culinary arts'. The massive sports entertainment industry competes head-to-head in North America with the theatrical and live performance industry. Clearly one is not widely held to be art while the other is. And yet they have so much in common. Wittgenstein's family resemblance theory might point to inclusion of both in the same category.

The communities of response definition of art does not hold up if we argue simply that matters of intersubjective agreement, or the formation of communities of response, are sufficient condition for naming something art. It does help, as we move along though, if we name the community of response as a necessary condition for naming something art.

We can then integrate this idea in with an institutional approach for defining art. As Davies notes, "The institutional theory does not explain why someone who has the authority to confer art status would choose to exercise that authority with respect to one object/event rather than another. So it explains how something becomes an artwork without explaining why it is an artwork" (1991, p. 113). But this flaw is eliminated if we accept that the reason something is accepted as art is that a community of response has formed promoting the object as interpretable as art.

Certain long-debated matters will come into play at this point. I agree with Dickie and those who would argue that in order for us to consider such a work to be communicative, or to be expressive of some thought or emotion, artifactuality is a necessary condition. Stanley Cavell states it well when he notes that we approach art objects “not merely because they are interesting in themselves, but because they are felt as made by someone – and so we use such categories as intention, personal style, feeling, dishonesty, authority, inventiveness, profundity, meretriciousness, etc., in speaking of them. The category of intention is as inescapable (or escapable with the same consequences) in speaking of objects of art as in speaking of what human beings say and do: without it, we would not understand what they are. They are, in a word, not works of nature but of art” (1967, p. 122). Mulhall notes that “on Cavell’s view, the first fact about works of art is that they are meant – that is, that they are the sort of thing that people make in order to elicit a certain sort of interest from other people – a refusal to relate to artworks in these terms would amount to a refusal to relate to them as works of art” (1996, p. 17). When we search for deeper meaning of art, then, we are entering into a sort of three-way communication. We are seeking a community of response with other observers of the artwork, but we are also attempting to understand the meaning placed upon it by the artist.

Arguments over what aesthetic philosophers refer to as hard or puzzling cases, such as Duchamp’s Fountain or ‘readymades’ are often used to argue for or against various definitions of art. As mentioned above, many have argued for and against the idea of Fountain being art. Others have noted that if Fountain is art, why are not all other



urinals also art (family resemblance?). Under a community of response model, we would note that an individual proposed the artifact as 'art'. A community of response came into existence to discuss and debate the issue. Discussion occurred around what the piece 'meant' and what the 'symbolism' was in displaying such an item as art. Those who found intersubjective agreement on the issue have declared it to be art, and it has continued to be analyzed for the attributes of symbol and meaning that we look for in art. Those who refuse to see it as art form another community of response and continue to analyze why they disagree with its status of art. No one has seriously proposed that all urinals be declared art, and if such a proposal were put forth there would, today, be difficulty in declaring what sort of symbolic meaning would accompany such a proposal.

Of course, the main argument against calling Fountain art has to do with aesthetics. Monroe Beardsley is committed to the idea of tying a definition of art to the ideal of aesthetics or the aesthetic experience. He admits that not all works of art can explicitly confirm such a connection, but plays with the idea that those works we call good works usually do. "If artistic goodness is that sort of goodness that an object possesses in virtue of its capacity to provide aesthetic experience (which is here assumed to be desirable), then there can be no artistic goodness unless there can be aesthetic experiences" (1969, pp. 4-5). Beardsley notes that there may be some disjunction between art and aesthetics when he states "It seems to me useful for aesthetics to have a generic term to mark out, though vaguely, the objects within its field of interest. And perhaps with proper qualification, the term 'work of art' will do. But it does suffer from quirks that make it unsatisfactory for certain philosophical purposes, in my opinion, and

we would do better to select a different term, say the neologism ‘aesthetic object’” (1961, p. 177). Beardsley does appear to reconnect the ideas of ‘aesthetic object’ and ‘work of art’ when he immediately notes, “I stipulate that all musical compositions are aesthetic objects, all literary works are aesthetic objects, all works of plastic art are aesthetic objects,...etc. This is an incomplete list, of course” (1961, p. 177).

I think that this argument stems from a very natural impulse to confuse what art is with aesthetics. And this originates as far back as the Kantian ideal that it is the beauty of nature that gives us our appreciation of art.<sup>6</sup> There is an argument in more recent aesthetic philosophy that quite the opposite is true; Davies notes that, according to this idea, “we experience nature aesthetically through the prism of art” (1991, p. 144).

We are sensual people, and we are drawn to beauty. Perhaps the most famous, and most common forms of art in our world have the aesthetic property of being ‘beautiful’ in some way. We should take care to not confuse this with the issue of whether or not such aesthetic merits must be included in a definition of what art is. People are drawn to sugar, and so like sweet things. Most desserts that can be had

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<sup>6</sup> Kant notes that judgments of ‘free beauty’ relate to our aesthetic pleasure in nature, and such judgments are seen as being pure. Judgments of ‘fixed beauty’ relate to our aesthetic pleasure in art, and require the further judgment of how perfect the object is in terms of its purpose, and are thus once removed from free beauty. “In order to judge a natural beauty to be that, I need not have a prior concept of what kind of thing the object is [meant] to be; i.e., I do not have to know its material purposiveness (its purpose). Rather, I like the mere form of the object when I judge it, on its own account and without knowing the purpose. But if the object is given as a product of art, and as such is to be declared beautiful, then we must first base it on a concept of what the thing is [meant] to be, since art always presupposes a purpose in the cause (and its causality). And since the harmony of a thing’s manifold with an intrinsic determination of the thing, i.e., with its purpose, is the thing’s perfection, it follows that when we judge artistic beauty we shall have to assess the thing’s perfection as well, whereas perfection is not at all at issue when we judge natural beauty (to be that)” (1790, p. 179)

following a good meal are thus sweet and contain sugar. The most popular desserts are sweet and contain sugar. This does not necessarily mean that the definition of dessert must state 'all desserts are sweet or contain sugar'. Lime sorbet, a very popular dessert, can be quite sour tasting.

From Kant on we have understood that what we call the aesthetic experience extends far beyond the realm of what we call art. As I have stated, for example, some argue that our aesthetic experience of art originates in our ability to experience nature aesthetically, and some argue the reverse. From the post-modern period on we have understood that there are well accepted works of what we call art that seem to fulfil some sort of intellectual response but clearly do not provide much of or any aesthetic experience.

There is room, I think, to argue how an amazingly excellent aesthetic experience enhances our experience of art. There is much cause to argue that the emotions and mindset caused by a wonderful aesthetic work facilitates the speed and strength with which a community of response forms to appreciate the work and name it art. It is all too apparent, however, that the aesthetic experience, while strongly linked to art, is not a necessary component of art or the definition of art. Art is something related, but other.

The question of who shall be deemed to comprise 'the artworld' that considers pieces for inclusion as art needs some further examination. Davies has difficulty with the wide open definition of who shall be making such decisions, and notes, "Roles that are occupied by everyone are not roles of the sort that characterize social institutions" (1991, p. 85). I don't share Davies' concern that social roles cannot be held by everyone.

Certainly being a consumer is a social role, and in North America today we are all consumers. On a lighter note, I am a teacher by profession, and social discussions over the years since I became a teacher have convinced me that everyone is apparently an expert in teaching.

What we would call an institutional approach to definition is not exclusive to the realm of art. In dealing with how we come to call acts or products 'creative', Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has proposed a model that very much resembles the institutional definition of art. Creativity, in Csikszentmihalyi's definition, is seen as being "any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one. And the definition of a creative person is: someone whose thoughts or actions change a domain, or establish a new domain" (1988, p. 28). Csikszentmihalyi describes the parts of his systems model as including a domain (rules), a field (participants in a domain), and an individual interacting with the other two parts. The formulation of these parts solves the idea of how creative products are evaluated for Csikszentmihalyi. The individual must have his products or ideas accepted by the field in order to be judged 'creative'.

