

Artistic Progress

Towards an Applied Philosophy of Image-Making

Kunstnerisk fremgang

Mot en anvendt filosofi om billedskapning

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Dedicated to my best friend and loving partner, Caiti van Heerden

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Abstract

The origins of image-making can be traced back over 73,000 years. Image-making in contemporary art differs significantly from that of our ancestors. One explanation for this is that changes in our conception of image-making bring about corresponding changes in image-making itself. However, it remains uncertain whether this transformation represents a progression and to what extent theoretical constructs have played a role.

The topic of this thesis is *artistic progress*. The general question I ask is whether the notion of progress applies to visual art and, in the case it does, in what sense and how? The more specific question is whether progress is intelligible despite art's pluralism?

I show that these concerns are met through *the noetic account of artistic progress*. According to the noetic account, artistic progress is made with respect to understanding image-making. This affords progress to art-practice through the integration of enhanced understanding.

Keywords: *artistic progress, understanding, art-practice, image-making, art theory*

Sammendrag

Billedskapningens oppstandelse kan spores tilbake over 73 000 år. Billedskaping i samtidskunst skiller seg vesentlig fra våre forfedres. En forklaring på dette er at endringer i vår oppfatning av billedskaping medfører tilsvarende endringer i selve billedskapingen. Det er imidlertid fortsatt usikkert om denne transformasjonen representerer en progresjon og i hvilken grad teoretiske konstruksjoner har spilt en rolle.

I denne oppgaven diskuterer jeg ideen om *kunstnerisk fremgang*. Det generelle spørsmålet er om forestillingen om fremskritt gjelder billedkunst, og i tilfelle den gjør det, i hvilken forstand og hvordan? Det mer spesifikke spørsmålet er om ideen av fremgang er intelligibelt til tross for kunstens pluralisme?

Jeg viser at disse bekymringene møtes gjennom den *noetiske beretningen av kunstnerisk fremgang*. Ifølge den noetiske beretningen gjøres kunstneriske fremskritt med hensyn til å forstå billedskaping. Den noetiske beretningen viser at ideen om kunstnerisk fremgang muliggjøres av å integrere økt forståelse i kunstpraksis.

Nokkelord: *Kunstnerisk fremgang, forståelse, kunstutøvelse, billedskaping, kunstteori*

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Preface

To provide context for what follows, it may be helpful to clarify the motives behind writing this thesis. My attraction to philosophy stemmed from a sense of uncertainty about my art-practice. No matter how I approached the question "What should my work do or be about?", I never felt that my answers were genuine. It was not clear what I was doing as an artist, or even what it is that artists should do. The confidence of others in this regard was equally unsettling—how could they be so sure?

Despite my search for answers in the artworld, I came to realise that any response would likely be taken as given, derived from a status quo that is built on questionable assumptions and values. Weighed down by the precarity that comes with being a professional artist, I felt a great sense of unease, amplified by the lack of answers to what it was about art-practice that could justify it. What is it about making art that compels me to do it? Had it not been for the encouragement and goodwill of Professor Ole Martin Skilleås, I might still be stranded on those shores. This thesis is the boat that I am sending back for fellow artists who share my concerns and for philosophers who ponder their pondering.

My inquiry is partly driven by my scepticism about the meaningfulness of my chosen artistic profession, and a desire to gain clarity in that regard in order to better orientate my art-practice. Furthermore, my investigation is prompted by a gap in the literature to find answers to my concerns, as there exists no dedicated monograph on the philosophy of art-practice.

So, why focus on *artistic progress*? One reason is, if progress is to be made in the realm of art, it is likely to be initiated by the artists themselves. I surmised that examining the question of artistic progress could serve as a means to consider art-practice from a philosophical perspective, whilst engaging with it from a maximal—trans-historical—

degree. The prospects of the historical approach suggested a consideration of both variation and constancies, and thereby all that art-practice is and has been. I was intrigued by the prevailing assumption that the most highly valued art in history is that which has fundamentally altered the course of art's narrative. I believed that if it could be shown that there truly was artistic progress, comprehending it could not only provide me with greater confidence in my own art-practice by reflectively locating myself in art's historical narrative, but could also offer the strategic advantage of hindsight and foresight. I did not expect to find how closely intertwined the notion of artistic progress is with the philosophy of art, art theory, art history and art-practice. Therefore, how important an account of artistic progress can be for art-practice.

My investigation comes full circle and forwards the philosophical project I could not initially find. An outcome of putting forth *the noetic account of artistic progress* is that it provides a rationale for an artistic project that can meaningfully guide art-practice. Namely, *an applied philosophy of image-making*. Like the many artists before me that have invested in artistic projects, it is the applied philosophy of image-making that I plan to adhere my art-practice to, in the hope that consequently I may become a wiser artist.

“By one of the ironic perversities that often attend the course of affairs, the existence of the works of art upon which formation of an aesthetic theory depends has become an obstruction to theory about them.” —John Dewey (2005, 13)

Introduction

The problem

The topic of this thesis is *artistic progress*. The general question asked is whether the notion of progress applies to visual art and, in the case it does, in what sense and how?

To address this concern, I take an artist's perspective and emphasize the central importance of art-practice in the debate about artistic progress. I use image-making as an exemplar for the medium of art-practice.¹ This is to avoid confusion with other artistic mediums and to explore how the discussion may expand beyond the notion of art. It is my belief that it is also possible for an account of artistic progress to deal with a coinciding concern. Namely, in what sense can the change we observe throughout the history of image-making be interpreted as progress and to what extent do theoretical constructs play a role?²

The notion of progress dates to Aristotle (2004, Physics II 3), but the notion of artistic progress becomes more explicit during the Renaissance with the introduction of a distinct notion of art (Doorman, 2003, 29). Distinct ideas about artistic progress have appeared implicitly and explicitly in artistic movements, art criticism, manifestos, art history and academic expositions. In literary form, key accounts have been made by theorists such as Giorgio Vasari (1965), Clement Greenberg (1993), Ernest Gombrich (1971; 1985; 2002; 2006) and most recently, by art critic and philosopher of art, Arthur Danto (1964; 1981; 1986; 1997). Danto's (1997) ideas concerning artistic progress are chiefly presented in *After the End of Art*, but are, in my opinion, flawed.

¹ My thesis focuses on 'art-practice' in terms of two-dimensional image art forms such as painting, photography, and printmaking. This is chosen because these kinds of images are the primary subject of concern in the literature. Moreover, these kinds of images are what is of interest in my art-practice.

² This concern is met by the noetic account of artistic progress I have on offer.

Danto's (1997) *non-progress thesis* can be summed up as follows: art history has exhibited a progressive narrative, which has now ended in contemporary art. The progressive narrative cannot be replaced by a new narration and therefore, the history of art has ended. For Danto (1997, 148), contemporary art is pluralistic. *Artistic pluralism* means that art's ends are plural and concurrent, and pursuing one is as valuable as another. In artistic pluralism, the progressive structure breaks down because there is an absence of an ultimate end to ground a monilinear progressive structure.³ Thus, artistic progress is unintelligible (Danto, 1997, 148). In essence, Danto finds that artistic pluralism and progress are incompatible.

This raises the more specific problem this thesis seeks to resolve. Namely, whether monilinear progress in art is still intelligible despite artistic pluralism. This is what I will deem the *Dantonian tension*. To ease the Dantonian tension, and to answer the general question of whether progress applies to the visual arts, an account of artistic progress that is compatible with artistic pluralism would require a rejection of Danto's (1997) non-progress thesis. A rejection of Danto's non-progress thesis is important, not just for an account of artistic progress, but to meaningfully guide art-practice towards its progressive end.

The plan

What is necessary for an account of artistic progress is to demonstrate: first, that developments exhibit a certain continuity and direction; secondly, that there is some evidence of accumulation in the phenomenon involved; and thirdly, that the change accompanying these developments is desirable (Doorman, 2003, 131). Further, to mitigate the Dantonian tension it must be shown that an account's progressive structure does not break down because of artistic pluralism. It is my contention that the

³ *Monilinear progress* refers to a single-end progressive trajectory.

interpretation of artistic progress I offer, *the noetic account of artistic progress*, meets both the conditions for progress and avoids the Dantonian tension.⁴

To get to my noetic account I propose to do three things. First, I approach the literature about artistic progress, engage with its central figures, and evaluate the arguments. The aim is to demonstrate that the notion of progress has had a significant impact on art and that earlier positions fail to reconcile with the nature of art today. Secondly, I evaluate the Dantonian tension in depth and consider how it may be resolved. Thirdly, I draw from the debate about scientific progress. This helps reconcile artistic pluralism and artistic progress, thereby circumventing the Dantonian tension. The approach to developing an account of artistic progress from the philosophy of scientific progress is chosen because drawing an analogy is not only feasible but provides valuable insights. I show that since image-making is a legitimate target phenomenon for understanding, we can thereby enable further understanding of image-making to be integrated into art-practice.⁵

The noetic account avoids the Dantonian tension by shifting the consideration of the ultimate end for progress from instrumental ends to the end of understanding. As we shall see, in instrumental accounts of artistic progress, their progressive structure is built upon instrumental ends (e.g., mimesis: visual-perceptual equivalence in images). While in the noetic account, a progressive structure is built upon understanding—by which instrumental ends become salient. Since there is a progressive structure which is

⁴ The noetic account of artistic progress defines artistic progress in terms of increasing understanding. I sometimes call it the noetic account for short. I have adopted the term noetic from Finnur Dellsén's (2022b) noetic account of scientific progress because I owe the general structure of my account to him. Moreover, Dellsén's (2022b.) noetic account defines scientific progress in terms of increasing understanding. Since the Greek word 'nous' is sometimes translated as 'understanding' (just as 'episteme' is often translated as 'knowledge'), Dellsén (2022b, 3) has called his view the noetic account of scientific progress.

⁵ The operational definition of 'understanding' I have in use follows from Dellsén (2016, 2018, 2022a, 2022b). Understanding would consist in gaining or improving abilities to correctly explain or predict aspects of a phenomenon (Dellsén, 2022a, 17). In contrast, knowledge typically refers to the information, facts, or beliefs that a person possesses about the world. For example, knowing that water boils at 100 degrees Celsius or knowing the historical events that led to the American Revolution are instances of knowledge. Understanding goes beyond mere knowledge. It involves a deeper comprehension or insight into the subject matter or the relationships between different pieces of knowledge.

compatible with artistic pluralism, the noetic account, therefore, avoids the Dantonian tension.

It is important to note that readers may have certain expectations regarding an account of *artistic progress* which conflate with a notion of *aesthetic progress*. However, the noetic account differs from earlier accounts by avoiding a commitment to any particular set of evaluative aesthetic standards. The noetic account doesn't provide a progressive structure by which we can determine if Gerhard Richter's paintings are *aesthetically* superior to Leonardo da Vinci's.⁶ Instead, the noetic account shows how both artists contribute—with varying degrees—to our understanding of image-making.

The central goals of the thesis are to argue, first, that progress in art history is intelligible. Secondly, to argue that a descriptive account of artistic progress can provide useful normative guidelines to meaningfully orient art-practice into the future. My conclusion on the first goal is that the noetic account can make sense of the history of art and image-making, as incrementally furthering understanding. Regarding the second goal, the noetic account presumes that our understanding of image-making remains limited. There is a vast horizon of understanding yet to be explored and there is still much more progress to come by. Ultimately, this ongoing exploration of understanding image-making is a testament to art's progressive narrative. The noetic account is descriptive of this narrative and can guide future art-practice towards further understanding. Consequentially, the noetic account provides a rationale for an artistic project or art movement that orients art-practice towards noetic progress. Namely, *an applied philosophy of image-making*. On the one hand, my contribution is modest. It sheds light on the way we already evaluate art and artists' implicit motivations in art-practice in terms of a notion of progress. On the other hand, my contribution is bold because it explicitly introduces criteria for what we should be doing as artists to make progress.

⁶ Richter is widely considered one of the most prominent and important contemporary artists.

In essence, I argue that artistic progress is best characterised in terms of increasing understanding. To some, this point may seem rather obvious but, as far as I can tell, it has not yet been made. It might have gone unnoticed because not much attention has been paid to connecting three rather large philosophical themes: the question regarding artistic progress, the nature of art-practice, and the nature of understanding in art.

Remarks on the literature

To address the concerns about artistic progress it has been necessary to draw from multiple fields such as the philosophy of art, philosophy of science, art history, art theory, art criticism and art-practice. Nevertheless, the nature of my debate is philosophical at its core. Since some of the accounts of artistic progress have emerged in fields other than philosophy, their philosophical content can be unclear and disorganised. Therefore, it has been necessary to extract these philosophical viewpoints and present them in a more systematic manner.⁷ There have been some recent contributions focused on evaluating accounts of artistic progress rather than presenting new accounts, such as that offered by Maarten Doorman (2003) and Alessandro Bertinetto (2015). Nevertheless, they both have hinted at possible directions for new accounts to take. Their work has inspired my approach.

Danto's (1997) view is widely regarded as the most philosophically thorough and rigorous, which is why it has been important to follow his ideas closely. However, even Danto's arguments can be convoluted and difficult to follow, possibly because some of his thinking developed within the context of non-academic art criticism.⁸ While there has been significant philosophical commentary on Danto's work, there has been little discussion on

⁷ Much of this work has already been done by authors such as Danto (1997), Bertinetto (2015) and Snyder (2018).

⁸ Danto is well known for having been a long-time art critic for *The Nation*.

his ideas about artistic progress. This is likely because the notion of progress in the arts fell out of favour in the sceptical atmosphere of the postmodern era.⁹

As a result of limited literature concerning artistic progress, my thesis presents many new ideas without the benefit of engaging in debate with opposing perspectives. Regarding the novelty of the noetic account, to my knowledge, no one has developed an account of artistic progress that draws on the current literature on scientific progress. I am not aware of any account that incorporates earlier accounts as constitutive, whilst remaining compatible with them. The noetic account offers a universal perspective of artistic progress that encompasses all instances of image-making, from the earliest examples to the present in contemporary art. The noetic account is unique in its ability to recognise the role of understanding and thereby art theory as a component of art's progressive narrative. As we shall see, new accounts of artistic progress suggest new frameworks to reconsider the function of art, how we value it and what it can do. The noetic account provides a reason for such a reconsideration. The noetic account serves as a rationale for a contemporary philosophical art-practice. To the best of my knowledge, no one has developed such an argument, despite Danto's (1997, 136) suggestion that art has taken up its philosophical self-consciousness.

Overview of the chapters

In **chapter one**, I discuss the key concepts needed to discuss artistic progress. I show how the notion of art introduces a unique framework for understanding and practicing image-making which is inextricably tied to a notion of progress. Further, I show how changes to our notion of progress have led to corresponding changes in art-practice. Ultimately, a consideration of changes to the notion of art's progressive end is the locus of the philosophical debate about artistic progress.

⁹ It is a widely held belief that postmodernist ideals continue to have a hold on contemporary art.

Chapter two offers a historical taxonomy of the key accounts of artistic progress and how they have impacted art. I shed light on the structure of these accounts to draw lessons from them in developing the noetic account. Moreover, I show that new accounts of artistic progress propose new ends which shifts the debate. When I get to Danto's (1997) account, we find that he offers something rather different. Danto (1997) claims, art has a plurality of ends, and that artistic pluralism and progress are incompatible. This begs the specific question posed in my thesis: whether artistic progress is intelligible despite the pluralism of ends?

Chapter three demonstrates that Danto's (1997) account fails to see the role of understanding and thereby art theory, in both his and earlier accounts. I contend that art theory enables an understanding of image-making's instrumentality. By virtue of the understanding enabled by art theory, aims become salient and can thereby be reflectively pursued in art-practice. What Danto's (1997) theory does not see is that the scope of ends is not boundless. If ends are valuable, then so is the extent of the scope. Nevertheless, the scope has a threshold which can become broader by way of further understanding. Since the orientation towards understanding is common to the debate about scientific progress, I find that a fruitful discussion might be made in parallel.

In **chapter four** I provide an account of understanding in art theory that draws from Finnur Dellsén's (2018; 2022a; 2022b) account of scientific progress as enabling understanding. This is feasible because image-making is a legitimate target phenomenon for understanding, and we can enable further understanding of image-making to be integrated into art-practice.

In **Chapter five** I forward the noetic account of artistic progress and consider some of its implications. According to the noetic account, artistic progress is made with respect to understanding. This affords progress to art-practice through the integration of enhanced understanding. Ultimately, in the noetic account, there is a monolinear progressive

structure that is compatible with artistic pluralism. Therefore, the noetic account avoids the Dantonian tension.

In **Chapter seven** I examine some further implications of the noetic account. The noetic account provides a rationale for an artistic project or art movement that orients art-practice towards noetic progress. Namely, *an applied philosophy of image-making*. I sketch out what this may entail and how it may serve artistic progress.

Chapter eight concludes the thesis, highlighting key takeaways. Ultimately, through the noetic account of artistic progress past progress is intelligible and future progress is feasible. The noetic account answers the general question of whether there is artistic progress and the specific question of whether artistic progress is compatible with artistic pluralism.

Chapter 1

Key concepts in artistic progress

In this chapter, I define some key concepts needed to discuss artistic progress. Some of these concepts are already used in the discourse, nevertheless, it will serve to offer some explanations coloured by art history. I introduce some new concepts and borrow others from fields such as the philosophy of science. In addition, I aim to demonstrate how related concepts interact and sometimes cluster together, forming new concepts.

The concept of progress typically assumes that developments exhibit a certain continuity and direction, that there is some evidence of accumulation in the phenomena involved, and that the change accompanying these developments is desirable (Doorman, 2003, 131). Since a phenomenon would progress towards a desirable end, the notion of progress is end-dependent. As such, without a salient end, it is unclear that an instance of progress is not simply a development. For instance, we might find running has developed in many ways that do not entail progress. However, when the end of running 100 meters as fast as possible is salient, we might say that running has progressed towards this end because the speed of running has increased. In essence, when an end is salient a *progressive structure* towards it can also be evident. By virtue of a progressive structure, gradability and thereby value judgements are possible.¹⁰ For instance, I might say that Dale runs 100 meters faster and therefore better than Leon. Progressive structures can be *normative* because they prescribe a normative order by which a phenomenon can be graded. Additionally, progressive structures can be *descriptive* because they account for the progressive nature of a phenomenon.

¹⁰ I use *progressive structures* to refer to the structure of account progress. For example, an account of artistic progress which finds that art image-making progresses towards mimesis may be referred to as a *mimetic progressive structure*.

To gain clarity through analogy, let's begin by considering how the progressive structure of 100-meters sprint sport impacts running, as I believe it can help demonstrate the impact of 'art' on image-making in the most ordinary sense.

We can start by noticing that running exists as a phenomenon. The concept of running refers to all that running can do as part of what it is. Running is a human practice. The way we run is also part of what makes us distinct organisms. Running is part of human nature. Running has an inherent nature. There are aspects of running which are unique to it. We run to catch the bus, for fun or professionally. We use running instrumentally to achieve tasks. One of running's more commonly exercised tasks is to get us from A to B as fast as possible. For this task, running faster is a desirable aim. We can think of the task of running as fast as possible as a kind of project. "A project", as Ole Martin Skilleås (2023, 24) defines it, is "the direction of attention and action towards some end, employing skills and competencies to achieve this end. A project will usually involve a purpose, and the direction of attention to this purpose, which involves ignoring as well as attending since some aspects are necessarily more important than others". Since multiple individuals may share the project to run faster, communities which are unified by it may emerge. As we shall see, just as we can have a sports project to progress in running as fast as possible, we can have artistic projects for progress in image-making.

One way we can get faster at running is by racing each other. Sporting institutions have emerged around this shared project. The 100-meter sprint sport has a salient end of running as fast as possible. Upon this end, a progressive structure is established. Accordingly, a runner's achievement can be graded. The sport makes it possible not only for runners to race others on the field but also all those who have run before. Over time we find that runners have been able to meet the sport's end by running faster and faster. Therefore, we can say that there has been progress in the sports running. We might also find that the fastest running ever occurred within the sport. Thus, by virtue of the sports project, running itself has become faster.

Upon the sport's progressive structure, although value judgements are possible, they are limited relative to the established aim. We value Usain Bolt's achievement in the sport more than any other because he is the faster runner to ever run. However, this aim-dependent judgement does not have the scope to extend beyond the aim of speed. If Bolt is the least beautiful runner, he is the fastest runner all the same. The beauty of the running does not factor in because the progressive structure has no scope for such evaluations. However, how can we be sure that these other developments (e.g., towards running beauty) are not also trajectories of progress?

The notion of progress gains philosophical complexity when we begin to challenge whether the aim of the sport can be assumed without question. It prompts us to consider if there are alternative aims that we should consider, how we can appropriately determine them and how these different aims—and accompanying progressive structures—may affect the nature of running itself. Moreover, if aims are plural, is there also a pecking order? If there are more desirable aims, the question of whether the current ultimate aim should be replaced arises.

