Beyond the Senses:

Arthur C. Danto and the Theorization of Contemporary Art

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Abstract

This dissertation is an intellectual history of the late American philosopher, Arthur C. Danto's theorization of contemporary art. More than any other thinker of his generation, Danto spent his career theorizing the nature of art and its relationship to art history after artists like Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, and Robert Morris sought to reframe the relationship of art to life during the 1960s. In so doing, such artists radically demoted the primacy of sensory impressions alone to artistic production and analysis. Danto spent his life attempting to account for this sea change in developing a systematic philosophy of art that reflected both contemporary artistic practice and its relationship to art history and theory. As he worked to develop a philosophy that accounted for this condition—the demotion of the senses and the abiding question of art's relationship to life—Danto produced some of the most significant philosophical work on the nature of contemporary art during the second half of the twentieth century. Danto's philosophy was formed in the crux of a fundamental reorientation of artists and intellectuals to the naturalist tradition in American thought during the 1950s; the emergence of new modes of philosophical analysis that shaped academic philosophy during the 1950s and 60s; the cultural politics of youth reaction to the Vietnam war; the realignment of the epistemological assumptions of the humanities and social sciences during the 1970s and 80s; and the vexed nature of art to morality and public discourse during the 1990s. My dissertation is the first to provide this intellectual-historical context to Danto's philosophy of art, which was one of the most systematic, sustained, and original estimations of the changes in recent art history in American thought.

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Introduction

In 2011, the music critic Simon Reynolds looked back on the first decade of the new millennium with dismay. "Time itself seemed to become sluggish, like a river that starts to meander and form oxbow lakes."[1] Contemporary music suffered from an acute case of what Reynolds labeled "retromania." The affliction: artists seemed only to be rehashing the tropes and styles of the recent musical past, with no apparent urgency towards innovation. The transgressive stance of rock music--the sonic avant-garde--had seemingly disappeared. "The very people who you once would have expected to produce (as artists) or champion (as consumers) the non-traditional and the groundbreaking—*that's* the group who are most addicted to the past…The avant-garde is now an arrière-garde."[2] For Reynolds, the abdication of the avant-garde was evident in its lack of novel aesthetic creations. If novelty seemed to propel the transgressive force of music history, then its absence was seemingly tantamount to music history's end.

Twenty-seven years earlier, the philosopher Arthur C. Danto proclaimed such an end to art as such. "The End of Art" was a condition under which the notion of "progress" in the arts, represented by an advanced avant-garde, had become incoherent. From the beginnings of Western art history in the sixteenth century, Danto argued, artistic progress had been tied, first, to the progressive conquest of visual representation; beginning in the late-nineteenth century, it tethered itself to the particular movements deemed by artists and critics to approximate the highest ideal of art. Cubism "superseded" Post-Impressionism, Dada "overcame" Cubism. Art history was a narrative of progress driven by the novelty aesthetic choices.[3]

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[1] Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2011), x.
[2] Ibid., xix-xx.
[3] Arthur C. Danto, "The End of Art," in idem., *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 81-116.

For Danto, however, the artists of the late 1950s and 1960s, particularly Andy Warhol, had shown that aesthetics alone—the merely perceptual features of art—were insufficient to understanding the nature of art as such. If aesthetics were irrelevant, moreover, then the extant notion of art-historical progress was, likewise, incoherent. In the wake of art-historical progress, Danto argued, contemporary art emerged as a directionless, pluralistic field of individual artists to be evaluated solely on their own terms, absent any overarching notion of definitive artistic quality. Art could be made in any register, but no movement, style, or individual artist could represent art's essence. If no artists, movement, or style could emerge as art's paragon, "carrying" its history forward, then progressive art history had to logically cease. The "End of Art", by which Danto meant an end to such a progressive conception of art history, became the philosophical condition of contemporary art.

From 1952 until his death in 2013, Danto was a professor of philosophy at Columbia University. In addition to his writings about art, his interests spanned the spectrum of the philosophical color palette, having written books and articles on knowledge, action, ethics, and the nature of philosophy itself. It was his lifelong dedication to the philosophy of art, however, that earned him global renown. At the time of his death, *The New York Times* championed Danto as "one of the most widely read art critics of the Postmodern era."[4] *The Guardian* proclaimed him as the philosopher who "transformed the philosophy of art, and, along with his art criticism in *the Nation*, and the catalogues he wrote for exhibitions, also influenced the art world itself, of which he was a starry frequenter."[5] Remembered among his academic peers in an issue of the

[4] Ken Johnson, "Arthur C. Danto, a Philosopher of Art, is Dead at 89." *New York* Times, October 27, 2013. Accessed March 15, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/28/arts/design/arthur-c-danto-a-philosopher-of-art-is-dead-at-89.html?_r=0

[5] Jane O'Grady, "Arthur Danto Obituary." *The Guardian*, November 4, 2013. Accessed March 16, 2016. http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/nov/04/arthur-danto

American Society for Aesthetics Newsletter, issued on Danto's passing, the American philosopher Noel Carrol described Danto as "the most important Anglo-American philosopher of art of the second half of the twentieth century."[6] My dissertation is the first attempt to give historical weight to these lofty claims.

More than any other thinker of his generation, Danto spent his career theorizing the nature of art and its relationship to art history after artists like Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, and Robert Morris altered erstwhile notions of what an artwork could be. During the 1960s, Pop artists, the music of John Cage, the experiments of the Fluxus group and, later, minimalist sculptors, feminist, and environmental artists had collectively demoted one of the key criteria defining Western art since the Renaissance: that art was defined, and recognizable, by the sensuous properties of a material object. What's more, as this criterion was demoted, it was replaced by artists' posing the question of art's relationship to life. Danto viewed this as a philosophical development of the highest order. The primacy of the senses to both producing and consuming art—what Danto defined as "aesthetics"—had been significantly undermined in the hierarchy of artistic analysis, which, he argued, radically altered traditional conceptions and practices of art history and criticism. Danto spent his life attempting to account for this sea change in developing a systematic philosophy of art that reflected both contemporary artistic practice and its relationship to art history and analysis. As he worked to develop a philosophy that accounted for this condition—the demotion of the senses and the abiding question of art's relationship to life—Danto produced some of the most significant philosophical work on the nature of contemporary art during the second half of the twentieth century.

[6] Noel Carrol, "The Age of Danto," *American Society for Aesthetics Newsletter 33* no. 3 (Winter, 2013), 2.

However, the development of Danto's philosophy of art can only be understood as the product of a broader set of historical circumstances that characterized American intellectual life during the post-WWII period. Danto's philosophy was formed in the crux of a fundamental reorientation of artists and intellectuals to the naturalist tradition in American thought during the 1950s; the emergence of new modes of philosophical analysis that shaped academic philosophy during the 1950s and 60s; the cultural politics of youth reaction to the Vietnam war; the realignment of the epistemological assumptions of the humanities and social sciences during the 1970s and 80s; and the vexed nature of art to morality and public discourse during the 1990s. Danto's theorization of art emerged from these formative contexts of the postwar period, as he attempted to spell out the implications of contemporary art's demotion of the senses, and its privileging of the question of art's relationship to life. My dissertation is the first to provide this intellectual-historical context to Danto's philosophy of art, which was one of the most systematic, sustained, and original estimations of the changes in recent art history in American thought.

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Danto was born on January 1st, 1924, in Ann Arbor Michigan. His father, Samuel Budd Danto, was a dentist, and his mother, Sylvia Gittleman Danto, a homemaker. While there is little record of Danto's youth, his early life was shaped significantly by the arts in Detroit. At age 15, he began studying painting with the Detroit-based muralist Marvin Beerbohm.[7] Beerbohm represented the quintessential American painter of the interwar years. He had studied at the

[7] Arthur C. Danto to Arthur Finkel, December 11, 1960. ACD Papers, Box, 11, Folder 3, Series 1.

Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts from 1928-32 and was later commissioned by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to produce works that would beautify public spaces. [8]

At Beerbohm's urging, Danto enrolled at his teacher's alma matter in 1939 or 1940, where he studied art while completing high school. After receiving his diploma, however, he interrupted what he would later describe as a "confused" youth to take up the call of American exceptionalism. At the age of eighteen, Danto enlisted in the United States Army, where he served during World War II as a guard on trains running between Casablanca and Oran, in North Africa, and in the Italian campaign as a driver for the military postal service.[9] By all accounts, his experience was not a trying one. In contrast to other philosophers of his generation for whom the devastation of the war played an instrumental role in their thought[10], Danto "loved it there, with the 'Ay-rabs', as the rednecks called them, leading camels under palm trees, and the veiled women, and the sports drinking granache at the Velo club."[11] Indeed, Danto's wartime experience recalled the vividness with which the immediacy of sensual pleasures had helped him at a time when he was "just nineteen…coming out of adolescence with the help of Morocco."[12] If the vividness of sensory stimulation helped Danto come of age, however, its imminent decline in artistic circles by the early 1960s would fundamentally define his life-long career.

After being honorably discharged from the war in 1945, Danto returned to Detroit to attend Wayne State University, where he double majored in art and history. Continuing his art

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[8] Elizabeth Clemens, *Images of America: The Works Progress Administration in Detroit* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 43.
[9] "Arthur C. Danto" in *Current Biography* 1995
[10] For John Rawls, for example, roughly Danto's contemporary, the brutality of the war was a spur to fundamentally re-evaluate the basis of Christian moral doctrine. See Brad Baranowski, "America's Moral Conscience: John Rawls and the Making of Modern Liberalism" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2017), chp. 1.
[11] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, January 7, 1996. ACD Papers, Box 12, Folder 11, Series 2.
[12] Ibid.

education where he left off, however, brought him into a new medium. At Wayne, he began making wood-block prints in the style of German expressionism, an artistic movement that flourished during the early-twentieth century in Germany. [13] Danto showed a distinctive inclination toward such prints, generating wiry, black and white figurations that, while abstract, depicted the emotional and intellectual depths of his subjects.

After graduating from Wayne, Danto moved to New York in 1948, where he reveled in a new environment of abstract painting that resonated with his own stylistic inclinations. Quickly, many critics and galleries noted, and indeed celebrated, the rather-striking nexus of abstraction and figuration in his work. Despite his talents as a young artist, however, Danto moved to New York to study philosophy. In 1948, he enrolled as a graduate student in the philosophy department at Columbia University on the condition of probation, given his lack of philosophical background. And while he excelled in the subject, earning his M.A. in 1949 and PhD in 1952, philosophy initially took a back seat to the imperatives of individual expression for which his art was a medium. "Whether I shall always lead this sort of double life I cannot say" he wrote in 1960, "but it perhaps goes without saying that were I to drop one of my callings, it would be philosophy rather than art."[14] Eight years after earning his doctorate, his preferred calling had generated more income than his job as a university professor. He had had three one-man-shows in New York and one in Detroit; had shown at most of the major American print shows, including the Brooklyn Annual, the Philadelphia Print Club, Northwest Printmakers, and the Society of American Graphite Artists; was included in the major exhibition "American Prints Today" which was shown in 16 major museums throughout the U.S. and a number in Europe;

[13] Starr Figura, "German Expressionism: The Graphic Impulse," in idem., *German Expressionism: The Graphic Impulse* (New York: Museum of Modern art, 2011), 10-35.
[14] Arthur C. Danto to Arthur Finkel, December 11, 1960. ACD Papers, Box, 11, Folder 3, Series 1.

and held permanent displays at the National Gallery, the Walker Art Center, The Library of Congress, The Detroit Institute of Art, and the Cincinnati Museum.[15] While by no means derivative, Danto's success during this period was largely due to the family resemblance of his prints to the big names of abstract expressionism then emerging—Pollock, Kline, de Kooning, Still, Motherwell. "My prints were conceived and executed under the imperatives of the New York School, even if they were figurative, and mostly on a smaller scale." Those imperatives, however, seemed lost on philosophers studying art. "The great work in midtown galleries in the 1950s was simply beyond the reach of what was taught in the aesthetics of the philosophical seminar room."[16] The tonality of philosophy clashed with the exciting dissonance of New York abstraction.

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Danto's interest in the philosophy art emerged from this growing discrepancy. As a practicing artist in New York during the 1950s, he was surrounded, and in fact deeply influenced by, abstract expressionism. His own work as an abstract printmaker bore the imprint of these luminaries. As he encountered the great texts of philosophical aesthetics while moonlighting as a graduate student, and continued to engage them as a young professor, however, such texts appeared deeply discordant with the life and imperatives of the New York art world. Classic texts in aesthetics such as Kant's *The Critique of Judgement* (1790) and George Santayana's *The Sense of Beauty* (1896) seemed to offer little in the way of explaining Pollock's "drip" method or the somber black bars of Motherwell's "Elegies" to the Spanish Republic.

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[15] Arthur C. Danto to Arthur Finkel, December 11, 1960. ACD Papers, Box, 11, Folder 3, Series 1.
[16] Arthur C. Danto, "Stopping Making Art," Arthur C. Danto Online Exhibition. https://artcollection.wayne.edu/exhibitions/reimagining-spirit#Stopping%20Making%20Art. Accessed March 19, 2019.

The sea-change in American art that emerged in the wake of abstract expressionism seemed to broaden the discrepancy into a full-blown chasm. Beginning during the late 1950s, artists in New York and elsewhere began to challenge the hegemony of abstract expressionism on several levels. The boundaries between painting and sculpture were attacked. Found objects, such as industrial debris and banal household items suddenly became materials for sculpture, and in many instances were presented as sculptures themselves with little or no alterations. Art and theater merged in the ascent of "performance art," where there was no "art-object" to speak of but instead performances of planned movements and gestures, many of which didn't even require an audience.[17] What united many of these disparate and novel challenges to art represented by Minimalism, Conceptualism, Assemblage, and Pop Art, was an abiding interrogation of the boundaries between art and life. Classic texts in the philosophy of art seemed woefully inadequate to explain that interrogation. Danto's career as a theorist of contemporary art, by contrast, began when he set out to develop a definition of art that took full stock of this moment in art, and why it represented such a radical break from progressive theories of art history and criticism, variously rooted in the primacy of the senses to producing and analyzing artworks.

For Danto, artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Jim Dine, Jasper Johns, Robert Morris and, particularly, Andy Warhol, were the harbingers of this condition during the early 1960s. In 1964, New York's Stable Gallery showed new work from Warhol in which he had arrayed a series of sculptures of Brillo Boxes of the same physical dimensions as those found in an ordinary supermarket. Warhol's artistic provocation changed Danto's life. In the presence of a work of art visually indiscernible from its counterpart, he argued in his first essay in the philosophy of art "The Artworld" (1964), the defining feature of art could no longer rest on any merely perceptual

[17] Barbara Haskell, *BLAM! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance, 1958-1964* (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1984).

feature. This was of enormous importance for Danto, as the entire history of Western art had in some form or another defined itself in terms connected with hierarchical values of 'taste', rooted in a purported ability to recognize good art by merely looking.[18]

For Danto, Warhol had not simply fabricated a replica of a Brillo Box and called it art; rather, he had successfully shown that eyesight alone was insufficient to distinguish between art and the objects of everyday life—there was an ontological distinction that vision could not account for. For Danto, this meant that the analysis of art now had to depend on identifying, via *theories* about art, what made it different from the objects of everyday life:

> What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo Box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo Box is a certain theory of art. It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is. Of course, without the theory, one is unlikely to see it as art, and in order to see it as part of the artworld, one must have mastered a good deal of artistic theory as well as a considerable amount of the history of recent New York painting. [19]

"The Artworld" (1964), Danto's first major essay in the philosophy of art, represented in microcosm the unique confluence in his thought of the radical New York art from which he took philosophical inspiration, and mid-century analytic philosophy in the United States. To other academics working in the philosophy of art or art history, the work of Warhol or other underground artists would have been mostly unfamiliar, if irrelevant to the serious study of art. Danto, by contrast, took this art seriously. But it was his identity as a philosophical analyst, however, that buttressed his sustained interest in the changing landscape of American art. Indeed, academic philosophy provided the architecture for the through-line in his philosophical corpus which, he argued, was the problem of indiscernibles. For Danto the problem of indiscernibles--

[18] Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy* (1964): 581.
[19] Ibid.

based on determining the epistemic and ontological distinctiveness of two events, descriptions, or objects that shared the same physical properties or features—was of paramount importance to solving philosophical problems, not least of which was the nature of art. In this sense, Danto's otherwise varied work in the philosophies of action, knowledge, and history, was closely linked to his philosophy of art.

Danto's paper "Basic Actions" (1965), for example, which made an enormous impact in the subfield of the philosophy of action, sought to distinguish between distinct actions that were indiscernible in appearance. Actions termed "basic", though indiscernible in appearance, were distinct from those that were *caused* in a traditional sense. I cannot have said that I *caused* my arm to move, for example, through some mechanism that could be isolated from the event of my having moved my arm. Basic actions may *look* precisely the same as if my arm had moved spasmodically, or as a reaction to an external stimulus. But the difference lies in its being a fundamental part of human behavior whose descriptions are not sufficiently intelligible in terms of cause and effect, something observable.[20] Much the same held, Danto believed, in the philosophy of knowledge, wherein he drew a sharp distinction between the descriptive use of sentences and their semantic construction. The failure to distinguish between the two resulted in a host of confusions about the nature of cognition. Ignoring the difference between description and semantics, Danto argued, led to epistemic and ontological confusions.

And yet beyond the issues of action and knowledge, the early philosophy that was perhaps most influential for his later work was his philosophy of history. Outlined in its most basic form in his early article "Narrative Sentences" (1962), Danto's philosophy of history was

[20] Arthur C. Danto, "Basic Actions," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 2 no. 2 (1965): 141-148.

based on the argument that narrative sentences, employed in both historical writing and everyday speech, operate under truth conditions distinct from ordinary propositions. The sentence, "The Thirty Years War began in 1618" is a true sentence; but it could not be considered as such to those living during the war, primarily because no one could have predicted that the war would last thirty years. Narrative sentences conveyed a particular form of knowledge about the past, but whose truth conditions could only be determined at a future date. Danto carried this thread through nearly all of his philosophy of art, using it as the architecture for his "End of Art" thesis. That the aesthetic criterion of art had ended with Warhol was not something any individual could have known at the time of his appearance; rather, it was a retrospective theory about the significance of his work that, on Danto's account, raised the problem of indiscernbiles at the level of art itself, posing the question of art's relationship to life.

When such a philosophical question was raised at the level of art itself, Danto would later argue, then philosophers, rather than artists, became the figures best suited to determining the nature of art. Artists, on the other hand, were "liberated." Once the primacy of sensory impressions became irrelevant to artistic analysis, they were free to make work in any register, without concern for how their work fit into a larger scheme of art history. On Danto's account, such a "larger scheme" had come to an end once sensory impressions lost their prestige in the hierarchy of artistic analysis. "Art-makers, living in what I like to call the post-historical period of art, will bring into existence works which lack the historical importance or meaning we have for a very long time come to expect."[21] Art *making* would continue in full swing, but no style or medium could logically supersede another as more progressive or advanced.

[21] Arthur C. Danto, "Learning to Live with Pluralism," in idem. *Criticism, Philosophy, and the Ends of Taste* (Amsterdam: G&B Arts International, 1998), 82.

Danto's 1981 book *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* and his 1984 essay "The End of Art" became his best known, and most controversial works attempting to spell out both a philosophical defense for the irrelevance of aesthetics to a definition of art, and the implications such irrelevance held for art history and its relationship to contemporary artistic practice. The former was the deepest exploration of the philosophical problem of indiscernibles and its relationship to art. The latter introduced a Hegelian schematic to explain how that problem, which revealed itself during the early 1960s to be the culmination of an implicit search for the essence of art, rendered impossible a further sense of progress in art history.

Danto's work in these areas generated a great deal of controversy among philosophers of art and art theorists over the next decade.[22] But he also reached a much wider audience when he assumed the position of resident art critic for *The Nation* in 1984. His pieces for *The Nation* assessed artists, both contemporary and historical, with a freewheeling and associative bent. What's more, he made no effort to connect his philosophies of art or art history with any particular artist under review. Indeed, his philosophy of art history logically prohibited the championing of any artist against another, either contemporary or historical, on the grounds that their work could not represent any ideal, aim, or goal of art. For this reason, Danto's writings in *The Nation* were both historically important and curiously banal. Vermeer was given as much pride of place as the contemporary photographer Cindy Sherman. Because he did not purport to assess art from the vantage point of a grand metaphysical system dictating what art must be or look like, Danto's approach to art criticism was wildly catholic, but with relatively low stakes. Indeed, this wide-ranging and charitable approach to art criticism was likely many readers' only

[22] See the essays collected in Arto Haapalo and Jerold Levinson, eds., *The End of Art and Beyond: Essays After Danto* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1997).

exposure to Danto's thought. For this reason, however, I focus much less on Danto's criticism itself in this dissertation, than on the philosophy and broader historical contexts from which it developed.

Danto's "End of Art" thesis provided both an historical and philosophical explanation for what he had described, since the mid-1970s, as an artistic environment with virtually no rules or strictures. Acknowledging that other periods in art history also saw stylistic co-existence, however, Danto's primary concern was to show why such a condition of artistic "pluralism" would continue indefinitely into the future, and why this fundamentally altered the nature of art history, criticism, and theory. To be sure, art could and *should* be defined, the attempt at which he systematically essayed in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. That attempt, however, which left him with two ultimate conditions of art, a) that a work of art must be *about* something, and b) that it embody its meaning, nevertheless left it more radically open to what an artwork could be than any definition in the philosophy of art that had preceded it. In this sense, Danto's philosophy was more in sync with the utter profusion of artistic variety by the 1980s than most other critics and theorists of art during this period.

For Danto, this condition of "pluralism," which would continue indefinitely into the future, was the definitive marker of contemporary art. In tracing the development of Danto's theorization of contemporary art, however, I make no claim of his 'influence' on contemporary artistic practice. While there is a good deal of evidence suggesting that contemporary artists read and admired Danto's work, virtually none of it suggests that it had any influence on the specifics of their artistic practice. Rather, it provided something of an ex-post-facto justification and validation for individual artists to do whatever they pleased. And while this is in fact remarkable in its own right, however, my dissertation traces the intellectual-historical conditions from which

Danto's philosophy developed, rather than his direct influence. As I show in the chapters that follow, the demotion of sensory impressions alone—the basic equation for Danto's definition of aesthetics—emerged from a broader set of discourses both within and beyond the realm of art and philosophy during the second half of the twentieth century.

By the early 1960s, when Danto began his initial theorization of contemporary art, artists began to redefine what art could be by making the relationship between art and life paramount to their work. Rather than a development internal to art itself, however, much of the production and analysis of this work represented the culmination of a broader tradition of philosophical naturalism in American intellectual life during the twentieth century.[23] Naturalism—the underlying orientation to nature, rather than metaphysics or religion—offered a means for artists such as John Cage, Alan Kaprow, and Robert Morris to break from the abstract expressionist tradition. In doing so, however, they set a precedent in American art that radically demoted the primacy of sensory experience alone to the analysis and appreciation of art.

Part of that demotion centered on a suspicion of traditional conceptions of art that yoked the psychology of the artist to a corresponding art object, arguably the hallmark of high-modernism.[24] This same animus towards the primacy of the psychological informed the trajectory of naturalism in American thought more broadly, beginning during the late-nineteenth century. By the 1940s, that tendency had become a paramount feature of Anglo-American philosophy in its attempts to eradicate any traces of romanticism, which many philosophers

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[23] On philosophical naturalism, see John Joseph Ryder, *American Philosophic Naturalism in the Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994). On the impact of naturalism on American thought more broadly, see Paul F. Boller Jr., *American Thought in Transition: The Impact of Evolutionary Naturalism, 1865-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969)

[24] On high-modernism in American intellectual life, see Robert Genter, *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 21-126.

associated with the destructive nationalism of German expansion. The anti-psychological axis along which both art and philosophy rotated by the early 1960s was a distinctive feature of Danto's intellectual and artistic worlds by the early 1960s. In both art and philosophy, the primacy of psychology, traditionally construed, had been fundamentally questioned. For Danto, this provided a fulcrum for connecting the artistic animus towards aesthetics with the semantic issues raised by analytic philosophy more broadly. In a wider sense, however, it further begged the question of the relationship between art and life. This convergence reinforced the underlying philosophical strategy that he would pursue in his attempt to understand the nature of contemporary art and the decline in the centrality of traditional aesthetics to art history and analysis. What's more, it also reinforced Danto's sense that his place in the changing landscape of contemporary art was more effective as a philosopher of art rather than an artist.

Danto gave up making art by the early 1960s to understand, on a philosophical level, what made art distinct from life. The problem of indiscernibility became his key philosophical maneuver in this attempt, and was reinforced by the work of artists like Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, whose artworks were indiscernible from ordinary objects. It also foregrounded the development of his first major essay on art, "The Artworld" (1964). The "Artworld" was Danto's first attempt to spell out the philosophical significance of the irrelevance of aesthetics to understanding the concept of art. However, that essay emerged from a broader trend within "analytic aesthetics" that made use of the indiscernibility problem to illustrate the inadequacy of empiricism to concepts of value, which had been a broader concern among academic philosophers of Danto's generation who were attempting to stake out a redefined vision of philosophical analysis in the United States and Britain.

The initial period of analytic philosophy--roughly 1930 to 1970—framed this conflict between empiricism and value judgements as an issue of language.[25] More particularly, that conflict was staged in the confrontation of logical empiricism by certain forms of Ordinary Language Philosophy during the 1950s and 60s.[26] Danto's generation of analysts emerged from this challenge to the limitations of the early analytic project and its aspirations to creating a Unified Theory of Science.[27] Largely under the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), many philosophers began to reframe the nature of language as a matter of *use* in various human contexts, allowing them to address philosophical problems that arose in areas such as ethics and art in novel ways. This development also allowed philosophers to reconcile normative concepts and ideas with the abiding aversion to metaphysics that characterized the trajectory of naturalism more broadly from the end of the nineteenth century to the early 1970s. Intellectual historians are only beginning to explore the consequences of this period of analytic philosophy, particularly as it manifested in the reframing of political and moral philosophy during the 1960s.[28] The trajectory of the philosophy of art, exemplified

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[25] On this "push-and-pull" relationship, see Mario DeCaro and David Macarthur eds., *Naturalism and Normativity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). For an example of how this tension manifested in American political thought during the 1930s and 40s, see Edward A. Purcell Jr., *The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism and the Problem of Value* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1973).

[26] Histories of analytic philosophy are largely internalist accounts of the discipline written by philosophers. These accounts, while informative, are also highly tendentious, and reflect little in the way of history as it would be recognized by intellectual historians. See, for example, Scott Soames, *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century, Volume 1: The Dawn of Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). A notable exception to this tendency, Joel Isaac has written about the history of analytic philosophy in a much more judicious and thoughtful manner. See for example, Joel Isaac, "W.V. Quine and the Origins of Analytic Philosophy in the United States," *Modern Intellectual History* 2 no. 2 (2005): 205-234; and idem., "Donald Davidson and the Analytic Revolution in American Philosophy," *The Historical Journal* 56 no.3 (2013): 757-779.

[27] For a more nuanced perspective on logical empiricism, see Alan Richardson and Thomas Uebel eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Logical Empiricism* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2007); Michael Friedman, *Reconsidering Logical Positivism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[28] See, for example, P. MacKenzie Bok, "To the Mountaintop Again: The Early Rawls and Post-Protestant Ethics in Postwar America," *Modern Intellectual History* 14 no. 1 (2017): 153-185; Katrina Forrester, "Citizenship, War, and the Origins of International Ethics in American Political Philosophy, 1960-1975," *The Historical Journal* 57 no. 3 (2014): 773-801; idem., *In the Shadow of Justice: Postwar Liberalism and the Remaking of Political Philosophy* (Forthcoming, Princeton University Press); Brad Baranowski, "America's Moral Conscience: John Rawls and the Making of Modern Liberalism," (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2017).

here in Danto's thought, offers a closely related history, broadening the scope and significance of analytic philosophy to American intellectual history more generally. In this way, Danto should be understood as a pivotal figure through which analytic philosophy becomes more than an arcane academic discipline. The historical significance of his thought illuminates the centrality of academic intellectual life and recent art history to broader developments in American intellectual life that underwrote his theorization of contemporary art.

