

The Holistic Definition of Art

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1 Method of Investigation

The research field relating to the “definition of art” is said to be extremely confused. This is because, in the 20th century, art departed from the principles of “beauty” and “technique.” The natural idea of characterizing a work of art by its intrinsic attributes, such as representation, expression, and significant form, has lost its effect.

Since the impossibility of defining art in the 1950s has been taken seriously, a variety of new art-defining attempts have begun to compete. The purpose of this paper is to examine whether the network of logical relationships formed by these definitions is academically sound, that is, forms a structure isomorphic to characterizations of key concepts in other fields.

The following working hypotheses are used as premises of this study.

- Assumption 1 (Parallelism Principle) There must be parallelism between definitions of concepts in different academic disciplines in the vicinity.
- Assumption 2 (Correspondence Principle) A parallel relation is observed in the form of a correspondence between similar theories that occupy counterpart positions in the two fields.
- Assumption 3 (Evaluation Principle) If sufficient parallelism is not observed, the research trend in either field is defective. Alternatively, an unstable situation is evidenced in the middle of the paradigm conversion.
- Assumption 4 (Extrapolation Principle) The absence of a corresponding theory in one field can be regarded as evidence that a new theory can be proposed at that position.

Assumptions 1 and 2 are derived from the possibility that multiple disciplines are likely to be included in a higher discipline that integrates them. Though Assumption 1 explicitly refers only to neighboring fields, due to the transitivity of the parallelism relation it also implies a global isomorphism between distant disciplines.

Assumptions 3 and 4 are heuristic hypotheses, which are expected to be more practical than theoretical.

This paper examines one established field and one emerging field, and compares each with art’s definition theory¹ to determine if two comparison tables can be generated neatly. The areas of comparison are normative ethics and gender theory. Normative ethics is a reflection on the definition

¹ The term “theory” can refer to a component within an academic discipline, as used in Assumptions 2 and 4, or to the discipline itself such as art’s definition theory or gender theory. Furthermore, as seen in “theory of value,” there is a third usage of “theory” which refers to a collection of disciplines. By convention, in this paper, the term “theory” will be used for all three meanings, but we do not specify the meaning in each case because it seems obvious from each context. This issue will be mentioned again in Note 3.

of “good” and thus corresponds to the consideration of traditional understandings of art, which has been characterized by the idea of “beauty” and its derivative aesthetic properties. Gender theory, on the other hand, attempts to rearrange existing categories by the recent transgenderism and queer theories, and should have the same problem awareness as contemporary theories of the definition of art, which must accommodate the tide of postmodernist art that appears to be severed from aesthetic nature and aesthetic value.

To adjust the two aspects of art’s definition theory—the trend to restore and sophisticate the traditional paradigm, and to uproot and transform it—normative ethics and gender theory, which try to systematize traditional ideas and category conversion, respectively, should be used as optimal reference systems.

2 Isomorphism Between Art’s Definition and Normative Ethics

First, let us examine how theories of normative ethics and art’s definition can correspond. To begin, I will clarify the two positions of meta-ethics that respond to differences in views on whether art can be defined.

The distinction lies between the position that the real definition of art is possible, and that the real definition cannot be achieved and only an honorific or persuasive definition can be made, corresponding to the distinction between cognitivism and non-cognitivism in meta-ethics. This is an intuitively fundamental and indispensable correspondence for the theory of value, and it is only natural that art’s definition theory is structurally parallel to normative ethics.

Going down from the level of meta-theory, let us examine some dominant theories in the cognitivism domain. Although any cognitivist theory can be copied as a mirror image into the non-cognitivist position, it is recognized at the meta-level as “just pretending to be the cognitivist theory,” and substantial classification must be made according to each speech act, not by supposed cognitive matters. Therefore, we will consider only the cognitive version for each theory. In other words, we examine which theories of normative ethics correspond to each theory that claims that art can be defined.