If it is found that the ultimate end (i.e., speed) should be replaced, then in opposition to this suggestion it may be argued that the aim of speed is built into the sport. The end of speed is a necessary aspect for the sport to be what it is. So, the argument would go, without the aim to run 100-meters as fast as possible, the race is not a race, and the sport would be something altogether rather different. Without the sport's progressive structure towards speed, sports running would be unintelligible in the way it previously was. In other words, changes to the aim of the sport and its progressive structure would entail radical changes to the sport itself.

It is my contention that this is the kind of deliberation in operation when it comes to artistic progress. However, when it comes to art, it has not always been so clear what its

aim should be. As a result, art's progressive aim has changed and brought with it corresponding changes in art-practice.

But what precisely is art and what does it mean for it to have progress? The debate about 'what art is,' is widely considered to be a convoluted discourse, fraught with controversy and perplexity. We have yet to have any significant convergence on such a definition in either our colloquial usage or in philosophy. Although my thesis may help enlighten this debate, a definition of art is not the goal here, and I do not claim to definitively offer one. Nevertheless, since an account of *artistic* progress is at stake, it is necessary to at least get a handle on the notion of art that I have in use. I hope to do so by considering the history of the notion of art and demonstrating a distinction between *art image-making* and *image-making* in general.

In brief, my use of the notion of art is functional rather than definitional and is illustrated by my sporting example above. I take what art is for image-making to be analogous to what sport is for running. The sport not only provides a framework to practice running but also for understanding running. In terms of the sport, we understand running in a particular way. For example, running is something that should be as fast as possible for there to be progress. Additionally, in the sport, we can practice running in terms of this understanding. When we do, we might say that we are not merely running but participating in the sport of running. Thus, if by virtue of the sport, running can be sport running, then by virtue of art, *image-making* can be *art image-making*. Additionally, images that are the outcome of this process can be considered *artworks*. Also, if by way of sport, a runner can be a sportswoman, then by way of art, an image-maker can be an *artist*. An artist engaging in the project of art image-making can be seen as partaking in art image-making practice. This can be called *art-practice*.¹¹

¹¹ In Chapter 5 it will be shown that art image-making is a phenomenon that can progress in a different, but mutually connected way, than art-practice.

Just in the same way as running predates the 100-meter sport, image-making predates art. Hans Belting's (2008) book, *The Image Before the Era of Art*, traces the history of devotional images in the Christian West until about A.D. 1400. Belting (2008, 53) finds that the earlier images, mainly icons, played a different role in people's lives from works of art after the emergence of the notion of art during the Renaissance. These earlier images were not even thought of as art in the elementary sense of having been produced by artists but were regarded as having a miraculous provenance (Belting, 2008, 53). It is often believed that there would then have been a profound discontinuity between image-making practices before and after the era of art had begun since the concept of the artist did not enter into the explanation of devotional images prior to the Renaissance (Danto, 1997, 3).¹² The concept of *the artist* became central in the Renaissance, to the point that Giorgio Vasari (1965) was to write his great book, *The Lives of The Artists*, which describes the work of numerous artists as a progressive development: towards a perfect aesthetic ideal (Doorman, 2003, 29-30).^{13 14}

Although the traditions of earlier paradigms of image-making surely influenced the notion of art in Renaissance thinking, it can be said that it was with the Renaissance that the notion of art, art theory, and art history emerged in a way that is familiar to us now—i.e., as a complementary reflective practice which includes literary expositions about topics such as the nature of art image-making and its history (Doorman 2003; Shiner 2001).¹⁵ Therefore, Vasari has proven to be a necessary point of departure for many—myself

¹² Once we can see that art has a recent beginning it is no longer that puzzling that theorists such as Danto (1997) thought it could end.

¹³ I revisit this in more detail in Chapter 2.

¹⁴ *Lives of the Artists* was first published in 1550.

¹⁵ The precise emergence of the conception of art which is familiar to us now is a matter of debate. There are different views that suggest Ancient Greece, the Renaissance, or Romanticism as possible origins. Several art historians and scholars have made the argument that art and art theory begins with Vasari. Some of the notable names include Ernst Gombrich, Julius von Schlosser, and Johann Joachim Winckelmann. However, this position is not universally accepted. There are other scholars who point to earlier examples of art and others that claim it begins only in later periods such as during Romanticism (Shiner, 2001). Nevertheless, my account of artistic progress does not depend on the exact moment when the notion of art emerges. Only that it does emerge.

included—who have reflected on the history of art. While image-making has a longer history, the Renaissance represents a significant moment in the development of image-making by introducing the notion of art and thereby a unique reflective theoretical component in relation to it.¹⁶ Reflecting and theorising about image-making would have started well before Ancient Greece, but it is only in that period that we find written records of it. Moreover, it is only until the Renaissance that we find reflecting and theorising about image-making through the lens of the framework of art.

It is therefore my contention that the emergence of art meant the establishment of a new kind of framework for understanding image-making. In addition, this meant a new kind of framework for practising image-making. Importantly, the framework of art is that by which art image-making could be distinguished from non-art image-making. In this way, art's framework is essential for making images intelligible as artworks, as it imbues them with meaning and purpose beyond being mere human-made marks on a surface. Without such a framework, images cannot be meaningfully assessed in artistic terms—they are otherwise not intelligible as art at all.

Throughout history, art's framework has changed. Nevertheless, one consistent feature of art's framework is that it has included distinct aims and notions of progress which establish standards, criteria, values, norms, and principles. It is by those standards and criteria that we can evaluate what images are artworks, and what artworks are more valuable. For instance, during the Renaissance, image-making that achieves perceptual equivalence of Biblical events may be considered art. By the same standard, we can ascertain that images which more effectively accomplish this goal are more valuable than those that fall short. For example, we might find that da Vinci meets this end to a higher degree than most of his peers. Moreover, a progressive narrative can be told about art image-making as it is further able to achieve perceptual equivalence of Biblical events.

¹⁶ While art surely inherited much from the Ancient Greeks and shares similarities with *techne*, it nevertheless has distinct qualities that set it apart.

Consequently, these standards orient artists towards particular aims and play a vital role in shaping the direction of artistic development. As we shall see, changes to the progressive aim of art lead to corresponding changes in art image-making and the orientation of art-practices.

In sum, the Renaissance's notion of art came with a unique framework for understanding image-making and practising image-making upon that understanding. The Renaissance's notion of art included unique ideas and standards which prescribed ways in which image-making may advance—and be evaluated as art or good art. Additionally, it prescribed a progressive structure for image-making to advance towards art's aesthetic ideals. Thus, in the same way, that the sport's project took effect on the phenomenon of running, so did art's project take effect on the phenomenon of image-making. By virtue of art's framework, image-making could be art image-making and it could progress towards art's aesthetic end.

It is precisely, the introduction of the framework of art to image-making and how the framework itself has changed and affected image-making which is my concern. From this perspective, I believe we can gain clarity in our thinking about art and artistic progress in relation to image-making. As we will see, I believe the introduction of art's framework provided progress for image-making. By way of reflecting and theorising about image-making in terms of art, our understanding of image-making was enhanced and integrated into image-making practice. Thus, image-making practice was afforded a new means of reflective inquiry into the nature of image-making itself.

But what exactly is a framework, and how does it impact our understanding of image-making? Moreover, in what sense can art (and art theory) provide such a framework? To address these questions, it is important to first define a few related concepts in terms of their place in theorising. In doing so we can appreciate the impact changes in our ideas can have on art. As I have mentioned, there is a lack of philosophical literature about art-

practice and artistic progress. It is, therefore, necessary to draw from other discourses such as the philosophy of science. To develop the noetic account of artistic progress I make use of frameworks, theories, and models. Moreover, I apply them to the theorising about art—i.e., artistic frameworks, art theories and models of image-making. As we shall see, the use of these concepts can help clarify our ideas about artistic progress. Although some of these concepts may be obvious to an astute reader, it will nevertheless serve to get a strong grasp of these concepts and how they can apply to art.

In terms of theorising, a framework is defined as a network, or “plane,” of interconnected concepts and relationships between them (Jabareen, 2009). A framework more specifically refers to a set of basic assumptions, concepts, and principles that provide a structured way of understanding and analysing complex phenomena (Jabareen, 2019). Frameworks can be thought of as a kind of intellectual scaffolding that supports and guides inquiry and analysis. Frameworks can be useful for organising and clarifying philosophical ideas, and for providing a basis for evaluating and comparing different philosophical positions (Jabareen, 2019). Additionally, we can have common frameworks that are used to evaluate and compare theories and models.¹⁷ Furthermore, frameworks can also be limited since they may exclude certain perspectives or ideas that do not fit within the framework. One way a framework may be developed is through theorising. Philosophers may seek to develop new frameworks that better capture the complexities and nuances of the subject matter at hand. Regarding the theorising of art, I believe that emphasising art’s framework is paramount because it helps us get a handle on how we understand in terms of art. Moreover, how we practice upon that understanding. For instance, just like we practice reflective thinking in terms of a psychological framework, we practice image-making in terms of an art framework.

¹⁷ For example, Dellsén’s (2022a) noetic framework provides a common framework to evaluate different models in science.

A theory is generally a broad explanation of a phenomenon or set of phenomena, based on a set of interrelated concepts, principles, and assumptions (French, 2014, 301). From one perspective, theories are the sorts of things that we have beliefs about, that we consider to be true, or that are empirically adequate (French, 2014, 301). From another perspective, theories are related to each other, to models, and of course, to the phenomena. Theories offer a systematic and organised way of understanding complex phenomena. They typically involve making generalisations or hypotheses that can be tested through observation and experimentation. Thus, theories are usually developed to explain and predict phenomena, such as the behaviour of living organisms, the functioning of economic systems, or our experience of art. Moreover, theories can be evaluated based on their coherence, empirical adequacy, and practical value or fruitfulness, among other criteria (French, 2014). In this way, theories can provide a framework for understanding and evaluating different aspects of reality. Additionally, they can lead to the development of new concepts or ideas within a particular field of inquiry. Moreover, the framework of a theory can have a significant impact on epistemic inquiry (Jabareen, 2009). Theory can shape the questions asked and the methods used to answer them, influence the interpretation and evaluation of evidence, and provide criteria for evaluating the reliability of knowledge claims. Therefore, the framework of a theory is crucial in shaping our understanding of a phenomenon and the understanding we can acquire about it.

An example of an art theory that provides a framework is Danto's (1997) theory of the end of art. Danto's theory proposes a set of interconnected concepts such as "master narrative," "artworld," "philosophical self-realisation," and "pale" (Danto, 1997). These concepts are related to each other in a specific way, and together they offer a structured way of understanding and evaluating different aspects of art, particularly in relation to the historical trajectory of art (Danto, 1997). Danto's (1997) theory can be used as a framework to analyse and evaluate different artworks and artistic practices, and to develop new theories, models, or concepts.

Many authors have pointed out that understanding is one of the central goals of science (Dellsén, 2022a; Frigg, 2020). We can assume theorising about art shares the goal of enabling understanding. In some cases, we want to understand a certain phenomenon (e.g., why there is a change in art); in other cases, we want to understand a specific art theory (e.g., a theory of artistic progress) that accounts for a phenomenon in question. Sometimes we gain an understanding of a phenomenon by understanding the corresponding theory or model. For instance, Gombrich's (1971) theory of artistic progress helps us understand why art changes towards further mimesis.

If we can gain understanding by way of both theories and models, then what exactly is a model and what is its relationship to theory? A theory and a model are both ways of representing and explaining a particular phenomenon, but they differ in some important ways (Frigg, 2023). A model is a simplified representation of a phenomenon or system. Models represent a selected part or aspect of the world, which is the model's target phenomenon (Frigg, 2020). Explanatory models, theoretical models, physical models, are but some of the notions that are used to categorise models (Frigg, 2020).¹⁸ Standard examples in science are the billiard ball model of gas or the Bohr model of the atom. Models aim to capture the essential features and variables of the phenomenon or system while omitting unnecessary details or complexities (Frigg, 2020). There can be many different models of a single phenomenon that incorporate different approaches (Frigg, 2020). Models can be developed using a particular theory and theories may also be developed using models (Frigg, 2023, 6). Moreover, models can also be used to explore the properties and implications of a theory that is already in place (Frigg, 2023, 378). For example, through Gombrich's (1971) theory of artistic progress, we can derive a model pertaining to art image-making instrumentality or its progressive nature. Using Gombrich's theory, we can deduce a model of the change we observe in art image-making

¹⁸ Some models are physical objects (Frigg, 2020). These models are commonly referred to as "material models". Standard examples of models of this kind are scale models of objects like bridges and ships. As we shall see, images are also related to this category.

as the target phenomenon and determine whether it meets conditions of progress. Similarly, through Gombrich's theory, we can deduce a model of the instrumental nature of art image-making instrumental potential.¹⁹ We can compare this model with say Dantonian model and test their validity against the phenomenon of image-making. This can help point out strengths and weaknesses within their respective theories. Ultimately, both theories and models can be seen as complementary and interdependent aspects of the study of art. An art theory can provide the framework needed to develop a useful and insightful model of a phenomenon, while a model of a phenomenon can help to refine and expand an art theory or develop a new theory altogether.²⁰

As I have noted, the notion of art emerged from reflecting and theorising about image-making. Thus, the notion of art has a theoretical dimension. Moreover, art has been the subject of theorising itself. For instance, Art Theory (AT) as a discipline represents the broad project to understand art.²¹ AT can be seen as a composite of many distinct art theories. However, the phenomenon of art is also a composite of a plethora of related phenomena that for example involve experiencing and making objects such as images. Some art theories tend to focus on particular aspects of art such as art-experience. At other times art theories have a broader focus and attempt to account for all of art's phenomena. Moreover, particular art theories—such as Danto's (1997) theory—may gain traction in the discipline of AT and have a great influence on AT as a whole. Additionally, art theories can impact art's framework.

It will serve to clarify my use of AT in this thesis to avoid misunderstanding. This is to circumvent any conflation between the discipline of AT with particular art theories. We can begin by noting again that AT as a field of study is multidisciplinary (Freeland, 2003). AT draws upon various fields, including philosophy, aesthetics, history, psychology, and

¹⁹ In the following discussion I refer primarily to models of image-making's instrumental nature.

²⁰ In Chapter 4 I will explore how a dependency model of image-making may be used to develop art theory.

²¹ From here on I will indicate the broader discipline of Art Theory as AT. I will use art theory to refer to specific art theories which are constituent parts of the discipline of AT.

science. AT seeks to understand how art is created, how it is experienced, and what it means in different cultural and historical contexts. It explores the role of art in society, including its political, economic, and social functions. Moreover, the theorising about art may also be coloured through broader intellectual lenses such as feminism or post-modernism.

AT is reflective of many different aspects of art and of art in its entirety. AT is a composite of the study of an array of target phenomena and systems relevant to art, such as art experience, art's ontology, artistic value, art's history, aesthetic expertise, or art-practice (Freeland, 2003). Each presupposes tailored epistemic approach to obtain an understanding. In this way, AT incorporates a plurality of paradigmatic methodologies—which have their own questions—to address a multitude of phenomena related to art. AT's respective fields of study are presumed to provide an understanding of these various distinct aspects of art—sometimes relative only to a specific field and other times shared. To paint a broad picture of this, take for example that the question of the definition of art may hold different answers seen from the perspective of art history, philosophy, or anthropology. In other instances, questions about the ontology of art and truth may be exclusive to philosophy. In this way, the philosophy of art would inclusively employ a philosophical empirical approach in art theory, but it need not be the unique approach to do so. The philosophy of art may also draw from other fields such as psychology or history. Thus, one might engage with art theory via a philosophical approach as much as a psychological approach without there necessarily being a contradiction. Ultimately, AT includes a multitude of approaches and paradigmatic frameworks. Moreover, one can engage theorising about art through a multitude of lenses.

By understanding the phenomena of art through these fields of inquiry, we might presume to gain competence in relation to them. A greater understanding of the history of art and its workings may lead us to completely engage in the historical lineage of art, making it possible to contextualise artworks within its history. Similarly, a greater

understanding of art-practice may afford artists more competence in art-practice. Certainly, artists may gain tacit understanding through practice itself, but they surely would have something additional to gain by art theories that provide an understanding of the practice they partake in.

However, to my knowledge, an explicit sub-categorisation of AT based on art's composite phenomena has not yet been made. Nor has there been a philosophical investigation of what different aspects of art may be best suited to distinct methodological approaches or lines of questioning. Most importantly, neither has there been an explicit field of study with the sole concern of providing an understanding of art-practice—such as a philosophy of art-practice—even though much of the theorising about art implicitly addresses this topic.

Despite my anticipation for what will later unfold, it is my contention that these developments would be of great benefit to AT. As I later argue, this is because art-practice is ontologically dependent on ideas about art. In this way, art-practice is central to art. Art-practice is the process by which we are afforded artworks at all. Thus, art-practice is also seemingly at the nexus of the discipline of AT as a whole. In other terms, there is an ontological bread trail leading right back to our understanding of art-practice, which in my view art theories have a responsibility to address. For an art theory to be of use to art-practice, it must provide an understanding of it, so that artists may gain competence in it. Since art's other aspects are inextricably tied to art-practice it would also impact other art phenomena and theorising about them altogether.

To ensure that art theories serve art-practice, they must provide competence to the practice and prioritise understanding the practice itself. Nevertheless, not all art theories need to directly address the target of art-practice. As I have mentioned there are many distinct aspects to art. However, even in these cases, art theory must recognise the importance of art-practice as the central target for understanding. To ensure that some

art theories provide the necessary competence for art-practice, it is essential to maintain art-practice as its primary concern. This can be achieved by differentiating between distinct target phenomena, such as art-practice and art-experiencing, and employing approaches tailored to each of them. This differentiation prevents the conflation of different types of ideas about art and may provide the desired competence for artists.

Importantly, it is the perspective of the artists that I have access to and understanding art-practice's progressive nature is my concern. Therefore, in this thesis, my specific focus is that art theories, at least in part, provide a broad framework that can be employed to understand image-making—or at least the kind of image-making we call art. My use of art theory is somewhat liberal and includes any information structure that associates with image-making and can benefit our understanding of art such as ideas, accounts, and models. Whether or not such information structures in fact feature in an art theory, or have theory status, they can nevertheless have a place in an art theory. What goes into these art theories is about what image-making is in terms of art. Additionally, art theories are that by which ideas are drawn from and grasped by artists. Later we will find that, given art theories may enable further understanding there may be progress therein. In sum, the key to my discussion is to recognise that art theories enable an understanding of image-making. Moreover, art theory's understanding can be grasped by artists and integrated into their art-practices. Additionally, this integration can take an effect on art-practice at both a local and global scale.

The relationship between theorising and practice is reciprocal and it is difficult to determine which one influences the other more, as they both have an impact on each other. Some art theories may be normative, prescribing themselves to art-practice. While others may be more descriptive, for example by reporting a posteriori on the progressive directions which art has taken. Descriptive insights nevertheless can be integrated and perpetuated in art-practice. Furthermore, ideas put forth by art theory need not be acquired from direct contact with reading an author's book. They can disseminate

through word of mouth, through art school education or any other means. Nevertheless, the ideas that art theories put forth, when shared, can unify the *artworld* community. “The artworld”, as Danto (1964, 580-581) describes it, is a shared “atmosphere of artistic theory [...] the theory that takes [the artwork] up into the world of art and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is”. Thus, art theories can not only provide an understanding of image-making, but also establish a framework for how we experience, evaluate image-making as a community upon, for example, certain norms, standards, and values. In sum, art theories can moderate the project of art since our ideas about art inform and shape art-practices. For example, when artists integrate an art theory’s ideas into their art-practices, they create artworks that reflect certain standards and values. In addition, distinct artistic paradigms exhibit different kinds of artworks which encapsulate distinct aesthetic hallmarks that might reflect a particular art theory’s ideas standards and values.

By recognising that art theory can provide ideas about what image-making is and that these ideas can be integrated into art-practice, it also becomes apparent how different ideas about art can bring about corresponding changes in image-making itself. As we shall see, throughout history, art has undergone change because of changes to the notion of artistic progress. New notions of artistic progress prescribe new distinct progressive aims and thus evaluative standards, which in turn have also impacted image-making. The changes in art have been shaped by various historical factors, such as economic and political circumstances. Nevertheless, changes to the notion of artistic progress play a significant role in explaining art’s ideological shifts. These shifts occur because ideas of progress have been seen as outdated or unsatisfactory and therefore, replaced by new ones. Usually, new notions of artistic progress are presumed to guide the development of art more meaningfully. As we shall see, the Renaissance’s notion of art found that image-making progressed towards an Ancient Greek aesthetic ideal, during impressionism towards expression and in the post-modern period towards a multitude of ends. In terms of the debate about artistic progress, later accounts of artistic progress

revise earlier ones, the noetic account builds on Danto's (1997) account, which in turn builds on Gombrich's (1971) account and so on. Shedding light on these accounts and their differences will demonstrate that new accounts of artistic progress propose new aims and can shift the paradigm of art towards them.²²

It is my contention that we can diagnose the source of these shifts as philosophical assumptions about the progressive nature of art. Additionally, we can find that these shifts result in distinct art movements.²³ As we shall find, notions of artistic progress are precisely what make different art periods unique and distinct. Further, there is a direct correlation between changes in our ideas about artistic progress and significant changes in art image-making itself. Thus, I share the contention that the notion of artistic progress has laid the foundation for how we think about and appreciate art, and that it has played a significant role in shaping the course of art history (Bertinetto, 2015; Danto, 1997; Doorman, 2003). This emphasises the importance placed on the notion of artistic progress since it can be said to be inextricably connected to our notion of art and the change in art over time.²⁴

²² The development in art theories is later found to be a progression in terms of the noetic account.