Danto's attempt to understand what made art distinct from life was further reinforced during the late 1960s as he encountered a changing political and cultural landscape in the United States. As he contemplated the politics of student protest against the Vietnam War, the inadequacy of aesthetics was given a moral dimension by his negative perception of his students, as well as the New Left and counterculture more broadly. Largely sympathetic with their political aims, Danto nevertheless viewed the youth culture of the 1960s as an example of art merging with life, to the detriment of both. The complete merger of art with life was inimical to Danto's philosophy of art and stood at odds with the consequences of looking at art through the lens of indiscernibles. In Danto's mind, so-called cultural radicals had made the aesthetics of cultural trappings, such as a facile appropriation of Eastern philosophy and religion, ends unto themselves. This reinforced his view that the surfaces of cultural acts or objects were cheapened when made into ultimate goals, blurring the necessary distinction between art and life. Moreover, Danto's aversion to "youth culture aesthetics" also reinforced a political commitment to the virtues of postwar liberalism that informed his developing views of art and philosophy alike. As he bristled at the dogmatism he perceived in his students, Danto's insistence on openness and complexity, virtues broadly championed by other liberal intellectuals of his generation, further reinforced his sense that both art and life were distinct entities, and that any definition of art that

necessarily dictated its appearance or purpose was inherently dangerous. Danto carried these virtues of liberalism into his defense of pluralism as the defining condition of contemporary art during the 1980s and 90s.

As Danto continued his theorization of contemporary art during those decades, his thought reflected a broader realignment within the human sciences that also bore the imprint of his early work. Danto's *Analytical Philosophy of History* (1965), and in particular his discussion of narrative sentences, had helped to inspire a broader conversation within the humanities and social sciences during the 1980s that redefined the relationship of traditionally artistic tropes to scholarly research methods and practices. In philosophy, literature, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and history, academics of all stripes suddenly became enamored with the methodological promises that "narratives" held for the foundations of their respective disciplines. Dubbed the "narrative turn" by contemporary theorists, this moment in the humanities also formed an important context from which Danto's definition of aesthetics began to evolve. One of the broader implications of the "narrative turn" was that traditionally "aesthetic" tropes began to lose their autonomy—their application to the arts alone—as they became relevant to more capacious views of reasoning in scholarly research. In addition to sensory impression as one of its definiens, Danto now began to speak of an "autonomy" that art and its related concepts had recently lost, the residual staying power of which he attributed to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and, in his own time, the art criticism of Clement Greenberg. Danto's "End of Art" thesis, and his philosophy of art history more broadly, emerged as part of this fundamental reassessment of the significance of narratives to broader conceptions of reasoning. To that end, I present a novel reading of the connection between Danto's philosophy of art and his philosophy of art

history that philosophers have hitherto ignored.[29] In tethering the definition of art to both its *narration*, and in linking the ontological structure of art to that of language itself, Danto's mature writings during the 1980s partook of a broader moment in academic intellectual life in which the autonomy of distinctly aesthetic categories had all but collapsed.

In insisting that his analytical definition of art, developed in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, was inextricable from art's narrative history, Danto developed a philosophy of art history that, he believed, fundamentally explained the nature of contemporary art. In one sense, Danto was in sync with certain postmodern theorists about the decline in the view of aesthetics as an "autonomous" realm of thought and practice as a condition of art during the 1980s. In *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (1983), for example, the art critic Hal Foster proclaimed "that the very notion of the aesthetic, its network of ideas, [was] in question."[30] For Foster "the idea that aesthetic experience exists apart, without 'purpose,' all but beyond history, or that art can now effect a world at once (inter) subjective, concrete, and universal—symbolic totality," was a specious concept.[31]

Rather than postmodern, Danto described his "End of Art" thesis as a proclamation of the 'post-historical' moment in art, by which he meant a period after the de-legitimation of narrative art history. Indeed, Danto's "End of Art" thesis was part of a larger intellectual shift that began during the 1960s that had proclaimed an end to progressive narratives, including Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Michel Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge*

[29] See, for example, Jonathan Gilmore, *The Life of a Style: Beginnings and Endings in The Narrative History of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 112-142.
[30] Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface," in idem. ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), xv.
[31] Ibid.

(1969), and Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992).[32] Appreciating the development of Danto's thought as it led up to his "End of Art" thesis, then, provides an important insight into the intellectual conditions surrounding a suspicion of progress more broadly. While there is virtually no historiography that has explored this development in detail, historians, however, have tended to yoke the larger intellectual and cultural shifts of the 1970s and 80s to its underlying economic conditions. For the historian J. David Hoeveler, for example, the coming of "post-industrial" America explains the so-called "postmodernist" turn in American thought and culture during the 1970s. For Hoeveler, the transition from a "production" to an "information" economy during the 70s was reflected in the pluralistic, directionless state of the artworld in that decade, which he reads as an expression of a new phase of capitalism that blurred the distinction between art and commerce. While Hoeveler is one the few intellectual historians to treat of the art-historical discourse of the late-twentieth century, his analysis of artistic pluralism ultimately reduces its features to those of the late-capitalist information economy. Likewise, he treats trends such as photorealism and feminist art as reflections of a postmodern temper in which representation, identity, and individualism were compounded and amplified by the transition from "Fordist" capitalism to more "virtual" means of production such as service and information.[33]

Hoeveler's reduction of artistic pluralism to a postmodern "moment" undergirded by financial capitalism is reflective of other work that has attempted to make sense of the arc of late-twentieth century thought. Daniel Rodgers's *Age of Fracture* (2011), for example, argues

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[32] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 1962); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010); Francis Fukayama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

[33] J. David Hoeveler Jr., *The Postmodernist Turn: American Thought and Culture in the 1970s* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 54-76.

that the underlying "fracture" and "disaggregation" of American intellectual life reflected the contingent, flexible, and de-centered nature of late-capitalist market relations.[34] While neither Hoeveler nor Rodgers's analyses are incorrect, they both employ the rather-sweeping metaphors of deregulation, flexibility, and contingency to explain shifts in intellectual life that are not easily reducible to the metaphor of financial capitalism. This is especially true in the case of the intellectual history of contemporary art. By contrast, Danto's thought and its broader contexts reveal that the radical and diffuse possibilities that emerged for American artists during the 1970s and 80s were not easily reducible to the emergence of financial deregulation.

One historian who has carefully considered Danto's thought is George Leonard. On Leonard's reading, Danto's philosophy represented the culmination of a tradition in Anglo-American thinking about art that he (following the literary critic M.H. Abrams) calls "natural supernaturalism." Natural supernaturalism, in the thought of William Wordsworth, Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Cage, and Danto, was a tradition of thinking about the arts that imbued ordinary objects with religious significance. Each of these thinkers, Leonard argues, displayed a reverence for the ordinary conditions of experience as a necessary prerequisite for the art object, a pattern of thought whose apotheosis was in Danto's proclamation that, with Pop, ordinary objects themselves could be works of art.[35]

While Leonard's analysis is both original and incisive, however, he misreads both Danto's philosophy and his relationship to the naturalist tradition in American thought. Much of this stems from a failure to understand Danto's firm rootedness in the tradition of analytic philosophy. Intellectual historians have largely ignored the traditions of analytic philosophy in

[34] Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2011).
[35] George J. Leonard, *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

the English-speaking world during the twentieth century, viewing the emergence of logical empiricism during the 1940s, which cemented that tradition in the U.S., as the death-knell for more practical or humanistic concerns among philosophers.[36] In many ways, this neglect is not surprising. With some exceptions, philosophers during the postwar period by and large sequestered their work from matters of practical concern. And while this has been a complaint among both historians and philosophers, lamenting especially the eclipse of the indigenous American tradition of pragmatism, it ignores the fact that philosophy has, throughout its history, remained an abstract discipline, its practical applications and consequences in the history of philosophy notwithstanding.[37] Danto's work was no exception.

Danto, however, was unique among analytic philosophers of his generation in his lived engagement with art and art history. Yet this engagement has led to the tendency to treat him as both an outlier in the field of analytic philosophy and an unwitting ally of the ostensibly more humanistic tradition of continental theorizing in the vein of Friedrich Nietzsche or Martin Heidegger.[38] The only book attempting to make sense of Danto's philosophy as a whole, for example, maintains that Danto's small book on Nietzsche, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (1965), is "the philosophical Key to the meaning of Danto's work."[39] Like Leonard, this perspective fails to appreciate the unique confluence of analytic philosophy and contemporary art, as well as its

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[36] See, for example, George A. Reisch, *How the Cold war Transformed the Philosophy of Science: To the Icy Slopes of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); John McCumber, *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011); Andrew Jewett, "Canonizing Dewey: Naturalism, Logical Empiricism, and the Idea of American Philosophy," *Modern Intellectual History* 8 no. 1 (2011): 91-125.

[37] On the advocacy of Pragmatism against excessive scientism or quietist relativism, see James Kloppenberg, "Pragmatism: An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?" *The Journal of American History* 83 no.1 (1996): 100-138; Richard Shusterman ed., *The Range of Pragmatism and the Limits of Philosophy* (New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2004); and Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays, 1972-1980* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

[38] See, for example, Santiago Zabala, "Danto, Philosophy, and Art," *Divinatio* 38 (2014):181-84.

[39] Tiziana Andina, *Arthur Danto: Philosopher of Pop* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 7.

relationship to broader trends in American intellectual history at the end of the twentieth century, that combined to shape the arc of Danto's philosophy. While Danto appreciated the ideas of continental philosophers, as was evident in *Nietzsche as Philosopher* and *Jean Paul Sartre* (1975), his primary intent in those books was to show the legitimacy of their thought to other analytic philosophers, and to unpack the logic of their seemingly obscure arguments. In point of fact, these books played a marginal role in the development of Danto's thought.[40] Likewise, while his dissertation, and books on action and knowledge are significant to his thought as a whole, they play less of a role in his theorization of contemporary art than the texts on which I've chosen to focus.

Rather than texts alone, this dissertation is the first to employ archival material to better understand the implications and motivations behind Danto's "End of Art" thesis during the 1980s and 90s. This material, contained primarily in personal correspondence and writings, helps to better reveal some of the underlying contradictions in Danto's mature philosophy of art and art history. Those contradictions are revealed in large part by assessing the arguments of Danto's philosophy against his personal feelings about artists more generally, his view of philosophy as the "queen of the sciences," and his equation of intellectualism with male superiority.

In many ways, the contradictions in Danto's position as both a philosopher and a public "art intellectual" were reflective of a broader ambiguity in the idea of artistic authority at the end of the twentieth century. However, they also help to reveal the larger significance of Danto's thought to the historical and philosophical import of contemporary art. Danto was by no means the only significant theorist of contemporary art during the second half of the twentieth century. However, in taking contemporary art as his philosophical source material, Danto largely set the

[40] Arthur C. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); *Jean Paul Sartre* (New York: Viking Press, 1975).

agenda for the philosophy of art at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first. And while his method of indiscernibles and “End of Art” thesis have largely fallen out of favor among current philosophers of art, the development of his thought is worth explaining, historically, for the broader connections that it reveals between recent American intellectual history and the broader theorization of contemporary art.

Giving Up on Art: Self-Erasure and the Culmination of High-Modernism

When authorship is denied, it is often in order to extol certain sources or origins instead-William H. Gass-1984[41]

On October 25th, 1961, the French town of Vallauris threw a lavish birthday party. The occasion was the eightieth birthday of the Spanish painter Pablo Picasso, who made his first ventures into sculpture in the small town and had helped to revitalize its ceramic industry in the decades prior to the momentous occasion. Fortuitously, it was the same year that Arthur Danto spent in France, on Sabbatical from his teaching duties at Columbia. As part of the festivities, the town had organized an exhibition of Picasso's work, and upon learning of the exhibition in a local Nice newspaper, Danto took his family to pay tribute to the aging master. When he arrived, however, he encountered much more than a celebration.

The streets were "thronged with people waiting for Picasso to turn up." When the renowned painter finally arrived, "riot policeman joined arms to make a passage…and a current ran through mass[es] of people there of an almost religious intensity."[42] A current ran through Danto as well. "I had never felt anything comparable before, the immense personal power of the man."[43] The experience of re-discovering Picasso, whom he felt he and the other painters in New

[41] William H. Gass, "The Death of the Author," *Salmagundi* no. 65 (Fall, 1984): 9.
[42] Arthur C. Danto to James Guttman, November 3, 1961. James Guttman Papers, Box 1, Series 1, Folder 8. Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscripts Library.
[43] Ibid.

York had "written…off too soon," was a "shattering experience." Being in the presence not simply of Picasso's art, but in the presence of a mythic figure, was like having "been exposed to some vast force…I couldn't think of painting for three days after."[44] Three *years* after the encounter, Danto had given up on art altogether.

It was more than a little ironic that Danto had been moved less by the art, some of which he found "corny and just bad," than by the "immense *personal* power" of Picasso's presence.[45] At the same time that he moved about in a town "decked out with streamers," awash in Spanish music and adorned with replicas of the "old man's symbols" paying tribute to the artist's artisanal heroism, artists and critics in New York were beginning to insist that the most exciting new art was deeply *impersonal*; the personal trace of the artist was, the avant-garde and its interpreters claimed, irrelevant to understanding art itself.

By the early 1960s, artists working in the wake of abstract expressionism began to insist that art and life had been too-artificially separated. And while not a novel sentiment in the intellectual history of the avant-garde, it quickly manifested in a broader impulse to deny more traditional roles accorded to authorship in the arts—particularly conceptions of permanence, personal trace, and tangibility. Artists during this period sought to do away with the paradigm of the artist as expressive translator of his or her psychology, emotions, or technical acumen to a physical object. In doing so, they sought to close the gap between art and life, artist and reality. This reorientation was one of the most distinctive intellectual shifts characterizing the initial transition from abstract expressionism to contemporary art. But it also reflected a moment that linked American art with a broader trend in trans-Atlantic philosophy during the previous forty

[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

years that had sought to efface romantic or psychological conceptions of the self from philosophical analysis.

Both Danto's early philosophy and his decision to jettison his own artistic practice were consequences of this development of philosophical naturalism. By the early 1960s, avant-garde artists were drawing from a through-line of naturalist thought that sought to rid egocentrism from the equation of philosophical and cultural analysis. In so doing, they radically altered both the language of artistic analysis and the terms of its production, rendering the merely sensuous properties of art irrelevant to the nature of art itself. This chapter traces the gradual emergence of that irrelevance by showing the interwoven histories of art and philosophy from the 1930s to the 1960s, which were linked by a shared animus towards psychology and interiority. It was the consequences of this history, as they manifested in the 1960s artworld, that initially spurred Danto's abiding concern in the philosophy of art: what constitutes the difference between art and reality? As that question began to consume his intellectual energies, moreover, Danto's growing sense of the irrelevance of his own artistic authorship reflected the broader bias towards egocentrism in avant-garde circles by the early 1960s. On this basis, Danto reasoned, his contribution to the changing landscape of contemporary art was better made in his role as a philosopher.

Originality and Immediacy

The New York artworld that Danto entered as a young printmaker wore the cultural and intellectual consequences of two world wars on its proverbial sleeve. As the United States emerged triumphant in the battle against Fascism and Totalitarianism after 1945, both a renewed sense of individualism, and an entrenched allergy to the dangerous metaphysics tied to nationalism, produced a culture of painting that reflected those values and their newfound international superiority. It had been a long time coming. Despite the serious painterly traditions of social realism and regionalism in the decades prior[46], Americans during the first part of the twentieth century had nevertheless looked to Paris as the source of the most advanced developments in modern art. The famed "Armory Show" of 1913, which introduced Americans to Fauvism, Cubism, and the work of Marcel Duchamp, cemented the French capitol's reputation in American minds as the paragon of cutting edge, creative work.[47] When the city of lights fell in 1940, however, its status as the center of modern art fell with it. Once viewed as the vanguard of creativity, the metropole that had produced the works of Cezanne, Matisse, and Monet lost its cultural credibility. In effect, this created an opportunity for postwar-American painters, deeply suspicious of conformity after the horrors of Nazism and Fascism, to take the cultural reins. Continuing the development initiated by French post-impressionists, American painters, in at least one sense, followed a triumphant post-war individualism to the non-representational depths of Abstract-Expressionism during the 1940s and 50s. This newly formed avant-garde, represented by painters as diverse as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Franz Kline, and Robert Motherwell, found themselves championed as exemplars of individual freedom over Totalitarian

[46] On American regionalist painting, see Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
[47] On the significance of the Armory show in American culture, see Casey Nelson Blake, Marilyn S. Kushner, and Kimberley Orcutt eds., *The Armory Show at 100: Modernism and Revolution* (London: Giles Ltd., 2013).

subversion, expression for its own sake over forced repression. Their abstract images represented the marks of unsullied individuality.[48]

If abstract expressionism represented a cultural vanguard of American individualism, moreover, its reception and interpretation reflected a larger intellectual and political consensus then emerging during the postwar period, characterized by a distinctive aversion to metaphysics and historical determinism. Suspicious of totalizing schemes and the distortion of both scientific and metaphysical systems toward those ends, American intellectuals expended a great deal of energy during the 1950s explicating and defending democratic institutions and individual liberty against the horrors of Fascism and Totalitarianism that had culminated in Hitler's Final Solution. Philosophical tomes on the nature and dignity of man, more sober assessments of political systems and their implications, and formalist readings of literature and art, divorced from larger cultural or political contexts—these formed a loose cannon of works defending a broad "liberal-consensus" against the incursions of Authoritarianism of any kind.[49] Historians have viewed the emergence of this consensus as part of a broader "de-radicalization" of intellectual life, among both the Stalinist left of the Communist party and the non-Stalinist left associated with periodicals such as *Partisan Review*. Likewise, art critics who had once extolled the virtues of a politically motivated art of the left during the 1930s now embraced abstraction as as an

[48] On Abstract-Expressionism as a cultural expression of Cold-War values, see Serge Guibault, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

[49] Mark Grief, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933-1973* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1985); Robert Genter, *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Howard Brick, *Daniel Bell and the Decline of Intellectual Radicalism: Social Theory and Political Reconciliation in the 1940s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

affirmation of American values. Abstract art offered both a defense of both *individuality* and *expressive immediacy* cum anti-fascism.

By the early 1960s, however, the centrality of individualism as an artistic virtue waned. In its stead, a gradual demotion of the artist's psychology or ego came to dictate a radical decline in the centrality of traditional conceptions of authorship to understanding art. This was one of the most significant intellectual shifts marking the transition from the high-modernist notion of an artistic vanguard, in the form of abstract expressionism, to the 'decentralized' nature of contemporary art. In an important sense, Danto's thought about his own work mirrored those values. As a young printmaker, he emphatically insisted that his prints were to be appreciated in their immediacy to be truly understood, absent his own authorial presence. He claimed to "try in my work always to make a direct statement, with nothing either hidden or implied, and the meaning wholly there on the surface. And this is just the way I think pictures must be seen: *immediately*, without thoughts or words, or else not at all. For a picture is not an answer to a question. So there is nothing I can usefully say about this print which it does not say itself. But if it says nothing to a person, then no words of mine can be of any use."[50] Danto's authorial presence was irrelevant to understanding his work. Pictures without thoughts however, belied the fact that his prints were figurative. This was particularly true of his series of abstract renderings of the busts of famous philosophers like Kant and Spinoza, as well as scientists such as Einstein. For the art critic Dore Ashton, Danto's strongest prints were "expressionist in tenor," as in "his portrait of Kant, in which heavy black bars close in the head, suggesting the weighty maze of Kant's philosophy; or of another philosopher, Spinoza, whose gentleness is stressed in the soft

[50] Arthur C. Danto to Liz (last name unknown), undated. Associated American Artists Records ca. 1934-1981, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

shadows and features of the face."[51] Danto's figurations stood in tension with his stated aim of a "thoughtless" immediacy requiring "no words of mine," the attempt to render his authorial presence irrelevant.

Danto's insistence on the impersonal, "thoughtless" immediacy of his art, juxtaposed with his figurative expressionism, told of a larger shift in American art of which the eventual jettisoning of his own practice was representative. Immediacy and individuality were the twin virtues of abstraction during the late 40s and mid-1950s; by the late 50s and into the 1960s, however, artists and critics alike continued to speak of such immediacy but began increasingly to insist upon a corresponding demotion of the artist's ego. In other words, originality paradoxically increased as the work's *origins* were put at a distance. This "de-psychologization" of the artist, however, represented the culmination of a broader tradition of philosophical naturalism that had begun during the late nineteenth century, and that brought art and philosophy into a shared discursive orbit by the mid-1960s.

By that time, much of the most original art was, paradoxically, described by critics and artists as devoid of personal trace or handwriting. The ego of the artist was often said to yield to the ideas contained in his art. Danto himself walked this dialectical line during the early 1960s, which was illustrated in the tension contained in his conception of art as a "knowledge-less immediacy" and his desire to produce original, self-expressive work. By 1962 or 3, however, he had stopped making art altogether and began to focus on philosophy exclusively.[52] Broadly speaking, Danto's gesture partook of the recent history of both art and philosophy in the United

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[51] Dore Ashton, "Art: Gallery Pot-Pourri (Danto Woodcuts Seen Among Exhibitions), *The New York Times* (May 8, 1959), 45.
[52] Arthur C. Danto, "Stopping Making Art," Arthur C. Danto Online Exhibition. https://artcollection.wayne.edu/exhibitions/reimagining-spirit#Stopping%20Making%20Art. Accessed March 19, 2019.

States, both of which were united by an impulse to denigrate subjectivity. In avant-garde circles, that impulse radically changed the nature of artistic analysis and production, which, for Danto, made art a properly philosophical enterprise deserving of his full intellectual energies.

From Immediacy to Self-Erasure

If the trend towards self-erasure became the terminal point of late modernism in the U.S., its initial metaphor was the emphatic insistence upon immediacy that Danto had claimed of his prints. Perhaps the clearest proponent of the virtues of immediacy in abstract painting was the cultural critic Harold Rosenberg. In his most influential essay, "American Action Painters" (1952) Rosenberg argued for the abstract painting as an "event" rather than an object as such. Accordingly, the canvas on which the painter worked was "an arena in which to act—rather than a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze, or 'express' an object, actual or imagined."[53] Bearing strong resemblance to the French existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose injunctions to individual choice resonated with an intellectual public disillusioned with mass-society[54], Rosenberg equated the "act-painting" with the "same metaphysical substance as the artist's existence."[55] More importantly, however, he argued that the canvas—as arena for action--

[53] Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters" *Art News* 51 no. 8 (1952): 22.
[54] On existentialism's popularity with mid-century American intellectuals, see George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 105-266.
[55] Ibid., 23.

provided a forum of *liberation* for the artist, a retreat from value of all types into the world of painting itself. "The big moment came when it was decided to paint . . . just to PAINT. The gesture on the canvas was a gesture of liberation, from Value — political, aesthetic, moral…. Liberation from the object meant liberation from the 'nature', society and art already there."[56] More than simply individual expression, Rosenberg promoted the view that painters' "actions" created a "pure" art in its very immediacy to the viewer, unencumbered by anything resembling a subject standing beneath the surface of the painting itself.

While couched more in terms of subjective action, Rosenberg's analysis resonated deeply with an emphasis on unencumbered immediacy common to mid-century aesthetic thought. In the visual arts, the key evangelizer of this view was the critic Clement Greenberg.[57] A member of the so-called "New York Intellectuals" associated with *Partisan Review* and the anti-Stalinist left during the 1930s and 40s, Greenberg championed the abstract expressionists as the most advanced form of avant-garde art, based on the "purity" of their reduction of paint to the most basic elements of its medium. His early essays "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939) and "Towards a Newer Lacoon" (1940), couched in an extant socialist politics, outlined the art-historical basis of that view. For Greenberg, seventeenth and eighteenth-century painting in Europe was undermined in becoming the handmaiden of literature, at that time the dominant form of art. As a result, painters attempted to imitate literary expression at the expense of their own medium. That tendency became most pronounced during the first half of the nineteenth century when painters by and large took their cues from the bourgeois sentiments of romantic literature. The 'exhaustion' of romanticism by 1848, Greenberg argued, pushed painters and that borrowed

[56] Ibid., 23-24.
[57] On Greenberg's hegemony in American art criticism, see Caroline Joes, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

sentiment to Bohemia in the formation of an avant-garde. Toward the end of that century, the avant-garde, now eager to guard art against the influences of capitalism and nascent government bureaucracy, retreated to a defense of art for its own sake. "This [also] meant a new and greater emphasis upon form, and it also involved the assertion of the arts as independent vocations, disciplines and crafts, absolutely autonomous, and entitled to respect for their own sakes."[58]

For Greenberg, aesthetic autonomy also meant that the best modern art (of which painting was the highest expression) was that which best expressed the conditions of its medium. In painting, this meant work that eschewed illusionism and emphasized the medium itself through conformity to the flatness of its support. As such, the *content* of the painting was irrelevant-- its purely immediate, formal properties took precedence. "Content is dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself."[59] Greenberg's formalism also dictated a strict separation *between* artistic mediums as a condition of legitimacy. Because painting, for example, was defined by the flatness of its surface, but shared 'color' as a formal property with a medium such as sculpture, then flatness should be the sole defining aesthetic of modernist painting.

Greenberg's formalism was given theoretical ballast within the humanities by the philosophers W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley in their influential paper, "The Intentional Fallacy (1946)." In that paper, Wimsatt and Beardsley argued that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art."[60] Such a view resonated with the dominant emphasis on immediacy in painting by the late

[58] Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," *Partisan Review* 7 no. 4 (1940): 301.
[59] Clement Greenberg, "Avant Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* 6 no. 5 (1939), 36.
[60] W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *The Sewanee Review* 54 no.3 (July-September, 1946): 467.

1950s and early 60s. As the abstract expressionist and proto-conceptual artist Ad Reinhardt claimed in 1963, for example, art should be "unmannered and untrammeled…unentangled."[61] For many mid-century intellectuals, moreover, refuge in the formal autonomy of art also acted as a defensive mechanism of human values against the perceived encroachments of science and bureaucracy.[62] In the case of Greenberg, however, the line between art and science was not as fine as it seemed. Indeed, there was indeed much to commend Greenberg's program to the scientific ethos of Cold War America. For Greenberg, painting should "make no reference to anything given in any other order of experience" for the sake of "scientific consistency." What the Abstract Expressionists took from their cubist predecessors—the rejection of illusion and the "insistence on [the] physical nature of the two-dimensional picture plane" reflected for Greenberg "the empiricist's faith in the supreme reality of concrete experience."[63] Greenberg viewed this parallel between science and aesthetic judgement as the "cold side of Modernism," believing his judgements in line with the empiricist temper of Cold War knowledge production.[64] "The taste most closely attuned to contemporary art has become positivist, even as the best philosophical and political intelligence of the time."[65]

Insofar as Greenberg shared something with the best "philosophical" intelligence of his time, it was with the inchoate movement known as "analytic" philosophy in the United States. The program of "analytic" philosophy was less of a unified program of thought than a stylistic

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[61] Ad Reinhardt, "Art as Art," in idem. *Art as Art: The Collected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, edited by Barbara Rose. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 54.
[62] See, for example, Robert Genter, *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 21-53. On American artists and writers' attempts to pose an aesthetic of 'spontaneity' to the same end, see Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
[63] Clement Greenberg, "The Decline of Cubism," *Partisan Review* 15 no. 3 (1948): 366-69.
[64] Clement Greenberg, "Necessity of Formalism," *New Literary History* 3 no. 1 (1971): 174.
[65] Clement Greenberg, "Abstract Art," *The Nation* (April 15, 1944): 451.

imperative based on the virtues of clarity, parsimony, and a rigor modeled on the natural sciences. Greenberg's "cold side" of modernism, however, was part of a longer trajectory of twentieth-century transatlantic thought in which aesthetic considerations were, in many ways, linked to the fate of scientific and philosophical naturalism. A key part of that link began in the turn to empiricism in Anglo-American and European thought at the end of the nineteenth century, which yoked together philosophy and aesthetics in a shared revolt against the interiority of Victorian sensibility. One of the founders of the analytic tradition, the Cambridge philosopher Bertrand Russell based much of his writing on a reaction against the Hegelian idealism of the British philosophers T.H. Green and F.H. Bradley at the turn of the century. Viewing idealism as a reactionary holdover of religious thought and a dangerous form of political quietism, Russell developed a wholly empirical approach based on the primacy of sensory impressions as the fundamental unit of philosophical analysis, organized through symbolic logic. More than simply a local, technical achievement, however, Russell's work played a crucial role in the epistemological development of the early modernist "Bloomsbury Group," which produced the novels of Virginia Wolf, and the formalist aesthetics of the critic-philosophers Roger Fry and Clive Bell. [66] Indeed, Fry and Bell's formalist aesthetics, of which Bell's theory of "significant form" was representative, held that what was unique to art was the particular emotions elicited by particular combinations of lines, colors, and relations of forms. In eschewing *content* and emphasizing the particularity of empirical features unique to individual mediums, Bell and Fry were important forerunners to Greenberg's empiricist formalism.[67]

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[66] On Russell's revolt against idealism, see Peter Hylton, *Russell, Idealism, and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). On his influence on the Bloomsbury Group, see Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell, and the Epistemology of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

[67] Clive Bell, *Art* (New York: Frederick A Stokes Company, 1913), 3-48.

