

Chapter 1

Process and Product

I

The first thing this book is going to do is attempt to define the term 'work of art.' Now the history of such attempts is anything but edifying. Many definitions have been proposed, and none has stood the test of subsequent (or even previous or contemporary) works of art. Indeed, the sheer conceptuality of the situation is absolutely hopeless. The test of a definition is whether it counts all and only the right items as works of art. That is the only *possible* test of a definition of art; it has got to count as art those items which we all (or at any rate most of us) agree are works of art. Otherwise, the definition could be completely arbitrary. I could, for example, define 'work of art' as follows: anything, and only things, that are crayons or canyons are works of art. Now you might point out that such a definition does not count the *Mona Lisa* as a work of art, and that it does count the Snake River Gorge, and you might point out that these are obviously mistakes. But if my definition does not have to stand up to empirical confirmation, I can laugh off objections like that and stick to my guns.

So a definition has got to be adequate to the facts about which items are, and which items are not, works of art. The problem is this: I cannot, it seems, know precisely which items are works of art and which items are not, until I know what art *is*, that is, until I have a theory or a definition. But I cannot know whether I've got a good theory or definition until I know whether that theory or definition counts all and only the right items. Now this problem is nasty enough when we stick to

Western art and Western thought about art. There are plenty of debates within the Western artworld about whether such works as, say, Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'artista* (*Artist's Shit*) (a canned and signed limited edition of excrement) are works of art. But the problem gets completely out of hand when one is attempting—as this book attempts—to give a theory that is capable of applying to the art of other cultures, a theory that takes into account the philosophical and spiritual traditions of those cultures. Take, for example, a Navajo sand painting. It more or less *looks* like art, and some sand paintings have been preserved and placed in museums. But the Navajo use sand paintings for purposes they regard as practical and religious. The paintings are used during ceremonies called “sings” to effect cures in persons or in the environment, after which they are usually destroyed. Now the question is: are these items works of art? To know that, we have to know whether a work of art could be intended for practical purposes, or whether there could be art in a culture where the items in question are not preserved. To know *that*, we need a theory of art. But to know whether we've got a good theory of art, we need to know whether the theory has to count Navajo sand paintings. So we're stuck.

And in fact, the entire project of presenting the philosophy of art of non-Western cultures, which is one of the tasks of this book, may seem to be misguided from the start. For notice that art, and for that matter philosophy, are themselves Western notions. It may well be claimed that these concepts have no application to other cultures whatsoever. Let us frame the dilemma this way: there is no way to escape ethnocentrism in a project such as the one reflected in this book. If “we” (Westerners) claim that there is art or philosophy in exactly our sense in, for example, Yoruba culture, then we are guilty of simply slapping our concepts onto their practices in a way that falsifies those practices. All we then experience is Yoruba culture as a pale reflection of our own culture. It is very likely that, in that case, their “art” and “philosophy” will seem to be miserable failures. They will seem to be miserable failures because we judge them by our standards, not theirs. On the

other hand, if “we” (Westerners), intent on respecting cultural diversity, deny that our concepts apply at all to Yoruba culture, then we must remain in willful ignorance. We have no equipment to start to investigate other cultures but the concepts we do already possess; we must always start exactly where we are. Simply to deny that our concepts have any foothold in their culture would keep us from trying to understand it at all. At its most extreme, this approach might take the form of simply denying that the Yoruba have any art or any philosophy. That, too, is ethnocentric; since we tend to think of art and philosophy as (potentially, at any rate) among the highest human achievements, denying them to the Yoruba sounds patronizing. So ethnocentrism is inescapable: we are ethnocentric if we apply concepts such as “art” and “philosophy” to other cultures, and ethnocentric if we do not.

This dilemma has immediate implications for how we experience and understand the art of other cultures. For example, the approach of simply slapping our concepts on other cultures has led to specific museum practices. We take an African mask, for example, and encase it in glass in a museum, then we try to appreciate it exactly as we try to appreciate Western paintings. We may be able to appreciate the mask in this way, or we may not. (It’s likely that it won’t stack up very well with the Monets, works which were consciously projected into the museum context.) But what is missing is precisely the cultural context in which this mask operates: as part of a festival, say: a celebration that includes music, dance, architecture, body decoration, and so forth, and has a very specific religious function. On the other hand, if we *refuse* to bring African masks into our art institutions, because to do so is to falsify them by yanking them out of context, then we may simply be denying ourselves the chance to feel their aesthetic, and for that matter, festive and religious, power. Either way, our experience is impoverished.

The problems that arise here are, to repeat, immediate and practical. The clearest examples of cultures that possess philosophy and art in just our sense are the Far Eastern cultures. But even in China and Japan, the ease with which we identify

the moral philosophy, the landscape painting, and so forth is precisely the danger; the apparent familiarity can blind us to the more subtle, but equally important differences. For example, both the philosophy and the art of China are insistently *practical* in orientation. Though there was a brief flourishing of more or less pure abstract reasoning in ancient China, Chinese philosophers have always started with questions such as how rulers are to rule and how a person can live satisfactorily. General questions such as whether it is possible to know anything at all or as to the nature of the Good arise very rarely. Similarly, within the Confucian tradition, music and poetry are valued for the fact that they reflect and effect social harmony, rather than in virtue of the sheer beauty of their form. So when philosophers such as Hsün Tzu make the claim that music is key to the creation and preservation of social cohesion, we are tempted to ignore this as bizarre or dismiss it as hyperbole, rather than hearing it, as it is surely meant, as an absolutely serious discussion of what music is for.

