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Jacques Maritain's Definition of Art

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Abstract

I examine Jacques Maritain's definition of art and what it contributes to debates on definitions of art in contemporary aesthetics. Of particular concern are the so-called 'fine arts'. I make three claims; first, that Maritain's definition of art is superior to other traditional and contemporary theories in avoiding their pitfalls and accommodating key data to be met by definitions of art, such as the existence of avant-garde art. Second, I claim that in accommodating avant-garde art, in particular 'conceptual art', Maritain's definition of art refutes the Wittgensteinian argument that art is an 'open concept' which cannot be defined. My final, resulting claim is that Maritain's definition deserves to be the pre-eminent definition of art today. This article consists of four sections. Section one provides some context of definitions of art and the data and conditions that have to be met by a viable definition. Section two provides the foundation and first pillar of Maritain's definition of art, what I identify as a cumulative 'descriptive' definition. Section three provides the second pillar of Maritain's definition of art, applicable specifically to the fine arts. Section four applies Maritain's full descriptive definition to the problem of conceptual art.

Keywords

Jacques Maritain, Defining Art, Thomas Aquinas, Arthur Danto, Beauty

Defining Art

Traditional definitions of art have focused on the ontology of the entity that we call the artwork, be it an artefact or performance, attempting to find one common property or multiple common properties of art. These definitions—'imitation', 'representation', 'expressive' and 'formalist'—are generally regarded to have shown certain

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necessary conditions for some works to be artworks, but no sufficient conditions, due to ready counter-examples, and therefore fail to define the concept of art.[1] For example, the existence of 'content' such as emotional expression or representation in an artwork is a necessary condition for the novel, but is not or an 'avant-garde' 'music' piece such as John Cage's *4'33"*, which expresses no emotion nor attempts to make any representations. The existence of content such as the aforementioned is therefore not a sufficient condition or defining property for art *simpliciter*.

Of utmost concern for theorists of art in the last century and today is 'radical art' or 'avant-garde' art (and thereof, in particular 'conceptual art') such as *4'33"* by Cage which began with Duchamp, and which questions if not undermines traditional views of art as concerned with beauty, representation, craftsmanship and even the distinction between art and every-day objects.[2] Paradigmatic examples of radical visual art are Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), an upturned commercial urinal, Warhol's *Brillo Box* (1964), which, other than the materials used, are act copies of commercial Brillo boxes, and which were made mechanically without Warhol's physical intervention, and Martin Creed's *The lights turning on and off* (2000), which consists of a lightbulb turning on and off in five second intervals in an otherwise empty room.

The failure of traditional definitions and the disparities between radical art and traditional art prompted Wittgensteinians such as Weitz to suggest that art was indefinable and was instead analogous to a game, of which only 'family resemblances' could be made. Vagueness between ordinary objects and artworks (such as whether Gide's *The School for Wives* is a diary or a novel) and innovation in art lead Weitz to conclude that art is therefore an 'open concept', rather than a closed concept with an identifiable essence.[3]

In judging what Maritain's definition offers to contemporary debates concerning art, it not only has to address the problem of radical art and the Wittgensteinian critique of essentialism, however; it also has to be compared with other contemporary definitions of theorists who have denied the Wittgensteinian claim that art cannot be defined and which have tried to deal with the aforementioned data and concerns. Adajian[4] exhaustively lists the data and constraints that these

[1] Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 206.

[2] Arthur Danto, *What Art Is* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 26.

[3] Morris Weitz, 'The Role of Theory in Aesthetics', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15 (1956), pp. 31–32.

[4] Thomas Adajian, 'Definitions of Art', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2012), via: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/art-definition/

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definitions of art must meet (reorganised and paraphrased where appropriate and to which my analysis will refer):

(1) '. . . entities . . . intentionally endowed by their makers with a significant degree of aesthetic interest [and properties, usually perceptual], often surpassing that of most everyday objects, exist in virtually every known human culture'.

