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# Must we mean what we say?

## A Book of Essays

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can be described as feelings of sincerity, which, perhaps, he attaches to the words in his poetry. Does all that make the words, his utterance in the poem, sincere? Will he, for example, *stand by them*, later, when *those feelings* are gone? Suppose he does; that will not, of course, prove that his poetry is worthwhile, nor even that it is poetry. But I haven't suggested that sincerity proves anything in particular—it can prove madness or evil as well as purity or authenticity. What I have suggested is that it shows what kind of stake the stake in modern art is, that it helps explain why one's reactions to it can be so violent, why for the modern artist the difference between artistic success and failure can be so uncompromising. The task of the modern artist, as of the modern man, is to find something he can be sincere and serious in; something he can mean. And he may not at all.

Have my claims about the artist and his audience been based on hearsay, or real evidence, or really upon the work itself? But now the "work itself" becomes a heightened philosophical concept, not a neutral description. My claims do not rest upon works of art themselves, apart from their relations to how such works are made and the reasons for which they are made, and considering that some are sincere and some counterfeit. . . . But my claim is that to know such things is to know what a work of art is—they are, if one may say so, part of its grammar. And, of course, I may be taken in.

## VIII

### A Matter of Meaning It

#### I

It is not surprising that Professors Beardsley and Margolis found what I had to say about modern art and modern philosophy obscure and, I take it, unsympathetic; I tried, in the opening section of my remarks, to give reasons why these subjects are liable to obscurity and unattractiveness—as it were, to make this fact itself a subject of philosophy. (In perhaps the way Hume suggests, in the Introduction to his *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, that the subject to follow is characterized by alternating obscurity and obviousness.) It is therefore the more surprising that they find me clear enough to agree in several points of interpretation and in one or two major proposals. (1) Both take it as a central motive of my paper to rule out certain developments within recent music as genuine art. (2) Both object to my insistence on the word "fraudulence," wishing some more neutral description. (3) Accepting the fact that objects of modern art create a problem for aesthetics, but taking the nature of that problem as known, each suggests an alternate line of solution, and in each case the solution is one which is, and is explicitly said to be, philosophically familiar: Beardsley's solution is to define a notion of art (i.e., music) broad enough to include the problematic objects; Margolis' is to regard the problem as another instance of "borderline cases" and therefore to

These rejoinders to Professors Beardsley and Margolis refer to their respective papers published in the Proceedings of the Oberlin Colloquium, *Art, Mind, and Religion* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967), and are reprinted by permission of the publisher. Page references are to the Proceedings.

require the discovery of criteria for the "propriety" of treating the new music as art. (4) Both suggest that an obvious notion of organization or coherence will supply the (or a) determining ground for including objects under the new classification.

These are not my problems. Taking them in order:

1. I was not directly concerned to rule out or rule in any particular work as music, but to bring to attention the fact that this had become a problem in modern art and to suggest that it therefore ought to become a problem for philosophy. I do not think it is clear, and I found it of philosophical interest that it is not clear, what kind of problem modern art poses, nor what philosophical considerations might uncover it. But I am confident that the redefinition or extended application of the term "music" is not what is needed, for that leaves the behavior of composers and critics and audiences and the experience of the works themselves, old and new, incomprehensible—a problem has not been solved, but made invisible. Convinced that swans are white, and one day stopped by a black bird for all the world a swan, I have some freedom: "So I was wrong"; I learned something. "So there is a swan-like bird which is black"; but then I had better have a good reason for taking color to be so important. But in the present case it is as though there is something on the horizon which *for some reason* I insist on calling swans (and after all, it isn't as though I *knew* the reasons, or even had reasons, for calling the old ones swans), but which sometimes look and behave so differently that not only do I feel called on to justify *their* title, I feel called on to justify my hitherto unquestioned ability to recognize the old ones. How do I do it; what *is* it about them? Surely that graceful neck is essential—its melodic line, so to speak? But it may be that my experience of the new ones makes the old neck rather a distasteful feature sometimes, as though it were somehow arbitrary, as though the old ones now sometimes look *bent*.

2. Similarly, I was not directly concerned to condemn any given work as fraudulent, but to call attention to (what I took to be) the obvious but unappreciated *fact* that the experience of the modern *is* one which itself raises the question of fraudulence and genuineness (in something like the way I take the experience of momentary or extended irrelevance, and sudden relevance, to be characteristic of philosophy; the way the experience, and danger, of the distance or absence of God, and sudden closeness, is characteristic of modern

religion). It goes without saying that I may be wrong about this experience, or poor in characterizing it and sounding its significance. But if I am not wrong, then the problems it raises, or ought to raise, are not touched by suggesting that I am unjustly attributing motives to certain artists, nor by redefining terms in such a way that the attribution of fraudulence need not or cannot arise. For the experience itself has the form of attributing motives (I referred, for example, to the riots and inner violence which dog the history of the *avant garde*), and redefining some terms will not, or ought not to, make the experience go away.

3. What ought to make the experience go away? Further experience, or else nothing; entering the new world of these objects, understanding them not in theory but as objects of art, in the sense in which we have always, when we have ever, understood such objects.<sup>1</sup> This is the essential reason that redefinitions and borderline cases are irrelevant here. For the question raised for me about these new objects is exactly whether they are, and how they can be, *central*. If they are not, if I cannot in that way enter their world, I do not know what interest, if any at all, I would have in them. It *may* turn out to be one which would prompt me to think of them as borderline cases of art; or I might think of them as something which replaces (which replaces my interest in) works of art.

Not every object will raise this question of art, i.e., raise the question "What is art?" by raising the question "Is this, e.g., music?" Pop Art as a whole does not, and it is exactly part of its intention and ideology that it should not. For philosophy to scramble for definitions which accommodate these objects unproblematically as art—or art in a wide sense, or borderline cases of art—insures its irrelevance, taking seriously neither the claims such objects make (namely, that they are not art) nor the specialized amusements such objects can provide (e.g., a certain theatricality), nor the attitude they contain toward serious art (sc., that it is past); nor the despair under the fun, the nihilism under the comment, nor the cultural-philosophical confusion which makes such claims and fun and comment possible.

