



Are Works of Art Affective Artifacts? If Not, What Sort of Artifacts Are They?

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Abstract

Works of art are usually meant to elicit psychological effects from their audiences whereas paradigmatic technical artifacts such as hammers or cars are rather meant to produce physical effects when used. This suggests that works of art and technical artifacts are sharply different entities. However, recent developments in the cognitive sciences and the philosophy of technology have individuated special artifacts, namely cognitive and affective artifacts, which also generate psychological effects. In particular, affective artifacts, which have the capacity to alter the affective condition of agents, seem to share crucial features with works of art. Can we subsume works of art under that kind? I will argue that we cannot. Still, comparing art with affective artifacts will help us to clarify the relationship between art and technology, and to introduce a new category, namely the experiential artifact, which can properly encompass works of art.

Keywords Art · Artifact · Experience · Function · Technology

1 Introduction

Works of art are traditionally contrasted to technical artifacts since the latter have functions that the former seem to lack. In §§ 1–2 I will present and discuss such traditional contrast between technical artifacts and works of art. The recent introduction by philosophers of technology of novel categories of artifacts having psychological functions may lead to believe that works of art can be encompassed in one of those. The categories of cognitive and affective artifacts seem promising in this respect, especially the latter one. In § 3 I will argue that this cannot be the case; works of art cannot be encompassed by such categories. Still, such failure will not lead us back to the tradition of sharply contrasting works of art to technical artifacts. There is a grain of truth in the idea that works of art are sorts of technical artifacts that fulfill psychological functions. To make this grain grow, I will, in the first instance, assess the main attempts in the philosophical literature to endow works of art with functions, to wit, aesthetic and communicative functions. This will be the subject of § 4. Then, in §§ 5–7 I will propose a slightly

different functionalist account according to which works of art can be encompassed in the category of experiential artifacts, which fulfill the function of eliciting experiences from their users. My argument is abductive: I will show that the notion of experiential artifact leads us to a functionalist account of art which is more compelling and explanatorily adequate than those offered by its rivals. In § 8 I will draw my conclusions.

2 Technical Artifacts

According to a popular view in philosophy of technology, technical artifacts are constituted by both their structure and their function, and they perform their function in virtue of their structure (Kroes 2012). The structure of a technical artifact is typically individuated by the way in which concrete elements are organized. Still, there can be abstract artifacts such as computer programs whose structure organizes abstract elements which depend on, but do not come down to, concrete elements (Koepsell 2003). The function, on the other hand, is the effect that the artifact is meant to produce when used according to what Wybo Houkes and Pieter Vermaas (2010) call its “use plan”. Even though an artifact can carry out a variety of functions, the use plan, which can be made explicit through a user manual,

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individuates its primary function, which is its *ratio essendi*, what it is for. Thomasson (2014) casts the use plan as a sort of norm which establishes how the artifact should be used. The use plan, in this sense, selects the appropriate use of an artifact—its primary function—out of possible uses of it. From this perspective, technical artifacts are ontologically twofold entities which are constituted not only by their matter but also by norms depending on the meshing of the makers' intentions and the users' expectations, and emerging from regularity of uses (García-Carpintero 2022).

As pointed out by Simon Evnine (2016), the notions of structure and function can be traced back to the Aristotelian notions of matter and form. Specifically, Evnine revisits Aristotelian hylomorphism by unifying the notion of form with those of origin and function, and by subsuming under the notion of matter not only stuff such as clay or marble, but also more complex structures which the form configures. For example, the matter of a bicycle might consist of wheels, frame, tires etc. while its form is the way in which those components are organized by a certain process of making (the origin), for a certain purpose (the function). Technical artifacts, from this perspective, are “the impress of mind on matter” (Evnine 2016, 100).

Asya Passinsky (2021) proposes a normative variant of hylomorphism in which the form is connected not only to the psychological “impress of mind on matter”, but also to social norms. While Evnine mainly focuses on technical artifacts, Passinsky applies hylomorphism to social objects, arguing that the form is a norm that governs the use of the matter. Hence, social objects owe their existence to both material constitution and constitutive norms. For instance, the form of a border is the norm that establishes whether one is entitled to cross the strip of land that is the border's matter.

