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ARTIFACTS, NATURAL OBJECTS, AND WORKS OF ART

By DANIEL DEVEREUX

WHAT is required for a natural object to become an artifact? Is it enough, as George Dickie suggests, that the object be treated as a kind of artifact?¹ I want to argue that it is not enough—that for a natural object to be ‘artifactualized’ it must at least undergo a change in the thing itself, and not just in the relationships which it has to other things. The relevance of this question to the issue of the definability of art will emerge in the course of the discussion.

Dickie argues against Morris Weitz’s claim that a natural object, like a piece of driftwood lying on the beach, could be a work of art. If someone were to call it a work of art, he would, according to Dickie, be using the expression in its evaluative and not its descriptive sense; i.e., he would be praising the object rather than classifying it.² But in discussing the question whether a work of art must be an artifact, and the more general question whether the expression ‘work of art’ is definable, we are interested in the descriptive or classificatory use of this expression and not in its evaluative use. Thus the fact that someone might call a piece of driftwood on the shore a work of art does not show that a natural object could be a work of art in the relevant sense.

But Dickie goes on to say that a piece of driftwood could *become* a work of art if, for example, someone carried it home and hung it on a wall.³ This does not upset his general claim that a natural object could not be a work of art, for he argues that the very process which makes the driftwood a work of art also makes it an artifact. In other words, putting a piece of driftwood on display, in the way in which one might put a painting or other work of art on display, transforms it from a natural object into an artifact.

One may feel an initial scepticism about the idea that a natural object can become an artifact simply by being put on display in a certain way. That there is a solid basis for this feeling can be brought out by the following examples. (1) Suppose I am out in the woods looking for a fern to take home with me. I find a rather attractive one and transplant it to a pot. When I get home I hang the pot in the living room in a place which will show off the plant to best advantage. I wish to display it for basically the same reason I would a beautiful picture. On Dickie’s view we must

¹ *Art and the Aesthetic* (Cornell University Press; Ithaca, N. Y., 1974), pp. 44–45. Cf. also ‘Defining Art’ *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1969), pp. 253–256.

² ‘Defining Art’, p. 253. In *Art and the Aesthetic* Dickie modifies his objection to Weitz by introducing a third sense of ‘work of art’ (pp. 24–26). Since this issue is not relevant to my argument, I have stuck with the simpler formulation.

³ *Art and the Aesthetic*, p. 44 (‘Defining Art’, p. 255).

say that the fern is no longer a natural object, that it has been transformed into an artifact. (2) Presumably it is not essential to the process of transformation that the object be put on display inside a building. Suppose I buy a tree from a nursery and carefully choose a place in my front yard to plant it. My reasons for choosing this particular tree and this particular place for it are chiefly aesthetic. Does the tree, once planted, become an artifact? Does it cease to be a natural object?

As I think these examples show, for a natural object to become an artifact it is not enough that it be displayed in a certain way. As a general rule, I suggest that a natural object cannot become an artifact without undergoing some internal change. By 'internal change' I mean a change in the thing itself and not just in its relationship to other things. Changes in size, shape, or colour, would count as internal changes; a change in physical location would not. I am not suggesting that if I produce an internal change in a natural object it thereby becomes an artifact; pruning a tree does not make it an artifact. My claim is that the process of transforming a natural object into an artifact must *at least* involve some internal change in the object.

This claim is open to question. Suppose I find a large piece of driftwood on the beach which has the general shape of a chair and is very comfortable to sit on. I take it home, and without doing anything to it I start using it as a chair. After a while I no longer think of it as a piece of driftwood which I am using as a chair, but simply as one of my chairs. It might be argued that since a chair is a kind of artifact, this piece of driftwood has become an artifact without undergoing any internal change.

I would grant that it is natural and appropriate to speak of the driftwood in this example as a chair. But it is not necessary to accept the claim that a chair must be an artifact. Paperweights and bookends which are not artifacts are more common than chairs which are not, but this makes no difference to the argument.

If it is true that a natural object cannot become an artifact without undergoing an internal change, then the driftwood which is hung on the wall is not an artifact. Of course the driftwood could become *part* of an artifact without any internal change. For example, I might use a small piece of driftwood in putting together a collage.

The results of the discussion so far raise a question about Dickie's general claim that being an artifact is a necessary condition of being a work of art. For if the driftwood hanging on the wall is a work of art, as he claims, then it seems that Weitz was right in arguing that a work of art need not be an artifact. But, as far as I can see, there is nothing which compels us to regard the driftwood as a work of art. We enjoy natural beauty as well as art, and we sometimes treat natural objects in very much the same way that we treat works of art. The fern hanging in someone's

living room may have the same function as the painting on his wall. But that is not a good reason for considering the fern a work of art. And since the driftwood hanging on the wall need not be classified as a work of art,¹ it does not undermine Dickie's general thesis that artifactuality is a necessary condition of being a work of art.

¹ One could perhaps consider the driftwood together with the wall as a composition and a work of art. But in this case the driftwood would only be a part of a work of art; it would not itself *be* a work of art.

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MORE ON QUINE'S REASONS FOR INDETERMINACY OF TRANSLATION

By ROBERT KIRK

QUINE has argued that the underdetermination of theories brings with it indeterminacy of translation of theories: translation of a theory is indeterminate at least to the extent that the theory is underdetermined by the totality of true observation sentences, so that where *A* and *B* are physical theories both compatible with the data, it might be possible for us to 'adopt *A* for ourselves and still remain free to translate the foreigner either as believing *A* or as believing *B*' ('On the Reasons for Indeterminacy of Translation', *Journal of Philosophy*, 67 (1970), 178–83). I have tried to show that Quine's argument fails ('Underdetermination of Theory and Indeterminacy of Translation', *ANALYSIS*, 33 (1973), 195–201). M. C. Bradley and Peter Smith have each raised counter-objections (M. C. Bradley, 'Kirk on Indeterminacy of Translation', *ANALYSIS*, 36 (1975), 18–22; Peter Smith, 'Kirk on Quine's Reasons for Indeterminacy of Translation', *Philosophical Studies*, 27 (1975), 427–31). The extraordinary interest of Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation and the dearth of good arguments either for or against it are, I think, good reasons for taking the discussion further.

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First, an objection of Bradley's to my whole strategy. I maintained that if Quine's argument works at all, it should work even if we assume that the underdetermination of theory sets in only at a certain level of theoreticity, and that translation of sentences below that level is determinate. I went on to argue that on this assumption there will also be