

## **Gimme Shelter: Global Discourses in Aesthetics**

### **“Historical significance” and the value of art**

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#### **Introduction**

Contemporary theories of art need to take a position regarding globalization; how to approach images, texts and sounds from other cultures. The problems art theory faces dealing with globalization are parallel with the ones history faces: on the one hand the history of other cultures can be seen through the matrix of western history. In this case their past is assimilated. The histories of other cultures tend to become variations on the master narrative of European history.<sup>1</sup> Non-western cultures will turn out to be “figures of lack”.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, those other cultures can be perceived as profoundly different, only to be understood in their own terms. In this case, cultures are too easily seen as essentialist homogeneous wholes.<sup>3</sup> Do we understand and judge the artistic endeavors of other cultures through the matrix of the western artistic canons and standards or “in their own terms”?

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 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 artmaking 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 makes 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.<sup>4</sup> In order to identify 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 and artistic value aim to do this. A good example in case is formalism. Formalists claim that the essential feature of art is form, and artistic value should be judged on that basis.<sup>5</sup> Modern art and “primitive” artifacts can be judged artistically side by side on the base of decontextualized formal similarity between them.<sup>6</sup> But to see and judge non-western art aesthetically only in the light of formal qualities like harmony and unity degrades its specific cultural and social context. In this way, formalism appropriates non-western art: it includes non-western art through denying any original meaning and exclusively focusing on a particular cultural interest, namely form.<sup>7</sup>

Formalism seems to be able to include “non-canonical” art, but then it is only art to “our” standards. The principle of formal similarity confirms the cultural dominance of the West rather than it leads to the emancipation the formalists intended.<sup>8</sup>

Contextualists, contra formalists, claim all artifacts should be interpreted and judged within their own historical and cultural context. There is no transhistorical and transcultural essence of art. Contextualizing art can lead to the point where there is no common ground to judge all art on. It ends up in a certain brand of relativism where validity of artistic judgments is completely connected to its specific context, but can never transcend it. It can also lead to “othering”. “Othering” or alienating means making non-Western art different, and that often means making it unequal or else disregarding it.<sup>9</sup> This othering, where art is judged along cultural lines, can also have profound conservative consequences. First, intended or unintended, western art stays referential: all art evaluated as art distinct from “our” tradition is exotic. Second, it can force the non-West to perform their pure “otherness”.<sup>10</sup> It essentializes cultures and cultural recognition turns into cultural pressure: members of a culture are not only allowed to perform their cultural practices, but obliged to do this.<sup>11</sup>

The art theories of Jerrold Levinson and Arthur Danto try to formulate an answer to the problems sketched above. Both argue against aesthetic and formalist approaches. They claim that aesthetics cannot be part of the definition of art as not all art has aesthetic properties.<sup>12</sup> Aesthetics cannot account for the difference between art and mere real things. This does not mean art has no essence. For Levinson, an object must be intended for regard as an artwork. Formal similarity is not enough, as only relatively complete or total ways of regarding are to be allowed: not single, isolated ways of regarding.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, an artwork is only correctly regarded in light of its true history of production.<sup>14</sup> It follows that non-western objects cannot be art due to their formal similarity with modern western art. They can be art, but for different reasons. A similar view can be found in Danto: “Claiming an affinity is the very opposite of inferential art criticism, for it entails no historical explanations at all”.<sup>15</sup> It does not follow that Levinson and Danto claim there is no art beyond Western post Renaissance art. Both argue 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.<sup>16</sup> Levinson 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.<sup>17</sup>