From Evnine's perspective, the form originates from the act of creation. From Passinsky's perspective, the form is the norm that prescribes the function. I contend that Evnine's and Passinsky's approaches can be combined by casting the (Evninian) creative act as the main source of the (Passinskyan) norm whereby the function is prescribed. The creative act produces, on the one hand, the structure of the technical artifact and, on the other, crystalizes into a norm prescribing the function. All this paves the way for a unified account of technical artifacts (on which Evnine focuses) and social objects (on which Passinsky focuses). Yet, there are other human-created entities, namely works of art, that seem to resist such unification.

3 Works of Art

Both works of art and technical artifacts are brought into existence by the intentional activity of human makers. They are both, as Evnine (2016, 100) puts it, “the impress of mind

on matter”. They both differ from biological organisms and other chemical or physical entities that are thoroughly independent from mental states. Nevertheless, a gap remains since works of art, unlike technical artifacts, do not seem to be constituted by their function. Alva Noë (2015) casts artworks as “strange tools” which lack a function. Evnine (2016, 129) expresses “a nagging skepticism” about the attribution of functions to artworks. According to Amie Thomasson (2014) technical artifacts are governed by norms that establish their functions while artworks are rather governed by norms that establish their appearances. According to Jonathan Lowe (2014), the identity conditions of technical machines are determined by the scientific principles of engineering while the identity conditions of artworks are rather fixed by the free creativity of artists.

Let me call this “the art-technology problem”, in analogy with the notorious mind-body problem. Following this analogy, I call “monism” and “dualism” the two possible solutions to the art-technology problem. Dualism claims that works of art are peculiar artifacts to be theorized independently of technical artifacts, possibly in the framework of aesthetics, while monism claims that works of art are a kind of technical artifacts to be theorized in the framework of the philosophy of technology. Dualism seems to be more popular than monism not only in analytic philosophy (as suggested by the above-mentioned essays) but also in the continental tradition (see Heidegger 1950; Gadamer 1960; Adorno 1970). Yet, successfully defending monism would have the advantage of unifying technical artifacts and works of art thereby offering a simpler, more elegant and compelling account of human culture. Recent works in the philosophy of technology might be helpful in this respect since they provide us with insights that seem to favor a monist approach to the art-technology problem. I will discuss them in the next section.

4 Cognitive and Affective Artifacts

A basic difference between paradigmatic technical artifacts and works of art is that the former produce physical effects whereas the latter mainly generate psychological effects. However, over the last thirty years, philosophers and cognitive scientists have individuated a special kind of technical artifacts, namely cognitive artifacts, which also are meant to generate psychological effects (see Norman 1991 and 1993, Hutchins 1995 and 1999, Heersmink 2013 and 2016, Casati 2017, Fasoli 2022). Cognitive artifacts are bearers of information which carry out the function of contributing to perform high-level cognitive tasks which involve gathering of information, application of concepts, inferences, and formation of beliefs. In short, they are

“things that make us smart”, as Donald Norman (1993) characterizes them.

Maps are paradigmatic cognitive artifacts since they allow users to perform tasks of orientation, and so are abaci which facilitate tasks of calculation. Since both cognitive artifacts and works of art are valuable for the effects they produce on the human mind, the philosophy of cognitive artifacts might be of some help to bridge the gap between art and technology. Yet, an important difference remains since works of art are not usually meant to contribute to specific high-level tasks such as orientation or calculation in the way cognitive artifacts do.

Furthermore, the thesis called “aesthetic cognitivism”, according to which works of art contribute to advance knowledge and enhance understanding, is quite controversial, especially in the strong version according to which *all* works of art contribute to such cognitive enterprise (see Currie 2020; Schellekens and Dammann 2021). Casting works of art as cognitive artifacts, however, would commit us to such a controversial version of aesthetic cognitivism. Here is a good reason for looking for a better suited category of artifacts to encompass works of art.

Drawing on the philosophy of cognitive artifacts, Giulia Piredda (2020, 550) introduces the category of affective artifacts, which “have the capacity to alter the affective condition of the agent”. Richard Heersmink (2021) and Marco Viola (2021) develop Piredda’s proposal by investigating the function of affective artifacts. While cognitive artifacts contribute to high-level tasks of belief-formation aimed to represent states of affairs, affective artifacts rather induce affective states that have an evaluative, phenomenal, and motivational character (Viola 2021, 230–231). Although emotions (e.g. joy, sadness, anger, fear) are the paradigm states induced by affective artifacts, other states such as moods (objectless affective states such as elation or anguish), sentiments (tendencies to feel emotions), and temperaments (tendencies to have moods) also can contribute to the “affective condition” that those artifacts are meant to alter (Heersmink 2021, 10).