Csikszentmihalyi's 'field' then, is analogous to Dickie's 'artworld'. That is to say, the 'artworld' is the field in which artworks receive their recognition and status as art. Further examination of Csikszentmihalyi's 'field' then can help to answer some of the concerns about who has the status of 'artworld' in the institutional definition. Happily, Csikszentmihalyi uses the specific domain of visual arts to define what a field is. "In the visual arts the field consists of art teachers, curators of museums, collectors of

art, critics, and administrators of foundations and government agencies that deal with culture. It is this field that selects what new works of art deserve to be recognized, preserved, and remembered” (1988, p. 28).

The critics of institutional theory who label it elitist often claim that the artworld consists of the last two groups named by Csikszentmihalyi only, namely the critics and administrators. But consider how democratic and inclusive Csikszentmihalyi’s definition is when he names ‘collectors of art’. Who does not have a photograph, work of art, or reproduction of a work of art on their wall, a video or dvd movie, record albums, c.d.’s or cassettes of music? Csikszentmihalyi could be talking about art when he admits that “For some domains, the field is as broad as society itself. It took the entire population of the United States to decide whether the recipe for New Coke was an innovation worth keeping” (1988, p. 43).

At the risk of overcomplicating matters, what we can observe of the ‘artworld’ might best be served by taking Csikszentmihalyi’s model and splitting the idea of the field into ‘microfield’ and ‘macrofield’. This would help to describe what we see happening with art, a domain that is so multidimensional with such a wide open and democratic field that practically everybody either has membership or could be considered for membership.

In this model, there would be some heed paid to the scope of influence or recognition achieved by artists or particular artworks. Leonardo DaVinci’s work is well established historically. Certain of his works stand as icons of painting and sculpture. Recognition of DaVinci’s work as art would come from majority segments of all the

groups listed above by Csikszentmihalyi in the field. We could consider that DaVinci's work is deemed art by the macrofield.

We could also consider that there are certain works accepted or given the label of art by the macrofield or artworld that do not merit the label with the majority of the microworlds. Works of art that challenge our perception of what art is while finding acceptance and being given value by the artworld have not been as accepted by the rest of the population. This sort of difference of opinion between the microworlds and the macroworld accounts, for example, for the controversy experienced when the National Gallery in Ottawa purchased Barnett Newman's "Voice of Fire" for 1.8 million dollars in 1990.

What of my neighbour, who makes incredibly beautiful pottery in her garage. All the neighbours gather to browse through her work at the yearly garage sale and pay a high price to buy a piece for the mantel. Art critics and foundations may be completely unaware of her work. There is, nevertheless, a 'field' of art collectors, admirers, or consumers who admire her work and declare it to be art. We could call such a field, a rather localized and limited group, a microfield. Having one's work declared as art by either a micro or macrofield would be enough to consider an object 'art'. This reflects reality anyway. Small groups have always formed communities of response to declare local artists' or artisan's work to be art. At the risk of reengaging the elitist tag used against Dickie, there has always been a macro art establishment involving gallery curators and academics whose declaration of 'art' appears to exist on a separate plane from those other groups.

I suspect that there would be little opposition to allowing us to name the work just discussed as art. Many, though, may argue against allowing small, local, communities of response to apply the label art. In a real sense, however, this idea reflects the democratization of art that we could expect from this century. Csikszentmihalyi's criticism against modern art is that "The greatest art, East or West, was not produced when the artists set the agenda, but when the patrons insisted on certain standards that benefited them. Patrons wanted primarily to be admired by the public, so the art they demanded had to appeal to and impress the entire community. In this sense, medieval and Renaissance art, commissioned by popes and princes, was in reality more democratic than it has become since the art world gained the power to separate itself from the rest of society – as a field with its own peculiar tastes and criteria of selection" (1988, p. 325). Allowing that consumers and collectors can be members of the 'field', and establishing that they have the power in smaller groups to establish what is art not only reflects reality, but reinvigorates art.

To summarize the definition established, then, art is something made or chosen and adapted by an individual. This made or adapted thing is intended to express something. It is often self-expressive, but can be symbolic or expressive of something other than self. The artist's intended expression may or may not be crucial, but either the artist is deliberately expressing something, or the audience must thoroughly believe that an expression is readable. This item may or may not have been formed or created with the intention of seeking the art label. It is presented or introduced to a community of response, either a microfield or a macrofield. The community of response debates

meaning and assesses whether the label of art applies. Again, the debated meaning of the object is part of the intersubjective agreement, and various communities of response can form around single objects based on understood or agreed upon meanings. Regardless of the various meanings attributed to an artwork, if intersubjective agreement is arrived at in the manner of calling it 'art', then the work in question receives the label 'art'.

With this definition we see the merging of Stanley Cavell's and Charles Taylor's ideas. Firstly, we note that there are multiple ways in which art is used, in this construct, to seek or define self. The first, most obvious manner is when the artist makes art to be self-descriptive. The works of artist Tracy Emin or writer Virginia Woolf jump to mind. This is not a simple, snapshot-like process either. Artists who express themselves through their work struggle to find exactly what it is as they get it right. And of course, the ultimate goal of this work is to bring it to others, to seek the *communitas* and to receive the feedback of *communitas*.

But the artist need not be the only one who is involved in the act of self expression. Often, in interacting with or viewing art we discover something of ourselves that we had overlooked or not known. Who has not had an emotional reaction to a movie and been moved to explore a side of self not touched upon before?

And because of the way we interact with art, as soon as we find something of self we wish to explore, we seek others who have been touched the same way. We want to know that we're not alone in finding this gem in ourselves. We want to know that we link to others through this discovery. Self-definition leads immediately to seeking *communitas*.



Let's examine some challenging cases to see if the definition holds. Firstly, it might serve to introduce something that I don't think merits the label 'art' according to our working definition, but might end up labelled so under some of the other ideals we discussed above. What I will choose is a fine, aged bottle of a very expensive red wine. This bottle is widely known for the vintner, and for the year in which it was produced. It is considered a masterpiece.

This wine was made by a very talented craftsman. Recall that most of the people we know today as artists were once labelled as craftsmen; painters, sculptors, musicians. There can be no doubting the level of talent and knowledge displayed by the finest vintners. They produce artifacts. They take raw materials and fashion them carefully and knowledgably to create the rarest bottle of wine. The product they produce is unique and individual. A connoisseur of fine wine can sniff it, examine it, roll it around the mouth and identify who made it, and where, and when.

If our definition of art rests merely on the production of an artifact, the wine is art and the vintner is artist. If art is inextricably tied to the aesthetic experience, how can we even question the matter? It is art. And yet, there does not seem to be any major move to call vintners artists and wine a true art. This is because it lacks that vital component of meaning. We can argue artifact and aesthetic experience, but there is no statement of the human condition, no message to be interpreted in a bottle of wine (other than drink me with a nice meal). As Duchamp proved, a person who removed a fine bottle of wine from its regular context and placed it on exhibit as having alternate meaning might cause us to shift perception and discuss an art label, but it is not happening with an entire batch

of wine or the entire class. Dickie notes that Dali pointed at a pile of rocks and claimed they were art because he said they were but that this has not convinced many. (1984, p. 46). Now if Dali had removed and reassembled the pile of rocks in a gallery with an attached tag or notice, chances are these acts of adaptation (the moving to a gallery, the placing of the name) would have helped to establish the much needed meaning.

