

## 2. Definitions of Art and the Art World

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### Introduction

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If someone calls it art, it's art. (Donald Judd)<sup>1</sup>

Donald Judd's statement seems self-evident. If someone wants to call something 'art', who can stop them? While such an assumption appears common sense, it leads into challenging disputes. Today, many people would consider Martin Elliott's poster *Tennis Girl* of 1970 (Figure 2.1) to be in poor taste. They may or may not regard this attribute positively, but they would generally be unlikely to think it was an example of a serious work of art. We may decide to make precisely the same evaluation of Jeff Koons' sculpture *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* (1988) (Figure 2.2). A senior art world representative, such as the Director of New York's Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), would, however, be very likely to accept Koons' sculpture as a significant work of art, while rejecting Elliot's poster. We may object to the art world representative's views, but what would this objection achieve? If it is really a case that if someone says it's art, it's art, why is the art world representative taken more seriously on such matters than most? Who or what has the power to proclaim some things works of art and not others?

These are difficult questions to answer in the abstract, since what can be said to be art has changed throughout history along with its conditions of display and consumption. Today's professional art representative is very different from someone



Figure 2.1 – Martin Elliott, *Tennis Girl* (1970). © Martin Elliott.



Figure 2.2 – Jeff Koons, *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* (1988). San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. © Jeff Koons.

who would have been in a position to commission an artist 500 years ago. The audiences for Elliot or Koons also differ dramatically from earlier audiences. When audiences and institutions mutate, art changes as different cultural possibilities emerge. What is important to note is that these possibilities are *finite* at any given historical moment. This is one reason that only a limited number of people have been able to proclaim something to be art and have their opinion taken seriously. Moreover, this authority has only been vested in artists themselves for a relatively short period of history.

### The Rise of the Idea of Art

In the early modern era, large mural commissions provided by the Church and rich merchant patrons gave artists greater responsibility for the production of intellectually and technically ambitious works. In Rome, Michelangelo Buonarroti produced murals for the *Sistine Chapel Vault* (1508–12), paintings that were symptomatic of the artist's new sense of authority. Michelangelo's control over the intellectual content and practical execution of the murals signified that he was not simply a proficient technician, but an *individual* who could respond to Christian doctrine on his own terms. By conceiving and painting his work alone,

Michelangelo distanced his practice from that of fellow craftsmen and collective workers such as masons, house builders, locksmiths, tinkers, weavers, spinners, tailors, watchmakers and jewellers. Michelangelo was seen to perform in an independent realm, unconstrained by rules.

In part, this sense of independent 'genius' was an illusion. Like today's gallery directors and collectors, rich patrons were in a position to give artists such as Michelangelo a sense of freedom. At the same time, financial autonomy from church patronage began to allow artists to explore secular themes. Given this, it is unsurprising that during the early modern era, painting and sculpture began to be counted amongst the liberal arts such as poetry.<sup>2</sup> Art became separated from other craft skills, skills which were now perceived to be the province of merchants and the labouring classes. This division of labour marks the origins of the way many people today use the term 'art', yet to many, art is still shorthand for 'well crafted', a relic of a much older understanding of the term.<sup>3</sup> To a Renaissance artist such as Michelangelo, however, this was insufficient. Art was above craft; it was part of a higher order of human production. This division between secular art (scholarly and independent) and religious art (a tool of Christian propaganda) was aided by the Protestant attack on images in the 1500s. Bolstered by the wealth of Protestant merchants, iconoclasm created the locale for the urbane art-lover to break away from the need for art to serve an overt ideological function, in search of artistic freedom.

Forms of display in the early modern period hindered this quest. Art galleries did not come into existence until the mid-eighteenth century;<sup>4</sup> today's ubiquitous 'white cube' exhibition venues are a product of twentieth-century conspicuous consumption.<sup>5</sup> Stimulated by the rebirth of humanist scholarship and its insights into natural history in the early sixteenth century, princely courts, scientific societies, religious orders and laypersons started to collect curiosities.<sup>6</sup> Further encouraged by the developments in transport that led to the European exploration of 'new' worlds, they collected objects from around the world and placed them in their 'cabinets of curiosity' (also often referred to by their German name, *Wunderkammer*).<sup>7</sup> The majority of the cabinets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries consisted of composite objects and seldom contained only works of art. Works of art were not valued as highly as some curios and often fetched lower sums. These cabinets formed synopses of the world, allowing the produce of the earth, sea and air to be compared with the produce of mankind, using wonder to imagine humanity and nature. The cabinets of curiosities were collections of rare or odd objects representing the three elements of *naturalia*: the animal world, the vegetable world and the mineral world. In addition, collectors would accumulate *artificialia*, or human achievements. Amassing the most curious artefacts in the world, collectors sought to illuminate the secrets of nature by reproducing its spectacle and fantasy in microcosm. The cabinets were non-scientific in the sense that

