

OF FAMILY RESEMBLANCES AND AESTHETIC DISCOURSE

The ensuing analysis examines the view that in a descriptive sense it is impossible to specify the necessary and sufficient conditions for saying that something is a work of art. This thesis, as expounded by Weitz, Kennick, and others, has recently encountered criticism which misses the substance of the way it relies upon aspects of Wittgenstein's later thought. A review of the literature ever since Weitz' pioneering work suggests a need for surveying the manner by which Weitz adopts Wittgenstein's insights for his own designs. Hopefully what can be shown is that the view under investigation is far from acceptable, since the basic philosophical pre-suppositions upon which it is founded, that is, family resemblances and the open concept, neither necessarily nor provisionally suggest the conclusions which Weitz' supporters and critics alike find unavoidable. For the Wittgensteinian influence which is the foundation of this theory is itself remarkably unclear, making its unreflecting adaptation yield the production of less than tenable conclusions. Even in most recent discussions dealing with the definition of art, the nature and significance of Wittgenstein's thought upon Weitz is accepted as is, without careful consideration of its very tenability.¹

The analysis is presented in three sections. First, an exposition of Weitz' position and the effectiveness of Mandelbaum's criticism of it. Secondly, an examination of Weitz' position from the view point of the notion of family resemblance, and whether the latter is as clear a notion as some suppose. Finally, a view of aesthetic discourse which looks beyond Weitz' attempt by seeing such discourse as a phenomenon immanent in the very *practice* of a particular language, which cannot be meaningfully spoken of in terms of family resemblances or apart from the particular language it manifests itself in.

I

Weitz proceeds on the observation that though works of art have certain specifiable characteristics in common, there is no

single characteristic or set of characteristics which all works of art possess. Hence one can speak of certain resemblances between works of art, but not about so-called "essential" characteristics *all* such objects have. The similarities between instances of art are seen as family resemblances, referred to by Wittgenstein when attempting to illustrate the non-essentialistic nature of ordinary discourse. At this juncture one must note that the idea of family resemblance is considered by Wittgenstein in contexts which involve the use of language. Weitz, however, often expounds his position by weaving in and out of contexts which involve either art objects *themselves*, or the *speaking about* such objects.² Hence where Weitz speaks of family resemblances, one must keep in mind that he is considering how such resemblances are manifested in both contexts. Thus just as various art objects may exhibit certain similar characteristics, without their all sharing any one single characteristic, so also various instances of talk about art exhibit family resemblances as well. However, in Weitz' view it is futile to search for essential properties for all such objects or modes of discourse, as aestheticians since Aristotle have attempted.³

The persistent difficulty is seen by Weitz as being both epistemological and logical. For he is interested in exploring the grammar of the word "art", as it is influenced directly by the variety of objects which are recognized or referred to when the word is employed. Aestheticians have failed to realize that the sense of discourse involving art is never predictable, in that the "expansive" and "adventurous" nature of art itself defies an essentialistic definition, and points to the inescapable "wide-open texture" of art as a concept. Thus the logic or "grammar" of the word "art", or of aesthetic discourse generally, cannot be something which can be formalized for all possible cases. Rather, one can only notice the resemblances between different cases in which the word "art" is being used.⁴

Consequently, when it comes to deciding whether or not something new is to be called art, one must either extend or totally alter the prevalent meaning (use) of the word. This is why when aestheticians are called upon to defend their definition and uses of the term, they cannot appeal to clear and direct evidence to justify their pervasive claims. For there will always be the

possibility of including some new and different thing to all that which has been covered by the term before. Seeing that there always is an exception, their theories of art's meaning, or what art refers to, can never be open to objective proof. On the other hand, where these theories are interpreted to be a priori true (in an analytical sense), conflict invariably arises as to whether such theories conform with the everyday use of discourse. At most Weitz would view this approach to theory construction in aesthetics as the setting forth of arbitrary definitions of what art is supposed to encompass. Generally, theories of art stem from theorists seeking to answer the question "What is art?" instead of trying to answer the more realistic question "How is the word "art" used?". The latter involves studying the workings of discourse with respect to the word's use. The former has been taken as implying (however erroneously) a single answer, or one which is essentialistic in nature.⁵

In understanding Weitz' view one must see it as distinct from issues involving the nature of aesthetic qualities, e.g., whether they are affective or directive. For Weitz does not deal with the phenomenology of aesthetics, but with the logic of aesthetic discourse. Keeping in mind as well that Weitz is developing his position by applying Wittgenstein's insights into the workings of language, one must consider what he has to say on a linguistic level of analysis.⁶ Thus the issue one is faced with when considering the adequacy of Weitz' view is whether or not his conception of aesthetic discourse is in fact correct. For he does not concentrate specifically upon the problem of how to conceive of aesthetic objects as such, but how they are to be spoken about. Even in contexts where he considers objects of art in themselves, he views them as given. Clearly, the questions which supposedly concerned Wittgenstein in *Lectures and Conversations* were matters which did not have a direct influence upon the presentation of Weitz' view point. Rather, he is more directly influenced by the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, who views language as a collection of games one plays with words. For Weitz then, aesthetic discourse is a particular kind of language game, whose rules are uniquely flexible, and open to an apparently endless variety of transformations.