The Bloomsbury group's suspicion of "content" paralleled the anti-metaphysical and anti-psychological empiricism of the Austrian philosophers and scientists known as the Vienna Circle, many of whose members emigrated to the United States during the 1930 to escape Fascism. The Vienna Circle was a loosely associated group of philosophers and scientists during the 1920s who developed the movement known as logical empiricism in Austria and Germany, and deeply influenced the trajectory of Anglo-American philosophy.[68] Like the Bloomsbury Group, their ideas (while by no means unified) held in common a cultural sensibility—"Aufbau"-- based in the collective desire to resist a politically dangerous metaphysics. The Aufbau ("rebuilding" or "reconstruction") referred to a general term common to descriptions and self-understandings of architecture, planning, art, philosophy, and science in post-WWI Germany and Austria. Intellectuals both within and beyond the Vienna Circle attributed the devastation of the war to the decadence of ornamental architecture, romantic music, and metaphysical philosophy, all of which had culminated in a destructive, romantic nationalism by 1914. In response, the Aufbau expressed a cultural imperative toward an empirical, transparent, and logical ordering of life; if scientific understanding was an antidote to Victorian interiority in the Anglo-American world, it was an antidote to Fascism on the other side of the Atlantic. In aesthetic terms, the interiority of "content" or personal expression was eschewed in favor of form. Such an understanding provided cultural unity between the modernist architecture of programs such as the Dessau Bauhaus, the post-impressionist criticism of Bell and Fry, the turn to third-person narrative in the novels of Virginia Woolf, and the logical empiricism of the

[68] Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000* (New York: Clarendon Press, 2003), 232-37.

Vienna Circle, which, "stressed the purification of language, the reduction of all talk to the simplest of starting points," that is, basic sensory impressions.[69]

This through line connecting philosophy and art ultimately culminated in the avant-garde's appropriation of naturalist thought by the early 1960s, leading it to question the line between art and life. What manifested then as a radical cultural impulse, however, had more arcane roots in a transatlantic conversation that radically denigrated the priority of interiority during the first decades of the twentieth century.

"Anti-Psychology," Modernism, and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy

In order to fully understand how this conversation came to a head with American artists, however, it is necessary to show how certain fundamental imperatives of early analytic philosophy in the U.S. came to resonate with, and ultimately diffuse to artistic circles by the 1960s. Foremost among those imperatives was the animus towards psychology and an unbridled embrace of sensory experience.

The beginnings of analytic philosophy in the United States were part of a larger intellectual trend that had emerged from developments in mathematics, logic, and psychology in the German and English-speaking worlds during the second half of the nineteenth century, all of which severely damaged the basis of Kant's transcendental psychology. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787) Kant had claimed that the basis of our empirical knowledge resided with truths considered *synthetic a priori*. The best examples of *synthetic a priori* truths—Euclidean

[69] Peter Galison, "Constructing Modernism: The Cultural Location of Aufbau," in Ronald N Giere and Alan W. Richardson eds., *Origins of Logical Empiricism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 17-40. Quote on p. 36.

geometry, arithmetic, and Newtonian physics—were grounded on a transcendental basis in the psychological faculties of the sensible manifold (sensory impressions) and the twelve "pure concepts" of the understanding. The truths of geometry and arithmetic, for Kant, were found in the pure forms of intuition—space and time—that gave shape to the deliverances of the sensible manifold. The deductions used to reach the laws of Newtonian mechanics, on the other hand, depended on spontaneous acts of 'synthesis' in which the pure concepts of the understanding were brought to bear on the sensible manifold through the mediation of the pure forms of intuition. In both cases, these 'pure' forms of intuition were transcendental elements of human knowledge.[70]

Kant had yoked his intuitionism to the most advanced geometry and physics of his time. However, fundamental challenges to those disciplines arose in Germany and Britain during the second half of the nineteenth century. Beginning in the first decades of that century, with a series of mathematical proofs showing that Euclid's fifth postulate was not deducible from the other four (and that it was not provable at all), mathematicians gradually converged on the view that the axioms of geometry could be constructed in alternate configurations, while still remaining empirically consequential. From this basis, many concluded that Euclidean geometry was one among *many* that could be applied to the natural world, severing its tie to a transcendental psychology. David Hilbert's *Foundations of Geometry* (1899), moreover, offered perhaps the most serious blow to that psychology in providing a full axiomatization of Euclidean geometry in

[70] My understanding of the developments outlined in this and the next paragraph is derived from the following sources: Michael Friedman and Alfred Nordmann eds., *The Kantian Legacy in Nineteenth-Century Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006); Alan Richardson and Thomas Uebel eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Logical Empiricism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Hans Reichenbach, *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963, 1951); Joel Isaac, *Working Knowledge: Making the Human Sciences from Parsons to Kuhn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 16-22; Ronald N Giere and Alan W. Richardson, *Origins of Logical Empiricism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

purely deductive and abstract terms, which had meaning only within the economy of the axioms themselves. Multiple, non-Euclidean geometries could now be applied based on the meanings of the axioms within an abstract, man-made system.[71] Even more significantly, Einstein's relativity theory showed that these multiple geometries had potential application to the representation of space and time itself. The transcendental basis of both geometry and physics henceforth became a contingent matter of non-intuitive arithmetic, rather than a timeless fact of human understanding.

Further work by the Jena based philosopher and mathematician, Gottlob Frege, attempted to show that even mathematics itself could be reduced to pure logic, the status of which became paramount in demonstrating that knowledge could be put on a purely formal basis.[72] This work provided the foundation for Frege's famous essay, "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry" (1918), one of the founding texts of analytic philosophy. In that essay, Frege fleshed out the implications of his "Begriffsschrift" in putting logic in a platonic realm distinct from both individual sensations and the physical world itself. For Frege, the importance of logic was in establishing *truth* as the basis of objective science. However, truth was not defined as correspondence between an idea and its object. In fact, truth was not a relational property at all. For if truth is to be perfect, then two distinct things must coincide exactly, which would collapse the distinction between them altogether. The use of the word 'true,' then, should "contain[s] no reference to anything else to which something must correspond."[73] Rather, truth is something asked of *sentences* describing certain states of affairs. Sentences containing 'senses', in turn, express

[71] David Hilbert, *Foundations of Geometry* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1902).
[72] Gottlob Frege, "Begriffsschrift: A Formula Language, Modeled on That of Arithmetic, For Pure Thought," in Jean Van Heijenoort ed., *From Frege to Gödel: A Sourcebook in Mathematical Logic, 1879-1931* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 1-82;
[73] Gottlob Frege, "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry," *Mind* 65 no. 259 (1956): 291.

Thoughts, which are either true or false. “The thought is the sense of the sentence without wishing to say as well that the sense of every sentence is a thought. The thought, in itself immaterial, clothes itself in the material garment of a sentence and thereby becomes comprehensible to us. We say a sentence expresses a thought.” Frege was no traditional empiricist. But he helped to inaugurate one of the founding projects of analytic philosophy: translating experience to the realm of sentential logic, prompting a profoundly “linguistic turn” in Anglo-American philosophy.

“The Thought” also established the resolutely *anti-psychological* basis of early linguistic analysis. For Frege, Thoughts were distinct from what he called ‘ideas’, or the “content of my consciousness.” “Ideas cannot be seen or touched, cannot be smelled, nor, tasted, nor heard.” Moreover, ideas have bearers, and cannot be shared with others. It was in this sense that Thoughts, rather than ideas, contained truth values. I may see the same green rose as you, but there is no sense in speaking of the truth of *my* green rose and *yours*. Ideas have only one bearer, but the Thoughts expressed in sentences are objects in their own right, which form the basis of shared knowledge. Truth and knowledge, on this view, were not psychological matters at all, and in fact the question of skepticism that could arise from its basis would only undermine the basis of shared communication. “I am not my own idea and if I assert something about myself, *e.g.* that I do not feel any pain at this moment, then my judgement concerns something which is not a content of my consciousness, is not my idea, that is me myself. Therefore that about which I state something is not necessarily my idea. I have an idea of myself but I am not identical with this idea.”[74] Continuing in the tradition of formalization, Frege had set an important precedent in

[74] Ibid., 305-6.

early analytic philosophy in eliminating the psychological in favor of language and its logical functions.

The Viennese and Cambridge philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein built on Frege's anti-psychologism while ignoring his strictures against a correspondence theory of truth. In the *Tractatus Logicus Philosophicus* (1922), Wittgenstein urged that knowledge was tantamount to the truth-functional composition of elementary propositions that "pictured" the facts of the world. While Wittgenstein was ambiguous about how exactly that "picturing" occurred, it was clear that the basic elements composing propositions were empirically verified by experience. The propositions that pictured states of the world, however, were tautologies, which is the paradox Wittgenstein introduced in justifying his "picture theory" of meaning. The exact nature of how language "mapped onto" the world could not be *said* in that same language, but only *shown*. "The world is *my* world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of *language* (of that language which I alone understand) mean the limits of *my* world."[75] Importantly, this also meant that anything like Kant's transcendental psychology could not meaningfully be identified *in* the world, for it was co-extensive with the language that marked its boundaries. "The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world."[76]

If logic and language underwrote this new view of the world and its dissolution of the metaphysical self, moreover, it was also supported by new developments in empirical psychology. Physiological psychology, which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century in the work of Ernst Mach and Hermann von Helmholtz, had advanced the claim that the world was composed solely of material substance, and that the self was an illusion derived from

[75] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuiness. (London: Routledge Classics, 2001, 1922), 69.
[76] Ibid., 70.

associations connecting its discrete parts. Mach's *The Analysis of Sensations* (1899) urged the view that empirical experience *tout court* was composed of elementary sensations that provided the illusion of an ego-like substance only through their regularity and continuity. "The apparent permanency of the ego consists chiefly in the single fact of its continuity, in the slowness of its changes."[77] Inspired by Wittgenstein and Mach alike, one of the founding members of the Vienna Circle, Rudolph Carnap, built on these insights in his *Der Logische Aufbau der Welt* (1928) in claiming that the "given" of experience "does not have a subject" and that knowledge of that given was apprehended in the logical deductions of its architecture.[78]

Carnap was paramount in introducing the methods and issues of logical empiricism to American philosophers.[79] But in a broader way his anti-psychological austerity had been prefigured in a larger turn toward Darwinian evolution at the end of the nineteenth century in which politics, aesthetics, and philosophy were united under the more holistic metaphor of "experience." For the American philosopher William James, works like Mach's *Analysis* had shown how traditional notions of the self and consciousness could be replaced by the naturalistic metaphor of the organism's experience in the environment. There is "no aboriginal stuff or quality of being, contrasted with that of which material objects are made, out of which our thoughts of them are made; but there is a function in *experience* which thoughts perform."[80] Thoughts, as functions of experience, tipped the balance of narrative description in favor of the

[77] Ernst Mach, *The Analysis of Sensations and the Relation of the Physical to the Psychical*, trans C.M. Williams. (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1914), 3.
[78] Rudolph Carnap, *The Logical Structure of the World and Pseudoproblems in Philosophy*, trans. Rolf A George. (Chicago: Open Court, 2003, 1928), 103.
[79] Isaac, *Working Knowledge*, 125-157.
[80] William James, "Does Consciousness Exist?," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods* 1 no. 18 (1904): 478.

third person, a perspective that many artists breaking from abstract expressionism would embrace by the 1960s.

This line of thought had linked philosophy and art under the guise of naturalism since the beginning of the twentieth century. As James Livingston has argued of fin de siècle American literature, for example, realist novels like Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) combined the literary tropes of naturalist-realism with the narrative form of romance, to reflect the *theatricality* of a subjectivity bound by the new regime of corporate capitalism; Victorian interiority was subsumed by the impersonal metaphor of cultural "experience." Echoing James, for Livingston "the finished characters posited by realism became problematic if not *unintelligible*. The rediscovery of romance-the literary form in which the line between self and society cannot clearly be drawn-accordingly became possible, and perhaps necessary."[81] As an aesthetic sensibility, the anti-intentional metaphors of naturalism became a fundamental part of literary modernism for authors as diverse as Gertrude Stein and James Joyce. As Joyce's Stephen Dedalus remarked of the archetypal modernist in *The Portrait of the Artists as a Young Man* (1916) "the personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalises itself, so to speak."[82]

By the early 1960s, however, the impulse to censor the self had become a full-blown mantra for artists working in the wake of abstract expressionism. Artists as diverse as Andy Warhol, Robert Morris, Alan Kaprow, and, in particular, John Cage, took that imperative, and

[81] James Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 132. Emphasis mine.
[82] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: W.B. Huebsch, 1916), 256.

demoted the centrality of sensory impressions alone to understanding art, which they believed had created an artificial divide between art and life.

Naturalism and the Break from High Modernism

If more 'scientific' variants of naturalism had become entrenched within academic circles during the 1930s and 40s, a more "experiential" variant was making firm inroads with American artists looking to break from Abstract Expressionism by the late 1950s. Artists during this period began to challenge the inherently dualistic assumptions on which abstract expressionist painting and criticism rested—artists were removed from critics, audience from artist, and work from environment. Moreover, many American artists by the mid to late-1950s sought to question the inherently individualistic expressionism that abstract painting had come to represent, as well as the style's increasing appropriation as a symbol of corporate power and imperialist values. The artist from whom much of those critical impulses were taken was the composer John Cage who, more than any other figure, introduced a more holistic and "experiential" variant of naturalism to the Avant-Garde in an unlikely pairing of Deweyan pragmatism and Zen Buddhism.

In 1952, Cage had shocked the artworld at a performance in Woodstock, NY, when his pianist David Tudor sat down to perform the piece *4'33".* With Cage's score in front of him, Tudor sat at the piano for precisely four minutes and forty-three seconds, without touching the keys. For Cage, the piece was not meant to be pure silence, but for the audience to reach a state of awareness of the sounds in the hall itself, obliterating the distinction between traditional music and pure sound.

> Sounds occur whether intended or not, [and] one turns in the direction of those he does not intend. This turning is psychological and seems at first to be a giving up of everything that belongs to humanity-for a musician, the giving up of music. This psychological turning leads to the world of nature, where, gradually or suddenly, one sees that humanity and nature, not separate, are in this world together; that nothing was lost when everything was given away. In fact, everything is gained. In musical terms, any sounds may occur in any combination and in any continuity.[83]

Cage approached music as a way of bridging the gap between art and life and, like his scientific-naturalist counterparts, viewed the ego as a hindrance to the pure experience of sound in the environment. Writing music was "an affirmation of life-not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's *mind* and one's *desires out of its way* and lets it act of its own accord."[84] Much of Cage's "anti-intentionality" would resonate with artists during the late 1950s and 1960s in his classes on "experimental composition" at the New School in New York City. Running from 1955-1961, these classes were attended by many of the most important figures of the New York art world then emerging to challenge Abstract-Expressionism's hegemony, including George Brecht, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, George MacLow, and Allan Kaprow. In his attempt to break the hold of ego-centricity, Cage exposed his students to the experiments of the European Dadaists, who had recently been introduced to New York artists via Robert Motherwell's *Dada Painters and Poets* (1951). In the same spirit, he de-emphasized the hierarchy of artistic performance in teaching the French poet Antonin Artaud's *The Theater and its Double*, which had recently been translated into English in 1958.[85] This led

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[83] John Cage, "Experimental Music," in idem., *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 8. Emphasis mine.
[84] Ibid., 12.
[85] Barbara Haskell, *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance, 1958-1964* (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1984), 32.

many of these artists to undermine the modernist imperative of medium specificity and hierarchy, which generated works in radically discontinuous forms with no sense that any one medium was a closer approximation of "ART" than another.

Significantly, Cage also encouraged his students to relinquish ego-centered "control" over art through the teachings of Zen Buddhism. Cage had been exposed to Zen through the seminars of the Japanese ex-patriot and Zen-master D.T. Suzuki. As part of a grant from the Rockefeller corporation, Suzuki taught seminars on Zen at Columbia University from 1952 to 1958, which were attended by several prominent mid-century American artists and intellectuals. Along with Cage, its participants included the prominent psychoanalysts Erich Fromm and Karen Horney, as well as the artists Ad Reinhardt and Phillip Guston. In those classes, Suzuki stressed the impossibility of understanding the world through dualistic thinking and the illusions created by Western conceptions of reason.[86] This had a profound impact on Cage's view of music, leading him to a spiritual revelation in which chance, indeterminacy and noise became part of integrating art with life, self and world. As his student Allan Kaprow recalled of his time in Cage's class, "Attitudes about such things as being the boss, being in control, having others follow my will, making art as a contest between my creative powers and the imperfection in the world…all of these unquestioned assumptions and attitudes that we ordinarily put up with in the West were questioned very openly by Cage's study of Zen and in what he taught in the class and what he seemed to exemplify as an artist."[87] Through Zen, the larger stream of experience that

[86] Ellen Pearlman, *Nothing and Everything: The Influence of Buddhism on the American Avant-Garde, 1942-1962* (Berkeley: Evolver Editions, 2012), 14-16.
[87] Allan Kaprow, "Cage's Influence: A Panel Discussion," in David W. Bernstein and Christopher Hatch eds., *Writings Through John Cage's Music, Poetry, and Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 172.

dissolved the boundary between self and world in turn of the century naturalist thought continued at mid-century in avant-garde circles.

Just down the hall from the philosophy department, Danto also attended Suzuki's seminars. Danto had little familiarity with Asian cultures before a Fulbright year in Paris between his M.A. and PhD, where he had purchased an austere, Japanese print, which resonated with his own artistic practice. Moved by the print, Danto returned to New York and began to read widely in Japanese and Chinese philosophy, especially the parables of the meticulous Chinese butcher Chuang Tzu. In his readings of Chinese and Japanese texts, he was enamored by the "knowing effortlessness in which the object and the agent collaborate to achieve a mutual fulfillment. The beauty of Zen was that there were no sacred texts and no special practices. One could practice it as a writer or a painter, but also as a butcher or a wheelwright…or in motorcycle maintenance. This idea had great appeal for me; it was a way of being religious without adhering to an official religion."[88] The appeal, however, was not simply a means by which to achieve a certain mindset without religious dogma, but rather, for Danto, an underwriting of his work as fledgling analyst.

Suzuki's seminars reinforced a unique affinity between Zen and analytic philosophy. As he recalled later in life, "I had become an analytical philosopher, and philosophical analysis seemed almost to confirm the ideas of Zen for me, in the sense that one felt that problems should somehow solve themselves, once one perceived their logical structure."[89] The language of problems 'solving themselves', much like his "pictures without thoughts," betrayed the sense in which Danto had inherited the strictures on a substantive ego generated by the clarity of

[88] Danto, "Upper West Side Buddhism," in Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacobs eds., *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004), 51.
[89] Ibid.

propositional logic. Echoing Frege and the early Wittgenstein, discerning the logical structure of thought was a matter seemingly irrelevant to personal psychology and its interaction with the world. In a letter to his friend and Chinese polymath Chi'ang Yee in 1969, Danto described the teachings of the Japanese poet Matsuo Basho along these lines. The clarity attained in enlightenment, which Danto equated with logic, meant that "one transcends reality precisely by remaining in it: which is a deep teaching of Zen; and reality, all the while remaining what it is, is spiritualized and intensified, rotated back on itself through some special dimension."[90] More significantly, in the same letter Danto conveyed how Basho's teachings resonated with his own desires to attain a loss of self through enlightenment, as "artistic nirvana." "There is only one artistic nirvana, but very many paths to reach it by, and one may arrive only on one's own path, so each must eke but his own artistic salvation, though salvation is the same for all. So one's own person is logically co-implicated in the attainment of an art which *extruded individuality* completely."[91] The presumptions of unmediated clarity common to logic and Zen Buddhism alike gave rise to the imperative of self-erasure through revealing the fundamental structure of reality. True artistic nirvana required giving up the authority of authorship.

This non-dualistic austerity, as it was promoted by Suzuki and Cage, however, was filtered for the post-war avant-garde through the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey. Cage periodically taught at the experimental Black Mountain College in Asheville, North Carolina during the 1940s and 50s. Founded in 1933 by John Andrew Rice, Theodore Dreier, and Frederick Georgia, Black Mountain's guiding mission was based on Dewey's progressive principles of education, specifically the belief that experiential and participatory learning were

[90] Arthur C. Danto to Chiang Yee, July 6, 1969. ACD Papers, Box 11, Folder 16, Series 1.
[91] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

indispensable to educating democratic citizens. By 1934, Dewey had become a board member at Black Mountain, coinciding with the publication of his canonical work on aesthetics, *Art as Experience*. In that book, Dewey lamented that the arts in the Western, industrialized world had become reified as a domain of experience for cultivated "experts" and detached critics. Severed from the conditions of everyday life that created and engendered shared experiences of significant meaning, Western culture had come to idealize "esthetic" experience by relegating it to the realm of specific objects, forms of presentation, and hallowed precincts. By contrast, for Dewey "esthetic" experiences were a fundamental part of shared human life that was not, *a priori*, tethered to any specific objects or institutions. The aesthetic qualities of ordinary life formed the basis for our appreciation of art as such, and so the distinction between high and low forms of art, art and everyday life, was contingent and unnecessary. As such, art was a cognitively significant human affair because it played a fundamental role in the shared realms of human meaning.[92]

Danto was not particularly sympathetic to Deweyan pragmatism. After teaching a course on American philosophy to high-school teachers at Bennington college in 1960, he wrote to his colleague James Guttman stating that teaching Dewey, "whom I am trying to treat as sympathetically as I can, requires effort."[93] For Danto, Dewey represented a staid relic of both his department and American philosophy's benighted past.[94] During his graduate training, it was only his advisor Ernest Nagel who appeared to be sufficiently rigorous to keep pace with the

[92] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Penguin, 2005, 1934). On Dewey's intellectual development and hos relationship to democratic thought, see Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). C.f. Purcell, *The Crisis of Democratic Theory*.
[93] Arthur C. Danto to James Guttman, July 27, 1960. James Guttman Papers, Box 1, Series 1, Folder 8, Columbia University.
[94] Arthur C. Danto, "Hayden White and Me: Two Systems of Philosophy of History," in Robert Doran ed., *Philosophy of History After Hayden White* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 110.

'scientific' approach of analysis. Crucially, Nagel, along with the University of Chicago's Charles Morris, was an important intermediary between Dewey and the Logical Empiricists, finding in their work a common commitment to the scientific method and a sober-minded empiricism.[95] For Danto, the overly-psychological metaphysics of Dewey's theories of "experience" was rightly superseded by the austerity of scientific philosophy. For artists working in the wake of abstract expressionism, however, Cage became a medium between Dewey's anti-aesthetic impulses and the anti-psychological austerity of early analytic philosophy, mirrored in the form of Zen Buddhism.

At Black Mountain, Dewey's aesthetic naturalism made firmer inroads. The democratic imperative of the college's contemporary art program soon became that of bridging the divide between self and world. As he wrote in *Art as Experience*, "the uniquely distinguishing feature of esthetic experience is exactly the fact that no such distinction between self and object exists in it, since it is esthetic in the degree in which organism and environment cooperate to institute an experience in which the two are so fully integrated that each disappears."[96] As a driving philosophical inspiration, the students and faculty at Black Mountain took this injunction and ran with it. As many of its members migrated to New York and sought to make their artistic voices heard during the 1950s, Deweyan Pragmatism and Cagean Buddhism gave young American artists a language through which a more holistic version of naturalism could speak to the pretense of aesthetic formalism. [97]

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[95] Andrew Jewett, "Canonizing Dewey: Naturalism, Logical Empiricism, and the Idea of American Philosophy," *Modern Intellectual History* 8 no. 1 (2011): 91-125; Daniel J. Wilson, *Science, Community, and the Transformation of American Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), chp. 7.
[96] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 259.
[97] For Dewey's influence on Cage and Black Mountain College, see James M. Harding, *The Ghosts of the Avant-Garde(s): Exorcising Experimental Theater and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 67-69. On Black Mountain College more generally, see Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge: MIT Press,2002). On Cage as a descendent of a broader, "non-dualistic" Avant-Garde in the United

Much of the art and criticism that emerged between 1958 and 1964 took advantage of that language, if only indirectly. And again, Cage had provided the example. In the Fall of 1952, the same year as *4'33"*, Cage stood at the top of a ladder in a Black Mountain auditorium, lecturing to an audience of experimental artists and writers. Just above him, Rauschenberg's "White Paintings" hung suspended at various angles from the ceiling. Between the deliberate silences in Cage's lecture, imposed to engender an awareness of sound as such, the poets Charles Olson and M.C. Richards took turns ascending and descending another ladder. At other intervals, Rauschenberg intermittently played an antique, horn-bowed phonograph situated next to a dog. David Tudor played piano. The experimental choreographer Merce Cunningham led a group of dancers through and around the audience. Arranged by Cage, the performance was an attempt to "eliminate central focus." More importantly, however, it was an offering of the experience and flux of life itself as art, rather than a singular object for passive aesthetic contemplation.[98]

Between 1955 and 1964, Cage's efforts to undermine the divide between art and life had become the central mission of artists seeking to break from the restrictions of abstract-expressionism. Artists like Rauschenberg, Kaprow, Red Grooms, Claes Oldenburg, Martha Jackson, and Jim Dine began incorporating 'found' objects from their environment—often found in the trash—in works that transcended the boundaries between painting and sculpture. Unlike their Dada and Surrealist predecessors, however, these 'assemblage' artists eschewed the referential associations of their objects and simply presented them as they were—industrial debris, discarded household items, taxidermized animals, beds. In Rauschenberg's *Bed* (1955),

States, see Christopher Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998); and George J. Leonard, *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[98] John Cage, Michael Kirby, and Schechner, "An Interview with John Cage," *The Tulane Drama Review* 10 no.4 (1965): 52-3.

for example, the artist took a well-worn pillow, sheet, and quilt, and used it as a canvas on which he haphazardly splashed paint. Others such as Jasper Johns questioned the boundaries between art and life on a distinctly ontological level in his incorporation of flags, numerals, and targets into his paintings. Numerals, like flags and targets, were both part of these paintings and distinct entities themselves. Johns's *Numbers in Color* paintings (1958-59), for example, suggested that the numerals in the paintings were both part of the painting and distinct entities whose ontological status was insuperable from their representation--one could not create a "picture" of a numeral without also creating a numeral itself. When the work of Johns, Dine, Kaprow, Rauschenburg and others was displayed at the "New Media-New Forms" exhibition in 1960 at the Martha Jackson Gallery, it was clear that the canvas, paint, and traditional sculpture had been infected by the ordinary conditions of experience; art and life were merging.[99]

For Kaprow, a devoted student of Cage and deeply influenced by Dewey, the 'ordinary', as an injunction to bridge the gap between art and life, had become almost an imperative for modern artists. "Young artists of today need no longer say, 'I am a painter' or 'a poet' or 'a dancer.' They are simply 'artists.' All of life will be open to them. They will discover out of ordinary things the meaning of ordinariness. They will not try to make them extraordinary but will only state their real meaning. But out of nothing they will devise the extraordinary and then maybe nothingness as well."[100] Artists of the 1950s and 60s took the "experiential" naturalism introduced by Dewey and promoted by Cage as a call to make art that neutralized meanings attached to aesthetic superlatives. Rather, the 'stream of experience,' what James described as "radical empiricism," made collapsing the boundaries between art and life the basis for artistic

[99] Haskell, *BLAM!*, 15-29.
[100] Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," in idem. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 9.

practice, rather than hierarchical conceptions of meaning, separation of medium, or, importantly, ego-centered control.

Taking off from Cage's 1952 Black Mountain performance, Kaprow deemed his embodiments of that philosophy "Happenings." His 1958 "Happening" at New York's Hansa Gallery, for example, called for his performers to execute arbitrary tasks simultaneously: jumping through props made from lumber and plastic sheets, rattling various noisemakers inside chicken coops, and group painting. Kaprow's *18 Happenings in Six Parts* (1959) divided the gallery into three sections with translucent sheets of plastic while performers variously bounced balls, played records, read from placards, and moved their bodies while programmed sequences of lights flickered on and off.[101] Kaprow described these performances as "events that, put simply, happen. Though the best of them have a decided impact—that is, we feel, 'here is something important'—they appear to go nowhere and do not make any particular literary point. In contrast to the arts of the past, they have no structured beginning, middle, or end. Their form is open-ended and fluid; nothing obvious is sought and therefore nothing is won, except the certainty of a number of occurrences to which we are more than normally attentive."[102] Ordinariness, in the form of 'indeterminacy,' 'non-meaning' and 'anti-intentionality,' became a defining condition for much of the avant-garde that followed in the wake of Assemblage and Kaprow's "Happenings," including the more extreme experiments of the Fluxus group, the Minimalist works of Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt, Donald Judd, and Carl Andre, and the Pop Art of Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, and Roy Lichtenstein.

[101] Haskell, *Blam!*, 32.
[102] Kaprow, "Happenings in the New York Scene," in idem, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 16.