Works of art also might be cast as objects that have the function of altering the affective condition of their appreciators (Heersmink 2021, 11; Viola 2021, 233). Yet, Piredda (2020, 550) does not focus on works of art but rather on artifacts which are significant to an agent in virtue of some deep affective, somehow idiosyncratic, personal bond to them whereby they can “play an important role in defining that agent’s self”. Exemplary affective artifacts, in this sense, are teddy bears which, one might argue, have the generation of affects as their primary function. Wedding rings also are among Piredda’s examples, but in this case the primary function of the artifact is rather a symbolic one (to wit, representing that a person is married) on which the affective one is

superimposed as a secondary function. The famous Linus’ blanket in the Peanuts comic strip also has an affective function (eliciting a sense of security) that is superimposed on the primary one (covering the human body). In this case the act of superposition or “appropriation” (Juvshik 2021) is even more idiosyncratic since the secondary affective function can only be superimposed on particular blankets by particular agents whereas the wedding ring’s affective function, albeit secondary, remains a “kind-associated function” (Evnine 2016, 11), that is, a function associated to the wedding ring as an artifactual kind.

Despite those differences concerning primary and secondary functions, artifacts such as teddy bears, wedding rings, and Linus’ blanket are all meant to generate affects only for certain individuals who enjoy an exclusive relation to them (the husband and the wife who wear the wedding rings, the child who owns the teddy bear or the blanket). Works of art, on the other hand, are usually meant to elicit affective responses from any appreciator. One might contend that teddy bears are more akin to works of art since they are likely to provoke affective reactions in numerous people in virtue of their appearance. Yet, one particular teddy bear fulfills its affective function in virtue of an exclusive link to its owner whereas a work of art is meant to elicit experience from an audience independently of ownership. For sure, one can become affectionate—in the same private, idiosyncratic, exclusive way that characterizes paradigm affective artifacts—to a particular work of art because one owns it, or for other personal reasons such as having written a dissertation on it or even having made it. Nevertheless, the work of art, as such, is meant to elicit experiences from a whole audience, not just from one privileged member of it.

In sum, both works of art and affective artifacts can alter the affective condition of subjects, but paradigm affective artifacts alter the affective condition of certain individuals (through somehow idiosyncratic and exclusive personal bonds) while works of art are meant to alter the affective condition of an audience that, in principle, may include everybody. While paradigm affective artifacts belong to the private domain, to one’s subjective life, works of art have their place in the public domain and enable one to share and coordinate one’s experiences with other subjects thereby overcoming the alleged privateness of one’s subjective sphere.

The fact that paradigm affective artifacts significantly differ from the work of art since the former tend to be private while the latter is meant to generate the same sort of experience from any subject, however, does not prevent one from insisting that works of art belong to the category of affective artifacts, despite not being paradigms of it. Works of art might be non-paradigmatic affective artifacts that are meant to alter the affective condition of a whole audience instead of just that of one person.

A deeper challenge to the hypothesis that works of art are affective artifacts consists in questioning whether the generation of affective states is the *ratio essendi* of all works of art. Although most works of art arguably are meant to generate affective states, there might be forms of art, artistic movements, or particular works of art (e.g. conceptual art, the Darmstadt School of music, Borges' short stories) which are rather meant to minimize affectivity in favor of the generation of perceptual or cognitive states. As Noël Carroll (2022, 6) puts it, "some art is designed to block feelings altogether, sometimes for purpose of stimulating thought and even in order to promote a thesis that is intended to be scrutinized cognitively".

The point is that affectivity is just a component among others of the complex sorts of experiences that works of art are meant to generate. If we want to cast works of art as generators of psychological states, we need a category that can encompass the varieties of states that works of art might generate. Cognitive artifacts and affective artifacts are not sufficient for this goal since works of art can generate not only cognitive and affective states but also other mental states, especially perceptual and imaginative ones, but even agentive ones. Heersmink (2021, 11) acknowledges this issue, which his account might address through two further categories he introduces beside cognitive and affective artifacts. The first is the category of "perceptual artifacts" like glasses and telescopes, which "help us perceive or quantify the world better" (2021, 7). The second is that of "embodied artifacts" like musical instruments and paintbrushes, which "can feel like transparent extensions of our body" (2021, 6). Yet, none of Heersmink's artifactual categories can encompass works of art on its own. The conclusion that Heersmink (2021, 17) draws from his taxonomical premises is that "These categories can overlap and so some artifacts are members of more than one category". Works of art, from this perspective, instantiate such categorial overlapping.