Weitz' thesis of course has received amplification by a number of writers. To mention but a few, W. E. Kennick observes that

aestheticians in doing art criticism have erroneously assumed that they must apply or work with universal standards of analysis. Their assumption is that art is basically a monolithic subject for analysis, wherein its variety does not come to influence the standards of criticism one brings to it.⁷ Again, Weitz' argumentation is seen as underlying Beryl Lake's criticism of Croce's theory of art. Lake observes that Croce must assume, in defining art as "intuitive knowledge", that his definition is a priori true (in an analytical sense), since Croce cannot empirically illustrate what he means by intuitive knowledge. On the other hand, if it is taken to be an a priori statement, it surely does not reflect how the term is widely used. For other aestheticians use the term differently, making the latter an arbitrary definition at best. Similarly, W. B. Gallie employs Weitz' line of attack to criticize essentialists for presupposing that in order to define art, they must know what it is *in essence*. Gallie prefers a much more experimental approach to the problem, so as to determine how art manifests itself in different ways, and then to proceed to more rigorously define art as a concept.⁸

Alternatively opposition to Weitz' position centers mainly on how it is based upon Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance. Mandlebaum, borrowing from Helen Harvey, argues that to say works of art or uses of the term "art" exhibit family resemblances, but that there is no single characteristic or set of characteristics which all works of art have in common, really does not clarify the situation. For the similarities which are at issue here do not in themselves manifest *genetic* resemblances. Surely there can be accidental resemblances between things which have absolutely no genuine bond between them, and hence they cannot be said to have a "family" resemblance. Mandlebaum argues the sense of saying that art objects, or different instances of aesthetic discourse, exhibit a family resemblance, and that for this reason one uses the word "art" to refer to them. One does not know which way to go with the idea of family resemblance in this situation. Does it imply inherent relationships or accidental appearances? Weitz' failure to face this question gives him no right to speak in terms of a "logic" for the word "art". If one is dealing with genetic relationships here, where are the criteria for determining that there are genetic similarities to consider?⁹

Mandlebaum, however, is all too eager to claim that when Wittgenstein spoke of family resemblances he meant genetic relationships, in a biological sense. Scrutiny reveals that this is hardly defensible. When speaking of resemblances Wittgenstein repeatedly asks us to look for and "see" these resemblances in the very use of language. This is not a matter of specifying genetic linkage, but of simply noticing the function of discourse. On the resemblances between language games, Wittgenstein makes the following observation :¹⁰

"Don't say : 'there must be something common, or they would not be called 'games' . . . but *look* and *see* whether there is anything common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat : don't think, but look ! . . ."

Quite clearly, in his criticism Mandlebaum seems to be concentrating only upon similarities manifested in family resemblances, to the point of interpreting these similarities as genetic identities, and thus misconstruing Wittgenstein. His emphasis upon how they must somehow reflect a family tie amongst various exemplars of games, suggests that Mandlebaum views these resemblances as designating essentialistic properties. This they cannot do. For by saying that family resemblance involves the exhibition of similarities, etc.- Wittgenstein does not mean to say that because of this, things exhibiting a family resemblance to each other cannot be totally unlike each other in many other ways. Such differences are also part of all that is involved in the notion of family resemblance. Wittgenstein's very directive above for *not* thinking but rather looking for these resemblances, indicates that one should not approach them with any preconception concerning their inherent nature (e.g. genetic linkage), but merely to observe *that* they are present.

On the other hand, Mandlebaum's interpretation of resemblances misses an essential point of development in Wittgenstein's thought, namely that the latter has moved away from an essentialistic conception of language as expounded in the *Tractatus*. In fact the very notion of noticing a resemblance between various language games is precipitated by Wittgenstein's recoiling from his earlier

conception of ordinary discourse as a structure of atomic propositions, whose logical nature constituted the essence of such discourse.¹¹ How incongruous is it then to argue that family resemblances must in some way reflect genetic linkages? Most recently, W. G. Bywater has emphasized the fact that Weitz and Kennick adopt Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance since they, like Wittgenstein, are reacting to closed systems, which in their case are the a priori theories in aesthetics.¹²