Both theorists make a clear distinction between arthood and artistic value. A definition of art must account for all art: good or bad, western or non-western, new or old.<sup>18</sup> It does not follow that artistic value is relative: Danto regrets the multiculturalist stance where the best one could hope to do is to endeavor to understand how those within a given cultural tradition appreciated their art. It ends up in a kind of relativism where the concept of quality becomes odious and chauvinist and where art criticism becomes a form of cultural criticism.<sup>19</sup> He argues that a pluralist view on art should not lead to the erasure of the distinction between good and bad art. Levinson also makes clear the distinction between good and bad art holds and is objective. Contrary to relativist theories, he is trying to validate the difference between good and less good art universally. As David Hume, he is

seeking a principle to make valid judgements about artistic quality; pronouncing one judgment correct and other incorrect.<sup>20</sup>

Levinson and Danto both propose a theory of art that can accommodate for all art without denying specific historical contexts. But, this does not lead to relativism: their theories try to make a valid distinction between art and non-art and good art and bad art universally. They both avoid the exclusionary and appropriating traits of formalist definition and evaluation, as non-western art is not seen and judged artistically only in the light of formal or aesthetic qualities, excluding other cultural and social meanings. On the other hand, arthood and artistic value are universal. If art and artistic value are seen as social constructs, non-western art can be excluded or appropriated, but cannot be seen as equal. On the one hand, it can be excluded as “they” do not have our concept of art. A much offered solution by relativists is including them into a newly founded field, namely “visual culture.” Art historian Kitty Zijlmans rightly argues the replacement of the term “art” by “visual culture” offers no way out: exclusionary concepts of art will not be challenged and will remain the point of reference.<sup>21</sup> Excluding non-western artifacts from artistic judgement is denying the non-west equal judging. On the other hand, relativists like Moxey claim that art historians should promote political, historical and social agenda’s.<sup>22</sup> Including non-western art for political reasons again equals appropriation: the original meanings are ignored in function of political aims and non-western art is again not equally judged as western art.

### **Historicism and Essentialism**

Levinson and Danto both 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 through combining historicism and essentialism. Both Danto and Levinson underwrite the historicity of art. Art is not the same throughout time and space and is historically conditioned, but this does not mean it has no universal essence. Is their way out of radical essentialism and radical relativism satisfying? They start from the same premises: what it meant to be art in the past and what it now means to be art is not the same. We need to know the historical context of an artifact to find out whether it is art and to judge it artistically. Due to a different view on the philosophy of history, their historical approaches are totally different with different outcomes for the evaluation of non-western art. Whereas Danto has a teleological view on history; where the history of art fulfills her historical mission through her history, Levinson denies the history of art such a goal.

Levinson puts forward 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”.<sup>23</sup> An object is art when it is or was intended or projected for overall regard as some prior art is or was correctly regarded.<sup>24</sup> This means arthood is dependent on the intended relationship of the object with the preceding history of art. As other relational approaches, Levinson defends the separation between the tasks of defining and evaluating art.<sup>25</sup> 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 clear

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.<sup>26</sup>

Danto connects historicism and essentialism differently. Danto argues “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”.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> This transhistorical essence in art, everywhere and always the same, only discloses itself through history.<sup>29</sup> Danto explains that 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.<sup>30</sup> The history of art was over once art itself raised the true form of the philosophical question – that is, the question of the difference between artworks and real things.<sup>31</sup>

Both Levinson and Danto claim to formulate a universal theory of art that can accommodate art from all cultures. What does the historical component of their theory mean for arthood and artistic value? Is there a relationship between historical significance and artistic value?

### **Levinson and historical significance**

For Levinson, both arthood and artistic value are dependent on historical significance. The historical significance of an object shows if an object is or is not intentionally related to prior art or prior good art. Very important in his view is that historical significance makes reference to the past, not to the future. Levinson makes a clear distinction between definition and interpretation of art on the one hand and evaluation of art on the other hand. Arthood and art content do not change over time. This position is called “traditional historicism”.<sup>32</sup> “Traditional historicism” is committed to an exclusive role for *preceding*, rather than *succeeding*, historical context in the generation of an artwork’s central content.<sup>33</sup> But, Levinson clearly argues, this traditional historicism is only about arthood and art content and not about the permanence of artistic value. His “traditional historicism” should not lead to any conservatism as to how canons should be constituted.<sup>34</sup>