they primarily encapsulated the sense of wonderment that lay at the heart of Christian creationist doctrine. As such, the objective of the early modern cabinets was *not* to produce a logical, encyclopaedic map of everyday *naturalia* and *artificialia*, but to support and promote religious knowledge. The early *Wunderkammer* were primarily produced for spiritual and ritualistic purposes.

Curiosity cabinets began to disappear in the following centuries when their contents became subsumed as explicable objects of scientific enquiry rather than religious relics or puzzling wonders. The objects considered most interesting were relocated to museums of art and natural history. The transformation of the princely galleries of Europe into museums was one that served the ideological needs of the middle classes and nation states, providing secular civic rituals. Museums became one means by which emergent imperial states such as Britain, France and Germany could represent, justify and take pride in their global authority. Public museums not only displayed the nation's power and wealth, in the form of objects taken from colonies, but provided a platform upon which to establish an historical canon of 'national' culture.<sup>8</sup> Viewing 'indigenous' artefacts imparted a strong sense of civic and national continuity, ritualising the acquisition of national identity while surreptitiously nurturing the colonial logic of international cultural superiority. Museums applied enlightenment logic to these collections, classifying them scientifically and placing them into appropriate departments. Such museums were public rather than private; they were often state-owned and had an educational role and responsibility. They were credited with the ability to escort an unsophisticated public into a new comportment and higher echelon of moral and civilised behaviour. Public and moral policies nursed the modern museum out of the curiosity cabinet, to take part in new schemes of biological categorisation and museological spectacle illuminated by exuberant collisions of visual techniques and concepts.

By the late 1700s, therefore, artists were given further reason to define their activities systematically in terms of what they were *not*. Like natural science, art became increasingly exclusive, a professional activity engaged in as a form of specialist knowledge. The formation of artists' academies, following the model of the Académie Royale founded in Paris in 1648, also cemented this process. Modern industrialised society of this period was dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge to achieve order. Modernity relied increasingly on establishing binary oppositions between 'order' and 'disorder', constructing 'disorder' as a foil. As the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has pointed out, a central recurring feature of modern society has been its attempt to marginalise the ambiguous, the ambivalent.<sup>9</sup> Art occupied a complex position in this situation. In choosing the terms by which they wished their work to be received, artists rejected numerous unwarranted associations. In the Renaissance, this meant differentiating 'high' art from the merely artisanal. By the late eighteenth century, it meant separating art from 'science'. Rather than support the totalising claims of science and the industrial 'progress' of enlight-

enment reason, Romantic conceptions of art and the artist held that the world was too complex to be mapped out in its entirety.<sup>10</sup> Faced by the demystifying challenge of rigorous scientific method, art increasingly became a haven for the imagination, the irrational and the sublime, it became a means of dealing with things not easily understood or represented in rational terms, providing distraction from the cultural, political, social and economic changes wrought by the industrial revolution. For example, in *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (1790), one of the most important works of modern aesthetics, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) made imagination central to aesthetic experience and the production of art, insisting, too, on the impossibility of reducing judgements of beauty or the sublime to logical concepts.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, for Kant, aesthetic appreciation of art denoted taste, and although not deliberately so, it was socially exclusive, a rejection of the democratising claims of modern knowledge. It has been argued that his emphasis on the free imaginative play involved in art represented the ideals of the late eighteenth-century middle classes.<sup>12</sup> It has also been pointed out that it was racially motivated; Kant explicitly states that non-Europeans are incapable of appreciating art aesthetically.<sup>13</sup>

### Aesthetics and Art Theory

The conditions of the production and reception of art were further mutated by the development of mercantile capitalism spawned by the industrial revolution. New money created new tastes, bringing an even greater sense of the artist's autonomy from the world. Artists were able to split from their patrons with the introduction of art dealers and the art market. Patronage no longer had to be sought from rich merchants, the Church or the state; artists could begin to make works speculatively for the market. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, artists became vocal in their rejection of the established academies of art. Artists were also increasingly successful in establishing their own systems of support and education such as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the New English Art Club, the so-called *Salon des Refusés* and the Vienna Secession. In all, these developments had the effect of amplifying the sense that art was a separate realm from the rest of culture, generating the related illusions of aesthetic autonomy and artistic self-sufficiency.