Still, this is not the whole story. Categorial overlapping can be overcome by introducing a new category of artifacts endowed with psychological functions, namely, experiential artifacts. This category, I will argue, can properly encompass works of art. Before articulating my argument, however, let me consider in the next two sections a few notions that have somehow foreshadowed the concept of experiential artifact in the analytic philosophy of art.

5 Aesthetic and Communicative Artifacts

The philosophical discipline that has traditionally studied the way in which works of art elicit experiences from us is aesthetics. The fact that works of art belong to the more general category of artifacts is acknowledged by

aestheticians, but their primary focus of attention is what differentiates works of art from technical artifacts rather than what they have in common.

According to the "proceduralist accounts" (Abell 2012), works of art differ from technical artifacts since they are not individuated by the function that they fulfil but rather by the procedure through which they are made or used. For example, George Dickie (1969) characterizes the artwork as an artifact used within a certain institutional context, while Jerrold Levinson (1979) characterizes the artwork as an artifact created within a certain historical tradition.

The "functionalist accounts" (Abell 2012), on the other hand, state that a work of art, just like a technical artifact, essentially has a function. Specifically, according to the functionalist accounts proposed by Monroe Beardsley (1983) and Nick Zangwill (1995), works of art are aesthetic artifacts that fulfill the function of eliciting aesthetic experience. The latter notion, however, is hard to characterize and one can even argue that aesthetic experiences are not different enough from ordinary experiences to warrant the introduction of a specific experiential kind (Dickie 1964; Cohen 1973; Kivy 1975; Dokic 2016). Although functionalist accounts such as Beardsley's and Zangwill's highlight a significant analogy between works of art and technical artifacts, the notion of aesthetic experience seems to be too controversial to fix the function of works of art in the way the functions of technical artifacts can be fixed by considering their practical purposes.

As an alternative to the function of eliciting aesthetic experience, Arthur Danto (1997) introduces the function of "embodying meaning" to characterize works of art. From Danto's perspective, works of art are communicative artifacts that we use to convey meanings to others. Works of art, in this sense, resemble linguistic utterances. Still, the artistic function of *embodying* meaning is more sophisticated than the merely linguistic function of *conveying* meaning since the former involves the careful and skillful articulation of a medium (see Davies 2004). Art, in this sense, is a sort of excellence in communication; one might say that art is to ordinary language as Olympic Games are to everyday bodily movements.

The conception of works of art as communicative artifacts, however, finds it hard to deal with works of art as for example certain sonatas or abstract paintings that do not seem to fulfill a communicative function. As Noël Carroll (2022, 7) puts it, "surely some art might be, in a manner of speaking, beneath meaning. Some fine art, for example, might be designed to be simply visually stimulating or interesting or pleasing or just beautiful".

With the aim of facing this objection, Carroll (2022) amends Danto's account by replacing the communicative function with a more generic "constitutive purpose". The latter may be communicative in certain cases, but in others is, as Carroll puts it, "to be simply visually stimulating

or interesting or pleasing or just beautiful”. This sort of functional pluralism is advocated also by Jonathan Gilmore (2011, 290), who argues that “artworks possess essential functions but there is no one function or set of functions that works of art share qua works of art”.

Carroll’s and Gilmore’s functional pluralism, however, restores an ontological gap between works of art and technical artifacts. The latter, indeed, have kind-associated functions whereas the former only have constitutive functions at the individual level; as Gilmore puts it, “there is no one function or set of functions that works of art share qua works of art”. Functional pluralism thus brings us back to the art-technology dualism. Artifactual kinds are individuated by functions whereas art as a kind lacks a function even though each work of art can have its own function. Hence, art is not an artifactual kind.

If one wants to preserve monism, two options are available. The first consists in challenging the notion of kind-associated function, arguing that technical artifacts, just like works of art according to Carroll and Gilmore, have constitutive functions only at the individual level. A similar conception of technical artifacts is sketched by Diego Marconi (2013), who argues that each individual artifact is constituted by its own purpose or “point”. Still, the notion of kind-associated function is so entrenched in technological practices that a philosophical account of technology that gives it up would risk to be excessively revisionary. A monist account that can preserve the explanatory value of the notion of kind-associated function seems preferable to one that renounces to it. The second monist option, for which I will argue in what follows, satisfies this desideratum, stating that works of art can have kind-associated functions just like technical artifacts.