(2) '. . . such entities sometime have non-aesthetic—ceremonial or religious or propagandistic—functions, sometimes do not'.

(3) '. . . new genres and art-forms develop, standards of taste evolve, understandings of aesthetic properties and aesthetic experience change'.

(4) '. . . there are institutions in some but not all cultures which involve a focus on artefacts and performances having a high degree of aesthetic interest and lacking any practical, ceremonial, or religious use'.

(5) '. . . such institutions sometimes classify entities apparently lacking aesthetic interest with entities having having a high degree of aesthetic interest'.

(6) '. . . many things other than artworks—for example, natural entities (sunsets, landscapes, flowers, shadows), human beings, and abstract entities (theories, proofs) are routinely described as having aesthetic properties'.

(7) Ostensive or list-like definitions are to be avoided because they do not explain why what is on the list is on the list (paraphrased).

(8) Definitions of art have to account for borderline cases (paraphrased).

As Adajian notes, most contemporary definitions of art attempting to account for these data fall into two broad categories of Conventionalism and Functionalism.[5] Conventionalism itself consists in two sorts of definitions, the institutional and historical. Institutional theorists, such as Dickie, generally claim that something is an artwork if some institution or person representing the 'artworld' deems it so and plays some part in disseminating it, such as a gallery exhibiting

[5] Ibid.

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the work.[6] Historical definitions generally claim that artworks must stand in an art-historical relation to other identified artworks, such as being intended for exhibition like other works, being of the same art form as other works, or being of the same or a similar artistic context or tradition as other art works.[7]

In contrast to Conventionalists, Functionalist theorists claim that functions are definitive of artworks. One line of functionalist definitions, 'aesthetic' definitions, claim that an artwork must satisfy an aesthetic function, such as providing an aesthetic experience or having been purposefully endowed with aesthetic properties such as being beautiful.[8]

A final contemporary definition of art to mention for comparison with Maritain's is Danto's mature definition. Danto's 'embodied meaning' definition is as follows:

> . . . something is a work of art when it has a meaning—is about something—and when that meaning is embodied in the object in which the work of art materially consists . . . works of art are embodied meanings.[9]

Danto, however, has more to say concerning what art *should* be, or what it should avoid. For Danto, 'That something could be art but not beautiful is one of the great philosophical contributions of the twentieth century.'[10] Danto was a pre-eminent art critic and philosopher of art in the mid to late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and as such those who oppose the current dominance of conceptual art and a perceived disdain for traditional art and beauty such as Nerdrum and Scruton place much blame on Danto for the current situation in the art world. This is due to his search for a definition of art which affirms the primacy of radical art and excludes beauty, even positively repudiating beauty as an artistic concern.[11]

The Virtue of Art

Maritain makes the fundamental Aristotelian distinction between the speculative (or theoretical) and the practical intellect. When we

[6] George Dickie, 'Defining Art'. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6 (1969), pp. 253- 256.

[7] Thomas Adajian, 'Definitions of Art', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2012), via: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/art-definition/

[8] Ibid.

[9] Arthur Danto, *What Art Is* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 149.

[10] Ibid., p. 28.

[11] See Roger Scruton, *Beauty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 168–169 and Arthur Danto, *What Art Is* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 25–28).

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speculate or theorise, we aim to know for the sake of knowing, to understand reality or being as being. However, as Maritain states:

> The practical intellect knows for the sake of action. From the very start its object is not Being to be grasped, but human activity to be guided and human tasks to be achieved. It is immersed in creativity. To mould intellectually that which will be brought into being, to judge about ends and means, and to direct or even command our powers of execution— these are its very life.[12]

In general terms, truth for the speculative intellect is the correspondence between the mind and reality, and other than steering the intellect to certain subjects of deliberation, the appetites or emotions and bodily drives do not influence speculative reasoning. Truth for the practical intellect, however, consists in:

> . . . the adequation or conformity of the intellect with the straight appetite, with the appetite as straightly tending to the ends with respect to which the thing that man is about to create will exist.[13]

