

Gimme Shelter: Global Discourses in Aesthetics

Being Part of the History of Art: Defining Non-Western Art

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INTRODUCTION

In the beginning of the 20th century, art history did not seem to be of much relevance to the philosophy of art. Art was defined in terms of its function (mostly providing aesthetic pleasure through form) and was judged upon that basis. Not only avant-garde art challenged these 'simple' essentialist definitions. It was also urged that we cannot identify and judge non-Western artworks through our narrow Western paradigms like form and non-functional aesthetic pleasure. In order to understand the significance and to judge the value of an artwork, we need to know its historical context. The relevance of the history of art to the philosophy of art is fully acknowledged by Arthur Danto and Jerrold Levinson. They both formulate historical theories of art. It is claimed by Jerrold Levinson that arthood is dependent on the artifact's relationship to past artworks, and thus to the history of art. Arthur Danto argues that (the resolution of) the history of art made it possible to define art philosophically. The question I want to address here is the place of non-Western art in these historical theories: how are these artifacts defined and valued as art?

It will be shown that the place of non-Western art in these theories depends (1) on whether non-Western artworks are included in or excluded from art history and (2) on the view of history that is held. First, I will explore the attitude towards non-Western art within the philosophy of art and art history and the changing relationship between the two fields. I will show that this change made possible a fuller appreciation of non-Western art, without ending up in relativism. Then, I will examine Levinson's definition of art and show what it entails for the categorization of non-Western art. I will argue that Levinson's actual starting point is the Western history of art. It follows that non-Western artifacts are easily categorized as 'artlike' and this has damaging consequences for the evaluation of these artifacts. Thirdly, I will turn to Arthur Danto's theory of art and show how it can account more fully for non-Western art, but is equally exclusionary as it excludes virtually all non-Western art from the history of art.

Art history and the philosophy of art

Contemporary philosophies of art need to take position regarding globalization; how can images, texts and sounds from other cultures be defined. Here, the philosophy of art faces

similar problems as (art) history. On the one hand, the history of other cultures can be seen through the matrix of Western history. Consequently, the histories of other cultures tend to become variations on the master narrative of European history with its scientific revolutions, Enlightenment and progress.¹ Non-Western cultures will mostly turn out to be “figures of lack”.² Seen through the matrix of Western history, their revolutions and progress will turn out to be less significant. Similarly, if we define and understand the artistic endeavors of other cultures through the matrix of the Western art history, we make the arthood of these artifacts fully depend on ‘our’ history. As it turns out that these artifacts do not completely correspond to this history, these artifacts are seen as ‘artful’ or ‘artlike’, but not as art in the full sense. On the other hand, non-Western cultures can be perceived as profoundly different, only to be understood in their own terms. Contextualists take this stance: they claim that all artifacts should be interpreted and judged within their own historical and cultural context. Remarkably, this leads to a (different) form of cultural exclusion. Contextualists turn non-Western art into something totally alien to our artistic practices and that often implies making it unequal or else disregarding it.³ Contextualism, by judging art along cultural lines, can also have profound conservative consequences. Firstly, though unintentionally, Western art stays referential: all non-Western art is defined as art distinct from “our” tradition. Secondly, it can force the non-West to perform their pure “otherness”.⁴ It essentializes cultures and cultural recognition turns into cultural pressure: members of a culture are not only allowed to perform their cultural practices, but are obliged to do this.⁵ Their artifacts will be labeled as art only insofar as they represent their ‘authentic’ culture. From contextualism, it follows that there is no coherent universal concept of art and non-Western artifacts are excluded from arthood as we understand the concept.

The intensified confrontation with globalization in general and non-Western art in particular begged the question: are art and artistic value concepts of transhistorical and transcultural significance or are they only referring to a specific Western phenomenon from the Renaissance onwards? If all non-Western artifacts are excluded from “arthood” and art is simply equated with post-Renaissance, self-conscious art making then this, on the one hand, makes a concept with a positive value connotation, in the sense that good art is worthwhile, exclusive to Western societies. On the other hand, it renders the concept of art highly Eurocentric and thus of limited relevance in a globalised world. Beyond that, it is empirically hard to maintain that no other society beyond the post-Renaissance Western society had art.⁶ Hence, in order to define and judge all art, we need a theory of art and artistic value that can accommodate artifacts from all cultures and times.