Artists and philosophers also made increasing efforts to separate aesthetic questions from moral and political debates. By the mid-nineteenth century, these aesthetic concerns – having been developed to an immensely sophisticated level – began to materialise explicitly in the fine arts. This quest for artistic self-sufficiency reached a sophisticated state of self-awareness when artists began to think of their works as having no relationship with the outside world. As one of the characters of Oscar Wilde stated: 'Art never expresses anything but itself . . . She develops purely on her own lines. She is not symbolic of any age. It is the ages that are her symbols, her reflections, her echoes.'<sup>14</sup> James Abbott McNeil Whistler is a good

example of an artist seeking to make their work self-sufficient, demanding that it be observed by a gaze unobstructed by bourgeois values of practical efficiency (what does it *do*?) and morality (what does it *tell* us?). Whistler famously defended his painting in court, arguing that its main concern was not with the reliable depiction of the visible world, but with forms (colours, lines and masses) and relations of forms. He later stated that art should 'stand alone and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding it with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, love, patriotism and the like. All these have no kind of concern with it, and that is why I insist on calling my works "arrangements" and "harmonies"'.<sup>15</sup> Conspicuously, Whistler's conception of art is based on a further set of exclusions: he excludes the sentimental, moralising literary content popular in his day, perhaps for fear that such associations are insufficiently *pictorial*. In place of literary elements, Whistler alludes to music, an art form he believed had no representational value, one appreciated for its formal or aesthetic values alone. Whistler was in favour of art being used to denote *visual* cultural production, and as such he explicitly rejected the intellectual, political and moral functions previously thought to be central to art.

This notion of formal visual experimentation can be found in many artworks in the ensuing century. For example, Morris Louis' 1960 acrylic painting *Beta Lambda* (Figure 2.3) was, in his own words, about 'colour and surface. That's all'.<sup>16</sup> Such a definition is related to the theory of aesthetic formalism, an idea associated with figures such as Kant and critics such as Clive Bell, Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. Despite their insistence on pure form, their theories of art also tended to promote the idea that something becomes art because it performs particular *functions*. Indeed, numerous people hold 'functionalist' theories of art without realising it. For example, to claim that art should make one happy or should produce a feeling of elation is to require that it fulfil these functions in order to claim art status or 'arthood'. To come back to the specific case of formalism, the claim that art is defined and understood by sight alone seems relatively easy to understand. In this sense, it might have a democratising effect since it seemingly requires no knowledge of art history or theory, providing all with a system of comprehending art from all periods of history. As such, formalism also seems to confirm our most basic responses to art. As a universal theory of art, however, it is wrought with problems.

For Kant, an artwork was produced 'through a capacity for choice that grounds its actions in reason',<sup>17</sup> which is to say that artworks are man-made, deliberately *designed* objects. This suggests a dissimilarity between our experience of art and our experience of nature, namely, that the experience of nature involves the experience of 'free beauty', whereas art is produced by conscious human subjects. Hence, while the experience of nature is based on a non-conceptual aesthetic response, the experience of art cannot help but involve consideration of what kind of a thing the painting, sculpture or drawing is meant to be. Kant thus concluded that in contrast to