Indeed, the very notion that music is “for” anything at all rings strangely in contemporary Western ears. The modern West has learned to treat art as merely interesting form: lines and colors, masses and surfaces, harmonies and rhythms. We gaze at paintings in museums or listen to symphonies in concert halls in order to have an “aesthetic experience,” or to cultivate the “aesthetic attitude.” Such an experience has been described by Kant as “disinterested pleasure,” and such an attitude has been described by Bullough as “psychical distance.” These phrases, which capture the central modern Western view about how art is to be experienced, rely precisely on a contrast of the aesthetic and the practical; much of this book is devoted to putting that contrast into question. The proper response to a painting of a nude, for example, is not supposed to be sexual arousal, but a sheer appreciation of form.

Now this can lead us to two possible reactions. We could simply deny that Confucius and Hsün Tzu are writing about art in our sense. Or we could allow the experience of their writings to affect our own experience of the Western conception of

art. It is the latter which I want to suggest is the most promising response: we can hold our concepts, and ourselves as users of those concepts, open to the experience reflected in the expressions of other cultures. We can only start where we are. But where we are can change as we travel. All we can do is muddle through, trying to reach a mutual adjustment of concepts. For example, as we read and take seriously the Confucian notion of music as an agent of social change and cohesion, we might notice with surprise that music *does* play that role in our culture. (I will discuss this at length in the chapter on American music.) To be identified as someone who likes heavy metal, or punk, or rap, or "alternative," or "classic rock," is to be identified with a certain generation and a certain sub-culture. These styles of music affect dress, recreation, and many other aspects of cultural life and expression. They unite people in dance and at concerts and as listeners to the same radio stations; they are important elements of cultural identification and personal self-image. Potentially, then, a reading of the Chinese sources has redirected our gaze to items, and features of those items, that have been neglected in Western philosophy of art. We have learned something about ourselves by taking others seriously.

Such problems run even deeper with regard to other cultures. In subcontinental Indian, many African, and many Native American cultures, for instance, there is not only no distinction between the practical and the aesthetic; there is no distinction between art, philosophy, and religion. In one sense, for example, the Indian tradition in philosophy is both the most ancient and the most elaborate in the world. In another sense, however, there *is* no Indian philosophy, at least until very recently; virtually all Indian thought, including reflections on what we call their art, are in the service of religion. Indeed, virtually all of their *art* is devotional in a broad sense; what we are tempted to identify as their sculpture, their literature, their dance, even their architecture: almost all of it is permeated by religious concerns and religious purposes. The spiritual classic *The Bhagavad-Gītā*, to which I devote a chapter of this book, is a passage from the great Indian epic *The Mahāb-*

hārata. Is *The Mahābhārata* a work of fiction in which a great scripture is embedded, or is it through and through a religious work? Within traditional Indian vernacular, that question cannot even be formulated.

In fact, one thing that emerges from a study of the world's art is that most of it has been produced for religious reasons. African masks and music usually have a function within religious festival. Navajo sand paintings are used for healing, and, beautiful and elaborate though they are, are destroyed when their task is accomplished. Are such sand paintings medicines, or works of art, or both, or neither? Again, the approach I suggest to such questions is, first, to admit that they cannot be solved on their own terms, and then to start trying to muddle through. Notice, for example, that for thousands of years most Western art, too, was produced for religious reasons. Notice that, in the West, we continue to produce stained glass for churches, continue to compose gospel music, and so forth. That is, much Western art continues to be devotional in character. And notice, too, that we approach our museums themselves in an attitude of devotion, that we still attribute to works of art and to artists an odd sort of supernatural, and perhaps healing power. We still speak of artists, for example, as "inspired," surely an acknowledgment of their quasi-religious function. And the paintings of Van Gogh, for example, seem to be imbued with a life and a value that is essentially magical: we do not treat these items simply as inanimate objects, paint on canvas; we venerate them, and exchange them for millions of dollars. Again, we see how a serious encounter with the practices of other cultures might affect our experience of our own. It might even lead us to count as art things which we had previously neglected.

No non-European culture has a concept of "art" in the aesthetic sense, and no culture has the practices of display and preservation that attend that concept. (This point must be handled with care with regard to Japanese and Chinese culture.) However, it is also true that Europe itself only developed this concept in the eighteenth century, and that the aesthetic concept of art built on and refined a sense of 'art' that meant

'devoted skill.' In fact, *that* sense of 'art' is still current in Western languages. One might say of a baker, for instance, that "he is a real artist," meaning not that his cake ought to be in a museum or ought to be contemplated disinterestedly (indeed, it ought to be devoured), but simply that he displays great skill and devotion in his line of work.

The ancient Greek term for this is *technē*, and it ought to be pointed out that reading "ancient Greek aesthetics" such as Aristotle's *Poetics* raises precisely the same problems as reading the "aesthetics" of non-Western cultures. At any rate, though no other culture has a concept of art in the aesthetic sense, *every* culture with which I am acquainted has a concept of skilled and devoted making. The Chinese, for example, call it *shu*, the Indians *śilpa*, and so forth. Such terms, like our term 'art' in its original sense, do not distinguish between fine art and craft, between fine and decorative art, between fine and applied art. They do not pick out a certain range of activities, materials, mediums, or products. Rather, they characterize a *way* that *any* human activity can be pursued: with great devotion and great skill.