Most theories of art aim to do this. Formalism provides us with a good example. Formalists claim that the essential feature of art is (aesthetic) form, and artistic value should be judged on that basis.⁷ Modern art and “primitive” artifacts can be judged artistically side by side on account of decontextualized formal (aesthetic) similarity between them.⁸ But to define and understand non-Western art only in the light of formal and aesthetic qualities degrades its specific cultural and social context.⁹ Formalism seems to be able to include non-Western and other non-canonical art, but it renders arthood dependent on very narrow Western standards. The principle of formal similarity confirms the cultural dominance of the West rather than it leads to the emancipation the formalists intended.¹⁰ The arthood of the artistic endeavors of other cultures is derived from the

masterpieces of Western culture and arthood is bestowed on them only through the matrix of our history of art.

Jerrold Levinson and Arthur Danto seem to avoid the pitfalls of both contextualism and formalism. Contra formalism, they claim that we cannot bestow arthood upon artifacts because of their formal aesthetic properties.¹¹ It does not follow that art has no essence. Levinson argues that, for an artifact to be art, it must be seriously intended for regard-as-a-work-of-art, i.e., intended for it to be regarded in any way preexisting artworks are or were correctly regarded. Formal similarity between artworks is not sufficient, as the relationship between future and preceding art must be historical and intentional.¹² Thus, an artwork is only correctly regarded in light of its true history of production.¹³ It follows that non-Western objects cannot be art due to their formal similarity with modern Western art. An African artist from the 18th century cannot have intended to make an artifact that would invoke similar regards as a 20th century painting by Picasso. These non-Western artifacts can be art, but only because they were intended for similar regards as historically *preceding* artworks. A similar view can be found in Danto's philosophy of art. He states that formal affinity between modern art and non-Western artifacts cannot account for the arthood of the latter. Affinity is only relevant when there is a causal, and thus historical, relationship.¹⁴ It does not follow that Levinson and Danto claim that there is no art beyond Western post-Renaissance art. Both argue that an artmaker does not need to be conscious of the concept of art. Danto acknowledges that the distinction between artifact and art is not lexically marked in the vocabularies of African languages generally, but claims that the absence of lexical markers can hardly be taken as evidence that the distinction cannot be made or that it is not made in the linguistic community in question.¹⁵ Levinson also accepts the possibility that someone who does not know the concept of an artwork can make an artifact that we would have no conceptual difficulty regarding it as an artwork.¹⁶ Their insistence on the historicity of art does not lead to relativism: their theories try to make a valid distinction between art and non-art universally. Their definition should not only be applicable to Western art, but to all art.

In short, these historical theories of art try to identify and understand art within its context without throwing out the idea of a transhistorical and transcultural concept of art. They do this by combining historicism and essentialism. Both Danto and Levinson underwrite historicism, i.e. the idea that art is not the same throughout time and space and is historically conditioned, but also argue that this does not entail that art has no universal essence. Both relate historicism and essentialism in different ways and this leads to very different outcomes for the place of non-Western art in their theories. I will first turn to the historical intentional definition of Jerrold Levinson.

Levinson's Historicism and Art's Definition

Levinson argues that historicity *is* the essence of art. Levinson clearly explains: "So what I mean by historicism with regard to the concept of art, at least in this context, is [...] the conviction that the only common core of art applicable to art-making today and two thousand years ago, and to any activities and artifacts of other cultures we recognize without strain as evidencing art-making – is one which makes historical reference or connectedness, that is, reference or connectedness to predecessor works, activities, modes

of reception, *internal* to the idea of art-making itself”.¹⁷ An object is art when it is or was intended or projected for overall regard as some prior art is or was correctly regarded.¹⁸ Thus, arthood depends on the intended relationship of the object with the preceding history of art. Levinson defends the separation between the tasks of defining and evaluating art.¹⁹ It follows that to be art is a “neutral” state, and does not imply that it is worthwhile. On the other hand, Levinson makes a connection between *the way in which* art is defined and evaluated. Levinson claims that his theory allows concrete standards of evaluation to be derived from criteria of membership. Good artworks, Levinson argues, give at least initially similar rewards as past good artworks.²⁰