²³ These assumptions do not necessarily depend on theoretical accounts of artistic progress. Additionally, an *art movement* can be thought of as a kind of communal project in art.

²⁴ As we will find, shifts in the notion of artistic progress have a trend towards an accumulation of understanding of image-making's instrumental potential.

“Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?” — Paul Gauguin
(1897-98)

Chapter 2

A historical taxonomy of artistic progress

This historical taxonomy explores what I believe to be the key accounts of artistic progress and how they have impacted art. To reflect on the close relationship between the notion of art and progress, I primarily draw upon the views of Gombrich (1971) in *The Ideas of Progress and Their Impact on Art*, Danto (1997) in *After The End of Art* and the secondary literature of Bertinetto (2015) in *Gombrich, Danto and The Question of Artistic Progress*.²⁵

Part of the reason why I follow these expositions particularly closely is that they both track and build on earlier formulations of artistic progress. These key accounts are also chosen because they pave the way to Danto's (1997) perspective, which continues to have significant influence and relevance in contemporary art theory and practice today. As I have mentioned, later accounts revise earlier ones, with the noetic account building on Bertinetto's (2015) and Danto's (1997), which in turn builds on Gombrich's (1971; 2002).²⁶ I hope not only to shed light on the structure of these accounts but also to demonstrate that new accounts of artistic progress propose new aims that can shift the paradigm of art towards them. When we get to Danto (1997), we find that he offers something rather different: art has a plurality of aims, and artistic pluralism and progress are incompatible resulting in his non-progress thesis. This sets up the specific questions of this thesis, namely, whether monolinear artistic progress is intelligible despite artistic pluralism.

A historical taxonomy is of use because it categorises philosophical ideas based on their historical context and helps us to understand their development, interpretation, and application throughout history. A consideration of these accounts reveals their strengths

²⁵ I've followed Bertinetto's (2015) historical review closely because I have found it to be the most efficient and effective approach to this task with little room for improvement despite reviewing other more extensive attempts such as Snyder (2018).

²⁶ A summary of these shifts can be found in section 5.2.1.

and weaknesses. Additionally, a historical taxonomy serves to demonstrate why the accounts preceding Danto (1997) are inadequate in accounting for the state of contemporary art and therefore fail to be universally applicable. Moreover, this historical taxonomy forms the basis of what I have drawn lessons from to develop the noetic account.²⁷ This historical taxonomy elucidates the impact that the notions of artistic progress have had on art throughout history. Ultimately, a historical taxonomy is valuable in constructing an account of artistic progress not only by tracing the lineage of the notion of progress in literature but also by shedding light on the theoretical approaches that have contributed to the view that art has progress.

Given the scope of the thesis I only focus on the essential structures of key accounts. For example, I do not consider manifestos such as those from Dadaism or the De Stijl movement. Nor do I fully explore expositions such as Roger Fry's (1937) views on expressionism as progress, since I believe they represent relatively trivial shifts within art's progressive structure. For the accounts that I do consider, my focus is on the philosophical content and its development. In addition, I consider how these accounts have impacted the notion of art and image-making itself. Although important to the debate, I do not delve into external factors such as social, cultural, economic, and intellectual contexts. While a comprehensive survey may be required for historians it is unnecessary for the philosophical matter at hand.

Nevertheless, it is important to note first, that the theorising about artistic progress is closely tied to the broader intellectual atmosphere in which it arises, highlighting how historical epochs of thought shape and inform ideas of artistic progress.²⁸ For example, during the era after the Renaissance the influence of ideas about time and space affected our understanding of the future—and therefore our notion of progress—replacing the

²⁷ This also is why I examine these particular notions of artistic progress at length.

²⁸ For example, an intellectual atmosphere may be thought of as the Enlightenment or Modernism. The present intellectual context of scientific naturalism has shaped my perspective in formulating the noetic account. Similarly, Danto's (1997) position was formulated during postmodernism and Fry's (1937) during modernism. The context of intellectual atmospheres is significant but can be kept in the background.

biblical notion of an inevitable end of time with a more open-ended ever-expanding horizon (Doorman, 2003, 22). Secondly, the literature concerned with the historical trajectory of art, tells the story in terms of art image-making—more specifically painting—and therefore an equivocation in the literature between the notion of art with art image-making should be kept in mind. Nevertheless, this equivocation is not altogether contrived in the present debate, which specifically tracks art image-making. But it may nevertheless be problematic in terms of other artistic disciplines such as music. This is why I remain hesitant that an account of artistic progress can be generally stated in terms of all artistic mediums.²⁹ Thirdly, accounts of artistic progress—in their systematic literary form—are mostly developed from the audience’s perspective. In theorising about artistic progress there is a greater focus on the finished image (painting) over the process of image-making. Fourthly, as I have stated, the influence of art theories on artistic practice is difficult to precisely gauge, but it is apparent that theory has impacted practice to varying degrees. In contemporary art, where conceptual content is an integral component, it is reasonable to presume that theory matters to a large extent.³⁰ The relationship between art theory and art practice is reciprocal. It is difficult to determine which one influences the other more, as they both have an impact on each other. Some art theories may be normative, prescribing themselves to art-practice. While others may be more descriptive, they report a posteriori on the state of progressive directions which art has taken. Their insights nevertheless can be integrated and perpetuated in art-practice. As we shall see, Danto's (1997) position functions in both senses. On the one hand, Danto’s ideas opt to describe the current state of art as a product of its historical trajectory. On the other hand, they serve as a philosophical rationale to direct art’s future development considering this historical narrative. Many contemporary artists, critics, and scholars continue to engage with Danto's work and thus build upon his legacy. In discussions with fellow artists, they tend to align with Danto's (1997) non-progressive thesis, which speaks to the strength of his doctrine and its influence on contemporary art.

²⁹ I do not address this concern any further in my thesis. Nevertheless, I suspect there is a case to be made for noetic artistic progress in other mediums such as music.

³⁰ Contemporary art-practice is theory-laden.

However, whether they fully accept these ideas at a local level—in terms of their individual practices—I am less sure. For they surely take for granted that they might progress, as artists, in one way or another. Despite its fruitfulness, Danto's (1997) theory is not without its issues, which I will soon explore.

2.1. Gombrich's instrumental account of artistic progress

In *The Idea of Progress and Its Impact on Art* (1971) Gombrich presents an instrumental account of artistic progress.³¹ Gombrich's (1971) view can be condensed as follows: When the history of art is viewed instrumentally—analogously with science—we find that images have become increasingly mimetic. Art (image-making) is an instrument that serves a specific purpose (or ultimate aim) of representing visual reality more accurately. Through an instrumental progressive structure, the value of art image-making is gradable by its success in achieving mimesis. Thus, instrumental progress is feasible in art history.

At the outset of his book, Gombrich (1971, 2) argues that individuals living in "open societies" are inevitably predisposed to think in terms of progress. Hence, from classical antiquity until the present day, progressive narratives regarding art have been recounted in various ways—including by Gombrich himself. Gombrich (1971, 8) posits that the original version of the "progress thesis" pertains to art's ability to mimetically reproduce nature. This Ancient Greek concept of progress suggests that art progresses as the technical capacity to imitate nature improves, moving from good to best and ultimately to perfection (Gombrich, 1971, 8). But Gombrich (1971) takes a slightly different view. For Gombrich (1971), artistic progress is linked to technical progress, defined as a change that increases output for a given input. In essence, technical progress involves enhancing the means to achieve a desired outcome. Since art involves mimetically reproducing nature,

³¹ An expansion of these ideas can be found in *The Story of Art* (2006), *Meditations on a Hobby Horse* (1985) and most famously *Art & Illusion* (2002). Gombrich employed a multitude of methodological approaches in his theorising, for instance, art history, psychology, and philosophy.

its progress is contingent upon the development of means for more accurate imitation of nature as the ultimate goal of art (Gombrich, 1971, 10).

Gombrich's (1971) argumentative structure—which links artistic progress to technical progress towards the reproduction of nature—is formulated in relation to and thus preserves some of what is evident in Giorgio Vasari's famous book, *Lives of the Artists* (1965) (Bertinetto, 2015, 80). Vasari's (1965, 5) view is summed up when he states, "Art, which was once merely craftsmanship, has become one of the most important and universal activities of mankind; in its earliest stages, it was, like all primitive arts, simple imitation of natural forms. But as time went on, men learned to select, to vary, and to combine these forms, until art, like language, was able to express almost any conceivable idea." Vasari prioritises Renaissance art over Medieval art and thereby embraces a notion of artistic progress (Bertinetto, 2015, 81). However, Vasari (1965) does not necessarily equate artistic perfection with success in the imitation of nature. Instead, Vasari believes that the technical mastery of art lies in fulfilling another function: the expressive mimetic representation of the Holy History (Gombrich, 1971, 8). By defining the function of art in this way, Vasari is able to argue that certain artworks, such as some of Raphael's paintings, represent an improvement on others due to their ability to effectively illustrate biblical events. Therefore, Vasari's conception of artistic progress—the classical model—is not solely tied to technical improvement in the reproduction of nature, but also to the development of artistic expression in service of a specific function albeit by setting out towards an Ancient Greek ideal: aesthetic perfect (Gombrich, 1971, 2-10).

Gombrich (1971, 10) observes that the notion of instrumental progress and teleological progress—found in the classical model—are often conflated. Nevertheless, he argues that they are distinct concepts which should not be relativised (Gombrich, 1971, 10). For Gombrich (1971, 10), teleological progress, which Vasari subscribes to, follows an Aristotelian view of artistic progress as an inevitable development toward the essence or internal finality of art. According to this, only one perfect model exists, and art's progress

is a matter of increasingly realising this incubated inherently perfect aesthetic state (Gombrich, 1971, 10). Gombrich (1971, 10) attempts to resolve the confusion he finds in the classical model by highlighting the relativisation that leads to philosophical incoherence in the classical model. Gombrich (1971, 10) attributes this confusion to Aristotle's idea of organic growth, for which "The nature of a thing is its principle and its cause, and the source of its growth and development" (Aristotle, 2004, Physics II 3: 358-359). Gombrich (1971, 8) asserts that Aristotle was first and foremost a biologist and he conceived of the growth of any organism as the fulfilment of its inherent purpose. In essence, Gombrich (1971, 8) finds Aristotle's idea of organic growth posits that all instances of a causal change in organisms, and in art, are directed towards an *internal perfect ideal form* through a natural, universal causal process. An internal perfect ideal is incubated in everything from kittens to art. Moreover, an internal perfect ideal is the internal driving force of change in both kittens and art (Gombrich, 1971, 8). Just as a kitten becomes an adult cat so does art emerge into its inherent perfect state (Gombrich, 1971, 8).

In terms of art, once the solution to meet the requirements of perfection in the most skilful and economical way has been found, there is no need to look further. This solution can remain the exemplar for all who want to achieve the same end. This is, of course, the underlying notion of the classical work of art, the one which is recommended in Vasari's (1965) account for all times to come. For the classical model, this internal perfect ideal form for art was attained in Ancient Greece. Accordingly, once a model of perfection is established there are two possibilities: either artists imitate this perfection, or they decline and degenerate (Bertinetto, 2015, 82). Perfection is immutable in the Vasarian perspective, every change results in a worsening since perfection cannot be improved anymore leading to decline or, in the best case, restoration and rebirth—as seen in the etymology of Renaissance. Therefore, Vasari's (1965) account is a cyclic model of artistic progress conceived of in terms of three phases put along a circular line: 1. primitive, 2.

perfection, and 3. decadence (e.g., mannerism), followed by rebirth and return to phase 1 (Bertinetto, 2015, 82).³²

Gombrich (1971, 8) however does not agree with the Ancient Greek teleological view and instead advocates only for instrumental progress, where the instrumental aim is externally and autonomously set. Upon an autonomously set end, progress is measured by the technical ability to achieve that specific goal, such as the aforementioned mimetic reproduction of nature. Gombrich (1971, 56) asserts that this observation is already apparent during the Renaissance when scientific discoveries led to a new understanding of progress. Progress was not just about improving means to reach an end, but also about setting new ends (Gombrich, 1971, 56). As a result, history no longer allowed for comebacks. Progress became a straight line towards infinity: linear progress. Gombrich (1971, 60) notes that Romanticism later also challenged the classical model, as it emphasised the uniqueness of each civilization's art and rejected the idea of universal aesthetic perfection.³³ Here progress is recognised in many human endeavours such as medical improvements, political development, technological discoveries, scientific findings and importantly, in art (Gombrich, 1971, 60). For Gombrich (1971, 60), the commonality between these practices is that they are seen as technologies that improve as they serve an instrumental purpose. In this way, artistic linear progress was sometimes equated with scientific progress in the context of certain artistic movements, artists began to view their work as experimental and capable of teaching new ways of seeing, much like scientific experiments (Gombrich, 1971, 60). Thus, art is an instrument that serves an analogous aim to science.

³² This highlights that accounts which hold the possibility of reaching an end in perfection may run into the same cyclical problem. Moreover, cyclicity brings tension to the linear trajectory associated with the notion of progress. As we shall see, the noetic account avoids this problem because it does not have an end that can be attained in completion or perfect.

³³ However, the crisis of cyclical progress in the artistic field began with the *Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns* in the second half of the 17th Century (Doorman, 2003, 30)

In Gombrich's (1971) view drawing an analogy between art and science is fruitful, artistic progress should be understood as involving representations of nature becoming increasingly mimetic. According to Gombrich (1971), once an aim is established—in this case mimesis—the best means can be sought to achieve it. In addition, just as science does not derive its hypotheses by induction from observations, but by a creative intuition which is then checked against observation, so the artist, Gombrich (2002, 73) contends, "begins not with his visual impression but with his idea or concept". Thus, images are checked against reality and adjusted step by step until a satisfactory match is found. In Gombrich's (1971, 8) view, like science, art evolves through a learning process in which skills improve, leading to progress (in both art and science) through conjecture, falsification, and new conjecture.³⁴ Artists set a goal and use a trial-and-error process, along with feedback from critics, to improve their means of achieving the ends (Gombrich, 1971, 8).

Gombrich (1971, 8) observes a continuous change in art's technological capabilities throughout the history of art. He argues that art can be understood as a perceptual technology, and since it is uncontroversial that there can be improvements in technologies, it follows that we can have progress in art as a technology (Gombrich, 1971, 8). In this way, since we can have instrumental progress to better serve pragmatic ends, and art image-making can be seen as a perceptual technology, its instrumental improvements can be interpreted as instrumental progress. For Gombrich (1971) art is best described as progressing towards achieving higher degrees of mimesis—which parallels instrumental progress in the sciences. Art aims to offer a verisimilitude of perceptual reality, much like science aims to offer the truth about reality itself—which

³⁴ Gombrich's (1971, 46) approach draws on the work of his colleague Karl Popper (1992). Popper's (1992, 33) view of science is that it involves the rejection of one theory in favour of another because the latter is seen as more accurate than the prior. Thus, the sequence of conjectures, falsifications, and further conjectures is very like Gombrich's (1971) sequence of representational schemata rejected in favour of more adequate ones on the grounds of a mismatch with visual reality (Snyder, 2018, 216). Both theorists are concerned with what Popper (1992) speaks of as the "growth" of knowledge, and hence with a historical process representable via a narrative (Snyder, 2018, 218; Danto, 2014, 79).

may help explain why Gombrich saw mimesis as art's instrumental aim. In sum, Gombrich (1971) links artistic and scientific progress, presenting the instrumental history of pictorial image-making as a narrative towards perfecting the mimetic image.

Differently from the classical model, Gombrich (1971, 88-90) views art as a form of technology, and therefore, it is up to us to decide how to use it. Art does not have an inherent law of progression—in the teleological sense—rather, progress in art comes from autonomous human creativity and innovation.³⁵ Gombrich forwards an instrumental theory of artistic progress, which was anticipated by Vasari. However, Bertinetto (2015, 84) importantly notices that, differently from Vasari (1965), Gombrich's (1971) theory appears to be conditional. Given that progress is autonomously determined it allows for the possibility of plurality: *If the goal of art is mimesis, the representation of reality, then the progress of art runs parallel with the progress of science* (Bertinetto, 2015, 84). However, mimesis seems to be only one of the possible goals of art. So, generally speaking, to link pluralism to art, one must recognise that there are different goals of art beyond mimesis, and that progress can be achieved in different ways (Bertinetto, 2015, 84). This requires a recognition of pluralism in artistic goals and also a view that acknowledges that humans set the goals for art.³⁶

It is unclear whether Gombrich (1971) truly thought about his account in terms of pluralism for he never explicitly states so. The belief that the aims of progress are autonomously determined certainly points to such as reading. Nevertheless, given that Gombrich (1971) only ever posits the aim of mimesis, and extensively built his progressive structure upon it, I believe he saw good reason to set mimesis as the ultimate aim. Since increased mimesis is exhibited throughout the history of image-making, and mimesis is somewhat analogous to scientific accounts of nature, are reasons why I think Gombrich (1971) finds mimesis as the ultimate aim of art. Further, Gombrich's view implies such a

³⁵ Nevertheless, I believe teleological progress can be useful in thinking about cognitive development in art.

³⁶ This is part of what Bertinetto's (2015) account, and the noetic account offers.

justification for a single mimetic aim of artistic progress, even if it is only implicit. Therefore, I believe we should take his account at face value.

In any case, the major problem with Gombrich's (1971) account is that he never really abandons the mimetic ideal of the Renaissance. His mimetic instrumental account can be applied up until well into the nineteenth century, but with the discovery of photography, and later, of film, the visual arts began to move in a direction that robbed him of his footing (Doorman, 2002, 136). From then on, the mental processes of artists suddenly began to take the place of the mimetic tradition. Art's reference to reality became increasingly complex, especially with Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades and with the emergence of conceptual art. Gombrich's account is at odds with the way we experience and evaluate modern and contemporary art.

2.2. Danto and the end of artistic progress

Danto's (1997) account views contemporary art as pluralistic—i.e., art has multiple ends. Artistic pluralism undermines the monolinear progressive structure that once guided the notion of artistic progress because there is no single ultimate end. In the absence of an ultimate end to ground a progressive structure, progress in art is unintelligible. Thus, the traditional notions of artistic progress are no longer valid. This ultimately leads Danto (1997) to believe that art is in a post-historical stage, for which a non-progress thesis is needed to describe the nature of art. Danto (1997) formulates his position by arguing that until the present time, there have been two main progressive narratives (i.e., progressive structures) of art history that have now come to an end, thereby rendering the notion of artistic progress defunct.³⁷ These two progressive narratives are *the mimetic narrative* and *the modernist narrative*.

³⁷ Danto (1997) uses "narrative" to refer to the historical development of art within a progressive structure. I will use his terminology to preserve the nuance of his formulation in its original form. In addition, this is to avoid any misquoting. Moreover, Hegel largely influenced Danto, from whom I suspect he derives his notion of historical narrative.

2.2.1. The mimetic narrative

The mimetic narrative is aligned with Gombrich's (1971) account of instrumental progress but extends beyond it to other accounts such as Vasari's (1965). According to the mimetic narrative, artists have a model of reality that they compare with visual reality, and progress in art means improving the technical means for representing reality. The mimetic narrative structure organises art history and determines what is and what is not included in art history—artworks that do not adhere to the end of mimesis fall out of *the pale of history*—which holds until the late 19th century (Bertinetto, 2015, 85).³⁸ For example, impressionist paintings would be considered regress in terms of the mimetic narrative.

2.2.2. The modernist narrative

According to Danto (1997, 7), the mimetic narrative was replaced by the modernist narrative which emerged around 1880 with the works of artists such as Édouard Manet and lasted until approximately 1965. In this new narrative, the focus shifted from the mimetic representation of reality to the conditions of representation itself (Danto, 1997). Thus, impressionism marks a departure from the mimetic criterion in art.³⁹ Artists began to emphasise painterly expression over mimetic purity and painting itself is seen as part of its representational program (Danto, 1997). In essence, the new modernist narrative shares the instrumental progressive structure but with different ends.

Fry (1937, 194) was one of the first theorists to explore the idea that artists were no longer concerned with imitating reality, but rather, with the subjective expression of impressions of reality elicited in them. Fry's (1937) solution to the tension between the mimetic narrative and modernist innovations can be understood as an alteration to the aim of the

³⁸ Danto refers to the limits of the progressive structure as a "pale" or "pale of history".

³⁹ Impressionism began in the second half of the 19th century.

instrumental progress structure, suggesting that art would now progress as it better expressed the inner (phenomenological) impressions of reality (Danto, 1997, 52). Consequently, the move from the eye to the psyche and from mimesis to expression brought up new factors such as sincerity and authenticity into the critical discourse (Fry, 1937, 135; Danto, 1997, 52). Thus, in terms of an expressive instrumental notion of artistic progress, artists learn to express their inner world better, and the aims of art can be understood as verisimilitude of our emotionally laden experience.