Now, the activity of the practical intellect is divided between action and works to be made—moral activity and artistic creativity.[14] Concerned with the latter, we arrive at the foundation of Maritain's definition of art, that art is a habit, disposition of the mind or *virtue of the practical intellect*, which consists in making, the creation of objects: 'Art . . . is the straight intellectual determination of works to be made.'[15]

> . . . the judgement of the artist about each of the movements of his fingers have to make is true when it is in conformity with the appetite straightly tending to the production of the work through the appropriate rules born out of the intellect.[16]

This broad definition roots a definition of art not in the ontology of an artefact or performance first, but epistemologically, within the artificer, as *techne*, a habit of the creation of objects involving skill and the adherence to rules attained by the intellect, such as that of perspective in drawing. In other words, the foundation of Maritain's definition of art is first describing how artworks can come into being. Art thus defined includes both crafts or what has traditionally been called the 'useful arts' and what has traditionally been called the 'fine arts'. The difference between the useful arts and the fine arts is that whereas the useful arts serve a practical purpose, such as meeting

[12] Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York, NY: New American Library, 1953), pp. 32–33.
[13] Ibid., p. 34.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., p. 35
[16] Ibid. p. 38.

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a practical need or the improvement of an invention which serves a practical need, the object in the fine arts is beauty, which is held to be self-sufficient or valuable in itself, free from utilitarian purposes.[17] Thus Maritain prefers to call the useful arts 'subservient' arts (serving a practical purpose, performing practical functions) and the fine arts 'free' or 'self-sufficient' arts.[18] This precision of concepts serves to identify beautiful creations as *beyond use other than for themselves*. If consistent, it also universalises art made for beauty, avoiding the charge that art being made for beauty is an arbitrary eighteenth-century conceptual invention (*les beaux arts*).[19]

Now, Conventionalist definitions fail because they do not account for the first (probably primitive) artwork(s). Logical and temporal priority must be placed on first or paradigmatic artwork(s) on the basis of which other artworks can be compared if these theories undergirding the definitions are to be wholly explanatory of art in a 'conventionalist' way.[20] Maritain's definition of art as a virtue of making seems more historically sound. Maritain offers a historical narrative of the emergence of beauty as an object sought for itself which is coextensive with the emergence of the self and the self as its own subject for artistic inspiration and creation in terms of his concepts of 'poetry' and 'creative intuition' (subjects of section three).[21] Maritain's account also therefore offers flexibility with regard to vague objects which serve both practical and aesthetic purposes today, such as cars and clothes in asserting that these objects are not manifestations of 'free' art, but simultaneously serve practical functions, which *include the need for adornment*, adornment being distinguished from beauty valued in itself. Maritain therefore meets condition eight on page five and offers a convincing account of the first artwork(s).

Both Conventionalist definitions also lack informative characterisations of art traditions (art functions, artistic contexts) and so also any way of distinguishing them (and art functions and artistic predecessors) from *non*-art traditions, functions and predecessors.[22] They fail to tell us the *reason(s)* why something could be chosen as an

[17] Ibid. p. 41.

[18] John G. Trapani, *Poetry, Beauty & Contemplation: The Complete Aesthetics of Jacques Maritain*, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), p. 79.

[19] Paul O. Kristeller, 'The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics Part I' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951), pp. 498, 508–509.

[20] Thomas Adajian, 'Definitions of Art', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2012), via: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/art-definition/

[21] Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York, NY: New American Library, 1953), pp. 3–30.

[22] Thomas Adajian, 'Definitions of Art', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2012), via: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/art-definition/

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artwork, which is the point of the essentialist project to define art (see point seven on page five).

Maritain's definition of art is 'descriptive' in that it spells out the meaning of the word 'art' while accommodating existing usages—semantically and in artistic practices. With respect to the free arts, Maritain's descriptive definition of art as a practical virtue of making something that is beautiful (together, both necessary and sufficient conditions) is broad enough that it encompasses historical variety in artistic traditions, functions and contexts, and narrow enough to tell us *why* an artwork is to be distinguished from non-art. However, with respect to these two necessary and sufficient conditions, detail needs to be given on *how* an artist creates something beautiful such that it can be called an artwork and how that process of creation relates to its audience recognising the object as an artwork.