Diverse as these artists were, their work represented more than simply a break from abstract expressionism. In their earnest desire to break the divide between art and life, they fundamentally redefined the terms artistic analysis and production in the wake of abstract expressionism. Rauschenberg's "Bed" (1955), for example, was an artwork. But it was not meant to be *about* something outside itself; simply put, it was a bed. Art critics during the 1960s were quick to point out the thorny issues raised by this sort of conceptualism, particularly as it related to meaning and intentionality. For the critics Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, the "Dematerialization of Art" was conceptual art's defining condition, which meant that *ideas* became more important than presented material objects. To that end, the concepts it evoked were not necessarily complex but, rather, attempts to infuse art works with the ordinary conditions of the work's possibility in experience. "The 'thinness,' both literal and allusive, of such themes [in conceptual art] as water, steam, dust, flatness, legibility, temporality, continues the process of ridding art of its object quality."[103] In his essay "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967), the artist Sol Lewitt emphasized the point in making the *simplicity* of conceptual art's ideas central. "In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work…[but] "Conceptual art doesn't really have much to do with mathematics, philosophy, or any other mental discipline. The mathematics used by most artists is simple arithmetic or simple number systems. The philosophy of the work is implicit in the work and is not an illustration of any system of philosophy."[104]

For other artists, however, the 'simplicity' of conceptual art was part of a larger existential collapse of the viewer and the work, philosophical all itself. Robert Morris, whose

[103] Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Art International* 12 (1968): 34.
[104] Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5 no. 10 (1967): 80.

works included many bare, sparsely geometrical shapes, as well as *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961), a frame in the shape of the letter 'I' containing a nude picture of himself, believed that minimal sculpture reduced the number of 'relationships' in a work to create a unified 'gestalt' obviating the dualistic structure of traditional "viewing." "Characteristic of a gestalt is that once it is established, all the information about it, qua gestalt, is exhausted. (One does not, for example, seek the gestalt of a gestalt.) Furthermore, once it is established, it does not disintegrate. One is then both free of the shape and bound to it. Free or released because of the exhaustion of information about it, as shape, and bound to it because it remains constant and indivisible."[105] In other words, the best new work for Morris sought to obliterate the duality of the traditional "viewer-viewed" relationship in favor of an indexical stream of experience in which "one's awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work took precedence over the psychological or normative dimensions associated with 'content'."[106] Referring to Abstract Expressionism and formalist criticism, Morris believed that "what is antique about it is the divisiveness of experience that marks on a 'flat surface elicit." Echoing Cage and Dewey, such divisiveness "is not acceptable to an empirical and pragmatic outlook."[107]

Morris's conflation of the empirical and pragmatic outlook was reflective of the self-effacing attitude that marked the transition away from high modernism. As Lippard and Chandler observed, conceptual artists presented themselves as "aloof," the art embodying a certain "hermeticism of one kind or another…as an incommunicative blank façade or excessive

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[105] Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 1," in idem., *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge: MIT Press,1993), 7-8. Originally published as "Notes on Sculpture," *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (1966): 42-44].

[106] Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2," in idem., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, 15. Originally published as "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2," *Artforum* 5 no. 2 (1966): 20-23.

[107] Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 3: Notes and Non-Sequiturs," in idem., *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, 26. Originally published as "Notes on Sculpture, Part 3: Notes and Non-Sequiturs," *Artforum* 5 no. 10 (1967): 24-29.

duration" seemingly resisting interpretation."[108] But as Cage had urged, the blank façade was the basic condition of existence in which both artwork and viewer were mutually entwined; it was *meant* to resist interpretation, and hence to evade the authority of its creator. Such an austere conception was especially true of minimalist sculpture. Reviewing the minimalist show, "Black, White, and Gray" in 1964, *Artnews* critic Samuel Wagstaff remarked that "Much of it seems sparse, pared down to a minimum; much of it is conceptual, idea art, as opposed to the retinal or visceral. In this respect one thinks of Cage's 'music to be seen…Painting and sculpture of this nature often seems to be an idea made manifest." [109] Aesthetics had become irrelevant in the face of so-called 'idea art.'

Following in the lead of Rauschenberg, Kaprow, Fluxus, and Pop Art, minimalist artists often used austere geometric shapes and serially organized patterns rather than traditional sculptures or paintings. Critics, however, found that the austerity of such patterns seemed deliberately opposed to traditional modes of interpretation in order to evade the authority of its creator. Describing the painting of Frank Stella, Wagstaff wrote, "You cannot get into the canvas, nor can you read anything into it. Stella seems to have backed out leaving no trace of personal handwriting." Likewise, for the critic E.C. Goosen, the work of conceptual artists such as Carl Andre, Walter Darby Bannard, and Robert Barry "reject[ed] personal mannerisms and seek[s] intentional anonymity. In doing so they also reject romantic egoism."[110] For critics, this rejection of egoism and the embrace of anonymity was equally true of Pop artists like Danto's philosophical inspiration, Andy Warhol. For the critic Paul Bergin, Warhol's serial productions

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[108] Lippard and Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," 34.
[109] Samuel J. Wagstaff, "Paintings to Think About," *ARTnews* 69 no. 9 (1964): 33.
[110] E.C. Goosen, "8 Young Artists," Catalog Exhibition for *8 Young Artists: Carl Andre, Walter Darby Bannard, Robert Barry, Robert Huot, Patricia Johanson, Antoni Milikowski, Douglas Ohlson, Terrence Syverson* (Yonkers: Hudson River Museum, 1964).

of images such as Marilyn Monroe or Campbell's soup cans was "art stripped of personality and emotion and concerned only with the image, the obvious.[111] As Warhol himself had claimed in an interview just a year later, the personal idiosyncrasies associated with the effort of the artist, and indeed human effort *tout court* should be replaced: "human effort is too hard."[112] Or, as Danto had claimed of the machinery of modern logic, it allowed problems to "solve themselves."

Rejecting egoism was part of a larger emphasis on the austerity of empirical experience as a fundamental condition of art making for artists working in the wake of abstraction. Evading one's authorial presence became a means to erasing traditional conceptions of technique or expressionism in art. This often took the form of presenting what seemed to be a profound significance in the bare, necessary facts of experience. For critic George Swenson, "Frank Stella's paintings are facts. The simplicity of color and form convince us of the absolute and factual nature of the work...If we turn away to ponder *that simple thing* as concept, then when we turn to it again, we will find its factual existence has unexpectedly changed—it has become almost absurdly absolute, and in a way we could not previously imagine. These are necessary paintings, perfect facts."[113] Indeed, Danto had used language remarkably similar in his first attempt to explain the philosophical significance of works of art that looked indistinguishable from their counterparts in ordinary life, such as Warhol's "Brillo Box." What distinguished the former from the latter was that, as minimalist artists had been implicitly urging, the ordinary conditions of experience were incorporated into a theory of what gave works of art a distinctive ontological identity. Significantly, he drew from a parable of the Chinese Zen master Ch'ing Yuan to illustrate this point:

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[111] Paul Bergin, "Andy Warhol: The Artist as Machine," *Art Journal* 26 no.4 (Summer, 1967): 359.
[112] Gerard Malanga, "Andy Warhol on Automation: An Interview," *Chelsea* (1968): 84.
[113] George Swenson, "Reviews and Previews, *ARTnews* 62 no. 10 (1964): 11.

> Before I had studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains and waters as waters. When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains and waters are not waters. But now that I have got the very substance I am at rest. For it just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and waters once again as waters.[114]

Eschewing the referential associations associated with facts, and returning to them again to appreciate their utter necessity became a common frame of reference for American followers of Zen, analytic philosophers, and painters like Frank Stella. In this sense, Danto's use of Zen to illustrate the ordinary as a condition of contemporary art was indicative of just how closed the discursive orbit of art, criticism, and philosophy had become by the mid-1960s in its embrace of philosophical naturalism.

This was particularly true in the case of minimalist and conceptual artists. As the language of critics describing conceptual art began to converge on the significance of empirical austerity, for example, their conceptual frame began to closely resemble scientific philosophers like Wittgenstein and Carnap in their emphasis on necessity, facts, and propositions. By 1963, *ARTnews* critic Jill Johnson could thus claim of Morris's work that it "exhibits object-constructions which are meticulous plastic realizations of some *primary facts of existence*."[115] Likewise, Barbara Rose found much in Morris works to confirm Johnson's estimation. "The artist, behind the pink door of the 'I' box is happy to expose himself, but his smile is impersonal, and, finally, he gives away nothing…This complete impersonality, a kind of making of equations or *equalizing of all that is physical or mental*, pretends to give the secret of being and yields nothingness."[116] In this important sense, the necessity of simple facts embodied in an austere,

[114] Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy* 61 no.19 (1964): 579.
[115] Jill Johnson, "Reviews and Previews," *ARTnews* 62 no. 6 (1963): 14. Emphasis mine.
[116] Barbara Rose, "New York Minute," *Art International* 7 no. 9 (1963): 64. Emphasis mine.

reduced medium became a pivotal point at which the language of experiential and scientific naturalists began to merge. If the holistic imperatives of Dewey provided the spirit, the scientific metaphors of Carnap and Wittgenstein increasingly provided the justification-- self and world were neutralized to the simplest organization of empirical facts.

The justification, however, was not merely coincidental. In an article titled "The Serial Attitude," (1967) the conceptual artist Mel Bochner had referenced the work of Wittgenstein, the linguist Joesph Greenberg, and the American philosopher Josiah Royce's *Principles of Logic* in connection with the closed-system, pattern oriented work common to conceptual artists such as Morris, LeWitt, and Donald Judd.[117] "If Jasper Johns's notebooks seem a parody of Wittgenstein, then Judd's and Morris's sculptures often look like illustrations of that philosopher's propositions."[118] The conceptual artist Joesph Kosuth posited such a connection more explicitly in his essay "Art After Philosophy." Using the example of Marcel Duchamp, Kosuth argued that his work represented the beginning of a moment in Western art where it had moved beyond its status as object and became a comment on its own status. Such a move, Kosuth argued in "Art After Philosophy" (1969), was tantamount to positing art works as analytic propositions. "That is, if viewed within their context—as art—they provide no information whatsoever about any matter of fact. A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist's intention, that is, he is saying that that particular work of art is art, which means, is a *definition* of art."[119] In other words, artworks, like propositions, were true by

[117] Mel Bochner, "The Serial Attitude," *Artforum* 6 no. 4 (1967): 28-33.
[118] Barbara Rose, "A B C Art," in Gregory Battcock ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 291. Originally published in *Art in America* 53 no. 5 (1965): 57-69.
[119]Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy," in idem., *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 20.

virtue of their meaning alone, their *being* an artwork through the artist's offering of her work as a particular definition or instance of art.

By the 1960s, after giving up on his own art, Danto had achieved arguably the most radical form of that proposition in claiming that, consistent with the art of his time, his own philosophy became art. If the conceptual turn in art meant that artworks could be anything, then the lines between art and its philosophy were blurry at best. By the end of the 60s, Danto had seized on this collapse. "By bringing within itself what it had traditionally been regarded as logically apart from, art transforms itself into philosophy, in effect. The distinction between philosophy of art and art itself is no longer tenable, and by a curious, astounding magic we have been made over into contributors to a field we had always believed it our task merely to analyze from without."[120] Renouncing the egocentricity of artistic production by giving up art completely, then, was more than consistent with the art of the 1960s. As he was developing his second major statement on art, "a philosophical reflection on New York art from circa 1961 to circa 1969," it dawned on Danto that the paper "is part of its own subject, since it becomes an art-work at the end. Perhaps the final creation in the period it treats of. Perhaps the final work in the history of art!"[121] Danto may have given up his career as a practicing artist. But he was in lock step with the imperatives of the New York artworld in blurring the boundary between art and ideas, a hallmark of the emergence of contemporary art.

[120] Arthur C. Danto, "Artworks and Real Things, Draft," March, 1971, 23. ACD Papers, Box 1, Folder 28, series I.
[121] Ibid., 1.

Conclusion

By the mid-1960s, American artists working in the wake of abstract expressionism had replaced the mandate of authorial presence with the world itself. That is, in their early attempts to bridge the gap between art and life, they deliberately instigated a move against an artistic paradigm that put the artist on one side of a remove, and his art object on the other. But that move did not occur in a vacuum. As this chapter has shown, it was part of a larger imperative of naturalism in American thought that began during the late nineteenth century, and that was rejuvenated by World War II. That imperative--to deny the centrality of psychology and interiority in favor of empirical experience—was common to philosophy and art alike. But it culminated during the mid-1960s when artists and critics began to redefine the terms of artistic analysis once the primacy of both authorship, and sensory impressions alone, were demoted in the artistic hierarchy. As early as 1962 Danto could see that this development seemed to render his own authorship as an artist irrelevant. Artists had raised art to the level of philosophy by questioning the relationship of art to life. Once he began to pose that question in explicitly formal terms, he set on the path of finding a definition of art that could accommodate the fact that, as the radical experiments of the 1960s had shown, anything could be a work of art.

Curbing the "Erotics" of Art: Artworks, Real Things, and the Demotion of the Senses

What is needed, first, is more attention to form in art.-
Susan Sontag-1964.[122]

As Danto settled into his role as a full-time philosopher, the subject of art proved to be the most demanding of his energies. Danto had even flirted with the notion that there was no reason, in principle, why the philosophy of art could not be considered art itself. But what seemed perhaps the most oblique, and at the same time philosophically significant development of post-abstract art was the introduction of ordinary objects as works of art. The commonplace things of a fragile postwar stability—beds, ties, supermarket items, comic books—had miraculously become fodder for serious art critics.

Since the late 1950s, Danto had come to wonder how the precious ephemera of the mundane—a mug for morning coffee, a suit for a board meeting, a lamp for nighttime reading—came to rest in museums of fine art. What, he wondered, made the difference between the lamp on the pedestal at the MOMA and the identical lamp on a domestic nightstand? In 1964 he began to formulate more substantive philosophical answers. In his first and most enduring essay on art, "The Artworld," Danto boldly proclaimed that artworks were not something you *see*, at least not as part of their definition. The "ties" of avant-garde artists like Jim Dine and the "Brillo Boxes" of Andy Warhol were just that--ties and Brillo Boxes. What made them *artworks* was "something the eye cannot descry—an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history

[122] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Picador, 1962): 12.

of art: an artworld."[123] Rather than something delivered to the senses, art was, rather, a uniquely human *concept*, one tied to its history, and to the history of its discourse.

"The Artworld" itself, however, reflected a broader moment in the history of postwar art in which the concept of art had become so unstable that discriminations of 'taste' and 'quality' were fundamentally upended. That is, as artists like Warhol and Lichtenstein presented works indistinguishable from ordinary objects, or what some read as flagrant plagiarism, the imperatives of traditional artistic production—beauty, novelty, technique—became irrelevant to what could properly *count* as an artwork. For Danto, this was a philosophical development of the first order, and one that demanded an answer that would accommodate art's radical new openness. By his own account, this insight came to him like a flash of lighting, during his attendance at Eleanor Ward's "Stable Gallery" in 1964, when Warhol displayed his series of facsimiles of Brillo Boxes, indistinguishable from those in an ordinary supermarket. "My philosophical preoccupation with art began when I visited that exhibition."[124] In an important sense, however, Danto's recollection of this encounter was more self-mythologizing than historical fact.

Danto had been "primed" for this chance meeting with the "Brillo Boxes" years before 1964 through his navigation of new strains of analysis then emerging within Anglo-American philosophy. Danto came of philosophical age as part of the first generation of American analysts, for whom the logical empiricist tradition was both a point of departure and contention. For many of his generation, one of the primary problems that tradition presented, however, was its refusal to countenance normative questions—particularly those of ethics and art—as genuine inquiries

[123] Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy* 61 no. 19 (1964): 580.
[124] Arthur C. Danto, "The End of the Contest: The *Paragone* Between Painting and Photography," in idem., *What Art Is* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 114.

into objective knowledge.[125] Art, along with other normative and 'covertly' metaphysical concepts such as *persons,* was deemed overtly psychological or emotional, and so irrelevant to the pursuit of such "knowledge."[126] As the perspectives within the fledgling tradition of analysis grew during the 1950s, however, art and other "normative" areas of inquiry were treated with increasing philosophical seriousness, particularly among philosophers trained at Oxford and Cambridge. More than any other of these perspectives, Wittgenstein's posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) offered philosophers an alternative analysis of language that placed its meanings firmly within the value-laden realm of human practices. [127] This offered ethical theorists, philosophers of science, and aestheticians alike new resources with which to confront the shortcomings of empiricism by yoking their analyses of language to notions derived from anthropology, psychology, and sociology. Such a mixing of metaphors produced an otherwise disparate body of thought in which linguistic practices were described as reflecting something *fundamental* about human beings and the things they valued, not least of which, for Danto, was the human concept of art.

The first part of this chapter traces the history of that "metaphorical mixing" in conjunction with unpublished undergraduate lectures that Danto delivered in 1962-3. In tracing these stories in tandem, I show that what I am calling an "indiscernibility paradigm," which was

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[125] By 'normative' here, I refer to areas of inquiry that are not reducible to the empirical sciences, and that require deliberation about questions of value.

[126] John McCumber, *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001); George C. Reisch, *How the Cold War Transformed the Philosophy of Science: To The Icy Slopes of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[127] On the "normative" reading of post-war analysis, see Stephen Turner, *Explaining the Normative* (Cambridge: Polity: 2010). For the view of a general "return" to normative, interpretive, and metaphysical questions and strategies in American philosophy see the essays collected in Quentin Skinner ed., *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); James T. Kloppenberg, "Pragmatism: An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?", *The Journal of American History* 83 no. 1 (1996): 100-138; Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America: 1720-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); John Rajchman and Cornell West eds., *Post-Analytic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). As I show in this chapter, however, the normative and metaphysical questions raised in the philosophy of art are better understood as part and parcel of the establishment of the analytic tradition as a whole during the 1950s.

derived from Wittgenstein's writings about philosophical skepticism, was fundamental to the development of the early tradition of analytic aesthetics from which Danto's early philosophy of art emerged. For Danto, this paradigm became the primary philosophical strategy around which he would pursue the question, what makes the difference between art and life? for the rest of his career. The second section focuses more exclusively on how this line of thinking cohered in his first two, major, philosophical statements on art, which brought that paradigm to bear most explicitly on post-abstract expressionist art : "The Artworld" and "Artworks and Real Things" (1973). In those essays, Danto broadened his approach to the indiscernibility paradigm to show the centrality of *interpretation* to distinguishing between artworks and ordinary objects, which became a hallmark of his theorizing in the following decades. Both essays formed the foundation for his later theorizations surrounding the ultimate demotion of sensory impressions alone to understanding the concept of art, and the broader implications of that demotion for art history.

Establishing the Indiscernibility Paradigm

Danto hadn't begun his philosophical career with an interest in the philosophy of art. Making art was enough. His dissertation, for example, titled "Acts and Histories," was a technical exposition of problems in the philosophy of history.[128] As he gave up his identity as an artist, however, his exposure to the biases and predilections of those who talked about and analyzed art began to manifest on a more philosophical level. Moreover, his immersion in the New York artworld, which had begun to produce works that looked like ordinary objects, had presented a philosophical predicament for traditional definitions of art that necessitated beauty, novelty, or technique. Accordingly, in the Fall of 1962, Danto began a year-long course on

[128] Arthur C. Danto, "Acts and Histories," (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1953).

aesthetics with a bold claim: works of art were not recognizable through the senses alone. Such a proclamation flew in the face of both the fledgling field of analytic aesthetics, and erstwhile classics in the philosophy of art, which he had encountered as a graduate student. These early texts of analytic aesthetics, which for Danto were woefully out of step with the world of art he then inhabited, shared the early empiricist bent of the tradition as a whole in its reaction to idealism and metaphysics.[129] In these early books and papers, the "immediacy" of works of art made their philosophical appeal a purely perceptual enterprise. As a rejoinder to the idealist assumptions contained in works like Benedetto Croce's *Aesthetic as Expression and General Linguistic* (1909) and R.G. Collingwood's *The Principles of Art* (1938), analytic aesthetics began from the assumption that any point of analysis in art began and ended with a work's manifest properties.[130] Monroe Beardsley, who had just four years earlier published one of the founding texts of modern aesthetics, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (1958), enshrined this notion in claiming that works of art properly conceived were "aesthetic-objects" to be judged by the critic's perception of its manifest, internal qualities.[131] Indeed, Beardsley's work took for granted the perceptual assumption shared by the most influential philosophers of art during the first half of the twentieth century, including Bell's notion of "significant form", George Santayana's equation of art and beauty, and Greenberg's blatant formalism.[132]

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[129] See, for example, the collection of papers collected in William R. Elton and W.B. Gallie eds., *Aesthetics and Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967, 1954).

[130] Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic* trans. Douglas Ainslee (London: Macmillan, 1922); R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958). For examples of early analytic aesthetics in reaction to these works, see D.W. Prall, *Aesthetic Analysis* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1936); Stephen C. Pepper, "Aesthetic Quality: A Contextualistic Theory of Beauty," *Journal of Philosophy* 35 no. 17 (1938): 470-75.

[131] Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1981).

[132] Clive Bell, *Art* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1914); George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outline of Aesthetic Theory* (New York: Dover Press, 1955).

Danto began from a different position altogether, one that reflected the profusion of radical art then emerging in New York and elsewhere, and that flatly called into question staid conventions of artistic 'taste'. The question he posed to his students was this: how do we evaluate works of art when, as was the case in the contemporary art world by the early 1960s, there was no precedent for certain artistic forms or mediums? In the modern era, when works of art could appear the same as an ordinary object, Danto argued, their appreciation seemed less and less connected to their purely perceptual features. The same year that Danto began his lecture, for example, Roy Lichtenstein had taken panels and speech balloons from comic strips and presented it as his original art, an achievement not easily explained by appeal to its jejune imagery.[133] The key to explaining this watershed, however, seemed to lay in the nature of artistic description itself.

Describing works of art, he argued, was similar to the way we describe human beings and their character traits and actions. To describe an artwork as 'graceful', for example, was dependent upon a certain 'sensitivity' to the ways that artist *employed* aesthetic features, a sensitivity that was distinct from those features themselves. An artist may produce a work whose aesthetic features we describe as 'graceful', or 'powerful', for example, and then jettison such features in another, in favor of an entirely different set of features or arrangements; the latter work can still share that same quality of grace or power, but none of the same perceptual features. The determination of aesthetic features like grace, then, required the *sensitivity* to the *ways in which* certain aesthetic features were employed, rather than those features as such. "And it is because of this—because we cannot know what non-aesthetic features a thing must have in

[133] On Lichtenstein, see, for example, Michael Lobel, *Image Duplicator: Roy Lichtenstein and the Emergence of Pop Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

order to have the aesthetic features we are able to recognize—that we cannot find recipes, either for recognizing or for producing aesthetic qualities."[134]

As Danto urged, however, such sensitivity--contrary to both idealist and empiricist approaches to the philosophy of art--was not an innate capacity of the gifted. "Perceptiveness is mysterious only when we think of it as a special kind of perceptual ability, a sixth sense, exactly like the other senses, though possessed by some and not by others."[135] What such sensitivity required, rather, was something that evaded both inborn ability and, more significantly, a rigid book of rules or prescriptions. For Danto, artmaking and appreciation rested, rather than a recipe, on a certain ability to "recognize novel instances, if you are a person of taste, or to produce novel instances if you are an artist."[136]

The equation of taste with the novelty of the avant-garde's "high art" was a hallmark of modernism for both conservative and left-leaning intellectuals during the 1950s and early 60s.[137] More often than not, moreover, that conflation often redounded to a view of art that yoked together its so-called autonomy with a rarefied intellectual capacity necessary for its discrimination. The cultural critic Dwight MacDonald's 1960 essay "Masscult and Midcult", for example, bemoaned the incursions of the marketplace on what had been, before the late-nineteenth century, the autonomous realm of a high-art accessible only to those fit to recognize its purity.[138] Likewise, Theodor Adorno's essays on the "reified" quality of American Jazz music sounded a similar refrain over the bastardization of European "art music" by the commodified

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[134] Arthur C. Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics-Fall Semester, 1962-1963," Lecture 1. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1.
[135] Arthur C. Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics-Fall Semester, 1962-1963," Lecture 7. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1.
[136] Ibid.
[137] On liberal intellectual during the 1950s, see Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 50s* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1985).
[138] Dwight Macdonald, "Masscult and Midcult," in idem., *Masscult and Midcult: Essays Against the American Grain* ed., John Summers (New York: New York Review of Books, 2011), 3-71.

forms of American vernacular.[139] By contrast, Danto was developing a notion of 'taste' in a register that left it open what artworks looked like, or sounded like, leading the question of what *counted* as an artwork into an area distinct from the specious perceptual abilities often associated with connoisseurship and art-criticism. As Danto would go on to show, one could ascribe distinct terms of appreciation to two paintings that shared the same manifest properties, a condition inimical to a faculty of taste yoked to physical perception. When perception alone was demoted in the equation of artistic analysis, the faculty of 'taste' was much harder to define.

As he urged to his undergraduates at a moment when art and music were perceived to share more in common with mystical experience cum anti-establishment aura, art appreciation should be de-solemnified.[140] "I think we are all impressed with the idea that there is this direct and immediate quality ascribed to artistic activity and experience to want to endorse such statements as these: that painting cannot really be taught; that (of jazz), if you have to ask questions, don't mess with it; that you can't really be thinking about what you are doing and be doing it at all well."[141] Danto's rejoinder recalled voices such as those of the American novelist Norman Mailer, whose 1957 essay "The White Negro" portrayed African-Americans and their musical traditions as inherently sexual, primitive, and hence, more authentic expressions of life and feeling.[142] Against this way of thinking about art, Danto sought to de-couple the centrality of the senses from the concept of art altogether. In this way, he was developing the foundations for a philosophy art that accommodated the modernist imperative of novelty while refiguring its necessary conditions.

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[139] Theodor Adorno, *Essays on Music* trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 470-500.
[140] On the centrality of spontaneity to this aura, see Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
[141] Arthur C. Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics-Fall Semester, 1962-1963," Lecture 5. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1.
[142] Norman Mailer, "The White Negro—Superficial Reflections on the White Hipster," *Dissent* 4 no. 3 (1957): 276-293.

The modified conception of 'taste' by which he first introduced such refiguration was derived largely from the British philosopher Frank Sibley and his recently published paper, "Aesthetic Concepts" (1959). On Sibley's view, aesthetic concepts such as 'grace' were not "condition-governed." That is, there were no necessary or sufficient conditions, no non-aesthetic (i.e., perceptual) features of a work that held in every instance, for the application of aesthetic predicates such as 'grace'. To see soft, delicate lines in a painting, for example, might indeed indicate that it is appropriate to characterize a painting as graceful or subtle; but it might equally be the case that those same features indicated that a painting was clumsy or insipid. For Sibley, in other words, aesthetic predicates applied to works of art were underdetermined by their *perceptual* features.

There were no rules or formulas one could derive, inductively or deductively, simply by merely looking at a painting. "Though on *seeing* the picture we might say, and rightly, that it is delicate or serene or restful or sickly or insipid, no *description* in non-aesthetic words permits us to claim that these or any other aesthetic terms must undeniably apply to it."[143] As Danto had urged, there were no rules, properly speaking, for the application of aesthetic concepts. But if the exercise of 'taste' or 'sensitivity' to aesthetic features did not entail the rote application of rules, neither was it some mysterious capacity for judgement. Rather, as Sibley claimed, the job of the art-critic or educator was to *train* people to notice particular aspects of a work of art; to point to a significant but potentially overlooked relationship between colors, for example; to use similes and metaphors ("It's as though there are small points of light burning"); to use contrasts and comparisons or pure repetition, or to point to relevant facts about art history.[144] Training, exposure, repetition, and guidance were the prerequisites for what appeared to some as the

[143] Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," *The Philosophical Review* 68 no. 4 (October: 1959): 427.
[144] Ibid., 443.

mysterious faculty or taste or artistic sensitivity. Artists like Warhol and Lichtenstein had made even the possibility of such a faculty moot.