Good artworks, Levinson argues, give at least initially similar rewards as past good artworks.<sup>35</sup> The obvious question is: which past artworks are good? Levinson proposes an

answer in a Humean vein. Hume acknowledges that not everyone agrees on artistic judgments, but claims that one opinion is objectively superior to other opinions.<sup>36</sup> Those superior opinions are made by “ideal critics.” These “ideal critics” have a delicacy of taste, innate or cultivated, are practiced through frequent contemplation of particular species of beauty, compare works of art, lack prejudice and have a good sense.<sup>37</sup> Hume’s approach has been charged with circularity: how can we find out whether someone is an ideal judge? Critics of Hume argue that it is impossible to find the good critics unless you already know the good artworks.<sup>38</sup> Levinson tries to defend Hume’s account of artistic value against circularity by pointing out that of some artworks we actually know they are good. “[...]Works standing the test of time, paradigms of excellence in art, constitute the standard of taste in a given art form: there are no rules of composition with general application to be found: and true critics are not individuals who have grasped such nonexistent rules, but rather ones who are attuned to greatness in art and suited to identifying and explicating such for us”.<sup>39</sup>

How does he rhyme this idea of a collection of untouchable artworks with the fact that his theory does not aim at permanence of artistic value? Here he clearly advocates that in specific cases artistic permanence is objective. Though there are certainly artworks of very high quality we can still artistically appreciate, this is no reason to give these works a separate status of “untouchable” objective artistic quality. Why would anyone even consider re-evaluating them? If a new judge would feel there is a lack somewhere, he or she will not be seen as an ideal judge anymore. This makes an open encounter with these masterworks impossible. Moreover, the idea that some artworks’ quality is beyond discussion, leads to another problem pointed out by art historian Anna Brzyski. Not only judges are limited by making artworks’ quality untouchable, in other words, canonical. Artists themselves, well trained in art history, will consciously or unconsciously try to connect their artistic output to these canonical works of the history of art.<sup>40</sup>

A related problem, a problem Levinson touches himself, is that some artworks have been excluded from being artistically judged, not because they are not art, but because of political or social reasons.<sup>41</sup> Although they might be as old as the masterpieces, they cannot be seen as masterpieces as they did not stand the test of time. Only now, people began to judge them artistically. Levinson claims that he never proposed the test of time as a criterion of artistic value, but only as an important, yet entirely defeatable, *indicator* therefore. The test of time is a sufficient, but not a necessary condition: failing the test of time is not necessarily the fault of those works.<sup>42</sup> When the “objective good works” are the ones that have stood the test of time, they are “referential works” and will form a canon, but the works that did not stand the test of time will have to wait before they actually do stand that test. When the referential works stay the same, this will not easily happen. Levinson does not seem to acknowledge that through clinging to the idea that masterpieces are objectively so because they stood the test of time, he is in fact giving them a special status, unreachable for other artworks because of social, political or cultural reasons.

### **Danto and historical significance**

For Danto arthood is not dependent on the object’s historical significance, but the meaning of a work is. 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 is dependent on the historical context. So far, there is a clear parallel between Levinson's and Danto's theory.

Art, in Danto's view, has historical significance when it brought the history of art closer to its goal. The goal of art history or in Danto's words "what art want," is the philosophical understanding of what art is. This goal is achieved through a history of mistakes and false paths. Within this history of art, every mistake and false path was historically significant as it would eventually lead to the fulfillment of the ultimate goal of art history. Once, Danto explains, art itself raised the true form of the philosophical question – that is, the question of the difference between artworks and real things – history was over.<sup>43</sup> The master narrative of the history of art is that there is an era of imitation, followed by our post-historical era in which, with qualification, anything goes.<sup>44</sup>