Let us enumerate key positions of art’s definition beginning with skeptical theories about the essentialist definition, and consider whether each can find a main corresponding theory in normative ethics.

For this, we consider the position that art can be defined, but not by essence. There are two types of positions. The first is that art is not a single concept, but a collection of many art forms. Even if each art form can enjoy an essential definition, art can only be defined by the disjunction of those art forms. Lopez’s proposal of the buck passing theory (Lopez, 2014) is a prime example.

The other is Gaut’s cluster account (Gaut, 2000), which is the maximally theoretical reformulation of Weitz’s proposition (Weitz, 1956) that the real definition of art is impossible. Since Gaut himself described his cluster account as “not a definition,” Dutton’s “naturalistic definition,” which submitted a similar cluster account as a definition (Dutton, 2006), may be placed in that position as the representative.

Lopez’s buck passing theory does not admit unified “art” but instead recognizes the unique “artis-

ticness” of each art form, and is thus considered to be the counterpart of virtue ethics in normative ethics. Individual virtues, such as justice, courage, and tenderness, each have irreducible benefits, which together form the “good.”

Gaut-Dutton’s cluster account enumerates “artistic stereotypes” as criteria, and states that objects that meet a sufficient number of criteria are works of art. For them, the definition of a work of art (“characterization” for Gaut) is formulated as “the disjunction of the conjunctions of unspecified number of criteria.” This corresponds to libertarianism, as it supports a position that allows any “intuitively non-harmful conduct.” Instead of questioning the grounds of goodness, the idea is to recognize, as much as possible, the natural desires of human beings as coexistent by the unspecified, contentless principle of “liberty” or “freedom.” The cluster account deserves to be called libertarianism in the definition of art in that it treats the concept of art in an anti-revisionist manner, while confirming the current state of art.

Each of the aforementioned sets of theories is a disjunctive definition of enumerating the sufficient conditions of “art” and “good”, respectively, and connecting them with “or,” and then finally attaining the necessary conditions. However, what has traditionally been called “definition” in philosophy was the conjunctive definition of enumerating the necessary conditions of a concept, connecting them with “and,” to finally reach a sufficient condition. This conjunctive type of necessary and sufficient condition is called “essence”. It has been expected that the definition based on essence of art, namely “the essentialist definition of art,” can be formulated.

What about the functionalist definition of art, which is the traditional essentialist ideal? Functionalist definitions include a significant variety of definitions as subclasses. They encapsulate the common form of reducing the concept of “art” to a combination of more basic concepts, such as “form,” “expression,” “organism,” “intuition,” or “emotion,” in accordance with traditional mainstream essentialist views of art and can be called reductionist essentialism.

Under the current situation where it is almost clear that a work of art cannot be distinguished from a non-art object by any intrinsic definition using only aesthetic properties as perceptually manifested properties, it is necessary for intrinsic or aesthetic properties used in the definition to be understood in a broader sense or be supported by some additional concept, perhaps psychological or biological. In particular, Beardsley’s aesthetic definition appealing to the concept of “intention” (Beardsley, 1983), and characterizations of the evolutionary approach evoking the meta-property of “adaptation” (Davies, 2012), would be the most apt candidates. Of these reductionist essentialist definitions, counterpart theories in normative ethics are consequentialism, which reduces “good” to the effects of actions such as “pleasure”, “happiness”, “utility”, etc., and rationalism, which reduces “good” to formal aspects such as “universality”, and “logic”.

Among students in normative ethics, utilitarianism, a version of consequentialism— which emphasizes the experiential aspect of individuals—and deontology—a version of rationalism which emphasizes universalizable motives—are often viewed as being diametrically opposite. Moreover, they form the two most prominent schools of normative ethics and overwhelm all other theories. If these two main polar theories form a single group as reductionist essentialism in correspondence with the functionalist definition of art, it is admittedly a rather distorted correspondence.

