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The Nature of Art An Anthology

Thomas. E. Wartenberg



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An Anthology

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序

我们手中的这本选集是一个特别的尝试,值得一读。

首先,这是一本有着特殊阅读任务的文集。这部英文文集可以读到部分著作选段的原文,这很重要。作者并不都是英语作者,有些作者如柏拉图、亚里士多德、柏格森、海德格尔都有原文直接译成汉语的译本。对中国读者而言,读起来更容易;用母语来传达原文与英语来传达原文反正都是转译,我们很难想象汉语读者用英语译本读书会比读汉语译本更能理解其意义,但是汉译,尤其是艺术学方面,目前做得并不周全,而且许多是从英文转译的。所以这个尝试,其意义就不仅在于它的内容,而在于它是用英文在中国出版,并鼓励和要求读者把读英文作为一种任务。我对这个任务是这样理解的:

“因为历史原因,英语已经成为当代的世界语,是现代知识分子的普通话(而不是外语)。”

“随着全球化浪潮的推进,英语的使用范围更为广大。虽然作为母语非英语的知识分子,在维护母语,承建文化,创造文明的过程中要强调语言的差异,强调精神的回归、认同,但是全世界共同的非本传统的文明对象对每位知识分子来说,也是他立身世界的基础。世界的文明的一般性文字表达只约定一种语言,目前就是英语,所以英语不仅是实用的技能,也是文化的通道。”(《十九匠》2002年第二版第31—32页)

作为一个学生、学者,无论他是否把艺术或艺术学作为专业,都应该承担阅读英文表达的任务,因为艺术是生活的一部分,任何职业的人都可以遭遇。

其二,这是一本有着特殊学术任务的文集。无论用何种语言来选辑,这样一个题目都是一个艰巨的尝试。在其中文本的定义是相当困难的,编选者要为每个作者对于艺术的主旨找出一个定义,而且各个作者的定义皆不相同。在我看来,这几乎是不可能的。因为每个作者对于艺术的讨论皆有前提,而且各人之间也有许多“共识”和“偏好”。也就是说,各人说的不同,其实意思并没有太大的差异;或者,谈同一个问题,只是强调了某个侧面,并没有什么根本的差别。所以我拿到这本集子也很好奇。翻阅之后,还是觉得它未必不是一种特别的尝试,就是强调其间的差别。只是提醒读者,这些差别之间的幅度不太平均,有些定义之间有极小的差异,只是说艺术的某些特征,有些差异是信仰的产物,可能跟严格意义上的艺术定义的讨论风马牛不相及;也有些是对艺术的规定不同,作者之间谈的根本不是一种东西。

在其中,对艺术的本质的追索,在这本文集中显现出一个难题:对于本质的解释的差异证明本质不是实有的,而是人为解释的。也就是说,艺术的本质实际是一种“无有的存

在”，只是因为不同的追问者根据不同的问题而使艺术变现为种种的解说和文本，因为问题限制了对问题解答的前提和方向，所有的解释都在呈现人与艺术的某种关系。因此我们从这本结集出版的文本中一方面能透过艺术问题而深究人的本性作为艺术本质呈现的差异，差异拓展了读者的眼界，磨砺出自我的独立判断的能力。另一方面，我们也因此警惕，语言正引导人们追问的同时，使人陷入了自我的固执的理解，而这种理解只是一种理解，不可能是绝对正当的，也不可能是独一无二的。最为值得注意的是，一旦对本质形成理解，本质自体已离之远去，重新隐藏于不可言说的“无有的存在”。艺术，如同一切人的问题一样将不断被解释、被追索。

如果一本文集能够让我们意识到这个学术任务，当然是一个特别的尝试。

朱青生

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The idea for this volume developed through a course I was teaching with Sam Mitchell, *Meaning, Time, and Beauty*. Discovering that none of the standard aesthetics anthologies devoted sufficient attention to the question of what art is, I began to think about editing one myself. Although this volume has evolved in a variety of ways, it owes its existence to that course and the students who have discussed this issue in it. My thanks to all of them and to Sam for his support of my endeavor.

Alan Schiffmann once again gave me the benefit of his philosophic acumen and fine editorial eye. Without his efforts, my writing for this volume would have been less clear, my positions less precisely formulated. As usual, I value the care he has expended in refining my words and ideas.