In drawing on Sibley's paper in his early lectures, Danto had begun to disentangle perceptual criteria from the concept of art, which he had not as yet fully fleshed out. But both Sibley's paper, and Danto's incorporation of it, reflected a broader moment at the beginnings of analytic philosophy in the English-speaking world in which the shortcomings of empiricism more broadly were being challenged.[145] The establishing of analytic philosophy was defined, in its early stages, by the subordination of psychology to the austere stream of empirical experience, often reduced to symbolic logic. But it ran into problems when faced with the *normative* dilemmas that ordinary psychological and anthropological considerations raised in the analysis of language and its attendant *uses*. Questions that required determinate judgements about matters of *value* were not readily reducible to the analytic strategies that reduced to knowledge to the senses alone. In response to the challenges such considerations posed, new philosophical perspectives at Oxford and Cambridge emerged to meet them during the 1950s and 60s. Much of that effort was based in a trenchant critique of the shortcomings of both empiricism and the distended role assigned to truth-functional propositions. At Oxford, the philosopher J.L. Austin developed an influential rejoinder to the Tractatarian/Fregean tradition of linguistic analysis in developing what he called Ordinary Language Philosophy (OLP) during the 1950s. The main assumption of OLP was that language served a much wider range of functions than simply making denotative assertions of truth in propositional form. Rather, language was more akin to action, in that we often *did things* with words, as in the acts of promising or pronouncing a

[145] On the establishment of analytic philosophy as a break from the empiricist tradition, see Joel Isaac, "Missing Links: W.V. Quine, the Making of 'Two Dogmas', and the Analytic Roots of Post-Analytic Philosophy," *History of European Ideas* 37 no. 3 (2011): 267-279.

marriage.[146] Even more influential, however, was the posthumous publication of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* in 1953 by his British student Elizabeth Anscombe, a work that had no small role to play in Sibley's arguments in "Aesthetic Concepts."

In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein criticized the implications of his earlier views in the *Tractatus*, particularly regarding the issue of linguistic meaning. Rather than a matter of propositions picturing the facts of the world, Wittgenstein held that we should look, inductively, to the actual *use* of our language in its various human contexts. Offering important insights into the nature of philosophical skepticism, the *Investigations* became a critical philosophical resource for a number of prominent British and American philosophers such as Thomas Kuhn, John Rawls, Peter Winch, Elizabeth Anscombe, Phillipa Foot, Rush Rhees, and Stanley Cavell, who began to incorporate psychological and anthropological considerations such as pain, sympathy, and sociability into works in political and moral philosophy, the philosophy of the social sciences, and aesthetics.[147] Indeed, Wittgenstein's *Investigations* became the primary text through which normative issues in analytic philosophy during the late 1950s and 1960s, skirted by the empiricist tradition in philosophy, were approached. More significantly, it was fundamental to the foundation of philosophical inquiry into the nature of art and art criticism in the early analytic tradition.

Despite the fact that a significant canon of "analytic aesthetics" was beginning to take shape during this period, however, many philosophers held to the extant position that artworks

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[146] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa eds., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975, 1962).

[147] On Wittgenstein's importance for the introduction of psychological and anthropological concepts to mid-century analytic philosophy, see P. Mackenzie Bok, "To the Mountaintop Again: The Early Rawls and Post-Protestant Ethics in Postwar America," *Modern Intellectual History* 14 no. 1 (2017): 153-185; Joel Isaac, "Pain, Analytical Philosophy, and American Intellectual History," in Joel Isaac, James T. Kloppenberg, Michael O'Brien, and Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen eds., *The Worlds of American Intellectual History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 202-216; Brad Baranowski, "America's Moral Conscience: John Rawls and the Making of Modern Liberalism," (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison), chp. 2.

could not *mean* at all, could not be interpreted in any way because they contained no cognitive significance; statements made about them merely expressed subjective, or "emotive" preference. This position, known as "non-cognitivism", was promoted largely through the British logical empiricist A.J. Ayer and his American student Charles Stevenson. For Ayer and Stevenson, only statements that could be empirically verified held cognitive significance, that is, counted as genuine *knowledge*.[148] As the émigré logical-empiricist Herbert Feigl put the matter in 1949, "The pictorial, emotional, and motivational appeals of language, no matter how indispensable or valuable in the contexts of practical life, art, education, persuasion, and propaganda, must, however, not be confused with the cognitive meanings (purely formal- and/or factual-empirical) that are of the essence of science."[149] The *Investigations,* however, offered philosophers working in morality and aesthetics a fundamentally different point of departure.

In the *Investigations,* Wittgenstein presented the use of language as akin to learning the rules of a game. On initiation into such "language-games" one learns certain words and concepts through an immersive understanding of how they are *applied*—their rightness in certain situations and wrongness in others. The rules of application for the concepts of language, however, do not operate based on a manual or rigid instruction book. Rather, as Sibley and Danto had urged in the domain of aesthetic language, the mastery of a linguistic concept was dependent on understanding and applying such concepts in various and novel contexts, or what Wittgenstein called our various "forms of life." The problem with learning the rules of the various language games found in these "forms", however, was that it begged the question of how

[148] A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952); Charles L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).
[149] Herbert Feigl, "Naturalism and Humanism," *American Quarterly* 1 no. 2 (1949): 140.

such rules were grounded in something outside of the mere consensus of a community, beyond the *observable* fact of simply 'acting correctly'.

Wittgenstein's famous example here was that of a pupil who is instructed to construct a series of integers, each time following the rule: add two. The pupil seemingly follows this rule, constructing a series of integers 2, 4,6, 8, etc. until, upon reaching 1000, he adds four, and proceeds: 1004, 1008, etc. And yet, despite the fact that he had added four, the pupil claims that he had been following the *same* rule throughout the series, before and after reaching 1000.[150] The upshot was that one could bring any number of rules to bear on what would otherwise be two *perceptually indistinguishable* acts, one merely *appearing* correct, and the other being, in point of fact, *actually* correct. "No course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule. The answer was: if every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule, then it can also be brought into conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here."[151] The implication that many philosophers drew from Wittgenstein's thought experiment was that it generated skepticism about the grounding of thought and behavior; it seemed to expose an arbitrariness to our forms of life, that they demanded a criteria for verification beyond the mere fact of consensus or the observable basis of mere ratification.[152]

Danto had drawn on the same resources used in Wittgenstein's skeptical dilemma in his initial attempts at illustrating the incapacity of perception alone to ground art-appreciation. To illustrate this point to his students, he used the analogy of "politeness." The polite person, he

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[150] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford, Wiley Blackwell, 2009), §185.
[151] Ibid., 87.
[152] The literature on Wittgensteinian Skepticism is immense. For a good starting place, see Hans Sluga and David G. Stern eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

claimed, may *act* polite, may conform to the accepted rules of decorum for treating others with politeness. But if his *motives* for acting polite were less than genuine, it made little sense to describe such a person as genuinely polite. "A polite person acts politely, does not merely employ his surface in the situation of politeness (that is posturing, which has distinctly baroque overtones): politeness is an expression of his character."[153] In the same way that simply following the *rules* of politeness did not necessarily entail politeness as such, one could learn to identify grace in certain paintings through rote application, without actually understanding the concept of graceful paintings generally.[154] In the case of recognizing a painting as 'graceful', "a person might be normally sighted, etc. perhaps has learnt to use even the word grace in connection with a certain set of objects, but since this picture fails to resemble those objects in some important respects, he might say that this picture lacks grace or is not graceful. There is nothing here, let us suppose, that he does not *see*; and it is not a matter of teaching him to read, because the grace is not represented, it is, rather, presented as such."[155] Recognizing grace in painting was not simply something to be taught through formula. Like the add-2 sequence, one might have learned the application of the term in particular instances. But pointing to examples of graceful painting through what one took to be its formula, though potentially indistinguishable from someone else who truly understood the concept, betrayed a lack of mastery of the concept "grace."

Danto's use of character as an analogy for art appreciation in his lectures was not simply a novel intellectual strategy. It reflected a larger tendency among those seeking philosophical

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[153] Arthur C. Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics-Fall Semester, 1962-1963," Lecture 4. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1.

[154] This line of reasoning, in which the unobservability of character relative to actions that merely appeared to express true morality, first emerged in the Wittgensteinian-inspired works of Philippa Foot and Iris Murdoch. See Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 1978); Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

[155] Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics," Lecture 4. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1.

perspectives on normative human practices, such as art, to mix philosophical, anthropological, and psychological concepts to get at more basic facts about human beings as such. Such basic facts helped Danto to illuminate the inadequacy of sense-perception alone to explaining why certain forms of art could be considered art, while others, perceptually indistinguishable, could not. Initially, many of these explorations hinged on the nature of philosophical skepticism. In the same way that one might appear to have mastered the concept of 'grace' for example, or the function 'add 2', it was equally possible that I might be deceived on the basis of observing what might otherwise be a rote application of a rule. More generally, however, such instances of skepticism created a certain paradigm-case for the conceptual problem of *indiscernibility*. That is, they became a token philosophical form in which the inadequacy of sensory impressions was shown to be fundamental to the understanding of normative human practices. For Danto, such a paradigm helped to reveal both the philosophical and cultural significance of artists like Warhol, Dine, and Lichtenstein, and became a fundamental point of departure in "The Artworld."

As the previous chapter showed, the early Wittgenstein and the logical empiricists treated sensory impressions as a given for genuine knowledge. To take their primary example, the self was considered identical with the first-person sensations of the material body, which in matter of consequence were analyzed no differently than those of the third-person.[156] In other words, there was no self, but merely a material substrate that gave the illusion of a substantive ego. This presented a problem, however, when faced with seemingly fundamental facts about the ways that human beings responded to each other, particularly in the face of another's suffering. That is, skepticism seemed to arise as to whether *observable,* behavioristic evidence alone might not

[156] The most sophisticated defense of this position was elaborated by Morris Schlick. See Morris Schlick, "Meaning and Verification," *Philosophical Review* 45 (1936): 339-69.

deceive me, might lead me to doubt whether another really *was* in pain, or whether such pains resembled my own.[157]

Such skeptical doubts about pain utilized the indiscernibility paradigm by contrasting two *perceptually* indistinguishable states of affairs (suffering versus the *appearance* of suffering) to illustrate that perception was inadequate to understanding a normative concept, in this case the appropriate response to 'pain.' Wittgenstein answered the skeptic by claiming that he had misunderstood what he called the 'grammar' entailed by the concept of pain. That is, gestures such as wincing, crying, and verbal complaints were not meant to offer "knowledge" of the numerical similarity of my pain and yours. Nor were they meant to be doubted on the basis that our behavior gave no outward criteria of certainty. Rather such gestures were part of what the concept of pain *entailed*: something requiring pity, sympathy, compassion, and attention. Learning such concepts required immersion in irreducibly *human* 'forms of life.'

In both direct and oblique ways, Wittgenstein's treatment of pain and philosophical skepticism had important consequences for the development of analytic aesthetics during the 1960s. In the first instance, it offered philosophers the resources to deal with certain conceptual problems raised by the nature of artistic appreciation. One of Wittgenstein's students and co-editor of the *Investigations*, the American philosopher Rush Rhees, for example, argued that artworks, rather than sensuous objects, expressed abstract *ideas* with significant cognitive import. Though those ideas were not reducible to ordinary language, to appreciate them as such was to understand the various languages through which certain artforms took shape in novel instances. "I might be alive in a *primitive* way to the ideas of a work if I said, 'Putting those together in that way would have never occurred to me. And it is wonderful.'…I say it is

[157] Isaac, "Pain, Analytical Philosophy, and American Intellectual History," 202-16.

wonderful, not that it was good or skillful or perfect."[158] Explaining how novel uses of artistic forms elicited certain forms of exaltation, Rhees argued, was not a matter of a fine-tuned discernment of technical content. Rather, one could only appreciate such exaltation if one grasped the language-game of that art form through a "primitive" immersion in its form of life (i.e., its musical language, rules, and history). In other words, art appreciation rested on much more than the perceptual features of a given work.

For other philosophers, Wittgenstein's concept of language games offered a more direct defense of artistic innovation. In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein urged that the definitions of words only made sense within the context of particular language communities. When attempting to provide an exact and precise definition of a "game", for example, one quickly realizes that no two games are exactly alike, but shared "family resemblances" that allow us to get on with the definition in practical terms. Moreover, new games constantly come into existence which are potentially unlike any others having preceded them yet are still recognized as such. For Wittgenstein, the same was true for all our linguistic concepts. And for the American philosophers Morris Weitz and William Kennick, "art" was no exception. Weitz's "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" (1956) and Kennick's "Does traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?" (1958) both claimed of art that it was an "open concept." Art, on this view, was a practice whose results (artworks) shared various family resemblances, rather than definitive markers of their status as artworks. Accordingly, the project of providing a definitive ontology of art was futile because art remained an "intuitive," if open, concept.[159]

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[158] Rush Rhees, "Art and Philosophy," in idem., *Without Answers* (London: Routledge, 1969), 139.
[159] Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15 no. 1 (1956): 27-35; William Kennick, "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?" *Mind* 67 no. 267 (1958): 317-334.

During the watershed that was 1960s art, however, such catholicity was unwelcome to some. For the British poet Julian Symons, for example, the pop "spirit" inaugurated by Warhol and Lichtenstein signified nothing more than a "carboard falseness," and "embodied a kind of false democracy which aligns Bob Dylan with Shelley and stresses the unimportance of technique."[160] Indeed, Symons's concern that both a Dylan song and a Shelley poem could equally be considered works of art reflected a fear that one was "fraudulent," while the other, "true" art. For American philosophers working in the area of art, this fear reflected a larger philosophical problem raised by the unfamiliar in artworks like Warhol's "soup cans" or Lichtenstein's "comics." Here, Wittgenstein's work proved of use in directions more profound that Weitz and Kennick's anti-definitionalism.[161]

For the American philosopher Stanley Cavell, for example, there was a significant parallel between unfamiliar art and Wittgenstein's discussion of pain. Taking off from this insight, he drew on the indiscernibility-paradigm to illustrate how the liability of deception, and the related concept of *fraudulence*, informed modern art. In an essay titled "Music Discomposed" (1967) Cavell claimed that the experience of fraudulence was "endemic" to the experience of modern art. His most salient example was contemporary aleatory music, which had largely followed the twelve-tone procedures of the Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg. Schoenberg's procedure departed from traditional tonality and used mathematical procedures to produce pieces of music that emphasized chance and contingency rather than the intentional arrangement of notes and harmonies in a particular key.[162] For Cavell, the seeming evasion of

[160] Julian Symons, "Cardboard Revolution," *New Statesman* 2, vol. 75 (January 1, 1968): 146.
[161] On the anti-definitional turn in Anglo-American aesthetics during the 1950s, see Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored* (New York: Adams, Bannister, Cox, 1984), 33-73.
[162] On Schoenberg, see Walter Frisch ed., *Schoenberg and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

human intention in such music raised the question of how to treat such a radical departure from established musical and artistic traditions.

His answer, however, turned on a significant parallel to the tenuous nature of mutual attunement between individuals and communities, what he described as the existentially-tinged "truth of skepticism."[163] Throughout "Music Discomposed," Cavell presented the indiscernibility paradigm as an antimony of artifice versus sincerity to illustrate the nature of modern art. When one asks of developments such as "Pop Art," for example, "canvasses with a few stripes or chevrons on them," "the novels of Raymond Roussel or Alain Robbe-Grillet," is it art?, the answer cannot be satisfied by any outward or referential criteria. "Its full impact, even its immediate relevance, depends on a willingness to *trust* the object, knowing that the time spent with its difficulties may be betrayed."[164] We trust in the new and unfamiliar in modern art, moreover, knowing that the betrayal of such trust might amount to a sort of fraudulence, the feeling of being 'had.' The paradox that such a sentiment raises, however, is that we can never *prove* that we are being deceived. "There are no such proofs possible for the assertion that the art accepted by a public is fraudulent; the artist himself may not know; and the critic may be shown up, not merely as incompetent, nor unjust in accusing the wrong man, but as taking others in (or out); that is, as an imposter."[165] In the same way that there are no "proofs" for determining that someone is in pain, modern art demanded of its patrons the same sort of tenuous trust that we gave to that of persons; "acknowledgment" was analytic to the concept of a "person" as "trust" was to the concept of modern art. Indeed, Cavell made such a parallel explicit. "In emphasizing the experiences of fraudulence and trust as essential to the experience of art, I am in effect

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[163] Stanley Cavell, "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," in *Must We Mean What We Say*, 44-72.
[164] Stanley Cavell, "Music Discomposed," in idem., *Must We Mean What We Say: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 187. Emphasis mine.
[165] Ibid., 190.

claiming that the answer to the question 'What is art?' will in part be an answer which explains why it is we treat certain objects, or how we can treat certain objects, in ways normally reserved for treating persons."[166]

Part of Cavell's answer was that artworks were things *intended* by human beings. And so it made sense, as it did for Danto, that the range of certain concepts associated with human intention—"personal style, feeling, dishonesty, authority, inventiveness, profundity, meretriciousness, etc.,"—also applied to the analysis and appreciation of works of art. "We approach such objects not merely because they are interesting in themselves, but because they are felt as made by someone…the category of intention is as inescapable (or escapable with the same consequences) in speaking of objects of art as in speaking of what human beings say and do: without it, we would not understand what they are."[167] Likewise, we feel differently about a painting created by a person than one duplicated by a computer. Works of modern art were acts of *intention*. They were objects—like persons—the "grammar" of which demanded that they be read or interpreted, the sincerity or certainty of which was never guaranteed by merely looking. Ultimately, an artwork's sensuous properties mattered far less than our trust in their sincerity.

The potential of fraudulence contained in the antimony of artifice and sincerity was a theme that became fundamental to analytic aesthetics during the 1960s, particularly as it related to the potential for artistic forgery. Forgeries and fakes became a significant case study in the indiscernibility paradigm, revealing the growing irrelevance of perceptual criteria in the evaluation of art and aesthetics. Indeed, as early 1936, the Austrian art-historian Hans Tietze had implicitly claimed of forgeries that their presence revealed something fundamental about the nature of art, which challenged the primacy of mere perception to its evaluation. In an essay

[166] Ibid., 189.
[167] Ibid., 198.

titled "The Psychology and Aesthetics and Forgery in Art," Tietze argued that "when an object is discovered to be a forgery what occurs is not a change in its physical appearance but an *ethical* revulsion in the beholder which prevents him from having any further aesthetic reaction to the object."[168] The discovery that one authentic Rembrandt was visually indistinguishable from its forgery modified one's aesthetic response to the latter; the knowledge that one had been deceived, indeed morally wronged, made an aesthetic difference between two perceptually indistinguishable objects. Applied to artworks, the considerations "normally reserved for treating persons" modified not what one saw, but how it was seen.

In one of the most systematic works of analytic aesthetics during the 1960s, the University of Pennsylvania philosopher Nelson Goodman made a similar claim about the susceptibility of aesthetic revision, despite perceptual indiscernibility, in his book *Languages of Art* (1968). Even if an expert could use the scientific processes of dating to determine that a particular painting or sculpture was a forgery, Goodman asked, what difference would this make to our aesthetic appreciation of the forgery if one could not tell the difference from the original by "merely looking?" For Goodman, the *knowledge* that one was in the presence of a fake made the difference. "My knowledge of the difference between the two pictures, just because it affects the relationship of the present to future lookings, informs the very character of my present looking. This knowledge instructs me to look at the two pictures differently now, even if what I see is the same."[169]

Although Goodman's views were not directly indebted to Wittgenstein, he had exploited a prominent tool in discussions of both art and ethics that had been heavily influenced by the

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[168] Hans Tietze, "The Psychology and Aesthetics of Forgery in Art," *Metropolitan Museum Studies* 5 no. 1 (August, 1934): 16-17.
[169] Nelson Goodman, "Art and Authenticity" in idem., *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1968), 104.

latter's writings on skepticism during the 1950s and 60s. That tool was the indiscernibility paradigm: the contrasting of two perceptually indistinguishable states of affairs to illustrate the inadequacy of empiricism to concepts grounded in value, such as art and personhood. That paradigm provided a language for philosophers seeking to analyze such concepts through the familiar metaphors of ordinary psychology, morality, and anthropological observation. More than just a scholastic exercise, however, it reflected broader trends in contemporary art that were explicitly calling into question the primacy of sensory impressions, and the corresponding notions of beauty, technique, and novelty, to understanding art. Danto, Cavell and Goodman, had taken their cues from these trends in the artworld and explored their philosophical significance. In this sense, Danto's first essays on art "The Artworld" and "Artworks and Real Things" emerged from a broader conversation about fraudulence and skepticism in the production of new and unfamiliar art. Those essays would go on to form the foundation of his later theorizing about the decline in the significance of aesthetics and its significance to the emergence of contemporary art. Rather than a chance encounter with Warhol in 1964, however, Danto had already been engaged with these notions as part of a broader shift away from empiricism, constitutive of mid-century analytic philosophy more broadly. Artists like Warhol and Lichtenstein had merely given legs to a philosophical paradigm Danto had already been working within. In his first major essays on art, he ran with them.

From Indiscernibility to Interpretation

As Danto continued his exploration of aesthetic problems into the Winter of 1962 and early 1963, he continued to exploit the analogy between the character traits of persons and the

aesthetic terms used to describe works of art. The conditions under which we recognized kindness or cleverness in other people, for example, were always underdetermined by the performance of merely kind or clever *acts*; there was nothing on the surface of such acts that told against the possibility of "deception, illusion, and mistake in such a matter."[170] But early in the semester Danto had already begun to develop that analogy in conjunction with an extended discussion of how, in modern works of art, their perceptual features were secondary to appreciating their significance *as* artworks. More significantly, he increasingly illustrated that secondary status using examples that utilized the indiscernibility paradigm and the anxieties induced by fraudulence and imitation.

On Danto's account, an artist could readily imitate, or for that matter, reproduce, all the aesthetic (that is, perceivable) qualities of an existing work of art. But a work's susceptibility to reproduction seemed to suggest that its aesthetic features had little to do with either its status as a work of art, or its *value* as such. A work's being "inimitable is not a condition for a work to have aesthetic qualities. If it were, of course, reproductions of paintings would have none of the aesthetic qualities of the painting reproduced. A man could, I say, just copy a masterpiece, and, if a good copyist, get into the copy all the aesthetic qualities in the original."[171] That a work's aesthetic qualities could be transferred in reproductions or, for that matter, forgeries, seemed to beg something fundamental of the merely perceptual features of a work relative to the question of why something *counted* as an artwork. Why did the fact that certain paintings could, in theory, be duplicated with little effort---in the case of hard-edge abstractionist painters of the 1960s like Ellsworth Kelly, for example--seem to disqualify their evaluation as quality work? "So 'that is

[170] Arthur C. Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics-Fall Semester, 1962-1963," Lecture 6. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1.
[171] Arthur C. Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics-Fall Semester, 1962-1963," Lecture 2. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1.

imitable'—even 'that is imitable by anyone (a common critique of modern art) is not a judgement on the work, but rather, I think, a judgement on the rest of us…The parrot stands to the ordinary speaker of the language in something like the relation that the ordinary speaker of the language stands to the poet."[172] One might utilize the common or plain resources available to all people. But neither the ordinary and the mundane, nor the technically virtuosic, were logically connected with the concept of art.

In the first instance, the view that a work's perceptual features were logically connected to the concept of art reinforced the view of art as a mysterious or mystical enterprise. "A kind of no-philosophy philosophy of art," such a view erroneously "draws attention to a kind of ineffability and immediacy in art, [as] something mysterious and unexplainable," divorced from "its origins, its stages of evolution, the character of the person who made it." Such assumptions, moreover, "tend[s] to re-inforce an easy prejudice that art, and talk about art, are disparate sorts of enterprise, and not merely disparate but inimical."[173] The sort of "talk about art" that Danto was referring to was the significant act of *interpretation* required in the identification and evaluation of artworks.

To illustrate the necessity of interpretation to the concept of art, Danto presented an intriguing, if prescient, thought experiment. He asked his students to imagine four different paintings (A,B,C,D), each with different titles, but visually indistinguishable in appearance. Each of these paintings, Danto argued, were different works of art, though they were one object. "Possibly one might say this: there is a difference between the physical object and the artwork. By this I mean: something can be part of the object without being part of the artwork. One might

[172] Ibid.
[173] Arthur C. Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics-Fall Semester, 1962-1963," Lecture 5. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1.

say: there are four (at least) artworks here, but only one physical object."[174] In presenting the physical object as distinct from the four *different* works of art, Danto had already, before encountering Warhol, exploited not only the indiscernibility paradigm, but posed the question of what enfranchised works of art indistinguishable from ordinary objects. Distinguishing between the four artworks, on this account, required interpretation, in this case, aided significantly by the *titles* of the individual works. The titles, moreover, enfranchised the works by guiding one to *read* the paintings in different ways. Such readings secured both that one was in the presence of a work of art, and what sort of interpretation one might bring to its merely perceptual features.

Interpretation became one the defining points of analysis in Danto's philosophy of art as it developed over the following three decades. Indeed, the nature of interpretation in art played a key role in his most mature statement on art, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981).[175] For this reason, however, it is important to understand how his early thinking about interpretation was spurred less by individual works of art, such as "Brillo Box," than by broader developments in Anglo-American analysis, particularly those that occurred in confrontation with questions of value.

Rather than a change in interpretative lens, a different way of seeing each painting based on the interpretation one marshalled from its title, Danto seemed to suggest that each interpretation fundamentally changed the object itself. "For each change in interpretation is a change in the object: it is <u>not that we are seeing it in a different way</u>, but that we are seeing a different thing…when we go from A to D or C, it is not ourselves only, but the world we are looking at which has undergone the transformation: we have replaced one world with

[174] Arthur C. Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics-Fall Semester, 1962-1963," Lecture 3. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1.
[175] Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

another…In a way it is like replacing one total theory with another incompatible with it, where each theory accounts for all the known facts."[176] Interpretations in this sense were not simply *readings* of a particular art work; they prefigured an ontological change in the object itself.

Danto's rather extreme philosophical speculations about the ontology of artworks reflected, again, the influence of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, but this time in a different register. At the same moment that the *Investigations* was providing philosophers with the resources to approach the problems of value raised by ethics and aesthetics, it also offered new perspectives with which to approach certain theoretical issues raised by scientific practice, particularly those of observation, theory formation, and scientific discovery. Published the same year that Danto began his lecture course, Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) broached these issues, following Wittgenstein, from the perspective of revolutions in the history of science.[177] In *Structure*, Kuhn had used the controversial language of "world" change and "incommensurability" to describe the ways that revolutions in science, such as the advance from Ptolemaic to Copernican astronomy in the sixteenth century, did not simply advance new theories. As his controversial language suggested, rather, the establishment of new theories changed the ontology of the physical world based on a new conceptual scheme (i.e., heliocentrism) incommensurable with its predecessor.[178] Significantly, Danto's use of the notion of "world" change was taken directly from that book. [179]

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[176] Ibid.
[177] Joel Isaac, "Kuhn's Education: Wittgenstein, Pedagogy, and the Road to *Structure*," *Modern Intellectual History* 9 no. 1 (2012): 89-107.
[178] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
[179] For a perspective that relates "The Artworld" to Kuhn's notion of the 'paradigm', see Caroline A. Jones, "The Modernist Paradigm: The Artworld and Thomas Kuhn," *Critical Inquiry* 26 no.3 (Spring, 2000): 501. Jones, however, views the connection as hinging on the implied 'sociology' of the paradigm and the "Artworld" concept, something both Danto and Kuhn would have found anathema. For a different reading, see John Erik Hmiel, "Wittgenstein and the Genesis of Neo-Pragmatism in American Thought," *History of European Ideas* 42 no. 1 (2016): 131-149.

Kuhn's work itself, however, reflected a larger shift in both the philosophy of science and language in which philosophers began to emphasize the dependence of sense perception on non-perceptual, cognitive, and value-laden features, such as concepts and theories. Norwood Russel Hanson's *Patterns of Discovery* (1958), for example, argued that, for scientific discovery to occur at all, one needed a theory in hand to prefigure what initially *counted* as scientific data. "There is a sense, then, in which seeing is a 'theory-laden' undertaking. Observation of *x* is shaped by prior knowledge of *x*."[180] Such prior knowledge, however, was not merely a hypothesis about empirical data. "Interpretation is not something a physicist works into a ready-made deductive system: it is operative in the very making of the system. He rarely searches for a deductive system *per se,* one in which his data would appear as consequences if only interpreted physically. He is in search, rather, of an explanation of these data; his goal is a conceptual pattern in terms of which his data will fit intelligibly alongside better-known data."[181]

Crucially, Hanson had drawn on Wittgenstein's remarks on vision to illustrate the phenomenon that observation and perception were never a transparent matter of 'merely looking'. Hanson's "prior knowledge" was a working theory through which the 'data' of observations counted *as such*. In his lectures, Danto used language strikingly similar to Hanson's in a rejoinder to critics who urged that mere perception was all that was required in the understanding of modern art. "In art…we are told to <u>forget</u> about theories, just encounter, just engage with the object: and I am asking, what <u>is</u> the object? There is no object without the theory, without the reading: there is nothing to encounter? What are you going to tell people to

[180] Norwood Russel Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry Into the Conceptual Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 19.
[181] Ibid., 72.

encounter?"[182] In the same way that the concept of a person entailed certain forms of response, such as sympathy, in order to be enfranchised as such, the concept of the work of art was prefigured, and indeed enfranchised, by particular responses entailed by that concept. For Danto, the primary response was interpretation.