This anomalous situation indicates that there is a systematic flaw or instability in either art’s

definition theory or normative ethics, according to Assumption 3. For now, let us consider it as evidence of the instability of art's definition theory. In ethics, "good" is still the basic principle, whereas "beauty" has lost its stable position as a principle in art philosophy. This reflects the current state of the paradigm shift, for which a broader definition must be sought. (We will also consider later that the imperfections of normative ethics may be reflected here.)

Next, let us examine the procedural definitions that define "being art," not by the intrinsic (even in any broad sense) properties of individual objects but by relational properties; in other words, the non-reductionist essentialist definitions. There are two main theories: Dickie's institutional definition (Dickie, 1974), and Levinson's historical definition (Levinson, 1979).

Both theories use the word "art" to define "art." It is a kind of circular or recursive definition that does not directly define art. If these theories have counterparts in normative ethics, those that recursively define "good" with "good" should be identified.

Since the institutional definition of art is a definition by a kind of institution called "artworld," it will correspond to social constructionist normative ethics. Specifically, communitarianism would be the case. Communitarianism defines "good" as "being (stipulated as) good in a particular community." In a community that respects utilitarian judgments, utilitarianism is the correct theory, and in a community that prioritizes honor, a certain system of virtue ethics is true, where right and wrong are determined by honor and its associated virtues. Social constructionism, in this sense, is a kind of meta-ethical theory, but indirectly specifies normative ethics through a culturally relativistic worldview. The institutional definition of art certainly corresponds to communitarianism in that it regards art as a culture unique to Western civilization. This is because institutionalists regard art not as a global phenomenon, but as a local culture, in contrast to functionalist and evolutionary definitions.

On the other hand, the historical definition is the theory that art status can be guaranteed by maintaining an authentic relation with some art of a previous era, but this also regards art as a local causal line connected to one source. With respect to the supreme authority of temporal origin, it can be thought of as corresponding to the divine command theory that ethical principles were established at the beginning of history. The historical definition of "that of which the correct way of handling is the way the work of art has been treated in the past" corresponds certainly to the command of "an act that does not violate the rules specified by God at the beginning of history."

The institutional definition—communitarianism, and the historical definition—divine command theory, differ in that the former is circular, while the latter is recursive with a base case. For an institutionalist, "art" that differs among institutions has no base case outside the institutions. Similarly, "good" which differs among communities, has no base case anymore. For a historicist, the correct way the work of art should be treated is determined by Ur-art, just before the first art in history. Likewise, the correct content of God's command is determined by the physical fact that it is written in the Bible.

From the aforementioned, it was observed that art's definition theory is shaping normative ethics into a correspondingly easy-to-understand structure, although including a slightly distorted factor. While it is said that art's definition theory is confused, it can be said that it is reasonably in line with the tradition of conceptual analysis of value theory.

3 Isomorphism Between Art's Definition and Gender Theory

Next, let us examine the correspondence with gender theory. As gender theory attempts to address the paradigm transformation that resembles the one taking place in the art's definitions field, such as the redefinition of gender accompanying the rise of transgenderism, it is expected that an elegant isomorphism with art's definition theory can be found that does not take on the distorted ambience seen in correspondence with normative ethics that focuses on seeking the definition of the stable concept "good."

First, the gender-theoretical position corresponding to the pluralist theory of buck passing reminds us of the concept of "third gender or more" that abandons gender dualism. On the other hand, the other pluralistic theory, but without using discrete disjunctive categories, is the cluster account of art. This corresponds to—using a fluid combination of disjunctions by rearranging the criteria—the positions based from a gender-fluid perspective. In any case, as a large framework, liberal feminism permits non-binary positions, including both the many-gender model and the gender-fluid model. In exceeding the binary gender contrast, the former, which captures gender identity as a spectrum of intermediate genders, and the latter, which understands gender identity by combining various coordinate axes such as sex, race, ethnicity, and social hierarchy, certainly corresponds to Lopez's position and Gaut-Dutton's position, which regard "art" as a complex whole in each way.

