

Kendall Walton's 'Categories of Art': A Critical Commentary

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Kendall Walton's 'Categories of Art' is one of the most famous and, arguably, most important papers in modern aesthetics. Despite this, and the various references to it and discussions of it within the literature, there are no general commentaries on this essay. In addition to outlining a general framework for approaching the article, I identify and explicate the two main exegetical issues regarding it. The first concerns how to understand Walton's main thesis that the aesthetic character of artworks is determined, in part, by their 'correct category'. I suggest that the traditional interpretation of Walton's proposal is mistaken, and defend an alternative view at length. The second issue concerns the relationship between Walton's view and competing accounts of the aesthetics of artworks. Here I suggest that Walton's position is unique, contrasting the views of both typical formalists, on the one hand, and ordinary contextualists, on the other, in philosophically significant ways. Careful reflection on this particular issue helps reveal some very important distinctions among aesthetic theories, which have not been previously drawn or emphasized.

Introduction

Historically, Kendall Walton's seminal article, 'Categories of Art', was a watershed in the philosophy of criticism.¹ Originally published in 1970, it appeared at a critical juncture, the end of one era—stretching from Bell to Beardsley²—in which formalist/empiricist views of art appreciation dominated philosophy and art criticism, and the beginning of another that continues in the present, in which contextualist/cognitivist views are instead ascendant.³ This is no coincidence. In 'Categories of Art', Walton developed an intricate and powerful theory of the aesthetics of artworks, explicitly opposed to empiricism—at least, as traditionally conceived and defended—on essential points. As such, it stands as a philosophical reflection of the anti-formalist sentiments that were emerging throughout the art world at that time.⁴ But it was not just a remote, academic critique of aesthetic

1 Kendall Walton, 'Categories of Art', *Philosophical Review*, 79 (1970), pp. 334–367. Hereinafter cited in the text as CA.

2 Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958); Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1914).

3 Although there are, of course, still some that would like to see a renaissance of formalism, and are working toward that end: most notably, Nick Zangwill, *The Metaphysics of Beauty* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), chs 4–8.

4 Although some of Walton's ideas were anticipated, but not as fully developed, by E. H. Gombrich in *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon, 1960), ch. 11, which Walton happens to cite in CA, p. 345, n. 14.

empiricism—at least, not to analytic philosophers. Within the philosophy of art, Walton's paper, alongside influential works by Arthur Danto and Jerrold Levinson,⁵ helped turn the tide against classical empiricism, demoting it to a minority position, in need of special defence or substantial revision, while vaulting contextualism to the default view within the field.⁶ That is a simple history, no doubt; a full, detailed chronicle of the empiricism-contextualism saga would certainly complicate it. But none, I submit, could rightly ignore the timing and impact of Walton's article.

Despite its influence—its distinguished place in the field, its present status as 'required reading' on the topic—there remains very little exegetical work on Walton's essay. Indeed, there are virtually no general commentaries on 'Categories of Art' at all; even the most advanced expositions take place within the context of broader discussions, and so, naturally, are incomplete or superficial, in some respects.⁷ But even with so few discussions of the essay, one still finds competing understandings of it, even on rather fundamental points. For example, commentators still disagree on as basic an issue as whether Walton really is a contextualist, or after all just a reformed empiricist. Most happen to see him as the former; prominent and self-avowed contextualists, such as Jerrold Levinson and Gregory Currie,⁸ frequently cite him as an ally, while neo-formalist Nick Zangwill sees him as his greatest opponent.⁹ Yet some notable commentators, such as David Davies, demur, instead regarding Walton as an empiricist, albeit a sophisticated or 'enlightened' one.¹⁰ This current exegetical controversy regarding 'Categories of Art' parallels others in the literature; readers of Walton have construed his position differently on certain points, but none seem too aware of each other's views, and, perhaps as a consequence, none have done much to motivate their own reading of his article. This paper aims to do better. It is time for a focused commentary on Walton's classic essay—one that is mindful of what has been said, and what has been neglected.

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- 5 Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Jerrold Levinson, 'What a Musical Work Is', *Journal of Philosophy*, 77 (1980), pp. 5–28.
 - 6 It has also exercised inestimable influence on recent work regarding the aesthetics of nature, in particular Carlson's view, scientific cognitivism, which has been at the centre of discussion in that area for nearly three decades. For very direct, explicit illustrations of this, see, in particular, Allen Carlson, 'Nature, Aesthetic Judgment, and Objectivity', *JAC*, 40 (1981), pp. 15–27; Glenn Parsons, 'Nature Appreciation, Science, and Positive Aesthetics', *BJA*, 42 (2002), pp. 279–295. We will return to Walton and the aesthetics of nature later on.
 - 7 The most thorough, detailed treatments can be found in a handful of sources: Carlson, 'Nature, Aesthetic Judgment, and Objectivity'; Currie, *An Ontology of Art* (London: Macmillan, 1989), ch. 2; Parsons, 'Nature Appreciation, Science, and Positive Aesthetics'; N. Zangwill, 'In Defence of Moderate Aesthetic Formalism', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 50 (2000), pp. 476–493. Other notable discussions include Noël Carroll, *On Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2008), ch. 4; Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), ch. 8; Robert Hopkins, 'Aesthetics, Experience, and Discrimination', *JAC*, 63 (2005), pp. 119–133; Daniel O. Nathan, 'Categories and Intentions', *JAC*, 31 (1973), pp. 539–541; Glenn Parsons, 'Moderate Formalism as a Theory of the Aesthetic', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 38 (2004), pp. 19–35.
 - 8 Levinson, 'What a Musical Work Is', p. 11, n. 15; Currie, *Ontology of Art*, ch. 2.
 - 9 Zangwill, 'In Defence of Moderate Aesthetic Formalism'.
 - 10 David Davies, 'Against Enlightened Empiricism', in Matthew Kieran (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 22–34; ref. on pp. 22–23.

As readers of Walton are well aware, there are a number of interesting ideas, observations, and proposals in 'Categories of Art'. I will discuss many of these, but I want to focus on two issues in particular. Regarding both, I will suggest that Walton has been widely misinterpreted, and, even when he has not, strictly speaking, been misinterpreted, the uniqueness of his view has not been fully appreciated either, for it tends to be lumped in with others that differ in crucial ways. It is difficult to state these issues or my position on them without presupposing some familiarity with Walton's article. Having said that, the main proposals in this commentary can be gently summarized as follows. First, I will argue that Walton's main thesis, and related parts of his article, have been frequently misunderstood. Very briefly, Walton holds that the aesthetic properties of artworks depend on their perceptual properties when viewed in their correct category, and he offers a number of guidelines for discerning a work's correct category. Most commentators equate Walton's notion of a correct category of appreciation merely with the category a work belongs to, and they think his guidelines for discerning correct categories are thus guidelines for determining category-membership. I think this interpretation is fundamentally mistaken. In the following, I develop and defend an alternative construal, which has not been recognized or previously considered. Second, I aim to demonstrate that Walton's view differs in various ways from the ordinary contextualist views, with which it is usually affiliated. Readers have no problem seeing how Walton's view opposes traditional empiricism—the view he was reacting to—but many fail to see that Walton deviates less from that position than contextualists who would follow in his wake. This point is not merely of historical interest though; careful reflection on Walton's position helps unearth philosophically interesting distinctions among contextualist theories of art appreciation—even rather fundamental ones—that are still not explicitly articulated. I hope to clarify some of these here. Generally, I also hope to provide a clear, solid framework for readers who want to think more deeply about the essay. Of course, space will not allow me to cover every detail in 'Categories of Art', though I hope not to ignore any that are relevant to the main issues under discussion. In any case, omissions on my part should not be taken to imply there is nothing else of interest in the article; hopefully, this commentary will inspire further discussion, including that of any details I might not consider.

