Wollheim on art's historicity: an intersection of theoretical art history and the philosophy of art

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Art and its Objects by Richard Wollheim had a major impact on aesthetics and the philosophy of art when it was first published in 1968. Of the arguments offered in response to Wollheim's essay, Jerrold Levinson's intentional-historical theory of art has been one of the most enduring. Levinson was influenced by three key sections of Wollheim's enquiry: Section 40, which considers the claim that works of art fall under a concept of art, or that we are disposed to regard certain things as works of art; and Sections 60 and 61, which deal with art as a historical phenomenon, and problems arising from its identification and interpretation. To date, these claims have been raised as points of contention in the philosophy of art. This paper takes a different perspective. Wollheim's understanding of art's historicity draws explicitly on the literature of theoretical art history. Via Wollheim, old art-historical problems will reappear as new philosophical questions.

Introduction

Richard Wollheim's *Art and its Objects*, first published in 1968, had a major impact on aesthetics and the philosophy of art. In this book, Wollheim systematically investigates topics of enduring relevance to philosophers and historians of art, including expression, representation, intention, and the historical nature of art. The last topic—the question of art's historicity—is the focus of this paper. This proposition, raised in Sections 60–63 of *Art and its Objects*, led to an understanding of art as an essentially historical phenomenon. When dealing with this claim, Wollheim drew explicitly on the literature of theoretical art history. Of the sources cited, four contemporary works of theoretical art history would help to underwrite Wollheim's arguments: André Malraux's *Voices of Silence*, Arnold Hauser's *Philosophy of Art History*, George Kubler's *Shape of Time*, and Meyer Schapiro's essay 'Style'.[1]

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1   Some of the editions cited by Wollheim differ from the texts cited hereafter. Wollheim uses the first English edition of Malraux's *Voices of Silence*, published in 1954, and the first edition of Kubler's *Shape of Time*, published in 1962. Schapiro's essay 'Style', first published in 1953, was later reissued in a collection of theoretical writings. The 1959 edition of Hauser's *Philosophy of Art History* remains standard.

Among the theories and philosophical arguments offered in response to Wollheim's essay, perhaps the most enduring was that formulated by Jerrold Levinson (Levinson, 1979, 1989, 1993, 2002). When Levinson presented his intentional-historical theory of art, he acknowledged Sections 60–63 and Section 40 as principal sources of inspiration.[2] Three key sections of Wollheim's book resonate in Levinson's theory. In Sections 60 and 61, Wollheim examines art's historicity—or the claim that art is essentially historical. This builds on an earlier claim in Section 40 that objects *regarded* as works of art intrinsically fall under a concept of 'art'.[3] Readers and critics of Levinson's historical theory will recognize the significance of Wollheim's propositions. An analysis of Wollheim's sources can help us understand these key sections, while also providing a context for the philosophical debates that followed.

To date, these debates have been largely confined to the philosophical literature generated by Levinson's theory (Sartwell, 1990; Stecker, 1990; Davies, 1991; Oppy, 1992; Carroll, 1993; Carney, 1994; Wilson, 2015). This body of literature, however, has tended to overlook Wollheim's earlier contribution and influence. By investigating the art-historical origins of Wollheim's account of art's historicity, it is possible to interpret these later philosophical debates in light of earlier, art-historical ones. Via Wollheim and his sources, traces of old art-historical problems can be found in new philosophical questions, including those raised by Levinson in his intentional-historical characterization of art.

Art and its Objects is a book that traverses theoretical art history and philosophical aesthetics. For this reason, it remains an important and relevant conduit for interdisciplinary dialogue between both fields. The contemporary art world of the 1960s provides an important backdrop for Wollheim's essay (Wollheim, 1968). At the time, the practices known as conceptualism and minimalism were beginning to cast doubt on the concept of style, and the notion of modernism as a succession of style-based movements. The radical questioning of style had profound implications for the discipline of art history, upon which the unity and continuity of *art's* history were largely constructed. And yet, a critical tradition of theoretical art history had wrestled with the *problem of style* since the discipline was institutionalized in the nineteenth century (Podro, 1982; Rampley, 2013).