A number of people helped me decide what essays to include in this volume. Angela Curran, Noël Carroll, Stephen Davies, Cynthia Freeland, Paul Guyer, Patricia Mills, and John Verriano all made suggestions that have improved and expanded the scope of this volume. I would also like to thank Robert Wicks for some excellent advice on improving a number of the introductions to the selections. His knowledge saved me from some crucial errors. Deane Curtin, Gustavus Adolphus College; Elmer Duncan, Baylor University; Tom Huhn, Wesleyan University; Mary Sirridge, Louisiana State University; and Kathleen J. Wininger, University of Southern Maine, all provided careful and detailed comments on the manuscript that contributed to it in significant ways.

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Finally, a word of thanks to my wife, Wendy, and son, Jake, for bearing with me during the process of editing this volume. You both make it all worthwhile.

Thomas E. Wartenberg

ILLUSTRATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Suppose your best friend, proud of a very expensive painting he recently acquired, invites you over to admire it. Though you don't know quite what to expect, you are taken aback when your friend reveals his acquisition to you: It's just "a canvas about five foot by four: white. The background is white and if you screw up your eyes, you can make out some fine white diagonal lines."¹ "Is this simple, almost monochromatic canvas—hardly a painting at all—meant as a hoax?" you ask. Your friend protests angrily that he could make a tidy profit if he sold it to back to the dealer. And, he goes on, the work is by an artist whose paintings hang in the Centre Pompidou, Paris's great museum of contemporary art. Do these facts affect your judgment of the painting? Should they? What about the opinion of a mutual friend that "It's a work of art, there's a system behind it. . . . It wasn't painted by accident, it's a work of art which stakes its claim as part of a trajectory. . ." (*Art*, pp. 17–18)? Does evidence of deliberation establish this painting's status as a work of art? How important are your own, subjective reactions to the work? Finally, and most centrally, you puzzle, "What, if anything, makes something a work of art?"

The scenario just described is from *Art*, a very successful play written by the French author, Yasmina Reza. The questions it raises foreshadow much of the subject matter of this anthology. All the included selections contribute to the ongoing philosophic discussion about the nature of art. Some selections are drawn from the history of philosophy, going back over two thousand years; others are as recent as the "digital revolution." Some are written by philosophers working within the tradition of English-speaking or analytic philosophy; others stem from the European or Continental tradition. Some offer a crisp formula in answer to the question "What makes something a work of art?"; others argue that no simple definition will do; and still others doubt that the whole enterprise makes sense. What unites them all, however, is their confrontation with this thorny philosophic issue.

SOME QUESTIONS FROM *Art* ABOUT ART

Before we think about the question, What is the nature of art?, let's look more closely at the issues raised by the play. *Art* concerns Serge, an intelligent and

¹ Yasmina Reza, *Art* (London: Farber and Farber, 1996), 1. Future references to this work will be given parenthetically as *Art*.

cultured individual who buys an abstract painting, only to find himself caught up in a dispute with two of his best friends over its merits. Marc is a highly educated skeptic, who was once a mentor to Serge. Yvan, less self-assured, acts as a mediator between the two. The picture itself is an example of Minimalism, a contemporary movement that banishes many traditional aspects of painting. For example, it rejects what was thought for centuries to be the premise of visual art, the faithful reproduction of the look of things in the natural world. The white square painting Serge is so proud of is what it is, a white painted square, representing nothing beyond itself. It harbors neither emotional content nor any of the other features familiarly associated with art. As such, its status is problematic, for it is difficult to see what about the work makes it a work of *art*, let alone one whose quality might justify its high price.

One cannot visit a museum exhibiting contemporary art without experiencing the same range of reactions. *Art* uses the dispute between the three friends to pose some hard questions about how, in our (post)modern world, we understand art.

Does the Artist's Intention Make It Art?

When Yvan defends his judgment that the white painting is a work of art, he refers to a system behind the painting, the fact that it is not the product of accident (*Art*, pp. 17–18). In philosophic terms, this assertion claims that the *intention* of the artist is a crucial element in determining that something is a work of art. Indeed, one of the philosophers represented in this volume, Monroe C. Beardsley (Chapter 21), thinks that it is *the* crucial element. The basic intuition—derived from common sense—behind the **Intentionality Thesis** is that art objects are created by artists who are consciously trying to make art. To characterize something as a work of art, then, is to presuppose or acknowledge that it is the product of an artist's intentional activity.