Walton's Account: A Preliminary Sketch

In preparation for addressing the two exegetical issues I want to focus on, in this section, I offer a broad sketch of Walton's view. That is not an easy task; as any reader knows, 'Categories of Art' is a dense, challenging paper, replete with novel ideas and terminology. Nevertheless, abstracting away from its many intricacies, I think the paper may be usefully seen as advancing three 'big' ideas. These are the core theses of the article. All the other details contained within it are subordinate to these, and introduced on their behalf. At the outset then, I would like to very briefly present each thesis, along with what I see as their interrelations. Then, I will take a closer look at each individual thesis by itself. Note that parts of the following sketch are tendentious though, and anticipate exegetical theses I plan to argue for later. Still, I think it is far simpler—for both readers and myself—than attempting a 'neutral' exposition at the outset. If one happens to balk at certain claims I

make, then please be patient; I will address your misgivings later. For now, let me just outline my interpretation.

Walton's first big thesis is a psychological claim, which I will call *psychological category-dependence* (PCD). According to this proposal, the aesthetic judgements we actually issue regarding artworks depend—frequently, if not always—on the categories under which we judge them. Walton's proof for this consists of a wide range of examples chosen to demonstrate that our aesthetic assessments of a work can change as we shift the categories under which we view them. This includes, most famously, an example involving Picasso's work *Guernica*, which we will discuss shortly. PCD is enlisted, though not very explicitly, as support for the second major thesis, a normative claim, which I will dub *ontological category-dependence* (OCD). According to this idea, the aesthetic properties of artworks really are affected by their category-memberships. In a way, then, aesthetic reality mirrors our aesthetic judgements, on Walton's view—just as our aesthetic judgements are category-dependent, the aesthetic properties artworks really possess are category-dependent, as well. Nonetheless, artworks belong to various categories, and our judgements of artworks vary according to the category under which we view them—so says PCD. This seems to invite a relativistic view of the aesthetics of artworks, albeit one driven by a more unusual concern than those typically driving that doctrine. However, Walton squarely rejects aesthetic relativism regarding art, on the grounds that it would be too easy to issue correct judgements, were it true. So, he embraces the final thesis, which I will call *correct category-dependence* (CCD). According to this hypothesis, among all the categories to which any artwork belongs, there are 'correct' categories for appreciating them, and it is these privileged categories that actually affect the artwork's aesthetic character. As critics, it is our job to identify correct categories for appreciating works, and here Walton offers various guidelines to assist us. Very roughly and briefly, then, that is the general picture of Walton's account in 'Categories of Art'. He proposes three fundamental theses regarding the aesthetics of art: psychological category-dependence, ontological category-dependence, and correct category-dependence. Let us take a closer look at each, beginning with the first.

Psychological Category-Dependence

PCD says that our aesthetic judgements of art are category-dependent. In a superficial way, this seems easy to motivate. For example, if I listen to seminal band The Stooges as garage rock, many of their songs strike me as violent and wild. But if I instead hear them as, say, an early punk outfit, they seem much tamer—rowdy, but somewhat plodding. And if I judge them as garage-punk, they fall somewhere in between. I suspect most readers can think of similar examples from their own experience. So, at first glance, at least some of our aesthetic assessments of artworks are category-sensitive. Although we can, of course, debate the philosophical implications of this, I suspect modern readers will not find this idea too exotic. Nonetheless, Walton's explanation for this phenomenon is far from obvious; it is careful, rigorous, and strikingly unique, employing original ideas and terminology that demand careful elucidation. At the outset though, let us just baldly state Walton's hypothesis, using his preferred terminology. Precisely stated, then, on Walton's view, our aesthetic judgements of a work depend on categorization, because the aesthetic impact its

perceptual properties *seem* to have depends on which of these properties are taken to be *standard*, *variable*, or *contra-standard* relative to a *perceptually distinguishable category of art*. Obviously, that is a mouthful. Let us begin tackling it by first focusing on one key notion: perceptually distinguishable categories of art.

Even before clarifying this notion, it is important to appreciate that Walton's psychological hypothesis only concerns one species of art-categories. It does not concern them all. Indeed, as will emerge later, it excludes many that we often use to discuss and classify works. Whether Walton's thesis can or should be extended to include any of these is worth discussing. For now, though, let us just be clear about the nature of the categories Walton's hypothesis does invoke. By perceptually distinguishable categories, Walton means those in which membership is determined *solely* by perceptible features. Thus, under normal conditions (when one's senses are not impaired, when a work is clearly displayed or exhibited, etc.) one can determine whether a work belongs to a perceptually distinguishable category merely by perceiving it. In other words, one can 'see' or 'hear' whether or not a work belongs to such categories. At this point, though, it is natural to wonder exactly what familiar categories of art—those we actually use—would qualify as perceptually distinguishable. In concrete terms, what does Walton have in mind?

On this point, Walton is rather non-committal. He says, 'such categories include media, genre, styles, forms, and so forth', but only 'if they are interpreted in such a way that membership is determined solely by features that can be perceived in a work when it is experienced in the normal manner' (CA, pp. 338–339, my italics). Throughout 'Categories of Art', Walton does, in fact, treat many familiar categories as perceptually distinguishable. For example, he frequently employs the category of painting to illustrate his views, treating works as though they belong to that category solely in virtue of perceptual features—being flat, being painted, etc.—but no others. Some would no doubt balk at this, like Nick Zangwill, who flatly insists that 'what *makes* something a painting is, in part, the artist's intention'.¹¹ So, Walton's use of such categories invites some controversy. Nevertheless, instead of getting sidetracked by this issue, let us just emphasize that Walton's psychological hypothesis is restricted to categories that *might* well contrast with many of those we ordinarily employ—the 'folk' categories of criticism, as it were. And, in any case, it certainly excludes a great number that obviously involve some historical element: independent films, *oeuvres*, forgeries—the list goes on.¹²

Walton thinks that our aesthetic judgements of works depend on what perceptually distinguishable categories of art we view them under. Why? Because the aesthetic impact of any of a work's perceptual properties will depend on whether we view them as standard, variable, or contra-standard. Two questions: what are these categorial properties and what aesthetic impact are they supposed to have? First, the former:

A feature of a work of art is *standard* with respect to a (perceptually distinguishable) category just in case it is among those in virtue of which works in that category belong to that category—that is, just in case the lack of that feature would disqualify, or tend to disqualify, a work from that category. A feature is *variable* with respect to a category just in

11 Zangwill, 'In Defence of Moderate Aesthetic Formalism', p. 479.

12 We will return to this issue below.

case it has nothing to do with whether works belong to that category; the possession or lack of the feature is irrelevant to whether a work qualifies for the category. Finally, a *contra-standard* feature with respect to a category is the absence of a standard feature with respect to that category—that is, a feature whose presence tends to *disqualify* works as members of the category (CA, p. 339).