During the 1960s, interpretation had become a highly unfashionable concept among a new generation of intellectuals growing suspicious of claims to a universal humanity.[183] Echoing the neutralizing naturalism of Cage, the critic and novelist Susan Sontag, in her 1964 essay "Against Interpretation," argued against the imperative to "interpret" works of art as though they always contained some hidden meaning obscured by their surfaces. What she enjoined instead was a more profound attentiveness to the senses, to what she called the "erotics" of art. "What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more."[184] Sontag's strictures were resonant with the work of artists like Morris, Kaprow, and LeWitt. For Danto, however, it was precisely interpretation that made the sensuous properties of an object count as something more than mere marks on a canvas or the manipulation of material. While deleted from the published version of his 1973 essay "Artworks and Real Tings", a deleted portion of its its draft reveals that Danto explicitly had Sontag in mind on this point.

> The moment something is considered an artwork, it becomes subject, *despite what Miss Sontag says*, to an <u>interpretation</u>. Art exists in an atmosphere of interpretation and an artwork is thus a vehicle of interpretation. Interpretations, here, will depend on art that came before it, its location in art history, etc. The space between art and reality is like the space between language and reality partly because art <u>is</u> a language of sorts, in the sense that an artwork says something, and so presupposes a body of sayers and interpreters who are in position, who define what being in position is, to interpret an object.[185]

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[182] Arthur C. Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics-Fall Semester, 1962-1963," Lecture 7, 32. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1.
[183] On the trend towards suspicion of universality in American intellectual and literary life during the 1960s, see Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man*, 255-315.
[184] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1966), 23.
[185] Arthur C. Danto, "Artworks and Real Things, Draft," March 1971, 20. ACD Papers, Box 1, Folder 28, series I. Emphasis mine

While Danto's argument for the necessity of interpretation was derived largely from contemporary philosophy of science, however, it was resonant with humanist intellectuals during the 1960s, such as the literary critic E.D. Hirsch Jr. Hirsch lamented that the validity of interpretation was being undermined by a pragmatic, presentist, relativistic outlook in the humanities, a perspective encouraged by critics such as Sontag. In *Validity in Interpretation* (1967), Hirsch claimed that validity in the exercise of hermeneutics "has been neglected in recent years largely because the very conception of absolutely valid interpretation has come to be regarded with profound skepticism."[186] Such skepticism, which had been exacerbated by the tendency among younger scholars in the humanities to focus on how texts resonated with present concerns, denied "the possibility of validity in any absolute or normative sense of the word."[187]

Unlike Hirsch, however, Danto was not offering a conservative defense of humanism in his marshalling of interpretation. Rather, interpretation became an early staple of his thought as a means to consider objects as works of art that hitherto could not have *counted* as such. The so-called 'erotics' of art held the potential to become the purview of a self-annointed art cognoscenti, whose only claim to expertise was the specious faculty of taste. By contrast, the prefigurative act of interpretation disentangled art from its perceptual features alone, allowing for a range of questions and analyses precluded by exclusively perceptual or intuitive reasoning; this became Danto's original contribution to the indiscernibility paradigm. As Danto developed his thoughts about interpretation within that paradigm, moreover, it came to form the foundation of his theorization that aesthetics—the perceptible properties of art such as beauty, technique, or novelty-- were irrelevant to the nature of art as such.

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[186] E.D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), viii.
[187] Ibid.

Danto continued along this path with his students into the spring semester of 1963. Insofar as artworks became conterminous with ordinary objects for artists like Warhol and Duchamp, he suggested, their ontological status *as* artworks was hinged to their being *interpreted* as such. Moreover, the interpretation necessary to distinguish artworks from the ordinary objects that many of these works resembled, such as Rauschenberg's *Bed*, for example, confounded both the non-cognitive view of artworks and its corollary, that their appreciation depended on some sort of mystical ability. To that end, Danto posed a dilemma that befell both the non-cognitivist and the mystic when faced with an artwork that resembled an ordinary object. In the case of two individuals seeing a work of art, say the first claims that he is having an "aesthetic experience"—he 'gets' what the work is and is about in some intuitive or mystical sense. The other, however, sees only what the object is *manifestly*, say, a simple necktie in the case of Jim Dine. Both individuals *see* the same object.

How then, Danto asked, to make sense of two individuals who see one of Dine's "Ties" or Rauschenberg's "Beds," one having an ostensibly mystical "aesthetic experience," and the other seeing merely an ordinary bed? On what does the first individual's aesthetic experience rest? On the view that art is a non-cognitive or mystical experience, having an aesthetic experience would seem to rest on noticing a perceptible feature of an artwork. This put the non-cognitivist in a bind, however. If the aesthetic experience rests on noticing some perceptible feature of the object, then his aesthetic experience would hence be a cognitive one—knowledge of the work's meaning is *empirically* verified by noticing a perceptible feature, thereby satisfying the logical empiricist's criteria of knowledge. On the other hand, if one notices this feature but *fails* to have an aesthetic experience, then aesthetic experience, and hence the constitution of the *artwork* as distinct from its ordinary counterpart, cannot rest on anything perceptible. "If, on the

other hand, i [individual one] views the painting as a work of art W and j [individual two] views the painting simply as an object x, then i's aesthetic experience is cognitive. This, however, makes the status of W an issue, as it does not rest on a perceptible feature of x."[188] What constituted an object as a work of art, rather, was a theory indexed to a certain moment in history. Faced with the "Beds" of Rauschenberg "one cannot discover that a bed is not a bed."[189]

This was the fundamental premise of Danto's seminal essay of the following year, "The Artworld" (1964). In that essay, Danto had taken Warhol's "Brillo Boxes" to show that, because they were indiscernible from those found in a supermarket, interpretations, generated by a larger theoretical structure of what *counted* as art, were necessary to distinguish between the two. Contemporary art had now come to rest on "something the eye cannot descry—an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art."[190] For Danto, Andy Warhol's facsimiles of Brillo Boxes offered the most provocative example of a work whose status as an artwork depended on its being subject to an interpretation. "What in the end makes the difference, of course, between a Brillo Box and a "Brillo Box*"* is a certain theory of art. It is the theory which prevents it from collapsing into the real object which it (*non-interpretatively*) is."[191] On the theory that artworks could directly resemble ordinary objects, this made interpretation indispensable to establishing the ontology of artworks distinguishable from ordinary objects. Crucially, however, these claims had been a fundamental part of Danto's emerging thoughts about the nature of art well before he encountered Warhol.

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[188] Arthur C. Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics-Fall Semester, 1962-1963," Lecture 7. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1.
[189] Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld-Draft," 5. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series. 1.
[190] Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy* 61 no. 19 (1964): 580.
[191] Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld-Draft," 12. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series. 1. Both emphases mine.

In both the "The Artworld," and its sequel "Artworks and Real Things," Danto drew on the Oxford-based philosopher P.F. Strawson to show how the distinction between artworks and ordinary objects required conceiving of artworks as 'logically primitive' in the same way as *persons*. Distinguishing between ordinary objects and artworks to which they were perceptually equivalent, Danto wrote, is "something like, if we may assume as essentially correct some well-known views of Peter Strawson, mistaking a person for a material body when a person is indeed a material body in at least the sense that a whole class of terms, sensibly predicable of material bodies, are sensibly, and in accordance with no different criteria, sensibly predicable of persons." In the case of Rauschenberg's *Bed,* for example:

> It has to be explained to one that this is an artwork [by pointing] out that the paint streaks are not to be explained away, but are part of the object, so the object is not a mere bed with—as it happens—streaks of paint spilled over it, but a complex object fabricated out of a bed and some paint streaks—a paint-bed. Similarly…a person is not a merely material body with, as it happens, some thoughts, but a complex object made up of a body and some states of consciousness: a conscious-body…persons, like works of art, must be irreducible to parts of themselves and, in that sense, are 'primitive.'[192]

The paint on Rauschenberg's *Bed,* it could be conceded, could constitute a limiting condition for its difference from an ordinary bed. But even in the case of objects *completely* indiscernible from artworks, for Danto, the point was still the same. "A necktie which is an artwork differs from one which is not much as a person differs from a body: metaphysically, it takes two sets of predicates amazingly similar to the P- [person]and M-[material body] predicates which persons take on [in] a well-known theory of P.F. Strawson's."[193] Artworks were thus logically primitive in the sense that they both contained material properties, but were not reducible to those properties, were not dependent on them for their identity or ontological status *as* artworks.

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[192] Ibid., 6.
[193] Arthur C. Danto, "Artworks and Real Things, Draft," March, 1971, 16. ACD Papers, Box 1, Folder 28, series I.

In Strawson's landmark book *Individuals* (1959), he argued that what was then referred to as the "no-ownership" view of the self, common to many of the logical empiricists, rested on a mistaken reduction of personal identity to empirical reality. The philosopher's attempt to argue that the ego is an illusion, based on the reduction of the statement "my experiences are had by me" to the statement "my experiences are reduced to (uniquely dependent upon the state of) body B," is an attempt to show that the self is a merely contingent phenomenon. In other words, the attempt to eliminate ownership words such as 'my' and 'had by' should ultimately yield a contingent fact. However, the very basis of the fact it meant to yield rested on an analytic premise, which undermined that attempt. For Strawson, "the theorist cannot consistently argue that 'all the experiences of person P' *means* the same thing as 'all experiences contingently dependent on a certain body b'; for then his proposition would not be contingent, as his theory requires, but analytic."[194] In other words, the *meaning* of the "no-ownership" view was logically incoherent because it rested for its force on the very claim it meant to deny.

Strawson's answer to the "no-ownership" theory, drawing largely on the latter Wittgenstein, was to posit *persons* as "logically primitive" entities. To *persons* one can attribute predicates that would appropriately apply to other material entities (m-predicates), *as well as* predicates that apply only to persons (i.e., "is smiling" "is in pain"). For Strawson, however, the concept of a person was non-dualistic. To illustrate this point, he used the psychological case of "depression." If I take your depression as merely a piece of behavior meant to *signal* depression, then I can only do so based on inference from my own experiences of depression. For Strawson, however, ascribing states of consciousness like depression to myself was logically dependent on my ability to ascribe such states to other people. So the very idea of a gap between depression

[194] P.F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen & Co., 1959), 97.

and depression *behavior* undermined the basis of both my ability to ascribe depression to myself, or to another person.[195] Strawson's larger point here was to argue that *persons* were entities both material and immaterial without being divided between the 'substances' of body and mind.

A crucial part of Strawson's argument was based on the fact that there are certain predicates used in ordinary language that meaningfully apply to persons but that cannot be reduced to their physical status. Danto had made a similar point in "Artworks and Real Things," noting that part of ascribing the status "is an artwork" to certain objects involved certain *defeating conditions* that logically denied the status of such ascriptions. Like Cavell and Goodman, Danto exploited the indiscernibility paradigm by using the example of forgeries and fakes. For Danto, the defeating conditions for artworks were 1) fakes, and 2) non-artistic provenance (objects made by, say chimpanzees, children, or counterfeiters). In the same way, "'Person' is defeasible, for example, thorough such avenues as minority, subcompetence, disenfranchisement…and the like."[196] Just as such conditions stood to undermine the dignity and sets of rights accorded to persons by virtue of the fact that our concept of a person dictated such rights, part of the concept of a work of art, which would otherwise be defeated by such conditions as forgery or counterfeits, was interpretation. Interpretation was the barrier between art and reality; the indiscernibility paradigm kept it in place.

In the published version of "The Artworld," Danto had argued that the 'is' contained in a statement such as '*a* is an artwork', was the ascriptive verb used to identify one, any, or all parts of a physical object *as* an artwork. "I shall designate this the *is of artistic identification*; in each case in which it is used, the *a* stands for some specific physical property of, or physical part of, an object; and finally, it is a necessary condition for something to be an artwork that some part or

[195] Ibid., 107-109.
[196] Arthur C. Danto, "Artworks and Real Things, Draft," March 1971, 15. ACD Papers, Box 1, Folder 28, series I.

property of it be designable by the subject of a sentence that employs this special *is*."[197] In the draft of the essay, however, the ascriptive 'is' that picked out artworks was more explicitly part of its being a vehicle of *interpretation*. "I shall, for want of a better word, dub this the '*is of interpretation'*; and submit it as a necessary condition for an object O to be a work of art that some part p of O sensibly sustain an *interpretative* ascription."[198] That Danto had jettisoned the "is of interpretation" for the "is of artistic identification" shows precisely how the ontological status of artworks, as entities *distinct* from life, was tied to interpretation.

The necessity of distinguishing between art and reality, moreover, was not simply a philosophical position for Danto during the 1960s. As the gap between art and life seemed to be closing for more artists, political and cultural life seemed correspondingly, and unnecessarily, tied to a shallow attachment to the senses, a la Sontag. In a crossed-out portion of the draft of "Artworks," Danto went as far as expressing the view that recent American art had "*attacked* the boundaries between art and life."[199] For Danto, the conflation of art's "erotics" and reality itself reflected a larger cultural shift, particularly among America's youth. By 1971, Danto wrote, "politics [had] become[s] a form of theater, clothing a kind of costume, human relations a kind of role, life a game. We interpret ourselves and our gestures as we once interpreted art-works."[200] If the primacy of the senses to the concept of art was waning in artistic circles, for Danto, it seemed all too important for youth self-definition.

In his marginalia, Danto reflected a view of the 1960s characterized by the emergence of an increasingly subjective attitude that confused the trappings of style, bequeathed by consumer-

[197] Danto, "The Artworld," 577.
[198] Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld-Draft," 7. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series. 1. Emphasis mine.
[199] Ibid., 21.
[200] Ibid., 23.

culture, with political rebellion.[201] The connection between this history and Danto's thought is explored much more fully in chapter 3. It is worth noting, however, that his defiance of non-cognitivism in the name of *interpretation* during the period between "The Artworld" and "Artworks" was strengthened by his perception of the increasing conflation of subjective preference with consumer choice and the attitudes of youth. For the non-cognitivist and Danto's imagined young-person alike, aesthetics was tantamount to subjective preference, which found a corollary in the popular phrase of that decade, "do your own thing." But if this were true, he argued, there would be no way of accounting for disagreement in art. If aesthetics amounted only to personal preferences, then the expression of like and dislike among two people over the same painting would not constitute disagreement at all, for agreement must refer to something objective, outside of oneself, and if one is merely expressing one's feelings, then there is no accounting for the object that seems to elicit the alleged disagreement in the first place.[202] If art was only as cognitively meaningful as the idealistic impressions of young people, or its mere surfaces, then the philosophy of art stood, for Danto, in no higher intellectual standing than the writings of Abbie Hoffman.

On the non-cognitivist view, "There could, logically, be no disagreements in aesthetics at all, there could not because 'I like x' said by A and 'I don't like x' said by B, are perfectly compatible utterances, and both could be true. The fact that there is no disagreeing over taste then has nothing to do with aesthetics at all if, in fact, aesthetic judgements have nothing to do with personal pathologies, feelings, and the like, as I should like to suppose is the case."[203]

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[201] On the contradictions of American thought and culture during the 1960s, see David Steigerwald, *The Sixties and the End of Modern America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counter-Culture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
[202] Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld-Draft," 7, 38. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series. 1. Emphasis mine.
[203] Ibid.

Furthermore, certain aesthetic terms like beautiful compounded the problem. For example, when asked to give a reason why one likes a painting, and I respond, because it is beautiful, one is merely expressing a preference for the beautiful over, say, the ugly, and moreover expressing a subjective preference tout court. "Saying it is beautiful is like saying I like it: so when asked to give a reason for why I like the painting, I am, in effect, saying, I like it because I like it, which is tautological."[204] In this sense, Danto's resistance to the aestheticization of ordinary life, to "doing your own thing", was at once a philosophical position and a cultural stance. [205]

The metaphors of empirical austerity and psychological erasure that had come to define conceptual art seemed only to confirm that stance; in an important sense, they unwittingly threatened to undermine the very human basis of art as a shared concept of cultural life. For Danto, much of that cultural life depended on recognizing art and reality as distinct entities, lest we lose either. In an underlined passage of his draft of "Artworks", Danto wrote that "civilizations consist of the awareness of media as media, and reality as reality."[206] The space between the two was precisely what made artworks *meaningful*. Moreover, meaningfulness presupposed individuals for whom such works were meaningful *for*, so that obliterating the distinction between the two would be, in a sense, to do away with art altogether. Artworks, like language, were part of the larger fabric of meaning from which culture was constructed. But if theories of art that based artistic legitimacy on empirical verification were no longer appropriate to contemporary art making, then this put the burden of such meanings in the more firmly intersubjective realm of art theory and a work's place in art history, the knowledge of which required particular forms of interpretation.

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[204] Ibid. (where is footnote 206?)

[206] Arthur C. Danto, "Artworks and Real Things, Draft," March 1971, 2. ACD Papers, Box 1, Folder 28, series I. Emphasis mine.

During the 1960s, however, it was a fashionable refrain for artists to insist that their works resisted interpretation altogether. Artists and critics as otherwise diverse as Warhol, Sontag, and Robert Morris all cohered on the necessity of surfaces to the integrity of their work. As Warhol claimed of his famed "Coca Cola" prints, for example, "a coke is a coke…all the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good."[207] Despite his insistence on Warhol's genius, such an anti-interpretive stance more often than not represented a specious form 'hip' idealism in other artists. But it was equally a logical fallacy, particularly when it came to what he called 'negative painters'. Here, Danto had in mind the purported 'purity' that certain painters, particularly hard-edge abstractionists such as Ellsworth Kelly, attached to their work by virtue of their claims to having removed from their art of any trace of personal expression. The high-modernism of Greenberg, at least, had asserted that painting was about "paint"—a highly reductionist theory, yet a theory, nonetheless. But Danto was concerned with certain artists who insisted that their works were not *about* anything at all. Such a stance, he argued, was logically incoherent, because it necessarily had to incorporate and, by extension, repudiate, all the other stylistic options available to him throughout history, and among his contemporaries. "Negative painters, indeed, are apt to think of themselves as rather pure: having scoured their pictures clean of all the properties which are intersectional, they credit themselves with having produced pure art. But of course this is a logical fallacy. What they have only managed to do is to create non-…: and strictly speaking, their works are as rich in artistically relevant features as are their fellows and peers."[208] In other words, the "blankness" of a pure white canvass such as Rauschenberg's was enfranchised by its *not* containing color or content, which was itself a

[207] Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1975), 101.
[208] Arthur C. Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics-Fall Semester, 1962-1963," Lecture 7, 42. ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1.

theoretical gesture that required an interpretation, and a knowledge of the history of art to produce.[209]

It was on this basis that Danto argued that artworks existed in what he called an "Artworld", a loose assemblage of artists, galleries, museums, curators, critics, philosophers, collectors, and museum-goers. "Membership" in that world, moreover, required a knowledge of art history, contemporary art, and, significantly, the *theories* of art through which certain objects could be considered art at different moments in history. The "theory" that made artworks of objects indiscernible from their ordinary counterparts was not the product of some singular mind, however. Rather, it existed ambiguously as a reflection of the work of contemporary artists in New York during the past decade. "Of course, without the theory, one is unlikely to see it [Warhol's work] as art, and in order to see it as part of the artworld, one must have mastered a good deal of artistic theory as well as a considerable amount of the history of recent New York painting. It could not have been art fifty years ago."[210] Crucially, however, Warhol's work itself wasn't the catalyst for "The Artworld" and the philosophy expressed therein. Rather, his ideas about indiscernibility were formed in the course of his undergraduate lectures the previous year and turned on fundamental developments in the philosophy of language and philosophy of science that cohered around the indiscernibility paradigm. Rather than a spur, Warhol became Danto's affirmation.

[209] To be sure, Danto did not have Rauschenberg in mind on this point.
[210] Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy* 61 no. 19 (October, 1964): 581.

The Artworld as Institution?

Two years after Danto published "The Artworld", the conceptual artist Walter de Maria commissioned an infinite series of sculptures, titled "High Energy Bar" (1966). Consisting of a bare, stainless-steel bar just over a foot long and about an inch high, "High Energy Bar" also featured a notarized certificate of authenticity. Rather than a mere legal document, however, the certificate was itself part of the artwork, and stated that the document must be present in order for the work to be considered art.[211] The requiring of a certificate both conferring "artworld" status on itself and incorporating that conferral as part of the work was, arguably, either parody or navel gazing about the recent sociology of modern art.[212] Despite de Maria's intentions, however, "High Energy Bar" was an explicit acknowledgment that the enfranchisement of artworks required something that evaded mere perception of the object itself.

For the philosopher George Dickie, then a young professor at the University of Illinois, what was left after one subtracted perception from the equation of an artwork was an *institution* of art. Dickie had drawn largely from Danto's notion of an "artworld", which was left somewhat vague in his original essay, and developed it in the service of a definition of art that would become a serious position in analytic aesthetics during the 1970s and 80s.[213] That position, known as the "Institutional Theory of Art," was developed most clearly in Dickie's 1974 book *Art and the Aesthetic* (1974). On Dickie's account, the artworld was tantamount to the established practices and procedures through which art was produced, exhibited, consumed,

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[211] On Walter de Maria, see Jane McFadden, *Walter de Maria: Meaningless Work* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016).
[212] On September 27, 2018, the seventy-fourth 'iteration' of "High Energy Bar" sold for $27,500. https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/walter-de-maria-19352013-high-energy-bar-6161234-details.aspx. Accessed March 15, 2019.
[213] Dickie first began to develop these ideas in George Dickie, "Defining Art," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6 no. 3 (July, 1969): 253-256 and idem., "Defining Art II," in Matthew Lipman ed., *Contemporary Aesthetics* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1973): 118-131

criticized, and theorized. Moreover, it consisted of a "bundle of systems: theater, painting, sculpture, literature, music, and so on, each of which furnishes an institutional background for the conferring of status on objects within its domain."[214] But this left open a fundamental question. If, as Danto suggested, "there is no art without those who speak the language of the artworld," then how precisely did it get decided that, within that world, an object was an appropriate candidate for an interpretation? [215]

For Dickie, conferring the status of an artwork onto an object was akin to the conferring of legal status. [216] Outside of the institutionalized rituals for, say, pronouncing a couple married, or granting the status of knighthood, there was no *observable* criteria to certify the status of marriage or royalty. But we don't, either, claim of these legal statuses that they are arbitrary or invalid.[217] Similarly in the case of artworks, the conferral of the status of art on certain objects was made by a loosely knit group of (often conflicting) authorities. These authorities included "artists (understood to refer to painters, writers, composers), producers, museum directors, museum-goers, reporters for newspapers, critics for publications of all sorts, art historians, art theorists, philosophers of art, and others."[218] Outside of the 'forms of life' that these individuals and groups cultivated, there was no observable criteria for their authority. But, then, such a criterion would undermine the concept of art to which their identity contributed.

For Dickie, moreover, one did not need *permission* to become a member of the artworld. "Every person who sees himself as a member of the artworld is thereby a member."[219] While Danto's theory included certain defeasibility conditions, such as artwork made by children and

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[214] George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 33.
[215] Arthur C. Danto, "Artworks and Real Things, Draft," March, 1971, 20. ACD Papers, Box 1, Folder 28, series I.
[216] Dickie insisted on the term "artifact," rather than "object," as part of his definition of art.
[217] Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic*, 34.
[218] Ibid., 35.
[219] Ibid., 36.

animals, Dickie's reading of the artworld was much more liberal. On this reading, anyone could make an object and call it art. "Nothing prevents a group of persons from conferring the status, but it is usually conferred by a single person, the artist who creates the artifact."[220] Indeed, this was reflective of the profusion of new forms and experiences of art that were radically underdetermined by their perceptual features. Moreover, it reflected the profundity of Danto's influence.

For some observers, however, Danto's work and its implications perpetuated an insidious nihilism that was reflected in the art it sought to comprehend. After giving a lecture in aesthetics in January of 1966, Danto received a letter from a colleague in the art history department at Columbia, sounding a note of cultural despair. "When artistic nihilism began to be fashionable, I felt that the academic world would protect the great tradition and at least give sanity a harbor 'for the duration'...but I was quite disappointed to find that the intellectual establishment was not the least bit interested in clarification, having in fact joined the mad dance."[221] In the wake of Pop Art and Minimalism, the idea that a work of art could, in principle, take any form whatsoever, was disturbing to say the least.

For Danto, however, strict adherence to an evaluative scheme based in perception alone acted as a blinder to a more fundamental question about art itself: why is it something human beings have persistently *cared* about? And, more significantly, what makes the difference between art and life? As he developed his philosophy of art later in his career, part of his answers to these questions came in the form of a familiar analogy he had drawn on in his undergraduate lectures. In his most mature statement on art, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981), Danto wrote:

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[220] Ibid.
[221] Lincoln Rothschild to Arthur C. Danto, January 23rd, 1966. ACD Papers, Box 11, Folder 8, Series 1.

> What would be missing from a description of the self in the descriptions of neurophysiology unaugmented with the language of moral psychology would be all those features of *personality* and *character* which come closest to those qualities of style and expression in the world of art…It is possible to suppose that what is important to us in art, in view of these parallel structures, is of a piece with what is important to us in one another—as if the work of art were the externalization of the artist who made it, as if to appreciate the work is to see the world through the artist's sensibility and not just to see the world.[222]

Toward the end of his life, Danto even recalled the matter in political terms. "Nineteen sixty-four [when "The Artworld" was published] was a very political year for American civil rights activists, many of whom went into the South to register black voters who had been disenfranchised by racial prejudice. To be an art work meant that an object had all sorts of rights and privileges that ordinary objects lacked—people respected it, it was valuable, it was protected, it was studied and contemplated with awe."[223] No matter their outward appearance, artworks were valuable parts of human meaning, even if Danto, in his old age, certainly overstated the case. Like persons, the status of artworks, their being *inextricable* from meaning and interpretation, lay somewhere beyond what met the eye.

As Danto's marginalia indicated, his aversion to the senses alone was reinforced by what he saw as a youth culture who confused aesthetic choice with political rebellion and moral suasion. As he confronted that position in his own students during the late 1960s, however, it would reinforce his sense that the line between art and life was necessary on both analytic and political grounds.

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[222] Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 160.
[223] Arthur C. Danto, "Letter to Posterity," *The American Scholar*, September 4, 2012, accessed March 29, 2017, https://theamericanscholar.org/letter-to-posterity/#.

Liberalism, Pluralism, and the Ideology of the Aesthetic

"In truth dogmatism and intolerance have dogged our tracks ever since the advent of modernism." Arthur C. Danto-1998"[224]

On the evening of April 23rd, 1968, the esteemed literary critic Lionel Trilling gathered a group of influential Columbia professors to his apartment. The mood was one of grave concern.[225] Earlier that day, hundreds of students under the auspices of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and its charismatic campus leader, Mark Rudd, had taken over Hamilton Hall, and took the acting dean of Columbia College, Henry Coleman, as hostage. To SDS, Columbia had come to represent society's ills in microcosm. Just weeks after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the university still clung to its plan, years in the making, to construct a gym for Columbia students in Morningside Park, in the predominantly African-American and Puerto-Rican neighborhood of neighboring Harlem. Adding to its already significant real-estate investments in the neighborhood, the move represented the university's priority of profit at the expense of society's marginalized and disenfranchised. Nor were its investments limited to real estate. Columbia was one of several ivy-league universities acting as an institutional and research base for the Institute for Defense Analysis, an organization created by the defense department in 1956 to conduct weapons evaluation and other research related to national defense. The university's tacit support for racial injustice and the Vietnam war had rendered its authority moot—the

[224] Arthur C. Danto, "Ryman and Postmodernism (draft)," Box 7, Folder 54, Series 1. ACD Papers.
[225] Jerry L. Avorn, *Up Against the Ivy Wall: A History of the Columbia Crisis* (New York: H. Wolf, 1968),69-70.

students' last recourse was occupation and the taking of hostages. As SDS declared in its founding document *The Port Huron Statement* (1962), the American university's "comfortable", "intellectual" life did "not obscure the fact that the fundamental qualities of life on the campus reflect the habits of society at large."[226]

The professors convened in Trilling's apartment, however, didn't see it that way. Trilling, who urged that SDS must not be allowed to turn Columbia into "some scruffy Latin-American university," found common cause with his colleagues, the sociologist Daniel Bell, literary critic Quentin Anderson, and with Danto, in his feeling of besiegement. [227] After all, as eminent intellectuals prescribing and describing the postwar intellectual and cultural scene, the university footed their bill. More importantly, it provided a space for open, critical exchange in a world so recently beset by dogmatism and ideological blindness.