It is not hard to see why items produced this way, and the people who produce them, should be held in veneration in all cultures. Great skill and devotion is always valuable and impressive in itself. And its products are particularly effective in doing what they are intended to do, and particularly satisfying to use. Further, they are particularly pleasing to the gods, whatever gods there may be. Thus, art understood in its most general sense, art as skilled and devoted making, might be something we find wherever human beings are found, and something that is used for whatever human beings use things for. These are not conclusions that can be reached by an arm-chair examination of the Western aesthetic conception of art. They are, rather, conclusions that can be reached by an attentive experience of the things people make in various parts of the world, and an attentive experience of their reflection on those things.

The theory of art that I am going to go on now to articulate is my attempt to "muddle through." It is my attempt to coun-

tenance and celebrate as art as much as possible of what is made with devotion in as much as possible of the world. It is not free of values; it is not a pure description of what is. It is, rather, an attempt to direct the reader's gaze to what I find worthwhile, and it is an attempt to share with the reader an experience I might describe as devotional or spiritual. By 'spiritual,' to repeat, I mean the sharing of human experience at depth: the experience of peace in the world. Finally, I mean peace *through* the world, peace as a result of immersion and identification with the world as a whole. This, I think, is the deepest function of art wherever it appears, and whether it expresses itself religiously, aesthetically, or technologically.

II

One lesson to be derived from the history of attempts to define the word 'art' is that there is no one purpose for which all and only art is made, and no one manner in which all and only art is appreciated. Candidates for an overall artistic purpose have included the imitation and idealization of the real world, the expression of emotion, and the creation of significant form. Theories of art that focus on appreciation have appealed to art as a source of edification or catharsis, or as a source of aesthetic experience construed in terms of distance or nonpractical absorption. Such definitions can be refuted by the flick of a counter-example, particularly from a perspective that includes the avant-garde art of this century. Abstract art cannot be accounted for on the view that art is imitation; horrific or ugly art cannot be accounted for on the view that art is idealization; minimalist works cannot be accounted for on the expression theory; ready-mades and other appropriations from everyday life cannot be explained by formalism. And such theories too, as we shall see, fail miserably in the light of non-Western artistic and spiritual traditions. Much, if not most, of the world's art has been created for purposes that could be described as strictly religious or even magical. Some great art has been made as political propaganda (thirties American leftists), or as

moral lessons (Hogarth). No doubt some great art has been made to get the money or the girl. Pop art and Dada ridicule a distanced attitude; *Guernica* does not edify; wrapping islands in the manner of Christo does not provide catharsis. Such considerations have led directly to the claim that 'art' cannot be defined, that there are no necessary and sufficient conditions for something to count as a work of art.¹

Certain contemporary thinkers have replied that, though there is indeed no one purpose for which all art is made or way in which all art is appreciated, necessary and sufficient conditions for arthood can still be formulated by specifying the relation that works of art display to the institutional or historical contexts out of which works of art arise or into which they are projected. Dickie's institutional theory and Levinson's historical theory are exemplary in this regard. Putting it very roughly, Dickie's view is that an item is a work of art if and only if it has a certain place in the institutional context of the artworld, and Levinson's is that an item is a work of art if and only if it is intended to be regarded in ways that past works of art have been correctly regarded.² (I quote their precise formulations in chapter 4.) Now in fact I think such theories, particularly Levinson's, bid fair to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for something to count as a work of art in a certain restricted sense, that is, to identify properties that all and only examples of what are accounted the fine arts display. Nevertheless, even if such theories are successful in this regard, it is still possible to be dissatisfied with them from the point of view of the tradition of art theory. This is because such theories do not tell us, in a general way, why we should care about whether any given item falls within the extension of 'work of art,' that is, they do very little indeed to elucidate the *value* of art in general, which is exactly what traditional theorists have seen as their central task. To say that works of art are items that have a certain relation to the institution of the art world (Dickie), or to past works of art (Levinson), is intrinsically interesting. But the creation of art seems to be something of a universal impulse. It is even plausible to assert that no human culture has been completely anartistic.³ This seems to indicate

that art is in some way central human to human experience, that making art satisfies some central human need. Traditionally one of the functions of art theory has been to relate art to the needs it satisfies, the experiences it reflects or embodies. The institutional and historical theories do not perform this function.

There is, in the tradition of theorizing about art, an alternative to theories that define art in terms of the purposes they serve and the relations they bear to institutions or art history. I have in mind theories that characterize works of art by the distinctive processes that give rise to them and to which they give rise, or by the relation of such processes to the ends for which they are pursued. This chapter presents a new such theory. There are several process theories, all of which are related in various ways to the view I will propound. For example, the idea that art is a form of play, associated with Schiller, is a process theory. And Wollheim develops at least the beginnings of such a theory in *Painting as an Art*.⁴ The position that is most closely related to the present proposal, however, is that formulated by Dewey. According to Dewey, art is an experience that possesses rhythm rather than mere accumulation, consummation rather than mere cessation.⁵ In some ways I think this is the most satisfying theory of art that has come to my attention, and I will return to Dewey's view presently and again in chapter 5. Nevertheless, I am dissatisfied with Dewey's view for several reasons. I will mention but one here: the view is extremely vague, and would leave us at a loss to decide in most cases whether a given artifact is or is not a work of art. But it is also worth mentioning one of the great strengths of Dewey's view. Dewey's theory steadfastly refuses, in his terms, to "compartmentalize" art. It holds that art emerges organically out of the conditions of human, or indeed more generally, animal life. It does not alienate art into the rarefied province of an economic and intellectual elite. This feature distinguishes Dewey's theory at least from formalist theories and from the institutional view. I take it to be felicitous, and intend to preserve it in the definition I offer.