Poetry and Beauty

For Maritain, the artist is inspired by being able to figuratively see the world through emotion. The knowledge that the artist has is intuitive or 'connatural' knowledge, which, like intuitive moral reasoning 'in the moment', is preconceptual. Maritain holds that the artist has an 'experience-knowledge' through the senses in divining the 'secret meaning' of things, in virtue of emotion. Central to his later thought, Maritain's concept of 'poetry' (hereafter capitalised), as distinct from the art of writing verses, denotes the 'intercommunication between the inner being of things and the inner being the human Self which is a kind of divination.'[23] Maritain accepts the existence of the Freudian subconscious, but also posits a 'spiritual preconscious', which rests on his assumptions regarding the existence of the human intellect and ideas in a spiritual manner, and for whose unknown activities and operations (performed by what he calls the 'Illuminating Intellect') he believes a spiritual preconscious to best explain.[24] Now, the artist's activity is intellectual or intellective in a practical, connatural way, because the resonance between the artist's self and things such as objects, events and other people is more than emotion as we normally conceive it—as irrational. The Illuminating Intellect, when in contact with an emotion, turns the emotion toward the subconscious and spiritual preconscious, which by association, then transforms the emotion into a 'spiritualised' or 'intentional emotion', giving it aspects of the object of which it is an emotion.[25] The emotion that is

[23] Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York, NY: New American Library, 1953), p. 3.

[24] Ibid., pp. 70–71.

[25] Ibid., pp. 87–89.

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associated with a thing becomes one with it in the mind of the artist, and he in turn becomes one with the thing, such that he is able to manifest the spiritualised emotion in an artwork, that is both about a thing in itself and the artist's own emotions about it.

The first of these 'stages' is cognitive, and the second is creative.[26] In an artwork, the difference between an irrational emotion and a spiritualised emotion is that between 'sentimentality' which is not only contrived but lacks logic or lacks any informative power for ascertaining the meaning or the artist's 'intentions' in a work, and 'sentiment', which is a spontaneous, sincere, 'affective response to a valued situation or object.'[27] Art that moves us is filled with intentional emotion. Such genuine aesthetic experiences are contrasted with those experiences of art which do not move us because we recognise its contrived or shallow nature.[28] The difference between these aesthetic experiences forces us to affirm skill and sincerity in artistic creation and the possibility of critiquing aesthetic taste.

Poetry is natural to all humans, because it is possible for everyone with functioning cognitive faculties to appreciate art and intentional emotion. Poetry is the 'secret life of each and all the arts.'[29] The 'cognitive' 'stage' of aesthetic experience is thus universal and allows for all of us to appreciate and contemplate art. However, given that art is generally a virtue of making, the creative 'stage' is the province of the artist. Furthermore, while the cognitive and creative 'stages' may be logically distinguished for the sake of non-creative audiences of art, they are temporally and logically one for the artist, together constituting 'Poetic Knowledge'.[30] The artist creates, or he is not an artist. For Maritain, the cognitive, Poetic stage is *creative* intuition, for the sake of an artwork to be created. The practice and honing of one's abilities in inspiration and creation—the virtue of art—to see in things their 'secret meanings' and create objects that are filled with the personal significance of intentional emotion is why for the artist, his virtue of art is his most treasured possession.[31]

Now, what is the quality of the intentional emotions in an artwork? Why do we value artworks as distinct from other objects? Recall that it was asserted that the artist creates beautiful objects by

[26] Ibid., pp. 90–104.

[27] Sean M. Sullivan, *Maritain's Theory of Poetic Intuition* (unpublished doctoral dissertation), (University of Fribourg, Switzerland, 1963), p. 59.