And not every new work which gives itself out as serious art will raise the question of art. Part of what I say in my paper is a function of the fact that, for me, Krenek's late work does not raise this ques-

<sup>1</sup> Certain consequences of "entering a new world" are drawn in "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy," which appears in this volume, pp. 84-86.

tion, and that, for example, Carò's sculpture does. It is not, in this context, important whether I am right or wrong about these particular cases; what is important here is what kind of issue this issue is, what I would be right or wrong about.

It is, first of all, an issue in which it is *up to me* (and, of course, up to you) whether an object does or does not count as evidence for any theory I am moved to offer; and "count as evidence" means "count as art at all." Both Beardley and Margolis wish explicitly to separate the question of evaluation from the question of classification. Now I might define the problem of modernism as one in which the question of value comes first as well as last: to classify a modern work as art is already to have staked value, more starkly than the (later) decision concerning its goodness or badness. Your interest in Mozart is not likely to draw much attention—which is why such interests can be, so to speak, academic. But an interest in Webern or Stockhausen or Cage is, one might say, revealing, even sometimes suspicious. (A Christian might say that in such interests, and choices, the heart is revealed. This is what Tolstoy saw.) Philosophers sometimes speak of the phrase "work of art" as having an "honorific sense," as though that were a surprising or derivative fact about it, even one to be neutralized or ignored. But that works of art are valuable is analytically true of them; and that value is inescapable in human experience and conduct is one of the facts of life, and of art, which modern art lays bare.

Of course there is the continuous danger that the question will be begged, that theory and evidence become a closed and vicious circle. I do not insist that this is always the case, but merely that unless this problem is faced here no problem of the right kind can come to focus. For if everything counted as art which now offers itself as art, then questions about whether, for example, figurative content, or tonality, or heroic couplets are still viable resources for painters, composers, and poets would not only never have arisen, but would make no sense. When there was a tradition, everything which seemed to count did count. (And that is perhaps analytic of the notion of "tradition.") I say that Krenek's late work doesn't count, and that means that the way it is "organized" does not raise for me the question of how music may be organized. I say that Carò's steel sculptures count, and that raises for me the question of what sculpture is: I had—I take it everyone had—thought (assumed? imagined?)—but no one

word is going to be quite right, and that must itself require a philosophical account) that a piece of sculpture was something *worked* (carved, chipped, polished, etc.); but Carò uses steel rods and beams and sheets which he does not work (e.g., bend or twist) but rather, one could say, *places*. I had thought that a piece of sculpture had the coherence of a natural object, that it was what I wish to call spatially closed or spatially continuous (or consisted of a group of objects of such coherence); but a Carò may be open and discontinuous, one of its parts not an outgrowth from another, nor even joined or connected with another so much as it is juxtaposed to it, or an inflection from it. I had thought a piece of sculpture stood on a base (or crouched in a pediment, etc.) and rose; but a Carò rests on the raw ground and some do not so much rise as spread or reach or open. I had heard that sculpture used to be painted, and took it as a matter of fashion or taste that it no longer was (in spite of the reconstructed praises of past glories, the idea of painted stone figures struck me as ludicrous); Carò paints his pieces, but not only is this not an external or additional fact about them, it creates objects about which I wish to say they are not painted, or not *colored*: they have color not the way, say, cabinets or walls do, but the way grass and soil do—the experience I recall is perhaps hit off by saying that Carò is not using colored beams, rods, and sheets, but beams and rods and sheets of color. It is almost as though the color helps de-materialize its supporting object. One might wish to say they are weightless, but that would not mean that these massively heavy materials seem light, but, more surprisingly, neither light nor heavy, resistant to the concept of weight altogether—as they are resistant to the concept of size: they seem neither large nor small. Similarly, they seem to be free of *texture*, so critical a parameter of other sculpture. They are no longer *things*? (Something similar seems to be true of the use of color in recent painting: it is not merely that it no longer serves as the color of something, nor that it is disembodied; but that the canvas we know to underlie it is no longer its *support*—the color is simply *there*, as the canvas is. How it got there is only technically (one could say it is no longer humanly) interesting; it is no longer *handled*.)

\* In addition to the piece on Carò cited in note 4 of my opening paper, see also Fried's catalogue essay for an exhibition of Carò's work at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, September-October 1963; and Clement Greenberg's "The New Sculpture" and "Modernist Sculpture, Its Pictorial Past," both in his *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

The problem this raises for me is exactly not to decide whether this is art (I mean, sculpture), nor to find some definition of "sculpture" which makes the Caro pieces borderline cases of sculpture, or sculptures in some extended sense. The problem is that I am, so to speak, stuck with the knowledge that this is sculpture, in the same sense that any object is. The problem is that I no longer know what sculpture is, why I call *any* object, the most central or traditional, a piece of sculpture. How *can* objects made this way elicit the experience I had thought confined to objects made so differently? And that this is a matter of experience is what needs constant attention; nothing more, but nothing less, than that. Just as it needs constant admission that one's experience may be wrong, or misformed, or inattentive and inconstant.

This admission is more than a reaffirmation of the first fact about art, that it must be felt, not merely known—or, as I would rather put it, that it must be known for oneself. It is a statement of the fact of life—the metaphysical fact, one could say—that apart from one's experience of it there is nothing to be known about it, no way of knowing that what you know is relevant. For what else is there for me to rely on but my experience? It is only if I accept (my experience of) the Caro that I have to conclude that the art of sculpture does not (or does no longer) depend on figuration, on being worked, on spatial continuity, etc. Then what does it depend on? That is, again, the sort of issue which prompted me to say that modern art lays bare the condition of art in general. Or put it this way: That an object is "a piece of sculpture" is not (no longer) grammatically related to its "being sculptured," i.e., to its being the result of carving or chipping, etc., some material with some tool. Then we no longer know what kind of object a piece of sculpture (grammatically) is. That it is not a natural object is something we knew. But it also is not an artifact either—or if it is, it is one which defines no known craft. It is, one would like to say, a work of art. But what is it one will then be saying? Two serious ambiguities in my initial paper become particularly relevant here:

a) Beardsley, with good reason, on several occasions is puzzled about whether I am addressing the question "Is this music?" or "Is this (music) art?" I was, and am, very uncertain about this important alternation; but I want to suggest what it is I am uncertain about and why I take it to be important.