Walton provides a number of useful illustrations:

The flatness of a painting and the motionlessness of its markings are standard, and its particular shapes and colors are variable, relative to the category of painting. A protruding three-dimensional object or an electrically driven twitching of the canvas would be *contra-standard* relative to this category. The straight lines in stick-figure drawings and squarish shapes in cubist paintings are standard with respect to those categories respectively, though they are variable with respect to the categories of drawing and painting. The exposition-development-recapitulation form of a classical sonata is standard, and its thematic material is variable, relative to the category of sonatas. (CA, p. 340)

This, then, is the conceptual machinery Walton employs to motivate PCD. Now it is time to see how Walton does employ it. His strategy is to select a wide range of examples intended to show that the aesthetic impact a work's perceptual properties seem to have can change as we shift from category to category. Consider one of these, arguably the most memorable Walton offers, a thought experiment involving Picasso's masterpiece, *Guernica*:

Imagine a society which does not have an established medium of painting, but does produce a kind of work of art called *guernicas*. *Guernicas* are like versions of Picasso's 'Guernica' done in various bas-relief dimensions. All of them are surfaces with the colors and shapes of Picasso's 'Guernica,' but the surfaces are molded to protrude from the wall like relief maps of different kinds of terrain. Some *guernicas* have rolling surfaces, others are sharp and jagged, still others contain several relatively flat planes at various angles to each other, and so forth. Picasso's 'Guernica' would be counted as a *guernica* in this society – a perfectly flat one – rather than as a painting. Its flatness is variable and the figures on its surface are standard relative to the category of *guernicas*. Thus the flatness, which is standard for us, would be variable for members of the other society (if they should come across 'Guernica') and the figures on the surface, which are variable for us, would be standard for them. This would make for a profound difference between our aesthetic reaction to 'Guernica' and theirs. It seems violent, dynamic, vital, disturbing to us. But I imagine it would strike them as cold, stark, lifeless, or serene and restful, or perhaps bland, dull, boring – but in any case *not* violent, dynamic, and vital. We do not pay attention to or take note of 'Guernica's' flatness; this is a feature we take for granted in paintings, as it were. But for the other society this is 'Guernica's' most striking and noteworthy characteristic – what is *expressive* about it. Conversely, 'Guernica's' color patches, which we find noteworthy and expressive, are insignificant to them. (CA, p. 347)

What Walton wants us to take from this example is that the aesthetic impact one and the very same perceptual property seems to have depends on the category under which we

view the work exhibiting it. Viewed as a painting, the flatness of *Guernica* is standard and we simply 'pass over it', but if we manage to see it as a guernica instead, its surface becomes variable and assumes paramount importance. This intuition pump, along with the many others Walton presents, leads him to conclude that psychological category-sensitivity is 'not an isolated or exceptional phenomenon but a pervasive feature of aesthetic perception' (CA, p. 354). Predictably enough, some have disagreed,¹³ although many have been convinced. The question is: what are the philosophical implications of this?

Ontological Category-Dependence

OCD says that the actual aesthetic character of artworks is category-dependent. Walton construes this dependence along the same lines as PCD; just as our aesthetic judgements depend on which perceptual properties are standard, variable, or contra-standard relative to perceptually distinguishable categories of art, Walton supposes that the actual aesthetic properties of an artwork depend on which perceptual properties are, in fact, standard, variable, or contra-standard (relative to perceptually distinguishable categories of art). In other words, OCD parallels PCD. It thus needs no further explication. But a sceptic might wonder why we should accept it. Walton never explicitly argues for OCD on the basis of PCD. Indeed, he appears never to argue explicitly for OCD at all. Instead, he says he 'will *approach* this thesis by way of the psychological point', which we reviewed in the preceding section (CA, p. 338, emphasis added). Nevertheless, such remarks make it fairly clear that he takes PCD to motivate—in some way worth spelling out—OCD.

Presumably, any argument for OCD that exploits PCD will be less than decisive, and leave room for formalist dissent. Nevertheless, whatever arguments can be mounted are worth articulating. Walton may have had something like the following in mind. Suppose we grant that our aesthetic judgements are always (or even frequently) category-sensitive in the way that Walton suggests. Against traditional formalists—Walton's original opponents—one can then point out that OCD deviates less from our critical practices. And since many see our critical practices as a legitimate source of evidence—indeed, some would say it constitutes the final court of appeal—for assessing accounts of the aesthetics of art, Walton's hypothesis may be seen as possessing at least one advantage over classical formalism. A slightly different argument could be formulated focusing on reliability. Again, suppose PCD is correct. Were OCD then not true, we would appear to be hopelessly unreliable judges of the aesthetic character of artworks, endlessly misled by how we categorize them. But supposing we do not want to embrace such a dismal epistemic conclusion, it again appears that Walton's hypothesis has at least one advantage over traditional formalism. Of course, sceptics about aesthetic judgement will not be moved by such considerations, but since the rejection of scepticism is a shared assumption of Walton and his opponents, they are *prima facie* irrelevant. In any case, although it bears repeating that neither argument is to be found in 'Categories of Art', presumably whatever Walton had in mind would be somewhere in the neighbourhood.

13 Zangwill, 'In Defence of Moderate Aesthetic Formalism'.

Correct Category-Dependence

CCD says that there is a ‘correct’ category for judging each artwork, one that actually determines the aesthetic impact of its perceptual properties. Although Walton does not explicitly argue for the idea that category-membership affects the aesthetic character of works, he does explicitly argue for the notion that there are, in fact, correct categories for appreciating them. Walton begins from the fact that, in theory, we can view artworks in all sorts of categories; we can view *Guernica* as a painting, or—with some effort—even as a guernica. And this makes a difference aesthetically; *Guernica* seems energetic as a painting, but lifeless as a guernica. Supposing such categories can be aesthetically relevant, as OCD says, what, then, are we to say about the actual aesthetic character of *Guernica*? Is it really energetic? Lifeless? Both?

