The Art Circle by George Dickie
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sign should be transparent so that the Idea can be seen perfectly. Since he claims that poetry's signs are less visible and thus more effective, he also seems to want the arts themselves to become immaterial. Are the arts and their signs then simply functional, mere Platonic shadows of a higher reality? Lessing's conclusions prompt us to question the ontological status and social role of the arts, and Wellbery's study thus laudably fulfills its aim to promote the continuing importance of Lessing's *Laocoön.*

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DICKIE, GEORGE. *The Art Circle.* New York: Haven Publications, 1984, 115 pp., n.p.

George Dickie's new book is the outgrowth of the voluminous response to his earlier *Art and the Aesthetic,* where he developed his influential institutional theory of art. Unlike many philosophical theories, the institutional theory was so succinctly expressed in that book that its weak points were readily exposed by critics like Monroe Beardsley and Ted Cohen. Despite these shortcomings, the theory made a permanent contribution to aesthetics. Eventually, however, Dickie came to believe that the institutional theory required a major overhaul. The present book is an attempt to rescue what is of permanent value in the theory from the objections of its critics.

The essence of Dickie's original theory can be expressed as follows: Works of art are artifacts, things made or presented by persons. But only some artifacts are works of art. How are we to mark off the art artifacts from the others? Here Dickie takes his inspiration from twentieth century art itself: The Dadaists showed that people are capable of appreciating any artifact as art (as any natural object is capable of being appreciated in a different way?); at least we could say that it is possible to try to appreciate any artifact, recognizing that we might fail. Art really involves a kind of attention, a willingness really to examine the world as something other than a collection of objects ready at hand to serve human purposes. An artist is someone who tries to draw our attention to this. Thus a work of art is an artifact that has been singled out by conventional means for public appreciation. Dickie referred to this as the artifact's having conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation.

In the first chapter of *The Art Circle,* Dickie reviews the discussion of this earlier version of his theory. Readers sympathetic to his approach in its original form will appreciate his efforts to eliminate the more obvious, but surprisingly pervasive, misconceptions about the view, as well as his acknowledgment of some of its difficulties. In *The Art Circle* Dickie abandons the notion of conferring status, and he no longer speaks of the artworld as though it were an institution. Dickie will now argue that art is institutional because it is a social practice, and works of art must be made in accordance with certain rules by and for people fulfilling certain social roles. The second chapter is a critical discussion of Danto. Dickie and Danto have often been lumped together, and Dickie is at pains here to show that this has always been a mistake.

The reformulation of the Institutional Theory begins in Chapter III, where Dickie defends his claim that works of art must be artifacts. This claim is important to Dickie because his aim is to offer necessary and sufficient conditions for something's being a work of art. If he cannot persuade us that artifacthood is a necessary condition, the rest of his project will seem pointless. Conversely, if he *can* convince us that artifacthood is a necessary condition, a great step has been made toward the idea that a definition of art in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions is a genuine possibility. For then the person who argues that art cannot be defined is arguing only that we cannot tell which artifacts are works of art and which are not.

Dickie takes steps in *The Art Circle* to correct his earlier view that artifacthood can be conferred. He now argues, not that artifacthood can be conferred on, say, a piece of driftwood, but that artifacthood can be *achieved* by hanging the driftwood over the mantle. "The driftwood is being used as an artistic medium and being displayed within the context of the artworld, and it thereby becomes a more complex object. The complex object—the-driftwood-used-as-an-artistic-medium—is an artifact of an artworld system" (p. 45). Thus, as I understand Dickie, the driftwood itself is not an artifact at all, although the driftwood *qua* work of art (or the display of the driftwood) is. Likewise, to use Dickie's example, if the driftwood is used as a tool, it is, insofar as it is a tool, an artifact. Insofar as it is a piece of driftwood, it is not.

I think Dickie's way of handling this problem is wholly persuasive. Philosophers have a penchant for insisting upon bizzare counterexamples. If someone suggested that trees are natural objects, not artifacts, we would hear about synthetic Christmas trees, shoe trees, and the like. The philosophy of art is an especially difficult area to make arguments of the kind Dickie makes about artifacthood because there is something about art that makes people think they can get away with anything. Timothy Binkley, for example, in an article that Dickie roughs up in Chapter IV, suggested that a work of art is anything that is *specified* as such. At the end of his article, Binkley purports to solve the ontological

issue of art by specifying that everything in the universe is a work of art. Dickie's own theory, although not as expansive as Binkley's, is nevertheless extraordinarily accommodating when it comes to accepting objects as artworks; therefore, Dickie must steer a difficult course between the ease of creating art, on the one hand, and the constraints required by a theory on the other.