There is this asymmetry between the questions: If there is a clear answer to the question, "Is this music (painting, sculpture . . .)?" then the question whether it is art is irrelevant, superfluous. If it is music then (analytically) it is art. That seems unprejudicial. But the negation does not: if it is not music then it is not art. But why does that seem prejudicial? Why couldn't we allow Pop Art, say, or Cage's evenings, or Happenings, to be entertainments of some kind without troubling about art? But we are troubled. Because for us, given the gradual self-definitions and self-liberations over the past century of the separate major arts we accept, Pop Art presents itself as, or as challenging, painting; Cage presents his work as, or as challenging the possibility of, music . . . . It would be enough to say that objects of Pop Art are not paintings or sculptures, that works of Cage and Krenek are not music—if we are clear what a painting is, what a piece of music is. But the trouble is that the genuine article—the music of Schoenberg and Webern, the sculpture of Caro, the painting of Morris Louis, the theatre of Brecht and Beckett—really does challenge the art of which it is the inheritor and voice. Each is, in a word, not merely modern, but modernist. Each, one could say, is trying to find the limits or essence of its own procedures. And this means that it is not clear a priori what counts, or will count, as a painting, or sculpture or musical composition . . . . So we haven't got clear criteria for determining whether a given object is or is not a painting, a sculpture . . . . But this is exactly what our whole discussion has prepared us for. The task of the modernist artist, as of the contemporary critic, is to find what it is his art finally depends upon; it doesn't matter that we haven't a priori criteria for defining a painting, what matters is that we realize that the criteria are something we must discover, discover in the continuity of painting itself. But my point now is that to discover this we need to discover what objects we *accept* as paintings, and why we so accept them. And to "accept something as a painting" is to "accept something as a work of art," i.e., as something carrying the intentions and consequences of art: the nature of the acceptance is altogether crucial. So the original questions "Is this music?" and "Is this art?" are not independent. The latter shows, we might say, the spirit in which the former is relevantly asked.

b) To say that the modern "lays bare" may suggest that there was something concealed in traditional art which hadn't, for some reason, been noticed, or that what the modern throws over—tonality,

perspective, narration, the absent fourth wall, etc.—was something inessential to music, painting, poetry, and theater in earlier periods. These would be false suggestions.<sup>3</sup> For it is not that now we finally know the true condition of art; it is only that someone who does not question that condition has nothing, or not the essential thing, to go on in addressing the art of our period. And far from implying that we now know, for example, that music does not require tonality, nor painting figuration nor theater an audience of spectators, etc., exactly what I want to have accomplished is to make all such notions problematic, to force us to ask, for example, what the art was which as a matter of fact did require, or exploit, tonality, perspective, etc. Why did it? What made such things media of art? It may help to say that the notion of “modernism laying bare its art” is meant not as an interpretation of history (the history of an art), but as a description of the latest period of a history, a period in which each of the arts seems to be, even forced to be, drawing itself to its limits, purging itself of elements which can be foregone and which therefore seem arbitrary or extraneous—poetry wishing the abstraction and immediacy of lyricism; theater wishing freedom from entertainment and acting; music wishing escape from the rhythm or logic of the single body and its frame of emotion . . . . *Why* this has happened one would like to know, but for the moment what is relevant is that it has happened at a certain moment in history. For it was not always true of a given art that it sought to keep its medium pure, that it wished to assert its own limits, and therewith its independence of the other arts. Integrity could be assured without purity. So in saying that “we do not know what is and what is not essentially connected to the concept of music” I am not saying that what we do not know is which one or more phenomena are always essential to something’s being music, but that we have yet to discover what at any given moment has been essential to our accepting something as music. As was said, this discovery is unnecessary as long as there is a tradition—when everything which is offered for acceptance is the real thing. But so far as the possibility of fraudulence is characteristic of the modern, then the need for a grounding of our acceptance becomes an issue for aesthetics. I think of it as a need for an answer to the question, What is a medium of art?

<sup>3</sup> Sources of these suggestions, and ways they are false, were brought out by Michael Fried in his course of lectures on Nineteenth Century French Painting, given at Harvard in the spring term of 1965-66.

Philosophers will sometimes say that sound is the medium of music, paint of painting, wood and stone of sculpture, words of literature. One has to find what problems have been thought to reach illumination in such remarks. What needs recognition is that wood or stone would not be a medium of sculpture *in the absence of the art of sculpture*. The home of the idea of a *medium* lies in the visual arts, and it used to be informative to know that a given medium is oil or gouache or tempera or dry point or marble . . . because each of these media had characteristic possibilities, an implied range of handling and result. The idea of a medium is not simply that of a physical material, but of a material-in-certain-characteristic-applications. Whether or not there is anything to be called, and any good purpose in calling anything, “the medium of music,” there certainly are things to be called various media of music, namely the various ways in which various sources of sound (from and for the voice, the several instruments, the body, on different occasions) have characteristically been applied: the media are, for example, plain song, work song, the march, the fugue, the aria, dance forms, sonata form. It is the existence or discovery of such strains of convention that have made possible musical expression—presumably the role a medium was to serve. In music, the “form” (as in literature, the genre) is the medium. It is within these that composers have been able to speak and to intend to speak, performers to practice and to believe, audiences to attend and to know. Grant that these media no longer serve, as portraits, nudes, odes, etc., no longer serve, for speaking and believing and knowing. What now is a medium of music? If one wishes now to answer, “Sound. Sound itself,” that will no longer be the neutral answer it seemed to be, said to distinguish music from, say, poetry or painting (whatever it means to “distinguish” things one would never have thought could be taken for one another); it will be one way of distinguishing (more or less tendentiously) music now from music in the tradition, and what it says is that there are no longer known structures which must be followed if one is to speak and be understood. The medium is to be discovered, or invented out of itself.