His historical definition does not lead the idea that arthood and art content change over time. An artifact is art only due to it being intended for the same kinds of regard as preceding artworks. When an artifact invokes the same kinds of regard as future artworks, it does not follow that the artifact becomes art only after these future artworks came into existence. The African artifacts that inspired Picasso, do not become art because they can invite the same kinds of regard as Picasso’s art. The artifacts were art all along, because they were intended for inviting similar regards as art that preceded them, or the artifacts were never art in the first place. When an artifact is a source of inspiration to future artists, it is not granted arthood because of this. Levinson calls this position “traditional historicism”.²¹ “Traditional historicism” is committed to an exclusive role for *preceding*, rather than *succeeding*, historical context in the generation of an artifact’s status as art and its artistic content.²² Then, how can we find out whether, for example, the African artifacts that inspired Picasso are art? It is to this question I will now turn.

Accommodating for non-Western Art

Levinson insists that if another culture has art, it must be *art in our sense* more or less.²³ The obvious question is: what is art in our sense? What is art now and what has been art in the past is historically contingent to Levinson; the arthood of an object cannot be determined by its intrinsic characteristics. How, then, can non-Western art be related to what art is in our sense? Levinson offers two solutions to this problem. One strategy for assimilating to the intentional-historical conception of art phenomena outside the purview of Western fine art, Levinson argues, is to take the concrete totality of art regards that have accumulated in three thousand years or so of our common culture, all those relatively replete regards intending an object for which – or against which, in the case of revolutionary art – qualifies it as art, and seek to locate them in operation in those other domains, e.g., that of handmade furniture, or sculpted masks, or commercial design, or ritual music, or baton-twirling.²⁴ The other, weaker, strategy for assimilating non-paradigm art phenomena to the intentional-historical picture, Levinson goes on, is to attempt to identify in other domains simply the same *structure* of connectedness, of intentional invocation, whether immediate or mediate, of predecessor objects of the treatments they were accorded. If found, Levinson states, this would be some reason for thinking of those other domains as art-like, or as containing analogs of art, while perhaps not being strictly art in the particular, historicized sense it has acquired in our culture, and in which our culture is, in all its concreteness, and for better or worse, ineliminably implicated.²⁵

Levinson's first strategy contradicts his traditionalism and historicism. Traditionalism entails that only preceding regards are relevant to the arthood of an artifact and historicism implies that an artifact must be historically related to preceding art. For an artifact to be accorded arthood, it is not sufficient that there are preceding artworks that invite similar regards: the artifact must be intended for these regards. As such, the candidate for art and the preceding artworks must be historically related. On the problem of forgeries, Levinson claims that an original is correctly regarded only in the light of its true history of production, but a forger cannot rationally intend a forgery to be accorded the original regards as such.²⁶ Thus, a forgery is not art, because it was not intended for similar regards as preceding artworks. It was intended for people to believe that it *was* the original artwork and that is not a correct way of regarding an artwork. Non-Western or art-unconscious art, i.e. art that was made by makers who are unaware of the concept of art, is granted art status in reference to the concrete totality of art regards that have accumulated in three thousand years. But, then this art is not correctly regarded in the light of its true history of production. He takes together all possible art regards, while as a historicist he claims that not all art regards are valid at the same time and as a traditionalist he claims that we can only take into account the preceding art regards that were known to the maker. This means that these "correct regards" cannot be translocated in another cultural and historical setting. Moreover, connecting non-Western art to the art regards of "our common culture" leads to a form of appropriation: the inclusion of non-Western art in the history of art leads to a reaffirmation of the superiority of Western high art and the inferiority of non-Western art that was "granted" a place in "our" history of art. Though his historicist position on the one hand makes sure we do not include artifacts into the domain of art because of narrow Western concerns like form or non-functional aesthetic pleasure, as he starts from 'our' concept of art to accord arthood to artifacts from other cultures, arthood is, again, seen through the matrix of our concrete Western history of art.

