

FACULTATEA DE FILOSOFIE ȘI ȘTIINȚE SOCIAL-POLITICE

ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ DE FILOSOFIE

The Definition of The Work of Art.

A Procedural Theory of Art

SUMMARY

Conducător de doctorat

**Prof. Univ. Dr. D. N. ZAHARIA
(VODĂ)**

Student-doctorand

OANA NASTASĂ

2015

Table of contents

Introduction	3
I. Art's definitional crisis	6
I.1 Definition of art	7
I.1.1 Conceptual clarifications.....	9
I.1.2 The role of definition in art identification.....	11
I.1.3 The role of definition in art evaluation.....	15
I.2. Anti-essentialism.....	18
I.2.1 The impossibility of defining art.....	19
I.2.2 The thesis of linguistic competence.....	25
I.2.3 Family resemblances.....	31
Capitolul II. Institutionalism. Dickie's Institutional Theory of Art	38
II.1 The first institutional theory of art.....	39
II.2 The second institutional theory of art.....	42
II.3 Conferal of status.....	45
II.4 Arbitrariness.....	57
II.5 Presentation as a constitutive element of the work of art.....	60
II.6 The art world.....	66
II.6.1. Institution of art and its systems.....	67
II.6.2. Constitutive rules-normative rules. Conventions.....	71
II. 7 Historicity.....	75
II. 8 Aesthetic aspects in the institutional theory of art.....	78
Capitolul III. Other modern theories of art	84
III.1. Historicism.....	84
III.2. Functionalism.....	93
III.3. The cluster account.....	105

Capitolul IV. A procedural definition of art	112
IV.1. Artefactuality.....	114
IV.2. Specific artistic procedures.....	121
IV.3. Intentionality.....	139
IV.4. The art world.History and context.....	145
IV.5. Artistic relevant aspects.....	151
Capitolul V. Implications of the procedural definition of art	154
V.1. rules versus roles.....	154
V.2.Descriptive, not evaluative theory.....	156
V.3. Inclusivity and anti-elitism.....	160
V.4. Circularity.....	165
V.5. Evaluation of a work of art.....	166
Conclusions	180
Bibliography	182
List of image	192

Key words: *definition of art, art evaluation, the institutional theory of art*

Summary

The problem of the definition of art is a hard one nowadays. The traditional definitions of art are incomplete, and the reason for that seems to reside in the very artistic field of today, in the modern and contemporary artistic practice, which made a target in provoking and destroy any limit which threatens to interpose between art and non-art. Few observe the fact that, although the traditional definitions of art claim to be in search of the essence of art, they take into account only what is art at the moment in which the theory is created, and not any kind of art, but the most valuable and the most well-known, the paradigmatic art of that particular time. The past and the future of art is of no importance to these authors, they are neither interested in what was art before their time, nor in the potential development of art in the future. Under these conditions, these theories of art were from their beginning destined to desuetude.

Paradoxically, it was the very statements of the anti-essentialists, that art can't be defined because it is an open concept which has a content that always changes, the ones which fed all the modern definitions of art. The importance of the anti-essentialists theories (Weitz, Kennick, Ziff) lays in the fact that they pointed out that it is not the perceptual properties of an object the ones that includes the object in the class of the works of art, but another kind of properties, relational or generative ones. Some art philosophers are even today skeptical about the possibility of discovering a real definition of art and embrace the option of a description, often contextualized, of what is art. For other philosophers, a definition of art is possible, is necessary, and if a satisfying definition of art could not be produced yet, this those not mean that a correct definition of art can't be still created.

Modern theories of art, as opposed to traditional ones, seem to have taken seriously the ever-changing character of art, as was pointed out by Weitz, and they have tried to offer definitions of art that include all the artistic phenomena, but, as we will see in the paper, most of them fail in that regard: they succeed in explaining what is art only in the European society, or what is art in the European society at a particular moment, although maybe it will be useful to the understanding of art to discover a theory that will explain what is art in general, not just the art of a certain context. In the last two chapters of the thesis I advance and defend a definition of art which is extremely general and which is constructed in such a way that it can be adapted to every context. It illuminates not only what is art in general and what it

represents in various contexts, but also allows for comparisons to be made among different artistic and cultural contexts, clarifying not only the differences, but also the similarities between them.

The first chapter makes a brief description of the reasons we need a definition of art, and analyses the anti-essentialist arguments with two purposes, the first is to demonstrate that these arguments don't necessarily prove that a definition of art is impossible, and second because in these arguments lies the seeds from which all the modern definitions of art – including the procedural theory of art presented in the last two chapters of this thesis –grew. I consider that the function of identification art from non-art, of artistic objects from non-artistic objects is one which is of great interest for a definition of art. More, I also analyze the evaluative component of a definition of art and, although I reject the option of a evaluative definition of art and defend the opportunity of giving a classificatory definition, I think that a definition of art (even a purely classificatory one) could offer the means that, if we correctly classify a work of art, we will also discover it's purposes and, thus, we can deduce the evaluative criteria which apply to it.