If these sketches and obscurities are of any use, they should help to locate, or isolate, the issue of Pop Art, which is really not central to the concerns of my paper. Left to itself it may have done no harm, its amusements may have remained clean. But it was not made to be left to itself, any more than pin ball games or practical jokes or star-

lets are; and in an artistic-philosophical-cultural situation in which mass magazines make the same news of it they make of serious art, and in which critics in elite magazines underwrite such adventures—finding new bases for aesthetics and a new future for art in every new and safe weirdness or attractiveness which catches on—it is worth saying: This is not painting; and it is not painting not because paintings *couldn't* look like that, but because serious painting doesn't; and it doesn't, not because serious painting is not forced to change, to explore its own foundations, even its own look; but because the *way* it changes—what will count as a relevant change—is determined by the commitment to painting as an *art*, in struggle with the history which makes it an art, continuing and countering the conventions and intentions and responses which comprise that history. It may be that the history of a given art has come to an end, a very few centuries after it has come to a head, and that nothing more can be said and meant in terms of that continuity and within those ambitions. It is as if the various anti-art movements claim to *know* this has happened and to provide us with distraction, or to substitute new gratifications for those well gone; while at the same time they claim the respect due only to those whose seriousness they cannot share; and they receive it, because of our frightened confusion. Whereas such claims, made from such a position, are no more to be honored than the failed fox's sour opinion about the grapes.

4. I have been saying that what the modern puts in question is not merely, so to speak, itself, but its tradition as a whole. Without allowing this to become problematic, one will, for example, suppose that "organization" of some more or less indefinite description, is essential to art. So I used Krenek and Caro as examples which I hoped would bring that supposition into question: If Krenek's work fails to be music, this proves not merely that "organization" is not a sufficient condition of art—which we ought to have learned from Beckmesser as well as from his progeny; it suggests that we do not know what to look for as organizing a piece of music, nor what the point of any particular organization is supposed to be. Since Caro's work succeeds in being sculpture, the received notion of organization pales in a more obvious way: I do not say that it has become completely irrelevant but only that it is completely problematic. So far as "organization" just means "composition," his pieces have about the

same degree of organization as a three-legged stool. (Some will suppose that therefore a three-legged stool is a candidate for sculpture, and exhibit it. Well and good; look one over.) To say what "organization" means in reference to his work would be to say what organization consists in there.

## II

Whatever the distances between our philosophical and aesthetic sensibilities and tolerances, there are several further points at which it still seems to me reasonable to have hoped that what I wrote would have helped my commentators to some caution with their several certainties. Margolis makes me say, and say "angrily," that "... the new music 'expresses . . . contempt for the artistic process'" (p. 99); whereas what I said expressed this contempt was not "the new music," but two particular *theories* or apologies which are offered in defense of certain new music (supra p. 204). This slip is distressing, because the oblique and shifting relations between an art, and its criticism, and philosophy, is a major theme of the entire paper. Having summarized me, he begins his objections by (1) mentioning "the ideological battles which must be waged by artists *engagés*," and (2) taking it as his "clue about the new electronic music that composers have dispensed with the keyboard by taking the entire range of sound (now technologically available for the first time) as their materials." He concedes (3) that "they have eliminated . . . notation and performance and improvisation in this regard," suggesting that they are "composing musical sculptures" (pp. 99-100). Taking these points in turn: (1) In what sense are composers and painters *engagés*, and why *must* ideological battles be waged by them? I suggested that composers, in obvious ways the least *engagés* of artists (in the normal, lately fashionable sense of that term), had become the most embattled artistically, and I took this as characteristic of the musical community now. To say, as if it is obvious, that artists "must" wage ideological battles, obscures the particular phenomenon I wanted to make surprising, that composers have come to feel compelled to defend their work in theoretical papers, a phenomenon I take, in turn, to be characteristic of the kind of work they are compelled to produce. It is, moreover,

a phenomenon that has a recognizable and datable beginning in its modern form, with Wagner's writings in the middle of the nineteenth century. (2) To speak, as if in explanation, and with satisfaction, of "the entire range of sound now technologically available" is simply to accept the cant of one of the embattled positions, with no suggestion as to why that position has been opted for. (3) In *what* regard have notation, performance, and improvisation *not* been eliminated; and is this elimination of significance? When Margolis goes on to ask whether what is thereby "composed" may be called "musical sculptures," he astonishingly turns to the reader to find the answer, instead of giving his own; but since his phrase is baked up for the occasion, and since the only point in serving it would be to express an insight or temptation he has discovered in himself and therefore wishes us to test in ourselves, what can one conclude from his avoiding any response to it, but that there was nothing on his mind? So he has in fact given *no* suggestion about how this new access of the entire range of sound may or may not relate to music.

It may be true, as Beardsley says, that "Tolstoy at least knew what he was doing, for he was a radical aesthetic reformer, and understood very well that there is no more severe way to condemn works of art than to say that they are not even art at all" (p. 107). But one is not confident that Tolstoy's motives in his writings about art are justly seen when they are put as "condemning works of art"; for first, Tolstoy's point is that these works are not art, and second, he is condemning far more than putative works of art. Moreover, his condemnations seem mild compared to other ways in which art can be condemned, e.g., politically or religiously or simply through steady indifference—indeed, one of his motives, perhaps the most fundamental, was exactly to rescue genuine art (on anybody's view) from its condemnation to irrelevance, or to serving as morsels for the overstuffed, or as excitements for those no longer capable of feeling. Whatever Tolstoy understood very well, the denial that certain putative works of art are art at all is a criticism characteristic of, only available to criticism within, the modern period of art, beginning in the nineteenth century. Apart from Tolstoy and Nietzsche, other representative figures in this line would be Kierkegaard and Baudelaire, and Ruskin and Arnold.

