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Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction. By
NOËL CARROLL. Routledge. 1999. pp. ix + 273.

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CARROLL'S book, *Philosophy of Art*, appears in the series Routledge Contemporary Introduction to Philosophy. The series is intended for students, but should be accessible also to nonspecialists, and aims at introducing the reader to 'the main problems, positions and arguments of contemporary philosophy' (inside cover). Carroll's book, which can well be used as a textbook for undergraduate students, fits nicely into this series.

In the introduction, Carroll not only lays out the structure and the aim of the book, he also gives an account of the method he is using. He adopts the 'standard approach' of analytic philosophy, the 'method of necessary and sufficient conditions' (p.7). As a whole, the book is composed of five chapters, and in each of these a definition of art is proposed, and arguments in favour of and in opposition to it are discussed. The discussion is then always guided by the

question whether the definition under consideration provides necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be a work of art. Carroll examines whether every work of art fulfils these conditions and whether everything that fulfils them is a piece of art. His method is often rather schematic, even repetitive and tiring, but it makes things clear. Using this method, Carroll proceeds sometimes in general and argumentative ways, and sometimes by considering particular examples, mainly of twentieth-century art. He thus introduces at the same time both the techniques of analytic philosophy and major topics in philosophy or art.

Carroll is well aware that the method of analysing concepts and definitions, by asking whether they provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for works of art, is questionable. But he maintains, and is indeed successful in showing, that this method assists in making discoveries, and that even where this method seems to fail, it still helps us to 'flush out data and distinctions that enrich our understanding of art' (p. 10). The method is therefore at least of heuristic value, if not more than that.

The five chapters of the book discuss art first as representation, secondly as expression, thirdly as form, fourthly as aesthetic experience, and, finally, the fifth and last chapter faces problems of definition and identification of all in general, which includes neo-Wittgensteinian, institutional, and historical perspectives. In this last chapter, Carroll advances historical narration as 'the primary way in which we sort artworks from other things' (p. 15) and argues in favour of narration as being superior to the concept of family resemblances. That Carroll does not restrict himself to applying methods of analytic philosophy but is at the same time aware of the historical and dialectical aspects of 'philosophical evolution' (p. 17) certainly makes his book more valuable.

In chapter 1, Carroll shows that the relation of representation to art is an old and enduring one. Starting with Plato and Aristotle, imitation and resemblance were considered to be the main factors in art. This lasted well into the late nineteenth century, when philosophers became increasingly aware of art as less concerned with

imitation or resemblance and more concerned with aboutness. Works of art by Picasso and Duchamp are still about something. Ready-made and found objects such as *Fountain* and *In Advance of a Broken Arm* possess aboutness; they have semantic content, and the artist intended them to mean something. Even avant-garde works of art that defy interpretation have a subject, and mandate interpretation. On the other hand, pure orchestral music and nonrepresentational architecture seem to resist a definition of art in terms of aboutness. There is much art that is not about anything. Pure decoration is another example. Such artworks can be simply beautiful, 'beneath interpretation', and 'solely in virtue of the perceptual impact they make on us' (p. 32).

Although 'representation-type theories of art are inadequate' (p. 33) to address all possible cases, much art is indeed representational, and visual art is especially likely to be representational. In the remainder of the chapter, Carroll therefore further discusses the notions of resemblance, denotation, illusion, convention, and symbols in relation to pictorial representation, thereby advancing more and more refined lines of argument, and improving the definition of pictorial representation.

Carroll's argumentation is clear and brings out and discusses well several crucial problems of representational theories; however, his historical account of Plato and Aristotle, brief as it is, somewhat oversimplifies the Greek understanding of representation and drama. According to Carroll, 'the primary examples of art in their day were imitative'. What the Greeks saw in the theatre were 'imitations of heroes and gods and persons and actions—pieces of stone that looked like men, dancers that mimed human action, and plays that re-enacted important mythological events' (p. 21). Carroll draws the conclusion that 'the theory of art that Plato and Aristotle presupposed was fairly well motivated by what was available to them. It is only through the benefit of hindsight that we can see how far off they were' (p. 22). Here Carroll certainly does not do justice to the insights and the beauty of Greek drama. Greek actors wore masks. They presented idealized characters. Sophocles and Euripides did not try to imitate everyday life but conveyed

something about human nature in general, something about fate, or conflict of duties, for instance. They did not give mere 'imitations of heroes and gods and persons and actions'. They did not merely 're-enact important mythological events'. They also created them. And it is not necessary to move into the twentieth century to become aware of this.

In chapter 2, after having revealed several problems and limitations of representation-theoretic accounts of works of art, Carroll examines expression-theoretic accounts. Such accounts take art as expressive of emotions like sadness, joy, or fear. They became 'especially pronounced at the end of the eighteenth century, perhaps as a result of Romanticism and the rise of absolute music', and they 'resulted in a notable subjective turn in artistic practice throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' (pp. 104-105). As a representative version of the expression theory, Carroll gives the following: 'x is a work of art if and only if x is (1) an intended (2) transmission to an audience (3) of the self-same (type-identical) (4) individualized (5) feeling state (emotion) (6) that the artist experienced (himself/herself) (7) and clarified (8) by means of lines, shapes, colors, sounds, actions and/or words'. He then discusses objections to this definition, such as that the artist need not experience any emotion at all, that art might be commissioned, that art might be conceptual and about ideas, or designed to project vague feelings, or even be the result of chance procedures (aleatoric art). This all makes sense, but one should not overlook that the entire second chapter, comprising about fifty pages, is tacitly built on a presupposition, namely that

when philosophers of art talk about what poems express, they are not thinking broadly about the communication of ideas. For them, what gets expressed are certain human qualities (also known as anthropomorphic properties)—notably, emotional tones, moods, emotively colored attitudes, and the like. That is, the concept of expression that concerns philosophers of art is the one in evidence in sentences like: 'This artwork expresses joy'. (p. 80)