In 1917 Marcel Duchamp's Fountain, a urinal dated and signed 'R. Mutt' placed on exhibit, shook the art world and promoted lots of discussion about what is and is not art. Some critics to this day (see Beardsley) claim that it is not art. And yet the establishment accepted it as art. Max Podstolski notes that works like Fountain have "pioneered the concepts of 'low art', 'minimal art', 'conceptual art', 'body art', 'art as philosophical statement', 'art as provocation', and perhaps more. All became pivotal to cutting-edge or avant-garde art practices, for better or worse" (1999, p.1 ). This work, which has widely been claimed to be art by the artworld, qualifies as art under a communities of response definition.

The object has been chosen and exhibited for a conceptual meaning. As

Podstolski notes:

And touching on the connotations of the title itself: was Duchamp alluding to *Fountain* pissing on the artworld, the reverse of the artworld pissing into it, in the sense of biting the hand of high art that feeds it? Or in the sense of fertilising and nurturing 'low' art? These ambivalent senses reinforce each other, and reflect what actually happened to 20th century art. A fount, fountain, or fountainhead can mean the source or origin of anything, of subversion, regeneration, and confusion in this case. For 'low art' eventually became 'high art', and vice versa, and no-one really knows what these terms mean any more (1999, p. 1).

A community of response came into existence to give the work the label 'art'. In this case, the macrofield was one of the communities bequeathing the label.

A final thought must be spent, here, regarding the inflective nature of any definition or description of art that we consider. As noted in the last chapter, culture and art are concepts that are very closely related. In fact, as noted at the start of this chapter, there is a whole host of ideas that seem to be inextricably interrelated, including religion, ritual, art and culture amongst others. Dickie notes that "when we come to know that an object is a work of art, or even just see an object as a work of art (perhaps mistakenly), we fit it into a certain kind of cultural role" (1984, p. 83). Speaking of how closely related the definitions of terms I've mentioned in this paragraph are, Dickie notes "no member of such a set can be understood apart from all the other concepts in the set" (1984, p. 84).

At the start of this thesis, I noted how writers including Taylor and Egan have stated that art has risen in significance to assume what Taylor would call religion's horizon of significance in our culture. Eagleton notes that "Cultural truths – whether high art or the traditions of a people - are sometimes sacred ones, to be protected and revered. Culture, then, inherits the imposing mantle of religious authority..." (2000, p. 2). Indeed, Eagleton quotes T.S. Eliot who states that "The reflection that...even the most conscious and developed of us live also at the level on which belief and behaviour cannot be distinguished, is one that may, once we allow our imagination to play on it, be very disconcerting...To reflect that from one point of view religion is culture, and from another point of view culture is religion, can be very disturbing" (2000, p. 115).

If, as Eagleton suggests, “Culture is fatally enfeebled once it comes adrift from its roots in religion, even if clinging to those roots means consigning itself to irrelevance” (2000, p. 67), then the handoff to art of religion’s moral significance is a crucial point for us to consider. If we accept these ideas as even possibly persuasive, how can we continue to cling to formalist ideas which limit art’s power and impact to such a limited realm as the ‘aesthetic response’? As Anderson states, “Art is nothing if it inspires no feeling, but to equate art with narrowly defined aesthetic response is to ignore the other powerful sources of art’s impact on the human psyche. Art is seldom the vessel of small feelings, and art for art’s sake alone may be the least important reason for art’s existence” (1990, p. 278).

People nowadays think, scientists are there to instruct them, poets, musicians etc. to entertain them. *That the latter have something to teach them*; that never occurs to them. MS 162b 59v:1939-1940 (Ludwig Wittgenstein, Culture and Value: A Selection from the Posthumous Remains, p.42e).

## **USING A COMMUNITIES OF RESPONSE MODEL TO DESCRIBE ART EDUCATION**

When we set out to define what art is, and we look at the myriad of definitions available and the vast lack of agreement, as a teacher I am struck by the first obvious question. If we don't really know what art is, what the heck have we been teaching?

The first, most obvious answer to such a statement is that we probably don't have to have a working or agreed upon definition of art in order to teach it. In fact, art has probably worked as Davies suggests when he notes, "Sometimes a person may be able to identify and refer to Xs without being able to define what makes something an X. For instance, she might acquire a working mastery of the relevant concept as a result of being introduced to a range of typical examples. People could identify water successfully long before science revealed its essential molecular structure" (2001, p. 169).

Most people can list off subject areas such as visual art, music and drama when prompted for the subjects taught in school that would fall under the heading of 'fine arts'. Others might add subjects such as photography or literary studies to the list. Using the idea of communities of response, we can see how all these can be linked. All involve a product, produced by humans (artifact) that incorporates various meanings or messages. All can involve the formation of communities of response enjoined together to interpret or discuss the meanings set therein.

This does serve to help us note the first thing we can state in describing art education today. We have an ideal of 'fine arts', but the subspecialties that make up this wide field are relatively specialized and at the secondary level are usually taught in specific courses by teachers who have an interest and expertise in the specific domain.

The second thing we can note about arts education, and it is certainly not a given, is that the teaching of the arts is mostly concerned with the doing of the arts. Despite the attempts by those espousing programs like discipline-based art education, which advocated that "art is viewed as a subject with content that can be taught and learned in ways that resemble how other subjects are taught in schools" and teachers "teach their students using written, sequentially organized curricula, and student progress is verified through use of appropriate evaluation methods" as advocated by Clark, Day and Greer (1989, p. 131), most art classrooms today still feature students working projects in various media with an underlying goal of self-expression or exploration.

As Stuart Richmond points out, "making art in the studio and responding to art with understanding and appreciation are widely recognized as central in art education"

(Richmond, pp. 4-5). Contrary to a model of discipline-based art education advocated by Elliot Eisner, which sees the four disciplines of “art making, art criticism, art history, and aesthetics” (1986, p. 16), as being unique and exclusive requiring a carefully divided curriculum, the case studies embarked upon by Richmond show art classes to be integrated, with the emphasis on the making of art and communicating about it. “Art history, criticism, and aesthetics are integrated with practical work as needed to provide background knowledge, rather than being treated systematically as distinct areas” (1995, p. 12).

There are multiple possible communities of response available to teachers engaging in such programs from day to day. The teacher, communicating with the student about her work forms one possible community. The students communicating with each other about their work form another community. Finally, where projects are accepted as being art to the point where they are exhibited in the community in art-space such as galleries or public areas of shopping malls, there is a community of response formed between the students and the wider community.

The Good Art Teacher, a study of what was happening in six teachers’ art classes in British Columbia in 1995, reveals these communities of response at work. Cornelia Hoogland details the following exchange between students in a class and their teacher:

When she holds up another student’s work, the class cat calls. “Oh [student’s name], nice work! Ohhhh.” The teacher lets this be. “Sounds like they like your work,” she says, and then, after a moment, looks out over the class and says: “Shh. I think you’re embarrassing him. Maybe it’s more helpful if we tell him some specific things instead of making general noises. What are some possible directions his work might go? Some students offer suggestions. “Good. Did you hear what they said?”

she asks one student. “Why didn’t you hear? Could you repeat that then? What can he do with this? What would you do here? You have to make these kinds of decisions about your work, too. (1995, p. 24).

Martin Hamm notes that “marking each other’s work (even once), and deciding as a group on the marking criteria is one way of making the criteria, and the process of evaluation much more real, non-arbitrary, and personal, than if marks were just handed out by the teacher. (1995, p. 62). David Phyll details an interaction where a teacher:

held up a large painting by one of the students so that he could have a better look. Other students in the area freely and candidly commented on whether or not they liked it. One girl said she did not like it and he replied, “Well, who asked you?” She smiled back at him and there was much laughter among the students. Then he asked the students “Where should I hang this painting?” This too was followed with many quips, playful verbal jabs, and laughter. (1995, p. 80).