6 Artifacts for Perceiving, Imagining, and Getting Emotional

In the theory of artistic kinds such as depiction and fiction we can find sorts of kind-associated functions. In his seminal research on depiction, Richard Wollheim (1980) characterizes pictures as artifacts that have the function of eliciting an appropriate perceptual experience from their viewers, namely, a “seeing-in” experience that involves perceptual awareness of both the picture’s surface and the scene depicted. In a similar vein, Kendall Walton (1990) characterizes fictions as artifacts that have the function of eliciting imaginings from their users. Interestingly, neither Wollheim nor Walton commit themselves to the controversial notion of aesthetic experience. Rather, they rely on garden-variety mental states such as perception and imagination.

Wollheim’s and Walton’s account of fiction have been very influential in contemporary philosophy of art. Their idea that certain works of art have the function of eliciting perceptual or imaginative experiences has been applied, for example, to sculpture (Hopkins 2010), theater (Meskin 2009), film (Currie 1995; Wilson 2011; Smith 2017), video games (Meskin and Robson 2010), songs (Terrone 2020). On the other hand, the idea that certain artworks have the function of eliciting emotions has been crucial to the philosophical tradition at least since Aristotle’s characterization of tragedies in terms of the generation of terror and pity. More recently, works of art in the horror genre have been characterized in terms of the generation of emotions such as fear and disgust (Carroll 2003; Contesi 2020).

Despite such insightful contributions, the research on the functions of art remains fragmentary. Although deep inquiries have been made on the kinds of experiences that certain kinds of works of art have the function of eliciting, no unitary account has been provided so far. That is because, I contend, philosophers of art have so far focused either on the generation of specific components of experience such as perception, imagination, emotions, or on the generation of an elusive quality of experience such as the aesthetic, instead of on the generation of experience itself. With the aim of filling such a lacuna, I am going to introduce the category of experiential artifacts which is meant to encompass works of art and possibly other artifacts that have the function of generating experience.

7 Experiential Artifacts

Assuming that technical artifacts, in general, are created entities that perform their function in virtue of their structure, experiential artifacts can be cast as technical artifacts that perform the function of generating experience in virtue of their structure. An account of experiential artifacts thus requires, on the one hand, an analysis of the notion of experience and, on the other, an explanation of the way in which such experience can be generated through an artifactual structure.

Experience is, quite surprisingly, a somehow underexplored notion in contemporary philosophy of mind, which focuses on the notion of consciousness rather than on that of experience and tends to trace the latter back to the former. The two notions surely are essentially connected but I reckon that it would be worth keeping them distinct. That is because consciousness is a capacity of the mind (the fundamental capacity, one might say) while experience is rather the outcome of such capacity. The importance of the distinction between consciousness and experience can be emphasized by noting that the claim that art is meant to

generate *experience* sounds meaningful while the claim that art is meant to generate *consciousness* sounds quite awkward: we already have consciousness, we do not need art to generate it.

A basic characterization of experience is offered by William James' (1890) famous expression "the stream of consciousness". Still, this is just a metaphor to be unpacked. For this purpose, there are two preeminent philosophical frameworks on which one might rely, namely, Husserlian phenomenology understood as an account of subjective experience (Zahavi and Gallagher 2008), and Kantian transcendental philosophy understood as a "descriptive metaphysics of experience" (Strawson 1966). Although both frameworks might contribute significantly to the shed light on the sort of experiences that art is meant to generate, in what follow I will mainly draw on the Kantian framework as developed by Peter Strawson (1966) in his book *The Bounds of Sense*.

From the Kantian–Strawsonian perspective, subjective experience has three basic constitutive features. First, it is made of conscious phenomenal states such as sensations and feelings that exhibit the quality that following Thomas Nagel (1974) can be dubbed *what-it's-likeness*; there is something it is like to enjoy them. Such states form a temporal series, hence "subjective temporality" (Strawson 1966) or *lived-temporality* (Heidegger 1927) is the second constitutive feature of subjective experience (arguably, that is what James' stream-metaphor ultimately means). Moreover, such subjective states do not only have their place in one temporal series but also belong exclusively to one subject, hence "subjective unity" (Strawson 1966) or *for-me-ness* (Zahavi and Kriegel 2015) is the third constitutive feature of experience.