III

Here is what I take art to be:

A work of art is an intersubjectively available product which (1) is the product of a process in which, to an exemplary degree, some aspects of the process itself are pursued for their own sake, and not merely for the sake of the end for which the process is undertaken, and (2) is of a kind, members of which are themselves suited to play a role in such processes.

That is, a work of art is the result of activity in which, whatever its overall purpose, some of the means of achieving that purpose are to an exemplary degree pursued for their own sake as well as for the sake of the purpose. And such a work is itself of a kind suited to play a part in the processes pursued for their own sake as well as for other ends. For example, painting may be pursued for reasons having to do with the achievement of personal ambition, the veneration of God or the state, the expression or discharge of emotion, the recording of historical events, healing, the decoration of hotel rooms, and so forth. Architecture has the purpose of providing shelter and places of business. Music may be designed to edify, to disquiet, to challenge the virtuosity of piano players, to provide an occasion to dance, or simply to offend. Sculpture may be an exploration of three-dimensional space, of human sexuality, of mythology, or of the shape of a particular human head. What makes the items that are thus produced works of art, however, is that the manipulation of pigments, the conceptualization of space to be utilized, the juxtaposition of tones, the carving or modelling of stone or clay, are regarded by the artist as intrinsically satisfying, as well as adapted for their purposes. The contemporary painter Audrey Flack writes that "it almost doesn't matter what you paint. It is what takes place during the act of painting that matters."⁶ And it is not only what takes place in the act of painting that matters, but what takes place in the act of experiencing paintings. We may experience paintings in order to cultivate our sensibilities, impress our acquaintances,

augment our collections. But paintings can simultaneously be experienced for the sake of experience. It is plausible, too, to connect these facts; it is in part because it is created in a process pursued for its own sake that the painting is suited to give rise to such processes. It is absorbing because it was created with care.

One of the functions of art, in other words, is the enhancement of everyday activities. The San people of southwest Africa employ ostrich eggs as canteens. They decorate these items with beautiful designs. The purpose of making a canteen is to carry water—a function of extreme practical value in the desert environment—but the San devote themselves to the decoration of these items in part because such decoration helps make the canteens inherently satisfying to use. And in Western culture, many, if not most, of the utilitarian items we employ are decorated or adorned in various ways in order to enhance the satisfaction pursuant to their use. Think of cars, for instance. If such items are themselves created by an artistic process, then my definition counts them as art.

Dewey's aesthetics described art as human experience of a certain sort: rhythmical, coherent, consummatory. The present theory identifies works of art as the products and occasions of such experience, and furthermore begins to explain how such experience happens: in a devotion to means, to process, in short, to life. For though some of us live for ends, all of us live *in* means: all of us are "in process." Art in this sense re-embeds us in the very experiences we are having, and consecrates the moment in which we are having them. That is how I would like to read Dewey's theory of art, which he constructed with the purpose of recovering the continuity of art experience with normal processes of living. As Dewey says in *Experience and Nature*, "any activity that is simultaneously [means and consequence, process and product, instrumental and consummatory], rather than in alternation and displacement, is art."⁷

The visual artist is a person who is not only endowed with the religious, political, aesthetic, and psychosexual purposes she happens to possess, but also with the desire to handle materials and to think through their handling. It is sometimes

thought that an artist has a vaguely defined "artistic impulse" which can come to be expressed through any of several mediums. In general, that is not the case. The artist paints in part because she finds satisfaction in *painting*, that is, in mixing and arranging pigments. It is not a coincidence that the painter uses paint; the manipulation of paint and the working out of various problems that arise in that manipulation are regarded as worthwhile in themselves. The visual artist as she works becomes absorbed not only in a final disposition of her work, not only in the reactions it is designed to provoke, or the causes it is designed to promote. She is absorbed not only in her commission, in the approval of peers or critics or gallery-owners, but in the handling of materials, in the shaping of a thing with her hands. Any artist will, I think, recognize that part of the satisfaction inherent in creating a work of art arises from the solution of problems that arise in its creation, torturous though such a process may be in some respects. And though it has indeed occasionally been torture for writers to write or composers to compose, no artist would be willing to have finished works simply appear on command; working out problems within the chosen medium is precisely what constitutes him as an artist.

Wollheim, in *Art and its Objects*, discusses what he terms the *bricoleur* problem.⁸ ('Bricoleur' is French for 'handyman' or 'tinkerer.')

The problem is this: why do certain processes and materials become the accredited vehicles of art? The present theory presents a rather straightforward answer to that question: stone and paint, for example, are accredited vehicles of art because they are inherently satisfying to work, and because, worked, they are inherently satisfying to employ in various capacities. They are recalcitrant: that is, they do not immediately or easily assume the shape one desires them to. (Though there is, of course, a scale of recalcitrance; paint and clay, for example, are more easily worked than marble. However, clay is by no means easy to shape into an exemplary vessel, and paint by no means easy to shape into an exemplary fresco. That is, these materials are by no means easy to use in a way that suits the result to play a part in satisfying activities.)

A well-made vessel changes the activity of pouring liquids into something that is inherently satisfying. The recalcitrance of materials provides the opportunity to work them, and requires of the artist expertise in their working. This expertise in turn must be developed, a process which, despite its frustrations, can be joyful simply because these materials *are* satisfying to work. But such materials are not utterly recalcitrant; they are not impossible or extremely difficult to work; they are malleable if one devotes oneself to them. It is precisely such a combination of malleability and recalcitrance, along with a perhaps inexplicable capacity to yield satisfaction in manipulation (a match, as it were, between the qualities of the material and human capacities), that leads such materials to be accredited vehicles of art.