## III

I had wanted to bring more data to the issues of intention and seriousness and sincerity, but Beardsley finds that the phenomena which I say force the issue of intention, instead finally lay it to rest (p. 106). Here we do seem flatly incomprehensible to one another. However intractable the issue has been, one is dragged back over it again, faced with the alternatives Beardsley proposes: what we are to notice in "music (narrowly speaking)" is, roughly, rhythm and/or melody (p. 107); and what we are to listen for in "music (broadly speaking)"—i.e., in that part of it which is not music (narrowly speaking)—are "any traces of musical worth" (p. 109). I find that I can imagine listening to almost anything (which is audible, or in motion) for some trace of musical worth—except precisely those works which I accept as *music* (unless the context is one in which I am convinced that a piece of music is for the most part without a trace of musical worth). "Musical worth" is explained as "patterns of inner relationship that give it shape, notable regional qualities that give it character" (p. 109). But one can find or produce things of that description virtually at will, e.g., with hand claps, feet taps, and the sound of spoons tinkling; I am not on such grounds moved to call them music, however entertaining the proceedings. (They may be *related* to music in various ways, e.g., the way a design, say of a room, may be related to some painting.) What is missing from the characterizations of both the narrow and the broad is the sense that the thing one is listening to, listening for, is the *point* of the piece. And to know its point is to know the answer to a sense of the question "Why is it as it is?" It *bears explanation*, not perhaps the way tides and depressions do, but the way remarks and actions do. And a question I meant to be raising in my paper was: Is there any reason other than philosophical possession which should prevent us from saying, what seems most natural to say, that such questions discover the artist's intention in a work? I gave a number of reasons for thinking that the philosophical prohibition against saying this is poorly or obscurely conceived, and others meant to show why it seems lucidly true, i.e., cases in which it is in fact right. The appeal to intention can *in fact* be inappropriate or distracting or evasive, as it can in moral contexts; no doubt it frequently is in some of the work of the literary historians



and aestheticians opposed by the New Criticism. It is one irony of recent literary history that the New Criticism, with one motive fixed on preserving poetry from what it felt as the encroachment of science and logical positivism (repeating as an academic farce what the nineteenth century went through as a cultural tragedy), accepted underrunningly a view of intention established, or pictured, in that same philosophy—according to which an intention is some internal, prior mental event causally connected with outward effects, which remain the sole evidence for its having occurred.

This seems to underlie the following sort of remark: "Tolstoy's criteria of genuineness fail for well-known reasons—most decisively because the sincerity of the artist is seldom verifiable. Was Shakespeare sincere when he wrote *Macbeth* or Sonnet 73? Who can say?" (p. 106). Is that a rhetorical question? And does it mean, What difference does it make? But why ask it rhetorically? When I said that modern art forced the question of seriousness and intention and sincerity, I thought the implication clear enough that the issue was not forced in earlier art, and I suggested reasons for that: e.g., that conventions were deep enough to achieve conviction without private backing. If the question is a real one, what is the answer? Is it that *nobody* can say, because there is no verification available for any answer? But that assumes we know what "verification" would look like here. Beardsley refers to "well-known reasons" for the failure of such considerations. He may have in mind the sort of considerations pressed by him and W. K. Wimsatt in their well-known article, "The Intentional Fallacy":

One must ask how a critic expects to get an answer to the question about intention. How is he to find out what the poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem.<sup>4</sup>

It is still worth saying about such remarks that they appeal to a concept of intention as relevant to art which does not exist elsewhere: in, for example, the case of ordinary conduct, nothing is more *visible* than actions which are not meant, visible in the slip, the mistake, the accident, the inadvertence . . . , and by what follows (the embarrass-

ment, confusion, remorse, apology, attempts to correct . . . ). Of course we may not know what is happening in a given case: the boxer who connects and wins may have meant to miss and throw the fight. We may have to go outside the punch itself to find this out, but then there is no question what kind of evidence will be relevant. Now, how is it imagined we are to discover the artist's intention—when, that is, we are told that there is no way inside the poem of verifying it? Are we supposed to ask the poet, or interview someone who knows him well? But the problem is: How is anything we learn in such ways to be identified as the intention of *this* work?

I had suggested that a certain sense of the question "Why this?" is essential to criticism, and that the "certain sense" is characterized as one in which we are, or seem to be, asking about the artist's intention in the work. If this is correct, then these are plain facts, true descriptions which depend on knowing what kind of objects poems are and what kind of activity criticism is. The philosopher, hearing such claims and descriptions, has his ancient choice: he can repudiate them, on the ground that they *cannot* be true (because of his philosophical theory—in this case of what poems are and what intentions are and what criticism is); or he can accept them as data for his philosophical investigation, learning from them what it is his philosophizing must account for. Beardsley's procedure is the former, mine the latter. According to Beardsley's, when a critic inquires about intention, seriousness, sincerity, etc., he is forced outside the work. My point is that he finds this true because of his idea of where an intention is to be searched for, and because he has been reading unhelpful critics. For the *fact* is that the correct sense of the question "Why?" directs you further *into* the work. In saying that this, if true, is a fact, I mean to be saying that it is no more than a fact; it is not an *account* of objects of art, and intention, and criticism, which shows the role of this fact in our dealings with art.

I said that it is not merely a bad picture of intention that makes this seem false or contentious or paradoxical, it is also a bad picture of what a poem is. It is the picture of a poem as more or less like a physical object,<sup>5</sup> whereas the first fact of works of art is that they are

<sup>4</sup> "Judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine. One demands that it work. It is only because an artifact works that we infer the intention of an artificer. 'A poem should not mean but be.' A poem can be only through its *meaning*—since its medium is words—yet it is, simply, *is*, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant" (*Ibid.*, p. 4).

<sup>5</sup> "The Intentional Fallacy," in W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954; paperback, 1958, 1967), p. 4.

meant, meant to be understood.<sup>6</sup> A poem, whatever else it is, is an *utterance* (outer-ance). It is as true to say of poems that they are physical objects as to say of human actions that they are physical motions (though it is perfectly true that there would not be an action unless somebody moved, did something). But it is pointless to pursue this discussion in the absence of concrete instances of works and criticism to which each philosophy undertakes responsibility. So let me simply claim that apart from the recognition that one's subject, in art, is the intentionality of objects, one will appeal, in speaking of these objects, to sources of organization (rhyme schemes, scansion patterns, Baroque "structure," sonata "form," etc.) in ways which fail to tell why *this* thing is as it is, how it means what it does.

But of course I was claiming, in my paper, more than this. I was claiming that in modernist art the issue of the artist's intention, his seriousness and his sincerity, has taken on a more naked role in our acceptance of his works than in earlier periods. This is an empirical claim, depending on a view of the recent history of the arts and on my experience of individual works of that period. I discussed the concept of intention only long enough to try to head off the use of a philosophical theory which would prevent, or prejudice, an investigation of this claim. In this, I was evidently unsuccessful. So let me give one further suggestion about why, if the considerations I raised are relevant, they have not been confronted.