The second chapter analyses institutionalism in defining art, especially the two institutional theories of art offered by George Dickie, highlighting both the advantages of such a definition of art, as well as the problems it has. I emphasized those elements of the theory wich have a role in the later development of the procedural theory of art: I analyze the concept of conferral of status and I offer some arguments which prove that an institutionalism (proceduralism) who puts the conferral of status in it's center is not sustained by the actual artistic practice; I also reveal the arbitrariness of such a robust institutionalism; I analyze the presentation of a work of art as a constitutive element and I defend the position that, although in the case of some artistic procedures (dada works of art, conceptual art, etc.) the presentation is a part of the creation of that specific work of art, in the case of more traditional artistic procedures the presentation is only desirable, not necessary for an object to be an artistic object; I explain the notion of *art world* in it's various meanings and I clarify the meaning which has in the procedural theory: following Danto and later Graves, the *art world* as an artistic practice wrapped in an atmosphere of artistic theory, the totality of artistic theories (backed up by an artistic practice) organized in an ierarchical maner.

Chapter three makes an analisis of the other very important modern definitions of art, historicism, functionalism and the cluster account, highlighting the advantages as well as the

disadvantages of these theories. As I have tried to prove, none of these theories stands up without including an institutional dimension.

On the basis of the conclusions drawn from the first three chapters, in chapter four I offer the procedural definition of art: *a work of art in a classificatory way is (1) a form; (2) which is created by specific artistic procedures and (3) who has a set of aspects which are relevance in the context of the art world (in the coontext of a system or a sub-system of the art world)*. I stand for the necessity of the artifactuality condition regarding the works of art, but I employ a very relaxed meaning of the term: art as a human activity undertaken in an engaged way and having some purposes. For this, I borrow the term *form* from Carroll and I define it like this: “ensamble of choises made with the intention of fulfilling a certain purport or aim. I then defend the supremacy of artistic procedures (the procedures in which the artistic objects are created) in defining a work of art, and these artistic procedures are correlated with the relevant aspects of the specific procedure in which the artistic object is created. The procedural definition of art is an intentional-moderat definition of art, as I explain in this chapter, and has the advantaje of beeing suitable for being adapted to any historical time or to any cultural context in the following maner: a work of art in a classificatory way at the time t is (1) a form; (2) which is created by specific artistic procedures at time t and (3) who has a set of aspects which are relevance in the context of the art world at time t . Time t can be replaced with culture c .

The last chapter accounts for the major implications of the procedural definition of art: the rules of art as superiour to the roles fulfilled in the art world; descriptive not evaluative theory; inclusivity and anti-elitism; the way in which this definition resolves the issue of circularity; the way in which this definition, when applied to a specific work of art, can be of a real help in the proces of evaluation of that work.

This theory has a theoretic purpose, to help us understand what is (can be) art and why, as well as practical porpuses: it can help in the identification of an object as a work of art, being able to make a diference between works of art, non-works of art and objects which are (or were) ar the border; it can also be of a real help when we evaluate a particular work of art because, although is a classificatory definition of art, the understanding of the artistic procedure in which the work is produced leads to understanding the relevant aspects of that work and thus to the understanding of the conditions and purposes in which it has been created. We can thus avoid the common situation in which a work of art is considered without

value because it is evaluated according to a set of evaluative criteria which belong to different artistic practice. (artistic movement).

The theory which I defend in this thesis is an institutional theory, because it revolves around the notion of the *art world*, and it is named a procedural theory of art because the procedure in which the object is created is the one who determines the artisticity of that object. This theory has a place among the modern theories of art for various reasons. First, the other theories fail to accurately identify the art objects from the ordinary objects, some of them are not inclusive enough, leaving outside the realm of art objects which are actually art, others are too inclusive, allowing for objects which are not works of art to enter this class of objects – some theories are too inclusive and too exclusive in the same time. The procedural theory also offers a description of the border cases and has the means to explain why this is so.

Second, the procedural theory is not a normative theory of art and does not want to tell what should be art, its purpose is to say what is art and to explain why.

Third, most of the art theories speak about art as if art appeared in a spontaneous way and was exactly like it is today, refusing to include in the class of art the very procedures from which the artistic procedures as we know them today sprang. Most theories draw a line between art and Art, denying the artisticity of popular art objects. This theory wants not only to reinstate these kind of objects in the realm of artistic objects, but also to explain the powerful generative links which connect these types of art and makes them members of the same class of objects.