The question of the difference between artworks and real things was formulated by Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*. There, the point had been reached when art and reality were indiscernible.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> That the history of art has ended does not mean 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.<sup>47</sup> The end of the progressive historical narrative is a liberating idea, according to Danto. It liberated artists from the task of making more history, from having to follow the "correct historical line".<sup>48</sup> Historical significance ceased to be a factor in art criticism as no art is no longer licit.<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup>

Why would philosophy be the historical reason for 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? Even if Brillo Box definitely demonstrates the falsity of the modernist analysis, it does not follow that in the future, art cannot undertake yet now unknowable quests".<sup>51</sup> Danto's idea of one unique historical reason for art follows from his view on narratives. Danto does not see a historical narrative as one 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.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> 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".<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup>

He “projects” this narrative in all art before the end of art. He elevates Warhol’s Brillo Boxes to the resolution of the historical mission of art history, but he also denies the artwork other meanings it obviously has. Danto construes modernism in terms of a single progressive developmental history, oriented towards some recognizable goal or telos. Ironically, he is construing modernism exclusively in terms of categories taken up from Greenberg. In this way Danto, just as Greenberg, fails to do justice to other developments in twentieth-century art, such as Russian Constructivism, Dada and Surrealism.<sup>56</sup> As in historical times there was a correct historical line, art that was not “historically mandated” is excluded: surrealism, for example, did not move forward the (false) Greenbergian 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 history and as such did not help to attain its goal. Not being able to participate in the historical mission of art, 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.

Both Danto and Levinson agree that one needs to know the historical context in order to know whether an object is art or not. But historical significance or meaning is a completely different notion for them. For Levinson, to be part of the history of art means there is a specific intentional historical link between an object and past art objects. Danto, on the other hand, grants historical significance to art objects when they moved the history of art closer towards the resolution of the historical mission of art. It follows that for Levinson an object that is without historical significance is necessarily not art and an artwork that does not give related rewards as past good artworks is not a good artwork. An object can only be art and be valuable as art within the context of history. 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 is without a telos or a goal. The study of history is simply the study of the past. For Danto art history had a goal and this goal has been attained, so the history of art is over.

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.<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup> 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.<sup>59</sup> 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.

They both have an unproblematic view on the objectivity of history: Levinson has no difficulty accepting that the intentions of art makers can be discovered and "correct regards" can be revealed and used in his definition of art. Danto claims that the narrative he tells is not constructed by him, but has actually been lived that way. Levinson also claims that the history of art is not just a possible construction and as such cannot be rewritten: "my view that art is now an almost purely historical notion should least of all be thought to license the idea that we change, through interpretive reflection or construction in the present, what the history of art has been".<sup>60</sup> In both theories, the "historical significance" of an object is fixed, from the moment it is correctly interpreted.

### **Exclusion, Appropriation and Othering**

What are the consequences for the evaluation of non-western art of both art theories? Levinson insists that if another culture has art, it must be *art in our sense* more or less.<sup>61</sup> 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 characteristics. How 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.<sup>62</sup> 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, 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.<sup>63</sup>

Levinson's first strategy contradicts his traditionalism and historicism. In the context of forgery, 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 of same to be accorded that regard as such.<sup>64</sup> Translated to the situation of non-western or unconscious art – such 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 art regards that were known to the maker. This means this "correct regard" cannot be transplanted in another cultural and historical setting. His traditionalist intentionalist historical vision cannot accommodate for unconscious art in this way. Moreover, connecting non-western art to



the art regards of “our common culture” leads to a form of appropriation in which the inclusion of non-western art in the history of art only leads to a reaffirmation of western high art and the inferiority of non-western art that was “granted” a place in “our” history of art.