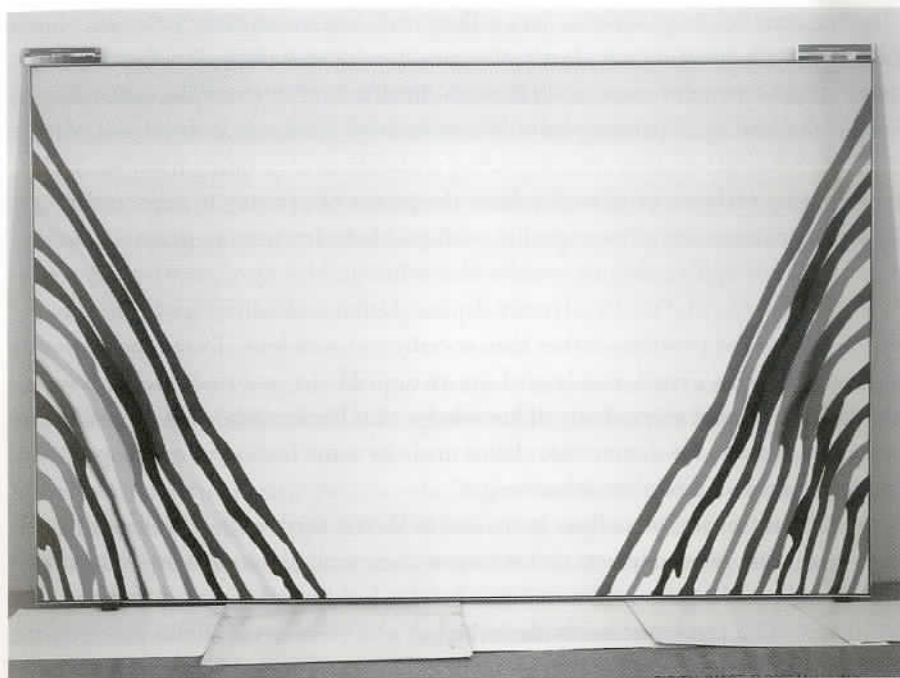


Figure 2.3 – Morris Louis, *Beta Lambda* (1960) New York, Museum of Modern Art. © Photo Scala, Florence.

nature, the aesthetic experience of art is not entirely 'free', since it is tied to non-aesthetic concerns. By the same token, it is clear that aesthetic effects, such as feeling elated, can be prompted by natural phenomena, such as noises, landscapes or rust, which possess formal properties but are not artworks. As such, the act of experiencing an artefact aesthetically would not justify classifying it as an artwork. Nor is it possible to claim convincingly, as Bell does, that 'significant form is the essential quality of a work of art, the quality which distinguishes it from all other classes of objects'.<sup>18</sup> To fail to experience an artwork aesthetically would not necessarily mean that we were not witnessing an artwork, since the way we experience objects aesthetically need have nothing to do with how we classify them.

Artists and critics such as Whistler, Bell or Greenberg saw themselves as part of an intellectual elite, regarding it as their duty to defend and promote challenging art in the face of 'popular' opposition. This attitude came from the growing sense amongst cultural elites in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that the rise of the middle classes and the spread of democracy vulgarised and commercialised art (or *kitsch* as Greenberg described the popular productions of the culture industry). In this sense, claims for the autonomy of art were tied to covert claims of cultural autonomy or elitism perpetuated by a particular dominant or strategically located group in society able to project their views as impartial. Exclusion, the regulation



of art against weak imitations, was a dominant feature of such a theory of art. Although such decisions are clearly historically relative and specific, formalist theories tend to present such exclusions as inevitable. For example, according to Fried, 'the history of painting from Manet through Synthetic Cubism and Matisse may be characterised in terms of gradual withdrawal of painting from the task of representing reality – or of reality from the power of painting to represent it – in favour of an increasing preoccupation with problems intrinsic to painting itself'.<sup>19</sup> By providing a highly selective causal and continuous history of painting's separateness from the world, Fried inadvertently reveals that such values are *historically specific* products and practices rather than socially transcendent. To see such painting as something concerned mainly with its own problems, as Fried does, we would need to have recourse to a body of knowledge that lies outside what we see before our eyes. As such, the democratic claims made by some formalists are jeopardised, for we never do simply 'see what we get'.

As a theory of art, formalism turns out to be too narrow. Bell even went so far as to claim that most artefacts that we most commonly think of as art were not: 'I cannot believe that more than one in a hundred of the works produced between 1450 and 1850 can be properly described as a work of art.'<sup>20</sup> Bell's focus on the *appearance* of art over its *role* excludes works of art and ways of interpreting it that are primarily focused on issues of history, ideas, meaning and representation, seeing the past as an inevitable preview of his present-day interests. In this, formalism is *essentialist*, an attempt to isolate 'art' artificially from the way it is revealed to us in experience in order to locate its mystery ingredients. Works of art are not necessarily autonomous objects; they are records of culture, or the world as seen by particular people at specific times. Formalism systematically obscures and denies its social and historical determinants, perceiving art and artists as extraordinary and timeless. Clearly, art is *at least* the product of the historical events I have described. The simple fact that formalism cannot account for the way that art has *always* been experienced bears testimony to the fact that it is not a universal definition of art.