The essentials of Dickie's own view arrive in Chapters IV and V. At bottom, Dickie is concerned to show that the existence of art requires a cultural matrix or framework. He draws support for this once again from Danto's "visually indistinguishable objects." If *Brillo Box* by Andy Warhol is perceptually indistinguishable from an ordinary Brillo box, the fact that the one is an artwork and the other is not can only be explained by supposing that it is the relational properties (and not the intrinsic ones) of *Brillo Box* that render it a work of art. What sort of framework will bring this off? First, Dickie says that the framework must persist through time; it cannot be created on the spot by the creation of the work. Thus Dickie rejects Beardsley's vision of the romantic artist who labors away on his art completely divorced from history, society, and other persons. Second, the framework contains, in addition to the role of artist, the corresponding role of a public. Of course, Dickie does not mean to suggest that every work of art is, or is intended to be, presented to a public. His proposal is that a work of art must belong to a *kind* or class of things "which has as a goal presentation to a public" (p. 66). The public Dickie refers to is not just anyone into whose perceptual field the hopeful artwork might fall; "being a member of a public requires knowledge and understanding similar in many respects to that required of an artist" (p. 66). Thus, Dickie's theory is that an artist must comply with two rules in order to make a work of art: he must make an artifact, and he must create a thing of a kind that is presented to an artworld public. Taken individually, compliance with these rules is a *necessary* condition for making an artwork; compliance with both rules is *sufficient* to create a work of art.

This revised theory preserves some of the distinctive features of the original version. According to the institutional approach, to be a work of art is not *eo ipso* to be a special thing of great value. Children in elementary school art classes make works of art, though not very good ones. Indeed, by giving a generous answer to the question "What is a work of art?", the work of philosophy of art is reserved for the question of why and how we know that some works are better than others. No one who does not think that the metaphysical problem can be dealt with independently from an inquiry into the standard of taste will find the institutional theory compelling.

Dickie's theory, however, is more elaborate than I have indicated. In reality, he offers a series of interlocking definitions. These definitions are easily given here:

I) An artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art.
II) A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.
III) A public is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object that is presented to them.
IV) The artworld is the totality of all artworld systems.
V) An artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public.

The circularity of these definitions is apparent, but Dickie is sanguine. (Hence the title of the book.) He does not think the definitions as a group are uninformative; on the contrary, he thinks the definitions provide the leanest possible description of the essential framework and the artworks embedded in it. "What the definitions reveal, by eliminating distracting detail, is that art-making involves an intricate, co-relative structure which cannot be described in the straightforward, linear way that such activities as saddlemaking presumably can be described" (p. 82).

There is much to ponder in Dickie's definitions. For example, what does it mean for an artist to "participate with understanding in the making of a work of art"? Would a well-informed assistant who holds a lamp while the painter works be an artist on this view? Again, in what "degree" must the public be prepared to understand artworks? Is it enough to *recognize* them as artworks, or must the public be capable of *appreciating* them? Dickie here moves dangerously close to reintroducing "evaluative" considerations into his definition. Finally, I think the notion of "an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public" needs considerable clarification. Is it possible to specify what is meant by "kind" in this context independently of the concept of a work of art? One cannot say, "By 'kind' I mean the kind of thing presented to the public for the appreciation appropriate to works of art." For the notion of "kind" is being deployed precisely to define what a work of art is. Even Dickie would concede that there are limits to acceptable circularity.

Dickie's theory is strongest when it emphasizes the "institutional" character of art. I think this can be done without seeking to define "art." But even those who take a dim view of attempts to provide this sort of definition may find of the highest interest the exploration of the

ways in which art is a function of its social context. Whether it is accurate to speak of this context as *institutional* is another question. Dickie does characterize art as a practice, an "Action-Institution," but he says that the practice itself is not conventional. If this is correct, it is worth wondering whether the practice is really an institution. When the concept of an institution is stretched too far, it is no longer interesting to use it to describe anything. But of course Dickie offers a *contextual* theory regardless of whether his theory is truly institutional.