On a theoretical level, Danto saw such blindness reflected in extant models of art analysis that relied on a specious faculty of taste, rooted in the senses and intuition alone. As he confronted his students, however, he saw this view mirrored on a larger cultural scale. Having only been a civilian for less than a decade before assuming his professorship at Columbia, Danto was particularly sensitive to quick or easy "fixes" to political or social problems. As a liberal, the moral certainty of his students' tactics and demands from the Left seemed to reflect the same ineffable certainty of art analysis based in the certainty of sense-perception alone. Moreover, as his and other students' attacks on liberalism became cloaked in the language of aesthetic choice, it served to reinforce his sense that there was a firm line between art and life. The failure to

[226] Students for a Democratic Society, *The Port Huron Statement* (New York: Students for a Democratic Society: 1964): 11.
[227] Also in attendance were the psychologist Eugene Galanter, professor of government Herbert Deane, and Danto's colleague and friend in the philosophy department, Richard Kuhns.

honor that divide, he believed, resulted in a fulsome worship of youth over experience, moral dogmatism, and even covert historical prophecy.

Danto's confrontation with his students, and youth culture more broadly during the late 1960s, became a pivotal moment in reinforcing his developing views about the definition of art. With a characteristically liberal sensibility that valued complexity, realism, sobriety, and openness, that experience particularly reinforced his commitment to openness in the philosophy and criticism of art.[228] As his students cloaked their moral righteousness in aesthetic posturing, it came to reinforce Danto's sense that a definition of art based in the senses alone was fundamentally dogmatic. If the "erotics" of art became synonymous with art's definition, then the latter became ultimately prohibitive. Such a prohibitive definition flew in the face of what was, by the early 70s, a profusion of artistic styles and mediums that co-existed, without a clear sense that art had to be any one thing, and that it could, in fact, look like anything at all.

This was also a crucial moment in Danto's development as a more public-facing "art intellectual." Danto's commitment to openness and pluralism in art was reflected, during the 1980s, in the pieces he wrote for *The Nation*. Relative to other art critics on both the right and the left, who viewed pluralism in the arts as a betrayal of art's mission, Danto maintained a defense of pluralism on the grounds that a definition of art that yoked it with a 'mission' was inherently dogmatic. In this sense, this chapter builds on the former by exploring the political and cultural dimensions surrounding Danto's distrust of the senses as a basis for the philosophies of art and

[228] On the relationship between liberalism and the virtues of "openness" and "complexity" see Jamie Cohen-Cole, *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), and Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1985); On liberalism as a kind-of Aristotelian virtue, see James T. Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

art history. Moreover, it provides a more historically grounded explanation of Danto's 'catholicity' in *The Nation* than an analysis of the development of his formal philosophy alone.

The Liberals, Vietnam, and the Structure of History

Nothing put the faith in post-war liberalism on the defensive more than the Vietnam war. Seemingly free of the specious reasoning that led the U.S. into Indochina in the wake of Dien Bien Phu, Danto's liberalism began during the "Good War." He had enlisted in the service of democracy and stability, against the ideological grandeur of revolution whose embodiments were Hilter, Mussolini, Stalin. The war had cemented his wariness of the view "that the way to solve problems was to begin all over again."[229] The atrocities that had awakened that reserve, moreover, heightened his sense of the seriousness and complexity of life, the fragility of the ordinary things that he had taken for granted before "coming out of adolescence with the help of Morocco."[230] Returning home to a life filled with art and philosophy, to the comfort and stability of a tenured professorship, Danto held a renewed sense of esteem for the post-war domestic order.

But he held no such esteem for the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, as his vociferous students were also proclaiming by 1968. By that time, liberals and "old-left" intellectuals, and their students alike, generally opposed the war. How to express that discontent, however, was another matter. In the months leading up to the April student takeover, Danto had openly expressed a desire for "complete withdrawal" from the war, along with a cohort of Columbia professors. On January 27th, he joined seven Columbia faculty members at a meeting with New York's democratic congressman William F. Ryan (24th C.D.) in encouraging the latter to take a

[229] Arthur Danto to David Carrier, January 15, 1998. Box 12, Folder 13. ACD papers.
[230] Danto to David Carrier, January 7, 1996. Box 12, Folder 11. ACD Papers.

"stronger and longer range" attitude toward American foreign policy, and a firmer stance on withdrawal from the war. According to Danto, Ryan was "a little evasive, but only in the way a politician is obliged to be." While other faculty members pressed Ryan more aggressively to put conscience above politics, however, Danto was the realist in the room. "Some were less willing to accept his politician's stand than I was."[231]

As students at Columbia and universities across the U.S. grew more impatient with the "politician's stand," Danto remained steadfast in his commitment to stability and practicality in the face of a nascent radicalism. This was particularly apparent in his attitudes towards draft deferment for graduate students. Like their undergraduate counterparts, graduate students were technically entitled to 2-S deferment status under the Selective Service Act of 1948. As part of the latitude given to local draft boards, however, more and more students saw their deferment status reclassified to 1-A, interrupting their educations and placing them in the pool of eligible servicemen.[232] As the pool of graduate students dwindled, Danto was ultimately more concerned with the preservation and maintenance of the university than taking concerted action to combat injustice. To be sure, many faculty members were concerned with the increasing number of deferment reversals that began apace in 1965. Meeting with a University Council to discuss a solution, however, Danto demurred that no consensus about what to do could be reached. The imminent solution was the practical one: simply over-admit graduate students. "From the practical point of view," Danto argued, "there's not much else we can do…we have to guarantee that the University will continue to function."[233]

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[231] "Ryan Criticized for Vietnam Views," *Columbia Daily Spectator* Vol. CXII no. 61 (February 9, 1968): 9.
[232] "Draft Boards Reclassifying Grad Students," *Columbia Daily Spectator* Vol. CX no. 25 (October 26, 1965): 1.
[233] Michael Stern, "Council to Delay Strategy on Draft," *Columbia Daily Spectator* Vol. CXII no. 69. (February 21, 1968): 6.

As Danto was quickly realizing, however, Columbia's functionality, and its embodiment of balance and restraint, was beginning to crack. When Columbia students initially proposed a one-day moratorium on classes for March 13 to "dramatize their legitimate concern over the issues which the war in Vietnam creates," Danto commended the effort for its balanced and non-ideological approach. The tenor of his praise, however, reflected his limited vision of legitimate protest. Commenting on the proposed action the day prior, he proclaimed that "The Moratorium will be effective only so far as it is not focused on the sorts of issues which militants demand. Its political strength would lie in its *ideological weakness*."[234] Likewise, the bounds of moral-criticism had to be measured, restrained to the extent that the legitimacy of moral concern appear rational and non-dogmatic. "By expressing its concerns in a way which can enlist the moral allegiance of a great many of us, by limiting the scope of the gesture to a single academic day, by choosing a curiously unaggressive and strangely sober label like 'Moratorium' to describe the expression, the movers of this action have found a serious and relevant way of voicing our moral unease." Danto shared his students' discontent with the war. But preserving the stability of the university, which was in many ways a metaphor for the preservation of reason itself, for warding off the conceptual monism of ideology, was "a more fundamental obligation than any which may seem to require an action [of] which [it] would be destructive."[235]

Danto shared with his colleagues gathered in Trilling's apartment a view of reason that venerated a "sober" realism over ideology, open-mindedness over dogmatism, and "complexity" over simplicity, all of which were fostered by a well-rounded liberal arts education. Chastened by the ideological and utopian visions of their generation's youth, liberal intellectuals had

[234]Arthur C. Danto, "Letters to the Editor: On the Moratorium," *Columbia Daily Spectator* Vol. CXII no. 82 (March 12, 1968): 5. Emphasis mine.
[235] Ibid.

particularly cherished the virtues of "difficulty" and "complexity" in intellectual and artistic production, as opposed to dogmatic and ideological bias. As Lisa Szefel has recently described it, "public intellectuals, writers, artists, academics, and even national security leaders across the political spectrum became convinced that, in order to save democracy from totalitarian terror and dogma, Americans had to develop critical thinking skills, read widely and deeply and, in the realm of culture, privilege difficulty and complexity."[236] Trilling had maintained this stance for nearly thirty years, remarking in *The Liberal Imagination* (1940) that the role of literary criticism was to "recall liberalism to its first essential imagination of variousness and possibility, which implies the awareness of complexity and difficulty." As such, the literary critic's primary role was to consider literature as "the human activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty."[237] Similarly, Bell's *The End of Ideology* (1960) represented a turn away from the Marxist writings of his youth in warning against a view of politics guided by theories of "Mass Society," the competing interests of civil society, bureaucracy, and welfare-capitalism urging more *complex* understandings of the U.S. "The growing complexity of society necessarily multiplies…interests, regional or functional, and in an open society…the prism of 'class' is too crude to follow the swift play of diverse political groups."[238] Bell extended this sense of 'complexity' to his analysis of the university. For him, the university's function was not to fundamentally alter individuals or society, but to make them aware of precisely such complexity necessary to successfully navigate the post-war world. "The university cannot remake the world…the university cannot even remake men. But it can liberate

[236] Lisa Szefel, "Critical Thinking as Cold War Weapon: Anxiety, Terror, and the Fate of Democracy in Postwar America," *The Journal of American Culture* 40 no. 1 (2017): 35.
[237] Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Harcourt, 1940): xii.
[238] Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: Collier, 1961): 66.

young men by making them aware of the forces that impel them from within and compel them from without. This, in itself, is the enduring rationale of a liberal education."[239] Appreciating societal complexity became a metaphor for the 'reasoned' considerations of the liberal-mind.

Indeed, this had been the enduring rationale of Columbia's commitment to a well-balanced, liberal education since 1919, when it established its required course for all incoming freshman, "Contemporary Civilization." Spearheaded by the philosopher Frederick J.E. Woodbridge, CC-A (and, eventually CC-B for sophomores) aimed to give students a solid foundation in the major political, intellectual, artistic, and historical issues in Western (and sometimes non-Western) "civilization" spanning from 1300 to the present, and was taught by faculty in the departments of history, political science, art, music, literature, and philosophy.[240] Inspired in large part by Dewey, Columbia's philosophy department saw itself and its role in these broader terms. The same year that Danto enrolled as a graduate student, it sponsored a course for the school of general studies titled "American Values in World Perspective," which the director of Columbia's public information office described as "one of the most comprehensive courses ever offered in Columbia University's School of General Studies." The course integrated politics, history, economics, art, and intellectual life under its banner, offering each as a component under the increasingly diverse, difficult canopy of postwar American life.[241] While never an unqualified champion of courses like CC-A or "American Values", the virtues of openness and complexity that they cultivated were not lost on Danto, particularly in his role as a philosopher.

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[239] Eleanor Prescot, "Bell Study Favors General Education," *Columbia Daily Spectator* Vol. CXI no. 1 (September 20, 1996): 14.
[240] Robert McCaughey, *Stand: A History of Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 291.
[241] Robert Harron, "Public Information Office, Memo, September 15, 1949," Box 44 Folder 10, Department of Philosophy. Columbia University Archives.

For reasons both philosophical and personal, Danto held no such view of philosophy as a guide to living, despite an early and short-lived admiration for Deweyan pragmatism. The pragmatic naturalism of his graduate school professors stood "like a kind of Tibet," an "awful scene dominated by the fuddy-duddies of early twentieth-century thought."[242] Rather, what seemed under attack in April of '68 were just those values of openness and complexity that he believed the university stood for. Seen as a guide to living, philosophy was potentially dangerous. What it offered, rather, was the virtues of clarity, reason, and aversion to dogmatism, the pitfalls of which he had seen in the hegemony of Greenbergian criticism and its adherence to a particular epistemology linking everyday perception to normative prophecy.

Danto's first major philosophical contribution was rooted in precisely those virtues. Written as an extension of his doctoral dissertation, Danto's *Analytical Philosophy of History* was an essay on the logic and meaning of both history and historical language. Having been deeply inspired by his undergraduate history professor William Bossenbrook, Danto carried his enthusiasm for the discipline into the world of philosophy, but sought to offer a philosophical explanation of history in decidedly more lucid, and logical terms than his predecessors in the field. Opposed to what he deemed "substantive" philosophies of history such as Hegel's, and pragmatist explanations of history that reduced historical sentences to predictions deduced from 'experience', Danto's underlying thesis was that the whole of history could not be explained in terms of either the past or the present. Indeed, there was no "whole of history" to explain, there being no reasonable or responsible way to predict the future. On his view, the past could only be

[242] Arthur C. Danto, "Hayden White and Me: Two Systems of Philosophy of History," in Robert Doran ed., *Philosophy of History After Hayden White* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). On the cohort of Deweyan Naturalists at Columbia and their relationship to logical empiricism during the 1930s and 40s, see Andrew Jewett, "Canonizing Dewey: Naturalism, Logical Empiricism, and the Idea of American Philosophy," *Modern Intellectual History* 8 no. 1 (2011): 91-125.

understood in terms of future events to give them significance. Historical knowledge was in turn codified in the form of *narratives*--events in the past whose temporal sequence was *explained,* and thus given significance, through the "past-referring" predicates embedded in our basic language of causality.

For Danto, that basic language involved more than just one entity acting upon another. Our descriptions of past events had truth conditions, the meeting of which could not logically be satisfied by empirical criteria alone. Danto had in mind both the pragmatic and logical empiricist emphasis on 'experience' as the repository from which true statements are verified via their predicted consequences. The problem with this view was that statements about the past became covert predictions about the future, that future consisting in the historians' verification of historical evidence. In other words, if the verificationist criteria of knowledge depended on a claim to the future, then it could not provide a meaningful basis for true statements about the past.[243] The further problem with this line of thinking, Danto maintained, was that the truth conditions of historical statements could not be translated into a temporally-neutral language. "Whatever the case, since past-referring predicates, when true of present objects, give us information about events and objects which are not present, it is plain enough that we cannot fully translate into a temporally neutral idiom sentences which employ these terms. For a full translation of a sentence S into a sentence T must, in addition to preserving the truth value of S, convey the same information that S does."[244] In the case of statements about the past, translation into the temporally neutral language of present observation would sacrifice those truth conditions not available to observation, which are particular to historical knowledge. For example, there is nothing *observable* about George Washington's house in itself that makes it the dwelling in

[243] Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 30.
[244] Ibid., 74.

which the historical figure lived. The house, or for that matter the whole world, may have been created five minutes ago leaving everything as it is but the past as such irrelevant. For Danto, the difference was that there would be a whole class of temporally unambiguous statements (specifically, statements that depend for their truth value on certain properties or events from the past) that would no longer hold. "There would be men, but no fathers; white marks but no scars, Dwellings on mount Vernon but not Washington's home."[245] The world would be, in effect, neutered of its past, left in a perpetual present.

Danto equated such an epistemology of the present with an emphasis on 'experience' that threatened to undermine the deeply temporal character of both life and language. "The concept of presentness is built into the concept of experience, so that it is analytically necessary that one can only experience the present. Given this logical fact, together with an identification of knowledge with experience, it becomes difficult to see how one can know the past: the past is one of the things which is not experienced. But if we go on to ask how, if all we experience is the present, we can possibly know the past, we are assuming a temporally neutral sort of experience."[246] The Substantive philosopher's claim to know the whole of history—past, present, and future—implied precisely such a flattening of temporality.

Significantly, Danto's critique of 'experience' as a covert offshoot of Substantive philosophy of history revealed an inchoate liberal sensibility, rooted in the twin virtues of both freedom and political sobriety. In a 1966 review of the historian Bruce Maizlish's, *The Riddle of History*, an intellectual history of the great philosophers of history beginning with Vico, Danto argued that "[speculative] Philosophers of history have begun by describing and ended by changing the history of mankind. To be ignorant of philosophy of history is virtually to be

[245] Ibid., 74-5.
[246] Ibid., 92-3.

victimized by it, so that it is a body of literature which, in addition to the intrinsic rewards it yields, may exact a penalty of those ignorant of its claims. This ironic, internal relationship between history and *philosophy* of history contributes to the fascination and *danger* of these strange and striking theories."[247] Danto was acutely aware of the dangers to which speculative philosophies of history had recently been put. Speculative philosophies whose logic made claims on both the future, and purported to deduce the "whole" of history from present experience, too easily made false prophets. In the immediate context of the cold war, prophecy and ideology were the liberal's bête noire, logic, limitation, reason, sobriety, and complexity their foil. Likewise, political claims based on the direction or structure of history itself threatened individual freedom. "The riddle of history lies in the fact that it has no riddle…no inherent pattern or inner meaning or necessary goal or law. And I believe our freedom as men is logically bound up with this fact."[248] Danto saw a logical necessity to the structure of individual freedom. Outlining that necessity in the language of "analysis" was not only a philosophical project, but a token of anti-dogmatism in the face of totalitarianism.

If he had outlined the seeming complexity of liberal freedom within the language of analysis, however, it had come under principled, if single-minded, attack from his students. As a fellow traveler in the world of art, Danto likely felt common cause with Trilling's more recent refrain about the university in the latter's collection of essays *Beyond Culture* (1955). For Trilling, university students had internalized the imperative of modernist art to "subvert" entrenched authority, but had done so as part of their collective identity as a group. As a departure from the avant-garde of the early twentieth century, who would have viewed any large-

[247] Arthur C. Danto, "Review of Bruce Mazlish, *The Riddle of History: The Great Speculators from Vico to Freud*" *The Bulletin of the Hudson Book Club* no. 163 (1966): 2. Arthur Coleman Danto Papers, Box 11, Folder 7 Series 1. Emphases mine.
[248] Ibid., 3.

scale institutions as anathema to the radical impulse, Trilling argued, university students had internalized "the adversary culture of art and thought," using it as a defense of "youth" against the entrenched interests of the old-guard.[249] For Trilling, adversarial thought had collapsed the boundaries between self and society, the authority of the self justified by 'experience,' unhinged from its societal past.

Before meeting in Trilling's apartment, however, Danto quickly realized that he had nevertheless become the old-guard. Approaching the students in Hamilton Hall, who had barricaded themselves inside with Dean Coleman hostage, Danto urged that "discussion at this point is the fundamental thing that is called for." Asking Coleman if he wanted to leave, to which he enthusiastically replied 'yes,' Danto's effort to remove him was summarily rebuffed by a student blockade.[250] Dogmatic response, or what he would privately describe two years later as "American nihilism" and an "absence of humanity" among his students, had won out over reasoned discussion.[251]

Danto's experience with his students had a profound effect on his personal and intellectual development. It was not simply his own frustrated attempts to offer reason against intransigence, however, that reinforced his anathema to dogmatic thinking. He had received multiple letters from colleagues at universities all over the country expressing everything from concern, to consternation, to bewilderment over similar events and attitudes among their own students on campus. The Haverford philosopher Richard Bernstein wrote to Danto having been "very much troubled recently about…the failure of liberal solutions and what is to be done."[252] Long Island University philosopher Elinor West found Danto's characterization of an "absence

[249] Lionel Trilling, *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (New York: Viking Press, 1955), xv.
[250] Avorn, *Up Against the Ivy Wall*, 57.
[251] Elinor J.M. West to Danto, April 3, 1970, Box 11, Folder 14, Series 1. ACD Papers.
[252] Richard Bernstein to Danto, June 22, 1968, Box 11, Folder 12, Series 1. ACD Papers.

of humanity" in American life apt, and was "especially disappointed to say that this is true in our universities."[253] Nearly a year after the events of April 68, however, Danto was offered an opportunity to attempt his own explanation. Solicited for an essay on the events by acting editor the *Columbia Forum*, Oona Sullivan, Danto proposed to write a piece on "students' attitudes toward morality."[254] He wrote the essay in two weeks, which appeared in the fall issue of 1969 under the title, "Two Stages of Student Morality."[255]

Danto began the essay by pointing out that the rhetoric of student activists of the 60s was cloaked in an unwarranted moral certitude which starkly separated them from undergraduates of the 1950s. "The students apply them [moral predicates] confidently and often, with the certitude of *prophets* and the casualness with which any of us, unless pathologically beset by epistemological reservations, apply such terms as 'yellow' or 'smooth'—as though they were gifted with a special sense organ for ethical discriminations."[256] It was precisely such "epistemological reservations" that students of the 1950s, on Danto's account, had displayed. The paradigmatic student of the 1950s was skeptical about moral beliefs as a second-order moral stance. Their skepticism was derived from "very large-scale theoretical considerations, themselves sometimes tenuously supported by the students' reading in anthropology or psychoanalysis or one or another of the historicist classics in social science."[257] Theirs, however, was an "uneasy" skepticism. The student of the 1950s was "uneasy," because he felt, out of a second-order *moral* conviction, that he hadn't the *right* to hold such views about moral belief. "Having taken a position logically beyond good and evil, they were alienated from their moral

[253] Elinor J.M. West to Danto, April 3, 1970.
[254] Oona Sullavin to Danto, July 23, 1969, Box 11 Folder 16, Series 1. ACD Papers.
[255] Oona Sullavin to Danto, August 8, 1969, Box 11, Folder 16, Series 1. ACD Papers.
[256] Arthur C. Danto, "Two Stages of Student Morality (Draft)," Box 8, Folder 26, Series 1. ACD Papers. Emphasis mine.
[257] Ibid., 3.

selves through what they took to be an exercise in philosophical virtue." In other words, discrepancies in moral points of view, supported by cultural anthropology, psychoanalysis, or historicism, supported a reticence of moral certitude without relativizing morality as such.[258] Although Danto was not uncritical of such a view, it stood closer to his view of the ideal of skepticism as a liberal foil to dogmatism.

For the students of the 1960s, however, the situation was reversed. Student protestors acted as though they possessed a certain moral "appendage" which made any other moral point of view not only suspect, but not moral *as such*. Significantly, Danto likened the moral certitude of SDS to the ethical intuitionism of G.E. Moore, the British philosopher whose *Principia Ethica* (1903) was one of the founding texts of Anglo-American ethics in the twentieth century. For Moore, moral judgements were objectively true or false on the basis on intuition alone, which for Danto falsely equated moral perception with sense perception, making the former alarmingly self-evident. "Philosophers have at times defended an analogy between moral perception and sense perception. G.E. Moore, for example, regarded 'x is good' as descriptive and 'good' as indefinable, and argued that, since we can know the former to be true, we must be directly acquainted with goodness itself, and equipped with a sort of moral sensorium…Then, as with the blind, [n]either the content of our moral propositions nor our mode of confirming them could be made intelligible to the morally insensate."[259] Significantly, Danto equated the "transparent" moral position of his students with the emphasis on empirical experience (in particular, sight) as a dogmatic mode of verifying knowledge (moral or otherwise). Moral certitude represented a dogmatic claim on the future without the liberal buffet of discourse and complexity.

[258] Ibid., 6.
[259] Ibid., 8.

For Danto, the "transparency of their moral vision" emboldened the sixties generation with an "authority" that was undermined by the "many features of their actions which cloud what seems to them their moral clarity."[260] More precisely, he argued that the means used to justify the students' ends—taking a Dean hostage, burning a professor's papers—were out of proportion to those ends. If the students admitted that their means were meant to enter into a moral calculus, then the choice of one over *another* of those means had to be justified—taking a dean hostage was justified over, say, a public debate. The justification of that particular means, however, could not be made through appeal to a particular end, since the justness of such an end would remain "invariant to all the means in question." In other words, the justness of the students' ends—an ending to the war, to the IDA, etc.—was indifferent to the means taken to achieve them, and so could not logically justify the choice of such extreme measures over those deemed less extreme.[261]

The problem with Danto's argument was that, by his same reasoning, the logical separation of ends from means also meant that the more extreme measures taken by the students could not be *condemned* either, except from Danto's own vantage point of professorial arbitration. That is, if the moral justification of a particular end was logically invariant to the justification of a particular means of achieving it, then the logical calculus of justifying particular actions to achieve a given end had no bearing outside of Danto's own stipulation. If his logic fell short, however, he also attempted a sociological, and ultimately more significant explanation for the discrepancy between the two modes of student morality. The moral deficiency of the 60s generation was, in part,

[260] Ibid.
[261] Ibid., 10.

> a result of their having been born into a situation of affluence, having achieved a remarkable degree of solidarity as a generation through mass consumption of the appurtenances of youth, viz., articles of bodily ornamentation, musical gear, and cultural products of a highly ephemeral order. Through the mechanisms of publicity and image-making integral to the merchandising of these goods, the generation attained a unity, a degree of identification, and a self-consciousness as a social entity ['youth'] which the proletariat of classical Marxist theory never began to approach. *The market was transformed into an entity by the consumers internalizing and hence avowing an image originally fostered upon it, and as an entity it was conspicuously defined through the exercise of taste*.[262]

Danto's problem with the exercise of 'taste' was not that it was attached to notions of cultural authority, but that it too easily lent itself to an exaltation of immediacy and instant gratification which had become increasingly commodified as fashion. Moral and intellectual authority were to be respected, but 'taste' had become a consumer item tethered to a generation raised with the increasing imbrication of images, fashions, and the free market.[263] Moreover, the "appurtenances of youth" had made the aesthetic imperative a binding ingredient in the claims of youth on the fate of the future. Hence, "the concept of moral authority is inconsistent with that image of moral infallibility which is only a version of the slogan that the customer is always right."[264] For Danto, aesthetics had become the binder for a generation of students assured of the certainty of their own moral prophecy.

Despite its lack of nuance, "Two Stages of Student Morality" developed an enthusiastic response from professors and other intellectuals across the United States. The author and playwright June Bingham Birge wrote to Danto saying that "I thought your Forum article on student morality was brilliant," adding only that the "apparent dogmatism may also stem from

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[262] Ibid., 14.
[263] For a more substantively grounded version of this argument, see Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counter-Culture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
[264] Ibid., 15.

the use of psychedelic drugs, not only while the person is tripping, but long afterward."[265] A young lecturer at Lehman College, Howard Seeman, wrote "I find it impossible to prefer the violent shouting strikers we recently had at Lehman to the police violence which has not yet arrived, and vice versa. Wouldn't it be great if the disillusioned could turn to Pascal for inspiration?"[266] Word of the article had even reached the West Coast. Visiting professor of Political Science Philip Siegelman contacted Danto with a sense that, after learning of the essay, he was not alone in his feelings of beleaguerment. "I've been told by a colleague about a marvelous essay you published in a recent issue of the COLUMBIA FORUM. Would it be possible for you to send me an offprint? I find that the feeling of being beleaguered is somewhat alleviated when the situation is demythologized and made more comprehensible. I gather that your article will be of some help along these lines."[267]

For others however, the pretense of the philosopher king pointing out the flawed logic of student morality smacked of hypocrisy. As former Columbia Law student Bill Bryson put the matter in a letter to the editor, Danto had failed "to demonstrate a full understanding of the circumstances of the action, including the purposes behind it." In the first instance, his position as a philosopher had made his point seem arcane and out of touch. "Perhaps the professor's message, so prettily wrapped in philosophical discourse and exquisite logic, was thereby obscured."[268] The price paid for such obscurity, however, betrayed a genuine lack of understanding. "What is most disturbing about professor Danto's observations on the students' behavior is that he does not seem to possess enough sympathy, understanding and consideration for their motivations and frustrations to move him to assess their actions generously. Rather, he

[265] June Bingham Birge to Arthur Danto, November 1st, 1969, Box 11, Folder 15, Series 1. ACD Papers.
[266] Howard Seeman to Arthur Danto, April 25, 1970, Box 11 Foder 14, Series 1. ACD Papers.
[267] Philip Siegelman to Arthur Danto, undated, Box 11, Folder 15, Series 1. ACD Papers.
[268] Brady O. Bryson to *Coumbia Forum*, 1, March 3, 1970, Box 11, Folder 14, Series 1. ACD Papers.

dissects them with a sharp scalpel, not always unerringly directed. Perhaps this is at the root of the gulf that separates students and faculty today."[269] The novelist Ann Grace Mojtabai wrote to Danto directly with the same concern. Although sympathetic to various points of his analysis, the problems with a philosopher lecturing to students about the logic of their moral positions was not lost on her. "Perhaps I can suggest (project) what many a new student must feel in confronting contemporary (Anglo) American philosophy where what prevails is a preoccupation with the structure of language so formal and arcane, and an industry for the manufacture of finer and even finer distinctions…There must be an enormous disappointment at what is to be an immense irrelevance and an unforgiveable delay."[270]

Conceptual Boundaries as Cultural Limitations

In Danto's mind, the arcane and formal structure of language was not arbitrary; but neither was it a transparent mirror of reality. Rather, the clarification of basic concepts, outlining not only their structure, but their *limits*, was an intellectual endeavor with significant cultural resonance. As he wrote of the concept of history in the introduction to *APOH*, "I shall maintain that our knowledge of the past is significantly limited by our ignorance of the future. The identification of limits is the general business of philosophy, and the identification of this limit is the special business of analytical philosophy as I understand it."[271] This became more salient to Danto as he perceived a culture increasingly concerned not only with transgressing moral limitations, but that seemed to be obscuring the point of drawing boundaries at all, conceptual or

[269] Ibid., 3.
[270] Ann Grace Mojtabai to Arthur Danto, undated, Box 11, Folder 15, Series 1. ACD Papers.
[271] Danto, *Analytic Philosophy of History*, 16.

otherwise. Significantly, Danto saw an important parallel to the moral temper of the time in the tendency to blur the boundaries between self and world in the aesthetic of "*mystical* experience" that had deeply penetrated the language and sensibility of the counter-culture during the late 1960s and early 70s.