Even the work of student artists not present is fair fodder for analysis:

At one point he (the teacher) stood in front of a work done by a student from a previous semester. Another student walked up to him as he stood there surveying the sculpture of a cross and candles. He quietly told the student of some anecdote about the controversial artwork. After listening the student said “Interesting. He spoke to another student about what he liked about a painting that was leaning against the wall, a painting which did not belong to the student he was talking to. The student looked at the painting and listened to the teacher trying to understand and relate to what he was saying (1995, p. 81).

Displaying an interaction with the community outside the school, Phyll notes that the teacher who he observed, “wants students to create art for outside functions, and promotes interest, ownership, responsibility, risk-taking, and controversy. He has had students create art in unusual settings; for example last year he had students make



paintings at an art conference” (1995, p. 86). Richmond notes of the study overall that “Art from the high schools is frequently exhibited in the municipal galleries, community centres, shopping malls, and the schools themselves” (1995, p. 11).

From the sheer amount of time spent on these interactions it becomes obvious that the making of art, though central to art classes today, is accompanied by a very deliberate communication that we can call a community of response. In fact, the community of response created around student art is often an integral part of the evaluation process. Students are expected to discuss aspects of production, aesthetics and meaning with the work that they produce as ‘art’. It could be noted that not all the student created work is necessarily considered for the label of ‘art’. Some teachers in the study had students select the work they wished to put forth for assessment. We could easily consider this selection to parallel the act where an artist selects work for introduction to the ‘artworld’, leaving other work that she doesn’t consider being up to the standard hidden on the shelf in her studio. All of the artists I have ever spoken to have such a body of work, which they do not want to submit to the community of response.

Though the studies outlined above all come out of the secondary school level there are certainly aspects of what has been discussed that are at play, in my experience, in elementary school level art classes. There are differences, though, and it would be interesting to examine how some of these differences come to be. Some differences may be related to the type of instruction required at the lower level. For example, perhaps a greater emphasis must necessarily be placed, in early instruction, on how to use the tools of art or what different media are possible. Some differences may be related to the

general control of art classes at the secondary level by teachers with a specialized training in art education versus the usual instruction, at elementary level, by teachers with general degrees who teach a class all of the academic and non-academic subjects.

Walking through an elementary school, one always sees a vast array of student work up for inspection in the hallways. There is generally a good amount of academic work, such as essays in the content areas or examples of student writing, but the vast majority of work displayed in the hallways tends to be art projects.

In a high school, one will see a vast array of different projects, often completely eclectic in manner or sometimes grouped around a theme. Even thematic work is seldom uniform. In elementary school hallways one is far more apt to see a display of work where all the students in a class have done very similar work in the same media. Having said this, one can generally spend a fair amount of time examining a display in elementary school and find great differences in how the assignment was completed, the level of student skill and the various meanings and interpretations built into the work.

Such displays of work by an entire class, perhaps, perform a function different from the deliberate choosing of work for display as 'art' that occurs in a high school display. I have seen programs, though, in elementary schools that come closer to paralleling this function of submitting work for consideration as 'art' from a body of work. A number of schools in my district have purchased formal looking frames for hallways. On a regular basis, works of art from the student body that are considered special, groundbreaking or unique are chosen for presentation in the frames. In one school where I taught, students who have their work chosen for these frames have their

names published in the newsletter so the parents know whose work they can come in and expect to see framed in the hallways. This highlighting of excellent work, though, rarely involves the teacher making the choices individually. It also represents a very small set of the work displayed in the hallways of the school. Most often an entire class or classes of work, demonstrating a wide variety and range of skill sets, is displayed. If there is some discussion to be had over which pieces are good art, or which are art at all, it is most often left to the discussion of the wider community or communities of response. One argument would posit that the teacher does not wish to affect the self-esteem of individual students by leaving their work out of the display. This idea seems to fit nicely into the idea that an individual, namely the teacher, would require some form of consultation in a community of response in order to judge something as art, and would be remiss to make the choice on their own. Certainly anyone who has ever wandered the hallways of an elementary school and examined the art has picked out particular pieces of work to examine carefully, and been involved in a community of response discussion that rated the work as art and perhaps even rated it as highly skilled or excellent art.

Other programs that I know of parallel this ‘publication’ or ‘submission to the community of response’. Each year, in our district, each school is given a period of a month in conjunction with several other schools for boardroom display. Our school, then, submits examples of work from each class to be taken down to the room at the board office where the trustees meet. Teachers pass on, for this display, examples of ‘excellent’ work, usually art, to be hung for this special audience. There are often, also, community art displays put on by the shopping centres during education week each year

that are run the same way. Many teachers, it should be noted, consult with their classes in choosing the work, and most teachers are sure to carefully involve the student whose work will be displayed in the process of choosing what will be sent.

A similar 'publication' or submission for art status seems to work in drama and music programs. In such classes, students often play with a variety of ideas or skills over time, but there are 'concerts' or 'presentations' or 'performances' where certain works or pieces are submitted formally to audiences of parents or students.

No aspect of school curriculum has been used more widely to promote the ideals of a multicultural society than the fine arts. Presentation of music, dance, drama or art from other cultures is a very common occurrence in our schools. Great portions of the current art curriculum are immediately concerned with exposing students to the art of multiple cultures. Anderson notes that "if one's aim is to appreciate art of foreign origin (or, indeed, of domestic origin) on its own terms, then obviously an understanding of the philosophical basis of that art is imperative. And clearly the more distant the aesthetic system is from our own, the more such information is necessary" (1990, p. 283).

Amongst the information needed to approach these works of art are, "the world view of the artist's culture, the stylistic and formal options available to the artist, and the symbolic meaning conveyed by the work" (1990, p. 283). This, of course, makes art an ideal format for the exploration of other cultures. If art is about both exploring self, and forming community as I have suggested, then logically, art is an appropriate realm in which to promote such ideals. And it seems to have very naturally taken on this task.

Further, one is hard pressed to find schools, particularly elementary schools, where art is performed only for art's sake. As Anderson notes, "Of all Western aesthetic theories, formalism is the most unique. Its assertion that art exists solely for aesthetic satisfaction and its claim that any social, cultural, or even representational message is a distraction from art's higher purpose is, so far as I know, unprecedented in comparative aesthetics. The art-for-art's-sake premise of formalism stands in marked contrast to the various art-for-life's-sake themes found in other aesthetic traditions" (1990, p. 286). In schools, art is tied to all other modes and areas of learning. One will find clever, graphically interesting posters created by grade three students that exhibit the meaning of place value in mathematics. Grade seven students will have works of art picturing the Egyptian Gods in classic Egyptian style hung in the hallway. My daughter spent a weekend, recently, creating a collage exhibiting the three states of matter for her grade three class.

The formalist, of course, will deny that this is art since the work is created to demonstrate her learning of a scientific concept, and not just for aesthetic purposes. Art, so intermixed with other realms of thought, ceases to be art in some modes of Western thought. Meyer points out that this ideal goes back to Ancient Greece. "Greek thought distinguished, though it did not radically separate, aesthetic experience from other fields of philosophical inquiry – from religion, politics, science, and so on" (1976, p. 53). He goes on to point out "Yet the differentiation between aesthetic experience and other forms of experience can be carried too far. It began as a legitimate distinction, but over the years it has tended to become formalized as categorical separation" (1976, p. 54). As

I have stated, if the separation of art from other realms of experience and learning is pronounced in the art galleries, it is most certainly not in the elementary schools. Some would see this as demonstrative of the lack of a proper art education in the elementary schools. I see the intermingling of art with other learning as immensely healthy.

If some have felt that 'art' must exhibit some formal, refined skills beyond those achievable by children<sup>7</sup>, it has not seemed to change the language and understanding that parents, teachers and the communities around schools possess. If some have declared that the artworld or some formal institution must declare or bestow the title of art upon an artifact, it has not changed the fact that communities label the work happening in schools as art.