One possibility is that all aesthetic judgements are simply category-relative. On this view, we cannot say that *Guernica* is simply energetic, simply lifeless, or simply anything, aesthetically speaking; instead, we can only appreciate it as a painting, as a guernica, and so on. Walton avers that such a view may be true with respect to certain kinds of things, like natural entities, but explicitly rejects it for artworks. Roughly, his objection is that it would be too easy to issue correct aesthetic judgements, were it true (CA, pp. 355–357). For any aesthetic judgement we issue of a work, there is bound to be some category which would vindicate it. But surely, Walton says, this is wrong. For example, it would be ‘natural to consider a person who calls “Guernica” stark, cold, or dull, because he sees it as a *guernica*, to be mistaken’, even while granting that it comes off that way as a guernica (CA, pp. 355–356). From the alleged untenability of this relativistic view, then, Walton arrives at the idea that there must be correct categories for judging artworks.¹⁴ The next question is: how do we know what these are? Here, Walton offers a rough guide, specifically, five different guidelines that, in conjunction and balanced against each other, he thinks are fairly reliable for discerning the correct category (CA, pp. 357–358). I do not want to enter a detailed discussion of these here, but it is worthwhile to list them briefly, since they will be relevant to correctly interpreting Walton’s view later on. Other things being equal, Walton thinks a category that minimizes contra-standard properties is more likely to be correct, for a given work. He says the same for categories that maximize the aesthetic value of works. Of particular interest for us, however, are three historical guidelines Walton endorses. Walton thinks that categories that members of a society actually use to classify works are more likely to be correct than those they do not. Categories in which the artist intended a work to be seen are also more likely to be correct than any that he did not. Finally, for some works, Walton thinks the mechanical process used to create a work can also be relevant. In brief, these are the guidelines Walton recommends.

Correct Categories of Appreciation

Walton’s discussion of correct categories of appreciation and his guidelines for discerning them can be interpreted in two different ways. These stem from competing understandings

14 Walton ignores the possibility that the actual aesthetic character of a work is the average, so to speak, of how it comes off in every individual category to which it belongs. Some have endorsed this kind of view though: see, for example, Carroll, *On Criticism*, pp. 181–183.

of what Walton means by a 'correct category'. Walton does not clarify this notion beyond saying that such categories are those that actually determine the aesthetic impact of a work's perceptual properties. This leaves undecided which of the two following interpretations is correct, however. On the traditional view, which virtually everyone appears to assume, a correct category is simply whatever category a work belongs to. On this construal, then, Walton's guidelines for discerning correct categories are thus guidelines for discerning what category a work actually belongs to. Consider *Guernica* again here. Walton says that guernica is an incorrect category for appreciating *Guernica*, and that cubist painting is instead correct. On this interpretation, guernica is the wrong category, because *Guernica* is not a guernica—it does not belong to that category. On the other hand, cubist paintings is a correct category, because *Guernica* does belong to that category—it is, indeed, a cubist painting. That is the traditional interpretation of Walton's view. But there is another.

A different way to see Walton's discussion supposes that a correct category is not merely one that a work belongs to. Rather, among all the various categories any work belongs to, it is a special, privileged category that actually helps determine a work's aesthetic character. On this interpretation, seeking a correct category to judge a work is not to seek a category that it belongs to; instead, it is to seek—among all the categories we already know it belongs to—one that is aesthetically active. Such a category might be complex or it might be nested within other categories—as the category of cubist paintings is nested within the category of paintings, to take a simple example. On this reading, Walton's guidelines for discerning the correctness of a category are not intended to determine what categories a work belongs to. Instead, they are meant to determine, among the categories a work does belong to, which are aesthetically active. Again, consider *Guernica* here. On this interpretation, Walton regards the guernica category as incorrect, not because Picasso's work is not a guernica, but rather because it is simply not a category that affects its aesthetic character.

Very briefly then, these are two different ways to understand Walton's account. Which one is right? Most commentators assume the first interpretation is correct. This is especially clear, in light of how Walton's views on the *Guernica* case are typically explained. Usually, it is said Walton takes guernicas to be an incorrect category for appreciating Picasso's work, simply because it is not a guernica, and cubist paintings to be the correct category, because it is a cubist painting. No one has actually argued for this interpretation though, and, indeed, none have considered, much less debated, the competing interpretation I have sketched here. However, I think multiple and quite serious considerations favour my reading over the traditional one, and I would like to spend some time developing three of them. Afterward, I identify a few reasons why it is important to correct this misunderstanding.

My first contention is that Walton's account is inconsistent or contradictory on the traditional reading, whereas it is not on mine. This point is subtle, and requires reviewing details in Walton's article that other commentators frequently neglect. Recall, in the first instance, Walton's hypothesis that the aesthetic character of artworks depends, not just on any old category of art, but, specifically, on perceptually distinguishable categories of art. But remember how these are defined: perceptually distinguishable categories of art are those in which membership is solely based on possession of perceptual properties.

Therefore, the aesthetically relevant categories of art include those of which membership is solely based on possession of perceptual properties, according to Walton. All of this is presented rather early in Walton's article. Later on, as we know, Walton also says there are 'correct' categories of appreciation, categories that actually help determine the aesthetic character of works. Now enter the traditional interpretation of Walton's discussion of correct categories. On this view, by 'correct category', Walton just means: whatever category a work belongs to. Walton's guidelines for discerning correct categories are thus construed as criteria for determining whatever category a work belongs to. But, crucially, some of these guidelines are historical. That would mean Walton thinks the criteria for determining the category a work belongs to are, after all, partly historical—not perceptual, as he says at the outset. Walton's account thus turns out to be contradictory, on the popular understanding of his view. But we need not attribute such an inconsistency to Walton, on my interpretation. To repeat, on my alternative construal, Walton thinks that works belong to all sorts of perceptually distinguishable categories, and the aesthetic character they seem to possess depends on which we choose to view it under. So, to avoid relativism, Walton hypothesizes that some of these are 'correct' categories under which to view it. Walton's historical guidelines are not intended to discern what aesthetically relevant categories a work belongs to, on this view. We already know what perceptually distinguishable categories a work belongs to via perception. The guidelines are merely meant to determine which of these is actually aesthetically active.