The New Critics' concentration on the poem itself, in a way which made the poet's intention or sincerity look irrelevant, had an immediate liability in their relative neglect of Romantic poets and their successors. (In itself, this is hardly surprising: particular poetic theories are directly responsive to *certain* poetic practice.) My claim can be put by saying that the practice of poetry alters in the nine-

<sup>6</sup>Someone will feel: "No. The first fact about works of art is that they are *sensuous*—their impact is immediate, not intellectual." There are times when that will be what needs emphasis, because that will be the thing we have forgotten. And I do not wish to deny what it means. But it only says why there is a problem. If words always supplied only information, if paintings were always diagrams or illustrations, if music were always the heightening of serious, or light, occasions; there would be no problem (or not the same problem) about whether, or how, the work is meant. Again, it should be considered that this emphasis on sensuousness is fully true only during *certain* moments in the arts, for example when pleasure is its motivation (when, say, gardening was still considered, as in Kant, one of the arts; and that motivation, in varying intensities, will no doubt continue in the major arts when gardens and gardening no longer serve it sufficiently). Still, if one wishes: The first question of aesthetics is: How does that (sensuous object) mean anything?

teenth and twentieth centuries, in such a way that the issues of intention and seriousness and sincerity are forced upon the reader by the poem itself: the relation between author and audience alters (because the relation between the author and his work alters, because the relation between art and the rest of culture alters . . .). Specifically, the practice of art—not merely the topic of art, but as it were the replacing or internalizing of its pervasive topic—becomes religious. When Luther said, criticizing one form in which the sacraments had become relics, "*All our experience of life should be baptismal in character,*" he was voicing what would become a guiding ambition of Romanticism—when religious forms could no longer satisfy that ambition. Baudelaire characterizes Romanticism as, among other things, intimacy and spirituality. This suggests why it is not merely the threat of fraudulence and the necessity for trust which has become characteristic of the modern, but equally the reactions of disgust, embarrassment, impatience, partisanship, excitement without release, silence without serenity. I say that such things, if I am right about them, are just facts—facts of life, of art now. But it should also be said that they are grammatical facts: they tell us what kind of object a modern work of art is. It asks of us, not exactly *more* in the way of response, but one which is more personal. It promises us, not the re-assembly of community, but personal relationship unsponsored by that community; not the overcoming of our isolation, but the sharing of that isolation—not to save the world out of love, but to save love for the world, until it is responsive again. "Ah, love, let us be true to one another . . ." We are grateful for the offer, but also appalled by it.

I say "we," and I will be asked "Who?" I will be told that it is not Mr. Arnold speaking to us, but a mask of Arnold speaking to . . . anyway not to us: we don't so much hear his words as overhear them. That explains something. But it does not explain our responsibility in overhearing, in *listening*: nor his in speaking, knowing he's overheard, and meaning to be. What it neglects is that we are to *accept* the words, or refuse them; wish for them, or betray them. What is called for is not merely our interest, nor our transport—these may even serve as betrayals now. What is called for is our acknowledgment that we are implicated, or our rejection of the implication. In dreams begin responsibilities? In listening begins evasion.

Not that it is obvious how intention and sincerity and seriousness

are to be established in art, any more than in religion or morality or love. But this is just what I have against the discussions I have read and heard on these topics; they are unreal in their confidence about what establishing an intention, or an attitude, would be like. A man asks me for a candlestick from the mantel and I bring it to him; he looks and says, "No. I meant the other one." Did he? Does his saying this establish his intention? Not in the absence of an understandable continuation. If he simply puts the thing on the floor beside him and I cannot imagine to what point, nor can I imagine what he may want to use it for later, nor can I see what its difference is from the one he rejected, I am not going to say that he *meant* this one rather than the other one. (Perhaps his intention was to demonstrate the completeness of my subservience, obeying pointless requests.) What the continuation will have to be, how it establishes the intention, will vary in range and complexity, with the context.

Take an example from the making of movies, which is relatively free of the ideologies and attitudes we have constructed for the major arts. On my interpretation of *La Strada*, it is a version of the story of Philomel: the Gineietta Masina figure is virtually speechless, she is rudely forced, she tells her change by playing the trumpet, one tune over and over which at the end fills the deserted beach and whose purity at last attacks her barbarous king. Suppose I want to find out whether Fellini intended an allusion to Philomel. If I ask him, and he affirms it, that may end any lingering doubts about its relevance. Suppose he denies it; will I believe him, take his word against my conviction that it is there? In fact, my conviction of the relevance is so strong here that, if I asked Fellini, I would not so much be looking for confirmation of my view as inquiring whether he had recognized this fact about his work. One may ask: "Doesn't this simply prove what those who deny the relevance of intention have always said? What is decisive is what is there, not what the artist intended, or said he intended." What this question proves is that a particular formulation of the problem of intention has been accepted. Because in what I have been urging, this alternative between "what is intended" and "what is there" is just what is being questioned. Intention is no more an efficient cause of an object of art than it is of a human action; in both cases it is a way of understanding the thing done, of describing what happens. "But you admit that Fellini may not have known, or may not find relevant, the connection with Philomel. And if he didn't

know, or doesn't see the relevance, surely he *can't* have intended it. And yet it is there, or may be."

What is the relation between what you know (or knew) and what you intend to be doing? It is obvious enough that not everything you know you are doing is something you are intending to be doing (though it will also not be, except in odd circumstances, something you are doing unintentionally either). To take a stock example: you know that firing a gun is making a lot of noise, but only in special circumstances will making the noise be (count as) what it is you are intending to do. But perhaps that is irrelevant: "It is still true that anything you can be said to have intended or to be intending to do is something you know you are doing. Either Fellini did or did not know of the connection with the Philomel story. If he did not know then it follows that he did not intend the connection. If he did know then that connection may or may not have been intended by him. In all these cases, what he knew and what he intended are irrelevant to our response. It is what he has *done* that matters." But it is exactly to find out what someone has done, what he is responsible for, that one investigates his intentions. What does it mean to say "Making the noise was not his intention"? What it comes to is that if asked what he is doing he will not answer (or one will not describe him as) "Making noise." That aspect of what he is doing is obvious, or irrelevant—there is no reason to call attention to it. But suppose there is. There is a child asleep in that house; or terrified by noise; or the noise is a signal of some kind. Suppose he hadn't known. Very well, it can be pointed out to him; and now, should he go on firing the gun, *what* he is doing will be differently described. We might say: his intention will have altered. And yet he would be *doing* the same thing? But the point is: when further relevances of what you are doing, or have done, are pointed out, then you cannot disclaim them by saying that it is not your intention to do those things but only the thing you're concentrating on. "Unintentionally," "inadvertently," "thoughtlessly," etc., would not serve as excuses unless, having needed the excuse, you stop doing the thing that keeps having these unintentional, inadvertent, thoughtless features.