The role of the artist's intentions in the creation of art has been a hotly debated issue. Those who argue for their relevance point out that art objects are a species of the broader class of artifacts, items produced by the skilled actions of human beings. Sunsets may be beautiful, they point out, but they are not works of art unless we attribute them to a Divine Artist. Surely what makes an object a work of art is that someone intended it to be one.

On the other side of this issue are those who deny intentions a necessary role in the creation of art objects. They point to the existence of cultures lacking a concept of art. Does this mean that none of the objects their artisans produce counts as art? Would this not be an unacceptable cultural egocentrism on our part? And since we deem them worthy of display in our museums and attend to them in the same ways we do to objects intentionally produced as art in our culture, don't we, in fact, already accept as *art* objects that may not have been intended as such?

A second problem with the Intentionality Thesis is that intentions by themselves seem inadequate to qualify something as a work of art. My intending that the doodles I draw on this napkin be a work of art is not sufficient to

make them one. The recognition of others seems somehow required before something can qualify as art. To this, the intentionalist could rightly respond that not anyone can create a work of art, but only someone skilled enough to be considered an artist. But then we are faced with the question: what determines whether someone is an artist? If it is the ability to create genuine works of art, then we are back where we started.

These kinds of problems with the Intentionality Thesis have led some philosophers to include those who view, study, buy, and sell art in the consideration of what makes an artwork art.

Does the Fact that a Work Is Treated as Art by the Artworld Make It Art?

When Serge is pressed by Marc to defend his purchase, he appeals to authoritative opinion. For example, he says that, even though he paid 200,000 francs for the painting—the play takes place in Paris—he could sell it to the gallery for substantially more. Later, he adds that the Centre Pompidou has three works by the same artist.

In both cases, Serge makes reference to the **artworld** to justify his claim that the white painting is a work of art. This term has been used by philosophers to characterize the social institution through which art is produced, exhibited, and sold. Although hard to specify precisely, the artworld is constituted by the practices of those social agents—presumably knowledgeable experts—who set prices and make decisions about which works to display in public, which books about art to publish, which artists and which works to include in college courses, and so forth. Museum directors, gallery owners, academics, critics—these are the functionaries of the artworld. And one very influential theory of art holds that it is they who determine whether something is a work of art (Chapter 20).

In the face of Marc's skepticism, Serge appeals to the authority of this world: to the price the white painting would fetch on the art market, and to the fact that other works by the same artist are in prestigious museum collections. If the painting is worth a lot of money, its creator is celebrated, and museums display this sort of work, doesn't that settle the question? Who is Marc to say otherwise?

The appeal of this **Institutional Theory of Art** consists in part in its resolution of some of the problems we saw with the Intentionality Thesis. For example, works produced in other cultures will count as art so long as they reside in *our* museums, regardless of why they were produced. Such objects are art objects because key players in the art world treat them as such.

Another advantage of this theory is that it doesn't subordinate art to some theorist's ideal. For centuries, the dominant view held in the West was that the goal of art was the faithful imitation of nature (see Chapters 1, 2, and 3). If nothing else, the twentieth century has treated this conception of art rudely, for relatively few of the most celebrated artworks of the last hundred years accurately represent the natural world. Art can no longer be limited to a single goal. The Institutional Theory is more inclusive than its rivals, precisely

because it makes an object's status depend on how it is received and not on features intrinsic to it.

On the other hand, does it make sense to accept certain opinions just because those who hold them are deemed experts? Even if we concede that the artworld plays a role in establishing what counts as art, on what criteria must its experts rely in making their judgments? What features are these experts trained to recognize when they determine that something is a work of art?

The idea here is that an object's being a work of art has something to do with its properties and not with the way in which people regard it. Only objects with these special characteristics should be accorded the status of art. If it does not seem right to allow the opinions of others, no matter how knowledgeable, to determine whether something qualifies as art, then what is the cognitive status of the judgments that any of us makes about works of art? Are they simply expressions of opinion or do they make claims for which reasons can be given?

Are Judgments about Art Objective? Or Are They Simply Matters of Taste?

In his attempt to mediate the dispute between Marc and Serge, Yvan suggests that the root of their disagreement lies in their differing standards of taste. Thus, Marc's "taste is classical, he likes things classical, what do you expect. . ." (*Art*, p. 14). So no wonder he doesn't appreciate the white painting.