The second strategy fails to accord arthood to non-Western art in a robust and full-blown sense. Since we need to look for the same kind of connectedness between past and future non-Western artistic practices as in 'our' history of art, again, the Western history of art is the matrix through which we accord arthood to artifacts from other cultures. Though in his first article on the definition of art, Levinson starts from the idea that art-unconscious art is art, he later on weakens this claim: art-unconscious art mostly turns out to be "artful" or "art-like".²⁷ First, we need to address the question: what is "art-like"? Levinson claims it is easy to distinguish the purely craft, i.e. the purely functional, from the purely artistic, i.e. the non-functional, from the items in-between, not purely craft, and not wholly art.²⁸ Here, he is clearly inspired by an aesthetic approach he tries to avoid, namely he uses the dichotomies craft/art and functionality/aesthetics. This appears to imply that Levinson knows what art is apart from a specific historical context. Levinson goes on "[...] factors that would dispose one to see a craft object as art would include whether it was fashioned by a single individual and reflected that individual's personality and taste, the amount of care evident in the handling of detail, the degree of attention to form as part from fittingness to function as such, the sense of a statement being made or an attitude expressed. But note that these signs, which would dispose us to classify as art, are exactly ones which implicate familiar regards that paradigm artworks of the past have been standardly accorded".²⁹ He seems to make his own definition of art redundant, as we can accord arthood to artifacts on account of aforementioned intrinsic criteria. But, Levinson explicitly contests this idea. He does not want to provide intrinsic criteria for

'hard cases', like art-unconscious art and non-Western art. So, the idea that functional art from other cultures is "not strictly art" and thus art to a lesser degree because of its functionality seems to contradict his own definition. Secondly, what does it mean for an artifact to be accorded the status of "artful" or "art-like"? They have a clearly inferior status to "art". Levinson might argue that art is a neutral status, so no value judgement can be deduced from it. Still, he also, rightly, claims that in order for something to be judged, we have to know what we are dealing with.³⁰ The artistic value of art is then clearly separated from and superior to the artistic value of something that is "art-like". Again, artworks within the tradition of Western high art, also called "uncontested" artworks, become referential: art-unconscious art seems art-like when it is not historically related to future artworks that are part of the traditional history of art. When it is, as for example in the case of Gregorian chants, art-unconscious art is art plain.³¹ Gregorian chants can be historically related to later uncontested art, whereas a lot of non-Western art cannot.

Levinson's definition cannot handle the problems that art history as well as the philosophy of art faces regarding non-Western art. On the one hand, arthood is derived from 'our' concept of art and thus, from our concrete history of art. It follows that the arthood of non-Western artifacts can only be seen through the matrix of Western art history. On the other hand, Levinson's definition cannot provide a coherent universal concept of art. He has to adjust his definition in order to accommodate for non-Western art in ways that contradict the original formulation of it. The fundamental problem is that a purely historical definition of art cannot provide a point of departure: it cannot account for artifacts that seem to be a candidate for arthood, but that do not consciously refer to a collection of preceding 'uncontested' artworks. The art status of certain artworks is uncontested because of historical consensus. But, when there is no historical consensus, and this consensus is a rather arbitrary given, then we have no criteria to accord or not to accord arthood to certain artifacts. It follows that a minimal intrinsic characterization of art is necessary in order for his historical definition to work. This is why I will now turn to the philosophy of art of Arthur Danto. Unlike Levinson, Danto does not propose a purely historical definition of art as he does not equate essentialism and historicism. Historicism is not the essence of art, according to Danto, but the intrinsic essence of art discloses itself through history.

Danto's Definition of Art

Danto connects historicism and essentialism differently. Danto states: "As an essentialist in philosophy, I am committed to the view that art is eternally the same – that there are conditions necessary and sufficient for something to be an artwork, regardless of time and place. [...] But as an historicist I am also committed to the view that what is a work of art at one time cannot be one at another, and in particular that there is a history, enacted through the history of art, in which the essence of art – the necessary and sufficient conditions – are painfully brought to consciousness".³² Danto has not formulated a clear definition of art, but Noël Carroll has derived a definition from Danto's thoughts, and Danto endorses this formulation. The definition states that something is an artwork regardless of time and place if it has a subject (i.e., it is about something) about which it projects some attitude or point-of-view by means of rhetorical ellipsis which ellipsis, in turn, engages audience participation in filling-in what is missing (an operation which can

also be called interpretation) where the works in question and the interpretations thereof require an art-historical context.³³