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2   On the influence of Wollheim, Levinson wrote:

The suggestions that regarding-as-a-work be a primary notion and that the nature of art must be located in its historical development can be found in Richard Wollheim's marvellous book *Art and its Objects*, Sections 40 and 60–3, respectively. It is those remarks which first prompted me to work out the view I am trying to present. I might add here that I use 'regard' in this paper as a broad term covering whatever is done in relation to an object so as to experience or interact with it.
(1979: 247–48)

3   Wollheim's interest in theoretical art history was not confined to art's historical or transformational character. His reading of art-historical theory is evident in other key sections of *Art and its Objects*, especially those that deal with expression. An extensive critique of E. H. Gombrich's account of expression (termed the 'Gombrich argument' by Wollheim) is presented in Sections 28–31.

What follows is a discussion of key points raised in Sections 40, 60 and 61 of *Art and its Objects*. The art-historical 'problem of style' is a recurring theme. This, however, is reinterpreted by Wollheim as a problem of art's historicity, a problem arising from art's tendency to change and transform throughout time. Discussion begins with Wollheim's projected method for id*entifying* works of art. This experimental framework is reminiscent of the approach proposed by George Kubler and recursive theories of art history derived from grammar. Wollheim's model aims to expose the shortcomings of so-called 'philosophical' art history. Citing objections from Arnold Hauser and Meyer Schapiro, Wollheim takes aim at Heinrich Wölfflin's formalist programme—especially its failure to adequately explain the more radical *transformational* characteristics of modern art. The focus of enquiry shifts from identifying to *understanding* works of art; a more difficult problem. Wollheim contends that works of art exhibiting more radical transformational devices demand a greater awareness of the devices that went to their formation. The paper concludes with a discussion of *revolutionary art* and its art-historical implications. Revolutionary art is a term used by Levinson to describe works of art that are intended to be regarded as completely unprecedented, or that consciously disavow antecedent art. This theoretical scenario was raised by Hauser in the 1950s when he considered the possibility of a completely spontaneous—that is, a totally unconventional—work of art.

On Identifying Works of Art

Compared to other sections of *Art and its Objects*, for which extensive sources are listed, the literature for Sections 60–61 is relatively brief. Wollheim's understanding of art's historical character is based on a handful of art historians, chiefly Heinrich Wölfflin, Henri Foçillon, André Malraux, Arnold Hauser, George Kubler and Meyer Schapiro. The anthropologist A.L. Kroeber is the only non-art-historical source listed. The influence of Malraux, Hauser, Kubler and Schapiro is especially evident. The premise that new works of art are made by reference to older works of art is a central theme of André Malraux's *Voices of Silence*. Malraux presents an account of art history in which 'the artist's way of seeing [has] been conditioned by the world of art' (1978: 281). As Malraux explains, 'artists do not stem from their childhood, but from their conflict with the achievements of their predecessors; not from their own formless world, but from their struggle with the forms which others have imposed on life' (1978: 281).

In a book dedicated to problems of aesthetics, Section 40 is among the most significant passages of *Art and its Objects*. In this section, Wollheim considers the claim that works of art fall under a *concept* of art, 'that it is intrinsic to our attitude to works of art that we should regard them as works of art, or, to use another terminology, that we should bring them under the concept of "art"' (1980: 91). This claim gives rise to the question, what is art? Wollheim's take on this question, however, is not to propose a set of constituent properties universal to all works of art. Rather, instead of pursuing a definition of art, he suggests this question may best be answered by considering the attitude brought to bear when considering what a work of art is. Thus, instead of trying to define something as 'art' or 'a work of art', 'we should rather define both these notions in terms of our disposition to regard things as works of art, and then make the elucidations of this disposition the topic

of our efforts' (1980: 92). Or, as he rephrased it, 'a work of art is now (by definition) an object that we are disposed to regard as a work of art' (1980: 92).

Wollheim's insights had an immediate impact on the philosophy of art. When Jerrold Levinson first outlined his intentional-historical theory, the influence of Wollheim was evident. In 'Defining Art Historically', Levinson writes, '*a work of art is a thing intended for regard-as-a-work-of-art*: regard in any of the ways *works of art existing prior to it have been correctly regarded*' (1979: 234, emphasis in original). Like Wollheim, Levinson did not see the need to explicate a definition of art. But because we are inclined to regard works of art in ways that past works of art have been regarded, art is necessarily backward-looking. A definition of art must therefore consider the fact that artmaking is, essentially, a historical process.