My second contention is that Walton's view on the aesthetics of nature makes more sense on my reading than the standard one. Although Walton is primarily concerned with the aesthetics of art in 'Categories of Art', he does make some passing remarks about nature. As with art, he says our aesthetic judgements of natural entities are category-dependent (CA, pp. 350–351), and appears to assume that their actual aesthetic character is category-dependent as well (CA, p. 355). However, he stops short of saying there are correct categories for appreciating nature. Instead, he is willing to accept the category-relative view that he rejects with respect to artworks, noting that the guidelines he develops for discerning correct categories of art appreciation are 'not readily applicable to most judgments about natural objects' (CA, p. 355). But recall that on the standard interpretation of correct categories of appreciation, a correct category is just one that a thing belongs to. So, on this view, Walton's denial that there are correct categories for nature is tantamount to denying that natural objects belong to categories. But it seems wildly unlikely that Walton ever held such a view. Surely, like anyone, Walton realizes natural entities belong to various categories. Marilyn Monroe, for example, was a human being, a mammal, an animal, a living thing, a natural entity—and much, much else. That is obvious. So, if Walton merely equated correct categories with categories a thing belongs to, it is hard to see why he would embrace a relativistic view of the aesthetics of nature. Were the problem merely one of discovering whatever category a natural thing belongs to, it would hardly matter that natural objects are not created by artists, for they belong to all sorts of categories that have nothing to do with anyone's intentions at all. It makes more sense, however, on my interpretation why he would seriously consider such a view. For, on my reading, Walton invokes the notion of a correct category of appreciation precisely because things belong to various categories, and it is not clear why one should be privileged over

another in determining a thing's aesthetic qualities. With the case of art, though, we might think we should privilege the category an artist took themselves to be contributing to, but there is simply nothing like this at all for natural objects. Of course, one might not sympathize with such worries, but surely this reading is more natural and plausible than one which would attribute to Walton the wildly unusual view that natural objects do not belong to any categories—as the traditional interpretation of Walton's discussion of correct categories of appreciation evidently does.

My final contention is simply that Walton's strategy for avoiding relativism makes more sense on my reading than on the traditional one. Recall that Walton invokes the notion of a correct category because he wants to avoid a relativistic view. But were a correct category merely one that a work belongs to, Walton's response to relativism would obviously be flawed, because works do not simply belong to one category. Even putting aside exotic or unfamiliar categories, such as *guernica*, it is clear that every work belongs to a variety of familiar categories. To take a wildly simple example, the recent movie *Twilight*, a hit among Western teens, belongs to the overlapping categories of vampire movies and teen romances. As the former, the presence of vampires is a standard feature; as the latter, their presence is variable. If Walton's theory is correct, this alone should motivate a relativistic position. For Walton says that whether a perceptual property is standard or variable makes an aesthetic difference. Therefore, if Walton's strategy for combating relativism were simply to find the category a work belongs to—as the traditional reading implies—this move would flatly fail, for many works do not belong to a single category of art. Walton does not come off so naïvely, on my view, however, because I think he invokes the notion of a correct category to choose among the categories a work belongs to, rather than to simply discern what category a work does belong to.

The preceding considerations constitute a real challenge to the traditional interpretation of Walton's view. Still, because many commentators have assumed it, one might think there are some compelling reasons for adopting it. Naturally, one would want to know what these are. Previous commentators have not actually defended their interpretation though. Hence, there are no relevant arguments to consider here. Presumably, this is because the traditional reading has struck previous commentators as natural or obvious. And since it has not been challenged—they are not aware of any of the problems I have sketched or the alternative reading I have presented—they see no need to defend it. However, we can speculate a little about why their interpretation has been so common. I think one reason readers have thought Walton equates correct categories of appreciation simply with categories a work belongs to is because it is obviously true that the only category that could potentially affect a work's aesthetic character is one to which it does belong. If a work lacks a property *F*, then being *F* cannot affect the status of that work. This is just a trivial extension of that idea. However, it should be evident that my interpretation also accommodates this truism, for, on my view, Walton assumes from the outset that the only categories that can affect a work's status is those to which it belongs. Indeed, from the outset he assumes the only relevant categories of art are those to which a work belongs merely in terms of perceptual features. The notion of correctness is not invoked, then, to determine a work's category-memberships, on my view, though it does accommodate the idea that, of course, the correct category would be one a work belongs to.

Another reason for the traditional reading of Walton is probably that some of his examples, like the *Guernica* case, involve exotic or unfamiliar categories. It is therefore natural to suppose that *guernica*, for instance, is an incorrect category for appreciating Picasso's work, because it does not belong to it. However, as we have seen previously, this interpretation, if correct, would render Walton's account inconsistent. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that it is not so strange to think Picasso's work really is a *guernica*, in the first place. Categories of art are simply defined in terms of properties that artworks possess. Many of these we do not use or care about, such as *guernicas*, but that does not make them any less of a category than familiar ones we use, such as cubist paintings. Artworks have properties, and for any property or set of properties they possess, there is a corresponding category to which a work thus belongs in virtue of it, regardless of whether we have a name for that category, use it, or care about it. *Guernica* is at least ten feet long. It thus belongs to the category of artworks that are at least ten feet long. There is no proper name for such a category, and I doubt it will ever figure into anyone's appreciation of *Guernica*, but Picasso's work still belongs to it, and it does so regardless of Picasso's intentions or our critical practices. It is not clear what convincing metaphysical reason could be produced for denying this.

A final and related reason that readers have typically adopted the traditional interpretation is probably the idea that many of our familiar categories of art are, in part, defined in terms of historical properties, like the artist's intentions. Plausibly, on the folk concept of a painting, a painted canvas only qualifies as a painting if it was created by an artist who intended it to be one. So, when Walton says that the correct category for *Guernica* is a cubist painting, and that this is due in part to the likely intentions of Picasso, it is natural to think Walton just means that *Guernica* is a painting, because of Picasso's intentions. However, again, this neglects Walton's crucial qualification at the beginning of his essay that he is only dealing with perceptually distinguishable categories of art and that this includes categories like painting *only* if we interpret them as perceptually distinguishable. All that being said, there may be other details in Walton's article that do support the traditional reading over mine. Nevertheless, any such details would still have to be balanced against the arguments I have put forward, none of which have been previously recognized. In any case, correcting the traditional interpretation of Walton's article is important for various reasons beyond the plain interest of rightly understanding such a widely read essay.

One reason is simply that, as a result of this misinterpretation, Walton has been wrongly criticized by some who think the notion of a correct category fails to avoid the sort of relativistic view for which Walton introduced it.¹⁵ Gregory Currie offers the following thought experiment to motivate this objection. Assuming the traditional interpretation I have been criticizing, he supposes Walton thinks *Guernica* is a cubist painting, but not a *guernica*, and that this is why the former is the correct category for appreciating it, rather than the latter. He then asks us to imagine a society in which we employ the category of *guernicas*, just as we do the category of paintings, and to suppose that Picasso intended *Guernica* to be both a painting and a *guernica*. He concludes that in this situation we would still be saddled with the problem of deciding which category really

15 Currie, *Ontology of Art*, pp. 31–32.

determines its aesthetic character—guernicas or paintings—since it comes off differently depending on which category we choose to see it in. If my interpretation is right, however, Walton anticipated this problem from the very beginning. The whole reason Walton introduces correct categories, in the first place, on my view, is because artworks belong to various categories, and it is not clear which one determines its real aesthetic properties, if we reject relativism. Indeed, if I am right, Walton already thinks *Guernica* is a cubist painting, a guernica, and countless other things. So, his account cannot be fairly criticized on such grounds. This is not to say, of course, that Walton's anti-relativist strategy is successful. One might think that his guidelines are incomplete or incorrect. Or, indeed, one might think the idea that there are objective guidelines for selecting a category of appreciation to be wrong-headed, to begin with. Nevertheless, Walton cannot be fairly criticized for naïvely supposing relativism can be avoided on OCD, simply by selecting a category a work happens to belong to.