So I would like to treat the handling of materials by visual artists as paradigms of artistic process. But artistic processes are by no means limited to such handling. I characterize artistic process as the entire activity that contributes to and precedes the finished artistic product, that leads to the item being made intersubjectively available, whether such processes are physical, emotional, or intellectual. Such processes generally include some initial emotional impulsion or idea which tries to find embodiment, as well as the visualization of the finished product, or at any rate of the next stage of the physical process. And some arts have stages that need not involve any physical manipulation at all. For example, a composer might invent a melody in her head without any recourse to an instrument, as might a poet a poem. An architect in general does not actually make the building she designs with her own hands; nevertheless, there certainly is a process in which the design is generated. Likewise, I do not wish to limit the notion of "product" to portable artifacts. Some artistic processes issue in artifacts, others in performances, plans, interactions, victories (think of chess). I treat the notion of "product" here roughly as any intersubjectively available result of an artistic process. Nevertheless, if a process that is pursued for its own sake does not yield such an intersubjectively available item, however ephemeral or physically discontinuous, it does not yield

works of art in the present sense, though we may in a slightly extended sense still call the activity, pursued in that way, an art. One cannot be a poet *only* in virtue of one's mental processes; in order to count as a *work* of art, the poem must be externalized, though before it is made intersubjectively available, it is a potential or proto-work.

IV

A word is in order about what it to pursue an activity for its own sake. I do not mean such a notion to indicate a concept of noninstrumental value of a kind that Dewey, for example, would find objectionable. After all, I am allowing that in every case some end or ends is or are in view in artistic production. Such ends include those delineated in the traditional theories of art, including the imitation or idealization of the real, the expression of emotion, and so forth. They may also include the accumulation of fame or wealth. Certainly they include devotional, religious, and magical ends. Such ends may in some cases be instrumental to yet other ends, and so forth. So I am not arguing that art is nonpractical in any sense. However, Dewey speaks of art providing experiences that are "enjoyable in themselves" or "directly enjoyable,"⁹ and I am asserting that artistic process embodies such experiences. However, I think that 'enjoyable' is not the most felicitous term since, again, artistic process is not always an unalloyed delight. One can pursue a process for its own sake even if the process is not purely pleasurable. Furthermore, the opposition between activities performed for their own sake and those performed for an end needs to be thrown quite generally into question, for to devote oneself to the means of achieving an end, in general, both increases the effectiveness with which the end is realized and embeds one more deeply in the process of achieving it. I will return to this point in a discussion of beauty in chapter 3.

Here is an example of what it means to pursue an activity for its own sake, and an example of the aesthetics of the ordi-

nary. The American aesthetician Horace Kallen, writing under the influence of Dewey, describes laborers working on a street with picks and shovels:

They do it, not because it is their way of living their lives, but because it is their way of earning their livings. They pick and they shovel intermittently, slowly, without zest, without eagerness. The slightest occasion is enough to stop their work, and they return to it reluctantly, as if forced. They appear to be at once bound to it and in flight from it, like an animal tethered. . . . When the five o'clock whistle blows they stop with an incomparable promptness, with every sign of bonds loosened, burdens dropped. They have stopped earning their livings and are ready now, perhaps, to start living their lives.

But if you watch carefully, says Kallen, you may see a surprising thing:

[E]very so often you will notice a change. Here a man with a pick, there a man with a shovel, will begin to make his movements, you can't tell how or why, in a different way. The intermittency, the slowness, the clumsiness pass over into a smooth continuous rhythm: tool and man seem no longer externally attached but inwardly confluent and shaping a melody of action patterns between the pounding pavement and the sky. . . . Interruptions are now interference, not relief, obstacle, not liberation. . . . [E]arning one's living and living one's life have for the moment penetrated and become the same.¹⁰

Kallen goes on to assert that the experience of the second workman is aesthetic. And he might also have claimed—accurately, I believe—that the second workman was engaged in the creation of a work of art: a dance that repairs the city streets. But notice that the workman's activity is obviously not purposeless, that the value of repairing city streets well is

hardly noninstrumental. And notice that well-repaired city streets enhance and transform the activity of driving.

It may well be asked, however, how we are to discern that someone is pursuing a process for its own sake. Well, in this case, the character of *Kallen's* experience of the workman's activity changed, as the workman's activity did likewise. That is, the workman's activity was of a sort that transformed a viewer's experience of that activity; exactly as the second clause of the present definition might lead us to predict. I think we *can* often recognize (though perhaps we cannot always tell how) when someone is engaged in an activity for its own sake. And it seems to me that each person is, at least sometimes, in a position, on reflection, to determine whether he is himself undertaking such a process. To put the point in the first person, it seems to me that I am sometimes in a position to say truly whether I am pursuing a process for its own sake or not. This is not, of course, to say that such judgments about my own reasons for pursuing a process are incorrigible; I may be subject to various mistakes here, various forms of self-deception. I am asserting merely that on some occasions reflection can make it evident to me that I am engaged in a process for its own sake as well as for the sake of further goals.

I think of "absorption" as a mark of such a process. We are all familiar, I think, with experiences in which we "lose track of time," absorbed in some process with which we are involved. This book is devoted to using such experiences as a model for how life could be lived. There is a continuum from processes that are experienced by those who undertake them as merely tedious, uninteresting, or mechanical, to those that are paradigmatically artistic, that are to an exemplary degree absorbing.