Next, let us examine the gender theory that corresponds to essentialist positions, namely functionalist and procedural definitions. Functionalist definitions, especially aesthetic definitions, recognize traditional aesthetic principles as defining features, and therefore correspond to the biological gender theory that gender is determined by body design, especially genitalia and chromosomes. According to this position, gender is not a sex-independent attribute; it is only a higher-order attribute emerging from genitalia. In other words, it is gender nominalism.

Gender nominalism is a view that regards gender simply as statistical sex differences, not any basic entity or property, so it is compatible with gender-free thesis and equivalent to radical feminism or gender-critical feminism that adheres to the assertion of the rights of biological women. In terms of transgender, gender nominalism would be equivalent to transsexual fundamentalism, which states that subjective gender identity alone is not enough to change legal gender, but that at least sex reassignment surgery is required.

On the other hand, procedural definitions of art are based not on the attributes of individual works but on external systems. This corresponds to gender realism, which is based on social and institutional gender rather than individual physical attributes. The institutional definition corresponds to trans-feminism or inclusive feminism, which recognizes legal gender identity by subjective gender identity independent of the body. The gender of an individual is determined by the individual's first-person authority, in the same way as a work of art is identified as such by the will of a qualified individual in the artworld.

Institutional and social recognition and individual decisions are, in fact, vastly different. However, if we refine the institutional definition of art, we must admit that, in effect, the declaration by an authoritative entity (usually an artist) determines the art status of a work. Therefore, the institutional definition corresponds to the proposal to allow "self-identification of social and legal gender identity."

In the historical definition, legal gender identity is determined not by an individual's intention but by inheriting historical gender treatment, that is, gender expression and gender roles. It is equivalent to patriarchal genderism, gender essentialism, or now, gender backlash.

The recursiveness particular to non-reductionist, including institutional and historical definitions, can be seen in both transfeminism and gender backlash. An individual's gender identity is a concept that can only be explained circularly if it can only be explained as "I am a man" and "I am a woman." In this sense, the institutionalism of art and transfeminism correspond to each other. Gender essentialism, on the other hand, is noncircular, as is the historical definition of art. This is because the gender specific characterization in gender essentialism is determined by the natural "gender expression / gender role of masculinity" and "gender expression / gender role of femininity" that emerged historically and evolutionarily.

Interestingly, the two majors in the same procedural definition include the extremes of gender theory—the most radical of transfeminism,² and the most conservative of gender stereotypes. It may be said that the heuristic possibility of philosophy of art, highlighting the unfamiliar potential of the conservative patriarchal tendency inherent in transgenderism, is impressively demonstrated here.

4 The Two-Layer Reformulation of the Aesthetic Definition

The correspondence between gender theories and art's definitions is less distorted than that between normative ethics and art's definitions. Anti-essentialist definitions of art correspond to anti-dualism of gender, reductionist definitions of art correspond to gender nominalism, and non-reductionist definitions of art correspond to gender realism. This beautiful isomorphism proves the substantial resonance between the current state of art's definition theory and the current state of gender theory. In other words, it reflects the correspondence between innovative movements that reconsider the tradition in which art has been defined by the essence of aesthetic qualities, and innovative movements that try to break the tradition of defining gender with the sexuality of the body.

Thus, if transgenderism could be a guide to modern new theories of the definition of art, then conversely, normative ethics could be a guide to traditional theories of the definition of art. In other words, it is natural to expect that the way reductionist ethical theories that have formed the mainstream, especially utilitarianism, was improved, could also be applied to reductionist definitions of art, especially aesthetic definitions.