Yvan's effort at peacemaking invokes a perennial philosophic debate: Are judgments about works of art simply matters of taste, or are there objective standards to which appeal can be made? The disagreement between David Hume (Chapter 4) and Immanuel Kant (Chapter 5) is over precisely this issue. If there is no accounting for taste—Can I be mistaken in preferring vanilla to chocolate?—does the dispute between Marc and Serge, despite appearing to be factual, come down to no more than this?

One of the issues here is how far we can trust our untutored responses to works of art. For example, for many people the paintings of Claude Monet, one of the central figures in the Impressionist Movement, seem immediately accessible—beautifully rendered, capturing with vivid directness the experience of being in the natural world.

How then to understand the derision that greeted the first showings of his work? What we now see as unquestioned masterpieces were regarded as clumsy travesties by most contemporaneous critics and viewers alike. Indeed, the Impressionists had such difficulty entering the great annual *Salon* exhibitions that they had to organize their own shows in order for their art to be seen.

The case of Impressionism—as of all the great schools of painting since—suggests that judgments about art cannot be simply a matter of individual preference. Today we would disagree with a viewer in 1880 who claimed that a Monet landscape was too poorly executed to be a genuine work of art. But are viewers' reactions and responses irrelevant to deciding whether a painting by Monet is a work of art?

One way out of this quandary would be to suggest that some individuals are more qualified than others to make judgments about art.

Is One Artistic or Aesthetic Judgment as Good as Another?

At one point Serge, who is angered by Marc's deprecation of his painting, remarks, "I don't blame him for not responding to this painting, he hasn't the training, there's a whole apprenticeship you have to go through" (*Art*, p. 15). In other words, not all judgments about art are on an equal footing. Those who have had training in the appreciation of a given art form, such as painting or music, are more qualified to determine what are and are not instances of it. Once again, this theme is repeatedly sounded by philosophers. For example, both David Hume (Chapter 4) and Clive Bell (Chapter 11) assert the existence of a cultured elite, knowledgeable about the arts, and hence in a better position to pass judgment on such matters.

But if artworks are supposed to produce pleasure, what are we to say of an object most people find incomprehensible or even objectionable? Is it art because the experts say so? Isn't their training designed to induct a few into positions of cultural authority? And yet. . . .

And yet, haven't most of us found some artwork puzzling—Picasso's *Guernica*, or *The Wasteland* or a Coltrane riff—then sought information about the work, and, having done so, come to better understand—and *appreciate*—it? Learning about the general cultural context, the artist's life, and the relevant history of that art form can help us see what the work is about and, thus, enrich the experience of viewing, reading, and listening. Does this mean that Serge, along with Hume and Bell, is right that only those with some training are equipped to judge that something is a work of art? If so, what does this training help us to identify in the work? What special *aesthetic* properties do artworks possess that distinguish them from all the other things we encounter in the world?

Does the Application of Aesthetic Concepts Make Something a Work of Art?

Consider Yvan's reaction when first shown the white painting:

YVAN Oh, yes. Yes, yes.

SERGE Antrios.

YVAN Yes, yes.

SERGE It's a seventies Antrios. Worth mentioning. He's going through a similar phase now, but this one's from the seventies.

YVAN Yes, yes. Expensive?

SERGE In absolute terms, yes. In fact, no. You like it?

YVAN Oh, yes, yes, yes.

SERGE Plain.

YVAN Plain, yes . . . Yes . . . And at the same time . . .

SERGE Magnetic.

YVAN Mm . . . yes . . .

SERGE You don't really get the resonance just at the moment.

YVAN Well, a bit . . .

SERGE No, you don't. You have to come back in the middle of the day. That resonance you get from something monochromatic, it doesn't really happen under artificial light. (*Art*, pp. 12–13)

It seems that Serge's application of the predicates "plain," "magnetic," and "resonant" justifies Yvan's appreciation of it as a work of art. While these are normal English words, some philosophers believe that their use in this context goes beyond simple description. For example, it is true that the white painting is plain (that is, it does not appear to have much visual complexity), but given the aims of the Minimalist Movement, to describe Serge's canvas as plain is to ascribe to it an aesthetic virtue. It is the sort of thing one says of such works of art.