While Section 40 considers a preconditioned concept of art from the perspective of the spectator and the aesthetic attitude, earlier, in Section 33, this idea is considered from the point of view of the artist. If, as claimed, a work of art is a solution to a problem, then knowledge of that problem is essential to aesthetic understanding.[4] Immediately before turning his attention to art's historicity, Wollheim examines the demands of unity and order in works of art. When confronted with the problem of artistic order, an artist will turn to historical precedents for instances of the type of order that is sought; that is, 'he [sic] will assemble his elements in ways that self-consciously react against, or overtly presuppose, arrangements that have already been tried out within the tradition' (1980: 142). Two key points emerge from Sections 40 and 33. Firstly, that a work of art involves a concept of art; and secondly, that artmaking is necessarily historical, in which the art of the present stands in relation to the art of the past. These propositions are the focus of enquiry of Section 60.

Efforts to understand the nature of art, both from the perspective of the artist and the point of view of the spectator, come to a head in this long and complicated section. In this passage, Wollheim discusses art's tendency to manifest change and transformation. Instead of positing a definition of art, Wollheim proposes a general method for identifying works of art, based on examples of original or *primary* types. Such a method, it is suggested, could be roughly analogous with the project of generative grammar; just as kernel sentences are used to establish 'rewrite rules' for more complicated sentences, original or *primary works of art* can be used to identify subsequent or derivative works of a type. Wollheim, of course, was aware that such methods had already been devised by art historians, often with limited success.

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4   This argument was presented by Erwin Panofsky, E. H. Gombrich and Arnold Hauser at roughly the same time. Wollheim cites all three art historians but singles-out Panofsky in Section 33:

In an essay entitled "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline", Erwin Panofsky has presented a powerful argument to show that there are cases where our understanding of a work of (visual) art and its stylistic peculiarities depends upon reconstructing the artistic "intentions" that went to its making, and to do this depends in turn upon identifying the "artistic problems" to which it is a solution. The identification of an artistic problem seems definitely propositional.

(Wollheim, 1980: 71–72)

Wollheim's experimental model for identifying works of art was evidently based on the recent example formulated by George Kubler in *The Shape of Time*, a book first published in 1962 and cited in Section 60. In Wollheim's case, the phrase 'primary works of art' appears to be a thinly veiled reference to 'prime objects', a concept denoting a principal invention in Kubler's theory. According to Kubler, 'an entire system of replicas, reproductions, copies, reductions, transfers, and derivations, [float] in the wake of an important work of art' (2008: 35). A 'prime object' can therefore have many replications; when explaining his terminology, Kubler chose 'replication' instead of 'copy' because the latter word had acquired a negative connotation in modern critical parlance (2008: 65). Furthermore, replication does not necessarily imply a work of inferior or declining quality. The act of replicating a prime object was meant to capture 'that essential trait of repeating events'——a process that leads inevitably to the appearance of 'trivial' and 'unwanted variation' in a formal sequence or class-type. This schema enabled Kubler to account for the presence of incremental changes in works of art of a related kind. Sustained repetition and lack of variation over an extended period had the effect of slowing historical motion, thereby prolonging the life of a formal sequence. As Kubler explains,

> The replication that fills history actually prolongs the stability of many past moments, allowing sense and pattern to emerge for us wherever we look. This stability, however, is imperfect. Every man-made replica varies from its model by minute, unplanned divergences, of which the accumulated effects are like a slow drift away from the archetype.
> (2008: 65)

In place of the notion of style, 'which embraces too many associations', Kubler's model outlines 'the idea of a linked succession of prime works and replications, all being distributed in time as recognizably early and late versions of the same kind of action' (2008: 119). Kubler compares 'artistic invention' with 'useful invention' in science and technology. In each realm, inventions are usually new revisions of older discoveries, and only exceptionally diverge from the linked order or sequence from which they emerge. In other words, 'most inventions arise, like rearranging the furniture, from new confrontations rather than from fresh questions aimed at the center of being' (2008: 62). Differences between art and science, however, are more pronounced when it comes to the category of 'radical' invention. For as Kubler explains, 'a special character of major artistic inventions resides in their apparent remoteness from what has gone before them' (2008: 63). A new 'prime' artwork may therefore initiate a whole new sequence or formal class, seemingly unrelated to any predecessor. Until the modern period, major artistic inventions were infrequent in art history. The system of artistic invention behaved for the most part like useful invention, where change proceeded gradually and incrementally.