Students working on projects have not been 'practicing skills so that they may one day make art'. They have been making art. Their work has been and continues to be called art within the community. Students who create wonderful works that are admired by their peers, parents, or teachers are not 'practicing to one day be artists'. Those whose work meets the community of response head-on and finds favour are called artists. I was at my district board office recently, looking at high school and intermediate artists' work hung up in the boardroom and discussing it with a district program coordinator, who admitted to me that he has approached students who created work for this regularly scheduled display in the past, bargained, and purchased works to take home for display.

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<sup>7</sup> In "Artworks and Real Things", Dickie notes that Danto claims "...children; chimpanzees, counterfeiters: tracing an object to any of these defeats it as an artwork..." (1984, p. 26).

Kindler and Darras state that “Teachers overt behaviour, the ways in which they structure and organize learning are dependent on beliefs, attitudes and values that they bring into their classrooms. The way art is taught in schools depends, to a great extent, not on formal curriculum recommendations or policy guidelines, but rather on teachers’ beliefs about the nature of art, artistic development, and the role that they are to play in students’ growth in this domain (1996, p. 162)”. Consider how perfectly the description that has been given of art education today and the language that we use fits into a community of response model of art.

Students are engaged in making art. Students, teachers and their communities regularly discuss this art. These discussions are a vital part of the process, and are thus integrated into the assessment routine.

Other models for teaching art, models that would make art more like other subjects and would thus reduce the amount of student art making and discussion about these pieces have been proposed over the years (e.g. Discipline-Based Art Education-DBAE) and have had relatively little impact on what happens in the classroom.

All of this could then be viewed as demonstrating a tacit understanding of the importance of the students being artists, of the community-building nature of the arts. Whether or not there has been a working definition of art that has led to a more complete understanding of how this process brings people together to seek intersubjectivity, the programs that we see in schools today achieve that end. Attempts to reduce the art-making in art classes, such as DBAE, have met with stern vocal resistance, and have failed to make significant inroads in our schools.

But amidst all this powerful and important work we still face, daily, the marginalization of the fine arts in our schools. With budget crisis after crisis, and the call for back to basics education, art departments usually find themselves facing the axe first. Often they are saved from complete obliteration only through the good will of those who seem to be able, instinctively, to grasp the importance of these departments to the well-being of the institutions and the system.

Consider how revitalizing it would be to build curriculum that loudly and convincingly voiced the role of art in the community. Imagine how much more powerful our classes and schools could be if the function of art were more fully and immediately employed through a curriculum designed to bring the full force of communities of response to bear in our society.



“I am trying to point out that certain subject matters have been traditionally taught in schools not because of a careful analysis of the range of other alternatives that could be offered but rather because they have traditionally been taught. We teach what we teach largely out of habit, and in the process neglect areas of study that could prove to be exceedingly useful to students” (Elliot Eisner, The Educational Imagination, Second Edition, p. 103).

## **BUILDING CURRICULUM USING A COMMUNITIES OF RESPONSE MODEL**

One teacher that I spoke with in the course of completing my studies at university spoke of being a high school art teacher in a neighbouring municipality. He spoke of how a change of administration had brought about a change in how student art was handled at his school. This teacher’s art studio classroom was located in a somewhat dim basement story of the school. The new administration had confined the display of student art to the walls of this basement hallway. Student art was replaced in the rest of the building by large, glamorous, framed motivational messages that are commonly marketed to businesses. Now, in place of the students’ work fancy photographs of mountain climbers or flying eagles with poetic messages and bold words like “Achieve” and

“Persevere” were on display in the main hallways. What message is sent, in such an arrangement, about the status of the students’ art?

An elementary school around the corner from where I teach was working on a spring musical production several years ago. It was due to be performed shortly, and then all the posters I had seen disappeared and the show was cancelled. The principal had walked into the weekend dress rehearsal and had been distressed by what she saw. The students weren’t nearly ready enough to perform in front of the parents, the show was going to be a big embarrassment, and it was promptly called off. There were parts where the students didn’t know their lines as professionals do, and the quality of acting and singing wasn’t good enough for a public performance. As a teacher who has directed multiple productions I have never seen a dress rehearsal that left anything less than a hollow feeling in the pit of my stomach that the whole production could be a complete mess. This anguish is part of the process and the team always brings it together. Even professional actors I’ve spoken to claim dress rehearsals are usually hideous. Were the students consulted in this cancellation? Was an unnecessary level of emphasis placed on the pride and reputation of the administration or teachers involved to the detriment of the value placed on the students’ art?

These stories are variations of the same theme. They are denials that what the students create in their learning environment is de facto art. When we adopt the philosophy that students are learning to make art, but are not yet making art (or only the few extremely talented ones are), then we are holding back the development of a vital

community of response. In tacitly accepting that art is only defined by a limited, elite establishment we inhibit the development of art community-wide.

Further, if we demand that artistic products need to meet some standard of presentation or appearance to be deemed art, then we are withholding the label of 'art' from the vast majority of work created by students. And any setting of a standard of 'perfection' to declare 'art' makes a fallacious assumption anyway. It assumes that all matters of presentation in art are under the control of the artist. The analogy I have used in the past is raku pottery. Raku potters have a limited amount of control over matters such as how the glaze will turn out, and that uncontrollable imperfections are part of the art form, are in fact considered to enhance it. Let's give such consideration to students in the creation of their art.

The first thing that must be accepted, if one is developing curriculum with a communities of response model, is that a majority of student work is, potentially, art. Their work is not just part of the process of learning to make art. It is not practice art. It is not developing the skills to create art in the future.

It is interesting to note that the inclusion of children's work in what we might call 'art' is a relatively recent phenomenon in the world of art, and not without those who would deny the label. Stuart Macdonald notes that Corrado Ricci's 1887 book L'Arte dei Bambini was groundbreaking in that "it was the first book to consider child art as a separate entity" (1979, p. 325). In 1890 the Society of Arts, "staged the first exhibition of children's art ever shown in Britain" (1979, p. 327). Macdonald states that "It is fitting that child art, as art, should have been first revealed to a wide public by practicing artists

such as Franz Cizek, Roger Fry, and Marion Richardson – and make no mistake about it, child art at its best is a very fine form of art, for there are passages in children’s paintings that have both a technique and a perception which make many adult artists feel inadequate” (1979, p. 329).

Dickie notes that rejection of children’s work as art may simply come about as a result of not understanding the various levels of expertise and ability that are accepted within the artworld. “Various primitive skills are required to make art, as well as the ability to understand the nature of the enterprise. Such skills and understanding are within the grasp of quite small children. Of course the creation of masterpieces requires skills of a kind which few can attain, but masterpieces constitute only a minute part of the class of artifacts with which the theory of art is concerned” (1984, p. 14).

But if the work of children can be formally classified as art, it must serve the same function and go through the same process that we subject all other art to in classification. This is why I refer to student work as being ‘potential art’ above. The introduction of the work, in some formalized manner, for inspection is required, as is the forming of a community of response to examine the work and its meaning.

The community of response that comes into existence to consider the meaning of work and declare it art is part of the process of art that we humans engage in. If this were not the case, there would be no difference between my nailing some lumber together in the backyard to make a sandbox for my children and the artist using wood to create a sculpture. The artist creates work to present it to a community as art, and this interaction is a vital part of art. We cannot teach or learn about art without engaging in this whole

process. And since this process ultimately results in the allocation of artistic status to the artist's work, this must be a part of the school program. And since this is so, the majority of work produced by students will, no doubt, lead to community of response interaction and the creation of art.