While formalism is thus flawed, it does at least provide a direction for artists to pursue by persuasively foregrounding certain developments in art as paradigmatic and seminal, at the expense of others, which are deemed unimportant. Where does this leave us in relation to Judd's definition of art? His exasperated comment was an attempt to validate and enfranchise the art of the 1960s, a period of rapid cultural and political experimentation in which a narrow and inhospitable modernism was supplanted by what Rosalind Krauss later called an 'expanded field' for art.<sup>21</sup> The so-called de-definitional impulse that swept through art practice in the 1960s led to a transformed conception of art based on alternative philosophical premises. Judd realised that formalist theories were inadequate to explain the status of works such as Piero Manzoni's *Artist's Shit* (1961), a tin can containing the artist's excre-

ment. The fact that Manzoni gave his signature to such an object as a means of presenting it as art suggests that he, and not just anyone, had the power to transform the mundane and everyday into a work of art. If we are to say that something is art, is it required that the meaning of the term 'art' have some limits? Must it be possible to call something 'art' and be wrong if the word is to have any meaning at all? If this is so, then perhaps Judd was wrong in an important sense.

How things acquire names has puzzled philosophers for centuries. In his children's fable *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1872), Lewis Carroll famously formulated this logical problem:

'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.'<sup>22</sup>

Humpty Dumpty is a relativist, one who claims that there are no external or objective standards of authority by which an individual might verify or refute the use of words. It may be that we cannot find an absolute form of authority, but, if we wish communication to take place, we can at least demand that there be some form of constraint upon the use of words. In this sense, the term 'art' must have constraints if it is to be useful. Manzoni's use of the term 'art' seems to have been constrained by his social investment in art institutions (signified by his desire to preserve his excrement for future generations to enjoy), its authorial signs (signatures) and his knowledge of the history of art (that Cubism and Dada were precedents for the use of found objects), factors which helped him manufacture his 'professional' reputation as an artist. Anyone can claim arthood for what they do, but to do so *convincingly* would seem to demand the tailored acquisition of an air of authority. The ways in which this authority is acquired are far more complex and negotiable than in Judd's dictum, something that suggested that a new theory of art was necessary to explain art that was multiple and open-ended.

### Art as an Institution

One important theory that emerged in the 1960s was known as the institutional theory of art, or proceduralism. Proceduralism is a theory of art most closely associated with the philosophy of Arthur Danto and George Dickie and the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>23</sup> While these writers are contemporaries, they also differ in their views, although we could say that they share the idea that art can be defined only in an historical and critical context that makes it relevant to social institutions. Art is not, in this view, produced for *effect*; it is created by following a set of rules or procedures. 'To see something as art,' wrote Danto, 'requires something that the eye cannot decry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, knowledge of the history of art; an artworld.'<sup>24</sup> For Danto, art worlds have always been constructed from

the interrelated efforts of artists, the history of art, changing conditions of display, critical writings and the responses of audiences. For Danto, the production of art is highly dependent on such funded experience, what is possible in art now being reliant on what has come before.

Proceduralism has a number of benefits. First, it allows *anything* potentially to become art, although there are limitations. Danto claims that at any specific time, the art world allows only esteemed figures to propose something as art. In addition, *what* they might propose to be art will, in turn, be limited by the course that such an artist has directed the artworld. To illustrate this point, he argues that Paul Cézanne would not have been able to present his tie as a readymade, whereas Pablo Picasso might have been.<sup>25</sup> Proceduralism allows *anyone* potentially to become an artist by following rules. In this sense, it may be more egalitarian than formalist accounts since it does not seek to mystify art by referring the viewer or artist to the immeasurable *effects* of the work. This means that intuitive definitions of art are ruled out explicitly; the 'innocent eye' found in formalism is regarded as a socially produced myth. Moreover, it is able to account for conceptual artworks, works of art that had no tangible material or visual form and readily adapt to the expansive changing character of art. As Danto puts it:

The greater the variety of aesthetically relevant predicates, the more complex the individual members of the artworld become; and the more one knows of the entire population of the artworld, the richer one's experience with any of its members.<sup>26</sup>

Such a theory eliminates the need to think of art as exclusive, since it transforms art into a descriptive rather than an evaluative term. Art is no longer 'fine'; it is simply a way of describing something that carries no sense of inherent value. Indeed, all art can be judged under the same criteria since proceduralism rejects 'realist' theories of representation, holding that all artworks refer to other artworks via the history of art and its social institutions rather than to the 'world'.