[28] John G. Trapani, *Poetry, Beauty & Contemplation: The Complete Aesthetics of Jacques Maritain*, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), pp. 56–57).

[29] Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York, NY: New American Library, 1953), p. 3.

[30] Ibid., pp. 85–86.

[31] Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism* (trans. J. F. Scanlan), 4th impression, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1934), p. 63.

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definition, and that beauty was valuable in itself. Some elaboration and exploration of this aesthetic element of Maritain's definition of art is needed by way of defining the beautiful, describing how the artist pursues it in relation to Poetic Knowledge and also seeing how the aesthetic element stands up to objections.

Maritain follows Aquinas in his declaration that 'the "beautiful" is something pleasant to apprehend'.[32] Now, while ideas can be beautiful, the beautiful specific to human beings as material-spiritual composite creatures is accessible through the senses. However, sensual delight only accompanies an intellectual delight upon the perception of the beautiful. For both Aquinas and Maritain, the beautiful consists in three properties of 'integrity', 'proportion' or 'harmony' and 'clarity' or 'radiance', the latter of which encompasses the former two and which denotes the intelligibility and splendour of the form of the beautiful object as a distinct object.[33] These properties are intelligible through the senses and for Maritain, when the mind recognises matter so intelligibly arranged as to be beautiful, it recognises its own nature and the 'intellectual appetite', which seeks after intelligibility is satisfied and rejoices in delightful contemplation of being itself. For this reason, the intellect, in its creative impulse, yearns to create the beautiful, as the process of creating the beautiful and the object itself are 'cleared of all adventitious elements' and is thus a matter of pure intellectual delight, hence the name of the *free* arts.[34]

However, what some find beautiful others do not, and this apparent relativity constitutes one objection to Maritain's thesis that artists produce the beautiful by definition. For Maritain, that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' is a half-truth. Beauty is clearly an object of universal experience and delight, which can be contrasted with the disgusting. Furthermore, there are things which are *always* beautiful for everyone, such as a sunset or a rainforest. For that reason, beauty is only relative to the nature and purpose of an *artefact or performance—an artwork*.

For Maritain, beauty is a transcendental, a property of being as being, or God.[35] Beauty is therefore omnipresent but also subject to 'proper proportionality'[36]: just as everything in creation is good and good in its own way(s), there are no fixed meanings of beauty with regard to artworks. Rather, each artwork is beautiful on its own terms,

[32] Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas* I—II (trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1920), I—II: 27, a. I, *ad* 3, via: http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2.htm

[33] Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism* (trans. J. F. Scanlan), 4th impression, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1934), pp. 24–25.

[34] Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York, NY: New American Library, 1953, p. 40.

[35] Ibid., pp. 25–26.

[36] Ibid., p. 173.

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subject to varying tastes, education and abilities of aesthetic appreciation of its audience. As an inexhaustible transcendental, beauty can be expressed in an infinite number of ways by artists.[37] From the above considerations, we see that Maritain affirms ontological and epistemological objectivity of beauty, and while affirming difference of taste, he qualifies this with respect to genuine aesthetic experience engendered by intentional emotion as opposed to feigned aesthetic experience engendered by sentimentality.

This qualification brings us to a second objection to Maritain's aesthetic thesis. Many 'artworks' are ugly, disturbing, and some are disgusting or grotesque—for example Piero Manzoni's *Artist's Shit* (1961) or much of Fred Einaudi's portfolio. Some of these works are also designed to shock. Again, following Duchamp and Danto, many today believe that something can not be beautiful but still be art. If the artist produces beautiful works by definition for Maritain, these works seem to be counter-examples to Maritain's definition of art.

First, on the basis of the aesthetic element of Maritain's definition, it seems clear that artefacts or performances made primarily to shock do not belong to the free arts. The work serves the practical purpose of shocking its audience and is thereby not created spontaneously. It is thus analogous to other work created for practical purposes, such as propaganda or a commercial publicity stunt. One also observes that being shocked by art is a visceral affair, and an appeal to gut reactions, biological impulse and base emotions, such that there is no 'meaning' or 'point' to it. 'Art' that shocks is therefore not primarily concerned with intentional emotion. These considerations permit us to reject it as an instance of free art.