The standards by which we make such judgments, in other words, are rough and corrigible, but it certainly does not follow that we cannot make more or less reasonable judgments along these lines. Deciding whether or not some product is a work of art, on the present view, requires an examination of the psychological states of its maker and its (potential) experiencers, and this may itself seem to render the application of the definition to particular items problematic. I will have a bit more to

say about this later, but for now we can note that there is no particular reason to think that the attribution of subjective states of the kind in question here (if these states *are* properly termed 'subjective,' which I doubt: they are states of persons in relation to things) is any more problematic than the attribution of subjective states in any other case. I am often in a perfectly good position to determine whether you are angry, or depressed, or, for that matter, absorbed. We have all "seen" that someone is absorbed in some process; there are features of behavior which mark persons as being in that state. If we can justify such an ascription to someone in virtue of behavior (including first-person reports), we are in a position to determine whether the process that person is pursuing is artistic.

Now I will argue that no process is *by nature* completely without absorbing elements, that it is possible to work oneself into a state in which one can become absorbed in any process. Finally, I will argue that one's life as a whole could be such a process. But there is no doubt that some processes have more potential for yielding absorption than others. For example, long days spent on the assembly line, performing a repetitive task for the sheer purpose of making a living wage, is likely to be a tedious, anartistic process, whereas crafting a beautiful object, and using such an object in the sort of activity for which it is designed, are likely to be pursued lovingly. However, the experience of production-line labor, if it could be engaged in for its own sake, might yield a particularly intense satisfaction, precisely in the overcoming of obstacles to becoming fully present within the activity.

The notion of a continuum of processes is one way of showing the connection of art to everyday life. The present view does not neatly separate the world into those items that do and those that do not count as works of art. Rather, there is a continuum of processes from those that yield products that are clearly not art to those that yield products that are paradigmatically so. Art shades off indistinguishably into non-art, and, furthermore, any activity can, in principle, be pursued as an art. It is in these senses that the present view provides an answer to "compartmentalized" views of art.

That said, however, I think that there are distinctive aspects of what are termed the fine arts that fit them to serve as particularly clear cases of art in general. That is why I have included in the definition the notion that a work of art is *to an exemplary degree* created by a process pursued for its own sake. There are two dimensions in which such degrees of absorption can differ. First, of two processes both of which are absorbing, one may be more absorbing than another. I think that what I take to be clear cases of artistic process—such as the arrangement of pigments or the carving of stone—are peculiarly suited to yield an intense satisfaction. Second, the definition counts as art what is created by a process *some aspects of which* are pursued for their own sake. But such processes differ as to the number of such aspects, and the number of aspects which are not so regarded. In a paradigmatically artistic process, most, if not all of the aspects of the process are absorbing. The less the process involves merely tedious aspects, the more artistic it is. Thus, again, to the extent that the definition is capable of picking out what we usually think of as the fine arts, it does so because the processes involved in the fine arts are to an exemplary degree absorbing, and thus because the processes themselves in which they are created and employed are paradigmatically artistic.

Now there are two obvious ways in which this view might be attacked. In fact, there are two obvious ways in which any theory of art may be attacked. It might be argued that it counts too little as art, or that it counts too much. That is, it might be argued that the definition does not provide necessary conditions for something to count as a work of art, or it might be argued that it does not provide sufficient conditions. Let us consider these in turn.

V

To begin with, then, it might be held that there are works of art which the definition does not count as such, and thus that the definition does not provide a necessary condition for some-

thing to count as a work of art. One sort of case that may seem to provide difficulty in this regard is the ready-made. For here, though there is indeed an intersubjectively available product, there seems to be no artistic process whatever. Duchamp did not make *Bottle Rack*, he merely bought and displayed it. But again, I want to countenance as parts of the artistic process not merely the manipulation of materials, but the whole mental and physical series of events by which a work is made intersubjectively available. Whether ready-mades count as works of art depends upon the sort of process by which they came to be displayed. If Duchamp regarded the mental exercise of conceptualizing and displaying ready-mades as satisfying for its own sake, then they are works of art. Thumbing one's nose at the art world is certainly admissible as an artistic purpose, and the question then becomes whether any particular thumbing of the nose is the product of an artistic process. To try to decide *that* question, one must make an historical investigation. Furthermore, *Bottle Rack* has a place in certain human activities, particularly museum-going. If it is of a kind which can make such activities themselves absorbing (and if it is in fact the product of an artistic process), then it is a work of art.

However, there is another argument that suggests that absorption in process cannot yield a necessary condition for something to count as a work of art. It might be asserted that much of what currently appears in museums and stages and concert halls just is not produced by processes pursued for their own sake. For example, it might be pointed out that Warhol was notoriously indifferent to the means by which his works were produced, often refusing even to supervise their production, which in any case was carried out more or less mechanically. Now I do not know whether this is indeed a correct way to characterize Warhol's works. But it certainly is the case that not everything that is displayed and appreciated as art was produced by a process which was regarded by its creator as intrinsically worthwhile.