This view of how art programs should work in schools, admittedly, diverges from the traditional and historical roles of art in the curriculum. Kerry Freedman, in The Formation of School Subjects, notes that the first art program in the public school system in the U.S. came as a result of lobbying by industrialists who were being forced to hire their industrial designers from the continent due to a lack of home-grown talent. Little resembling art classes of today, Freedman notes:

Children were taught the parts of shapes first. Drawings of individual shapes, and then objects, followed. The criteria for evaluation, that is, the accuracy of the copy, was measured with a ruler. Initially, children did outlines. Sometimes the teacher would copy a leaf outline, for example, in front of the class from a textbook, while the students followed her as she drew.<sup>8</sup> (1987, p. 66)

If one still feels this form of art class resembles what occurs in schools today, note Freedman's assertion that "The use of color was not often allowed until the last year due to a belief that color would feed a student's desire for fanciful experimentation" (1987, p. 66).

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<sup>8</sup> As if to illustrate this very point, one can find a picture from 1901 of a British class engaging in 'freearm drawing' of a leaf. The photograph is on a plate sandwiched between pages 352 and 353 in Stuart Macdonald's book The History and Philosophy of Art Education.

Freedman lists Labour Market Skills, The Quest of Culture and Leisure Time, The Molding of Good Citizens and The Healthy Individual and Scientific Study of the Child as the four traditionally dominant reasons for including the study of art in the curriculum. The curriculum that arose from a philosophy of marketplace need is, of course, noted above. As to culture, Freedman notes that “Studies in art appreciation had previously been held at the college level, initiated in 1874 at Harvard. The original courses were to aid wealthy young men with their choices of art investments. When art appreciation became part of public schooling, it was to support the acculturation of the middle class” (1987, p. 68).

The idea that art was to be taught as a leisure time activity arose at the turn of the century with changes such as a shortened work week or hours. It was felt that the schools should be helping to prepare members of the middle class for how to use their time productively in the many hours that they would be away from work. Not everyone agreed that such free time or cultural education for the masses was productive. “Snedden (1927) saw culture as ‘intellectuality, aesthetic superiority, refinement, and non-practicality...there appear to be no conscious and concrete demands for cultural education (pp. 240-241). It was Snedden’s belief that workers were to ‘seek out’ (p. 247) culture in their free time” (1987, p. 69).

Alas, we cannot dismiss any of the above justifications for the inclusion of art in the curriculum as being entirely extinct. Frequent back to basics moves in education, usually coupled with fiscal restraints, often feature arts departments justifying their existence in relation to jobs skills. Very recently I heard a music teacher expounding on

how many jobs there were for musicians in the computer software profession. They are hired to create music for video games in an industry that has grown immensely on a local level over the past several years. Thomas Barone describes an incredible art program in the Appalachian mountains of North Carolina in “Things of Use and Things of Beauty” that is vibrant, incredibly well respected in the community and a central focus of many students’ lives. Unfortunately, because the school serves a population situated on federal land, funding for the program comes from the federal government, and:

The Swain program must be resubmitted every year, with projections of courses to be taught and numbers of students, along with follow-up studies of program graduates. This last process is apparently crucial, for the survival of the program depends in large measure on the percentages of Art III graduates who choose to pursue arts and/or crafts as a vocation, or as a major in a technical school or four-year college. The required percentage fluctuates, but according to Ms. Alice Lance, the school’s Vocational Guidance Counselor, it usually hovers around 50% (1985, p.281).

One need only spend a short amount of time examining the proposals of Discipline-Based Art Education and its emphasis on art criticism and art history to hear the echoes of middle class enculturation, albeit shared out throughout the public school system to all classes today.

Throughout this thesis I’ve spent time examining, in detail, what art is by examining the function of art. And the function of art is a deep and meaningful one. Art brings us together in spontaneous communities of response to seek the intersubjective. Art serves as the focus for an important interaction between people that is community building. This form of linking has always been with us and is connected to the core of

who we are as human beings. Maxine Greene notes that “In thinking of community, we need to emphasize the process words: making, creating, weaving, saying, and the like. Community cannot be produced simply through rational formulation nor through edict. Like freedom, it has to be achieved by persons offered the space in which to discover what they recognize together and appreciate in common; they have to find a way to make intersubjective sense” (1995, p. 39). Greene notes that this community “can happen even in the local spaces of classrooms, particularly when students are encouraged to find their voices and images” (1995, p. 39).

For schools and societies today, could any justification for the inclusion of art in the curriculum be any more meaningful than this? Could the whimsical and unpredictable fluctuations in the job markets vis-à-vis art skills possibly be a better basis on which to build curriculum? In a world where cultures are changing at a frantic pace and the movement of capital is threatening to undermine the class systems we saw facing upheaval from the nineteenth century on, is there any meaning at all to the ideals of ‘enculturation’?

Curriculum begins with a mission statement, justification or rationale. It is unfortunate for those whose mission has been the teaching of art that the historical reasons for the inclusion of art in the curriculum have so obscured why we seek to teach art. It is even more problematic that we have not managed to clearly reason out why art is important and needs to be fully supported in schools today. It’s not that we don’t have a rationale in place. It’s that the rationale appears to have been simply added to again and again, throughout the years, in order to tie art to whatever cause, purpose or justification



was popular at the time. The “B.C. Curriculum for Fine Arts K-7”, for example, contains notes discussing the importance of fine arts to understanding and respecting multiculturalism, developing problem-solving and critical-thinking skills and competencies in other areas such as technology.

The main part of the ‘Rationale’, however, makes intriguing reading given some of the ideas about art that have been explored in this thesis. The opening statement notes, “The fine arts are important to our understanding of society, culture and history, and are essential to the development of individual potential, social responsibility, and cultural awareness. They also contribute significantly to the intellectual, aesthetic, emotional, social, and physical development of the individual”(Rationale, p. 1). This is, I believe, a powerful statement that would be more powerful still if there were some explanation, in the document, about how art builds community.

I think there is some confusion, here, between the concepts of why we should teach art and the distinguishing of its unique and vital values. Breathing gives me pleasure, provides a means of sensing when there are dangerous gasses in my environment and allows me to better appreciate my surroundings. None of these describe adequately why I breathe.

A curriculum rationale should perhaps not only explain why we should teach art, in other words explain what the function of art is, but also explain how this function is best or only served by art. Take the quotations from the B.C. Rationale offered above and substitute the words ‘Social Studies’ in for ‘The Fine Arts’ and it all looks perfectly logical and reasonable. It is too possible to walk through the rationale and describe how

all the outcomes and reasons for engaging in art can be served by the other subject areas. It seems self-evident that this idea, that the function served by art is redundant or unimportant, best describes why art has maintained a low status in the curriculum and funding-wise.

What is there in the “B.C. Rationale” that is served by art and not social studies, language arts, science or math? We could study culture in social studies class. Of course we understand that when we study art from another culture we are doing more than just studying or learning to understand that culture. There is a sense that we are entering into a communication with members of that culture. We are art engaging. History stories are interesting, but when we study historic art it is as if we were communicating through time. Anyone who has ever stood in a gallery and examined a five hundred year old artwork has surely felt this. We can develop intellectual, aesthetic, emotional, social and physical selves in a multitude of ways, but I’ve suggested in this paper that art does something unique and vital.

We need to build curricula that names and highlights this function. The other aspects of art are all there, but they need to serve as footnotes to art’s prime role. Only by directly referencing this function, the function served by art and only art, can we truly justify or provide a rationale for the inclusion of art in the curriculum. When we justify art otherwise, with a myriad of reasons that don’t come to the point, we do art a disservice.

I have described multiple communities of response throughout this paper. Art engaging is a wide and varied activity. The critic may ask, if all forms of art engaging

involve communities of response, what is wrong with a program of art that studies cultural and historic art and doesn't include a studio component. This would be the same, perhaps, as asking "What is wrong with studying the history of mathematical thought and studying various formulae without actually learning how to do them oneself?"

