

**STEPHEN DAVIES AUTHORIAL CLAIMS IN WEITZ'S
ANTI-ESSENTIALISM: A CRITIQUE - THE PARADOX AND
CREATIVITY AS THE DEFINING ESSENCE.**

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Abstract

The strength of a literary work lies in the critical analysis and review of its authorial claims. These include thesis statement, inconsistencies, contributions as well as overall effectiveness of the article. This paper sought to critique Stephen Davies' article on Weitz Anti-Essentialism (1991) which proposes nonbelief in an essence and unanimous intrinsic quality on the definition of art. The objectives was to identify Davies authorial claims and paradoxical position on creativity as a possible defining essence. Statements with implicit and explicit connotations were identified. Research grounds for acceptance or rejection were established. The Socratic Method of investigation was adopted to stimulate critical thinking. Findings from the article under review and other corroborations reveal Davies position of openness with creativity as a plausible necessary principle and condition for definition of art. However, the inconsistency lies in the writer's neutrality on what he describes as fundamental matters and complex web that does not require straightforwardness. The review concluded on the need for forthright empirical claims rather than merely keying in to already controversial issues. It was recommended that authorial claims should be written with greater clarity, consistency and conviction based on empirical research rather than an investigation devoid of contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

Keywords: *Stephen Davies Weitz Anti-Essentialism, Authorial and Paradoxical Claims, Critique, Creativity as the Defining Essence.*

Introduction

Revolutionary creativity is an integral fragment of past, present and future art regardless of the structural analysis. A denial on the characterization of ingenuity or creativity for definition of art purely from the notion that it is not jointly agreed is unacceptable. The strength of a literary work lies in the critical analysis of authorial claim. These include thesis statement, inconsistencies, contributions as well as overall effectiveness of the article. This critique sought to analyze Davies authorial claims on Weitz Anti-Essentialism (1991) which proposes nonbelief in an essence and unanimous intrinsic quality on the definition of art. Socratic Method of investigation was adopted to stimulate critical thinking. The objectives were to identify the writer's paradoxical complication of authorial claims on creativity as the defining essence. Statements with implicit and explicit connotation as well as sarcasm and hyperbole were identified, with grounds for acceptance or rejection. And regardless of the art form (visual arts, dance, drama, music and poetry), the capacity to think outside the norm in expression is a reasonable unifying factor for definition of art. Since creativity involves the ability to create, inspire and inform in aesthetically ways, it is critical to unravel the inconsistencies and opposing authorial claims by Davies in Weitz Anti-Essentialism.

The Paradox in Davies Authorial Claims

The writer's authorial strength is evidently visible in his ability to identify Weitz's opinion of '... no jointly property common to all and only artworks...' as conceptual rather than empirical. His reference to such claims as purely notional corroborates with history and revolutionary art expressions often represented in simple to complex groundbreaking ideas. Evidently as presented by Davies (1991), the presence of creativity, an 'immutable essence' of artworks could never foreclose definition. Rather future challenges, alterations, subversions or departure from past art have always had creativity as the central essence? Is Davies claim correct? What constitutes an essential aspect of

art in processes, techniques, products regardless of the artist, socio-cultural background and interpretations? Is it definitely the case of revolutionary creativity? Does changes in art procedures affect the immutable essence of art? Is this property of creativity not a jointly necessary quintessential for contemporary art? Could inventiveness not be a jointly necessary and sufficient essence for the definition of art in opposition to Weitz anti-essentialism? Is a paradoxical and complicated position needed for a consensus on the definition of art? Considering the fluidity of knowledge and approaches within a global setup, can creativity not be viewed as a defining essence? These questions can be inferred from the writer's counter reference to the radical yet innovative temperament of past, present and would be artist. Although not vigorously pursued as a possible essence, the writer appears to support revolutionary creativity in opposition to Weitz's anti-essentialism. The paradox lies in the apparent interrogating questions implied in Davies article in support of creativity and the seemingly neutral and non-straightforward position which is misleading.

Davies non acceptance of a work of art as an art or defined as such based on where the question is asked seems to support on one hand the subject of openness. (Davies, S. (1991). On the other hand the authors' introduction of personal perspective in subsequent draft on ways to re-orient our thinking in the hybrids direction evidently points to a position of neutrality on creativity as the defining essence of what constitute a work of art (Davies, S. (2013). Unarguably, researchers often questions and rejects long held opinions when new ideas with convincing evidence emerges. This makes camping between openness and foreclosing as well as a combination of approaches as a proposal to a defining essence of art, an expected academic exercise. Conversely, this critique views Davies authorship as imposing and authentic within the context of an empirical research. However, it critiques the inconsistencies resulting from Davies' neutral grounds in accepting creativity as an inclusive defining essence.