When Wollheim suggested an experimental method for identifying works of art, based on examples of original or *primary* works, he had the methods of 'philosophical' art history in mind. The aim of this exercise was to demonstrate both the endurance and limitations of recursive theories of art, especially the methodological programmes devised by the art historians Heinrich Wölfflin, Alois Riegl and Henri Foçillon. Kubler's method was the latest version of this tradition; Kubler was a student of Foçillon, and despite replacing

styles with novel concepts based on temporal sequences, his approach to art history was largely predicated on observing patterns of formal transformation over time. As Wollheim saw it, the achievements of the 'philosophical art historians' was subject to three limitations (1980, 145). Firstly, they had developed a narrow conception of the range of devices operative in art, focusing too intently on evaluative precepts derived from form and style. Secondly, their methods had failed to connect major stylistic changes on the general level with changes of style on the individual or expressive level; Wölfflin's so-called art history without names, a programme in which artists' personal styles are subsumed by general and anonymous stylistic categories, is cited as a case in point. Thirdly, they were criticized for misunderstanding the nature of their investigation, for believing that art was governed by autonomous laws of history rather than modes of artistic practice.

While grammatical principles helped art historians explain stylistic variations, the application of these rules was limited to certain styles and periods of art. Their function was largely restricted to derivations that had evolved from simple formal types, as was the case with Riegl's (2004) method, or when artworks act as *imitations* or *substitutions* of 'timeless' exemplars (Ackerman, 2002; Nagel and Wood, 2010). Wollheim cites the failure of academic convention 'to limit the domain of art to works that can be regarded as substitution-instances of an original or canonical work' (1980: 144). These rules, we are reminded, have been 'consistently frustrated' by examples of art where extensive stylistic variation is evident. The critique of formalist art history will be examined in the following section. But despite the limitations of recursive art-historical programmes, art's historicity seemed irrefutable to Wollheim.

It was left to Jerrold Levinson to elaborate on this theory. As Levinson noted, 'new art is art because of [its] relation to past art' (1979: 234). A 'backward connectedness' between the art of the present and that of the past allows for an art-historical understanding of art. In principle, this insight is broadly consistent with the historicism of Malraux and Kubler; indeed, it calls to mind a statement by Kubler, that 'the modern work takes its measure from the old' (2008: 80). But there are important points of difference. Chiefly, Levinson's 'internal historicism' (1993: 412) is less constraining than the visual or stylistic continuity proposed by 'philosophical' art historians. Specifically, Levinson's historical connections do not rely on semblance or identifiable aesthetic properties. As with Wollheim's 'minimal criteria' (1968), Levinson's flexible criteria were devised to satisfy the problematic requirements of contemporary avant-garde art.

Art and Transformation

It was Wollheim, however, who first identified the limitations of earlier art-historical approaches. Wollheim would therefore highlight the problems that Levinson's theory would seek to redress. The 'philosophical' art historians singled out for attention in Section 60 were, more accurately, formalist art historians. Wölfflin, Riegl, and Foçillon had studied art's transformational character from the point of view of stylistic change; each had attempted to formulate the recursive devices by which art proceeds from one period to the next. Their achievements were limited for reasons noted above. But Wollheim also notes that the 'philosophical' art historians concerned themselves too deeply with stylistic

transformations from earlier periods of art. The challenges of modern art would therefore prove to be more problematic, exposing the limitations of their methods. For unlike generative grammar, where only permissible derivations of ideal types are valid, modern art movements did not follow a predetermined set of rules.

The *deletion* and *suppression* of artistic antecedents was a peculiar trait of modern art movements. In the case of contemporary art, says Wollheim, 'such transformations consist in nothing less than the deletion of the principal characteristics of earlier art, effected either instantaneously or serially over time' (1980: 144–45). Taking Wölfflin's universal formulas as an example, these typologies cannot explain the extreme transformations encountered in twentieth-century art. 'For it is arguable', Wollheim continues,

> 'that whereas the earlier changes affected only the more or less detailed properties of a work of art, e.g. painterly versus linear, in the art of our day one work of art generates another by the suppression of its most general or its all-over properties'.
> (Wollheim, 1980: 145–146)

In this analysis, Wölfflin's formalist programme is subjected to particular scrutiny. Key points of criticism in Section 60 are borrowed from earlier critiques provided by Arnold Hauser (1959) and Meyer Schapiro (1994).