There are several possible answers in defense of a strong 'making special' component to the curriculum, which I advocate. Firstly, communities of response, as I have indicated, serve to give the status of art to objects. As I discussed, there is an institutional or distant 'artworld', what we called a macrofield using Csikszentmihalyi's system, which confers status upon artworks. The problem at the classroom level, as I see it, is that acceptance by the macrofield or artworld of an object and the conferral of 'excellence' status over time by the artworld shut off much of the possible microworld response or local communities of response. And it is the local, microworld communities that are potentially far more powerful and immediately relevant in the educational setting.

In calling for a strong masterpieces study component to the curriculum, for example, Ralph Smith calls for "An excellence curriculum (that) provides that at appropriate times the young will study certain kinds of art, for example (though not exclusively) masterpieces, exemplars, and often works that are excellent representatives of their kind" (Smith, p. 162). He also notes that, "An excellence curriculum, then, calls not only for teaching basic concepts, skills, and content, but also for organizing knowledge along predetermined lines and steering learning in a definite direction" (Smith, p. 163).

As I've noted, communities of response are democratic, free-flowing interchanges between people that are crucial for our intersocial well-being and are vital in our interactions with art. As is immediately evident, the approach outlined by Smith does not fit in well at all with such a vision of what art is, and certainly not with teaching art to young people in order to teach them to engage strongly in communities of response. Instead of making or viewing art in order to self-express, define, explore and communicate, this approach features a teacher saying, essentially: "This is the Mona Lisa. It is a Western cultural icon. It is an excellent example of art, so we will not be discussing whether or not it's art. Anyone who thinks otherwise is a fool. It is admired by critics, so we will not be discussing whether or not it's good art. Anyone who thinks it's not good art is dim, and will be assessed appropriately for not letting me steer your learning in the prescribed direction. We will be examining it so you can learn to appreciate it, and through it, to appreciate good Western art."

This may be a bit hyperbolic, but only a bit. In the closing of his K-12 Curriculum outline chapter, Smith notes that, "examples of artistic excellence wherever they can be found are candidates for study. Although for reasons I've made clear one would expect such study to feature masterworks from the Western and European cultural heritage, efforts should also be made to teach students to appreciate some exemplars or artistic excellence from non-Western civilization" (Smith, p. 180).

But, as Anderson has explored, to study the art of other cultures necessarily means to step outside of that unique, formalistic ideal of art for art's sake that is perhaps unique to Western aesthetic philosophy. Indeed, one must often leave behind this idea of

art for the sake of aesthetic experience in order to respectfully examine pieces that have deep social and cultural meaning. And then, as Anderson points out, the ideal of masterworks study becomes moot. Anderson notes, “But if the focus is to be upon the social and cultural aspects of art, one should not ignore even black velvet paintings” (1990, p. 268).

This is not to state that there are no judgments to be made about art that can, in a way establish ranking from amateur to masterpiece. It is just that such rankings are far less significant when one examines art from a cultural perspective that includes the multiple levels of meaning to work beyond aesthetic value. Anderson admits “Humans can seldom resist passing judgment, not only on people but also on the things people make” (1990, p. 269). Indeed, he points out that this sort of thought is one of the attributes common to cultures in his study. “Contemporary cultures, whether complex or small-scale, implicitly differentiate not only art from non-art, but they also distinguish good art from mediocre art (1990, p. 272). “However,” notes Anderson, “the details *are* inevitably structured according to some principles, and the origin of these principles remains to be accounted for” (1990, p. 272).

And this leads to my point. Smith would have us create curriculum that studies masterwork art from other cultures, or our own past, but from a Western aesthetic philosophy. Indeed, Smith’s curriculum proposal is anchored in this ideal of aesthetic experience. He notes “Aesthetic learning differentiates itself into five phases ranging from exposure to and familiarization with aesthetic properties and refinement of perception in the early years to historical and critical studies in the later ones” (1995, p.

174). Such study removes said works of art from the powerful ideals out of which they were created. Can we examine San ostrich eggshell beads sitting upon a table as a work of art, and for their aesthetic value, ignoring that they were created because “with their intrinsic attractiveness and labour-intensive nature, (they) make perfect candidates for valuable gifts to symbolize the bonds between people” (Anderson, 1990, p. 25)?

Further, this ideal of glorifying masterworks and master artists at the possible cost of denying, let us say, the student or child as artist bears a great cost. As Eagleton notes, “If creativity could now be found in art, was this because it could be found nowhere else? Once culture comes to mean learning and the arts, activities confined to a tiny portion of men and women, the idea is at once intensified and impoverished” (2000, p. 16). If the masterwork serves as an icon that blasts the importance out of any work that can be created in the school then the ability of art created at the local level to bring people together at a local level is sacrificed. If art and culture aren’t for all of us, or if we don’t all participate, than how important can they be? Again, it is not that I believe it is wrong to make judgments about whether art works are good or bad. As has been shown, it would appear that a great number of cultures do so. It is just that it may be a particularly Western phenomenon to use such comparison to deny the status of art altogether to objects that don’t meet certain criteria.

In a sense, though I have argued for a renewed curriculum that highlights the function of art in the creation of communities of response, I am left to wonder whether the curricula, as structured, would ever be able to do so. I’ve argued in this paper that art is tied very closely to all the other realms of experience, and that it is somewhat

unfortunate that since the Ancient Greeks we have pulled apart the realms of experience we call science, religion, politics, science, etc. (see p. 35). We probably don't make these divisions extremely distinct in daily life. I can read articles on all of these aspects of life in the front section of the newspaper and they aren't colour coded to warn me they are about 'science' or 'politics'. I can flow between realms without noticing that I'm doing so in building a cupboard in my house. I measure the pieces of wood (mathematics), create a design set up to be aesthetically pleasing (art), work out what the materials will cost (economics) and choose the latest high technology sliders to incorporate into the drawers (science-technology) and take no notice that I am wondering through various realms.

In classrooms, though, these divisions fragment the learning quite distinctly, and do so in increasing severity through the school years. In primary grades many teachers use thematic units and quite liberally stir up the objectives they're covering in the various curricular areas making them blend quite nicely. By the time students are in upper intermediate, discreet times are usually established through the school week to show that the curricular areas are being covered in turn, and students generally pull out specialized textbooks to work through a number of the objectives in various 'subjects'. And of course, by the time the students reach senior high school the fragmentation has gone even further. They don't take science, they take biology or physics or chemistry. Mathematics has become algebra, trigonometry or calculus. Such fragmentation of the curriculum allows for increased depth of study in these subject areas, fosters an understanding of very complex learning objectives and helps to organize time and forms of inquiry, but

there is a cost. Students who cannot put together the pieces of this mass puzzle and see how all these modes of learning are interrelated cannot, as the saying goes, see the forest for the trees.

I went to a non-instructional day workshop for teachers today. The focus was on strategies to use for teaching reading and increasing fluency in intermediate readers. The workshop coordinator is a very well known expert in such matters. She has a number of very widely read books that document, amongst other things, the importance of engaging the students in pre-reading strategies before approaching the text. In fact, such strategies were used and modeled at this workshop. The presenter gave an example, late in the workshop, of how teachers give meaningless, routine assignments to students that don't foster any learning. She spoke of how her daughter was bringing home and creating 'title pages' for some of her subject areas at the start of the year with open disdain, by example. It was amazing to me that pre-learning, focusing strategies in anything other than reading was apparently not valid. To me it seemed that it was being subtly suggested that anything involving what looked like art could obviously not involve 'learning'.

And that seems to summarize the difficulties inherent in advocating for the fine arts in today's educational system. Art, separated from life by Western aesthetic tradition, has become irrelevant. Stanley Cavell rallies against this state of affairs. Espen Hammer notes, "For Cavell, an important part of what the onset of modernism in the arts means is that the condition of mutual estrangement has been generalized to become an intrinsic feature of what art calls for and represents. Modernism in the arts signifies a



condition whereby art has become estranged from itself and its audience, and over the last 100-150 years, indeed since the late Beethoven, the production and reception of art has entered a phase in which all previous conventions have been questioned” (2002, p. 97). As a result, in the ladder of curriculum areas, art sits on the bottom rung.