In sum, (1) what-it's-likeness, (2) lived-temporality, and (3) for-me-ness are the three features that constitute experience regardless of its relation to an objective world. Assuming that a purely self-standing solipsistic subject of experience is conceivable (a sort of world-less subject), to make sense of her (somehow psychedelic) experience, one cannot help but ascribing (1)–(2)–(3) to it. Still, according to the Strawsonian reading of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, such core features are to be supplemented with four further characteristics that are indispensable if one is meant to have experiences that yield access to an objective world. The first of such characteristics is (4) object-directedness or *intentionality* whereby experience targets objects which are distinguishable from experiences of them. The other three characteristics concern the very objects of experience, which (5) must have a place in space that ensures their existence when they are not experienced (*spatiality*), (6) exhibit properties that allow us to experience them (*propertiedness*) and (7) fit into one temporal order that enables them to change their properties (*objective temporality*).

While the core features (1)–(2)–(3) constitute the subjective side of experience, the further characteristics (4) *intentionality*, (5) *spatiality*, (6) *propertiedness*, (7) *objective temporality* constitute its objective side, that is, its access to a world of objects that might be experienced and yet can exist unexperienced. Such an objective side makes room for a plurality of subjects of experience that share the same objective world in virtue of (4)–(5)–(6)–(7) even though they enjoy different subjective perspectives—or "perceptual routes" (Strawson 1974, 91)—on it in virtue of (1)–(2)–(3). For instance, subject A and subject B can perceive the same object O which has its place in the objective space and time even though A perceives O within a certain temporal series of subjective states that constitutes A's experience while B perceives O within another temporal series of subjective states that constitutes B's experience. In this sense, A and B perceive the same object O even though they have different perspectives on it.

The object O in this example can be whatever object of experience, for example a tree, a planet, a screwdriver, or a work of art. Yet, in the latter case, the object has the function of governing the experience that the subject enjoys when faces it, thereby getting A's experience of O closer to B's experience of O. The two experiences get closer since they are meant not only to share the same objective side (such sharing is indeed the experiential outcome that objects of experience, in general, produce), but also a bunch of relevant features on their subjective side.

A's experience, as a whole, is a subjective temporal series that goes from A's birth to A's death just like B's experience, as a whole, is a subjective temporal series that goes from B's birth to B's death. Thus, A's experience and B's experience can differ and diverge a lot depending on the vicissitudes of those two subjects. Yet, the segments of A's and B's subjective temporal series that concern the same work of art exhibit a degree of resemblance and convergence that it would be hard to find between other segments of those series.

On the one hand, A's experience and B's experience of a work of art O remain distinct experiences in virtue of their different for-me-ness or subjective unity; A's experience of O exclusively belongs to A whereas B's experience of O exclusively belongs to B. On the other hand, the work of art, unlike other objects of experience, carries out the function of shaping the two other components of subjective experience, namely what-is-likeness and lived-temporality, thereby approaching A's subjective experience to B's to a degree that is usually beyond the reach of other objects of experience. In what follows, I will show how works of art can do so in virtue of their artifactual structure.

8 The Varieties of Experiential Artifacts

Assuming that works of art are experiential artifacts, the different forms of art can be distinguished by considering the way in which the works that belong to them shape experiences in virtue of their structures. Let me consider, for instance, the six canonic forms of art according to the artistic tradition, namely, music, painting, sculpture, architecture, theater, and literature (cf. Batteux 1746).

Works of music are temporal structures that shape experience by imposing a certain duration on lived-temporality and by filling it with auditory qualities. Likewise, paintings are two-dimensional spatial structures that shape experience by offering a spatial array filled with visual qualities that imposes a visual perspective (on the depicted scene) that does not depend on the standpoint of the viewer and thus can be shared by different subjects regardless of their actual spatial and temporal location.

While paintings are *two-dimensional* surfaces, the other two visual arts, namely sculpture and architecture, produce *three-dimensional* spatial structures that shape one's experience by prescribing the perceptual exploration of an object that occupies one's spatial surroundings, that is, one's "egocentric space" (Evans 1982, 162). The difference between sculpture and architecture lies in the sort of experiential exploration of the egocentric space they prescribe; sculpture invites one to focus on the representational and expressive features of the three-dimensional object, while architecture, which arguably is the form of art that gets closest to paradigmatic technical artifacts, mandates one not only to visually contemplate the three-dimensional object but also (at least in principle) to *use* it, thereby generating an experience in which the agential dimension is as crucial as the perceptual dimension.

While music generates experiences through temporal structures, and the visual arts (viz. painting, sculpture, and architecture) generate experiences through spatial structures, theater (in which I am including also dance for the sake of simplicity) generates experience through a structure that is both spatial and temporal. To wit, a work of theater shapes experience by imposing a certain duration on lived-temporality and by filling it not only with auditory qualities (as music does) but also with visual qualities that have representational import (as in painting and sculpture).