In terms of the instrumental account of artistic progress, the innovations found in impressionism are considered regressive. Meaning that impressionist artworks fall out the “pale” of the historical narrative of mimetic progress—to use Danto’s (1997) terminology. However, this is at odds with how we experience and value the innovation in art from impressionism into the 20th century as progressive. Thus, Gombrich’s (1971) instrumental account of progress faces tension due to the advent of new image-making technologies and modern art innovations, bringing into question the mimetic narrative’s descriptive adequacy for modernist art. Therefore, the aim of mimesis can be seen as inadequate to universally account for artistic progress, at least in terms of art after the end of the mimetic historical lineage.

Danto (1997, 55-57) nevertheless accepted that the mimetic narrative can track a specific historical period of art but cannot be universally applied. It cannot account for the way art is now or might be in the future. Moreover, for Danto (1997, 55-57), we must also acknowledge that the mental processes of artists suddenly begin to take the place of traditional, purely painterly skills (Danto, 1997, 55-57). Instead, Danto’s (1997, 57) view finds that art becomes, in a sense, the subject of itself. However, Danto (1997, 64-65) sees another way of reading the move made by Fry (1937): as a way to move the narrative to a new level, in which the problem is to redefine art and to determine what art philosophically is.

For Danto (1997, 64-65) the narrative moved forward, not in terms of increasingly adequate representations, but rather in terms of increasingly adequate philosophical representations of the nature of art. There could now be a developmental progressive story to tell, but it would instead be the story of a progressive degree of philosophical adequacy (Danto, 1997, 64-65). What the kind of solution posed by Fry (1937) did not have, according to Danto (1997, 66), was a sense of what caused the shift to a new reflexive level to take place, or an account of a new narrative structure. One which describes how the new, or modern, art continued to fall under a narrative but on a new level (Danto, 1997, 66).

Danto (1997, 66) recognises this move in the writing of Clement Greenberg (1993), who according to Danto (1997, 63) achieved for art, “a self-consciousness of the ascent to self-consciousness, and whose thought was guided by a quite powerful and compelling philosophy of history”.⁴⁰ Greenberg’s (1993) approach prescribes that art should philosophically define itself through its own workings. Art can fulfil its intrinsic nature through a process of stripping it of any unessential elements. Thus, Danto (1997, 67) interprets Greenberg’s modernist narration as a way of defining art in new progressive terms.

Greenberg’s (1993) view can be summed up as follows: art does not progress in terms of representations of reality that are more and more adequate to reality, but rather in terms of philosophical representations, that are more and more adequate to the nature of art—as constituted by its material essence. The essence of painting, for example, is limited to its material makeup such as the squareness of the canvas, the flatness of the surface, and the painterly medium with its colour and varying viscosities (Danto, 1997, 67). Thus, Greenberg’s (1993) account also follows the instrumental progressive structure but with altered aims. In essence, in Greenberg’s (1993) account, the aim of progress is to strive

⁴⁰ Greenberg’s position lacks a systematic formulation and was presented mainly through art criticism (Danto, 1997, 63). Danto’s critique of the instrumental account provided a systematic form for Greenberg’s ideas. Therefore, I primarily rely on Danto (1997) to report on Greenberg (1993).

for a truth-likeness of the essential material nature of painting (Danto, 1997, 69). Ultimately, as painting better determines its essential material nature through painterly expression, it progresses within the bounds of its philosophical aim.

Greenberg's response to the modernist turn was influenced by the Kantian tendency towards self-criticality, which was a hallmark of the modernist period (Danto, 1997, 69). Kant viewed pure reason as the source of absolute a priori knowledge, free from empirical elements (Danto, 1997, 69). In consequence, each art, under self-criticism, would be "rendered pure," a concept Danto (1997, 69) believed Greenberg (1993) borrowed from Kant's notion of pure reason. Kant called a mode of knowledge pure when "there is no admixture of anything empirical"—i.e., pure a priori knowledge (Kant, 1963, 43). Additionally, "pure reason" is the source of the "principles whereby we know we know anything absolutely a priori" (Kant, 1963, 58). Thus, Danto (1997, 69) believed that Greenberg was inspired by Kant's (1963) self-criticality and a priori reasoning and applied it to art. In the modernist spirit, art should be self-questioning, and in the case of painting, the subject of painting, was the painting itself (Danto, 1997, 69). Therefore, Danto asserts that for Greenberg (1993), artistic modernism was a kind of collective inquiry by painting into painting, in an effort to exhibit what painting itself is (Danto, 1997, 69).⁴¹ What makes modernist painting modern is, on Greenberg's (1993) account, that it takes upon itself the task of determining "through its own operations and works, the effects exclusive to itself" (Greenberg, 1993, 91). Moreover, this essence of art coincided, "with all that was unique in the nature of its medium" and to be true to its essence each modernist work was obliged to "eliminate [...] any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art" (Greenberg, 1993, 91).

Greenberg (1993) advocates that pure abstraction is the means towards painting's philosophical aim. This led to a significant aesthetic rift between painting and reality. For

⁴¹ It is important that Greenberg (1993) introduced a sense in which art practice may perform a philosophical function. The noetic account takes inspiration from this idea.

instance, Greenberg's (1993) view emphasises aesthetic standards such as materiality and flatness as aesthetic criteria for pure abstraction (Danto, 1997, 68). Here, for example, the flatness of painting is seen as an improvement on illusion (mimesis) which requires the use of three-dimensional space, itself a borrowing from sculpture and hence a contaminant of painting construed as pure (Danto, 1997, 68). Therefore, abstraction is the ultimate means to express painting's philosophical essential truth. Thus, in this view, the aim to produce a visual reality mimetically redundant.⁴²

Just as for the classical narrative, in Greenberg's view if art does not adhere to the modernist aim, it also falls out of the pale of historical progress. Thus, Greenberg's (1993) account nevertheless maintains the instrumental progressive structure and sets in place aesthetic standards—pure abstraction—as a means towards its aim: defining its material essence. In the same way as the mimetic narrative, the modernist narration implies that some artists could not be included in the art's progressive history. Every artistic movement that does not comply with modernist standards is also out of the pale of history. The core of the issue, Danto (1997, 77) claims, is that Greenberg (1993) defines the modernistic narrative structure in terms of a natural continuation of the mimetic narrative. Albeit with the aim of a philosophical self-definition in terms of art's material essence. For Danto (1997, 105-106) the revision of aims, is a way of wrongly perpetuating the same master historical progressive structure.

2.2.3. Contemporary art and the end of art

According to Danto (1997, 73), the modernist narration is false because it is too partial. It cannot account for the representational prospects of painting, or any other instrumental aim painting might pursue. In Picasso's *Guernica*, for example, the representational content is more important than the attention Picasso paid to the properties of the artistic

⁴² Greenberg was a prominent and exceedingly influential art critic and theorist. His ideas were far-reaching and had a tremendous impact on art, fuelling the abstract expressionist movement.

medium (Danto, 1997, 73). But, more importantly, contemporary art does not meet the standards of modernism. For Danto, in contemporary art, artworks and “real” objects cannot be distinguished only by perception. An example of this is exemplified by Duchamp’s found-object artworks, which opted to shift the focus of art from the retinal to the mental (Danto, 1997, 113). According to Danto, while Greenberg—with an instrumental gesture—could interpret contemporary art as a phase of decadence, it fails to account for our experience of contemporary art as a valued development (Danto, 1997, 148). Thus, for Danto, the attention to the material medium must be now abandoned (Danto, 1997, 148).

Danto (1997, 148) writes, “My own sense of an ending suggests that it was the remarkable disjunctiveness of artistic activity across the entire sector that provided evidence that the Greenbergian narrative was over, and that art had entered what one might call a post-narrative stage”. For Danto (1997), contemporary art is not modern in Greenberg’s sense anymore, because it does not fit the mimetic or modernist narration. Nor does contemporary art mark an age of decadence. Danto (1997, 150) posits that the modernist progressive structure cannot be replaced by a new progressive structure because contemporary art is not bound by traditional progressive narratives or fixed aesthetic standards, rather it is pluralistic and limitless in its possibilities. Danto (1997, 135) suggests that the pluralism found in contemporary art is characterised by an open disjunction of media, which corresponds to a disjunction of artistic motivations and impedes the possibility of a progressive narrative. In contemporary art, there is no favoured aim for development. In essence, there is no longer an order of priority for instrumental ends.

It is important to highlight that up until Danto (1997), the notion of progress was fused to a single end that took precedence on a historical level. Accordingly, art progressed according to the progressive structure built on that end. However, this is complicated when we see that there is a plurality of instrumental ends. For Danto (1997, 44), not only

could art image-making pursue a plurality of ends, but those ends could be pursued concurrently whilst being equally valuable.⁴³ Pursuing visual mimesis was as valuable as abstraction or expression or aesthetic beauty. Since the plurality of ends is equally valuable, it was not possible to deduce an ultimate instrumental end in virtue of one end being more valuable than another. It is no longer possible to say, for example, that abstraction is more valuable than beauty or mimesis (Danto, 1997, 44). Thus, for Danto (1997) the progressive structure breaks down because, in artistic pluralism, there is an absence of an ultimate end to ground the progressive structure on. Without a structure of this kind, there is no longer gradability. Thus, artistic progress is unintelligible. For Danto (1997, 44) a grand historical progressive structure towards a single end—such as the earlier progressive accounts were built on—was no longer valid and artistic progress in the old sense was no more. Thus, contemporary art is out of the historical narrative made intelligible by a progressive structure towards a specific ultimate aim.

In essence, Danto's (1997) non-progress thesis is that there is not progress in contemporary art because artistic pluralism and progress are incompatible. Moreover, Danto's (1997) non-progress thesis is incompatible with any pluralistic instrumental account of progress because, in his view, artistic pluralism cannot be adequately captured within a monolinear narrative of progress.⁴⁴ This raises the 'specific' concern of whether monolinear progress in art is still intelligible despite artistic pluralism.

By extension of the non-progress, Danto (1997) forwards the idea that art has ended. He finds that once the end of the modernist narrative happens, the philosophical nature of art emerges into consciousness (Danto, 1997, 148). For Danto, "having brought itself to this level of consciousness, art no longer bears the responsibility for its own philosophical definition and that, instead, is the task of philosophers of art" (Danto, 1997, 36). In other

⁴³ As we will see in the noetic account although ends are plural, it does not find that all ends are equally valuable.

⁴⁴ 'Monolinear' refers to a single-end progressive trajectory.

terms, once art achieves philosophical self-consciousness, the history of art cannot take new directions, only the philosophical project to define art can. Art has been freed from the burden of defining itself by offering a narrative story in terms of aims. There are no longer any ultimate ends that can be distinguished. There is no longer a progressive structure determined by ultimate ends. Thus, art can no longer fall out of the pale of history. Instead, everything is equally possible. Therefore, the end of art's progress also means the end of the history of art. The project of art has been passed over to philosophy, and as such, art has reached its limits and cannot go beyond itself anymore. The definition of art is now no more an artistic task, but rather one left to philosophy alone.⁴⁵ Consequently, contemporary art is post-historical, meaning there is no room for artistic progress.

It is my contention that Danto's (1997, 147-150) assertion that the aims of art are plural and concurrent represents the most recent historically significant shift in art's progressive structure. Danto's ideas have been exceedingly influential and have had a great impact on the state of art we are familiar with today.

2.3. Bertinetto's plural artistic progress (despite Danto and beyond Gombrich)

Contrary to Danto (1997) and beyond Gombrich (1971), Bertinetto (2015) offers a *plural instrumental account of artistic progress*. In this view, artistic progress is intelligible despite artistic pluralism. However, for Bertinetto (2015) progress is feasible in pluralistic sense rather than a monolinear sense. Bertinetto's view is best understood as a modified instrumental account for which, instead of a monolinear trajectory towards a single aim, there is a pluralistic expansion in different directions like concentric circles of water. Bertinetto's (2015) assertion is that multiple directions may identify different exclusive

⁴⁵ Danto's (1981) definition of art is that art is an embodied meaning, which means that art is not defined by its physical or aesthetic properties but rather by its intended meaning and the context in which it is created and viewed (Adajian, 2022).

aims and a normative order toward these aims may be evaluated accordingly without phasing each other out (Bertinetto, 2015, 90).⁴⁶

Bertinetto's (2015) view is opposed to Danto's (1997). Bertinetto (2015, 88) believes that denying progress in contemporary art takes away its potential for innovation, originality, and its ability to be intelligible and evaluative. Therefore, for Bertinetto (2015, 88), Danto's (1997) non-progress thesis is at odds with our experience of art. Despite the assertion that there is no progress in art, we can nevertheless appreciate innovations in art (Bertinetto, 2015, 88). Thus, Bertinetto (2015, 88) believes Danto's postmodern move seems to throw the baby out with the bath water. For Bertinetto (2015, 88), rejecting a linear direction of progress towards a preconceived notion of perfection or infinity doesn't necessarily entail rejecting the idea of artistic progress altogether. Artworks can still function as new statements that open new possibilities of signification and set new goals and standards (Bertinetto, 2015, 88). Bertinetto (2015) asserts that art is inherently linked to progress. Any given artistic goal is only valid in relation to a particular aesthetic norm—even if the idea that progress is an end itself is flawed, such as in avant-gardism.⁴⁷ Bertinetto (2015, 89-90) thinks that a different notion of progress is needed. One which allows for single historical artistic movements that have distinct normative orders, but at the same time is qualitatively broader because it should not find progress only within one normative order (Bertinetto, 2015, 89-90). To develop such an account Bertinetto (2015) thinks we need to accept two related premises.

First, progress in art should not be defined as a monolinear trajectory, but rather as a pluralistic expansion in different directions. Bertinetto (2015, 89) suggests that Danto

⁴⁶ Bertinetto's reference to "normative order" is analogous to a progressive structure based on a single end. I will reframe from referring to them as progressive structures. This is to avoid confusion with these instrumental progressive structures and the higher-order progressive structure he finds as evident for art as a whole. This choice is also fuelled by my hesitation to see Bertinetto's account as one of artistic progress, but perhaps rather as one of artistic development. Moreover, this is to avoid depriving his argument of the nuance of its original form and making any misquotations. In any case, his terminology works just as well.

⁴⁷ The sentiment of 'avant-gardism' is progress for progress's sake.

rejects artistic progress for contemporary art because he makes the mistake of reductively identifying progress with a linear trajectory toward a specific goal which is incompatible with pluralism. However, monolinear progress is not the uniquely available concept of progress (Bertinetto, 2015, 89). Contemporary art shows that progress is not limited to improving means for pre-set goals but involves continuously reworking the connections between means (techniques, materials, procedures, styles, etc.) and goals (meanings, contents, expressions, etc.) (Bertinetto, 2015, 89). These connections are not always necessarily determined before creating artwork but are also established through the artistic process (Bertinetto, 2015, 89). Artistic progress is always ongoing because it engenders potentiality and transformations of the connection between means and goals—and thereby standards (Bertinetto, 2015, 89). This happens through the evaluative interpretations of (present and future) beholders and listeners, critics, and artists (Bertinetto, 2015, 89). Artistic progress is possible on the one hand because every artwork necessitates a normative order for its intelligibility (Bertinetto, 2015, 89). On the other, each artwork also takes a stance toward the current normative order and contributes to its transformation by introducing unexpected elements which were not previously anticipated (Bertinetto, 2015, 89). As different artworks respond differently to the same normative order, they allow for multiple possibilities for further developments within each normative order (Bertinetto, 2015, 89).

Secondly, artistic progress requires an evaluative understanding of artworks, which goes beyond their mere value as objects, and includes the reflection they elicit—which is often unconscious—on value production, transformation, and experience (Bertinetto, 2015, 90). This implies that every artwork not only takes place in a normative order, but also takes a stance toward it, and transforms it (Bertinetto, 2015, 90). Thus, artistic progress should be understood as the continuous reworking of the connections between means and goals. Hence, pluralistic progress seems to be not only possible but even necessary to art. In other terms, our notion of art is indeed tied to a notion of progress and unbinding the notion of art from the notion of progress would be like making art unintelligible

(Bertinetto, 2015, 90). Thus, the lack of a notion of progress would be at odds with the way we experience and evaluate images within the context of art.

For Bertinetto (2015) progress is compatible with artistic pluralism. Contemporary art has a plurality of unique ends for which there are corresponding unique progressive structures according to each end, resulting in a plurality of progressive structures. Since single-end instrumental progress is intelligible and a cluster of these ends constitute the available set of plural ends, so is plural instrumental progress intelligible. Thus, art has a plurality of instrumental ends to which art image-making can be applied. All of which are meaningful in their own right—i.e., in virtue of being aspects of part of art image-making's instrumental potential. Thus, art image-making may meaningfully pursue mimesis as it does abstraction. The single-end (e.g., mimesis) gradable value is relative to the instrumental effectiveness towards that specific end. This is opposed to being valuable in virtue of another instrumental end with lesser value (e.g., abstraction).

Ultimately, Bertinetto's (2015, 89-90) pluralistic instrumental account is novel in two important ways. First, it forwards the idea that progress entails the reflexive and transformative restatement of the connection between means and goals. Secondly, it finds each artwork not only answers the normative order but modifies it, leading to modified standards for which artistic achievement can be judged. Thus, contrary to Danto (1997), Bertinetto (2015, 91) does not think that in contemporary art simply everything is possible and that an artwork can be anything. Rather, in his view an artwork can be anything that is evaluated as a source of new possible meaning, in so far as artworks elicit reflections on value production, transformation, and experience transforming in different degrees our normative orders (Bertinetto, 2015, 91). This transformation is to be conceived of as a development of past normative orders or, in terms of pluralistic progress. This is because it makes possible different—possibly diverging and even incompatible—narrative discourses concerning art (Bertinetto, 2015, 91).

Importantly, Bertinetto (2015, 91) raises a potential objection to his view which challenges the validity of the notion of progress he has in use. Namely, his notion of artistic progress may be at odds with the very idea of progress, which is per se monolinear and mono-logical. Bertinetto (2015, 91) suggests that a different notion, such as the one of “development”, may be more apt to express what he has in mind. He asserts that if an artwork may be anything, provided that it opens a space of possible meanings and values, then it is true that art may “develop” in more and different directions (Bertinetto, 2015, 91). However, so the objection may go, those developments do not necessarily entail progress. Bertinetto (2015, 91) admits that the objection holds only if the notion of progress and its applications to art is limited to the idea of monolinear progress, and if it is necessary to cash out the term "progress" to avoid these semantic constraints, using the more neutral "development" would work just as well (Bertinetto, 2015, 91). Thus, Bertinetto (2015, 91) brushes this potential objection off as merely a verbal dispute. However, although I think his notion of plural progress might have validity despite the lack of a monolinear trajectory, I don't find anything about his perspective to be inherently incompatible with a monolinear progressive structure. This is because, as we later find, the pluralistic “developments” in his account may be interpreted as promoting a monolinear progressive trajectory.

I believe that Bertinetto (2015) moves the discussion forward significantly for four reasons. First, regardless of whether Bertinetto's account is actually one of artistic development, it provides valuable insights regarding the continuity, unity, and transformation of art-practice in developing an account of artistic progress. Bertinetto's (2015) insights help elucidate the relationship between art-practice and changes to art throughout history. Secondly, by putting pressure on a potentially outdated notion of progress. Thirdly, by shedding light on the intelligibility of art by virtue of a notion of artistic progress. Fourth, by demonstrating how artistic pluralism can square with a progressive order.

Nevertheless, Bertinetto (2015) fails to demonstrate that transformation is accumulative or desirable, which I believe undermines his position as an account of progress—and may also help explain his anxieties about forwarding an account of artistic development. Bertinetto's (2015) account can explain the transformation of normative orders in art, but it lacks a monolinear trajectory like that of science—i.e., towards something like understanding. In Bertinetto's (2015) account there is no concurrent ending to every single aim. Therefore, his account also fails to provide normative guidance on how artists can navigate the plurality of ends in a meaningful way. It does not propose, for example, that further pluralism is desirable.

From Danto's (1997) point of view, all ends are equally valuable. From Bertinetto's (2015) view, all ends are equally valuable by virtue of the progressive transformation they provide. Artists working within the premises of Bertinetto's (2015) account may better understand that their actions can contribute to artistic transformation. However, they are still equally likely to face the same lack of meaningful direction within the ocean of plural ends as with Danto's account. Again, Bertinetto does not show, for example, that artistic transformation is desirable. Thus, Bertinetto's ideas may address artistic progress on a plural instrumental level, but not at anything like the monolinear level which oriented art-practice in the past—e.g., towards mimesis.