Mandlebaum's second main argument against Weitz seems equally inadequate. The former argues that Weitz has not provided any evidence by which to demonstrate how the formal requirements necessary for arriving at any theory are *logically incompatible* with the concomitant requirement that however conceived, art objects must be said to exhibit an inherent novelty and creativity.¹³ Here it is hard to see what sort of evidence would satisfy Mandlebaum on this point, other than what Weitz and others have already pointed to. For if he is challenging the view that aesthetic expression necessarily of itself alters any established conception of art, then Mandlebaum has overlooked both the *fact* of novelty and creativity in such expressions, and one's manner of talking about it. Basically, supporters of Weitz' view rely upon the evidence that aesthetic expression invariably involves controversy prior to recognition (which is usually a matter of saying whether some particular object can fit into some accepted view of art), and artists themselves seem to hold as a primary objective an intentional departure from traditional modes of expression. Hence, on an empirical level, Weitz argues that works of art do not seem to follow a pre-established path, which will predetermine how these objects will manifest themselves. Consequently, this spontaneous nature of art is reflected in the way one comes to speak about it. For example, one finds that manifestations of art engender the use of descriptive terms like "novel", "revolutionary", "creative", etc. which are antonyms of terms connected with the attempt to define, e.g. "determine", "establish", "circumscribe", etc.¹⁴ Essentially, Weitz is saying that defining is an activity which by its very requirements cannot formalize the ever-changing subject matter of art. Apart from pointing to the very puzzling fact of trying to define art, it is difficult to fathom what Mandlebaum would accept as proof for the impasse Weitz has recognized. Since

Mandlebaum does not really question the way Weitz sets up the problem, the logical impossibility the latter points out seems unavoidable.

II

Thus Weitz' thesis is not reduced to paralytic inaction by the thrust of Mandlebaum's argumentation. However, Weitz is vulnerable on some of the points the former concentrates upon, though for significantly different reasons. In reviewing Weitz' position it is convenient to consider it from different vantage points. First, it is fruitful to consider how he treats aesthetic objects in relation to games. Secondly, the acceptability of his conception of aesthetic discourse is open to dispute, because of certain deficiencies in Wittgenstein's own conception of family resemblance. Thirdly, a theme permeating the whole of Weitz' position—namely that one can perceive how the variety manifested in works of art themselves influences the diversity in talk about aesthetic objects, leaves a great deal unexplained. Perhaps this latter point in itself provides most dramatic evidence for the shortcomings of Weitz' view.

First, however, it is appropriate to consider how Weitz employs the notion of games so as to call attention to the fact that art objects and aesthetic discourse seem to reflect the same traits exhibited by games. For such an investigation touches upon Weitz' fundamental conception of aesthetic objects. Interestingly, Weitz observes that one comes to see that an activity is like some familiar one called a "game", yet one also realizes that it is apparently impossible to unequivocally define what games are. Similarly, one comes to see how a work is like some other creation, which is recognized as "art", but one also realizes that it is impossible to arrive at a definition of art. Hence there are two points of similarity between games and art, which are reflected in discourse concerning them. On the one hand, games and art each constitute collections of things which exemplify family resemblances within each collection. On the other hand, it seems apparently impossible to define what kinds of things should constitute these collections. In view of this, Weitz argues in a way which strongly suggests that whatever Wittgenstein had to say about games and their various resemblances can be freely applied to discourse about art.¹⁵

Significantly, Wittgenstein himself did not make definite the above crucial association between games and art. Perhaps he realized basic differences between these two areas. Focussing upon these differences reveals the really fragile connection between these two thinkers. For instance, essentially, games are activities, which require that one or more persons *do* something. Art, on the other hand, deals largely with objects, specifiable entities considered in terms of the spatial temporal characteristics they exhibit. Moreover, the activity which a game involves, that is the participation or the playing, *is* the game. However, the activity which is involved by art, insofar as say the appraising of such objects is concerned, is surely something after the fact of having the object. Nor can it be said that the making of such objects is the activity to which the word "art" refers to, since the exact way of creating such objects is often unknown to the beholder. Even in the cases of poems and novels, the reader is presenting to himself through his own reading of the material the object, that is, the theme or the story the author endeavors to convey through his writing. It may be objected that symphonies, plays, etc. all involve performance, and this is the activity which art refers to. Such argumentation is equally untenable, however. For in cases requiring performance by actors, etc. one is really concerned with the *effect* of what they are doing, that is, the space-time event beheld by the audience. It is not the acting as a personal inner feeling within the actor which is observable here, but the projected appearance of the acting as an externalized spatial event. The latter again is an object in the sense that it is understood and criticized in relation to how its various facets intergrate over a span of time and space to form a consistent objective whole. Hence the observation that games refer to activities, but art apparently exclusively deals with objects, is a point which does not distort the way in which this distinction seems to underly ordinary discourse about such matters.

It may be pressed that art objects also involve activities, insofar as they intimately involve the perceptual acts of seeing, hearing, etc. which come to constitute or make possible the aesthetic experience. This, however, is hardly persuasive since it calls attention to the most fundamental pre-requisites of all experience, and thus does not inforce any thing but the basic fact that one

must have a reasonably conscious mind in order for there to be *any* awareness. The latter of itself does not justify the conclusion that conceptually art is somehow like games. Even where one was to put forth the view that aesthetic qualities are affective, and thus become manifest by the interplay of sense stimulation and perceptual activity, one still cannot claim that art and games are thus on an equal par, both involving activity. For the affective qualities result from an inner and therefore subjective reaction, whereas the activity a game involves is the public and therefore objective participation of one or more individuals. Hence though it can be said in a very general sense that some sort of activity is involved at particular stages in both cases, it is still not the same sort of activity. Furthermore, the so-called affective qualities which come to constitute aesthetic experience are still qualities *of* something, however, that something or object is completely manifested to the perceiver. Hence it appears that one cannot escape referring to art as something, though constructed of inter-related aesthetic qualities, whereas games *are* activities.