*The Art Circle* is elegantly presented and illustrated, and written with much clarity and grace. The reader will find in it much wisdom from one of the established figures in American aesthetics.

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HOLLY, MICHAEL ANN. *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984, 256 pp, $24.95.

American scholars retain an image of Erwin Panofsky in the kitchen of his home in Princeton trading quips with William Heckscher, in New York leading seminars on Renaissance iconology, or on the road delivering *Pandora's Box* as a lecture. They know that Panofsky started his career in Germany in association with Ernst Cassirer and Aby Warburg, but Panofsky's youthful theoretical writings with their strange blend of boldness and tentativeness remain unfamiliar ground. Michael Ann Holly has addressed this problem in *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* by focusing on his early papers in art theory. Her title has a wonderful—if possibly unintended—ambiguity. It implies a treatment of Panofsky's place as a founding father of the discipline. Yet the chapters deal mainly with his engagement with figures a generation older than himself, suggesting that he is working on a foundation largely in place. Holly's book allows for both of these interpretations, for it portrays a dialectic between a young scholar and a young profession. And Holly moves from early chapters on Panofsky's critique of Wölfflin and Riegl to suggest that Panofsky's exchange with the great art historical minds is the source of his methodology and consequently of his immense contribution to the history of art and the humanities in general.

The dialogue Holly sketches between Panofsky and Wölfflin, Riegl, and Cassirer provides much of the excitement of her book. One sees Panofsky the gadfly at work, and Holly is brilliant at tracing the developing strategy of each essay. Her Panofsky is an extremely clever antagonist, changing the focus of his attack, retreating here, and subtly raising the stakes there. In the early essays Panofsky shows less interest in lucid exposition than in provocation, but in provocation that evolves into creation. The culmination of this process comes with Panofsky's article of 1927, "Die Perspektive als 'symbolische Form'." Panofsky had been on the attack: "Wölfflin was reprimanded for not being 'cultural enough'; Riegl was admonished for not being more 'rigorously formal'" (p. 145). But with the new paper he turns to construction. "Panofsky has attempted within the confines of the essay on perspective, what he accomplished only in piecemeal fashion earlier: a totally comprehensive (formal, cultural, philosophical) treatment of one particular visual form" (p. 145). And Panofsky has accomplished this with the help of Cassirer's philosophy of the symbol. According to Holly, Panofsky uses Cassirer to deal with art in a way in which the formal, cultural, and philosophical aspects coalesce into "essential meanings." This pursuit of "essential meanings" Holly defines as Panofsky's iconology. It is, she argues, this neo-Kantian task which Panofsky describes in his now-famous "Introductory" to the *Studies in Iconology* (1939). Many of his subsequent works involved a more pedestrian sort of iconology; they were restricted to the philosophical interpretation of art, such as finding the neo-Platonic in Michelangelo. But, for Holly, the method of the essay on perspective stands as iconology in the strictest sense and the true model of Panofsky's methodology throughout his life.

Holly thus concludes an excellent internal analysis of the perspective essay by portraying it as a breakthrough for Panofsky. But that essay may represent not so much one of the first chapters of Panofsky's neo-Kantianism, which Holly argues, as one of the last. Although Holly in her introductory chapter sketches the neo-Kantian and neo-Hegelian components of Panofsky's intellectual environment, neo-Kantianism remains only an aspect of that setting and does not enter in an important way into her discussion of Panofsky's treatment of Wölfflin and Riegl. Yet neo-Kantianism arguably dominated the German academy, so that, for example, the *Kant-Studien* might be described as the unofficial organ of German philosophy. It numbered among its editors and contributors not only the obvious neo-Kantians, such as Wilhelm Windelband, Ernst Cassirer, Heinrich Rickert, and Wilhelm Dilthey, but also Rudolf Carnap, Paul Tillich, Ernst Troelsch, and Ernst R. Curtius. Panofsky himself chose to publish his theorectical papers of 1915, 1920, and 1925 in Max Dessoir's neo-Kantian-laden *Zeitschrift für Aesthetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*. Indeed, neo-Kantianism framed the questions Panofsky was asking. When he claims to be interested in find-