In fact, early improvements in utilitarianism could be diverted as options to modify the aesthetic definition. There were two major improvements. One is Mill's modifications to Bentham's original utilitarianism. The other is the revision that seems to have already been conceived in Bentham's thought. The former is that "pleasure," the ultimate unit of utilitarian calculation, came to be weighted not only by quantitative criteria, but also by qualitative criteria. The latter is that the utility calculation applied to individual acts has been replaced by the utility calculation applied to the general rules of acts.

² It is unclear which is supposed to be more radical, transfeminism or gender fluidity, but transfeminism is apparently more intense in terms of conflict with social customs.

The speculation that both of these tactics in normative ethics will also have a counterpart in art's definition theory is methodologically justified by previously listed Assumption 4. Let us apply the two typical improvements of utilitarianism to the aesthetic definition of art.

Tactics that incorporate qualitative evaluation of pleasure are, in the aesthetic definition of art, equivalent to tactics that enlarge the extension of aesthetic properties or aesthetic experiences. For example, conceptual art, which is the most popular counter-example to the aesthetic definition, can still be identified as having "aesthetic properties" or providing "aesthetic experiences" in the following way. A conceptual structure that is not perceptually enjoyed may be identified as a work of art that realizes a new kind of aesthetic category, which due to its non-perceptual atmosphere, provides an aesthetic experience in meta-level perception. Alternatively, the function of providing intellectual stimulus by betraying expectations of ordinary artistic pleasure may be reasonably accommodated in the traditional framework as a kind of traditional aesthetic category of "irony" (Hopkins, 2007) or "humor" (Miura, 2020).

The introduction of the qualitative standard of pleasure was a tactic to save utilitarianism from the fall to hedonism by strict selection of "the elements emphasized in utilitarian calculation," namely, tightening the utilitarian criterion. Aesthetic acceptance seeks to rescue the aesthetic definition from counterexamples by loosening rather than tightening the standard of "aesthetic." In that sense, we have adopted a starkly contradictory tactic to that adopted in normative ethics. However, both of these tactics introduce anti-hedonic and anti-vulgar factors, so they still follow the isomorphism of the two fields previously identified.

Which tactic of the aesthetic definition corresponds to the second tactic of switching from act utilitarianism to rule utilitarianism? The utilitarian tactic was to shift the category of what is morally evaluated from action to rule, so in the definition of art, it is "tactics to expand categories of candidates recognized as art" that is expected to remove difficulties from the aesthetic definition.

Specifically, the object being judged as art should be transferred from an individual physical object to the act of creating or presenting it. In other words, a conceptual art is re-identified not as a plastic art but as a performance. Alternatively, if the work has already been viewed as a performance, we must expand it to include the background of the performance and re-identify it as a process. Furthermore, if the work is already understood as a sort of process art, it could be further expanded to the circumstances of the creation of the process and re-identified as an event.

Conceptual art has not only been understood as a plastic art, but has also been positioned in the framework of various regulatory art forms such as music, drama, performance, and poetry. However, as for conceptual works that hardly depend on perceptual properties, the boundaries of the work can be broadened as much as the production act, process, or even event incorporated into the work's intrinsic properties. Then, the work will be viewed as an involvement in artistic issues in general rather than a conventional "work" in a narrow sense, and will have clear aesthetic qualities at some stage in the boundary expansion. This is the aesthetic definition's tactic, which corresponds to the rule utilitarian tactic.

Interpreting any artwork as an action, process, or event is the treatment to convert a judgment object into <thing → affair>, whereas rule utilitarianism converts the judgment object into <act → rule>. In the case of utilitarianism, the category of what should be judged had changed, whereas in

the case of the aesthetic definition of art, it may be said that it was not changed. The artwork and the act of making it are both physical phenomena. However, the act of creation does not always form a spatiotemporally continuous entity, or even display sporadic unorganized miscellaneous behavior, but it is likely that it must be understood also as an abstract object simply termed an “affair” or a “fact.” If so, the modification of the aesthetic definition follows the precedent of the revision of utilitarianism. In any case, tactics in these two fields are parallel in that they both broaden the boundaries of the individual target.