Nevertheless, I do not think that this fact militates against the present view. In arguing against the institutional theory, Ted Cohen has pointed out that it does not provide any condi-

tions of failure, that on it it is impossible to try to make a work of art and fail, or to wrongly accredit something as a work of art.¹¹ This is indeed intuitively unsatisfying. On the present view it is perfectly possible to discover that something that has been hanging in a museum to the rapt admiration of all is not a work of art. It is perfectly possible that Warhol was not an artist but a charlatan. (I do not *assert* that Warhol was a charlatan, only that my view makes sense of the accusation.) What would be required is an examination of Warhol's creative process, a process about which there is certainly rich documentation. If we do not ourselves find in Warhol's work an enhancement of our own experience, that may, again, constitute evidence that his products are not works of art. (However, I do think Warhol's works are art, in part because I do find such enhancement in them.)

This raises yet another difficulty, however, which is bound up with the very notion of a process theory, a difficulty which we broached earlier. For a work of art does not wear the process that produced it, as it were, on its sleeve. It may in some cases be impossible to reconstruct that process, or it might even be held that because the process is in part an inner series of events in the artist's mind, it is in principle inaccessible. And this problem is especially acute when, as I will do throughout this book, we move afield from our own culture, where the psychology and spirituality may appear alien. But even if the process were inaccessible, it would not follow that it is not process that makes something a work of art. No one may ever see a quark or a lepton, but it does not follow that the disposition of quarks and leptons does not in some sense explain the disposition of medium-sized physical objects. Furthermore, often (as in the case of Warhol), there are perfectly plausible ways to go about finding out how a purported artist worked, and how he thought about how he worked. Sometimes this can be plausibly inferred merely from the work itself. That is, the character of the object may itself be evidence that it was produced by an artistic process. Anyone asserting that Titian was not devoted to and absorbed by the juxtaposition of colors, or Beethoven to and by the juxtaposition of tones, has some

explaining to do. And as for the claim that the mental processes of an artist are in principle inaccessible, this appears to me to be simply a variety of scepticism about other minds, and to deserve whatever treatment we may want to give that position.

Finally, it has been suggested that, for example, religious painters of the middle ages offered their works as benedictions to God, and perhaps even regarded their own works as called forth by divine intervention, as, in some sense, not *their* works at all. In fact, and as we shall see, the sense of a loss of self in a devotional process is typical of artistic process in many parts of the world. But I do not think that such cases, even if this is an accurate description of them, provide genuine counter-examples. First of all, the devotion of such painters to their process is evident in their products, and in the apprenticeships they served in order to be able to produce them. And we ought to ask, as an addendum to the *bricoleur* problem, why such artists produced paintings, say, rather than merely engaging in the forms of benediction prescribed for all worshipers. I take it that, whether divine inspiration was in question or not, such painters took painting itself to be a peculiarly satisfactory offering to God and occasion of worship, and took themselves to be peculiarly suited to provide such offerings and occasions.

It is more likely, however, that the objection to the present theory that will immediately leap to the reader's mind is that it counts far too much as art. Art is often distinguished from craft, but no such distinction seems to be available on the present view. In fact, crafts, according to my definition, are paradigmatic arts, and I think this is a strength, rather than a weakness, of the view. I really do not see why (some) furniture makers, potters, blacksmiths, and ostrich-egg decorators should not be accredited as artists. If it is asserted that this is a mere abuse of words, I would point out that, whether from an etymological residuum of the ancient Greek or whatever cause, such activities are often enough in the common parlance counted as arts. One may well say admiringly of a certain blacksmith, who with evident satisfaction produces a

good horseshoe, that he is a real artist. I take such locutions seriously.

The potter Carla Needleman, in fact, describes her process in just the terms I have been setting out:

I could go on about the study of trimming the bottom of the plate to get the foot rim, the various discoveries I made about how dry the plate has to be before it can be trimmed, where to place the rim so that the plate looks right on the table, [and so forth]. . . . But the effort of precision, the search for perfection, is not undertaken for the sake of the finished product. If I don't have a goal, an aim, how will I know when I fall short? But if I have only the goal, how will I see where I am now?¹²

Art, in this sense, is "seeing where I am now." It is becoming absorbed in what one is doing at the present moment, in the process one is engaged in right now. In this sense, art is a coming to presence within one's artistic process.

And it is just here that the normative, as opposed to descriptive, agenda of the definition is evident. For the present definition indeed counts as art a tremendous number of items that never issue into the museum, the skyline, the book of poems, the stage. So among other things, I reject the distinction between the "classificatory" and "evaluative" senses of 'work of art' introduced by Weitz and taken up by Dickie and others. According to these thinkers, to say, for example, that a cake is a work of art is simply to praise it as a good cake; it is not literally to place it in the same category as Rembrandt's self-portraits. The cake is art only in the "evaluative" and not in the "classificatory" sense. My definition tends to count as art in the "descriptive" sense what these philosophers count as art in the "evaluative" sense. In fact, the distinction between "classificatory" and "evaluative" senses appears to me to be merely a way of enshrining extremely problematic distinctions between "fine art" and the various things to which it is opposed in the philosophical and critical literature: popular

art, folk art, craft. I will have much more to say against these distinctions later.