Second, concerning the ugly, Maritain's definition is broad enough to accommodate most examples of ugly work in the free arts, given his doctrine of proper proportionality and the free development of the rules of art. For example, what is superficially ugly, such as a anatomical deformity can also be beautiful, in the way that a person bears it, changes, and becomes a stronger, more compassionate person. Perhaps it is precisely one of the purposes of the artist to bring out such beauty. It seems that work that exhibits the most extreme ugliness—the disgusting or the grotesque—is the main challenge for Maritain's definition, and to which I finally turn.

I noted earlier that Poetry is natural to all, and it explains how both an artist is inspired in his work and how an audience appreciates it. It was said that the intellect, when free, longs to create the beautiful, because the beautiful is a manifestation of being as being—an inexhaustible wellspring of intelligibility in which the mind, spontaneously and non-self-consciously, delights. However, concerning the

[37] Ibid., pp. 45–46.

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Poetry that is a prior condition for the artist's Poetic Knowledge, Maritain writes that 'Poetry stands in the line . . . of the delight procured by beauty'.[38] This quote, which places the ability of the appreciation of the beautiful logically prior to Poetry, suggests that a proper mental or spiritual state is required to be able to see beauty in the world in oneself, and thus create and appreciate art.

From these considerations, just as for Aquinas and Maritain evil is a privation of the good, I posit that the grotesque, in its generation in the mind of the artist, is a privation of peace of mind and right emotion, materialised in artefacts or performances and characterised, like shocking work, by our psychosomatic detestation of it—hence, the grotesque of 'disturbing' is characterised by both sensual and psychological revolting properties. If, as a cognitive activity, Poetry is a kind of contemplation of the 'secret meaning' of things and experiences in the world and a unification of our mind and those things through intentional emotion, we must admit that there are healthy, good thoughts about the world and ourselves and states of mind which are natural and desirable, as opposed to disturbing or upsetting thoughts about the world and ourselves. This is not to deny the necessary existence of the latter, but it is to assert that the latter should not be dominant, and if they are, this is an unnatural and *unfree* state of mind. Extreme ugliness of the mind we recognise as undesirable and senseless, and the senseless—such as sentimentality—in art we recognise as ugly.[39] If artistic creation is fundamentally free, as Maritain claims, it is ordered to beauty and delight, and smothered to death by sentimentality, practical concerns, repulsion, self-doubt, despair and neuroses, which is why grotesque 'artworks' are never treasured as beautiful artworks are. 'What is most real in the world thus escapes the notice of a darkened soul.'[40] Whatever grotesque artefacts and performances are, they are not instances of free art.

One does not have to be a Maritainian or even a Christian to recognise the truth of this. Whereas in his writings and his acclaimed television work Scruton seems to view the rise of grotesque 'art' as synonymous with sacrilege and coextensive with the flight from religious faith,[41] a Buddhist or Taoist may identify it as coextensive with the commodification of nature, the rise of industrial society and especially with increased obsession with the self and expectations of happiness as opposed to highlighted negative aspects and experiences

[38] Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism* (trans. J. F. Scanlan), 4th impression, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1934), p. 97.

[39] Ibid., pp. 51–52.

[40] Jacques Maritain, *The Responsibility of the* Artist (1960 reprint), (New York, NY: Gordian Press, 1972), p. 93.

[41] Roger Scruton, *Why Beauty* Matters, (BBC, 2009).

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of one's life—a process of going inwards and downwards.[42] This is analogous to what Maritain identifies in surrealism as art's obsession with its own preconscious creative process, thereby perverting the process and artworks themselves.[43]

Art, as an activity of producing beautiful creations, such that audiences can participate in beauty, produces peace through Poetry and intentional emotion as the natural relationship between a person and the world. The artist non-self-consciously and spontaneously creates the beautiful in delight and peace,[44] loving the world as his own lodging.[45] One expression of this is a traditional Chinese painting in which the philosopher Chuang-tzu stands in the centre of the landscape, not domineering or anxious, but in harmony with it.