While Bertinetto lays the groundwork for a more nuanced debate, the Dantonian tension still prevails—i.e., the challenge to demonstrate whether artistic pluralism and progress at a higher-order monolinear level are compatible. Bertinetto's (2015) account provides a reason to accept plural progress at an instrumental level. However, it is not enough to say that there is also a monolinear trajectory of progress that carries through all of history like the monolinear accounts that hinge on a single ultimate end. The challenge remains that if we accept that all plural ends are equally valuable, then no single end is more valuable than another. Consequently, it is not obvious that anything like a uniform progressive structure is feasible by virtue of an ultimate end. What is necessary is to

explain how there may be a higher-order uniform progressive structure which doesn't break down when it finds that art image-making has a plurality of instrumental trajectories running in multiple directions. If a synthesis between Bertinetto's account and a monolinear trajectory is possible, there still may be hope for an account of artistic progress that can meaningfully guide contemporary art-practice. If it can be said that we can meaningfully navigate the plurality of ends and that we can have progress in this regard, it may double as the higher-order progressive structure which offers resolution to the Dantonian tension.

Ultimately, while Bertinetto (2015) and Danto (1997) offer valuable perspectives, they do not provide an account of how to meaningfully navigate the plurality toward a desirable end. It is my contention that this is due to the failure to recognise the significant role that understanding—and thereby art theory—has in illuminating art image-making's plural instrumental potentiality. Moreover, by overlooking the role of understanding image-making's instrumental ends, we also miss what makes instrumental progress possible. Undoubtedly, there has been an accumulation of understanding throughout art history leading to the availability of a broader scope of salient aims in contemporary art. I will now turn to exploring this concern in more detail.

Chapter 3

The role of understanding in artistic progress

In this chapter, I lay the foundation for resolving the Dantonian tension and to the noetic account of artistic progress. This is achieved by exploring my assertion that Danto (1997) overlooks the role of understanding by way of art theory. Upon our understanding of art image-making's instrumental potential (IP), ends become salient and can thereby be reflexively pursued in art-practice.⁴⁸ Thus, a broader scope of salient ends can entail more trajectories for plural instrumental progress. I contend that recognition of this underscores the significance of theorising for artistic progress.

As we have now observed, significant changes in art are prompted by shifts in our notion of progress. New notions of artistic progress set new aims and thereby values and standards to practice art. For instance, the shift from impressionism to abstract expressionism is a shift from one aim to another. In notions of artistic progress that predate contemporary art, art has a monilinear progressive structure. These notions of artistic progress prescribe a limit to art image-making's IP towards one specific aim—e.g., mimesis. In Danto's (1997) theory, instrumental ends are plural and equally tenable. Therefore, Danto's (1997) theory does not provide the same guiding principle for artists to practice art towards a specific end. Nevertheless, Danto's theory has an orientational role in contemporary art. It provides a philosophical rationale for artists to employ plural instrumental ends. Danto's theory determines a boundless scope of the plurality of ends for art. In addition, it functions to broadly guide art in terms of the plural instrumental trajectories within its 'boundless' scope of ends. Danto's theory manages to see that there is a plurality of ends, all of which can be meaningfully pursued. However, it does not

⁴⁸ From here on I will use IP. By understanding art image-making's IP we make its potential instrumental ends salient. IP can be thought of analogously to a phenomenon's latent potential for example electromagnetic potential or gravitational potential. IP refers to what image-making can possibly do. IP is an inherent aspect of image-making because part of what image-making is is what it can do.

account for what all the possible ends are, or how they can be navigated—for example, by pursuing some and not others. To determine what art image-making's instrumental ends are and how to meaningfully navigate them, I believe it is necessary to appreciate the role of understanding art image-making's IP.

It is my contention that a consequence of overlooking the role of understanding leads Danto (1997) to a failure to see that the plurality of ends cannot possibly be boundless. Instead, there are at least two necessary limitations regarding the scope of plural ends. First, by the understanding enabled by theorising—an *epistemic limit*.⁴⁹ We can determine the scope of salient ends by way of theorising. The scope of plural ends available to us is necessarily limited by our comprehension of what the ends are. Secondly, by the necessary selection that artists autonomously make from that scope—a *selection limit*. A selection is necessary because not all instrumental ends can be pursued simultaneously.

Nevertheless, we can presume that not all ends are yet accounted for and that we can come to understand more ends which can be incorporated into the scope. When we find that the scope of aims may broaden through further understanding, it becomes apparent that there may be a monolinear progressive trajectory (guiding principle) towards further understanding. Moreover, in terms of Danto's (1997) theory, if all ends are valuable, then so is the scope of ends. The broader the scope the more value it holds. By way of further understanding an expansion of the scope of plural ends is possible (e.g., mimesis, beauty, philosophical self-definition).

In terms of the epistemic limit, since *image-making's* instrumentality is limited so is the scope of ends that can possibly be accounted for. In other words, *art image-making's* maximal scope of instrumental ends is common with the phenomenon of *image-making*.

⁴⁹ As we will later see, in the noetic account, image-making also plays a role in enabling understanding of image-making's IP.

In this way, art image-making's instrumental ends are not boundless but limited by image-making's inherent IP. For example, just as art image-making's ability to exercise mimesis is by virtue of image-making's IP, art image-making cannot exercise instrumentality that image-making does not possess. Additionally, the epistemic limit is to the extent that image-making's instrumental ends have been accounted for. Nevertheless, the scope of art image-making's ends may expand as we have a better understanding of image-making's IP.⁵⁰

In terms of the selection limit, given the boundless open plurality of instrumental ends, it is hard to see how it is possible that all ends can be perused simultaneously in one work, by one artist, in one epoch or even throughout all time. For one, this is because new ends continue to emerge, and artists continue to explore new ways of creating images.⁵¹ Artists may focus on specific ends in their practice, but they cannot exhaust all possibilities. We can presume that not all ends are yet accounted for and that we can come to understand more ends as artists continue to make art. When we discover new ends, they can be incorporated into the scope of ends. Additionally, it is inconceivable that artists can pursue all ends of art image-making because not all ends are yet available to them. It is also inconceivable for artists to pursue all available ends simultaneously or throughout their lives because the number of possible ends is too vast. In sum, although there are many possible ends of art image-making not all of them can be pursued at any given time. There is a necessary selection and thereby a limit to the plurality of aims that can be pursued.⁵²

⁵⁰ As we shall see art image-making is one of the projects which reveals image-making's instrumental potential.

⁵¹ New image-making technologies can also bring about new ends—e.g., the camera or A.I.

⁵² Nevertheless, by extension of Danto's (1997) theory, we might take it that since pursuing one end is as valuable as another, so is pursuing one selection of ends over another. In any case, Danto never acknowledges this selection limit. Nor does he discuss whether there may be value in the pursuit of selections of ends. This could help make sense of the way contemporary art is orientated by themes such as post-colonialism or feminism which incorporate selections of ends.

Danto's (1997) theory fails to acknowledge the necessary limitations on the scope of plural ends. The epistemic limit and the selection limit represent a capacity problem that challenges the boundless instrumental pluralism proposed by Danto (1997, 150). From this perspective, it becomes clear that Danto (1997) overlooks the role of understanding by way of art theory. This leaves Danto blind to a potential monolinear progressive trajectory towards further understanding. In terms of Danto's (1997) theory, if all ends are valuable, then so is the scope of ends. The broader the scope the more value it holds. By way of further understanding an expansion of the scope of plural ends is possible. In the case that Bertinetto's (2015) plural instrumental progress is intelligible, a broader scope of ends can entail more trajectories for plural instrumental progress. Thus, there may be a progressive narrative in art towards further understanding.

In this way, the debate about artistic progress can shift its focus from a consideration of *instrumental ends* as establishing the progressive structure, to *understanding*—as that which affords us instrumental ends. This move emphasises *further understanding* as the monolinear higher-order progressive structure. Thus, if it can be shown that understanding is both accumulative and desirable, it may feasibly serve as the monolinear aim for an account of artistic progress. One which is compatible with artistic pluralism. If this is the case, such an account can resolve the Dantonian tension and point to a unique model of artistic progress. To test the viability of this suggestion, I will now consider in what sense art theory might enable further understanding of image-making analogous to the way science gains understanding in its own domain.

“There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists.”—Ernest Gombrich
(2006, 21)

Chapter 4

Noetic progress towards understanding

If there is a monilinear progressive structure that is compatible with artistic pluralism, then the Dantonian tension may be circumvented. As a promising way forward, the prevalence of a progressive structure oriented towards the aim of understanding image-making's IP is now apparent. This raises the questions: in what sense can we acquire further understanding? And how can there be progress therein?

In this chapter, I address these questions by looking over the fence to the debate about scientific progress. I consider Dellsén's (2018) account of understanding as dependency modelling which lays the groundwork for his account of progress. Then I consider Dellsén (2022a; 2022b) noetic account of scientific progress, which finds that progress is made in terms of increasing understanding. Dellsén (2022a) is also able to extend the noetic account to other paradigmatic cases, such as philosophy. I begin by explaining why it is feasible to draw insights from the philosophy of science. Then I examine Dellsén's (2022a; 2022b) noetic account in more detail while demonstrating its fruitful application to theorising about art.

As we shall see, drawing from Dellsén (2018; 2022a; 2022b) paves the way for the noetic account of artistic progress. Dellsén's (2022a; 2022b) noetic account provides a progressive structure towards understanding—*the noetic progressive structure*—according to which understanding is gradable. Since the orientation towards understanding in art theory is common with the debate about scientific progress, and image-making appears to be a legitimate target phenomenon for understanding, a fruitful discussion might be made in parallel.

4.1. Why draw from the philosophy of scientific progress?

The appeal of drawing from the philosophy of *scientific progress* to *artistic progress* is fourfold. First, the natural sciences' enable reliable contributions in modelling aspects of the world. If there is progress in understanding, we can expect that it can be found in science. Secondly, the philosophy of scientific progress has a comparatively mature discourse, which currently has the benefit of a lively, ongoing debate with rigorous and nuanced deliberation. Thirdly, ideas about scientific progress are being feasibly applied to other paradigmatic cases such as philosophy. Therefore, I believe it is compatible with theorising about art. Fourth, the noetic progressive structure towards understanding in science is useful in developing a noetic account of artistic progress.

As mentioned in Chapter 1 (pg. 27), AT is reflective of many different aspects of art and of art in its entirety. It is a composite of the study of an array of target phenomena and systems relevant to art, such as art experience, art's ontology, artistic value, art's history, aesthetic expertise, and art-practice (Freeland, 2003). AT draws upon various fields, such as philosophy, history, science, and psychology. Each presupposes tailored epistemic approaches for understanding. In this way, AT incorporates a plurality of paradigmatic methodologies—which have their own questions—to address a multitude of phenomena related to art. AT's respective fields of study are presumed to provide an understanding of these various distinct aspects of art by which, as I have argued, art-practice is of central concern. Moreover, my specific focus is to do with one of AT's composite parts, namely, art theories which provide an understanding of art image-making. Since art theories can feasibly draw from different fields, ideas about progress towards understanding in science may be feasibly applied to theorising about art. In sum, art theories can gain from instances of understanding enabled by other fields such as science or philosophy.

The applicability of a scientific approach to theorising about art will come as no surprise to those who accept Goodman's (1969, 9) dictum that art must be taken no less seriously than the sciences as a mode of discovery, creation, and enlargement of knowledge in the broad sense of the advancement of understanding. Those who have issues with accepting

this claim wholesale, might at the very least accept that both art theories and scientific theories share similarities as reflective practices that aim to provide understanding through inquiry. Nevertheless, my claim here is not that art-practice can produce understanding according to the same standards of science. Rather it is that the approach to understanding by way of art theories can gain from science. Both disciplines involve understanding phenomena which, specifically for art theories, can be the target of image-making. In a nutshell, accepting that art theories aim to enable understanding and that both disciplines involve understanding phenomena, it can be fruitful to lend from Dellsén's (2016; 2018; 2022a; 2022b) ideas about scientific understanding and progress.

So, what precisely does Dellsén mean by understanding? The nature of understanding is much debated (Dellsén, 2022a, 11). Indeed, one view on offer is that understanding reduces to a type of knowledge (Dellsén, 2022a, 11). Dellsén's noetic account, however, explicitly defines understanding such that it doesn't reduce to a type of knowledge, or even require epistemic justification (Dellsén, 2022a, 11). Thus, Dellsén asserts that scientific progress can be made in the absence of epistemic justification on the noetic account (Dellsén, 2022a, 11).

The idea that science makes progress by accumulating knowledge is *prima facie* plausible. However, the initial appeal of this idea may be due to the fact that knowledge has not always been clearly distinguished from understanding (Dellsén, 2016). When one takes care to distinguish these two cognitive states, it starts to seem less obvious that knowledge rather than understanding is what increases when science makes cognitive progress (Dellsén, 2016, 38). In order to settle this issue, Dellsén (2016) has considered cases in which knowledge and understanding come apart. It has been shown that in these cases, scientific progress follows increases in scientific understanding rather than accumulations of knowledge. The understanding-based account, proposed by Dellsén (2016), posits that an episode in science is considered progressive when scientists gain a precise grasp of how to accurately explain or predict more aspects of the world at the end

of the episode compared to the beginning.⁵³ In addition, Dellsén (2016, 38) has argued that considerations having to do with minimalist idealizations, pragmatic virtues, and epistemic value all favour the understanding-based noetic account of scientific progress over the knowledge-based epistemic account.

Dellsén (2018, 4) assumes that understanding is best exemplified in the natural sciences, but he does not limit understanding exclusively to empirical sciences. Dellsén (2018, 4) only asserts that any adequate account of understanding must also explain how understanding is achieved in empirical sciences. Thus, Dellsén (2022a) finds that ideas in his noetic account of understanding in science are also able to apply to philosophy. Dellsén (2022a) believes that paradigmatic cases of understanding are to be found elsewhere—for example in philosophy. Thus, I agree with Dellsén's (2018, 4-5) assertion that exclusively natural scientific empiricism for understanding would be inconsistent with the notion of understanding, in which all phenomena that exist can be the target for understanding. For if understanding was not possible outside of the process of verification by the natural sciences it would be impossible to reconcile our daily functioning which relies on understanding (Dellsén, 2018, 4-5). Therefore, we need different empirical strategies for different phenomena so that the paradigmatic cases of understanding in philosophy, and thereby art theory, could exercise facilities other than scientific empiricism to provide understanding—albeit in a different way than in the natural sciences (Dellsén, 2018, 4-5). Dellsén (2018, 4-5) finds that since science and philosophy are indeed forms of inquiry, science can inform philosophy and vice versa. Seeing this also suggests they have at least some aims in common, such as understanding, even if they pursue these aims in different ways (Dellsén, 2018, 4-5).

To be clear, Dellsén (2018, 4-5) asserts that none of this is to assume that science and philosophy are alike in all respects. If philosophy and science investigate different subject matter, it is reasonable to expect that they will employ different methods to make

⁵³ Thus, scientific progress is a kind of cognitive progress.

progress in understanding. However, Dellsén (2018, 4-5) asserts a stark methodological difference between science and philosophy is entirely compatible with a uniform account of progress across these disciplines. I agree with Dellsén's (2018, 4-5) assertion that even those who take science and philosophy to be fundamentally different have a lot to learn from accounts of scientific progress. At the very least, ideas about progress towards understanding in science may serve as a valuable point of reference for considering what should be expected from art theories.

While theorising about art is not a science, it is theoretical. Moreover, art theories can draw from scientific understanding. If the notion of understanding is a uniform concept, then it may apply to science, philosophy, and art theories alike, resulting in greater cohesion across diverse fields. Since AT is a composite of diverse fields, better integration of understanding may make it easier to uncover new insights and draw connections between them. Therefore, it is my assertion that both scientific understanding and philosophical understanding may feature in theorising about art.⁵⁴

4.2. Objectual understanding and the target of art image-making

The noetic account takes scientific progress to be explicable in terms of understanding. The notion of understanding that Dellsén (2018, 3) discusses is canonically ascribed to someone with a sentence of the form 'S understands P', where P is a phenomenon. In the philosophy of science, this kind of understanding is usually referred to as *objectual understanding* (Dellsén, 2018, 3).

Dellsén (2018, 3) points out that the term 'understanding' is slightly misleading since the target phenomenon P need not be a single object. Rather, a target phenomenon may be

⁵⁴ In this case, like philosophical or scientific understanding, we might think of understanding by virtue of art theory as *artistic understanding*. Although the kind of understanding we might have by virtue of art theories may not be totally reliant on the natural sciences or philosophy, art theories would nevertheless provide artistic understanding.

a complex system that is itself most naturally described as being composed of several interacting objects. For example, one can be said to understand complex systems like human minds, machines, economies, or art image-making—all of which are naturally thought of as systems with interacting parts. Thus, the term 'phenomenon' for the target of objectual understanding does not imply that these targets must be observational or empirical—atoms, quarks, and electric fields can be understood, even though they cannot be (directly) observed (Dellsén, 2018, 3). Dellsén's (2018, 3) account takes it that everything that exists is, or is part of, some phenomenon or other, and thus can conceivably be the target of someone's understanding. Therefore, following Dellsén's (2018) view, the phenomenon of art image-making qualifies as a target for objectual understanding.

Cognition is pertinent to art image-making. Art image-making is artistic understanding integrated into image-making. Artistic understanding is broadly a kind of thinking informed by ideas about art. These ideas often come from art theory.⁵⁵ Art theory provides an understanding of image-making. We can think of the phenomenon of *art image-making* as *image-making* with an integrated artistic understanding.⁵⁶ Thus, art image-making is an ontologically dependent process which necessitates, among other things, our ideas about art. Seeing this also helps explain why many have been hesitant to deem forms of image-making as art before the Renaissance (Belting, 2008; Danto, 1997; Shiner, 2001).

Similarly, any other (non-art) instance of *image-making* also presupposes that there is an understanding of image-making integrated within it. For an agent without any understanding of image-making, it would seem unlikely, if not impossible, that they could make images at all. For instance, this would have been the case before image-making emerged into existence. Before there was any understanding of image-making, the

⁵⁵ Even if not directly.

⁵⁶ As I have mentioned in Chapter 1, this phenomenon would have emerged during the Renaissance.

phenomenon of image-making surely did not exist. Sure, archaic homo sapiens might have made footprints, but it is only until there was a reflective understanding of image-making for homo sapiens that we might call the creation of images: image-making (Henshilwood, 2023, personal communication, 2 February). Even though artistic understanding is part of art image-making's ontological nature, if we can accept that *image-making* can in principle be the target of objectual understanding, then so can *art image-making*.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, my concern here is not with cognition in art image-making. Rather it is with modelling the IP of art image-making. As I have already alluded to, *art image-making's* IP is common with the phenomenon of *image-making*. In this way, art image-making's instrumental ends are not boundless, but rather limited by image-making's inherent IP. By further understanding image-making's IP, we also gain an understanding of art image-making's IP. The scope of art image-making's salient ends may expand as we have a better understanding of image-making's IP. Thus, for the purposes of objectual understanding, and for the sake of targeting art image-making's IP precisely, we can take image-making's IP as the target phenomenon.

Before we proceed, it will serve to first consider some of what makes image-making a distinct phenomenon in more detail. It has been found that the origins of image-making can be traced back to around 73,000 years ago (Henshilwood et al., 2018). We find that image-making exhibits properties unique to it. For one, it is apparent that image-making represents an innate and embodied inclination towards a visual expression that extends the boundaries of our perception and cognition. The phenomenon of image-making is a process which incorporates both a physical and mental constitution. Image-making involves a specific cognitive interface with matter, resulting in the creation of objects that are reflexive of specific aspects of cognition. For example, through image-making, aspects

⁵⁷ Art image-making can be categorised as a distinct phenomenon from other kinds of non-art image-making. Integrated artistic understanding is what makes art image-making distinct. Nevertheless, we can also see it under the larger category of image-making. Art image-making is a part of image-making.

of our visual experience become manifest in material form. In doing so we gain a material counterpart which enables access to our visual experience that cannot be achieved through any other means. Image-making presents an optically analogous representation of our visual perception on a physical surface. Similarly, image-making can present mental images that feature in the imagination. In some sense, it is by way of image-making we can 'model' and reflect our visual experience—which in turn can impact our visual experience and the way we think about our visual experience. In other words, image-making provides a unique means by which we can gain an understanding of ourselves—in particular, our private phenomenological experience.

Just as metabolism is understood as distinct from other phenomena (such as light waves), image-making should be understood as a distinct phenomenon. Part of what makes, for example, metabolism and image-making distinct phenomena is the fact that they have distinct natures inherent to them, part of which is their unique IP. Since image-making is unique it is best modelled separately from other processes such as metabolism.

Image-making appears not to be as uniform and predictable as other phenomena like light waves. Rather it is more like biological phenomena that exhibit unpredictable changes. When we consider all instances of image-making from its conception up until now, we can notice that the constitution of image-making includes variable components. One of the variable components is the cognition integrated into image-making. Cognition varies in its content but remains a consistently contingent property. Moreover, cognition in image-making is informed by the cognitive agent's understanding of image-making. Nevertheless, aspects of that understanding may be generally shared, such as within artworld communities. We find that as our understanding of image-making has changed, so has image-making itself. For instance, changes in our ideas about art, by way of art theories, have brought about changes in our understanding of image-making. These changes in cognition have brought corresponding changes in image-making. Ultimately,

given image-making's status as a distinct phenomenon, it is my contention that it can be the target for objectual understanding like any other existing phenomenon.