If the above can be accepted as a substantial basis for distinguishing between games and art, then a second major divergence between these two areas emerges, for games, as activities, invariably seem to involve rule-directed behaviour, whereas this is not the case with objects of art. However simple a game may be, the person (s) participating must adhere to some pre-established guidelines so as to achieve the goal, win, etc. Indeed, the way in which one determines whether or not an activity should be recognized as a game of some kind is to see whether or not it conforms to some rules of action, however, simple or complex they may be. In short, the determination of whether or not a rule is being followed becomes an important criterion for saying if an activity is or is not a game. There is no rule, however, which when followed or violated allows one to say that such and such is or is not a work of art. Even in cases where a critic speaks of the "correctness" in a certain style of say architecture or painting, one must not interpret such statements as dealing with rules or normative standards for the generation of art. As F. J. Coleman recently pointed out, considerations dealing with the correctness of a certain style invariably involve determining whether or not a certain aspect of an artistic creation

properly relates to the whole work in a certain way.¹⁶ However, this is not a matter concerning a rule for creating art, but involves the homogeneity of a particular work in relation to some established way of making such objects. Correctness of style is then a notion which comes into play where one endeavors to *recreate* art in some way, and thus involves a kind of indirect reference to already existent aesthetic objects. Hence, the idea of the rule directed activity which animates games, as contrasted to the absence of such controlled activity in the case of art objects, appears to hold up to careful scrutiny.

Moreover, the differences between games and art are reflected in the reasons one has for their respective definitions. Significantly, one expects that a definition for games should enable one to identify such activity as uniquely different from other kinds of activity, as say surgery or farming. Furthermore, it is expected that, however it turns out, a definition of games should enable one to distinguish such activity from random or haphazard activity.¹⁷ The definition of games then provides a means of making a selective and accurate identification. In defining art, however, the purpose of the definition is not only to identify the object as of a particular sort, but also to point out that the object is valued, which in turn becomes a standard or criterion by which to compare other similar objects. For whether it is a justified practice or not, objects of art once recognized as such acquire an honorific status, which projects them as in some sense exemplars of what art *should* be.¹⁸ Yet, though an activity is defined as a game, that particular game does not necessarily itself become a model by which to identify other games. Hence, there is room for saying that definition for art is more demanding, insofar as it should also be able to explain why the object is somehow special. This added requirement is not evident in the case of a definition for games.

In view of the above, it is highly tenuous to argue that art, as considered in ordinary discourse, is like or similar to games. Yet Weitz does proceed on the assumption that both exhibit a similarity, so that the apparent open-texturedness of art is justifiable *since* games are open-textured. At crucial junctures in their arguments, Weitz and his supporters claim that there is an analogous relationship between games and art.¹⁹ Moreover,

when Wittgenstein attempted to explain the workings of language he alludes to the games within language in a metaphorical way to show how certain forms of communication are like the playing of a game. Yet Wittgenstein does not say that there is a precise similarity between games and linguistic forms of life.²⁰ In articulating his theory, however, Weitz is interpreting Wittgenstein's allusion to games and language activity analogically, and thus he presupposes an exact relationship between games and art or discourse about art. The evident differences indicated above between these two underscore that at best their relationship cannot be analogical, but perhaps metaphorical.

If one were to allow the view that art is like games only in a metaphorical sense, then a basic rewording of Weitz' thesis must be undertaken. For it is art *in terms of* the language which is appropriate to it which is said to be a kin to the playing of a game. There is an awkwardness in not seeing that art in itself cannot be compared to an activity, as if both were the same sort of thing. As it has been pointed out, art refers to various things or entities which are considered in terms of their total intergration. Conversely, games are activities in which one or more take part in. The two cannot be treated in the same way, without their differences coming into consideration. Apparently, it seems more appropriate to say that aesthetic discourse is in some metaphorical sense somewhat like the playing of a game. In this re-presentation of Weitz' view at least one is comparing two activities, rather than an object (work of art) and an activity (the playing of a game). Thus as a form of activity, discourse about art is seen as an open-textured phenomenon, which defies any general definition. This restricts Weitz' manner of speaking indiscriminately in contexts involving art objects *per se*, and discourse about such objects. However, this does not distort Weitz' position, since he and others who subscribe to his view argue that aesthetic discourse is a particular kind of linguistic activity, which one comes to recognize through familiarity with the language one uses. Having thus reduced Weitz' viewpoint to a more intelligible version, it is appropriate to consider how he can justify the so-called "recognition" of aesthetic discourse as such.