Proceduralism has its problems nevertheless. Since the theory is concerned with art as a form of communication, it rules out the notion that art might fail to signify. For Danto, the inability to interpret an artwork marks its failure to achieve art status. Artists have to prove that they intend to make statements through their work, that they are not simply manipulating signs for their own sake. There are two main problems with this causal view of art. First, it assumes that we can determine our judgements of artistic intention on the evidence of objects alone, when material effects and acts have no essential meaning other than those that we bring to them. This is particularly difficult when considering found art objects, many of which, being mass-produced and identical, bear little trace of intentional production. In this, Danto risks committing the 'intentional fallacy' explored in chapter

10 below on authorship. This is partly avoided, perhaps, by Danto's stress on the socio-historical character of art, but this endeavour to project 'meaning' into history merely contradicts his emphasis on cause. Second, Danto's criteria of meaningfulness have difficulty accounting for irrational and absurdist art that struggles to elude making sense, such as Dada, surrealism or Fluxus. Moreover, at a basic level, from a proceduralist point of view, *anti-art* is unquestionably regarded as *art*. This largely defeats the intentions of anti-artists of the 1960s and earlier in that it posits that the neo-avant-garde assault on the conventions of art constitutes a form of art in its own right.

Another obvious weakness lies in the assumption that the art world really is an institution. It cannot be claimed that it is regulated like other institutions such as the police, since it has no set consensual values. The art world is a loose configuration of artists, critics, dealers, curators, collectors, commissioners, administrators, politicians and others. Some of these individuals share some ideas, others do not. We discuss the art world as a monolithic institution, and this is a popular pursuit of the media when confronted by art that they do not like. Proceduralism is problematic in its emphasis on the power of the institutions of high art and in many ways could be seen to be responsible for the increased bureaucratisation of art that has occurred since the 1960s. In heralding the 'end of art' as far back as 1964, Danto's institutional theory contained the seeds of its own destruction, transforming art into rhetoric by encouraging a 'linguistic turn'. The ensuing period of artistic production questioned many of these assumptions, while showing that such ideas have entered into the realm of received artistic ideas.<sup>27</sup>

This raises the question of whether or not it is desirable to seek a general theory of art in contemporary heterogeneous visual culture. Since the early 1960s, proceduralist definitions of art have been thoroughly absorbed and taken to new levels of complexity. David Wilson's Museum of Jurassic Technology (MJT) in Culver, California, for example, 'has left visitors puzzling over the veracity of its exhibits as well as the question of whether it is an actual museum or some kind of elaborate art installation'.<sup>28</sup> Former special effects designer Wilson mixes together fact, overblown truths and hoax. In the MJT, emphasis is placed on objects 'that demonstrate unusual or *curious* technological qualities'<sup>29</sup> such as rainforest bats that can fly through lead walls, *Megolaponera Foetens* (fungally-infected, spore-ingesting pronged stink ants of the Cameroon) and a horn grown on the head of Mary Davis of Saughall, Cheshire. The MJT tackles a number of key issues in the history of display:

- To put sacred works in a secular setting assumes that these artefacts possess aesthetic significance over and above their religious meaning. Placing them in chronological order presupposes that this is the best way to understand the relation of earlier to later art. Segregating artworks from minerals, shells and

animals implies that artefacts have a special identity. Preserving these artefacts implies that they are best seen as historical records.<sup>30</sup>

The system of organisation found in the MJT questions these very assumptions by aping the organisational system of the curiosity cabinets, drawing no clear line between art and non-art, fact and fiction, authority and imagination. Wilson sees no pre-existing, essential order to history; order emerges only within the MJT's peculiar narratives. In this, Wilson aims to make seeing oracular again, to reintegrate people with wonder while drawing attention to the museum's ideological role in a self-conscious way that has only recently become possible in wake of proceduralist theories of art.