A related, but larger, reason for emphasizing the correct interpretation of Walton's account is simply that it appears to be virtually the only attempt to solve this relativistic problem which arises for typical anti-formalist views of art appreciation. Even though the latter have dominated criticism for decades, and many thinkers embrace the aesthetic relevance of classification, precisely because they think our appreciation is category-sensitive, most do not recognize that this raises the problem of what category—among the various ones any work belongs to—we should appreciate a work under.¹⁶ But even those who do recognize it seem not to realize that some have attempted to address it.¹⁷ In any case, no one seems to realize that Walton was attempting to address it. Historically then, Walton deserves credit for identifying this problem and attempting to solve it. More importantly, his discussion provides a point of departure for addressing this issue, which is too little discussed by contextualists. Correcting the traditional interpretation of Walton also has importance for some areas outside the aesthetics of art, in particular, the aesthetics of nature, where Walton's framework has been enormously influential.

Although it has grown in different direction over the years, Carlson's influential position on the appreciation of nature, scientific cognitivism, was originally formulated as a modified extension of Walton's views on the aesthetics of art.¹⁸ Like Walton, Carlson thinks that our aesthetic judgements of nature and the actual aesthetic character of natural entities are category-dependent. Unlike Walton, however, Carlson rejects relativism with respect to nature; he thinks some aesthetic judgements, such as 'The Grand Tetons are dumpy', are simply false, and that others, such as 'The Grand Tetons are majestic', are simply true.¹⁹ However, he recognizes that Walton's guidelines for discerning correct categories of appreciation in art are inapplicable to nature, since, presumably, natural objects are not created by anyone with the intention of being viewed in certain categories; Picasso

16 One recent exception worth noting is Carroll, *On Criticism*, pp. 181–183.

17 Patricia Matthews, 'Scientific Knowledge and the Appreciation of Nature', *JAC*, 60 (2002), pp. 37–48; ref. on p. 45.

18 This is most clear in Carlson's early paper, 'Nature, Aesthetic Judgment, and Objectivity'. The following discussion is largely based on this article, though I am sensitive to the fact that scientific cognitivism is no longer a simple, unified research programme, perfectly reflecting Carlson's original account.

19 Carlson, 'Nature, Aesthetic Judgment, and Objectivity', p. 15.

intended *Guernica* to be viewed as a cubist painting, but no one made the Grand Tetons or intended them to be viewed in any particular category. Carlson, though, mistakenly assumes that Walton's correct categories of appreciation are simply whatever categories an object of appreciation belongs to. So, he dismisses the inapplicability of Walton's guidelines, and supposes that scientific categories are the correct ones for appreciating nature, since presumably science tells us what categories natural entities really belong to. But this misunderstands the nature of Walton's concern about applying his framework to nature. Even were scientific categories the only ones relevant to appreciating a natural thing—rather than others to which they also belong—natural entities belong to multiple scientific categories, and so nature-relativism is not avoided merely by identifying scientific categories as the correct categories for appreciating nature.²⁰ For example, Paris Hilton's pet, Tinkerbelle, may strike one as dainty and cute when viewed simply as a dog, but somewhat less so when viewed as a Chihuahua—both categories to which Tinkerbelle belongs. So, if Carlson and his followers want to resist nature-relativism, it will not suffice just to say that natural entities should be viewed under scientific categories, because they belong to them.²¹ On my interpretation, Walton's concern is not that we cannot identify categories, including scientific ones, that natural items belong to, but rather that it is not clear what reason we have for privileging one of these as the correct category—the category that actually helps determine its aesthetic character.

These are just a few of the reasons that it is important to clarify Walton's notion of a correct category of appreciation, and what role it is meant to play in his account. There are probably others as well, though I hope these suffice to convince readers that Walton's account has not been interpreted carefully enough. In any case, some of the same frequently neglected ideas in 'Categories of Art', which support my interpretation here, also reveal that Walton's account of art appreciation interestingly differs from paradigmatic contextualist views with which it is often affiliated. I would like to conclude by considering this issue—the location of Walton's view among theories of the aesthetics of art—which is often commented on, but not discussed all that rigorously.

The Aesthetic Relevance of Categories

In considering the theory Walton has contributed to the philosophy of criticism, most do so by immediately trying to place him on one side of the empiricism–contextualism dichotomy. And, as I mentioned in the Introduction, philosophers have classified him differently: some see him as an empiricist, while others see him as a contextualist. In the first instance, however, I do not think this is the best way to locate Walton's view among the various theories of art appreciation. Positions like empiricism and contextualism are

20 Although Malcolm Budd does not discuss Walton's article, he deserves credit for raising this problem for scientific cognitivism. See his article, 'The Aesthetics of Nature', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 100 (2000), pp. 137–157; ref. on p. 143.

21 Recently, Glenn Parsons has refined scientific cognitivism, in part to address this difficulty. Very briefly, his view is that the correct category for appreciating a natural entity is whatever scientific category it belongs to that maximizes its aesthetic value. See Parsons, 'Nature Appreciation, Science, and Positive Aesthetics'.

continually redefined. And so, for instance, those, such as Zangwill, who now claim to be formalists, endorse a position that, strictly speaking, would have been rejected by the empiricists of yesteryear, such as Bell or Beardsley. As a result, such broad classifications often neglect philosophically important distinctions. And I think this is especially a danger with Walton's theory, for, in many ways, it is a strikingly unique view. In this final section, I want to emphasize its uniqueness by focusing, naturally, on the role categories play in it *vis-à-vis* other theories, especially contextualist ones with which it is often associated. It should come as no surprise that virtually anyone who considers themselves a formalist or empiricist rejects Walton's view. Even modern formalists, who have weakened the position of people such as Beardsley, still reject it.²² However, it is often not recognized that Walton's view differs, in some ways, from those of most self-avowed contextualists as well.²³

On the traditional conception, empiricism states that the aesthetic properties of a work are solely determined by its perceptual, sensible, or manifest properties. In a way, Walton thinks this picture is right, as he himself says.²⁴ What is aesthetically relevant about a work, on his view, depends on its perceptual properties—how it looks, sounds, and so forth. But, of course, *contra* formalists, Walton thinks the aesthetic impact these have depend on what category we *perceive* a work in; the impact of *Guernica*'s flatness will depend on whether it is correctly judged as a cubist painting or as a guernica. The idea that categories of art are aesthetically relevant in any way does, no doubt, oppose traditional empiricism. However, given this, it is all too easy to pass over the fact that Walton's use of categories is much friendlier to formalism than those of everyday contextualists. There are two details, in particular, worth emphasizing here. First, the range of aesthetically relevant categories that Walton considers is much more restricted than those of ordinary contextualists. Second, the way in which these categories are aesthetically relevant is, on Walton's view, rather minimal as well. Both points are worth meditating on at length.