4.3. Objectual understanding as dependency modelling

Now that we have established image-making as a feasible target phenomenon of objectual understanding, let's consider Dellsén's (2018; 2022b) account of objectual understanding which he calls the *dependency model account*. This account holds that understanding a phenomenon requires grasping a specific kind of model of that phenomenon's dependence relations (Dellsén, 2018, 5). To consider how this may be translated in terms of artistic understanding, I will closely follow the stages of his formulation, starting with "modelling". I do not claim to provide a perfectly accurate account of dependency modelling for art theory. Rather, I only hope to demonstrate that this approach can be useful in modelling image-making's IP in terms of art theorising.

For Dellsén (2018, 5), a model is simply an information structure of some kind that is interpreted to represent its target. These information structures can be concrete, as in the original model of DNA, or abstract, as in mathematical and computational models (Dellsén, 2018, 5). In both cases, the information structures are associated with an intended interpretation that specifies how the different parts of the structure correspond to different elements and relations in the phenomenon (Dellsén, 2018, 5). In other words, information structures become a model only once different parts of the structures have been associated with specific parts of the phenomenon in question. In this way, a model of image-making's IP serves as an information structure that represents its object of study. Thus, specific parts of this information structure would correspond to specific parts of the phenomenon of image-making. Take, for example, that the part of the model that finds image-making can produce mimetic images would associate with this essential aspect of image-making's IP. Thus, this part of the model explains part of what image-

making is and it helps us predict what image-making can do. Such a model would propose an accurate association with the phenomenon of image-making.

Since understanding is something that happens in our minds, a model-based account of understanding requires that the relevant kind of model must somehow be present in thought (Dellsén, 2018, 5). Thus, for Dellsén (2018, 5), as far as the current account of understanding is concerned, all that's required is that models can be represented in the mind—e.g., by sets of propositions that describe these models. As a shorthand for the relation between the mind and the model, Dellsén uses the term 'grasping'. Thus, we can say that on the model-based account, understanding consists of grasping a certain kind of model of the understood phenomenon (Dellsén, 2018, 6). In an instance of image-making, the process of image-making itself may be said to be an indication that an agent has grasped a model of image-making's IP. Such that, grasping this model may even be said to be necessary for reflectively participating in image-making, as it requires a particular understanding to be present in thought.

By their nature, all models are incomplete or inaccurate representations of their targets (Dellsén 2018, 6). So which aspects of a phenomenon must be represented by an understanding agent's model? Dellsén's (2018, 6) answer to this question is that understanding involves identifying the dependence relations that a phenomenon or its features stand in towards other things. The kind of model used to capture these relations is called a *dependency model* (Dellsén, 2018, 6). A dependency model aims to represent the network of dependencies that a phenomenon has, regardless of what they may be (Dellsén, 2018, 6). Note that the sum of all dependence relations of image-making in a model would provide an account of the nature of image-making, including its IP. Dellsén (2018, 6) highlights that the most well-known kind of dependence relation is *causality*—an effect depends on its cause. For example, mimetic images are outcomes of the process of image-making. Similarly, mimetic image-making is caused by both cognition and practice. One of the arguably *non-causal* dependence relations is grounding—i.e., the in-

virtue-of relation (Dellsén, 2018, 6-7). For example, mimetic image-making is in virtue of image-making's IP.

According to Dellsén (2018, 7), to understand a phenomenon X, it is not enough to grasp any old dependency model of X. If this were so, any or no model would be just as good as any other (Dellsén, 2018, 7). But this is not the case. To understand the nature of something, we need to focus on its specific characteristics and how they relate to other objects. Only a model that captures these features can truly inform us about the target object. Thus, the model must in some sense be a good representation of what the relevant dependence relations are (Dellsén, 2018, 7). So, what makes such a model better or worse qua representation? Dellsén's (2018, 7) answer is that "a dependency model better represents X to the extent that the network of dependence relations that X stands in is correctly depicted by the model. Since a dependency model can thus fail either by incorrectly representing (i.e., misrepresenting) some aspect of this network, or by not representing it at all, we can identify two separate criteria here, viz. accuracy—the extent to which its claims are correct—and comprehensiveness—the extent to which it is informative" (Dellsén, 2018, 7).

Dellsén (2018, 4) determines that understanding is a gradable notion. As a case in point, agents can have various degrees of understanding of the same phenomenon. Moreover, different models can offer various degrees of understanding of a phenomenon. For Dellsén (2018, 4) understanding is a matter of degree in a way that propositional knowledge, for example, is not. It's not just that one can understand more or fewer phenomena. Rather, one can have more and less (or, if you prefer, 'better' and 'worse') understanding of a single phenomenon (Dellsén, 2018, 4). Thus, it makes sense to say, for example, that an experienced physicist has a greater understanding of Brownian motion than her graduate student, who in turn has a greater understanding of this phenomenon than the freshmen taking her introductory courses, and so forth (Dellsén, 2018, 4). A corollary of the gradability of understanding is that our understanding of a phenomenon

can (and typically does) improve incrementally over time (Dellsén, 2018, 4). In a model-based account of the sort Dellsén proposes, this is explained by the fact that the two aforementioned criteria (accuracy and comprehensiveness) are both gradable (Dellsén, 2022b, 9). Thus, one's degree of understanding of some phenomenon P is proportional to the comprehensiveness and accuracy of one's dependency model of P (Dellsén, 2022b, 9).

4.4. Progress as enabling further understanding

4.4.1. Noetic scientific progress

Dellsén (2022b) develops his account of scientific progress on his (2018; 2022b) account of dependency modelling. These two accounts are closely connected. Therefore, it will serve to first consider Dellsén's (2018) account of dependency modelling in sum.

In sum, Dellsén's (2018; 2022b) view of understanding directly refers to the dependence relations, such as causation, constitution, or grounding, that are often associated with an explanation. More specifically, this view defines understanding in terms of modelling such dependence relations, where 'a model' of a phenomenon is just an information structure that represents the dependence relations, or the lack thereof (Dellsén, 2022b, 9). Someone's degree of understanding at a given time is then determined by the accuracy (the extent to which its claims are correct) and comprehensiveness (the extent to which it is informative) of their dependency model (Dellsén, 2022b, 9). The dependency modelling account of understanding can be condensed as follows: "An agent understands X if and only if they grasp a sufficiently accurate and comprehensive dependency model of X, and the agent's degree of understanding of X is proportional to the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their dependency model of X" (Dellsén, 2022b, 9).

In this way, an agent understands the dependence relations of image-making's IP *if and only if* they grasp a sufficiently accurate and comprehensive dependency model of image-making's IP. For example, an agent's degree of understanding of image-making's IP is proportional to the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their model.⁵⁸ Thus, finding that there is accumulation and gradability of objectual understanding puts Dellsén in a position to define scientific progress in terms of increasing understanding. He states, "Scientific progress is made with respect to a given phenomenon X just in case, and to the extent that, changes in publicly available scientific information enable relevant members of society to increase their understanding of X, i.e., to increase the accuracy and/or comprehensiveness of their dependency models of X" (Dellsén, 2022b, 13).

As I have asserted, art theories, like scientific theories, provide understanding. Theorising about art can draw from dependency models of image-making's IP. Additionally, there may be many different models of a single phenomenon that incorporate different approaches (Frigg, 2020). There may be different kinds of models of image-making. These models can be developed using a particular theory and theories may also be developed using models (Frigg, 2023, 6). One kind of model of image-making we may develop is a dependency model. Therefore, theorising about art may progress in terms of Dellsén's (2018; 20221; 2022b) noetic account.

In terms of noetic 'scientific' progress in art theorising, noetic artistic understanding would consist in grasping a sufficiently accurate and comprehensive dependency model of image-making's IP to higher degrees. Here, the degree of understanding is proportional to the accuracy and comprehensiveness of that dependency model. So, noetic 'scientific' progress in art theorising would be made by way of understanding image-making's IP, and

⁵⁸ Note that when the understanding is sufficiently inaccurate and incomprehensiveness it is difficult to see how an agent can possibly make images.

to the extent that we succeed in modelling it.⁵⁹ The noetic account of ‘scientific’ progress in art theory, with image-making’s IP as the target phenomenon, can be formulated thus:

Progress in art theory is made with respect to understanding image-making’s IP to the extent that further understanding of image-making’s IP is enabled. I.e., by increasing the accuracy and/or comprehensiveness of the dependence relations of image-making’s IP that become available to be grasped and integrated into art-practice.⁶⁰

As I have mentioned, image-making’s IP would be only one target phenomenon pertaining to image-making. We can imagine that there would be other kinds of fine-grained target phenomena relating to image-making’s inherent nature. For example, the nature of change or mental and physical processes. In any case, the sum of dependence relations models would associate with the nature of image-making as a whole.

4.4.2. Noetic philosophical progress

Dellsén (2022a, 17) uses his account of noetic scientific progress to develop a noetic account of philosophical progress. According to this Dellsén (2022a) uses his operational definition of understanding, namely, further understanding would consist in gaining or improving abilities to correctly explain or predict aspects of the phenomenon (Dellsén, 2022a, 17). Dellsén (2022a, 17) emphasises that his noetic account allows for increased understanding and thus progress therein can be achieved via theories and models that include idealisations in so far as they facilitate correct accuracy and/or comprehensiveness. Accordingly, philosophical progress consists in increasing

⁵⁹ Image-making’s IP would be one of various fine-grained target phenomena pertaining to image-making. Again, it serves to be specific about image-making’s IP for the task at hand.

⁶⁰ Just as progress in a scientific theory would entail progress in science, progress in an art theory of image-making’s IP would also entail progress for AT. The same will apply to philosophical progress.

understanding of phenomena, or philosophical phenomena, or perhaps philosophical aspects of (possibly non-philosophical) phenomena (Dellsén, 2022a, 17).

However, Dellsén (2022a) never fully fleshes out a theory of noetic philosophical progress. He does not provide precise epistemic criteria for philosophical understanding. For example, he does not offer a philosophically analogous account of dependency modelling.⁶¹ Given the scope of this thesis, I will have to leave an investigation of the epistemic criteria for understanding in philosophy, and thereby AT, by the wayside. Whether or not we can gain access to such epistemic criteria for understanding in philosophy, or any other field will have to be assessed elsewhere. Nevertheless, we can assume that there certainly would be such criteria for understanding in philosophy as well as other paradigmatic cases such as psychology and history. In terms of AT, the list would be extensive, due to the many different epistemological approaches within AT's diversity of methodologies across numerous fields. Nonetheless, my argument does depend on the fact that we can gain a further understanding by way of both science and philosophy and thereby art theorising. For now, I will have to assume *prima facie* to gain understanding in art theorising by way of philosophy and science. Dellsén's (2022a, 17) general reference to such epistemic criteria for understanding will have to suffice for now. Therefore, for the sake of my discussion, a 'philosophical' noetic account of progress in art theory will only include understanding, grasping, accuracy and comprehension.

Importantly, Dellsén (2022a) does provide a general structure for how we might make progress towards understanding in paradigmatic cases other than science. Thus, he puts on offer a common progressive structure towards understanding that can be applied to multiple paradigmatic cases—philosophy included. I deem this the *noetic progressive structure* (NPS).⁶² When NPS is applied to art theory, we can find that it progresses

⁶¹ Nevertheless, it may be shown that a philosophical method could produce a dependency model. But, whether or not the method would then have a scientific status may be up for debate.

⁶² From here on I will use NPS.

towards understanding. The noetic account of ‘philosophical’ progress in art theory, with image-making’s IP as the target phenomenon, can be formulated thus:

Progress in art theory is made with respect to understanding image-making’s IP to the extent that further understanding of image-making’s IP is enabled. I.e., by increasing the accuracy and/or comprehensiveness of image-making’s IP that becomes available to be grasped and integrated into art-practice.⁶³

In the domain of AT, an example of noetic ‘philosophical’ progress may be illustrated by Gombrich’s (1971) ideas about the nature of image-making’s IP.⁶⁴ It elucidates the philosophical nuances and complexities of the phenomenon of image-making in the context of art. Gombrich’s (1971) theory makes us more informed about the changing nature of image-making and whether this change represents progress. Gombrich’s (1971) theory enables us to explain why there have been particular kinds of changes throughout art history in a way that wasn’t available before.

4.4.3. The desirability of understanding

As I have mentioned, the notion of progress assumes: first, that developments exhibit a certain continuity and direction; secondly, that there is some evidence of accumulation in the phenomena involved; and thirdly, that the change accompanying these developments is desirable (Doorman, 2003, 131). In terms of NPS, understanding is accumulative and gradable. But is it desirable? The idea that understanding is desirable is often taken as a given. Presumably, this is because the idea that understanding is valuable

⁶³ Progress in an art theory would presumably also afford progress to AT.

⁶⁴ To note, Gombrich’s view is not only associated with the target phenomenon of art image-making but also image-making. Gombrich (1971) offers a view of the trajectory of image-making from its first instances to that found in art.

is easily taken to be trivially true.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, it is important to briefly address this concern.

One of the more obvious reasons why we might believe that understanding is valuable is because it informs us about the way the world is. Moreover, greater competence is afforded by further understanding and part of the human project has to do with gaining understanding. We, for example, go through many years of education to gain understanding. Governments around the world invest large portions of their resources to make education possible. They presumably do so under the premise that understanding is valuable. It is by virtue of understanding that citizens gain competence that equips them to partake in various projects. For example, it is by way of further understanding that we have addressed the threat of a pandemic and begun to explore space. We engage in projects to understand because understanding is valuable and thereby desirable.

Similarly, the more we have understood the nature of image-making the more competence we have acquired in relation to it. Further understanding has meant that image-making's potential was not exhausted by the first hand on the cave wall. Had our understanding of image-making decreased or remained stagnant, it would be difficult to explain the complexity and sophistication exhibited in art image-making today. The extent to which we understand image-making illuminates the potential of what image-making can do. Moreover, increases in understanding have enabled artists to reflectively explore more expansive possibilities in their image-making practice. In sum, a greater understanding of image-making is desirable because it enables competence in our art-practices that otherwise would not be available to us.

⁶⁵ Dellsén doesn't explain why further understanding is desirable. Thus, I believe he relies on understanding as being either, or both, intrinsically and instrumentally valuable. Nevertheless, understanding can be shown to inform inquisitional practice in valuable and thus desirable ways. E.g., inquisitional competence is afforded through the integration of enhanced understanding into inquisitional practice.

More specific to the discussion about artistic progress, further understanding is desirable in terms of the premise of contemporary art—i.e., as an artistic framework that opens up previously limited possibilities in image-making practice. Additionally, in terms of Danto's (1997) theory, a pluralist view of art image-making is preferable to a monolinear view. For one this is because the pluralist view is descriptive of the state of contemporary art and the monolinear view is not (Danto, 1997). In Danto's (1997) view, all of art image-making's ends hold equal value. Moreover, artistic pluralism provides an open approach to exploring all of image-making's IP. Pluralism provides artists with a broader extent of valuable possibilities for their art-practice to take. As we have seen the scope of plural ends is limited by the extent of understanding image-making's IP. Nevertheless, the scope of ends may broaden with further understanding. Upon further understanding, new instrumental ends become salient. This allows for artists to reflectively pursue more ends in art-practice. For if I am more familiar with the instrumental nature of image-making, I might know how best to use it by virtue of its nature. I would be afforded competence about what image-making can be used for, and how to use it freely towards the artistic purposes I see fit.

It is therefore my contention that a model of image-making's IP that provides a further understanding is desirable because it can thereby make more of image-making's ends salient. This model can be used to deduce a more expansive understanding of *art image-making's IP* with more ends. Additionally, the model of image-making's IP can also be used to explore the properties and implications of Danto's (1997) theory. A model of image-making's IP can refine and build Danto's theory or develop a new art theory altogether. This in turn may lead to further understanding of image-making.

4.5. The common noetic progressive structure

The noetic account of progress in art theory defines progress as increasing understanding.⁶⁶ Consequently, the NPS makes gradability possible by virtue of understanding. Before delving into the application of the NPS to art-practice, it is important to briefly examine its potential influence on value judgments in AT.

According to the NPS, as understanding accumulates over time, so is there a monolinear progressive trajectory towards understanding. Thus, according to the NPS, understanding is gradable. Moreover, value judgements are possible in terms of the extent of understanding—i.e., higher degrees of understanding are better than lesser degrees.

As we have seen NPS can have multiple applicable instances. Therefore, it is my contention that the NPS offers a common progress structure which has multiple applications in the discussion about artistic progress. For now, it is apparent that the NPS has at least three applications.⁶⁷ NPS can apply to models, art theories and the history of AT.

First, consider the application of NPS to modelling image-making's IP.⁶⁸ When the model enables more understanding of its relevant target, there is noetic progress. If there are two different models of image-making's IP, the one that provides the most understanding is best. If both provide different understanding, we might make a synthesis of both, and form an even better third model. What's more, it takes time to develop a model of image-making's IP. As a model is developed, it provides more understanding. The more understanding it provides the better it gets, since more noetic progress is enabled. Similarly, if the NPS is applied to art theorising about art image-making's IP when the theorising enables more understanding of its relevant target, the theory progresses. In sum, the more understanding enabled by the respective theory or model the better it is.

⁶⁶ From here on the noetic account refers to its application to art, unless otherwise specified.

⁶⁷ In chapters 5 and 6 I will consider other applications.

⁶⁸ This would also apply to models that associate with other target phenomena.

Additionally, when the NPS is applied to the history of AT we can draw a similar conclusion. Throughout the history of theorising about art image-making, there has been an incremental furthering of understanding. Further understanding has meant progress in the theorising about art. Additionally, a further understanding more specifically about art image-making would also entail a further understanding of image-making. For example, gaining the understanding of art image-making that it has the potential for philosophical self-definition or mimesis, would also mean an understanding of the image-making is also attained.

Since some art theories offer different degrees of understanding, it becomes evident that certain art theories hold more value than others. Since understanding is gradable, not all art theories are equal. This would also apply to any form of art theorising regardless of whether it has theory or model status. Take for example, accounts or ideas.⁶⁹ The NPS makes it possible to compare our ideas about art based on the understanding they provide. For example, we might find that Danto's (1997) theory provides a further understanding of art making's IP than say Gombrich's (1971) theory. However, it is also fruitful to see that theories build on each other. For example, Danto built on Gombrich's theory. On top of that, Bertinetto's (2015) account enabled further understanding by virtue of the understanding accumulated through the tradition of art theory. In terms of the NPS, throughout the history of AT, there has been noetic progress towards our understanding of art image-making.⁷⁰ Moreover, this understanding has been integrated into art-practice.

This presents a twist in the tale of the debate about artistic progress. Namely, from the earliest instances of image-making to contemporary times, a prevailing trend towards further understanding of image-making has persisted. Within this history, theoretical constructs, such as those provided by art theories, have played a significant role. Thus, in

⁶⁹ I will, nevertheless, continue to refer to theorising about art as art theory.

⁷⁰ I will revisit this point in more detail in section 5.2.

terms of the NPS, it becomes evident that there has been a noetic progression in our thinking about image-making, and our thinking in art image-making. Thus, the NPS makes it evident that there has been a progression in art, at least so far as understanding image-making is concerned.

But as we have also seen, when our understanding of art image-making's IP is integrated into art-practice, it impacts art-practice. This raises the question: in what sense is the NPS also feasible for art-practice? In a way that goes beyond the thought that art image-making has progressed as our theoretical constructs have progressed, by imparting a greater understanding to art-practice. By developing an account of artistic progress on NPS we can also assume that our understanding of image-making's IP is limited. Nevertheless, our understanding may be expanded by both theorising about art and art-practice itself. Moreover, the accumulation of understanding over time is desirable and therefore progressive. In Chapter 2, the need for a monolinear progressive structure in an account of plural artistic progress has been raised. Such an account can evade the Dantonian tension. Thus, it is my contention that the NPS also may be fertile grounds for developing an account of artistic progress which is compatible with artistic pluralism. The sense in which the NPS squares with a broader account of artistic progress is a matter to which I will now turn.

Chapter 5

The noetic account of artistic progress

In this chapter, I address the core concerns raised at the outset of this thesis. The general question is whether the notion of progress applies to visual art and, in the case it does, in what sense and how? The more specific question is concerned with the Dantonian tension, namely, whether monolinear progress is still intelligible despite artistic pluralism? By satisfying the latter concern it logically follows that the prior is also met. If there is monolinear progress in artistic pluralism, then we also find that the notion of progress does indeed apply to art despite its pluralism. I contend that the perspective I put on offer—*the noetic account of artistic progress*—brings resolution to these concerns. The noetic account defines artistic progress in terms of the integration of enhanced understanding into art-practice.

In what follows I sketch out the various progressive structures prevalent in the noetic account. I then explore some of the noetic account's implications. Next, I show that the noetic account avoids the Dantonian tension. Following this, I consider how NPS makes sense of the historical shifts in the debate about artistic progress. In conclusion, I discuss some of virtues of the noetic account in terms of the debate about artistic progress.