Davies argument against definition that is devoid of interest and the general lack of consensus on the matter is persuasive yet misleading. Undoubtedly, insisting on a defense merely to ...'save a theory from falsity only at the cost of rendering it vacuous or meaningless' according to Davies (1991) is certainly baseless. This position is persuasive, reasonable and consistent with empirical approaches that reject or accept

hypotheses based on investigation rather than ignorance. Such claims enlarges on positive development of new ideas instead of insistence on the traditional approaches of controversial issues just to win argument. From the foregoing, it appears the writer's assessment is unbiased yet paradoxical. Nonetheless in the writer's final draft on intrinsic quality definition of art, emphasis seems to be on functionalism (art defined by purpose), proceduralism (process by which a work of art is created or viewed) as well as connectedness with history of past art (shared ideas). (Davies, 2013; Zangwill, 2007; Stecker, 2000). In this summation, Davies admits the necessity of combining approaches, which he calls 'hybrids' in defining art. This fusion of several theoretical perspectives is inclusive and exclude weaknesses associated with isolated definition. (Davies, 2013). However, does Davies grouping of necessary approaches for an acceptable definition of art foreclose creativity? Is there reason to be apprehensive of a counter position to anti-essentialism? Every work of art is ingenious with a creative person behind the scene. To accept otherwise is to betray the authority as a critic and reviewer.

Characterization of art works in terms of uniqueness and resistant to description in general terms are also strong indices of creativity. (Davies, 1991). Such boundaries extension in definition only makes us 'rule appliers and interpreters' ...and often a matter of accommodating supposedly wild creative ideas (Blay 2014; Davies, 1991). Having admitted this avant-garde nature of art, one would have expected the writer to assume a convincing exposition in favor or against the need for definition of art. A persuasive sub heading on creativity as the defining essence from where he addresses Weitz's main conceptual point would have been appropriate. Paradoxically, Davies constant use of the phrase ' I think', ' might' in proposing his position of creativity as a defining grounds for art works reveals contradictions and authorial flaw in flow of thoughts. Such irregularities weakens the strong comparison posited by him in chess playing where players can be creative, innovative and radical only within the framework of defining rules. This explicit analogy would have positioned creativity as the much needed defining property to counter Weitz's position. However it appears Davies was merely content with readers drawing conclusions rather than contending and taking a stand. Winning argument was certainly not the focus otherwise creativity to him is the jointly

necessary, common and sufficient property for art works be they primitive or western (Davies, 2013; Zangwill, 2007; Shiner, 2003).

Davies' Authorial Claims on Non Arts

Davies use of the phrase 'non art' with reference to Duchamp's ready-mades, Driftwood art, Chimpanzee art, Minimal art, Conceptual art as well as Environmental art is illogical. Making reference to these creative dispositions from and by human as 'seemingly not worthy of the status of art is paradoxical and unacceptable. These Avant-garde approaches to art are already controversial amongst artists and philosophers to which the writer would have acknowledged. Nonetheless, the writer's outright classification of this creative arrangement as non-art is misrepresentative and a betrayal to his position of openness. It is unacceptable because a cursory appraisal of these innovative arts reveals openness and borderless approach characterized by human arrangement, creativity and ingenuity. These new art movements fits into what Davies acknowledged as common when he stated that ..."artists are geniuses unconstrained by rules ...with valuable, interesting result from their action". This position although apt in the context under discourse, denies acceptance of creativity as the jointly necessary condition for definition of art. Admittedly, this is a description of revolutionary creativity confirmed by this writer and a fact inherent in the history of art. Characteristically, they are 'unique and resistant to description in general terms'. Davies inclusion of these ground-breaking arts as non-art is a paradox based on bias and a poor choice grouping from an ardent supporter of openness (Davies, 2003; Shiner, 2003; Davies, 1991). Every work of art is creative with unique skills involving proficiency. They are intentional creation art that defines features of modern human (Pelowski, Leder and Tinio, 2017). To accept otherwise is to betray the authority as a critic and reviewer.

Marcel Duchamp's fountains or urinals mentioned by the writer undoubtedly has been described as so-called sculptures, ordinary and epitomizing an assault on convention and accepted notion of art. However, these fountains have equally been rated as the most influential ideas of modern art to which the writer should have acknowledged. By joining camps to view Marcel Duchamp's Urinals as non-art is

contradictory and illogical. Davies' assessment is critical and unacceptable because they represent the process of seeing beyond the ready-mades to the creative interpretations, re-arrangement and installations of forms therein.

The interrogating discourse from Davies (1991) claims on 'hard cases where something alleged to be art is in most respects in discriminable'... appears to be structurally incorrect and bias in this context. In the former, the writer is giving the impression of cases lacking creativity that are not confirmed but assumed as art. And the later, Davies predisposition of chimpanzee art as non-art appears bias and a betrayal of intolerance to creativity as an inclusive definition of art regardless of the status of artist – mortal or animal. From the foregoing, it would appear the 'Congo' (1954-1964), an English artist and painter who was also a chimpanzee creative works is not regarded as art. And perhaps the entire painting competition of abstract expressionism organized by the Humane Society for 220 chimpanzees was a mirage to Davies. Obviously, Desmond Morris, a renowned British zoologist and surrealist painters' experimentation on *Congo* proved that creativity as a jointly necessary condition for definition of art. In that experiment, chimpanzees' basic sense of composition with controlled symmetrical consistency as well as colour harmony evidently shows Davies non art status reference, inconsistent and bias with known documentation. They were known for creative expressions in drawing and painting, See figure I and II.