The sixth and last canonic form of art, namely literature, is traditionally considered an art of time (see Lessing 1766) since it constrains lived-temporality by means of a temporal structure filled with linguistic signs. In oral literature the temporality of the structure is evident while in written literature the work's structure

looks spatial but reveals itself to be temporal in the act of reading (see Kivy 2006). The specificity of literature in comparison with the other canonic art forms is its independence from a specific sensory modality. Music essentially generates auditory experiences, the visual arts essentially generate visual experiences, and theater essentially generate visual experiences that may also have an auditory dimension. Conversely, what is crucial to literature is not the sensory character of the generated experience (which may be visual as in reading or auditory as in listening, or even tactile when one exploits the Braille code) but rather the cognitive effect of understanding and possibly the corresponding imaginative response (if the work of literature is an instance of fiction, see Walton 1990). Literature, in this sense, is more inclusive than the other forms of art since it prescribes experiences that are accessible also to people suffering from sense-organ disabilities such as blindness or deafness. Such specificity, however, might tempt one to claim that literature, unlike music, the visual arts and theater, does not generate experiences but rather high-level cognitive states (see Zangwill 2001). The account of experience proposed in the previous section enables us to resist this temptation since that notion of experience is broad enough to make room also for literature. The latter, indeed, generates experiences that surely have lived-temporality and form-ness, and what-is-likeness as well provided that one acknowledges the possibility of cognitive phenomenology (Pitt 2004). Specifically, the cognitive phenomenology of literature might consist in what is like for us to be in mental states such as understanding, belief-formation and imagining-formation (cf. Caracciolo 2014).

In the twentieth century, the dominance of the six canonical forms of art has been challenged on two opposite fronts. On the one hand, forms of "mass art" (Carroll 1998) such as film (whose novelty is explicitly signaled by the label "the seventh art"), photography ("the eighth art") or comics ("the ninth art"). On the other, forms of contemporary art such as installation art and conceptual art (see Goldie and Schellekens 2009). A full-fledged account of the sorts of experience that such forms of art are meant to generate is work for another day, but it is worth noting that our account of the canonic forms of art gives us effective conceptual tools to deal with more recent forms of art like those. Specifically, mass arts such as film or comics supplement the sort of visual experiences generated by painting with a temporal dimension that get closer to the sort of experiences generated by theater or literature; Erwin Panofsky (1995, 18), in this sense, states that "dynamization of space" and "spatialization of time" are the key features of the medium of film. Installation art, on the other hand, generates experiences that have not only a perceptual component but also an agential component as in architecture

(see Caldarola 2020a; Wilder 2020), while conceptual art generates experiences in which the role of sensory states is minimized in favor of high-level cognitive states that might involve some cognitive phenomenology as in literature (see Caldarola 2020b; Irvin 2022).

A significant difference between mass art and contemporary art is that the former tends to constrain experience much more than the latter. A film, for instance, determines the duration and the order of the visual perspectives that the viewer is meant to enjoy while a videoart installation, though also based on moving images, let the viewers free to navigate their way through the visual perspectives. This difference can be traced back to a difference in the canonical forms of art by comparing the way in which works of music, plays and paintings constrain the beholder's experience while sculptures, works of literature and especially works of architecture offer more opportunities to personalize one's experiences of them.

Still, all these are just differences in degree, not in substance. All works of art, whatever the form of art to which they belong, are meant to generate experiences that can be shared by all beholders to a certain extent and make room for a personal supplementation by each beholder beyond that extent. Let me call 'comprehension' the basic mental activity that a work of art is meant to elicit from any beholder and 'interpretation' the supplementary mental activity that the work hands over to the personal initiative of each beholder. In film, for instance, the look of a fictional character is mainly a matter of comprehension while in literature is rather a matter of interpretation. Yet, the latter interpretation relies on a basic level of linguistic comprehension of the literary text, just like the cinematic comprehension makes room for a further level of interpretation concerning, for instance, hypotheses on the psychological attitudes of fictional characters.