What are the consequences of his definition for non-Western art? Let us return to the African artifacts that inspired Picasso. Both Levinson and Danto agree that we cannot accord these artifacts arthood because that they resemble artworks of modern Western artists or that they inspired these artists. Danto argues that Picasso *discovered* that these African artifacts were in fact works of art, i.e. they were art all along, but this does not mean that any object that inspires us aesthetically becomes art: “Anything can become an object of detached aesthetic scrutiny – the teeth of a dead dog, [...] but, whatever the appearances, the distinction between artwork and artifact, is absolute”.³⁴ Moreover, Danto states that all art has the same philosophical structure. It follows that non-Western art is art in the full-blown sense, it is not merely ‘art-like’ or ‘artful’. Consequently, the artistic value of these artworks is not inferior to the value of Western artworks: “My point, then, is that Picasso discovered [...] the fact that, whether known or not, the master carvers of Africa were artists, and that artistic greatness was possible for them, not simply within their own traditions, but against the highest artistic standards there are”.³⁵ Moreover, from the fact that many non-Western artworks are functional, it does not follow that they are ‘art to a lesser degree’. About these uses of artworks, Danto states “Their uses may even form the basis for their being works of art, since the meanings they condense and express may have to do with weaving or with planting, but taken up into a system of beliefs and symbols that constitute a kind of philosophy. In their capacity as works of art they belong to a different totality altogether than that into which they have entry as object of use”.³⁶

Danto does not ask for “art” to be “art in our sense”: what makes an object an artwork is the fact that it embodies, as a human action gives embodiment to a thought, something we could not form a concept of without the material objects which convey its soul. It is in this sense that the philosophical structure of, for example, African artworks is the same as the philosophical structure of artworks in any culture.³⁷ Danto does not need to give strategies for assimilating to his conception of art phenomena outside the purview of Western fine art. Whatever problems Danto’s definition might raise, the structure of his definition makes sure that (1) arthood is not made dependent on ‘our’ history of art and (2) non-Western art and Western art are equally art. Uncontested artworks from our tradition do not become referential. Still, his historical philosophy of art is by no means unproblematic. His teleological view on history excludes non-Western art not from arthood, but from the history of art.

Danto’s Historicism/Essentialism

This transhistorical essence of art discussed above, everywhere and always the same, only discloses itself through history, according to Danto.³⁸ The end and fulfillment of the history of art is the philosophical understanding of what art is. He parallels this history to the personal history of the individual. Everyone tries to achieve an understanding of oneself. We do this through the mistakes we make, the false paths we follow and so on. The first false path in art’s history was the close identification of art with picturing. The second false path was the materialist formalist aesthetics of Greenberg.³⁹ The history of art was over once art itself raised the true form of the philosophical question, that is, according to Danto, the question of the difference between artworks and real things.⁴⁰

Danto's whole theory revolves around the problem of indiscernibles. His main point is that two indiscernible objects do not necessarily have the same object status. One can be an artwork, while the other is not or they could both be artworks, but with totally different artistic meanings. The true status and meaning of an object depends on its historical context. In this respect, there is a clear parallel between Levinson's and Danto's theory. According to Danto, the question of the difference between artworks and real things was formulated by Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*. This artwork showed that art and reality can be indiscernible.⁴¹ Danto argues it was the historical mission of art to make philosophy possible, after which art has no historical mission in the great cosmo-historical sweep. The fulfillment of the history of art is the philosophy of art.⁴² The history of art has ended, but it does not follow that the practices of art will not continue. They simply go on existing without a goal. Art is now in a post-historical era and its activities no longer have any historical significance.⁴³ The end of the progressive historical narrative is a liberating idea, or so Danto argues. It liberated artists from the task of making more history, from having to follow the "correct historical line".⁴⁴ Historical significance ceased to be a factor in art criticism.⁴⁵ The post-historical era of art is an era of pluralism. The arts are liberated, having handed the problem of the nature of art over to philosophy, to do what they wanted to, and at this precise historical moment pluralism became the objective historical truth.⁴⁶