The term "aesthetics" has been used as a synonym for the "philosophy of art" since this field of philosophic inquiry came into being during the eighteenth century. Prior to this, "aesthetic"—derived from the Greek *aisthanesthai*, to perceive—was more or less synonymous with "sensory." But because philosophers saw our experience of beauty—both natural and artistic—as primarily a sensory matter, they began to use the term in its modern meaning. Thus, Immanuel Kant (see Chapter 5) used the term "aesthetic" to refer both to those general principles determining sensory knowledge and to the more specific principles for judging objects to be beautiful. As the earlier usage declined, the latter became the accepted characterization of the philosophic study of art.

The great idealist philosopher, G. W. F. Hegel, was the first to contest Kant's usage, rejecting both the limitation of the philosophy of art to questions of beauty and the consideration of natural beauty under the same rubric as the study of art (see Chapter 7). Many contemporary philosophers of art—myself included—agree with Hegel that the philosophy of art should be a separate discipline. We do not see ourselves as concerned with beauty in general, but only with art, and the latter as itself no longer focused solely on beauty.

I raise this issue now because it bears on the question of the types of properties artworks might be said to possess in distinction from other kinds of things. The traditional answer would be *aesthetic properties* and *plain, magnetic*, and *resonant*, in our example, would then count as instances of such properties. Philosophers who deny that the philosophy of art is identical with aesthetics would characterize these as *artistic properties*, that is, properties that art objects have and that nonart objects lack.

A number of the philosophers represented in this anthology emphasize the role of artistic properties in determining whether something is a work of art. Martin Heidegger (Chapter 14), Nelson Goodman (Chapter 18), and Arthur Danto (Chapter 19) all agree that art objects have properties that other things

lack—though they don't agree on what these properties are—and that it is possession of these properties that makes something a work of art.

Troubling questions arise for this view, too. Don't we have to know that something is a work of art before we attribute such artistic properties to it? Couldn't we attribute such properties to anything if we chose to view it as a work of art? Instead of just typing on the keys of my computer, I can sit back and savor the luminous quality of the light they reflect and the simplicity of their shape and placement together. Does my ability to admire the computer keyboard in this way make it a work of art?

Art has become a very different phenomenon in the twentieth century from what it was in the seventeenth. Could our puzzlement about art be related to the fundamental changes in the meaning of art?

Is Contemporary Art Still Art?

In justifying his dismissal of the white painting, Marc explains how his reaction to it reflects a deeper discomfort with contemporary art: "I don't believe in the values which dominate contemporary art. The rule of novelty. The rule of surprise." (*Art*, p. 55) That Marc's hostility to recent art is widely shared is evident to anyone who reads the daily newspaper or watches the evening news, which frequently report controversies over public funding of art that appears aimed only at provocation. Robert Mapplethorpe's confrontational photography, Karen Finley's performance art, or Nigerian painter Chris Ofili's *Virgin Mary* seem to many to have lost touch with the values realized in earlier art.

In the selection from Martin Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art* (Chapter 14), for example, we can sense an aspiration that art return to what Heidegger sees as its authentic mission: the revelation of the historical world which produced it. However, other philosophers, such as Arthur Danto (Chapter 19) and Adrian Piper (Chapter 23), see in contemporary art possibilities for novel expression. Whether contemporary art has lost sight of its mission as art—or even has a mission—are issues dividing critics, philosophers, and the art-consuming public.

THREE APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING ART

Our consideration of Reza's play, *Art*, has led us to explore a range of issues touching on questions about the nature of art. Although philosophers have written extensively about these issues, the play's success is evidence that a far wider public cares about them. Perhaps the obscure and difficult nature of so much contemporary work—"white paintings" have their analogues in music, dance, literature, film—lends a special urgency to this, the central question of the philosophy of art: What makes something a work of art?

Although this is posed as a question about the ontological status of the artwork in general, independent of its specific manner of instantiation—whether poem, symphony, or statue—there has been (*contra* Derrida [Chapter 24]) a

general tendency among philosophers to treat visual art, especially painting, as paradigmatic. Although a number of the selections in this volume use literature as their point of reference, only Schopenhauer (Chapter 6) focuses primarily on music. The clear majority think painting is the quintessential art form.

As you become acquainted with the issues raised by these selections, you should bear in mind these questions: Does each of the accounts privilege, consciously or unconsciously, one or another art form? How does such a bias affect the general applicability of the theory of art put forward?