But this seems to me to be too narrow a con-

ception of 'expression'. Carroll does not say why he thinks that philosophers of art have such a conception. I think they do not. Kant, for instance, writes much about the expression of aesthetic ideas, and these are not mere feelings. Carroll later on observes that 'much art is expressive, but it is not the case that all art is expressive of emotion. A great deal of twentieth-century art is preoccupied with ideas, rather than emotions' (p. 105). Unfortunately, he makes this comment merely on the side and at the end of the chapter. And once again there is no need to look at the twentieth century to make this observation. A glance at almost any kind of classical art, Greek drama for instance, would do at least as well. Despite this criticism, the second half of the chapter contains interesting accounts of metaphors, points of view, and configurations as constituting expressive properties.

The third chapter examines definitions of art in terms of formal aspects, such as possession and exhibition of significant form. Carroll confronts these definitions with particular works of art, such as works by John Cage and Robert Morris, which are formless but nevertheless art, and fascist works, the problematic content of which the formalist tends to overlook. Carroll furthermore criticizes this definition for being obscure, because it is not clear at all what a 'significant' form should be. Nevertheless, his argument against formalism, that it cannot account for demon figures as art because such figures 'will not frighten anyone away, if they simultaneously invite the appreciation of significant form' (p. 117), is not convincing. One can be haunted by demon figures, and thus indeed be simultaneously frightened away and kept spellbound by them.

Looking at the chapter as a whole, Carroll's discussion of form, content, function, and appreciation is well written, and students should find reading it interesting and worth their while.

Art and aesthetic experience is the topic of the fourth chapter. Works of art should have the 'capacity to afford aesthetic experience' for which 'content-oriented' and 'affect-oriented' accounts can be given. Accordingly, Carroll discusses the concepts of unity, diversity, intensity, disinterestedness, sympathy, and contemplation.

Carroll again shows that neither of these accounts, provides necessary and sufficient conditions for art. He proceeds by arguing that aesthetic properties are in any case response-dependent, and that they are neither merely detected nor merely projected. The convergence of aesthetic predication might be explained by common conceptual frameworks obtained through social conditioning. But, so Carroll argues, this presupposes that aesthetic properties are objective and detected (p. 197). Here I do not find his arguments conclusive. Carroll, if I did not miss it, never mentions Kant in the entire book. But at this point, Kant's notions of free play and purposiveness would be useful for the discussion, because these two notions explain the relationship between aesthetic properties and our aesthetic experience of them. In the object of aesthetic evaluation, aesthetic properties are those properties that we find to be suitable for a free play of our two faculties of cognition, namely imagination and understanding. Such a free play essentially goes along with pleasure or displeasure, and concerns cognition in general (*überhaupt*).

The last chapter introduces three additional definitions of art: one associated with neo-Wittgensteinianism and two associated with contemporary perspectives, namely the institutional theory and the historical definition of art. The reader has clearly seen by now how all previously discussed attempts to define art have failed, and one might think that art simply cannot be defined at all. This feeling was common among philosophers of art in the 1950s, when Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance became popular. But that wide acceptance did not last long, and Carroll successfully shows why this notion failed to provide a solution to the problem. The institutional theory, as proposed by George Dickie in the early 1970s, can accommodate the required openness of a concept of art just as well as neo-Wittgensteinianism can, but it does not rely on manifest properties of the works of art as the concept of family resemblance does. Instead, it takes into account the genetic connections of a work of art in the network of society and culture. According to the historical definition of art proposed by Jerrold Levinson, something is a

piece of art if whoever made it had the intention to proffer it for what are well-precedented and historically acknowledged criteria for judging whether or not something is a work of art. Finally, Carroll himself gives an account, namely a narration-theoretic one. One can identify something as a piece of art by 'telling a story that links the contested work to preceding art' (p. 252). Carroll favours this account as the 'most plausible one' (p. 264).

If one chooses to read Carroll's book in order to learn about the philosophy of art, one should be aware from the start that Carroll chooses a certain approach, a certain 'type of philosophy'. Already on the first page of the introduction, Carroll announces that 'the type of philosophy that we will be exploring in this book is often called *analytic philosophy*. In fact, the title of this book could be accurately expanded as the *Analytic Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (p. 2). A systematic approach in the style of analytic philosophy suits the aim of the series, namely to present 'the main problems, positions and arguments of contemporary philosophy'. But it also carries the risk of overlooking valuable insights of those philosophers in the past who have also reflected about art. Such philosophers as Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, to name just a few, wrote about art, and they did not always try to give necessary and sufficient conditions of works of art. How can Carroll be sure that he does not miss anything essential by using his analytic approach? Some of these philosophers, like Nietzsche, had taste themselves, and not only wrote about art, but at the same time produced pieces of art. They thus brought us very close to art itself, creating vivid images and causing us to create such images ourselves. They told stories and employed the idea of historical narration. Hence, Carroll's own contribution at the end of this book, his idea of 'historical narration', which he calls his 'pet idea' and his 'brainchild' (p. 10), might not be new at all. Some philosophers of the past may have been aware of this idea. Not only this, they may even have carried it out.

Carroll's book is to be highly recommended as a textbook for undergraduates. It is well organized, and the arguments are well presented and stimulating; however, with its sole focus on

possible definitions of art, it gives almost no account at all of classic philosophies of art. This might lead a student to believe that philosophers of the past had nothing worthwhile to say about art. It would therefore be advisable to supplement Carroll's book with another that is rich in its historical accounts. In the same year as Carroll's book, there appeared Gordon Graham's book *Philosophy of Art*. That book, for instance, might serve such a purpose.

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