A principal criticism levelled at Wölfflin's method by both Hauser and Schapiro—and subsequently by Wollheim—was that it had failed to appreciate the significance of Mannerism. Both Hauser and Schapiro viewed Mannerism as a pivotal period of art history, a style that prefigured modernism; in *The Philosophy of Art History*, it was described by Hauser as 'the first conscious revolt in history against the prevailing artistic conventions' (1959: 402). This incipient modern art movement initiated a cycle of rebellion, a struggle between the past and the present, which animated the course of Western art from Romanticism to the contemporary avant-garde. Hauser theorized the terms of this struggle as a conflict between originality and convention. These competing tendencies allowed Hauser to explain the phenomenon that Wollheim had described in Section 60; that is, the urge to 'supress' or 'delete' the art of one's predecessors.

The realization that modern art behaved differently to art from earlier periods and cultures perplexed George Kubler and other art historians who relied on grammatical rules and recursive devices to understand the process of artistic change over time. There are periods in the history of art, says Kubler, 'when an entire language of form suddenly falls into disuse, being replaced by a new language of different components and an unfamiliar grammar' (2008: 63). Modernism was the most striking example of such a phenomenon. Kubler described the transformation of Western art from about 1910 as 'discontinuous, abrupt, and shocking', with 'the total configuration of what we now recognize as modern art coming all at once into being without many firm links to the proceeding system of expression' (Kubler, 2008: 64). As noted earlier, Kubler viewed major 'radical' invention as a special characteristic of art. Unlike the incremental stages of useful invention, which continued step-by-step in closely linked order, major artistic inventions can arise spontaneously and *in apparent remoteness from what has gone before them*. The technical and scientific advances of the nineteenth century extended into the twentieth century. But during the same period, 'the system of artistic invention was abruptly transformed, as if large

numbers of men [sic] had suddenly become aware that the inherited repertory of forms no longer corresponded to the actual meaning of existence' (Kubler, 2008: 63).

Kubler's system of 'linked successions' and 'formal sequences' could discern abrupt changes in the history of art, but it could not readily account for how, or why, these radical transformations occurred. Although he rejected the art-historical notion of style, Kubler's theory relied on observable patterns of resemblance and formal modifications of archetypes. Replication was a process based on the intentional or ritual desire to repeat—although not necessarily to copy—the visual characteristics of prime antecedents. Despite its linguistic connotation, Hauser's notion of convention was not recursive in a formal sense. In other words, his understanding of artistic convention was not confined to art's stylistic features. When the Mannerists revolted against the Renaissance convention, they were not merely spurning the pictorial and optical techniques of their Renaissance masters. They were also rejecting the world view that this art represented; central perspective, which had imposed a unitary point of view on nature, was emblematic of the rational outlook they refuted. Hence, when the Mannerists set themselves against Renaissance convention, they were rejecting a prevailing episteme as much as a style.

> And like the representation of space, all the other elements of a Renaissance picture—the composition, the colouring, the treatment of light, the representation of the human body and so on—are given a scientific twist, being subjected to artistic conventions permeated by science. The unitary, systematic character of the world-view becomes an artistic ideal.
> (Hauser, 1959: 401–02)

From Identification to Understanding

Section 61 of *Art and its Objects* considers the more difficult problem of understanding works of art. While a framework like the one proposed in Section 60 might help to identify something as a work of art, 'a far more difficult problem arises concerning the relation between the conditions necessary for identifying a work of art and those necessary for its understanding' (Wollheim, 1980: 147). There is no simple method for understanding works of art, but as a general principle Wollheim posits: 'those works of art which result from the application of the more radical transformational devices will require for their understanding a correspondingly greater awareness of the devices that went to their formation' (1980: 147). In other words, our ability to understand a work of art is predicated on our knowledge of the structural or expressive devices that the piece in question exhibits. A work of art exhibiting radical new modes of expression will require an awareness of the constituent elements that make this work radical and new, an understanding commensurate with its demands.