Defining Art

The readings in this volume represent three fundamentally different approaches to answering the question of art's nature. The first, and dominant, tendency proceeds by attempting a definition. Historically, this is the approach taken by the first philosopher of art, Plato, who defined art as imitation. Down through the centuries, the search for a definition continued, even among those who rejected Plato's thesis. By the early twentieth century, with the advent of analytic philosophy—a style of thought captivated by advances in mathematical logic and its formal methods—this project had become one of attempting to specify necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of the concept “art”: For the term to be meaningful, there must be criteria that allow one to tell whether something is, or is not, a work of art.

One of your tasks in reading this book is to assess the validity of such attempts to grasp art's nature. In doing so, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between what some philosophers have called the **classificatory** and **evaluative** senses of the term “art.” For the most part, attempts to define art are intended in the former sense, that is, as distinguishing things that are art from things that are not. For example, the **Imitation Theory** proposes that only those things that are imitations of the “real world” are works of art. On these grounds, the white painting is excluded from the class of artworks, since it is not an imitation of anything.

But often, “art” is not used in this descriptive way, but in an evaluative manner—as when Marc protests that the white painting is not art because it isn't particularly good, at least not the sort of thing a knowledgeable art-lover should take seriously. This, however, leaves no room for judging a work to be bad or inferior, but still art.

Take one purported definition—art communicates emotion between a creator and an audience. Any object—a painting, a poem, a symphony—would fail to be art if it failed to achieve such communication. But, just as philosophy can be done badly, so can art, and a definition of art needs to leave open this possibility. The **Communication Theory**, by conflating descriptive and evaluative meanings, precludes it.

Although there is a tendency to think about art objects in abstraction from anything else—a tendency typical of much recent analytic philosophy and exhibited here by my focus on the white painting—these objects are situated in

a complex set of relationships. Other elements figuring in this matrix include, of course, the artist or creator of the work as well as the audience that experiences it, the conventions governing the art form and art as a whole, modes of artistic training, and so on.

Philosophers have differed on which elements are crucial. Thus, some philosophers fix on the artist (Collingwood, for example, in Chapter 12), even to the exclusion of the work. More counterintuitive still, the French literary theorist, Roland Barthes (Chapter 22), thinks of the *audience* as the real site of artistic meaning. In contrast to these, some others (Martin Heidegger, for example, in Chapter 14) view the whole complex of relationships as crucial. So in seeking to define the nature of art, one has to either decide which is the most important, the one needing definition, or conclude that it is the whole that should be the object of the definition rather than any of its aspects, standing alone.

Skepticism towards Defining Art

The second approach to the central question of the philosophy of art—What makes something a work of art?—is skepticism about the possibility of definition. In a way, the skeptic argues, art is itself a phenomenon that by its nature defeats attempts to define it. Since, to Marc's chagrin, originality is a central value in art, painters, composers, and writers are continually striving to break the boundaries of what was previously considered art. The very examples theorists cite to justify the Institutional Theory—Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (Illustration 7), for example—clearly did so. Duchamp took a mass-produced urinal, signed it with the name "R. Mutt," gave it the title, *Fountain*, and submitted it for exhibition. If the mere act of naming, signing, and displaying a mass-produced urinal could result in a work of art, how could one possibly specify in advance what sorts of things can be so counted? Isn't art precisely the sort of phenomenon that breaks accepted conventions and challenges our prior convictions about what it is? And, if so, doesn't its very nature dictate the very impossibility of definition?

It was only in the latter half of the twentieth century that philosophers raised skeptical doubts such as these. Within the analytic tradition, Morris Weitz (Chapter 17) best exemplifies this approach; within the Continental tradition, Jacques Derrida (Chapter 24) is today's reigning skeptic. Although Weitz and Derrida operate with very different conceptions of philosophy, they agree that the tradition was seriously mistaken in assuming that the appropriate goal for the philosophy of art was defining art's nature. Each in his own way sees art as defying the theorist's ability to conceptualize it.

This approach to the project of defining art is an instance of the broader strategy of **anti-essentialism**. *Essentialism*, a philosophic position reaching all the way back to Aristotle, proposes that a variety of different particulars can all be referred to by the same word—fall under the same concept—only if there is some common **essence** or nature that they all share. Thus, according to