Utilitarianism is currently the only viable option in many practical contexts of educational settings and social welfare. The same is true of the aesthetic definition of art. The greatest evidence is that art studies are still integrated with aesthetics.

However, both utilitarianism and aesthetic definitions are subject to much criticism and objection in a theoretical context. Although utilitarianism has considerably improved in its theoretical coping, the theoretical foundation of the aesthetic definition of art is still in the process of being developed. The fact that major essentialist rival theories, such as institutional and historical definitions, have ultimately gained substantive content through aesthetic experience such as “appreciation” indicates the final victory of the aesthetic definition, even though no definitive path is yet to be seen.

In this paper, we conducted two verifications on the “current unstable state of art’s definition” in which the theory that should form the mainstream has been shaken. First, by comparing it with gender theory, we confirmed that instability was a product of meta-theoretical necessity. Second, we confirmed the prospect of seeking a way to eliminate instability in the development of normative ethics.

Therefore, it can be expected that a powerful option that art’s definition theory should try is to reformulate aesthetic definitions. Simultaneously, a promising method to be attempted in gender theory is perhaps a certain form of gender nominalism.

5 Lessons from Extrapolation

Then, I would like to highlight two extrapolation by-products obtained from the search for cross-cultural isomorphism, as attempted in this paper.³ Guided by the four assumptions, we were able to verify the structural correspondence of the three disciplines, and this is positioned as a provisional result to proceed with drawing a cultural isomorphism that includes many other disciplines. The prospect of drawing such a comprehensive isomorphism could have delineated a new policy of art’s definition, and simultaneously, provided important insights into areas used for comparative speculation.

Let us confirm this from the findings of gender theory. Recall that a position in gender theory, which corresponds to the anti-traditional procedural definition of art, was found to split into the most advanced theory of transfeminism and the patriarchal gender backlash. This is a positive finding, as

³ Here, the term “culture” refers to cultural areas such as art, ethics, gender, science, and religion. See Note 1. In the text, it is sometimes argued that various cultural areas themselves show an isomorphic correspondence, but that correspondence is epistemological when various cultural areas are grasped as research subjects, and we do not necessarily affirm the isomorphism between pre-theoretical practices of different cultural areas.

aforementioned, that “advancement” and “conservativeness” often coincide. Looking in the opposite direction, the nature of the view of art behind the procedural definition becomes clear. It is also noticed that the procedural definition relies on the social authority of “institution” or “history,” which, in its spirit is subject to a very traditional, conventional, authoritarian regime established long before the advent of expressionism and formalism. This concurrently provides a perspective to re-evaluate the innovative power of the aesthetic definition, contrary to its old-fashioned appearance.

Another byproduct insight relates to normative ethics. It was confirmed that the correspondence between normative ethics and art’s definition is “distorted.” However, the distortion was only felt on the surface. The two dominant theories appeared to correspond to reductionist essentialism because we focused on ethics in a narrow sense. If we extend the discussion to include political philosophy into ethics, libertarianism and communitarianism will no longer be minor theories. Thus, it can be confirmed that dominant ethical theories correspond well to theories other than reductionist essentialism.

It was necessary to mobilize libertarianism as the counterpart of the cluster theory, and communitarianism and cultural relativism as institutionalism because normative ethics under the current academic classification or ethics itself is likely to be imperfect as a discipline. It is suggested here that ethics and political philosophy must be integrated to complete a moral study comparable to art’s definition or gender theory.

Of course, art’s definition theory and gender theory will only be “perfect” in a relative sense. As far as comparing the three disciplines, we merely demonstrate that majority voting has resulted in the loss of normative ethics. Creating a correspondence table with some other discipline rather than normative ethics may clarify certain missing items of art’s definition and gender theory. It is at this point that our method of “searching for cross-cultural isomorphism” can assert its flexible heuristic significance.