Conceptual Art

As mentioned above, avant-garde art, and in particular conceptual art, poses the most significant challenge for a definition of art because many conceptual artworks lack aesthetic features, are indistinguishable from ordinary objects and often are not physically made by the artist. Definitions of art have to accommodate conceptual art either by finding necessary and sufficient properties for art that conceptual artworks also possess or by denying that conceptual art is art—that it does not belong within the same concept as free art given its uniqueness. LeWitt says of conceptual art:

> In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art . . . all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.[46]

On the basis of his definition of art, I believe Maritain would follow the second line of argument that conceptual art is of such a different kind as to not be the same work-producing activity as the free arts. If, as LeWitt says, for the conceptual artist the concept or idea is the most important aspect of the work, and the 'execution is a perfunctory affair', this disjunct between idea and creation is inconsistent with

[42] Lao-tzu, *Tao Te Ching* (trans. S. Addiss and S. Lombardo), (Indianapolis, IN: Hacking Publishing Company, Inc., 1993), 13.

[43] Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York, NY: New American Library, 1953, p. 59.

[44] Chang Chung-yuan, *Creativity and Taoism: A Study in Chinese Philosophy, Art and Poetry*, (London: Wildwood House Ltd., 1975), pp. 96, 120–121.

[45] Lao-tzu, *Tao Te Ching* (trans. S. Addiss and S. Lombardo), (Indianapolis, IN: Hacking Publishing Company, Inc., 1993), 13.

[46] Sol LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', in A. Alberro and B. Stimson eds., *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology,* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), p. 11.

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Poetic Knowledge, where the first cognitive stage—logically prior to the creative stage—is *creative* intuition.

If a concept or idea is an abstraction from reality (including the self) and a static expression of it, its generation is speculative activity, and by definition speculation by concepts. This speculative conceptualisation of reality is, as an activity of the speculative intellect, ordered to knowledge, of reality and the self. Conceptual artists need not 'make' a new physical object, but in creating a concept or idea that represents and expresses reality for the benefit of knowledge of it, they are creating the concept or idea itself which can then be embodied in matter. This only apparently coincides with Danto's embodied meaning definition of art, however, because it is a mistake to conflate concepts with intentions. It seems that precisely because the execution or materialisation of a concept is only of incidental importance for conceptual artists, what is often thought of as the intention of an artist in works or the 'meaning' of a work need not be there; for example, the intentions of Duchamp's 'Readymade' *In Advance of a Broken Arm (*1915), are imperceptible, and perhaps non-existent. In contrast, the concept running throughout Duchamps' 'Readymades' is evident: any object can be art if the artist declares it is.[47] Danto's definition is therefore false, on this account, then, because the conceptual art does not *necessarily* possess the property of meaning(s). Danto's other necessary property, that is, of material embodiment of those meanings, is also incidental for conceptual art, if the generation of concepts or ideas is of foremost importance. In fact, Danto appears to hold a position stronger than LeWitt, and in so doing, contradicts himself concerning the necessity of execution or materialisation of concepts:

> One may say that the fact that it is painted on canvas does not enter into the meaning. It just supports the painting. It is not at all part of the meaning, even if it is part of the object that embodies the meaning . . . It is the invisible properties that make something art.[48]

Danto's position is furthermore contrary to the experience of the artist, where the medium, materials and techniques are intimately bound up with the meaning of the work or intentions of the artist, for example, the differences between techniques and intentions for and in different paints, such as the suggestiveness of watercolours or the watery ink of Chinese calligraphy (the application of which represents

[47] Marcel Duchamp, M. *Interview with Martin Friedman*, October 1965, via: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYqDpNmnu8I

[48] Arthur Danto, *What Art Is* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 39–40.