Though in his first article on the definition of art, Levinson starts from the idea that unconscious art, is art, he tends to weaken his claims, to it being “artful” or “art-like”.<sup>65</sup> The first question is: 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.<sup>66</sup> Here, he is clearly inspired by an aesthetic approach he tries to avoid, namely he uses the dichotomy craft/art, functionality/aesthetics. This also seems 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”.<sup>67</sup>

Objects that are “artful” or “art-like” have a clearly inferior status to “art”. Levinson would claim 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.<sup>68</sup> The artistic value of art is then clearly separated from and superior to the artistic value of something that is “art-like”. Again, the “uncontested” artworks become referential: they are given a special status that puts them higher up in the hierarchy. Unconscious art seems art-like when it is not connected to the traditional history of art. When it is, as for example Gregorian chants, it is art plain.<sup>69</sup> Gregorian chants can be related to later uncontested art, whereas a lot of non-western art cannot.

Danto does not ask for “art” to be “art in our sense”. If in a definition not all art is equally art, than this definition fails. Danto claims that 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. In this sense, the philosophical structure of, for example, African artworks is the same as the philosophical structure of artworks in any culture.<sup>70</sup> Danto does not need to give strategies for assimilating to his conception of art phenomena outside the purview of Western fine art.

Though on the one hand, Danto claims his master narrative of art, namely, his scheme of imitation and self definition, has universal validity, on the other hand he acknowledges the history of non-western art is very different. In his essay on African art he claims resemblance is not an important consideration in African art, it follows that the forms in African art are not distortions. If a Western artist, on the other hand, inspired by African models, introduces such exaggerated features into his work as he finds in his models, they really will be distortions, just because resemblance counts significantly in Western art. Danto then rightfully raises that to appreciate African works for their distortion is accordingly to fail to appreciate them at all.<sup>71</sup> What is problematic, is that he claims the

universal history of art and its resolution starts from imitation and ends into self-consciousness. In this way, African art has no part in this history: it is not excluded from arthood and even appreciated in the fullest sense as art, but it is excluded from the master narrative of art and in this sense “othered”.

In the end, 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.

## **Conclusion**

In both theories the traditional Western art historical canon plays a much more important role than acknowledged. For identification of art and artistic value, Levinson resorts to the connection of uncertain cases to undeniable cases of art or good art. It is not clear at what point artworks turn into “uncontested” artworks. He clings to the idea of artworks and good artworks that have passed the test of time, but he does not acknowledge that this special status has major consequences for the identification of art and artistic value of non-western artifacts and other marginalized cases. What was art and artistic value in the past cannot be the sole ground for defining art status and artistic value. The consequences for non-western art is that it is inferior art or not art at all.

For Danto, almost only Western art had historical significance: all art is art, but only Western canonical art has contributed to the historical mission of art. On the one hand, he appropriates art as he projects it onto his historical scheme and denies artworks meanings that do not fit into the narrative. On the other hand, he “others” and excludes non-western art in the sense that he excludes them, not from art, but from the history of art. Levinson’s non-teleological view makes sure he grants “history” to non-western art.

They both have an unproblematic view on the objectivity of history: Danto claims that the narrative he tells is not constructed by him, but has actually been lived that way. Levinson also stresses that the history of art is not just a possible construction and as such cannot be rewritten. Their purely objective view on history leads to cultural exclusion. Levinson cannot connect non-western art to the history of art in the fullest sense, as he clings to the idea that the true narrative of art history is the one where the West is implied.<sup>72</sup> This is why he has to resort to the notions of “artful” or “artlike”. Danto cannot allow that there are other narratives besides the one he has laid down, he cannot grant non-western art historical significance.

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1 Chakrabarty, Dipesh, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History. Who speaks for “Indian” pasts?” *The Decolonization Reader*. Le Sueur, Ed. James D. New York, 2003. 428-448, 428.

2 Chakrabarty, Dipesh, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History. Who speaks for “Indian” pasts?” *The Decolonization Reader*. Le Sueur, Ed. James D. New York, 2003. 428-448, 442.

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