6 The Holistic Definition of Art

Finally, we provide a new outline for the theory of art’s definition derived from the findings of this paper.

The assertion that art should be defined by the “difference” with certain other cultural domains, namely ethics, gender, science, religion, politics, education, economy, philosophy, sports, etc., which could be generalized into the thesis that any cultural area should be defined by its differences from other cultural areas, can be called a “holistic definition of art,” in contrast to traditional attempts to define art within its practice and more or less independently of other cultural areas. Thus, conventional definitions can be referred to as “local definitions.”

The motivation for “searching for cross-cultural isomorphism” itself came from my pre-conceived idea of a holistic definition of art. In that sense, the holistic definition of art was not the result but the premise of this paper. However, by actually developing the discussion, the “search for cross-cultural isomorphism” could be performed consistently and was found to have considerable heuristic significance. Therefore, the validity of the presupposed “holistic definition of art” has been confirmed.

The holistic definition of art, unlike the standard practice of local definitions, does not necessarily

select individual works as privileged targets for classification, whether art or non-art. Even if some weakened or modest attempts are adopted, which extract artistic and non-artistic aspects within each target rather than classification among targets, they do not require extraction to be performed on individual works. For individual or collective activities, relationships, events, conditions, etc., we can ask whether they are art or non-art. That is, the definition target is individualized not by the “thing” but by the “affair.” This is because in a holistic map, there are few cultural territories where produced objects or works can be identified in a similar manner as in art. Of course, there are cultural areas in which the subject can be set as the unit of research in the form of “work” or “writing,” such as science, law, and philosophy. On the other hand, fields such as politics, religion, education, ethics, gender, and economics, where products of essential acts take various forms that are ambiguous in their proper framing or delineation, are more common. Thus, from the perspective of a holistic definition that seeks to integrate art’s definition into the study of the majority of cultural areas, the distinction between art and non-art should not only be made in terms of clearly demarcated works but also in terms of vague “business,” “relationships,” and “ideas” whose boundaries have not been determined.

Revisions in this direction are derived from understanding conceptual art by category conversion, “from work to production circumstance” which was noticed earlier in response to the trend from act utilitarianism to rule utilitarianism. However, this revision requires a fundamental abstraction that combines expansion, synthesis, reduction, and analysis more than the earlier revision that basically relies only on “expansion” or “category level raise,” which specializes in the aestheticization of conceptual art. In addition, it is a revision that seeks to recreate the concept of art as a “culture in which all concrete and abstract objects coexist as the same basic unit,” correcting the biased view of art that overemphasizes “works” that include process art or environmental art as a very small part.

It is the “proper cultural significance” and “proper social role” discriminating art from any other cultural domain that is appropriate for being recognized as the defining property that binds artistic “productions,” “works,” “relationships,” and “ideas.” In other words, that defining property is the “function.” The only way to differentiate each area of culture is to appeal to the social division of labor entrusted to each area, so the characterization by each “function” is inevitable.

Therefore, the concrete content of the holistic definition of art should depend on the “proper functions” that art performs in the whole culture. It can be expected that the appropriate definition of art is again a reformulation of reductionist essentialism, especially the aesthetic definition, which adheres to the art’s characterization of functional orientation. (It is somewhat ironic that the leading candidate for a “holistic” definition is the noticeably “reductionist” definition.)

This conjecture is strongly supported by the correspondences between the aesthetic definition of art and the other two fields. In other words, the counterpart of the aesthetic definition in each field—utilitarianism or deontology in normative ethics and gender nominalism in gender theory—fall into the most popular doctrine. This is not a historical coincidence and suggests that the aesthetic definition occupies a very promising position.

The aforementioned proves the academic significance of the search for cross-cultural isomorphism, proposes a holistic definition of art, and anticipates that the definition will effectively reformulate the aesthetic definition of art. These three proposals are reported as the contributions of this paper.

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