5.1. The noetic account of artistic progress

As we have seen, throughout the history of art there has been an exploration of the ultimate ends for art image-making to take. Consequently, there has been a continuous broadening of the scope of instrumental ends, for instance, beauty, expressionism, and philosophical self-definition. Most recently, Danto's (1997) theory has shown that art image-making has a plurality of ends which run concurrently and are equally valuable. This is contra to earlier monolinear accounts which find that one end is more valuable

than any other. Although Danto's (1997) pluralistic view recognises that ends are plural, it does not specify what these ends are or could be. Nor does it find that our understanding of the plurality is limited. However, as we have observed, the scope of plural ends is limited. However, we must assume that not all *art image-making's* ends are yet available to us. There is more to be understood. This can be done by further understanding *image-making's IP*.⁷¹ By way of further understanding so can more ends become salient. Thus, the scope of art's salient ends may broaden. Furthermore, as Bertinetto (2015) has shown, there is a plurality of progressive trajectories towards a plurality of ends. Thus, as more ends become salient, more plural instrumental progress can be made.

An account of artistic progress must recognise that art image-making can serve multiple ends, make progress towards these ends, and the scope of salient ends can broaden with further understanding. Hence, the general question above can be answered by succinctly stating: the notion of progress in art makes sense in different ways. Describing these ways with regard to the noetic account requires four kinds of progressive structures. The first shows how art image-making can progress towards a single instrumental end in the scope of plural ends. The second shows how art image-making can progress towards the plurality of instrumental ends. The third shows how art theory can progress towards understanding and how image-making can promote progress in art theory. The fourth shows how art image-making practice (i.e., art-practice) can progress with the integration of further understanding.

The single-end and plural instrumental progressive structures are drawn from the account Bertinetto (2015) puts forth in which instrumental progress finds that art image-making progresses towards instrumental ends (i.e., mimesis or beauty). Before moving on to a formulation of this structure, there is an important distinction to be made between

⁷¹ Art image-making's IP is synonymous with image-making's IP.

internal ends and *external ends*.⁷² This distinction is worth making because it can help avoid confusion when discussing the ways in which art image-making may instrumentally progress. *Internal ends* are limited by the image-making's IP—for example, visual mimesis, expression, or abstraction. Internal ends refer to the optical potential of image-making. Internal ends are deduced from image-making's inherent IP and are therefore limited by image-making's IP. *External ends* are limited to the possible application of internal ends. In other terms, internal ends (e.g., mimesis) are means to bring into effect external ends—for example, beauty, art's philosophical self-definition, or expressing political ideas. External ends refer to the operative potential of image-making. Internal and external ends cannot extend beyond what is instrumentally possible for image-making. For example, it is nonsense to say that an internal end to the consumption of food, or an external end is to solve world hunger.

The single-end instrumental account of progress may be formulated as follows,

Single-end instrumental progress in art image-making is made with respect to a *particular* instrumental end (e.g., mimesis), and to the extent that a particular end is met. Single-ends are deduced from image-making's instrumental ends. These may be internal ends (e.g., mimesis: an increased ability to achieve mimesis) or external ends (e.g., beauty: an increased ability to utilise internal ends—mimesis—as a means to bring into effect external ends—beauty).

In short, the single-end instrumental account finds that progress in art image-making is made to the degree that a single-end in the scope of plural ends is met. An episode of single-end instrumental progress may occur when, for example, an artist is able to achieve

⁷² This distinction is evident by comparing the accounts of Gombrich (1971), Vasari (1965), Greenberg (1993) and Danto (1997). Gombrich's (1971) and Greenberg's (1993) theories refer to internal ends as opposed to Vasari's (1965) theory which referred to external ends. Danto's (1997) theory refers to both internal and external ends.

greater degrees of mimesis. For instance, when Da Vinci introduced a geometrical perspective in art image-making.⁷³

In contemporary art, instrumental ends are plural. Thus, all ends, and their respective progressive trajectories can be grouped together in a pluralistic progressive structure. *The plural instrumental account of progress* may be formulated as follows,

Plural instrumental progress in art image-making is made with respect to the *plurality* of instrumental ends. To the extent that a. the plurality of ends is salient, and b. are met. These may be internal ends (e.g., mimesis: an increased ability to achieve mimesis) or external ends (e.g., beauty: an increased ability to utilise internal ends—mimesis—as a means to bring into effect external ends—beauty).

In short, the plural instrumental account finds that progress in art image-making is achieved when we identify possible instrumental ends and the degree to which ends are met. In contemporary art, there are artists pursuing a plurality of ends and meeting them to higher degrees. For example, Richter has arguably made progress towards mimesis as well as in expressing political ideas.⁷⁴ Moreover, we find that through the collective project of art, new ends continuously become apparent, thereby expanding the scope of salient ends.⁷⁵ These new ends can then be increasingly met to a greater extent.

As we have also seen, plural instrumental progress can be promoted by understanding image-making's IP.⁷⁶ By making ends salient, instrumental progress is possible. Upon

⁷³ The introduction of geometric perspective in painting is attributed to the early Renaissance artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Filippo Brunelleschi, and Leon Alberti (Gombrich, 2006). Since the historical accreditation of geometric perspective is attributed to many artists, for the sake of simplicity, I will credit Da Vinci. Da Vinci applied mathematical principles to achieve a realistic sense of depth and spatial representation in his artwork. Moreover, he provided guidelines for artists to create convincing three-dimensional illusions on a two-dimensional surface.

⁷⁴ As mentioned on pg. 13, Richter is widely considered one of the most prominent and important contemporary artists.

⁷⁵ Particularly with regards to external ends.

⁷⁶ Note that promoting progress is distinct from progress.

further understanding, the scope of salient ends broadens. This enables there to be instrumental progress therein. One way our understanding of image-making's IP is via theorising. Thus, an account of artistic progress must account for the understanding that theories enable, as well as art image-making's instrumental progress towards its ends.

This points to another kind of progressive structure that sees plural instrumental progress and further understanding as mutually supportive. To be explicit about its workings, I have articulated the position in a division of two mutually connected parts. First, noetic progress in the art theory by virtue of theorising. Secondly, progress in art theory by virtue of image-making. As we shall see, image-making plays a significant role in enabling further understanding of image-making's IP. Collectively this amounts to the noetic account of artistic progress in art theory.

It is important to keep in mind that the following formulation has the sole concern of noetic progress in art theory towards the target of image-making's IP.⁷⁷ However, the extent to which we can understand art image-making goes beyond the sole concern of understanding image-making's IP. There might be discoveries about art image-making that neither shed light on instrumental possibilities nor provide insight into the means by which those ends are met. Again, these insights would also enable an understanding of image-making since art image-making is a kind of image-making. For example, art historical information might only provide an understanding of the historical context we find art image-making now without providing instrumental understanding. Furthermore, there may be psychological, neuro-aesthetic, or philosophical insights that provide an

⁷⁷ As I have argued art image-making's IP and image-making's IP are synonymous. Nevertheless, for the purpose of understanding image-making's IP as the target phenomenon, I will use image-making's IP in the formulation. I refer to understanding that can be obtained from a variety of methodological approaches, including science and philosophy, which may fall under the umbrella of art theorising. Additionally, I use art theory as a stand-in for all theorising that could fall under its umbrella. For example, scientific theorising or philosophical theorising. This also includes other forms of inquisition that don't hold theory status but could feature in theories. For example, accounts, models, or ideas. I have relied on *theorising* instead of *reflecting* because Dellsén's (2018; 2022a, 2022b) formulation of noetic progress has not yet been applied to an account of cognitive progress.

understanding that does not target image-making's IP. This would require that theorising has distinct fine-grained target phenomena. In this way, there may be noetic progress in art theory towards target phenomena other than image-making's IP. Hence, we can presume that art theories progress towards understanding art image-making in a broad sense.

The noetic account of progress in art theory (by virtue of theorising) may be formulated as follows,

Progress in art theory is made with respect to understanding image-making's IP to the extent that further understanding of image-making's IP is enabled. I.e., by increasing the accuracy and/or comprehensiveness of image-making's IP that becomes available to be grasped and integrated into art-practice.

In short, the noetic account of progress in art theory finds that when further understanding of image-making's IP is enabled there is progress. For instance, noetic progress in art theory would occur when art theories determine new instrumental ends or the means to meet ends. Similarly, there would be progress when a model of image-making's IP makes more ends salient. For example, an instance of noetic progress in art theory was made when Gombrich's (1971) theory saw that image-making had an instrumental nature and its ends were autonomously set. Gombrich (1971) enabled a further understanding of image-making's IP.

Although the theorising about art has afforded much understanding of image-making's IP, we also find that new insights about image-making's IP have become available through the practice of image-making itself—as illustrated by art-practice. Art image-making practice has enabled further understanding of image-making. For example, via Da Vinci's employing geometrical perspective in art image-making we gained an understanding of image-making's IP. When Da Vinci further met the end of mimesis, we also acquired an

understanding that mimesis could be met to a further extent. Additionally, through the images made by Da Vinci, it was possible to develop guidelines for artists to create convincing three-dimensional illusions on a two-dimensional surface. Similarly, it is through the process of art image-making practice that artists come to determine new ends. These new insights about image-making are then able to be described by art theory. Accordingly, art theory progresses.

In essence, we can gain an understanding of image-making, not only through theoretical inquisition but also through image-making. This is because image-making can make salient apparent previously unknown aspects of what it can do and thereby what it is. In this way, images, which are the outcome of image-making, also can enable an understanding of image-making's IP. Or, if you will, images can function analogously to models by making aspects of image-making's IP salient.⁷⁸ Additionally, this is how we might explain the dissemination of the understanding of image-making's IP before art theory came onto the scene. Even with art theory at our disposal, it is fair to make the claim that the primary vehicle for disseminating the understanding of image-making's IP is performed via images themselves. Therefore, it is my assertion that the noetic end of art theory can be extended to image-making. In doing so we find that image-making can *promote* noetic progress in art theory.⁷⁹ *The noetic account of progress in art theory (by virtue of image-making)*, may be formulated as follows,

Progress in art theory is made with respect to understanding image-making's IP to the extent that image-making promotes further understanding of image-making's IP for art theory. I.e., by increasing the accuracy and/or comprehensiveness of image-making's IP that becomes available to be grasped and integrated into art-practice.

⁷⁸ This suggestion rings in accordance with Borges's (1999, 325-326) "On Exactitude in Science", who famously stated that only an exact copy of something can represent all its aspects in an accurate way.

⁷⁹ Presumably, image-making might enable insights about the nature of image-making other than about its IP.

In short, image-making enables new insights about image-making's IP. Image-making makes these insights available to be described by art theory. When art theory provides further understanding of these new insights there is noetic progress in art theory. In this way, both theorising and image-making play a role in enabling further understanding of the nature of image-making's IP.

For example, when Da Vinci introduced a geometrical perspective in image-making, he made this aspect of image-making's IP available to be described in art theory. As the end of mimesis was further met in image-making so did we gain an understanding about the degree to which this end could be met and how to meet it. Art theory could be descriptive of the new extent of image-making's IP. As art theory provided further understanding of image-making's IP it progressed. Furthermore, this enhanced understanding was also available to be integrated into other artists' practices. This played a role in other artists' ability to achieve higher degrees of mimesis and thereby make instrumental progress towards mimesis.

In sum, we find that instrumental progress in image-making can promote noetic progress in art theory. Additionally, noetic progress in art theory promotes instrumental progress in image-making. Ultimately, theorising and image-making can make image-making's instrumental ends salient. As more ends become salient, more plural instrumental progress, and thereby noetic progress, can be obtained. Thus, I believe the plurality of instrumental progressive trajectories can be collapsed into a single higher-order trajectory towards understanding. In this way, all episodes of instrumental plural progress are intelligible as promoting progress towards understanding. Therefore, instrumental progress is intelligible in terms of the noetic account. For example, an instance of instrumental progress towards mimesis can be phrased as an instance of promoting further understanding of the extent of image-making's IP. Similarly, by way of image-making an artist that determines a new end of image-making enables noetic progress.

As I have pointed out, this is still not the full picture on offer. Art theory's understanding can be integrated into image-making, and thereby affect it. Therefore, noetic progress in art theory has a bearing on an account of artistic progress in art-practice (i.e., art image-making practice).

We can begin by noting that art theories can enable a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of image-making's IP. When this further understanding is grasped by an artist, more of image-making's IP becomes salient. The integration of this further understanding means that image-making's IP can be reflectively exercised in art-practice. The value of further understanding is that it provides the artist with greater competence in art-practice. As we shall see, this also increases the likelihood of the artist ever enabling further understanding. Thus, noetic progress in art theory can be seen as affording progress to art-practice through the integration of enhanced understanding into art image-making processes. *The noetic account of artistic progress in art-practice* can be put as follows,

Progress in art-practice is made with respect to the integration of an enhanced understanding of image-making's IP to the extent that art theory and image-making enable further understanding of image-making's IP. I.e., by increasing the accuracy and/or comprehensiveness of image-making's IP that becomes available to be grasped and that is integrated into art-practice.⁸⁰

In short, art-practice progresses with the integration of an enhanced understanding of image-making's IP. For example, an instance of artistic progress occurred when Richter grasped and integrated a greater understanding of image-making's IP. This provided him

⁸⁰ It is to be noted that I draw a distinction here between progress in art image-making towards instrumental ends and progress in art image-making practice (i.e., art-practice) towards integrated enhanced understanding. This is because they are separate entities that are progressing in different ways. Even so, their progress is mutually connected.

with a broader scope of possible instrumental ends and the means to meet them than he otherwise would have access to. He was able to practice image-making with greater understanding. Thus, Richter was afforded further competence in regard to image-making practice. In integrating an enhanced understanding into his art-practice, Richter also acquired an ability to make further breakthroughs. Richter was able to make images that exhibited an extension of image-making's IP. His images provided new insights into the extent of mimesis and forward political ideas. Thus, Richter was able to enable further understanding of the image-making's IP. Additionally, the understanding that his images enabled was grasped by other artists and art theorists. This understanding was disseminated to the artworld community. Putting other artists in a position to make further breakthroughs. In this way, the growth of understanding and thereby competence accumulates throughout history. Moreover, this historical progressive trajectory is what the noetic account takes to be artistic progress at both a local level (for an artist) and a global level (artworld community). Ultimately, noetic artistic progress is a cognitive and practical progression specifically in art image-making practice which parallels human cognitive progress in general. Noetic artistic progress enables us to competently explore the vivid potential of image-making.

But in what sense does the integration of higher degrees of understanding enable an increased likelihood of producing breakthroughs? As I see it, this is because a greater understanding of image-making's IP enables the recognition of new IP as novel when it occurs. An artist with an enhanced integrated understanding of image-making's IP means that new insights are discernible from those which are not new. In addition, the integration of enhanced understanding makes it possible to practice image-making in ways that reveal new aspects rather than just emulating what is already understood. In other words, the integration of enhanced understanding is valuable, and thereby desirable, because it promotes noetic progress and rolls the ball 'progressively' forward. Take for instance, a novel episode of image-making that enables further understanding, which is then integrated into image-making practice, which then enables further

understanding, and so on. In terms of the noetic account, art-practices evolve progressively through a learning process, by virtue of which competence in image-making increases. Just as each step towards the mimetic end leads to the next possible step that can be taken, so does greater understanding lead to more understanding.

5.1.1. The implications of the noetic account

Let's now consider some implications of the noetic account that serve to reveal its intuitive appeal for making sense of artists' implicit motivations in art-practice and how we evaluate art. The noetic account takes a different turn from previous accounts that find instrumental progress is valuable in its own right. Instead, in terms of the noetic account, instrumental progress is valuable by virtue of the understanding it enables. The noetic account, therefore, also has a bearing on the way artists meaningfully navigate the plurality of ends.

Earlier accounts find that one end (e.g., abstraction) is more valuable than another (e.g., mimesis). This provides a reason for artists to pursue the most valuable end to make progress. However, the noetic account finds that since all ends can provide understanding, they all can have value. Nevertheless, an end's value is conditional. In terms of the noetic account, artists have reason to pursue some ends and not others, by virtue of the extent of understanding they can provide. Pursuing an end that can promote progress—by enabling understanding—is more desirable than pursuing an end that cannot. Pursuing already well-understood ends or reiterating the degree to which they have been met, means that less or no understanding is obtained.

For the sake of explanation, consider that with the invention of the camera, the end of mimesis has been almost entirely met. There is little more to understand regarding how

this end can be met more fully.⁸¹ Just like a scientist that conducts an experiment which results in outcomes that we already understand, if an artist were to pursue the end of mimesis, it would provide less understanding than another we have no understanding of. Given the noetic project, an artist has reason not to pursue ends which lack the potential for further understanding. In the same vein, an artist has reason to pursue ends that can enable high degrees of understanding.

However, it is not clear that we do fully understand any one end. Nor all the means by which any end can be met. For one, we might use mimesis as a means to a variety of external ends. This may enable a further understanding of the mimetic end. Further, new external ends become apparent all the time. Just because we have identified mimesis, abstraction, or beauty as ends, and are perhaps able to meet them to a fair degree, it does not mean that there is not more to understand about them. It is not clear that we can have anything like a complete understanding of any single-end (internal or external) at all. In essence, there is no end point of total understanding in sight for any instrumental end. There is no perfect complete state for noetic progress.⁸² However, like in science, the degree to which we can gain further understanding of image-making's IP may become less as we come to understand more. Additionally, high degrees of understanding about a particular end does not thereby render that end no longer worth pursuing at all. We must assume that there is still much to achieve regarding these ends. Some 100 years ago, there might have been a large consensus that everything we could know about evolution had been achieved, but later to find there was still much more understanding that can be obtained. Similarly, for artists, a return to earlier forms of image-making—primitivism, minimalism, impressionism—may be further mined for the understanding they can provide.

⁸¹ However, I in fact believe that there is much more to understand about this end. For example, by advances in image-making technologies.

⁸² This demonstrates that the noetic account avoids the cyclical problem of Vasari's (1965) account.

Domains of image-making that hold the promise of providing further understanding entice artists to explore them in their practice. When the ends of abstraction, emotional expression or surrealism came onto the scene there was very little understanding of the potential that those ends held. Artists recognised these new ends as rife with the potential for them to make breakthroughs. Artists collectively applied themselves to those ends, gaining a greater understanding of them.⁸³ When a new domain for understanding, rich with potential discoveries, becomes apparent, like scientists, artists turn their attention to them. Nevertheless, this can come with a caveat: turning attention to new domains may leave previous areas of interest not fully explored. Returning attention to earlier domains of interest is seen, for example, in art movements such as neo-expressionism and zombie-formalism.

Given the NPS, breakthroughs in understanding vary in scale. We might discover completely new ends, or we might discover new ways to make images that have never been considered. All of which would provide great degrees of understanding. But more generally, like most scientific progressions, artistic progress is furthered incrementally—in small doses that collectively accumulate over time. Like scientists, artists are motivated to make discoveries of great significance, be that towards mimesis, beauty, or art's philosophical self-definition. In doing so they gain fame as pioneers who have made epic contributions to understanding within their field—such as Da Vinci, and Duchamp.⁸⁴

The noetic account makes sense of the way we evaluate artworks, and highly value groundbreaking artworks over those that simply emulate what we all know very well. If some works of art can supply us with a deeper understanding, then it is no more puzzling that we lend greater importance to them than those that do not. We value Manet's masterpieces over his images that provided less understanding, and a forger who copies Manet's work even less so. Similarly, this helps explain why we find artists who emulate

⁸³ The collective project to explore these ends results in art movements.

⁸⁴ However, this does not discount the value of all the artists who contribute to understanding through 'smaller' breakthroughs.

someone else's style, claiming it as their own, so distasteful, and those who carve their own path so virtuous. Just like the scientist, an artist who claims to have made a discovery which turns out to be already understood finds that the value ascribed to their rediscovery is null.

In terms of the NPS, understanding is gradable. Hence, instead of judging the value of an artwork in terms of its achievement relative to an instrumental end (e.g., beauty), in terms of the noetic account, the value judgement is made by virtue of the understanding that an artwork provides. For example, we can compare Da Vinci's artworks with Richter's in terms of the understanding they enabled.⁸⁵ For example, we might say Da Vinci enabled greater understanding than Richter. This comparison can be made independent of the artworld's specific evaluative standards—e.g., Da Vinci's work is more mimetic than Richter's.⁸⁶

The idea that art progresses as artists produce new and unexpected images that extend the scope of our understanding of what image-making can possibly be is already very familiar to us. This emphasises the intuitive appeal of the noetic account because it explains why we value particular artists, artworks, and art movements in art history. We value them by virtue of the understanding they enable. Additionally, the appeal of the noetic account extends to the idea that art-practice is an understanding-orientated endeavour. I am certain most artists would subscribe to the idea that they provide at least some understanding to others. Or at least try to. Even if it is as direct as showing how something looks in the world or in imagination.⁸⁷ I cannot think of any artist I know that does not want to make new and unique art of significant novelty. Thus, the noetic account can also illuminate a fundamental motivation for artists in art-practice. Namely, to understand. Therefore, the noetic account does not fall suspect of being at odds with our

⁸⁵ This kind of comparison is also possible between, for example, art theories, art movements, and artistic periods.

⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the noetic account may be compatible with such evaluative standards, as long as those standards relate to a legitimate internal or external end of image-making.