This has been explored by major modern and contemporary art museums such as the predominately privately-funded MOMA in New York and the mainly state-funded Tate Modern in London. Both institutions have abandoned the linear and historical models of display that once dominated the historical exhibition and of Western art, models that MOMA was influential in forming. In their place are thematic devices that seek to elaborate important issues within twentieth- and twenty-first-century art practices, looking 'at the art of the last hundred years from the vantage point of four separate themes that cut right through history'.<sup>31</sup> The 'Anxious Object' room in the Tate Modern, for example, displays works by major artists in vitrines in order to rehabilitate and remind audiences of the cabinets of past displays. The works in this space seem to be located between objects deliberately fabricated as works of art and found objects of curiosity. To some, this exemplifies art as an institutional game to be played out by curators and organised like a stamp collection, cut off from any sense of living culture in an entertaining state-endorsed spectacle.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps this is an unfair criticism. Tate Modern has learned its lessons from critiques of the authority and exclusivity of museums inaugurated by the disciplines of art history, art theory and museology. Unfortunately, its authoritative stance on its chosen issues seems to undermine the element of surprise and anti-establishment readings of art that it seeks to achieve. This is evident in Herzog & de Meuron's commanding architectural conversion of Giles Gilbert Scott's Bankside Power Station and also in Tate Modern's propensity towards a didactic curatorial approach.<sup>33</sup> Architecturally, Tate Modern is modelled on artist-initiated warehouse exhibitions popular in London and elsewhere in the late 1980s. In this, it attempts to ape more contemporary conditions of display favoured by artists who found themselves excluded from the pantheons of art. However, like many major contemporary art museums around the world, Tate Modern wants to remain *the* official national British institution of contemporary art *and* be perceived as a major world player, lending this power to everything it sanctions.<sup>34</sup>

Are such grandiose venues and their accompanying bureaucracies really required for bestowing the appropriate context in which to produce or display works of art

today? In 1995 in the northern English city of Manchester, a group of artists, finding that they had little opportunity to exhibit their work in their municipality, decided to create their own institutions without the sanction of the leading art world figures. The artists saw themselves as their own best critics, a peer group that could award each other time and space in which to show their work on their own terms. Venues were varied and generally non-sanctioned, ranging from people's houses to the Town Hall. The events were organised around the ironically distinguished legend 'The Annual Programme', as a means of attracting attention.<sup>35</sup> As a group of self-organised, quasi-autonomous artists, 'The Annual Programme' were far from unique, but their strategy succeeded in Manchester, providing them with the infrastructure they needed to establish their own microcosmic art world, thereby allowing the rest of the world to know what they were accomplishing. Indeed, their strategy had its roots in the self-proclaimed autonomy to be found in avant-garde movements from the Vienna Secession of the late nineteenth century to punk's pop/anti-art 'do-it-yourself' attitude. This had a particularly strong heritage in Manchester.<sup>36</sup>

### Conclusion

While Enlightenment models of institutional and theoretical authority still exist, today's local and global art worlds are bigger, more fluid, multivalent and fragmented than before. Due to travel and technology, artists can make work practically anywhere in the world, with virtually anything, for almost any perceived audience they wish to attract. Digital mass communication is rapidly transforming the world, allowing artists to disseminate their cultural productions to a global audience instantly. It would seem that today's artists are, more than ever, in a position to declare that what they do is art (persuasively or otherwise) without recourse to well-established, centrally sanctioned authorities or meta-theoretical justification. In some ways, perhaps, Judd wasn't so wrong after all. The power to nominate something as art has come to be seen as dispersed rather than possessed. Unlike Danto's idea of a limited and definable art world that is inhabited predominantly by *theories* of art, today's art world is a rapidly expanding space occupied by an overabundance of *agents*, mediators who constantly seek to redefine the limits of their roles. In this climate, 'art' becomes an increasingly vacuous term, used to describe any number of activities, regulating art only at the moment of each new articulation. As such, the important questions presently do not (and cannot) continue to revolve around oblique and circuitous debates of how something achieves arthood. They cannot continue since, as Danto argues, continual broadening of art's definition will eventually make it impossible to define art semantically in terms of what it is not.<sup>37</sup> Today's highly visually literate audiences ask trusting and more challenging questions of artists and what they do, while artists continue to demand more of their ever-diversifying audiences.

- Duncan, Carol. *Civilising Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London, 1995).  
 Harrington, Austin. *Art and Social Theory* (Oxford, 2003).  
 Shiner, Larry. *The Invention of Art: a Cultural History* (Chicago, 2001).  
 Williams, Robert. *Art Theory: an Historical Introduction* (Oxford, 2004).