The question here can be put simply yet forcibly as follows : how does one come to recognize linguistic forms of life as those

which are peculiar to art? Clearly Weitz and his followers wish to escape the allusion to any sort of stable reference points, i.e. criteria, which would justify the recognition of such forms of life.²¹ For criteria of even a provisional sort would bring them closer to the essentialism they are seeking to repudiate. Surely to say that such and such characteristics are the objective grounds for aesthetic discourse is to move towards the establishment of necessary and sufficient conditions for such discourse. Yet this is the dead end Weitz sees as the undefensible presupposition of all aesthetic theorizing. On the other hand, Weitz cannot go in the direction of maintaining that aesthetic discourse functions in the same way as emotive discourse, as perhaps the word "pain" functions in ordinary discourse. Surely his earlier rejection of the emotivist theory in aesthetics would prohibit his claiming that the word "art" works in the same way to replace some private experience, known only to the perceiving subject. More recently, though commenting upon a latter manuscript not actually authored by Wittgenstein (*Lectures and Conversations*), F. J. Coleman also disowns as too simplistic the possibility that one can interpret aesthetic discourse solely upon an emotive level of analysis.²² Again the logical consequence of the emotivist interpretation would be that one cannot really know any public sense of the word "art". Yet Weitz and others speak of the meaning of this term as something which is exemplified by various cases of linguistic use. However, whatever the nature of its meaning, "art" is not allowed criteria of recognition. Understandably, to allow such criteria would incur undercutting the thesis of the "adventurous" and "expansive" nature of art. Thus, one is faced with the internal contradiction of saying that the logic of the word "art" is recognizable in different language games, yet the ever-changing meaning of "art" itself prohibits the possibility of establishing criteria for the recognition of its meaning.

The difficulties surrounding the exegesis of how aesthetic discourse involves a particular kind of language activity are inherited by Weitz through his uncritical acceptance of Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance. For where he talks of the application of general terms, Wittgenstein asks us to look for and see the resemblances in its use, and cautions us not to insist that there *must* be a resemblance. Yet what is this resemblance?

Does it result from pointing to specifiable denotata, or is it manifested through the intercrossings of various language games themselves. In his article "Something Common", Robert J. Richman points to the difficulties of the notion of family resemblance as expounded by Wittgenstein in the *Investigations*, and his insights can be applied to the present discussion with telling results.²³

Richman states that in seeing the limitations of the notion of family resemblance one must keep the following two issues distinct. First, the question of whether or not general univocal terms are meaningful because they allude to "something common" between them is itself an ambiguous question, since what is going to count as the "something common" is difficult to explicate. Secondly, the preceding question is an issue separate from the fact that certain general terms are purposefully ambiguous.²⁴ This is to say that certain general terms like "warm" or "bald" are used in ways which presuppose that they are not going to be used to refer to certain precise phenomena, but rather to degrees of the appearance of certain things.²⁵ It can be safely said that aesthetic discourse is not purposefully ambiguous, since one usually presupposes he knows what sort of things *should* be covered by its terms. For even Weitz argues that there is a logic to aesthetic discourse, and hence it is not inherently ambiguous. Thus the second issue Richman points to does not pertain to the present analysis.

The first point Richman brings out concerning the nature of the meaning of univocal general terms is actually the central issue which undermines the notion of family resemblance, and thus proves useful to the discussion at hand. Richman observes that the Wittgensteinian point that family resemblance is a phenomenon one sees in the use of language is difficult to explain. For is such resemblance the result of the interweaving of certain properties of linguistic activity, or does it arise from a direct reference to particular *denotata*? The latter kind of answer would open up the possibility of introducing subsistent entities which are the "meaning" of general univocal terms. Wittgenstein, however, seeks to present an alternative to this essentialistic conception of meaning, so as to distinguish general terms from simple terms, such as 'red'. In doing this he introduces the notion of family resemblance to suggest an alternative to strict deno-

tative meaning. His remedy, however, is not very useful since there is no clear way of explaining what constitutes family resemblance. This is to say that since such resemblance is not tied down to any reference point, one cannot specify the kind of things (the "something common") which would satisfy saying that there is such a resemblance. Even holding that the intercrossings of usages as the meaning for general terms is inadequate, since one would still not be able to specify the precise points of interdiction on pain of advocating a referential basis of meaning. Furthermore, if one were to attempt strengthening the notion of family resemblance by arguing that *any* sequence of the denotata of some general term say T would come to constitute the something common making possible the family resemblance which is the meaning of T, then still one cannot continue to maintain a clear distinction between the nature of the meaning of T and that of a simple term say S. For one could always point to the quite obvious relationship of "being next to" which both respective denotata of T and S exhibit, and then argue in a way suggesting that T and S are alike in the nature of their meaning.²⁶

Richman's interest is of course directed towards showing the weakness of the notion of family resemblance, and how on Wittgensteinian terms it cannot fend an important distinction between the meaning of simple and complex terms. Yet Richman's insights pertain to Weitz' conception of the role of family resemblance in aesthetic discourse. For where the latter speaks of the recognition of family resemblance, which makes aesthetic discourse somehow unique, the meaning of such "recognition" is problematic. It clearly cannot involve a reference to denotata, since Richman's analysis shows that family resemblance cannot, as a particular type of meaning, involve specific reference points. Hence what is one to look for where he turns to the specific family resemblance which determines that one is dealing with aesthetic discourse? The question here has no answer because it fails to achieve a meaningful interrogative. For since the notion of family resemblance does not involve referring to anything, and since also connotatively family resemblance as a notion does not seem to unambiguously connote anything, one is really unable to claim that he identifies any consistent set of linguistic phenomena as *the* family resemblance which aesthetic discourse exemplifies.