"But doesn't this just show how different the artist's situation is? There isn't going to be some obvious description like 'Firing a gun' to describe what he's done, and even if there were, you couldn't *alter* his intention (whatever that means) by pointing out the further rele-

vances of his work, because in looking for the artist's intention the point surely would not be to get him to stop doing what he is doing, or do something else; his intention is history, forever fixed—whatever it was, it has had *this* result—and the work it has created has consequences only in terms of that work itself. You say that if a man doesn't realize the concomitants of his action you can point them out; but before you point them out they were not known and hence cannot have been a part of *that* intention." The artist's situation is indeed different, but it doesn't follow that what we are interested in, being interested in his work, is not his intention (in the work).

Suppose Fellini hadn't thought of Philomel. How am I to imagine his negative response to my question—when, that is, I find that it doesn't matter what he says? Am I to imagine that he says, "No. I wasn't thinking of that," and there the matter drops? But one would not accept that even in so simple a case as the firing gun: he may not have thought of it before, but he had better think of it now. I am not aesthetically incompetent (any more than I am morally incompetent when I point out that a child is asleep or terrified); I know what kind of consideration is artistically relevant and what is not, as well as anyone else, though I may not be able to articulate this relevance as well as useful critics can, much less create the relevance in a work of art.

I say he had better think about it once I point out the connection; but obviously he may refuse to, and he *can* refuse because this is not a moral context, there is no new practical consequence forthcoming. But there are consequences: if he doesn't see the relevance, I am shaken in my trust in him as an artist. He may not care about that, but I do, and that is all I am concerned with here. Suppose he does acknowledge the relevance, but hadn't thought of it until it was pointed out to him. Wouldn't that in fact just show that he can't have intended it?—So intention cannot be what secures the relevance of one's descriptions of a work.

Now the difference between the artist's case and the simple physical action becomes critical. Everything depends upon how the relevance is, or is not, acknowledged. Suppose he says, "Of course! That's just the feeling I had about my character when I was making the picture. Odd the story never occurred to me." Or: "How ironic. I had tried to translate that story into a modern setting several times with no success. Here, without realizing it, I actually did it." In such

cases I am inclined to say that the relevance is intended. (Here, one will have to investigate ordinary cases in which, e.g., dissatisfied with the way you have put something—a phrase, or a vase—you are offered a new alternative and, accepting it, reply: "Yes, that's right. That's what I meant"—when, by hypothesis, *that* alternative had not occurred to you.) At a glance, one might take the second case ("without realizing it") as one of inadvertence rather than intention. But that would be true only if the allusion was one he hadn't wanted, doesn't want now. (In the land he has made, the artist is entitled to everything he wants, if it's there.) Nor am I prompted to add that the intention was *unconscious*. That may well describe certain cases, but its usefulness will have specifically to be made out. What would prompt it here is the idea that intentions must be *conscious*—the same idea which would prompt one to deny that Fellini can have intended the reference if it hadn't occurred to him at the time, if he hadn't been aware of it. But what is the origin of the idea that intentions must be conscious? It is not clear what that means, nor that it means anything at all, apart from a contrast with unconscious intentions; and it is not clear what that means.

Part of its origin is doubtless the fact that you can't be intending to do a thing if you don't *know* you're doing it, or rather don't know how what you are doing could have that consequence (if you didn't know about the child, you can't have intended to frighten it). But what does "knowing it" consist in? Certainly one can know a thing without bearing it in mind (fortunately—otherwise there wouldn't be room for much), or having it occur to you at regular intervals. It makes sense to say Fellini intended (that is to say, Fellini can have intended) the reference to Philomel if he knew the story and now sees its relevance to his own, whether or not the story and its relevance occurred to him at the time. (I do not say that under these conditions he did intend it; knowing is at best necessary, not sufficient for intention. Whether he did intend it depends on what he *did*, on the work itself.) This may still seem puzzling; it may still seem, for example, that no present or future revelation can show what an earlier intention was.

But why is this puzzling? Perhaps it has to do with our, for some reason, not being free to consider what "acknowledging an intention" is, or what "being shown relevance" is. Suppose the man had known about the child but had forgotten. Reminded, he is stunned,

and quickly acknowledges his forgetfulness. Without that, or some similar, acknowledgment, the excuse/apology would not be acceptable—would not *be* an excuse or apology. Suppose he has conventionally forgotten; confronted, he may vehemently deny that he had known, or that it matters; or vehemently acknowledge that he had intended to wake or terrify the child. Vehemence here measures the distance between knowing a thing and having to acknowledge it. I imagined Fellini's acknowledgment of the relevance as coming with a sharp recognition, a sense of clarification. Otherwise, it is not an acknowledgment of something he intended or wanted. He might simply have been putting me off.

Perhaps the puzzlement comes from the feeling that it is not enough for him merely to have *known* the story; the knowledge must have been *active* in him, so to speak. And doesn't that mean he must have been aware of it? Two considerations now seem relevant:

1. It is not necessary for him in fact to have been aware of it; but it is necessary that he can *become* aware of it in a particular way. The man firing the gun can become aware of those further relevances only by being told them, or by further empirical exploration. But the artist becomes aware of them by *rethinking* himself of them; by, as it were, trying the intention on himself now. This difference is what one would expect. For there is no relevance to point out, in relation to a work of art, which the artist has not himself created. It is he who has put the child there and made it sleep or filled it with fear.