In order to advocate for the arts, one has traditionally to argue that the fine arts are important and that they deserve a certain amount of funding and a certain amount of dedicated time allotted to them. This is because, as Eisner points out, the allotment of time in the competitive world of curriculum denotes value.

In planning school programs one of the decisions that must be made is when various subjects will be taught and how much time will be devoted to them. Although such decisions are not intended to reflect to students value judgments about the significance of various subject areas, in fact, they do. Students learn in school to read the value code that pervades it. One of these coded qualities is the use and location of time. Take as a specific example the location and amount of time devoted to the arts in school programs. Virtually all elementary school programs devote some attention to the arts. But if one asks about how much and compares it to the amount of time devoted to, say, social studies, reading, mathematics, or the sciences, the proportion is quite small. But if one looks further to determine when the arts are taught, one will find that they are generally taught in the afternoon rather than in the morning and often on Friday afternoons (2002, p. 92).

What is interesting is that, in order to win the battle within the current system, one generally needs to advocate for specialist teachers teaching the specialized subject matter in dedicated time. In other words, if one creates a collage of images bearing meaning as part of a social studies lesson that doesn't count as art. Designing a piece of kinetic sculpture utilizing multiple levers or pulleys as part of a science of physics project does

not count as art. We may know it to be art, we may label it as art forming a community of response, but it doesn't fit the assembly line that is curriculum and it may be career suicide for specialist art teachers or departments to advocate that art occurs in other spaces of the school.

In an earlier edition of The Educational Imagination, Eisner discusses “the scientific based technology of educational practice” (1985, p. 8) that is our current curricular system. Eisner notes that this system is “something akin to agriculture, engineering, or medicine” (1985, p. 8), noting that the idea behind the system was “to discover the *laws* of learning so that teachers could rely *not* on intuition, chance, artistry, or talent but rather on *tested principles* and *procedures* for managing the students learning” (1985, p. 8, italics mine). One can readily note the irony of fitting the teaching of art into a system that rejects the use of intuition or artistry in the educational process. This fragmentation of learning might better be compared to the Ford Assembly Line developed at the start of the last century. Much as one individual is responsible for placing the right front quarter panel on a particular vehicle (or one robotic/software subroutine today), one teacher in one particular subject area is responsible for teaching a particular concept or particular chunk of knowledge.

Curriculum is the detailed division of discrete learning objectives. If certain parts of knowledge or understanding seem inextricably bound to other parts in neighbouring realms, the only decision left is how to rip these apart and see who gets what. This division of the realms of knowledge in curriculum mirrors Western philosophical thought. Mulhall (1994) notes that this partitioning of Western thought into

compartments or realms of knowledge began in earnest during the Enlightenment. The push, during this period, towards individual autonomy resulted in the fragmentation of these various aspects of culture, such as politics, arts and sciences away from one another. Advocates of these various realms then set out to develop or discover the principles and characteristics unique to their own realms, and establish the importance of their specific realms within the culture. Mulhall notes that “For art, the removal of any external underpinning for aesthetic activity threatened its annihilation or (what comes to the same thing) its transformation into entertainment unless some principles unique to its own practice could be discovered” (1996, p. 2). Of course, this same process then occurred on the next scale down, as art fragmented into the various disciplines of art with each needing to discover its own guiding principles, and the other disciplines (science, economics) doing likewise.

As Eisner notes, “The consequences of scientifically based approaches to educational evaluation extend beyond the issue of what subject matters should be emphasized. In many schools they influence how curricula will be organized and how teaching will occur. If one conceives of the curriculum as a kind of assembly line that produces at predictable intervals a certain complex of behaviours, then it appears reasonable to specify those behaviours and to set up the mechanism through which they can be measured. This involves breaking up complex forms of learning into smaller units of behaviour or performance and then using a monitoring system to determine if these microperformances have been achieved” (1985, p. 15). Thus, not only do we have discrete learning in the sciences and humanities, but we have drama, visual arts, and

music courses in our secondary curricula. Poetry, of course, is claimed by the English Departments, and might thus not be considered art.

Thus would I argue, that if art is indeed more closely tied to life and human experience than the current system allows, perhaps the primary teachers have it right. Eisner decries the current state of arts programs noting that there is a “general neglect of the arts in elementary and secondary schools. Although elementary schools are generally supposed to provide programs in the arts, few well-thought-out and competently taught art programs exist at this level. Elementary school teachers have little background in the arts and, in general, are not well prepared to teach them” (2002, p. 106). As a result of this lack of philosophical grounding, and being ill-prepared to teach the fine arts, perhaps they get it right. It is, after all, these ill-prepared elementary school teachers who readily integrate many of the fractured subjects and sets of learning objectives together to form integrated units. Far less attention is paid, in elementary school classrooms, primary in particular, to which subject is being taught at the moment. And art infuses all. Rarely is the opportunity to draw, sing or create something special in order to solidify learning in the classroom forfeited.

Perhaps the revitalization of fine arts within our curriculum requires nothing less than the restructuring of curriculum as a whole to make more learning experiences resemble what we see happening in primary classrooms. Such integration of learning might serve to revitalize more than the fine arts. I am cognizant of the number of times I have been teaching mathematical concepts and found that the students could not relate what they were learning in the classroom to their experiences comparison shopping at the

mall or building a tree fort even when we were calculating percentage discounts or working on measurement units. Curricular subjects are not only compartmentalized apart from each other, they have become compartmentalized away from life.

Reintegrating learning would not only revitalize the fine arts, it would revitalize the lives and experiences of students whose interests and strengths have been undermined by the current system. As Eisner notes, “If, for example, high ability in the arts is regarded as laudable, but nonintellectual in nature, and if the school gives its most highly prized awards to what it regards as intellectual achievements, children who shine in the arts will never shine as brightly as those who are excellent in mathematics; the arts, like the children attracted to them, will remain second-class citizens in the hierarchy or curricular values” (2002, p. 82).

Why do I teach art? I teach art, and enjoy it so much, because teaching the fine arts isn't at all like teaching in the other subject areas. Participating in the fine arts is likewise an experience unlike the other activities in life. Perhaps, if we really got it right as a society, more of life's other experiences would have that integrated, holistic feel about them.

# APPENDIX

## Lessons Learned on Stage

Editor, The News:

On May 3, 4, 5 and 6, both my children at Fairview Elementary had the privilege of participating in the production of the musical Oliver, which was directed by an energetic teacher, Mike Saul.

Involvement in this production has been a fabulous learning experience for both my kids. They've made many friendships that come with a shared experience. They've learned the value of cooperation and teamwork in a way that classroom 'cooperative learning' never has taught them, and never could. They have learned the value of commitment and hard work, and have experienced both the pain and the joy that it brings.

They've learned to take pointed criticism, and to rise above the hurt to accept responsibility and fix the situation. They have learned about setting goals, and about self-discipline, they now know that being tired is not the end of the world. They have both gained a tremendous amount of self-confidence.

They (and many other children) have learned that the school, and society, value other talents in addition to academic and athletic ability. Indeed, I've been very impressed with some of the "hidden talents" which have appeared. I'm quite certain that for some of these children, this experience will change their lives. All this, and they

learned something about 18<sup>th</sup> century England too! What more could one ask from one production?

This has convinced me that there is far more to “education” than just the “three R’s.” I sincerely hope that the school board continues to support this kind of project in the future.

Debra White, Maple Ridge

The caption under the picture reads, “Kenny Price and Katie Thomson in a scene from Fairview’s production of Oliver”.

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