Pursuing Richman's analysis indicates that if one were to argue that family resemblance is somehow directly the result of the intercrossings of usages, then it is in essence abstracted from various forms of linguistic life. Indeed, where Wittgenstein admonishes the reader not to insist that there are resemblances, but to look for the possibility of such a resemblance, he appears to suggest that the resemblance itself is somehow inferred by the language user in the special way the discourse proceeds. Yet if the resemblance peculiar to aesthetic discourse is in any way inferred, then it should be open to some sort of exemplification, and if not then it is somehow intuited. Yet to allow for demonstration would bring him closer to some sort of essentialism. Alternatively, to say that such resemblance is somehow intuitive, i.e. private, makes the fact of inter-subjective communication in aesthetics difficult if not impossible to explain. Thus Weitz' allusion to the notion of family resemblance forces him either to a form of essentialism, which he desires to avoid, or to an intuitionism, which renders impossible any explanation of such discourse. Towards the end Weitz speaks of peculiar "criteria of recognition" for discourse dealing with the arts, though these criteria are taken to be neither necessary nor sufficient. Yet what kind of criteria can the latter be? He alludes to them as bundles of properties which are somehow the excuse for applying a descriptive use of the word "art". Yet these properties, conditions, etc. seem to suggest stable reference points, though Weitz would deny that they must be present in order to recognize something as art. The ambiguity here has not been seen by recent analysis.

The thrust of Richman's analysis also has interesting implications for the manner in which Weitz argues, weaving as he does in and out of contexts involving art objects and aesthetic discourse itself, taken meta-linguistically. As it has been shown, Weitz apparently believes that somehow the very variety of art works becomes reflected in talk about art, and possibly contributes to the open-texturedness of the latter. Yet if such discourse is somehow intimately connected with the physical phenomena it deals with, then these phenomena become criteria or sources of explication for the use of the terms which concerns such discourse. However this alternative cannot be

admitted since it again leads towards stable criteria of reference, which is a form of essentialism. This not only suggests that one cannot argue in terms which intercross contexts dealing with art objects and contexts involving discourse about such objects, but a basic Weitzian pre-supposition that art objects somehow influence the open-texturedness of aesthetic discourse becomes less tenable. The nature of the connectedness between the two contexts of art object and aesthetic discourse cannot be consistently confirmed without tying down the notion of family resemblance in aesthetic discourse to some sort of reference.

Perhaps most striking is the point that according to Richman one cannot really specify where there is *no* family resemblance. This is to say that even if one were able to specify in some way that some modes of linguistic behaviour exhibit a family resemblance, the notion of family resemblance because of its inherent opacity, does not in itself provide any internal means by which to say that there is no family resemblance with respect to other modes of linguistic activity.²⁷ The ramifications for what has been said about aesthetic discourse thus far are quite significant. For one can point to nothing in the so-called "logic" of aesthetic discourse which would explicitly exclude saying that such and such linguistic activity is not aesthetic discourse. Here one may ask what sort of "logic" can this be which provides no internal means of expressing contradiction? Without a means of saying that something is not aesthetic discourse, Weitz cannot defend his general thesis that there is a particular kind of discourse which *is* aesthetic discourse.

The line of criticism suggested above differs from Mandlebaum's in that: (1) it concentrates upon a distinction between games (as activities) and art objects, and (2) it suggests a serious problem in explaining how one comes to *recognize* a particular kind of discourse as aesthetic discourse. Neither Weitz nor Mandlebaum care to even consider the implications of these two points, and both presuppose that they can speak of aesthetic discourse interchangeably with aesthetic objects, with the latter somehow influencing aesthetic discourse. Though Mandlebaum alludes to Richman's article, the former misses the depth of implication in Richman's work, concentrating instead on a too literal interpretation of the notion of "family resemblance". Both

Mandlebaum and Weitz fail to see when and how the conjuring trick of the fact of aesthetic discourse has taken place. As it has been repeatedly brought out above, to recognize discourse dealing with art presupposes that one already has criteria for the application of the term. This means that one already has some knowledge of such discourse or language of art. Yet how does this knowledge by recognition come about? One seems to be here in the same position as that described by Wittgenstein himself, where he says that language, like a spider's web, dissolves at the very touch of explication. Hence to even suggest that aesthetic discourse is a special kind of discourse since it reflects in its many forms a particular pattern, or resemblance, is to assume already that one knows what such discourse is supposed to be. How else can the pattern be recognized? Thus the delicate *fact* of language is torn by the crude requirements of recognition implicit in the very articulation of the notion of family resemblance.