The key question that Wollheim seeks to address in Section 61 is the following: *to what extent do we need to be able to locate the work of art in its own historical setting before we can understand it?* Although, he says, this will vary from one work of art to another, 'the issue depends on how much of the style of the work is an institutional, and how much it is an expressive, matter' (1980: 147). If 'institutional' means the stock of styles from the

repository of art history, then Wollheim is asking whether the work in question resembles a known style. It is a plausible assumption that works of art exhibiting 'institutional' stylistic devices will be more comprehensible than those that rely on singular expressiveness. For example, a piece displaying Gothic stylistic characteristics is likely to be interpreted in terms of mediaevalism, while a work expressing a seemingly original and spontaneous style will be more ambiguous. An artwork manifesting established stylistic or pictorial devices may therefore seem more intelligible than one composed of novel or unfamiliar devices.

If Wollheim is correct, then artistic convention plays a role in our ability to understand works of art. He provides two examples to illustrate this point. Firstly, a relatively straightforward one involving the role of convention in literature. In *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Stendhal deliberately refrains from using some common rhetorical devices, largely because he assumes his readers are already conversant with the narrative conventions of the psychological novel. Dramatic tension is achieved without resorting to familiar narrative techniques such as interior monologue. This effect, however, will disadvantage readers unacquainted with the conventions of the genre. As Wollheim explains, 'the reader of *Le Rouge et le Noir* needs to come to the book with at any rate some acquaintance with the conventions of the early-nineteenth-century novel' (1980: 147).

The second, more radical, example involves Duchamp's *Fountain*. To comprehend the significance of this problematic case, we return to Section 40 and Wollheim's claim: *that it is intrinsic to our attitude to works of art that we should regard them as works of art, or, to use another terminology, that we should bring them under the concept of 'art'*. Wollheim quotes from an argument advanced by Adrian Stokes in support of Duchamp. To appreciate the iconoclastic significance of *Fountain*, 'we must project onto the object's patterns and shapes a significance learnt from many pictures and sculptures'.[5] Whereas Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* presumes knowledge of a literary genre, *Fountain* calls for an understanding of the entire history of art. In Wollheim's words, 'it would be difficult to appreciate what Duchamp was trying to do without an over-all knowledge of the history of art's metamorphoses' (1980: 148).

Wollheim's observations appear to confirm Hauser's characterization of convention, conceived of as a system or procedure in which artistic forms are rendered communicable or comprehensible. This theory was presented by Hauser in his treatise *The Philosophy of Art History*, a book used by Wollheim when writing Sections 60 and 61. A synopsis of Hauser's thesis is provided hereafter for the purpose of elucidating Wollheim's arguments. While a defence or critique of Hauser's theory of convention is beyond the scope of this paper, his art-historical insights are relevant to this discussion and the section that follows, which deals with the problem of 'revolutionary art' from the perspective of Levinson's intentional-historical theory.

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5   Adrian Stokes made these remarks about Duchamp's ready-made sculpture *Fountain* in his book *The Invitation in Art*, published by Tavistock Publications in 1965 with a preface by Wollheim. Wollheim acknowledged Stokes's philosophy and criticism as a major influence on his thinking about art. In recognition of this influence, Wollheim would dedicate *Art and its Objects* to Stokes.

No work of art, according to Hauser, is wholly homogeneous in the composition of its elements. Every work constitutes a struggle between the competing demands of originality and convention, between the new and the traditional. Thus, says Hauser, 'a work of art must express its own novel and particular view of the world if it is to have any value in itself, indeed, if it is to have aesthetic quality at all' (1959: 369). And yet, no work, however great its originality, can be novel in all respects and in every one of its creative aspects. This is because, 'every work of art that has originated in a historical context—that is, all art that we know of—manifests conventional as well as original features' (Hauser, 1959: 369). Although Hauser views these tendencies as conflicting forces in the history of art, he also regards their interaction as mutually beneficial. On the one hand, 'a purely conventional art in which all spontaneity and originality was lacking would be completely insipid' (1959: 407). While, conversely, 'a work of art that consisted entirety of original, strictly creative elements would be unintelligible' (Hauser, 1959: 370). In essence, Hauser proposes that a work of art 'becomes intelligible only through a certain sacrifice of originality' (1959: 370).