As I stressed earlier, the only aesthetically relevant categories that Walton considers are perceptually distinguishable ones. Again, such categories are defined solely in terms of perceptual properties, and we can assign or exclude a work from them merely via perception (under epistemically favourable conditions); in a sense, we can *see* a work is a painting or *hear* a work is a sonata, a point Walton stresses throughout his discussion of PCD. Naturally, one might wonder whether there is a compelling reason to make such a restriction, especially since Walton seems to offer no reason himself. But, in any case, it is a concession to formalist views. This is especially apparent in light of the much wider range of categories ordinary contextualists think are aesthetically relevant. Consider some standard examples. Historically, the bedrock cases motivating contextualism are fakes, forgeries, and ready-mades. For instance, if a work is a fake, then in contextualist terms, that makes an aesthetic difference. If two works are perceptually indiscernible, but one is a fake, while the other is an original, the former is allegedly aesthetically worse than the latter on many—though

22 For example, Zangwill, 'In Defence of Moderate Aesthetic Formalism'.

23 Currie points out some of these differences. See *Ontology of Art*, ch. 2.

24 Although Walton rejects traditional formalism, he still says 'there is something right in the idea that what matters aesthetically about a painting or a sonata is just how it looks or sounds'. See CA, p. 377.

not all—contextualist views.²⁵ But note that the category of fakes is plainly not perceptually distinguishable. Without worrying about a precise definition here, a work is clearly a fake in virtue of historical properties, not perceptual ones. We cannot see a work is a fake—at least, not in the sense that Walton thinks we can see a work is a painting. The same considerations can be said of the other standard cases, namely forgeries and readymades. But fakes and the like are just starting points for contextualism; many other historical categories are also considered aesthetically relevant, on typical versions of this position. For example, it would surely be unremarkable for a contextualist to claim that, say, *Guernica* is rightly appreciated as a twentieth-century European painting, but clearly such a category would be perceptually indistinguishable, and, hence, not a category of art, as Walton defines it. For a theoretical articulation of this style of thinking, which Walton opposes, consider Jerrold Levinson's views on the aesthetics of music.²⁶

Levinson claims that the aesthetic properties of a musical work depend not just on how it sounds but also on what he calls the 'total musico-historical context' in which it is composed.²⁷ Although he declines offering a precise definition of this notion, Levinson still offers a rich characterization in the following passage:

The total musico-historical context of a composer *P* at a time *t* can be said to include at least the following: (a) the whole of cultural, social, and political history prior to *t*, (b) the whole of musical development up to *t*, (c) musical styles prevalent at *t*, (d) dominant musical influences at *t*, (e) musical activities of *P*'s contemporaries at *t*, (f) *P*'s apparent style at *t*, (g) *P*'s musical repertoire at *t*, (h) *P*'s oeuvre at *t*, (i) musical influences operating on *P* at *t*.²⁸

Superficially, this account obviously differs from Walton's in that he makes no use of the idea of a correct category of appreciation; indeed, he does not literally speak in terms of categories at all. However, we can roughly recast his proposal in such terms, and serious differences still emerge. For simplicity, just focus on one component of a musico-historical context. Levinson suggests that a composer's *oeuvre* is aesthetically relevant; a musical work's aesthetic character partly depends on its membership in its creator's body of work. He offers an example to illustrate this:

suppose there had been a composer (call him 'Toenburg') in 1912 identical with Schoenberg in all musico-historical respects, e.g., birthdate, country, style, musical development, artistic intentions, etc., except that Toenburg had never written anything like *Verklarte Nacht* though he had in his oeuvre works structurally identical with everything else Schoenberg wrote before 1912. Now suppose simultaneously with Schoenberg he sketches the sound structure of *Pierrot Lunaire*. Toenburg has not

25 One exception might be Mark Sagoff, 'The Aesthetic Status of Forgeries', *JAC*, 35 (1976), pp. 169–180.

26 Levinson, 'What a Musical Work Is', pp. 10–14.

27 Although Levinson's focus here is musical works, something like the following proposal is widely accepted among contextualists for other kinds of artworks too. Note also that in this paper Levinson defends the stronger thesis that musical works are partly constituted by context, though this ontological view will not figure in the following discussion.

28 Levinson, 'What a Musical Work Is', pp. 10–11.

produced the same musical work as Schoenberg, I maintain, if only because his work has a slightly different aesthetic/artistic content owing to the absence of a *Verklarte-Nacht*-ish piece in Toenberg's oeuvre. Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* is properly heard with reference to Schoenberg's oeuvre in 1912, and Toenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* with reference to Toenberg's oeuvre in 1912. One thus hears something in Schoenberg's piece by virtue of resonance with *Verklarte Nacht* that is not present in Toenberg's piece – perhaps a stronger reminiscence of Expressionist sighs?²⁹

So, on Levinson's view, the aesthetic character of *Pierrot Lunaire* is affected by its membership in Schoenberg's oeuvre. But, again, on Walton's view, the category, Schoenberg's compositions, is not perceptually distinguishable. Fakes and oeuvres are, nonetheless, just two random examples of historical categories that ordinary contextualists think can affect a work's aesthetic character; there are many others in addition. This constitutes one interesting difference between his theory and those typically endorsed under the contextualist banner. Another interesting difference concerns the precise way in which categories are supposed, on Walton's view, to be aesthetically relevant.

In principle, there are a few different ways that membership in a category might be aesthetically relevant. We can call these *modes of categorial aesthetic relevance*. It is important to see that Walton commits to one of these modes, but not the others. The first mode might be called *direct aesthetic relevance*. If a work's membership in a category is directly relevant, that means merely belonging to that category entails possessing some aesthetic property. In this vein, consider the category of fakes again. One might think, as many contextualists do, that merely being a fake—or, if you like, belonging to the category of fakes—constitutes an aesthetic demerit. Invoking a category in this style of aesthetic explanation clearly has nothing at all to do with Walton's hypothesis regarding standard, variable, and contra-standard properties. Here, mere membership alone is supposed to be aesthetically relevant. This mode of explanation is evidently less commonly invoked among contextualists, but since it seems to capture the manner in which the category of fakes is often exploited—one of the standard cases motivating their view—its importance to the contextualist tradition cannot be ignored.