III

Some attempt should be made perhaps to pursue the question concerning how discourse about art does come about. In doing so it is interesting to return to Wittgenstein once more, specifically to his last known manuscript: *On Certainty*, for some illuminating insights. In the latter he endeavours to clarify some basic issues involving the problem of knowledge. In a passage where he considers the implications of G. E. Moore's views concerning how it can be said that one knows matters of immediate experience, Wittgenstein observes that to say that one knows some statement to be true implies that one can produce "compelling" reasons to bring to bear so as to prove that it is true.²⁸ This insight has interesting ramifications when applied to issues of how one comes to recognize aesthetic discourse. Hence, how can one say that it is *known* that some sort of linguistic behaviour is aesthetic discourse? What sort of compelling reasons can he bring forth to *prove* what is supposed to be known? Weitz and those who subscribe to his view would surely insist that some sort of proof should be forthcoming before one can accept any account of one's knowing that something is aesthetic discourse. Proof for these analysts would be, as has been repeatedly stated,

some allusion to family resemblances. Yet apart from the lucidity of the latter notion, the new difficulty here is to make sense of the very attempt at *proving* the knowing that something is aesthetic discourse. The latter seems to defy justification by any sort of proof, because it is a form of linguistic behaviour whose certainty one learns *along with*, in conjunction with, the very learning of a natural language.

It seems more accurate to say that one believes some particular linguistic behaviour is aesthetic discourse. Belief here is taken in a Peircean sense, involving action based upon success in a given context of language use.²⁹ Its certainty arises from the very practice of language, rather than from proving that aesthetic discourse must somehow correspond to certain exterior facts in the spatio-temporal world. One might say that aesthetic discourse is an aspect of the spontaneous development of a culture's language, and thus cannot be *proven*, as if some claim were open to constant doubt and always must be verified by appealing to evidence. To ask for such verification is to miss its significance, insofar as this is *not* a matter of there being offered a choice of say either the acceptance of a general definition someone suggests, or adopting some vocalized mode of speech. Rather, aesthetic discourse is a form of linguistic life which is inseparable from one's actual success in communicating in a culture.

To speak of aesthetic discourse in terms involving one's believing entails *pragmatic-semantic* considerations. This is to say that the belief here is by someone, who, on the basis of prior success in his use of language in some contexts, believes that the same mode of language will work (i.e. communicate) on a future occasion. Thus the language user is related to the language behaviour he employs from the view point of its success or its being true for communicating in a given context. There is an added flexibility in this approach towards analysing aesthetic discourse. For if factors within the believer's environment bring about a change so that new or innovative manifestations of language use are required to speak about new phenomena in art, then the language user must adopt such new modes of discourse so as to communicate about aesthetic objects. Hence one can say that as an environment undergoes transformations, the aesthetic discourse operative within it also undergoes change. However,

older manifestations of this kind of discourse are not inaccurate or somehow false examples of aesthetic discourse. Rather, the latter once served a purpose, whereas they can no longer serve that purpose again due to the environmental changes. There is not a question of proving one mode of aesthetic discourse is true, whereas another is false. In essence there is no ideal form of aesthetic communication. Apparently, what one has here is a question of what happens to work, for someone, at some particular time, in a certain context.

There is a profound difference between the view expressed above, and Weitz' view involving the recognition of family resemblances. For recognition in the latter view entails the notion of acceptance. This is to say that where Weitz requires that one recognize the peculiar resemblances exhibited by cases of aesthetic discourse, he is supposing that there are patterns in discourse, which one can accept as indicative of a particular kind of language activity. Thus the idea of recognition, in its involvement of acceptance, also implies alluding to proof, or "compelling reasons", to justify the act of accepting. However, the aesthetic discourse being accepted is viewed by the acceptor *inscriptionally*, that is, the specific linguistic form of life is taken as a syntactic phenomenon, or a sequence of syntactically concatenated and verbalized expressions. Thus, in Weitz' view, the language user is related to the language he is supposed to recognize as aesthetic discourse from the perspective of a *pragmatico-syntactical* relation. Thus the act of recognition, with its implicit notion of acceptance, does not have the language user employing any linguistic expression. Most likely,, the reason for considering aesthetic discourse in such a syntactical manner is due to Weitz' strict adaptation of Wittgenstein's idea of *looking for* family resemblances. Apparently, the notion of looking entails "looking at", which turns the phenomenon of aesthetic discourse into something which is *to be* observed, rather than an activity which one gradually learns about through his practice of the language.

In essence Weitz and his followers are saying that so variable is the pattern of aesthetic discourse, that no essentialist theory thus far is flexible enough to explain it. Their approach then sees aesthetic discourse from the outside, as *de facto* present.

The latter is different from the approach which considers the belief factor which is operative in the very practice of such discourse.