Because art, like language, replaces things with signs, 'art cannot avoid schematizing and conventionalizing to a certain extent' (Hauser, 1959: 370). Hauser supposes the earliest conventions arose from technical problems of representation. The frontality of Egyptian art, 'that paradigm of all conventions', likely originated from the difficulty of drawing foreshortened aspects of the human figure. However, the endurance and significance of such conventions cannot be explained wholly in terms of artistic problem-solving. Frontalism in Egyptian art persisted long after its artists had mastered the techniques of illusionism. Over the course of time, this mode of depiction 'had been transformed from a mere expedient into a symbolic form, from improvisation into an institution' (Hauser, 1959: 377). While the highly formulaic art of ancient Egypt is illustrative of this process, it is not a case of conventional forms being imposed on artists to inhibit their originality or spontaneity. Rather, 'the original experiences themselves move as it were upon rails that have been already laid down by convention' (Hauser, 1959: 372). Hauser, following Malraux, holds the view that every artist takes their *conception* of art from the examples of their predecessors. Without 'the inbreeding and self-generation of artistic conventions', Hauser argues, 'every painter would have to invent painting afresh, every composer invent music, every dramatist the theatre' (1959: 373).

The Problem of 'Revolutionary Art'

Modern art not only exhibits stylistic transformations that are more extensive than those of earlier periods; its metamorphoses are also more radical in form, if not ideology. In the art of the modern period, one work of art generates another not by the expansion of its stylistic range but rather by *suppressing* its most general properties. We are reminded again of Wollheim's observation that such transformations consist in nothing less than the *deletion* of the principal characteristics of earlier art. For philosophers of art writing after Wollheim, this process came to be known as the 'repudiation sequence'. If, as James D. Carney (1994: 121) implies, deletion and suppression is tantamount to repudiation, then the art of the twentieth century witnessed a series of 'repudiation sequences'. Carney

provides the following example: Academic art—Impressionism—Cubism—Abstract Expressionism—Minimalist—Conceptual. According to this logic, the act of repudiating pre-existing art enables stylistically disparate artworks to become historically linkable in a chain of negation. Repudiation, as a concept, was earlier defined by Noël Carroll to describe a particular kind of artmaking activity. For an object to count as a repudiation, says Carroll, 'it must not only be different from what has preceded it, it must also be interpretable as in some sense opposed to or against an antecedent artistic project' (2001: 69).

Repudiation can therefore be contrasted with recursive artmaking practices as outlined by Kubler and others, according to which a newer artwork extends or amplifies the formal range of its 'prime' antecedent by means of variation or repetition. But as a description of artistic behaviour, the repudiation sequence can be explained in terms proposed by Hauser. Here, conventions of art provide continuity while also acting as catalysts for radical artistic change. Put simply, a convention provokes a revolt; the revolt affirms new modes of expression, which in turn become conventionalized; and so, the revolt ends in new conventions. The revolt that began with cinquecento artists reacting against quattrocento conventions ends with Mannerism, the style that lent its name to artifice and exaggeration and a model of conventionalism par excellence (Hauser 1959: 403). An artwork that aims to repudiate its predecessors will therefore retain a historical or causal connection to the art it seeks to renounce.

Following Wollheim, Levinson addressed the problem of deletion and suppression from the perspective of revolutionary art. Revolutionary art poses a challenge to Levinson's intentional-historical theory because, by his own admission, it is *intended* for treatment in a manner that is completely different from all other art that has gone before it. Because Levinson's artmaking intention is necessarily backward-looking, where a thing intended for regard-as-a-work-of-art rests on ways that artworks prior to it have been correctly regarded, a work that demands to be regarded in unprecedented ways will struggle to be regarded as art. According to Levinson (1979: 241), a *revolutionary artwork* can be distinguished from a *new artwork*, which is simply one non-identical to any previously existing artwork, or an *original artwork*, which is significantly different in structural or aesthetic properties from any previously existing one. Thus, 'the production of original art could continue indefinitely without there being any additions to the stock of ways in which artworks are regarded' (Levinson, 1979: 241). But by revolutionary art, he means 'one for which any of the past ways of approaching art seems inadequate, inappropriate, pointless or impossible; a revolutionary artwork appears to be ultimately calling for a kind of regard which is totally *unprecedented*' (Levinson, 1979: 241, emphasis in original).