2. It is, or ought to be, obvious enough that an artist is a man who knows how to do something, to make something, that he spends his life trying to learn to do it better, by experience, practice, exercise, perception . . . . And as is familiar with any activity: you can be an expert at it (know how to do it well) without knowing (being aware of) what it is you do exactly; and certainly without being able to say how you do it. (There are obvious problems here. Can you know how to play the clarinet if you can't play the clarinet? You might know how—without being able to—well enough to teach someone to play. Only you won't, as part of your teaching, be able yourself to *demonstrate* the correct way. In certain cases one might wish to say that you couldn't *teach* someone how, but you could *tell* him how.) Suppose someone noticed that Babe Ruth, just before swinging at a pitch, bent his knees in a particular way. Obviously he may *not* be aware that he does this, but does it follow that it is not done inten-

tionally? If there is reason to believe that bending his knees is an essential part of what makes him good at batting—an explanation of how he does it—I find I want to say that he does it intentionally; he means to. I would not say this about the way he habitually tugs at his cap before gripping the bat, unless it were shown that this was connected with the way he then grips it—e.g., he has some secret substance in the bill of the cap, or it serves to fix his fingers in some special position. Nor would I say this about some action which hindered a performance—the way, for example, one of his team mates drops his shoulder as he swings; he may invariably do this, and be perfectly aware of it, and working hard to get over it: it is unintentional, he doesn't mean to. But all of this is hardly surprising: intending to do something is internally related to wanting something to happen,<sup>7</sup> and discovering an intention is a way of discovering an explanation. That one is locating intention is what accounts for the fact that a piece of criticism takes the form of an interpretation.

I do not wish to claim that everything we find in a work is something we have to be prepared to say the artist intended to put there. But I am claiming that our not being so prepared is not the inevitable state of affairs; rather, it must be exceptional (at least in successful works of art)—as exceptional as happy accidents, welcome inadvertencies, fortunate mistakes, pure luck.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the actions of artists produce more such eventualities than other forms of human conduct (hence, the poet as dumb Bard, or wild child, and the function of the Muse). But then they are also fuller of intention (hence, the artist as genius, visionary).

Given certain continuations I may want to say: Fellini didn't intend the reference, but, being an artist he did something even

<sup>7</sup> This is one among several points at which acknowledgment is due G. E. M. Anscombe's *Intention* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1957), a work which no one involved in this topic will safely neglect.

<sup>8</sup> The "must" in "must be exceptional" is a point of Transcendental Logic. It doesn't mean: Invariably, most of what is in the object is intended. It means: Our concept of a work of art is such that what is not intended in it has to be thought of, or explained, in contrast to intention, at the same level as intention, as the qualification of a human action. Of course not every portion of an interpretation will be directed simply to pointing out something which is there, i.e., something the artist may or may not have intended. Sometimes it will be directed toward helping us appreciate what has been pointed out. Sometimes this will involve evaluating the intention—e.g., as cheap, childish, courageous, perverse, willful; sometimes it will involve evaluating its execution, as, e.g., crude, brutal, thoughtless, inattentive; sometimes it will involve comparing the given work with another one whose intentions are different.

better; he re-discovered, or discovered for himself, in himself, the intention of that myth itself, the feelings and wants which originally produced it. Or I may simply say: So it wasn't intentional. I shall be surprised, perhaps led to go over his work again to discover whether I still find the connection as powerful as I did at first; perhaps it is merely a superficial coincidence, and blocks me from a more direct appreciation. But if I do still find it useful, I shall still use it in my reading of the film, not because his intention no longer guides me, but because what it does is exactly guide me (as it guided him). To say that works of art are intentional objects is not to say that each bit of them, as it were, is separately intended; any more than to say a human action is intentional is to say that each physical concomitant of it is separately intended—the noise, that grass crushed where I have stood, that branch broken by the bullet, my sharp intake of breath before the shot, and the eye-blink after . . . . But all these are things I have done, and any may become relevant. In tragedy, consequence altogether outstrips the creature's preview, and nature and society exact their price for a manageable world; in comedy, the price is born by nature and society themselves, smiling upon their creatures. In morality, our interest in intention, given the need to confront someone's conduct, is to localize his responsibility within the shift of events. In art, our interest in intention, given the fact that we are confronted by someone's work, is to locate ourselves in its shift of events. In all cases, the need is for coming to terms, for taking up the import of a human gesture. In all, I may use terms to describe what someone has done which he himself would not use, or may not know. (Here the problem of oblique contexts is explicitly relevant.) Whether what I say he has done is just or not just is something that will require justification, by further penetration into what has happened, what is there. What counts is what is *there*, says the philosopher who distrusts appeals to intention. Yes, but everything that is there is something a man has *done*.

Games are places where intention does not count, human activities in which intention need not generally be taken into account; because in games *what happens* is described solely in terms set by the game itself, because the consequences one is responsible for are limited a priori by the rules of the game. In morality, tracing an intention limits a man's responsibility; in art, it dilates it completely. The artist is responsible for everything that happens in his work—and not

just in the sense that it is done, but in the sense that it is *meant*. It is a terrible responsibility; very few men have the gift and the patience and the singleness to shoulder it. But it is all the more terrible, when it is shouldered, not to appreciate it, to refuse to understand something meant so well.

I break off with one further way in which questioning the artist may work itself out. Instead of considering my inquiries with due solemnity, he may tell me to mind my business, or my manners; or deliberately mislead me. (So may his work. And of course by now the artist has dropped out anyway; it is his work we are interviewing.) What would this signify? Perhaps that he has said all he can, conveyed his intentions as fully as his powers allow, in the work itself—as if to say: "You want to spare yourself the difficulty of understanding me, but there is no way else to understand me; otherwise it would not have cost me such difficulty to make myself exactly understood." One might have been aware of that oneself, and not meant to be getting out of difficulty, but asking help to get in further. Why, in those circumstances, would the artist turn away? In *those* circumstances he might not. But then claiming to be in those circumstances is a large claim, and how does one justify it? Asking anyone about his intentions is asking whether he is meeting his responsibilities, asking an explanation of his conduct. And what gives one the right? In morality the right is given in one's relation to what has been done, or to the man who has done it. In art, it has to be earned, through the talent of understanding, the skill of commitment, and truthfulness to one's response—the ways the artist earned his initial right to our attention. If we have earned the right to question it, the object itself will answer; otherwise not. There is poetic justice.