⁸⁷ In terms of the noetic account, we get more competent in this regard.

experience of art. Rather, the noetic account makes sense of the way we evaluate artworks and artists' implicit motivations in art-practice. Additionally, the noetic account provides a reason for artists to orient towards ends that further understanding, and thereby make artworks that are valued by already implicit practised standards.

5.2. The noetic account and the debate about artistic progress

It is now worth briefly considering the crucial shifts in the debate about artistic progress in terms of the NPS. This will help contextualise the noetic account within the history of theorising about artistic progress, and its ability to make noetic progress intelligible in this history. Through the NPS, art theorising can be seen to gain greater degrees of accuracy and comprehension. To appreciate the noetic account's contribution to the discourse I will do three things. First, outline these pivotal shifts in the debate leading to the Dantonian tension. Secondly, demonstrate how the noetic account resolves this tension. Thirdly, explore the noetic progress the noetic account can offer.

5.2.1 Shifts in the debate about artistic progress

Vasari's (1965) account was groundbreaking because it described a progressive structure for art. This set out an explicit end (aesthetic ideal) for image-making. The implementation of a specific ultimate end meant that a progressive structure towards that end was intelligible. The progressive structure made it possible to grade—by aesthetic evaluation—the value of images according to how fully that end was met. It provided a framework by which image-making could be art image-making. Thus, by determining an ultimate end and a progressive structure towards it, progress was intelligible. The importance of Vasari's (1965) account for the debate about artistic progress is that this general progressive structure is largely present in the accounts that succeed it, with variation occurring most notably to the distinction of ends. For example, Gombrich's progressive structure is largely the same as Vasari's, other than its distinct aesthetic end.

The next significant shift in the debate came with Gombrich (1971), who introduced an instrumental reading of the progressive structure Vasari (1965) had set out. Gombrich (1971, 8) found that art image-making should be understood through an instrumental lens. The end of art image-making is not teleological, and thereby inevitable, rather it is autonomously applied. Gombrich (1971) found that throughout history, images had become increasingly mimetic. Therefore, art image-making's single or most valuable instrumental application is the representation of visual perception. Hence, art image-making progresses as it becomes more mimetic. Through this instrumental progressive structure, one could determine the value of art images based on how effectively it achieves mimesis. Gombrich was groundbreaking for his ability to adopt an empirical approach that draws on science.

Greenberg (1993) again shifted the progressive structure by setting a new end which nevertheless maintained a sense of 'truthlikeness' and instrumentality. Greenberg's (1993) account found that art image-making should aim to take upon itself the task of determining, through its own operations, the effects exclusive to itself. This meant that the aim of painting (i.e., art image-making) is a philosophical investigation into the nature of painting's material essence. Thus, in Greenberg's (1993) view, the ultimate aim of painting is its ability to express its physical nature. This provided a reason for artists to make abstract paintings which expressed the physical constituents of paintings' make-up: paint, canvas, colour, and brushwork. Thus, the better a painting could achieve this end, the more valuable it was. This shift was groundbreaking because it severed the progressive structure from its ties with solely aesthetic ends. Instead, it put forth a philosophical end. Moreover, it saw that art-practice also had a 'philosophical' function in so far as its self-determination.

In what I believe to be the most recent and historically significant shift in the progressive structure, Danto (1997) determined that the ends of art were plural and concurrent. Up

until Danto's (1997) theory, the notion of progress was fused to a single end that took precedence on a historical level. Art progressed according to the progressive structure built on a single-end. However, this kind of progressive structure was challenged when Danto saw that there is a plurality of instrumental ends. For Danto (1997, 78), not only could art image-making pursue a plurality of ends, but those ends could be pursued concurrently whilst being equally valuable. Pursuing visual mimesis was as valuable as abstraction or expression or beauty. Since the plurality of ends is equally valuable, it was not possible to deduce an ultimate instrumental end by virtue of one end being more valuable than another. Thus, it is no longer possible to say, for example, that mimesis is more valuable than beauty (Danto, 1997). For Danto (1997) the progressive structure breaks down because, in a pluralistic account there is an absence of an ultimate end to ground the progressive structure on (Danto, 1997). Without a progressive structure of this kind, there is no longer unification, accumulation or gradability. Thus, progress in art is unintelligible. For Danto (1997) a grand historical trajectory towards a single end, such as the earlier progressive structures were built on, was no longer valid. Artistic progress in the old sense was no more. The end of artistic progress meant the end of art. This shift was groundbreaking because artistic pluralism described the plural instrumental nature of image-making.

5.2.2 The noetic account and the Dantonian tension

The Dantonian tension raises the question of whether progress is nevertheless intelligible under a monolinear progressive structure when there is a plurality of instrumental trajectories running in multiple directions.

The noetic account of artistic progress I have on offer finds that instrumental progress is made by virtue of further understanding image-making's IP. Contra to Danto's (1997) position, the noetic account finds that although we can see that ends are plural, we must also assume that we do not have a complete understanding of image-making's ends. For

if it were the case that we had a complete understanding, then Danto's claim that artistic progress and thereby art had reached its end, may very well be true. However, I believe this is not only untrue but inconceivable since there is clearly so much more to be understood. As our understanding of image-making's IP grows, so does the scope of salient ends broaden. We cannot have mimetic progress if the mimetic end is not yet fully understood, but we can have instrumental progress when until it is. Thus, understanding affords the possibility of plural instrumental progress. Moreover, in the noetic account, all episodes of instrumental plural progress are intelligible as promoting progress towards understanding.

The noetic account is unique in that it sets the progressive structure at a higher-order level than that of the plural instrumental ends, but on the same monolinear terms that Gombrich (1971), Vasari (1965) and Greenberg (1993) foresaw as necessary to account for progress at all. Unlike earlier accounts that fused a single instrumental aim with a grand historical progressive structure, the noetic account recognises that multiple instrumental ends operate at a lower level. Instrumental ends do not define the trajectory of progress itself but rather contribute to noetic progress. Ultimately, through a reading of the noetic account, the plural instrumental progression becomes intelligible on a higher-order uniform historical level towards understanding. Since there is a higher-order progressive structure which is compatible with instrumental pluralism the noetic account therefore avoids the Dantonian tension.

Ultimately, given that Dantonian tension holds no threat to the noetic account, we need not accept Danto's (1997) non-progress thesis because progress in contemporary art is indeed intelligible. Further the noetic account applies to the entirety of art history. We can accept the plural instrumentality of Danto's (1997) position while rejecting that there is no higher-order uniform progressive trajectory. Instead of finding that artistic pluralism leads to the breakdown of a progressive structure, we can find that artistic pluralism is afforded by understanding and that there is progress therein. Thus, there is reason to

accept the noetic account as the most viable account of artistic progress. Moreover, we can reject Danto's (1997) non-progress thesis. In doing so we can embrace the idea that understanding is the ultimate monolinear end for art. Additionally, we can find that the noetic account makes artistic progress intelligible.

5.2.3. Virtues of the noetic account

The noetic account has the benefit of at least eight virtues in terms of the debate about artistic progress. First, it meets the conditions of our notion of progress by being able to track developments that exhibit evidence of continuity and direction, and that the change accompanying these developments is desirable. Secondly, it finds that the NPS is compatible with artistic pluralism. Thus, it resolves the Dantonian tension and provides a reason to reject Danto's (1997) non-progress thesis. Thirdly, the noetic account avoids conflating a notion of aesthetic progress towards a particular aesthetic end with that of progress in art-practice. Instead, the noetic account finds that aesthetic ends are plural and pursuing them can provide understanding. Fourth, the NPS can universally also apply to the history of image-making within any culture, past and future—extending from its first instances to the present moment. The NPS makes sense of the change we observe in image-making throughout history and the extent to which theoretical constructs have played a role. Fifth, the NPS can be feasibly applied to art history as well as to the history of AT. The NPS provides a structure by which gradability is possible and progress is intelligible. Sixth, the noetic account incorporates a progressive structure that is common across other fields such as science, philosophy, and arguably the broader human cognitive project to understand. Seventh, concerning whether the noetic account is at all at odds with how we experience and evaluate art. It is not. The noetic account has intuitive appeal by being able to make sense of how we evaluate artworks and artists' implicit motivations in art-practice. The noetic account succeeds in explaining the driving force of change in the history of art image-making. Moreover, how we can already compare artworks, artists and art movements in terms of the understanding they enabled. Eighth, the noetic

account provides a monolinear trajectory which can help meaningfully guide artists within artistic pluralism. The noetic account provides a reason to pursue particular ends and not others, depending on the potential understanding an end may bring. Ultimately, the noetic account provides an account of artistic progress in which past progress is intelligible and future progress is feasible.

In seeing the significance of understanding and its place in artistic progress, my contribution to the debate is that I shift the focus from a consideration of instrumental ends as establishing the progressive structure, to understanding—which affords us those ends. Thus, I have emphasised that understanding is the ultimate end of art-practice. In terms of the noetic account, understanding is the ultimate aim of art theory and art image-making alike and understanding is without completion.

What is distinct in the noetic account is that it finds that art theory is implicated in the progression of art. When we apply the noetic account, we find that throughout history our understanding of image-making has expanded and improved. Progress in art theorising has led to a deeper understanding of image-making and more of its instrumental ends have become available to us. Additionally, the noetic account provides the capacity for artists to pursue those ends and progress in achieving those ends. The progress in art theorising has impacted image-making in that a more expansive instrumental capacity has been afforded to us. Further understanding has enabled artists to explore new artistic possibilities and achieve previously unimaginable heights in the creation of images. As art theories have shaped our conception of image-making throughout history, they have also influenced how image-making has been reflectively carried out within the framework of art. This has led to artists exploring the potential of image-making.

Thus, a unique upshot of the noetic account is that it can make sense of the exhibited changes in the history of image-making and art theory. For example, through the noetic

account, the theorising about art and all the instances of artistic breakthroughs can be seen as incrementally furthering understanding. Unlike earlier accounts of artistic progress, the noetic account sees previous accounts as contributory episodes in the development of understanding—despite the noetic account standing in opposition to other accounts as the most viable description of artistic progress. Thus, the shifts we observe in the debate about artistic progress are intelligible within the NPS. Namely, they stand as contributions to the progression towards understanding which can be grasped by artists and integrated into art-practice. In essence, the ongoing exploration of the possibilities of image-making is a testament to art's progressive narrative.

Given the noetic account, we can see that the concern with progress in art has also afforded noetic progress. The endeavour into how art image-making may progress has meant we have enabled greater understanding of art image-making. In the same light, given the validity of the noetic account, it also provides a further understanding of art image-making's inherent nature. Thus, it too may also contribute to progress. The noetic account makes further understanding of artistic progress salient and available to be grasped and integrated into art-practice. When the noetic account is grasped by artists and integrated into their art-practices, artists can reflectively practice art image-making with an understanding of noetic artistic progress. Therefore, the integration of the noetic account has implications for art-practice. Instead of contemporary artists—who subscribe to Danto's (1997) view—being in a state of extended paralysis in which any direction is equally tenable, the noetic account can guide art-practice in a meaningful way: towards understanding. Thus, the spirit of the avant-garde prevails. But instead of the unquestionable criterion of progress for its own sake, it is for the sake of artistic understanding and competence. As we have seen throughout art history, embracing new accounts of artistic progress can redefine our ideas about art and inspire innovation and motivation for new kinds of art movements. The noetic account gives me a reason to believe that it also provides a rationale for an artistic project that orientates towards noetic artistic progress. In what follows, I briefly consider what this may entail.

“Painting is a science of which pictures are but the experiment” — John Constable
(1962, 54)

Chapter 6

Towards an applied philosophy of image-making

Having now put forth the noetic account of artistic progress, it's worth briefly considering some further implications. The noetic account provides a description of past artistic progress. Additionally, it provides normative guidelines for how art-practice can make progress. The future of art depends on the artistic projects we pursue. Like earlier art movements which have been oriented by a notion of progress, the noetic account also proposes to meaningfully guide art-practice: towards further understanding. Thus, it is my contention that the noetic account provides a rationale for an artistic project that fulfils its progressive vision. To address this vision, I will briefly outline this project in what I call *an applied philosophy of image-making (APIM)*.⁸⁸ In what follows I explore what APIM may entail and how it may serve artistic progress.

As we have seen, in terms of the noetic account both theorising and art-practice should serve the task of enabling an understanding of image-making. The methodological approach to either is unique. Nevertheless, they stand to enable aspects of understanding that the other cannot obtain. Although distinct in form, each is mutually supportive. Therefore, it makes sense for both theorising and art-practice to have a seat in a project towards their shared aim. Moreover, the aim of enabling understanding is valuable because it leads to artistic progress regardless of the approach. Additionally, all enhanced understanding should be integrated into art-practice to enable further understanding. In essence, I believe incorporating theorising and image-making practice into APIM, can enable artistic progress by facilitating the accumulative learning process by which

⁸⁸ I have chosen philosophy as a stand-in for theorising because it encapsulates the understanding to be gained about image-making by all forms of theorising. For example, by virtue of science, philosophy, history, and psychology alike. I have chosen to use image-making as opposed to art image-making to clarify that the target phenomenon of image-making itself is at hand. I have used 'applied' to allude to the integration and application of enhanced understanding in practice.

competence in art-practice can increase and breakthroughs in understanding are more likely to occur.

APIM has the potential to both systematically contain and cultivate an understanding of image-making. This is possible in at least four ways. First, by accommodating all previous understanding pertinent to image-making. Secondly, by reframing previous relevant ideas about image-making towards APIM's concerns when possible. Thirdly, by developing new theoretical projects that enable further understanding. Fourth, by applying and integrating our understanding in image-making practice. This also encourages the possibility for a posteriori theorising. Thus, I envision, in short, a kind of experimental and applied philosophy of image-making.

Regarding the theoretical component of APIM, there is already a rich diversity of information structures pertaining to its aim. With the goal of APIM being to foster as much understanding as possible, it would find that much of what has already been accomplished in the theorising about image-making should have a place. The relevant understanding has been enabled by, for example, the philosophy of art, art history, psychology, and neuro-aesthetics.

In cases where the ideas, theories, or models are applicable but not altogether aligned with the ambitions of the project, they may be reframed or adapted slightly to enable further understanding of the specific target of image-making. This reorientation would entail that the understanding of image-making maintains a centrality and additionally, that explicit fine-grained targets for understanding are pertinent to image-making. These ideas, theories, and models may be used to build a more accurate and comprehensive unified theory about image-making that draws from multiple fields.

An upshot of this approach is that already established debates may bear new fruit. Take for example, Richard Wollheim's (1980, 176) concept of "seeing-in" which refers to the

process by which a viewer sees an object represented in a work of art and identifies it as something other than what it appears to be on the surface.⁸⁹ In reframing Wollheim's (1980) insight in terms of APIM, we might build on it by considering the process by which this phenomenon comes about and further, how an integrated understanding of Wollheim's (1980) idea affects image-making and the phenomenon of seeing-in. Moreover, we could consider how "seeing-in" might be viewed as a valuable instrumental end in image-making that holds empirical significance. In another example, the discussion about the institutional context of art (the artworld) framed in terms of APIM may bear new fruit. This may lead to further consideration of the degree to which institutional contexts inform image-making. Additionally, we might ask: what improvements can be made to the contexts, such as the artworld, to enable further understanding?

APIM has the potential to initiate a new domain of inquiry in various areas, for example in phenomenology, metaphysics, epistemology, aesthetics, and ontology. All of which pertain to image-making—e.g., the ontology of image-making. This would enhance our understanding of image-making in new ways. The integration of these new insights may in turn take effect on art-practice, opening new possibilities and directions for image-making to take.

For APIM, the tools of academic research and image-making are used to achieve understanding. Art-practice has recently entered the academic sphere in what is called *artistic research*. Consequently, there is still much uncertainty about its validity as a 'knowledge' cultivating method and discipline (Cazeaux, 2017). Given the requirement of academic projects to result in outcomes that contribute to understanding, the assumption is that artistic research projects should comply by producing paralleled results in artistic terms. In other words, artistic research should produce understanding. APIM

⁸⁹ This process of recognising a representation in an artwork is an essential aspect of artistic perception and understanding. According to Wollheim (1980, 197), "seeing-in" involves not only recognising the subject of a representation, but also recognising the style, intentions, and meanings of the artist who created it (Wollheim, 1980, 197). This concept has been influential in discussions of the role of interpretation in art and the nature of aesthetic experience.

can lay the foundation for at least one set of standards for how the outcomes of artistic research may be evaluated, namely, by virtue of the understanding these projects enable—albeit through the methodologies inherent to artistic mediums. Another upshot of APIM, is that we might better understand image-making's capacity to produce understanding. Therefore, APIM could lead to clearer artistic research outcomes.

To address the practical aspects of APIM, we must consider how an orientation towards understanding influences art-practice. In APIM, the orientation towards understanding has a bearing on the way we navigate image-making meaningfully: towards enabling further understanding. Nonetheless, artists have many varying ambitions in their practice. Some might want to artistically explore their emotional experience and others something entirely different. But how does the end of understanding square with a multitude of subjects to explore in art-practice?

Again, following Goodman (1969), images may enable understanding of all sorts of things. Surely a photograph of a cup at least enables an understanding of how the cup looks. As we have observed, understanding is of something. Nevertheless, in APIM, understanding should be of image-making. Even so, APIM would find that understanding image-making and understanding a subject of image-making are compatible. For instance, we can make breakthroughs in pursuing the internal end (mimesis) as a means to the external end (to understand the cup). Accordingly, we can better understand the degree to which image-making can enable understanding of the cup. Thus, our understanding of image-making IP increases. Therefore, APIM would warrant that artists inquire into a multitude of topics and themes that nevertheless contribute to the understanding of image-making.

In terms of APIM, Danto's (1997, 36) idea that art has taken on its philosophical self-consciousness can take full form. Contrary to Danto's view that the task of understanding art is solely the domain of philosophy, we can recognise the essential role of art-practice in this endeavour. We could more clearly recognise that art-practice not only involves

technical skill and creative expression, but also requires critical thinking, decision-making, rationality, and intentionality. APIM would seek to promote philosophical thinking within art-practice, by providing a framework for deliberation that is grounded in good reasoning. This would emphasise the importance of good reasoning in artistic decision-making and provide the means for more reflexive art-practice. Ultimately, APIM would aim to endorse philosophical reflectivity, competence, and the virtues of deep consideration in art-practice.

In terms of APIM as an art movement, it would opt to actively modulate its framework for understanding and practising image-making to optimise further understanding of image-making. In contrast to non-philosophical art movements that passively absorb art frameworks and conventions through osmosis, APIM's framework would be suspect to revision based on philosophical deliberation. Artists following this project would be encouraged to learn as much about image-making as possible, be that explicit or tacit understanding, and apply that understanding in image-making practice.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have discussed the idea of “artistic progress”. The general question asked has been whether the notion of progress applies to visual art and, in the case it does, in what sense and how? The more specific question has been concerned with whether progress is intelligible despite artistic pluralism?

I have shown that there can be artistic progress through *the noetic account of artistic progress*. According to the noetic account, artistic progress is made with respect to understanding image-making. This affords progress to art-practice through the integration of enhanced understanding.

In the lead-up to my account, I have offered a historical taxonomy of the debate about artistic progress. I have demonstrated that the notion of progress is closely tied to the notion of art, art-practice, and art history. I have shown that in the most recent and prevailing theory, forwarded by Danto (1997), reveals a tension regarding the feasibility of artistic progress. The Dantonian tension posits that monolinear progress and artistic pluralism are incompatible. Subsequently, a valid account of artistic progress must also satisfy this concern. The noetic account resolves the Dantonian tension. This is done by demonstrating that artistic pluralism is compatible with progress if the focus shifts from a consideration of instrumental ends as establishing the progressive structure, to understanding—as that which makes ends salient. This approach is developed by drawing on Dellsén's (2018; 2022a; 2022b) work on scientific progress. I find that image-making practice and art theory have played a role in enabling further understanding. Accordingly, in terms of the noetic account, artistic progress is made through the integration of enhanced understanding into art-practice. This is valuable because it increases the competency in art-practice and thereby the ability to make breakthroughs that enable further understanding.

The noetic account is distinct because it finds that art theory is implicated in the progression of art. Moreover, it opts to take art-practice as a central concern for artistic progress. Through the lens of the noetic account, we find that throughout history, our understanding of image-making has expanded and improved. The development in understanding exhibits evidence of a certain continuity and direction, which is desirable. The accumulative learning process towards understanding is what the noetic account describes as progress. The noetic account's progressive structure is universally applicable. It can account for image-making at any point in history and is able to track past and future changes. More specifically, it can apply to the history of art. The noetic account has an intuitive appeal for being able to make sense of how we evaluate artworks and artists' implicit motivations in art-practice. Through the noetic account, progress is intelligible despite artistic pluralism. Thus, instead of artists being in a state in which any direction is equally tenable, the noetic account can guide art-practice in meaningfully towards gaining understanding. In this way, the noetic account also provides normative guidelines for how art-practice can make progress in the future. Therefore, I have suggested that the noetic account provides a rationale for *an applied philosophy of image-making* which can assist to facilitate artistic progress. Like earlier art movements that have been oriented by a notion of progress, the noetic account can also meaningfully guide an artistic project towards its progressive end. The question remains: what more can we understand about image-making and how?

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