Fig I
Chimpanzee arts,
Artist: Congo
Source: Wikipedia
Retrieved on 24.03.2023



Fig II
Chimpanzee arts,
Artist: Congo
Source: Wikipedia
Retrieved on 24.03.2023

Similarly, Pablo Picasso's passion for these chimpanzee art and the inclusion of these paintings *Congos'* in an auction art in Bonham further proves Davies claims contrarily. These paintings were auctioned alongside impressionist master Renoir and Andy Warhols' pop art works. In it, three of Congos' paintings were purchased by an American collector Howard Hong for over US\$ 25,000. Thereafter documentations with captions such as ***"Painting by Chimpanzee Outsell Wharhol, Renoir at Auction"*** and ***"Art world goes wild for chimpanzees' paintings as Warhol work flop"*** went viral. Why was the writer bias towards this feat by chimpanzee art? Did his opinion on creativity and openness on what constitute art foreclose creativity in animal paintings arranged by ingenious humans? What was Davies basis for associating chimpanzee art as non-art and 'seemingly not worthy of the status of art'.

It is also paradoxical to refer to Minimal, Conceptual, Driftwood as well as Environmental arts as non- artworks. The simplicity and deliberate lack in expressive content of Minimal art often engages viewers to probe beyond the obvious. In being kept at minimum, the art work becomes the focus and allows room for individualistic interpretations characterized by 'openness and resistant to description in

general terms'. One then wonders if this is not a case of radical yet innovative creativity. In citing Wittgenstein (1956), the writer admits that 'no rule determines its own interpretation, rather patterns of communal behavior and judgment. Pointedly, he concludes that creativity is required in deciding how rule is to be applied to new cases. Why then did Davies refer to Minimal art as non-art after such corroborative argument? Davies reference to conceptual art as non-art is also misleading. The fact that ideas or concept are more important than process or product does not diminish the status of artworks or the necessity of creativity. The case of man's connectivity, celebration and installation of found natural materials as in the case of Environmental art only adds to the range of resourcefulness possible. Undoubtedly, the writers' authorial claims would have been stronger if creativity was used as the essential woven fiber in the complex web of resemblances or membership mentioned in Weitz's Anti-Essentialism.

Davies Implicit and Explicit Connotations

Davies reference to Weitz point on a defining essence to suggest total irrelevance and impossibility is sarcasm with a hint of hyperbole. The writer buttresses this distasteful remark by stating that 'identifications of artworks is not the only reason or interest a definition would serve. By not maintaining the authorial contributions in identifying creativity as defining essence, Davies research exercise may appear null and void. The making of such critical statement draws attention to the writer's contrary position, namely; the credibility or non-reliability of an essential property for a definition of art. Admittedly, the complexity of the subject matter does not allow for straightforwardness (Davies, 2013). Conversely, this gab as observed by the reviewer is a lack in authorial flow and persuasive ability to take a stand and sustain readers' attention. It is also not consistent with the authority and capability of an independent researcher.

Davies argument on creativity as a jointly necessary essence in art is metaphoric as well as paradoxical. This is evident in his corroborating summation; 'Now if we see definitions as formulas or rules, it will be natural for us to share Weitz's conclusion that creativity precludes definability.' This is an implicit inference included without questioning and by implication takes readers position for granted. One

may wonder, Are readers under compulsion to accept that ‘an essential definition of art would determine the character of yet-to-be-made artworks? In a way that rule out art making as a creative activity. Is the writer’s claim justifiable, considering the fact that deliberate challenge and rule breaking is a norm in the history of art? Expectedly Davies neutrality is deliberate and non-optional in what he calls ‘complex and fundamental matters’ as in the case of a definition of art.

Conclusion

Davies authorial claims argues for openness and revolutionary art but emphasizes on ‘no jointly necessary condition’ regarding definition of art (Weitz anti- essentialism) when he states... ‘Straightforwardly decisive arguments are not to be expected’. This is the paradox of the Stephen Davies article (Davies, 2013, 1991). Such inconsistent claims are seen in his neutral position on creativity as a defining essence. Davies’ thesis statement is also anchored on the ‘shift of focus from preoccupation of traditional aesthetics to historical and social context as well as functions, production and consumption of art’ is contradictory. Consequently, the reference on his assertion as a ‘rewarding orientation with a measure of credit to Weitz’s position’ only adds to the paradox of his authorial claims. The decision to take a stand against anti-essentialism of ‘no jointly perceptible property intrinsic to artworks’ was and still too weighty for Davies to take. Obviously, the writer is not convinced in Weitzs notion that definition cannot be applied to alterable concept like art and definitely not ready to argue and be quoted as having stated otherwise. Davies would rather prefer new orientations which he admits are soon to be scrutinized or challenged.

What then is the extent of progress on the celebrated open-minded or avant-garde nature of art? Is Davies article on Weitzs anti essentialism a progressive discourse on creativity as a defining property of art? Was it merely a weak suggestion lacking authority and straightforwardness? Future critique and review on the adoption of Davies paradoxical authorial claims is critical and non-optional, hence the recommendation this review.

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