In this way Danto's philosophy of art, just as Greenberg's formalism, fails to do justice to other developments in twentieth-century art, such as Russian Constructivism, Dada and Surrealism.⁴⁷ In "historical times" there was a correct historical line: all the artworks that followed this correct historical line contributed to the history of art. Art that was not "historically mandated", on the other hand, is excluded: surrealism, for example, did not move forward the (false) formalist Greenbergian narrative. Consequently, surrealism did not help the history of art forward, neither in the Greenbergian narrative, nor in Danto's narrative. In the end, his theory is just as exclusionary as Greenberg's except that Danto shows a way to recuperate "historically insignificant" art, as after the end of art, historical significance lost all meaning for art criticism. In this way, it seems to be nondiscriminatory: after the end of art every artwork deserves "equal judging". Still, all art beyond the pale of history will never be able to participate in art's own history and as such did not help to attain its goal. Not being able to participate in the historical mission of art undoubtedly diminishes the value of these "historically insignificant" artworks. Danto himself draws the parallel between the end of the history of art and endings of movies where people live happily ever after. The point is that the story of people living happily ever after will not be told, it is excluded from the movie. Formulating one historical goal for art, is denying all art that falls outside this history of participation in this history and of setting its own historical goals. A noteworthy consequence is that non-Western art is not granted any specific role in the history of art, as these artworks do not seem to play any part in attaining art's goal of attaining self-understanding. Danto's teleological view follows from his 'robust historicism', a view explicitly contested by Levinson.

Minimal Historicism vs Robust Historicism

Both Danto and Levinson agree that one needs to know the historical context in which an object originated in order to know whether the object is art or not. But *being part of history* is a completely different notion in their philosophies. For Levinson, to be part of

the history of art means that there is a specific intentional historical link between an object and past art objects. Danto, on the other hand, grants art objects a place in the historical narrative only if they moved the history of art closer towards the resolution of the historical mission of art. History for Danto is Hegelian history: history moves towards a goal. Artworks can fall beyond the pale of history: they are art, but did not participate in the history of art. For Levinson, history does not have one such telos or goal. The study of history is simply the study of the past: any event in the past can be the object of historical inquiry. For Danto, art history had a goal and this goal has been attained, so the history of art is over. Levinson, on the other hand, wants to dissociate "the minimal historicism of art claimed by my theory from more robust historicisms of a Hegelian or Dantoesque sort, such as ascribe to the development of art an inherent goal, or view the development of art as governed by inherent laws of stylistic evolution".⁴⁸

For understanding an object in its historical context, Levinson sticks to "surface interpretation". Past intentions and correct regards are in most cases suggested by the outward face of the object, its context of creation, the process by which it came about and the genre it appears to belong to. In cases of doubt, Levinson argues, people can be queried, journals consulted, etcetera.⁴⁹ Surface interpretation must be scrupulously historical, and refers only to possibilities the maker or artist could have acknowledged without attributing to him knowledge of the human sciences of the future.⁵⁰ Danto claims that surface interpretation is needed, in order to come to a deep interpretation of the object. A deep interpretation is one that is hidden from the one that is being interpreted.⁵¹ Danto's end of the history of art is a form of deep interpretation. Every artist who has contributed to the historical mission of art, is not aware of this. Only afterwards, one can interpret artworks in this way and put them together in this master narrative. In Levinson's view, the history of art cannot end when art is still being made. The history of art is the narrative of objects that are related through historical intentions, but this narrative lacks a hidden structure or mission.

One might wonder why philosophy, and more specifically "the question what art is", would be the historical mission of art? Art historian and philosopher David Carrier states: "Why confine art to the task of self-definition, to the quest to determine what art is?"⁵² Danto's idea of one unique historical reason for art follows from his view on narratives: a historical narrative should not be seen as possible way to tell a history; historical narratives are not just what historians construct. The end of art history as he identifies it, is not merely the end of one narrative, it is the end of this actual sequence of events in the world's history. *After the End of Art* describes the nature of art, not just one way of telling art's history.⁵³ Danto is committed to narrativism *de re* – the belief that the history of art itself is narratively structured. Its having an end depends, then, not on Danto's goals but on its own goals.⁵⁴ Danto states: "It will be clear that, for me, a narrative is something actually lived, something realized in and as history, rather than [...] merely the way historians organize event".⁵⁵ Danto claims that after the end of art, art is freed from art historical and philosophical imperatives. But this liberation is only possible through stripping away the possibility for art to set her own historical goals. The philosophy of art assures its own historical significance by being the discipline which defines art as having no historical significance.⁵⁶