## Notes

- 1 Donald Judd, 'Art after Philosophy I', *Studio International*, October 1969, pp. 134–7.
- 2 See Ernst Gombrich, 'The Renaissance Conception of Artistic Progress', *Norm and Form* (London, 1966), pp. 1–10.
- 3 In classical antiquity the terms for 'art' (*ars* in Latin and *technē* in Greek) denoted skill, and art was deemed one (low-ranking) skill amongst many others. For a brief sketch of the connotations of the term, see Roy Harris, *The Necessity of Artspeak* (London and New York, 2003), pp. 15–28.
- 4 See Susan L. Feagin and Craig Allen Subler, 'Showing Pictures: Aesthetics and the Art Gallery', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 27 (1993), pp. 63–72.
- 5 See Brendan O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Los Angeles, 1999). See too Russell Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (London, 1995).
- 6 See Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Los Angeles, 1994); and Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1100–1750* (New York, 1998).
- 7 See Tom Barringer, *Colonialism and the Object* (London, 1998). See too Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London, 1995); and Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, eds, *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford, 1985).
- 8 For a recent account of museum in relation to the nation state, see Nick Prior, *Museums and Modernity* (Oxford, 2002).
- 9 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge, 1993).
- 10 See Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity* (Manchester, 2003).
- 11 See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgement*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge, 2002).
- 12 See Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, 1990). See especially 'Free Particulars' (pp. 13–30) and 'The Kantian Imaginary' (pp. 70–101).
- 13 A thorough critique of the racial bias of eighteenth-century aesthetic theories, including that of Kant, has been offered by David Bindman, *From Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2002).
- 14 'Vivian', in Oscar Wilde's satirical manifesto, 'The Decay of Lying: A Dialogue', in James Knowles, ed., *The Nineteenth Century: a Monthly Review*, Vol. XXV (January–June 1889), p. 51.
- 15 James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Ten o'Clock Lecture at Princes Hall, Piccadilly, London* (London, 1885).
- 16 Cited in Ellen H. Johnson, *American Artists on Art: From 1940–1980* (New York, 1982), p. 50.
- 17 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, § 43 p. 182.
- 18 Clive Bell, *Art* (Oxford, 1987), p. 8. First published in 1914.
- 19 Michael Fried, *Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella* (Cambridge, MA, 1965), p. 5.
- 20 Bell, *Art*, p. 46.

- 21 See Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, No. 8 (1979), pp. 31–44.
- 22 *The Penguin Complete Lewis Carroll* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 196.
- 23 See George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca, NY, 1974); and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, 1984).
- 24 Arthur Danto, 'The Artworld', *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 61 (1964), p. 580.
- 25 See Arthur Danto, 'The Last Work of Art. Artworks and Real Things', *Theoria*, Vol. 39 (1973), pp. 1–17.
- 26 Danto, 'The Artworld', pp. 583–4.
- 27 See Reesa Greenberg, *Thinking about Exhibitions* (London, 1996).
- 28 Ralf Rugoff, 'Rules of the Game', *Frieze* (January/February 1999), p. 49. Wilson founded his first permanent Museum of Jurassic Technology in a small windowless store-front on Venice Boulevard, Culver City, California in 1988, opening a second branch at the Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum in Hagen, Westphalia, Germany in 1994. See Lawrence Wechsler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder* (New York, 1996).
- 29 David Wilson, *Introduction to The Museum of Jurassic Technology* (Los Angeles, 2002).
- 30 David Carrier, 'The Display of Art: An Historical Perspective', *Leonardo*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1987), p. 83.
- 31 Lars Nittve, 'Director's Foreword', *Tate Modern: The Handbook* (London, 2000), p. 10.
- 32 See Matthew Collings, *Art Crazy Nation* (London, 2001).
- 33 See Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (New York, 1995).
- 34 '[Tate Modern] aims to be "a flagship for London", "a new landmark for the nation", and one of the premier global centres of modern art.' Doreen Massey, 'Bankside: International Local', *Tate Modern: The Handbook*, p. 27.
- 35 See Richard J. Williams, 'Anything is Possible: The Annual Programme 1995–2000', in *Life is Good in Manchester* (Manchester, 2001).
- 36 See Howard Slater, 'Graveyard & Ballroom: A Factory Records Scrapbook', *Break/Flow*, Issue 3 (1998).
- 37 As Danto states: 'When philosophy's paintings, grey in grey, are part of the artworld, the artworld has shaded into its own philosophy, and by definition, grown old.' Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA, 1981), p. 148.