More commonly cited in contextualist work is what I call *indirect aesthetic relevance*. For simplicity, this mode can be negatively defined in relation to direct aesthetic relevance; here, mere membership in a category does not itself constitute an aesthetic merit or demerit, or entail possession of any particular aesthetic property. The kind of categorial aesthetic relevance Walton has in mind is of this kind. However, Walton's mode is not the only species of indirect relevance contextualists have endorsed or exploited. There are others. One is what I call *comparative aesthetic relevance*. As a first pass, if a work's membership in a category is comparatively relevant, it captures the proper frame of reference for judging a work. A good example here is the aesthetic relevance of oeuvres. Consider Levinson's thoughts on Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. It is clear enough that the latter's membership in the category, Schoenberg's musical compositions, is not directly aesthetically relevant, on Levinson's view—or on anyone else's, for that matter. Merely belonging

29 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

to that category does not entail any particular aesthetic property at all. So, if it is, indeed, aesthetically relevant, it must be so indirectly. But in what precise way? It appears that Levinson's idea is that the work's aesthetic character depends on its relation to other works in Schoenberg's *oeuvre*, like *Verklarte Nacht*. In comparison to these, it evidently sounds more resigned or longing. The style of categorial-explanation in this example is far more common among contextualists than the direct variety, and is much closer to the kind Walton employs. However, it still differs from the latter.

For Walton, categories matter, because whether a perceptual property of a work is standard, variable, or contra-standard matters. In principle, one can know whether a property is standard, for example, relative to some category, without knowing anything about the other works in that category. With comparative relevance, that is not possible; one must know the other members of the category. That is not necessary on Walton's view: to rightly judge *Guernica* as a painting just means we must realize that its flatness and its being painted are standard, while many of its other manifest properties are not. Put another way, we only have to understand the *idea* of a relevant category, on this mode of categorial relevance, but nothing about other members of the category—at least in principle.³⁰ Walton's mode then, is a particular species of *ideal aesthetic relevance*, because here it is the idea of a category that matters, and not the other members of it. Walton's ideal relevance is more similar to, but still distinct from yet another potential sort of categorial relevance also worth mentioning.

It is common among contextualists—and even among ordinary people—to think some artworks have a purpose in virtue of belonging to a certain category, and that the aesthetic character of such works, especially their value, depends, in part, on how well they fulfil that purpose.³¹ For example, one might think that the purpose of *The Exorcist qua* horror film is to frighten audiences; the purpose of *Annie Hall qua* comedy is to make people laugh; the purpose of *Imitation of Life qua* tearjerker is to sadden audiences; and so on. This potential sort of categorial relevance can be aptly called *teleological aesthetic relevance*, since it involves the notion that membership in a category entails having a certain purpose, and that a work's aesthetic character depends in part on how well and skilfully it executes it. Like Walton's preferred mode, teleological relevance does not hinge on any relation to other members of a category—so it is also a species of ideal relevance—but it evidently differs in that Walton makes no mention of artistic purposes, and it is not clear how his framework involving standard, variable, and contra-standard features could be essentially connected to it.

Very briefly then, these are four potential modes of categorial aesthetic relevance. In the first instance, there is the basic distinction between direct and indirect relevance. Under indirect relevance, we can distinguish between comparative and ideal relevance. And, finally, under ideal relevance, we can distinguish between non-teleological relevance and

30 Of course, as a practical matter, it might help to be familiar with a lot of works from the category under consideration, but this is just an epistemic point, one that even formalists ordinarily grant. It has nothing to do with the idea that the category actually affects the aesthetic character of the work, as Walton holds.

31 For a philosophical articulation and defence of this sort of idea, see Daniel Kaufman, 'Normative Criticism and the Objective Value of Artworks', *JAC*, 60 (2002), pp. 151–166.

teleological relevance. No doubt, they could be sharpened as well. However, this brief exposition should suffice to clarify some of the ways in which Walton's position differs from that of ordinary contextualists. First, Walton is probably unique in committing to only one mode of categorial aesthetic relevance. Most contextualists seem just as likely to accept one as any other, as illustrated by the fact that many of them subtly invoke various modes of categorial relevance throughout their work. But Walton is very explicit in thinking categories of art are aesthetically relevant in just his preferred way, and his various examples and thought experiments seem faithful to this, his 'official' position. We can put this point another way: Walton seems to be a *category-relevance monist*, while most we would classify as contextualists are probably *category-relevance pluralists*. Nevertheless, even if there are any other monists, I am unaware of any but Walton who just endorse the mode with which he is concerned.³²

Second, the kind of categorial relevance Walton accepts seems friendlier to formalist theories of art appreciation than the other kinds canvassed. This requires some explanation. Formalists, above all else, want to maintain that the aesthetically relevant properties of a work are those that impact our perceptual experience of it; in other words, no aesthetic difference without a perceptual difference. That is precisely why—rightly or wrongly—they dismiss historical properties of works as aesthetically irrelevant. But now note that categories of art matter for Walton in a way that seems to accommodate this idea. For categorial knowledge, on Walton's view, is supposed to literally affect our perception of a work: 'to perceive a work in a certain category is to perceive the "Gestalt" of that category in the work' (CA, p. 340). Accordingly, to see *Guernica* as a painting is supposed to be different than seeing it as a guernica. Walton does not go very far in explicating this alleged difference, but, presumably, it would be somewhat similar—though not exactly like—the perceptual difference between seeing, say, the famous duck–rabbit as a duck rather than as a rabbit. To this extent then, Walton seems sympathetic to formalism. But now note that this empiricist strand seems absent from the other modes of potential categorial relevance; a category could be directly relevant, comparatively relevant, or teleologically relevant, independently of how it affects one's perception of a work. For instance, take the standard example of direct relevance: fakes. Although knowing a work is a fake should affect one's aesthetic estimation of it—most contextualists will say—that does not mean it should actually look different to how it would look independently of this knowledge. Whatever the reason status as a fake is aesthetically relevant—if, indeed, it is—it surely cannot be rooted in perception, as Walton's use of categories evidently appears to be. Likewise, supposing that a work has some purpose to fulfil or that it ought to be compared to some set of other works should not literally affect how it appears. In this way, Walton's position again seems to differ subtly from that of ordinary contextualists, because his favoured mode of categorial relevance is evidently connected to perception in a way that others commonly accepted among contextualists are not.

32 Comparative relevance seems to be the mode most often relied on by contextualists. So, chances are, if there other monists, they are most likely to just accept this mode of categorial relevance.

This discussion—brief though it is—should raise a number of questions regarding contextualism and the aesthetic relevance of categories of art. For example, if a work’s membership in a category can be aesthetically relevant, is it only in one sort of way—perhaps just in Walton’s way—or should contextualists accept multiple modes of categorial relevance, perhaps even more than those we have viewed here? And what are the true relationships between these evidently distinct modes? Are some more fundamental than others? Do some even reduce to others? Naturally, these questions deserve their own space, and it would be inappropriate to address them here, but let me conclude by saying that it is to Walton’s credit that reflection on his distinguished essay ultimately leads to them.³³

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