Likewise, different mixtures of comprehension and interpretation reveal themselves if one compares the experiential function of architecture with that of painting. On the one hand, architecture leaves more room to interpretation than painting since the viewers of a painting are given just one perspective on the scene depicted while the visitors of a building can select their own route through it (thereby interpreting it in the way an actor would interpret a script, see Wollheim 1980). On the other hand, the architectural interpretation relies on a basic comprehension of the spatial features of the building that constrain one's movements around or inside it, just like the pictorial comprehension leaves room for interpretation inasmuch as the viewers can decide how long to look at the painting and in which order pay attention to its figures. All this leads us to conclude that the experiential differences between forms of art with respect to comprehension and interpretation are just differences in degree, not in substance.

9 The Explanatory Virtues of the Concept of Experiential Artifact

The various forms of art are so multifarious that one might be tempted to conclude that there is no way to unify them into one category (see Lopes 2014). In the previous section, I have argued that we can resist this temptation by subsuming all works of art under the category of experiential artifacts, which fulfill the function of eliciting experience in virtue of their structure. Still, this category seems to encompass not only works of art but also other sorts of artifacts such as toys, drugs, candies or rollercoasters which arguably have the function of generating experiences. Does this mean that the concept of experiential artifact fails to properly account for works of art? Not so, for the reasons that I am going to articulate.

First, the concept of experiential artifact individuates an artifactual genus to which works of art belong as a species together with other species such as toys, drugs, candies, or rollercoasters. The concept of experiential artifact, in this sense, enables us to connect art to technology by underlining functional correspondences between works of art and other artifacts.

The development of technology between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had challenged the traditional concept of art, as Walter Benjamin (1936) points out in his seminal essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. With the digital turn between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries art has been even more surrounded by a variety of objects that goes from websites, posts, twits, selfies, videos, reels, stories up to virtual reality environments and A.I.-generated texts and pictures, which surely are not works of art (at least in the vast majority of cases) and yet seem to fulfill the same function that works of art have fulfilled historically, namely, the generation of experiences. The concept of experiential artifact highlights the relevant features that works of art and such other objects have in common, despite their alleged differences in cultural relevance or aesthetic value.

At this point, after tracing the species of works of art back to the genus of experiential artifacts, one can look for the "specific difference" that differentiates the species of works of art from the other experiential artifacts. I contend that this specific difference lies in the notion of "design stance" that Nicolas Bullot and Rolf Reber (2013) introduce in their threefold account of art appreciation, which also involve "basic exposure" and "artistic understanding".

The core response elicited by works of art as experiential artifacts corresponds to the fundamental layer of appreciation that Bullot and Reber dub "basic

exposure”. However, basic exposure is something that also non-artistic experiential artifacts can generate. The specificity of art lies rather in the second layer of appreciation, namely, “design stance”, which consists in wondering how and why such experiential artifact has been made. Supplementing the experience generated by the artifact with a reflection on the history of making of the artifact—supported by information about the context of making the gathering of which Bullot and Reber dub “artistic understanding”—is the specific difference that can enable us to differentiate works of art from other experiential artifacts.

Works of art are experiential artifacts that generate an experience that is meant to be cognitively enriched with an examination of the sources of that experience. The user of a non-artistic experiential artifact such as a roller-coaster is not meant to wonder how and why the roller-coaster was created. Enjoying the experience is, as such, a proper use of the artifact. The user of a work of art, on the other hand, is meant not only to enjoy the experience that the work generates but also to supplement such “basic exposure” with the two cognitive layers that Bullot and Reber call “design stance” and “artistic understanding”.

My passport photo, a cat meme,¹ and the photograph *Rue Mouffetard, Paris*² are all experiential artifacts. Specifically, they all have, as pictures, the basic function of eliciting visual experiences. What differentiates them is what one is meant to do with those experiences. The experience generated by the cat meme is just meant to give one fun. The experience generated by my passport photo is meant to enable one to identify me. The experience generated by *Rue Mouffetard, Paris*, as work of art, is special compared to those others: it is meant to lead one to a “design stance” whereby one wonders why and how somebody had created that picture, and to an “artistic understanding” whereby one aims to answer the design-stance questions by gathering information about the picture’s history of making. One can do so, for instance, by acknowledging that the picture was taken by French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson in 1954, in the framework of his poetics of “the decisive moment” according to which “photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression” (Cartier-Bresson 1952, 14).

As work of art, *Rue Mouffetard, Paris* generates an experience to be traced back to an historical chain that originates from an act of creation. Works of art are

experiential artifacts that call attention to the relationship between their appearance and their history.

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¹ <https://tenor.com/it/view/cat-crazy-cat-keyboard-cat-fast-gif-5753018>.

² <https://high.org/collection/rue-mouffetard-paris/>.

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