But Weitz's distinction of 'art' into various senses seems to me unmotivated and invidious in the first place. We ought to be extremely leery of multiplying "senses" of terms. At the very least, if there are both evaluative and classificatory senses, they are obviously related. 'Art' is not a homonym. Take the term 'king.' We sometimes use it to refer to the male monarch of a nation, but we also use it in several "figurative" or "evaluative" ways, as when we refer to a magnate as "The King of Pork" or a pornographer as "The King of Sleaze" or to Elvis Presley simply as "The King." I suggest that we are not dealing with separate senses, or at the least, if we are, that the "evaluative" sense is parasitic on the "classificatory." There is a range of cases for the proper use of the term 'king,' from the paradigmatic to the fanciful. Indeed, most natural language terms have such a range of application. If the extended uses were in fact different 'senses' of the term, those extended uses would be incomprehensible. That is, the extended uses receive their sense from the paradigmatic uses, and cannot be isolated from them without losing their meaning. I am, then, arguing that the paradigmatic cases of art are not limited to the museum and the concert hall. I take it that ditch digging, philosophy, or quilting can quite literally be artistic activities. Of course it is easier to find satisfaction in some processes than in others, but virtually no process is necessarily devoid of intrinsic satisfaction if it is pursued in the right spirit.

Though I reject any principled distinction between classificatory and evaluative senses, my definition does not provide a full-scale evaluative program for works of art. A very bad work of art may arise from a process that is paradigmatically artistic, and may certainly be *of a kind* (e.g., High Renaissance painting) that is suited to enhance experience. For example, I do not reject various evaluative criteria that arise from Western characterizations of art, though I reject the characterizations. Other things being equal, it is better for a work to be formally interesting than not. Furthermore, given that there is a plurality of artistic ends, it is plausible to evaluate at least

some works of art by how well they serve the ends for which they are created. For example, if an altarpiece is designed to arouse the viewer to adoration, but in fact is merely ugly and commonplace, it is a bad altarpiece. Notice that its chances are considerably enhanced if it was made by an artist in devotion to the process of its making.

This will certainly raise another objection. Calling Elvis "The King" does not deploy a different sense of 'king' from the usual, but it does use the term in a metaphorical way. Metaphorically, Elvis is the monarch of rock; his fans are his "subjects." (Of course, and again *contra* Weitz and Dickie, the metaphorical use is dependent on the paradigmatic use, and does not yield a new sense of the term.) By parallel, it might be asserted that various uses of the term 'work of art' which my definition counts as literal are in fact metaphorical. If we say of a blacksmith or a quilter or an advertising designer that they are producing works of art, it will be claimed, we may be using the term metaphorically.

As the sketch of a response to this objection, it seems to me that whether a word is used figuratively or metaphorically on a given occasion is relative to the etymology of the word. The literal sense of a term, on this suggestion, is to be found by tracing its history, and looking for some core of early uses that are properly related to its present extension. We shall have a chance to look at the history of the term 'art' in somewhat more depth later. But very briefly, the word 'art' in its derivation from the Latin 'ars' and so on originally denoted great devotion and skill in a wide variety of endeavors; it picked out certain characteristics of process rather than, say, certain mediums such as painting and sculpture. Phrases such as "the art of war," "the art of cooking," "the art of love," and so forth are extremely well-established, indeed ancient, usages. By contrast, the widespread use of the term and its cognates in other languages in a specialized sense to refer to what we think of as the fine arts dates from the eighteenth century,¹³ or at very earliest from the Renaissance. This suggests (though of course hardly demonstrates) that the sort of extension countenanced for 'work of art' on the present account does not merely con-

fuse literal and metaphorical uses. It suggests, that is, that the compartmentalization of art against which Dewey and many others have inveighed corresponds to a relatively late *restriction* of the use of the term (a restriction which in turn, and as we shall see, corresponds to the beginning of the discipline of art history and of the museum system). If this is so, a definition such as the present one can claim not to be simply countenancing metaphorical usage as literal, but rather deploying a literal use of the term, and, furthermore, a use that is still in general circulation. And to relate the present proposal to the etymology of 'art,' it seems to me that when someone is pursuing an activity for its own sake, with loving absorption, that person is very likely to develop great skill in making the objects to which that activity gives rise. And objects that are skillfully made are suited to enhance the experience of those who use them.

But what is accounted art in the restricted use of the term that developed in eighteenth century—the notion of the “fine arts”—emerges out of a wider context of satisfying and absorbing activities, and this is not adventitious. It is bound up with the basic conditions of human life, and is found wherever human beings are found.

Notes

1. See, e.g., Morris Weitz's classic article “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 15 (1956).

2. See George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974); “The New Institutional Theory of Art,” in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, ed. George Dickie, Richard Sclafani, and Ronald Roblin (New York, St. Martin's Press, 2nd ed., 1989), 196–205. Jerrold Levinson, “Defining Art Historically,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 19, 3 (Summer 1976): 232–50; “Refining Art Historically,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47, 1 (Winter 1989): 21–33.

3. Two recent books which argue this point elaborately, and which, I think, provide a wealth of empirical evidence for a theory of art such as the one put forward in this paper are Richard Anderson, *Calliope's Sisters: A Comparative Study of Philosophies of Art* (New York:

Prentice-Hall, 1990), and Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *Of Birds, Beasts, and Other Artists* (New York: NYU Press, 1989), which for my money is the best book in aesthetics to appear in many years.

4. Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), especially chapter 1.

5. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934).

6. Audrey Flack, *Art and Soul* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1986), 10.

7. Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 2nd ed., 1958), 361.

8. Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), section 22 et seq.

9. See, e.g., Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 1958), chapter 3.

10. Horace Kallen, *Art and Freedom* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1942), 950, 51.

11. Ted Cohen, "A Critique of the Institutional Theory of Art: the Possibility of Art," reprinted in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, 1st edition, ed. George Dickie and R.J. Sclafani (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 192.

12. Carla Needleman, *The Work of Craft* (New York: Arkana, 1986), 17, 18.

13. The first such use recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates from 1680.