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the flow or *li* of the Tao or Nature, determining the intention and method of the calligrapher).[49]

Conceptual art *seeks after knowledge* but nevertheless is also a *creative activity*. Recall that the wider concept of art is fundamentally a virtue of making. From Maritain's terminology, I posit that we should therefore call conceptual art a 'speculative art,' which, along with logic, aims at knowledge and perfecting the intellect by sharpening ideas or putting our concepts in order, or framing a proposition.[50] Conceptual art, while often thought to be a type of philosophising given that its aim is to make people think,[51] serves philosophy as a tool, so that the philosopher can theorise using clear concepts,[52] even if the concepts or ideas of conceptual art are themselves sometimes vague, very broad or illogical. For conceptual artists, 'Ideas alone can be works of art'.[53]

Theoretical philosophy aims at *knowing* first causes for knowing's own sake, and is not ordered to the creation of objects.[54] Conceptual art therefore is art in the widest possible sense of creating in so far as it creates an object in the mind, but it is not among the free arts, which are defined by Poetic Knowledge and ordered to the creation of beautiful physical objects, and should therefore not be considered, taught, or physically placed among them as in galleries, exhibitions and art schools.[55] Maritain's framework allows us to accommodate conceptual art while maintaining an essentialist project of defining art, thereby avoiding the Weitzian-Wittgensteinian temptation to claim that art is an open concept in light of avant-garde and conceptual art.

'What the [conceptual] work of art looks like isn't too important. It has to look like something if it has physical form.'[56] That conceptual artists are not primarily concerned with the making of a physical object explains why many conceptual artworks cannot be differentiated from ordinary objects. In light of Maritain's theory of Poetic

[49] Alan Watts, *Tao: The Watercourse* Way, (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1975), p. 15.

[50] Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York, NY: New American Library, 1953, p. 300.

[51] Elisabeth Schellekens, 'Conceptual Art', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (2014), via: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/conceptual-art/

[52] Jacques Maritain, *An Introduction to Philosophy* (trans. E. I. Watkin), 7th impression, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1937), p. 147.

[53] Sol LeWitt, 'Sentences on Conceptual Art', in A. Alberro and B. Stimson eds., *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology,* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), p. 107.

[54] Jacques Maritain, *An Introduction to Philosophy* (trans. E. I. Watkin), 7th impression, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1937), pp. 104–105.

[55] David Molesky, 'The Nerdrum School', in M. J. Pearce ed., *Kitsch & Beauty: The Proceedings of the Representational Art Conference* 2014, (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), p. 244.

[56] Sol LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', in A. Alberro and B. Stimson eds., *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology,* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), p. 13.

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Knowledge, one sees that this is because conceptual art, as a speculative art, does not as a requirement materialise the intentional emotion needed for the audience to have a genuine aesthetic experience and therefore identify something as an artwork, asking, 'What is this about?' A concept is static, whereas an emotion is dynamic, and rooted in matter, accessible through the senses, and accessible to all.

Conclusions

Maritain's descriptive definition of art consists of necessary and sufficient conditions—free art as an activity aiming at the production of beautiful physical creations—which is superior to traditional and contemporary definitions of art in avoiding their common pitfalls and accommodating the eight data identified by Adajian and listed earlier. Maritain's descriptive definition of art as a virtue of the practical intellect ordered to the creation of beautiful physical objects seems to be both extensionally and intensionally adequate: there are no current counter-examples to it and given its broadness, it seems that there are no *possible* counter-examples. Given that it is rooted epistemologically in the artist and his activity first, from which the ontology of artworks and non-art is made intelligible, Maritain's descriptive definition of art also seems to be 'sense' adequate. Moreover, Maritain's definition of art is consistent with artistic practice, artistic traditions and aesthetic experience of art cross-culturally. Its greatest strength is that it explains the recognisibility of art by its audience, which is particularly relevant with grotesque and conceptual artefacts and performances. From the above conclusions, I claim that Maritain's definition deserves to be the pre-eminent definition of art today.

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