And yet, even Levinson seems unconvinced that such an artwork is possible. If the consciously revolutionary artist wants to see their artmaking intention regarded as art, they have two options available. The first is by ruse. That is, by disguising their true 'revolutionary' intentions and directing the audience to regard the object in ways that art has previously been correctly regarded. Only later, after the object has been taken as art, may its true aims become apparent; that is, after efforts to understand the work 'prove frustrating or unrewarding', will the audience be 'prodded' to regard the thing in unprecedented ways. The second strategy is generally consistent with the notion of repudiation, or the *suppression* or *deletion* behaviours of modern art as characterized by Wollheim. Instead of

a thing intended for regard-as-a-work-of-art being regarded in ways that past artworks have been *correctly* regarded, this criterion can be expanded to include works intended to be regarded *in conscious opposition to those past correct ways*. So, in the second strategy, the self-aware revolutionary artist need not insist that their art be treated in ways that are completely unheralded, 'but only that he [sic] should project the new way *in relation* (albeit antagonistic relation) to its predecessors' (Levinson, 1979: 242, emphasis in original).

Of the ways in which an artwork can stand in relation to the art of the past, repudiation might offer the most transformative and original results. But even an artwork that consciously denies, disavows, or repudiates its predecessors cannot escape their influence. This is because conventions (or concepts) of art provide not only the conditions of existence for artistic rebellion, but also the means by which these expressions are understood. Again, Hauser makes the point that even an opposition must employ the means of expression characteristic of the art it opposes, and 'in this respect a revolutionary artist is no more independent of the past than the feeblest follower of tradition' (1959: 373).

In Section 40 of *Art and its Objects*, Wollheim considered the claim that works of art fall under a concept of art, or that we are disposed to regard certain things as works of art. As we have seen, this presupposition laid the foundations for Sections 60 and 61, which dealt with art's historicity and problems that arise from the identification and interpretation of art. With the example of Duchamp's *Fountain* in mind, Wollheim asks how such a radical gesture is to be seen as falling within the ambit of art. The answer comes from Adrian Stokes, the aesthetician and art critic. To understand *Fountain* as a work of art, we are required 'to project on to the object a significance learned from many pictures and sculptures' (Wollheim, 1980: 148). Thus, while the originality of *Fountain* made Duchamp's revolutionary idea worth communicating, it was the conventions of sculpture that made the idea communicable.

Concluding Remarks

Art historians have continued to deal with the problems of art's historicity, but usually without recourse to Wollheim and Levinson. Some, like Whitney Davis (1993, 2011), have found common ground between the philosophical and art-historical approaches. Despite their different takes on the historical nature of art, theoretical art history and the philosophy of art have continued to follow parallel paths. Levinson's argument 'that art is necessarily backward-looking' and 'must involve, as opposed merely to follow, that which has preceded it' (1979, 232–33), was largely self-evident to historians of art. Michael Baxandall (1985) approached the problem of influence and intention from a distinctly analytical perspective, thereby earning the praise of philosophers such as Arthur Danto (1986). Others, like Thomas Crow (1999), found answers to these questions in the most successful and challenging examples from theoretical art history.

Wollheim's critical appraisal of 'philosophical' art history was based on its failure, as he saw it, to explain art's more radical stylistic transformations. The recursive methods of its leading practitioners were invalidated by opposing modern art movements, which sought to suppress, rather than merely expand, the stylistic elements of earlier art. It is worth noting, however, that Wollheim had the extreme transformations of the contemporary

avant-garde in mind when he formulated his critique. And yet, while valid with regard to modern art, Wollheim's criticism of 'philosophical' art history was also one-sided and misdirected. Wölfflin, Foçillon and Riegl were principally concerned with explaining art's long-term transformations, often describing changes in styles that spanned centuries or millennia. Their projects did not aim to (or claim to) explain the rapid acceleration of extreme stylistic variation encountered in modern art movements.

It is arguable that the 'repudiation sequences' of Western avant-garde art received undue attention in Wollheim's account of art's historicity. Furthermore, if we take comparative and global art *histories* into consideration, it is also arguable that European modernism was accorded more significance than it now merits. The suppression and deletion of antecedent styles, and the presumption of progress that such a process implies, is at odds with other artistic practices where continuity and convention are revered. Indeed, if the needs and experiences of global art histories are to be historicized, a model like Kubler's might be more applicable than Wollheim had supposed. Concepts like 'sequence' and 'drift', borrowed from linguistics and customized to deal with cultural duration, can help us come to terms with enduring traditions like the art of Aboriginal Australia, which call for an understanding of regularity and variation across time.

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