It is noteworthy that Danto, in his book *Analytical Philosophy of History* (1965) opposed to just such a form of speculative or substantive history, i.e., a philosophy of history that

makes claims about the future. On the one hand, in this book he stresses that historical selection, i.e. the objects that are chosen for historical inquiry, is influenced by personal biases. Danto states: “[...] historical significance is connected with non-historical significance, and this latter is something which varies with variations in the interests of human beings. The stories historian tell must not be relative merely to their temporal location, but also to the non-historical interests they have as human beings. There is, then, if I am right, an inextinguishable factor of convention and of arbitrariness in historical description, and this makes it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to speak, as the substantive philosopher of history wishes to, of *the* story of the whole of history, or, for that matter, *the* story of any set of events”.⁵⁷ Here, Danto ignores the idea that the whole history of art could be written, and certainly that we could claim this history has come to an end. Moreover, he claims: “[...] narrative organization is something that *we* do. Not merely that, but the imposition of a narrative organization logically involves us with an inextinguishable subjective factor. There is an element of sheer arbitrariness in it”.⁵⁸

On the other hand, Danto forcefully argues in *Analytical Philosophy of History* that historians can only talk about facts that are in their past. Talking about the future is not practicing history. He states “[...] we cannot, in brief, consistently have a complete historical account. Our knowledge of the past, in other words, is limited by our knowledge (or ignorance) of the future. [...] So if philosophy of history is impossible, complete historical accounts are impossible as well, and historical accounts are thus *essentially* incomplete”.⁵⁹ Giving a complete account of the history of art is exactly what Danto is trying to do in his book *After the End of Art*.

Levinson seems to adhere the earlier, ‘analytical’ view of history developed and defended by Danto. This view is more beneficial to the place of non-Western art in art history: anything can be an object of historical inquiry and it follows that non-Western artworks do have a history in a full-blown sense. Levinson rightly contests the idea that the history of art has one historical mission and that there is, as a consequence, only one master narrative of art. Still, he does not fully acknowledge that the practice of history plays a big part in the constitution of ‘uncontested artworks’. The selection a historian makes is heavily influenced by personal (cultural and social) biases. This does not make their historical narratives incorrect, but when we derive uncontested artworks from these narratives, our selection will be quite subjective. As the collection of uncontested artworks is arbitrary and Levinson has to rely heavily on these artworks in order to identify non-Western art, his identification of them as ‘art’ or ‘art-like’ or ‘non-art’ is quite subjective also.

Conclusion

Arthur Danto and Jerrold Levinson both try to define art universally without ignoring the historicity of art. It follows that they should be able to include non-Western art, without projecting purely Western preoccupations in it. Still, both give special significance to artworks from the Western history of high art. Levinson resorts to these artworks in order to grant arthood to non-Western artworks that have no clear uncontested predecessors. Consequently, the arthood of these objects depends on our history of art and as many do not fit this history completely, they are called ‘art-like’ or ‘artful’. In Danto’s definition, Western high art does not seem to play such a big role. All art is art in the fullest sense. Still, the discovery of this essence of art, i.e. his definition, was made possible through

history. As it turns out, this history is, again, the Western history of high art. Though non-Western art is art in the fullest sense, they are not granted any historical significance in Danto's view.

In order to accommodate for art universally, without making non-Western art inferior to Western high art, we are in need of a definition of art that adheres to a minimal historicism while also formulating minimal intrinsic criteria for arthood. Danto's and Levinson's definitions and theories have provided us with useful means to provide such a theory. Still, both Levinson and Danto exclude non-Western art from the center of the history of art. For Levinson, most non-Western art is called "art-like". For Danto, all art, Western or non-Western, is art in the fullest sense, but he does exclude non-Western art from the master narrative of art history.

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