Moreover, generally it may be said that a fundamental reason as to why aestheticians have had difficulties in presenting their positions, whether essentialist or of any other variety, is because they endeavour to find a single theory to cover many different objects, originating in various culture, at different times. Even Weitz, in his criticism of other theories of aesthetic discourse, finds fault because they are not complete enough to cover *constant* exceptions. Hence he proposes that one observe language in aesthetic contexts so as to achieve a freedom from exceptions manifested by the very variety of art. However, particularity evidently should be preserved in any account of discourse about art. Art critics tend to seek out similarities between art objects, rather than considering the place these kinds of objects have in different culture. For example, one often finds them assuming that because say an Egyptian mirror is found in an art museum, it is a kind of art, along with other art objects. Hence they seek to discover points of congruence between it and other forms of aesthetic expression. Their approach, however, misses the individuality of the object, the cultural context from which it arose, and the entire linguistic form of life which was sensitive to it.³⁰

One can only suggest in a peripheral manner the kind of factors which enter into the question when discourse about the arts is considered in terms of the beliefs which underlie its success as communication. Evidently, the complexity of the task would take this investigation beyond its intended bounds of indicating the shortcomings of Weitz' general position. One major point, however, suffices to underscore the point of departure between Weitz and the proposed alternative. This is to say that the latter by-passes questions dealing with the justification of recognizing patterns of aesthetic discourse. Rather, it raises the question of why one believes that the discourse he engages in with respect to certain objects will function to communicate with other people. The very thrust of this kind of question will necessitate the introduction of cases in the past where it has worked, as well as the specification of the reasons why it would not or does not work to communicate. The factors which contribute to the development of these beliefs may be quite varied, since the reasons animating the believing may

very well range over a wide area of anthropological factors. There is no presupposing here of what aesthetic discourse is, or what it should be. Rather, the issue becomes why some particular form of communication succeeds.

The emphasis upon noting the particularities within aesthetic communication does not preclude that general statements cannot be made about such discourse. Apparently, the shared fact that *human* communication is operative in diverse *human* environments will manifest points of similarity in the way in which different people talk about art objects. The latter, however, should not become the paramount factor which somehow comes to be the key point of analysis in understanding the nature of aesthetic discourse.

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NOTES

1. Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, also : T. J. Diffey, "What is Art? The Problem of Definition Today," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 11, (1971), 146-147., "Essentialism and the Definition of Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 13, (1973), 105-106.

2. Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 15, (1956), 30-31. (Evident shifting from talk about aesthetic discourse to talk of aesthetic objects themselves is seen in the way Weitz goes from considering the logic of the word "art" p 30, to considering the open texture of art objects p. 31.)

3. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

7. William E. Kennick, "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on A Mistake," *Mind*, 67, (1958), 319-320.

8. William Elton, ed. *Aesthetics and Language*, (Oxford, 1967), 104-105, and 23-24.

9. Maurice Mandelbaum, "Family Resemblances and Generalisation Concerning the Arts," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 2, (1965), 221, also see T. J. Diffey, *Op. Cit.*, 105.

10. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, (Macmillan 1970), 31 e. para. 66.

11. David Pears, *Luding Wittgenstein*, (The Viking Press, 1970) 73-75.

12. William G. Bywater, "Who's in the Warehouse Now?" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, (Summer, 1972), 524-525.
13. Maurice Mandelbaum, *Op. Cit.*, 226.
14. Morris Weitz, D. W. Peetz, *Op. Cit.* 30, also "The Autonomy of Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 8, (1968), 177-178.
15. Morris Weitz, *Op. Cit.*, 31.
16. Francis J. Coleman, "A Critical Examination of Wittgenstein's Aesthetics," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 5, (1968), 259.
17. William E. Kennick, *Op. Cit.*, 320-321.
18. John Dewey, *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, Volume II., John J. McDermott, editor, (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1973), 529.
19. Morris Weitz, *Op. Cit.*, 31.
20. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Macmillan, 1970), 6e-7e.
21. William Kennick, *Op. Cit.* 322-323.
22. Francis J. Coleman, "A Critical Examination of Wittgenstein's Aesthetics," 260.
23. Robert J. Richman, "Something Common," *The Journal of Philosophy*, LIX, (1962).
24. *Ibid.*, 821.
25. *Ibid.*, 824.
26. *Ibid.*, 827-828.
27. *Ibid.*, 828-829.
28. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, (Harper & Row, 1972), G. E. M. Anscombe, and G. H. vonWright editors, 32e-34e.
29. Charles S. Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," in *Pragmatic Philosophy*, (Doubleday, 1966), Amelie Rotary, editor, 7-9.
30. Paul Ziff, "The Task of Defining a Work of Art," in *Contemporary Studies in Aesthetics*, Francis J. Coleman, editor, (McGraw-Hill, 1968), 108.

(The position developed here differs from Ziff's insofar as it concentrates upon the *beliefs* which underlie this particular kind of discourse, rather than the often incalculable consequences of aesthetic discourse.)