As a generation of students confronted the injustices of radical racial inequality and the Vietnam war, the intellectual foundations of Western superiority, namely, the Enlightenment tradition, came under deep attack. In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno had pronounced the ironic and self-destructive impulse of that tradition as a deeply "irrational" impulse responsible for totalitarian and bureaucratic thinking as early as 1944.[272] By 1968, however, the regnant antidote to the "loneliness, isolation, [and] estrangement," that the signers of the "Port Huron Statement" described as the prevailing cultural mood of their generation had become a generalized skepticism of all prevailing models of Western authority. As the New Left turned that skepticism increasingly to the site of culture, the first step toward radical political change seemed to demand a profound reorganization of consciousness itself, one taken from another cultural tradition altogether: the East.

Obsession and vulgar fetishization of Eastern religious and cultural traditions became a mainstay of the countercultural left during the late 1960s and 70s, often connecting the "mystical" experiences of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism with a pseudo-liberationist politics. In a review of the work of Herman Hesse, whose books did much to popularize Eastern religion in the U.S., the literary critic George Steiner described his experience at a Haight-Ashbury commune in 1969 with all the "props" of the East cum liberation, in place: "posters of Bob Dylan and the Maharishi [Mahesh Yogi, which the *The New York Times* described as the "Chief

[272] Max Horkheimer & Theodore W. Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

Guru of the West"]…vistas of Nepal," a hi-fi on "perpetually, humming out ragas" a house conspicuously devoid of books except for Hesse's *Magister Ludi* and *Steppenwolf*.[273] For Steiner, the singular focus on Eastern thought portended a dangerous anti-intellectualism, signaled by the commune's rejection of reading any books but Hesse's.

But many didn't see it that way. Eastern religious and cultural practices offered its American enthusiasts a means for transcending the divide between self and other, self and world, dualisms increasingly associated with Western imperialism and technocracy. For the Beat poet Gary Snyder, for example, the teachings of "dharma" and the Zen Buddhist tradition offered wisdom, the "intuitive knowledge of the mind of love and clarity that lies beneath one's ego-driven anxieties and aggressions." Ridding oneself of such anxieties would open a world of political change, a "cultural and economic revolution that moves clearly toward a free, international, classless world."[274] In one sense, Zen had the potential to unite, to cultivate community, and to offer a sense of clarity against the "illusions" of acquisitiveness.

More often, however, Eastern religions were appropriated to an extant American individualism in the name of aesthetic posturing. Jack Kerouac's best-selling novel *The Dharma Bums*, for example, saw its main character Ray Smith (based on Kerouac) turn to Zen meditation in an effort to gain personal clarity and insight amidst the clamor of his fast-paced bohemian lifestyle. At the book's conclusion, Smith descends from a hilltop after sixty days of isolated meditation, having attained a "vision of the freedom of eternity."[275] Smith had attained his "vision" in large part through the influence of his companion in the novel, Japhy Ryder, who was based largely on Snyder, Kerouac's real-life inspiration for his turn to Zen and the East more

[273] George Steiner, "Eastward Ho!," *The New Yorker* (January 18,1969): 87.
[274] Gary Snyder, "Buddhist Anarchism," *Journal for the Protection of All Beings* 1 (1961): 12.
[275] Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 243.

generally. The sense of being "one" with the world, of seeing through the illusions of Western rationality that divided mind and body, self from other, was initially introduced through an aesthetic of "romantic modernism" in figures like Kerouac and other "beat" writers of his generation such as William Burroughs and Alan Ginsberg.[276] By the late 1960s, however, the counter-culture had followed the "wind from the east" in enacting what one writer referred to as a "psychic revolution" in which individuals sought to rid themselves of the dualisms of Western consciousness through largely therapeutic means such as LSD and Yoga.[277]

Ironically, the imperative to abolish such dualisms resulted largely in a more strident affirmation of the authority of the self. As one historian describes the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm's attempt to fuse Zen Buddhism with psychoanalysis, the result of which was the 1957 collection of essays *Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism*, "For Fromm, both Zen and psychoanalysis required independence from any authority external to the self." [278] For Danto, the authority of self-certainty, particularly under the guise of 'experience', had been an unfortunate mainstay of postwar aesthetic and philosophical thought. In his 1962-63 undergraduate lectures on aesthetics, for example, he emphasized how logical empiricism's strict criteria of verification—through sense experience and analytic statements alone—bore a deep affinity to the romantic belief in the ineffability of artistic provenance. Much of that attitude reflected a view of art that emphasized process over product, the ineffability of the artistic process as an inevitable byproduct of creativity. It encouraged the view "that there is something in artistic

[276] I borrow the term Romantic-Modernism from Robert Genter's *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 137-272.
[277] Barry Farrell, "Swept Up in a Psychic Revolution," *Life* 60 no. 12 (March 25, 1966): 31-33. On LSD and the sixties counter-culture, see Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: Grove Press, 1998). On the counter-cultural appropriation of Yoga, see Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 48-72.
[278] Lawrence J. Friedman, *The Lives of Erich Fromm: Love's Prophet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 167.

activity which places it beyond the pale of rational discourse to illuminate: those who know do not talk, to paraphrase the Tao Te Ching, and those who talk do not know."[279] Even before May of 1968, the romantic "aura" of creativity portended for Danto an alarming censure of discourse.

What's more, the sense of ineffability propounded in both popular attitudes toward art and by American students of Eastern religion was lent credence in contemporary philosophical aesthetics, which he described in one lecture as "singularly vacuous and beside the point."[280] By the mid-1960s, the prevailing view among philosophers of art in the English-speaking world took off from the articles of Weitz and Kennick. Weitz's "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" (1956) and Kennick's "Does traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake" (1958) both claimed of art that it was an "open concept." Art, on this view, was a *practice* whose results (artworks) shared various family resemblances, making the futile the attempt to provide a definition of art.[281]

For Danto, however, such a deflationist attitude towards art simply reinforced the same insidious dogmatism as his Columbia undergraduates. The idea of "family resemblances" between artworks presupposed that such resemblances were readily identifiable and, in an important sense, intuitive. The very idea of having an intuitive grasp of art reinforced the same prejudice of romanticism and ineffability that seemed too quickly to shut down conversation or illumination of the sort he imagined himself capable in negotiating with student protesters. In an important sense, both Danto's students and the wider counter-culture had assimilated that aesthetic intuitionism into the fabric of their politics. They had shown how such an attitude, when translated into the moral idiom, had consequences that seemed to foreclose the liberal

[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15 no. 1 (1956): 27-35; William Kennick, "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?" *Mind* 67 no. 267 (1958): 317-334.

sense of complexity and openness that he shared with his colleagues. Aesthetics, in this sense, had become political, even moral.

It was no coincidence, then, that the years following Danto's confrontation with the aesthetics of student revolt led him to a deeper consideration not only of aesthetics itself, but of its relationship to moral thought. Something had changed after 1968, and not only in himself. As a primary editor of the *Journal of Philosophy*, Danto noticed a more pronounced interest in moral philosophy as a pressing matter of practical concern.[282] Non-cognitivism in ethics now seemed patently indefensible "in consequence, I think, of having internalized moral pressures it must be impossible to have lived through [in] the late 1960s without feeling in the most agonized form. To a quite extraordinary degree, philosophers have been addressing themselves to questions of the greatest immediate urgency."[283] By 1974, he and his colleagues had published papers on topics such as "sexual perversion, civil disobedience, equality, medical ethics, and the like." Such papers "almost certainly would never have been written at all had it not been for that frightening and intoxicating moment in the sixties when all the ligatures of moral life appeared to be giving way, and when the need to examine the foundations of our practices seemed the most urgent preoccupation and demand."[284]

After some intervening years of reflection, Danto felt that urgency personally. While drafting a paper addressing the marked change in moral philosophy, he wrote, and then subsequently crossed out, that the renewed interest in practical and normative ethics was, for him, "an awakening from a moral slumber which we may now appreciate as a kind of luxury of

[282] On the increase in matters of practical affairs on the part of Anglo-American philosophers after the Vietnam war, see Katrina Forrester, *In The Shadow of Justice: Postwar Liberalism and the Remaking of Political Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 72-103.
[283]Arthur Danto, "Some Recent Turns in Moral Philosophy (Draft)," p. 4, Box 8, Folder 18, Series 1, ACD Papers.
[284] Ibid., 6.

unearned stability."[285] Danto may have represented the status quo to his students. But they had also renewed his own commitment to openness, to his sense that intellectual (and moral) complacency was its own form of dogmatism. A few months before drafting his thoughts on the recent turns in moral philosophy, Danto was approached by a group of students who were organizing a conference on war and morality, proposing that he present a paper on the "feasibility of moral codes in modern war."[286] His decision to accept was perhaps more significant than the paper itself. Reflecting on that decision a few months later, he remarked that "had the same request come six or seven years ago I almost certainly would have refused the invitation, not merely on grounds that the subject lay outside my competence, but that it was not the sort of question I would have been prepared to acknowledge as philosophical." By 1974, however, he "felt quite differently: I thought I had an obligation to try to think the question through, and that it indeed had philosophical as well as human relevance."[287] The question certainly had personal and political relevance. But Danto's lack of experience with moral philosophy showed in what was a rather unremarkable paper. More significantly, however, it showed him still dealing with both the events of 1968 and his own personal response to them.

In the essay, titled "Moral Codes and Modern War," Danto's premise was that the conduct of war, specifically the use of violence, had to be constrained relative to a) the cost of violence (and its scope) and b) to the stated goal of political change. Following from the logic of his piece in the *Forum*, he also claimed that a uniform moral code shared by both combatants in a conflict was advantageous to the weaker combatant in attempting to secure the latter's political goal. That is, it allowed them to exploit that shared moral code to change the course of their

[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid., 4.
[287] Ibid., 5.

"stronger" combatants' actions. The weaker combatant will attempt to "force [the] broaching of these limits by putting the warmaker in positions where unless he violates them, he puts his enemy at an advantage. Such tactics are unavailing if the warmaker on the other side feels no moral pressures."[288]

Crucially, Danto imagined himself in 1968 as the "stronger" combatant in his own thought experiment. In the same way that hunger strikes and passive resistance appealed to a shared sense of morality to affect a change in the oppressor, the broaching of which secured political points for those appealing to moral principle to achieve their goal, "students occupying a building will have no effect, or a negative one, if the police are used routinely and refuse to accept moral pressure of this order."[289] When Danto met with Trilling and Bell in the former's apartment, they had emphatically emphasized that the police not be called to handle the situation.[290] Insofar as he viewed the students' demands as moral, calling the police would have denied the legitimacy of even their *grievances*, which Danto did not. His unwillingness to handle the situation through police force was evidence of both his and his students' shared moral space. What seemed to vitiate that space was the extent to which his students' tactical strategy denied morality as a feature of life they respectively held in common. Like the ontological space between persons and artworks, the space of language, discussion, and disagreement was constitutive of morality as such. For his students, on the other hand, moral claims were tantamount to acts of ordinary vision as aesthetic prophecy.

For Danto, the denial of morality as such was a logical consequence of a certain conception of naturalism which seemed to have pervaded both artistic and intellectual

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[288] Arthur C. Danto, "Moral Codes and Modern War (Draft)," Box 5, Folder 10, Series 1, 16. ACD Papers.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Avorn, *Up Against the Ivory Wall*, 70.

consciousness in American culture. The most patent manifestation of that tendency among the counter-culture was the particular brand of "mysticism" that seemed to provide the justification for everything from artistic practice to moral life, both of which appeared to instill authority in nothing but the self. Reflecting his early tendency to see practical problems in resolutely analytic terms, Danto claimed that defenders of mystic or "monistic" consciousness sought to deny the distinction between descriptive and moral terms. Wittgenstein's *Investigations* had reinforced such a view by hinging the *normative* content of language to the *description* of practices within particular language communities. The problem with this view, for Danto, was not that descriptive terms such as 'fat' or 'muscular' or 'black' or white', had no normative or evaluative dimensions; their use in particular contexts was plain evidence that they did. Rather, the very nature of moral language presupposed certain factual conditions about the world that provided the users of such language with the particular "application conditions" for which it made sense. If Wittgenstein proved advantageous to Danto's early thoughts in the philosophy of art, he represented a more ambiguous figure in the moral realm.

The concept of mysticism or "monistic" consciousness, in this sense, was an attempt to dissolve the distinctions between morally neutral and morally charged 'things', which robbed the concept of morality of its basic structure. "Mysticism dissolves the meanings morality vests things with because it radically dissolves away the possibilities of difference which the concept of 'thing' requires, and so dissolves the concept of a world of different things which any system of moral beliefs must presuppose in order to have application," imperatives being logically dependent on, but not deducible from, the way a particular world *is*.[291] In other words, if

[291] Arthur Danto, "Ethical Theory and Mystical Experience: A Response to Professors Proudfoot and Wainwright (Draft), p. 6, Box 4, Folder 23, Series, 1. ACD Papers. Published in *The Journal of Religions Ethics* 4 no. 1 (1976): 37-46.

everything is moral or normative, then nothing is; the concept itself loses its purchase. "All of the moral beliefs which define a community have factual presuppositions which state the application conditions of the imperatives implicit in the moral beliefs. And mysticism calls all factual beliefs, save the factual beliefs of mysticism itself, into question, and, in so doing, immediately renders the imperatives of any such system inapplicable."[292] Danto's critique of mysticism was both philosophical and political; it reflected his commitment to a fundamental dualism between reality and evaluation which, by his own light, contained the formula for sober reflection.

This was Danto's underlying argument in his first and only book on ethics, *Mysticism and Morality: Oriental Thought and Moral Philosophy* (1972). Written just four years after the events of April '68, the book began by extending beyond philosophy in sounding a note of cultural despair. "These are times when the moral fabric of our lives appears so rent that one must look with sympathy upon anyone who in desperation turns to other civilizations for guidance."[293] Other 'civilizations' however, held certain factual beliefs that were presupposed by their moral beliefs. In other words, one could not accept, for example, the Hindu concept of liberation (*moksha)* without first accepting the system of *Karma* as fact. Danto's short book was an attempt to outline such factual belief systems within Hinduism, Taoism, and Buddhism, only to show that the moral beliefs that Eastern societies attached to them entailed positions that would be difficult for any Westerner to realistically accept. Zen Buddhism, for example, taught that both meditation and ordinary rituals could be used to attain *Nirvana*. But in denying a sense to a transcendent realm, it also taught that *Nirvana was* the ordinary world, religious significance equally present in meditation as in walking or painting. For Danto, this contradiction made Zen a

[292] Ibid., 7.
[293] Arthur C. Danto, *Mysticism and Morality: Oriental Thought and Moral Philosophy* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), vii.

poor guide to morality. According to Zen Buddhist teaching, "this world is the only world, salvation not consisting in the transcendence of this world into a world beyond, but in accepting this world as sanctified. What is called for, is not a transformation of the world, but a transformation of the vision of ourselves and our relation to the world. So in doing our 'thing,' as it has become fashionable to say, we each attain the salvation we seek."[294] As a moral system, Zen was another example of a sense of monistic consciousness that collapsed the distinction between self and world, the space between which was precisely where morality as a concept came into being.

Danto's emphatic insistence on the divide between self and world mirrored his conviction that, despite what artists said about their work, there had to remain a difference between art and life if either concept was to retain its purchase. Danto was sympathetic to those turning to other cultures for guidance, but it ultimately redounded to an aesthetic exercise that reinforced solipsistic tendencies.

The "sympathy" Danto attached to those turning to other civilizations for moral guidance, however, was not mere charity. During the late 1940s, the Japanese government had sponsored an exhibition of artists in the United States whose works had a deep and lasting influence on American painting and printmaking. As an artist himself, Danto was particularly inspired by the work of Shiko Munakata, whose austere woodblock prints made a significant impression on his own aesthetic development as an artist. Aesthetics, however, spurred deeper philosophical and cultural exploration. During the 1950s, while attending Suzuki's seminars, Danto also helped to organize and run the "Oriental Humanities Colloquium" at Columbia College with William Theodore de Bary, a professor of Sinology and East Asian literature. Along with de Bary, the

[294] Ibid., 81.

Japanese translator and author Donald Keene, who also taught at Columbia and was a regular participant in the colloquium, exposed Danto to East Asian literature.[295] By 1961, Danto's reading in Asian literature and, especially, philosophy, had earned him a reputation as an "expert" in the field. Solicited by Barnes and Noble to review a copy of a "A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy" for its potential use in college classrooms, for example, their assistant editor wrote to Danto proclaiming that "since no one on our staff has specialized in Oriental philosophy—we felt we should like to have the opinion of an expert in the field."[296] To be sure, *Mysticism and Morality* was the only full-fledged work to have betrayed such expertise. At the time of his death, however, the hundreds of primary and secondary texts on Japanese, Chinese, and Indian philosophy, literature, religion, art, and history, which lined his bookshelf, displayed a mind consumed.[297]

Significantly, Danto's relationship to "the Orient" was also reflective of his emerging philosophy of art history and his growing wariness of the aesthetic as blind ideology. At the sixth-annual East-West Philosopher's Conference, held at the University of Hawaii in July and August of 1989, Danto presented a paper contending that one of the most striking beginning points of modernism in both the East and the West was an integration of foreign artistic traditions that changed one's relationship to the art-historical past. "For me, the deep change, and indeed the beginning of modernism, begins in the West when Japanese prints became objects not of curiosity but of influence. Monet collected Japanese prints, as Matisse and Derain collected African masks and figures. But Van Gogh and Gauguin decided to constitute the masters of the Ukiyo-I print as their predecessors, as Picasso determined a tradition in the Ethnographic Museum of the Palais de

[295] Arthur C. Danto, "Munakata in New York: A Memory of the '50s," *New Observations* 47 (1987): 4.
[296] Mary F. Johnson to Arthur C. Danto, February 28, 1961, Box 11 Folder 3, Series 1. ACD Papers.
[297] Pictures of Danto's bookshelf. December 15, 2016. Author's collection.

Trocadero as the relevant past for the Demoiselles d'Avignon."[298] When Western artists began to rethink the conquest of three-dimensional space as a progressive, art-historical imperative, then the "the representation of their own past [was seen as] less relevant to them than the imagined past of other cultures." In essence, Danto suggested that modernism began to unravel at the moment of its inauguration.

The imagined pasts that inspired the modernist masters had already inaugurated, if unwittingly, the move beyond vision's link to the imperative of artistic 'progress'. Moreover, such imagined pasts created "effects without causes", an important consequence of which was the disruption of linear narrativity, a sense in which the connection with the past had been broken, raising the *philosophical* urgency of art to a new level:

> One response to this has been the creation of a modernist aesthetic, which is essentially ahistorical. Formalist analysis cuts across all times and all cultures, making in effect every museum a Museum of Modern Art. All art exists for display and formal delectation, across an aesthetic distance. All art, the Dogon figures, the watercolors of Wan Shang-Lin, the works of Picasso stand outside life, in a space of their own metaphorically embodied in the plexiglass display case, the bare white gallery, the aluminum frame. When one seeks a deeper connection between art and life than this, modernism is over. That is our present situation. The effort to reconnect life through reconnecting with the past as in the referential strategies of Post-Modernism, is pathetic. Formalism is finally unsatisfying, and the need for a philosophy of art under which art is responsive to human ends is a matter of absolute priority. It is the mark of living in the post-historical period that we face the future without a narrative of the present.[299]

Ironically, the attempt to reconnect to the past in the "referential strategies of post-modernism" was simply another version of the appropriation of Eastern culture--both were efforts to provide such a narrative. Likewise, the sixties-generation's strident appropriation of "imagined pasts" in the service of a liberationist politics was simply another expression of the modernist belief in progress as ideology. For Danto, such expressions represented an anxious desire to attach a

[298] Arthur C. Danto, "East Meets West (Draft)", Box 12, Folder 5, Series 2, p. 14. ACD Papers
[299] Ibid., 18-19.

progressive narrative to a present already rent from its past, and a potentially dangerous claim on the future. This was the important distinction Danto drew between the philosophical and the cultural consequences of post-WWII art. The former seemed to necessitate a radical approach to the ontology of art in light of artistic developments that had radically undermined the basis of aesthetics in defining the work of art. The latter, however, reflected a shift towards a "monistic" consciousness in which the boundaries between self and world, past and present, had seemingly blurred. Consequently, those realms of life such as morality and politics, between which stood a boundary separating them from art, became sites of ahistorical, aesthetic immediacy. When those boundaries were blurred, moreover, the authority of the self became a dangerous model of certainty, threatening to lapse into a kind of cultural and political dogmatism. It was precisely such models that had fueled the narratives of both progressive art history and more nefarious forms of philosophical history and ideology that liberals like Danto, Trilling, and their colleagues had worked so hard to relinquish from intellectual and cultural life after the war.

The Problem of the Self and the Problem of Pluralism

For Danto, the new authority of the self that emerged in the wake of the 1960s was intimately linked to the new cultural authority of the aesthetic. Moral and intellectual life had taken on those very qualities of immediacy and certainty that had defined the imperatives of both formalist criticism and logical empiricism alike during the 1950s. The verificationist principle reinforced the idea that knowledge of the world rested on a deeply solipsistic and, ultimately, intuitive basis; the events of the 1960s seemed only to buttress that tendency by aggrandizing the self to the extent that such forms of intuition became indistinguishable from reality itself. It was precisely this

conflation of philosophical and cultural diagnosis that led Danto to a position remarkably distinct from his contemporaries in art criticism during the 1980s in defending a notion of artistic pluralism, rooted in the philosophical directives of post-war liberalism. But where he departed from his contemporaries attempting to make sense of the aesthetic environment after Vietnam and Watergate, he was more in line with a broader intellectual trend that saw a deepening connection between aesthetics and the cultural life of the American self.

For his colleague Quentin Anderson, for example, the 1960s had heralded an era of narcissistic, "imperial selves" that had deep roots in some of America's paramount men of letters during the nineteenth century: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Henry James. Having developed their intellectual sensibilities during the age of Jackson, a time of entrenched suspicion of 'elite rule' and democratic decentralization, these writers captured a regnant sensibility rooted in an extreme sense of "passivity" created by a loss of religious and political authority. In its wake, writers like Emerson and Whitman offered a compensatory vision of a self for whom the whole of the universe was immanently manifest. For Anderson, their legacy was felt acutely in the current generation of youth for whom the contingency of history and circumstance was subordinated to self-certainty as narcissistic grandeur.[300] As one of Danto's confidantes gathered at Trilling's apartment that night in April '68, it seems more than likely that his reading was reinforced by the strident claims of SDS which had so threatened his professorial authority.

The diagnosis of narcissism in American culture was articulated most trenchantly, however, by the historian and cultural critic Christopher Lasch. A former member of the New Left who became disillusioned by its theatrics and dogmatism by the late 1960s, Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979) lamented what he saw as a pervasive "survivalist" mentality among

[300] Quentin Anderson, *The Imperial Self: An Essay in American Literary and Cultural History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1971).

Americans during the 1970s, rooted in a concern for one's immediate needs and sense of 'well-being'. Having lost a sense of continuity with the past and grown wary of both religious and political authority, the self, rather than expressing an "imperial" omniscience, became an anxious, empty vessel obsessed with maintaining psychic equilibrium above all else, subject to the whims of experts, crisis managers, fashion consultants, and spiritual gurus.

For Lasch, an important cultural consequence of this "culture of narcissism" was that the distinctions between art and reality became increasingly blurred. "At the same time that public life and even private life take on the qualities of spectacle, a countermovement seeks to model spectacle, theater, all forms of art, on reality—to obliterate the very distinction between art and life."[301] Citing as precedents the work of avant-garde playwrights such as Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee, and Jean Genet, whose work reflected a profound collapsing of illusion and reality, contemporary writers and artists such as Norman Mailer and Andy Warhol used the pretense of everyday life to mask a profound sense of narcissism. "A complete indifference even to the mechanics of illusion announces the very idea of reality, dependent at every point on the distinction between nature and artifice, reality and illusion. This indifference betrays the erosion of the capacity to take any interest in anything outside the self."[302] For Lasch, everyday life afforded a poor model for art because it eroded the necessary boundary between aesthetics, ethics, and politics, leaving only the immediate gratification of individual desires in its place. Privately, Danto expressed similar reservations, writing to his friend David Carrier in 1993 that "mostly [artists] are so ungenerous, egotistical, envious: I don't think either the practice or the study of art makes for moral goodness, and that aesthetics thus gives a bad model for morality."[303]

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[301] Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), 86.
[302] Ibid., 87.
[303] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, December 24, 1993. Box 12, Folder 8, Series 2. ACD Papers.

While at the opposite end of the political and cultural spectrum, the novelist and critic Susan Sontag sounded a similar refrain in her 1977 collection of essays, *On Photography*. For Sontag, photography represented the triumph of the aesthetic over content as such. The proliferation of personal cameras, the advent of photojournalism, and the pervasive presence of television and film had placed a paramount on viewing reality in increasingly aesthetic terms. Photography, and the image more generally, had come to represent the dominant form of knowledge in Western culture. In obscuring the distinction between image and reality, experience became increasingly understood in visual terms, while knowledge became tantamount to seeing. "Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from *not* accepting the word as it looks."[304] For cultural critics during the 1970s and 80s, the *appearance* of the world seemed lamentably synonymous with the world as such.

Following on the heels of Sontag and Lasch, the Marxist theoretician and literary-critic Frederic Jameson labeled this condition *Postmodernism*. Though not the first to use the term[305], Jameson's 1984 essay, "Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism?" described postmodernism as a condition in which the aesthetic had so deeply pervaded American culture that the latter's dominant foundation now lay in endless interpretations and reinterpretations of itself undergirded by the stage of late-capitalist production. Reflecting a deep "historical amnesia" that ingratiated itself to the capitalist pandering to immediate desire, postmodernism rendered "culture" as the reciprocal sphere within which capitalism operates, the effect of which is to render the various reactions (notably shock, disgust, or surprise) associated with the novelty of modernism

[304] Susan Sontag, "In Plato's Cave," in idem., *On Photography* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), 23.
[305] The earliest use of the term was in C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1959).

innocuous; they "no longer scandalize anyone and are not only received with the greatest complacency but have themselves become institutionalized and are at one with the official or public culture of Western society."[306] Echoing Lasch, the erosion of the historical sense licensed a culture of immediacy and aesthetic grandeur in a perverse re-iteration of the Kantian sublime. Thus, "the breakdown of temporality suddenly releases this present of time from all the activities and intentionalities that might focus it and make it a space of praxis; thereby isolated, that present suddenly engulfs the subject with undescribable vividness, a materiality of perception properly overwhelming, which effectively dramatizes the power of the material-or better still, the literal-signifier in isolation."[307] The "materiality" and pervasiveness of the floating image, unmoored from history, had become a metaphor late capitalism itself..

Danto agreed. The same year that Jameson published "Postmodernism," he wrote his first essay as an art critic for *The Nation*. A review of some of the most important developments to have spurred his thinking about art, the essay was a review of a retrospective at the Whitney museum titled, "BLAM!: The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance, 1958-1964." However fitting as a first review, though, Danto's response to the show was less than enthusiastic. The period covered by the retrospective "began insidiously, under the sullen shadows of Abstract Expressionism, and ended sharply, when everyone became slick and expensive, and the art world became a precinct of the world of high fashion, and the great dealers assumed the role of makeweights in the marketplace of *taste*."[308] As such, the revolutionary works that the show was supposed to commemorate, works that challenged the boundaries of high and low art, art and life, felt out of place in the Whitney. In an important sense, Danto's

[306] Frederic Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in idem., *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 4.
[307] Ibid., 28.
[308] Arthur C. Danto, "Art," *The Nation* 239 no. 12 (October 20, 1984): 392. Emphasis mine.

critical voice emerged in tandem with other cultural commentators who, during the 70s and 80s, despaired of the growing imbrication of subjective preference, fashion, commerce, and art:

> The way these works were meant to be effective was the way the political happenings of the latter 1960s were meant to be, and one cannot overlook how the spirit of the artworks surfaced in what we refer to as The Sixties…in the forms of protest and confrontation. Politics, it was often enough observed at the time, had become a genre of happening, and protest a mode of theater, and rebellion a style of life. The transformative ambitions of the artists were transmitted, perhaps through the massive publicity these movements received in the popular press, and inherited by the counter-culture. And the ragbag thrift-shop look of so many of these works became the costume of political participation in the peace marches and teach-ins, the demonstrations and rock festivals that swept the youth of the world. Much in the way that young people began to 'dress for success' and take up positions in the corporate establishment, the prefiguring of artworks took on the air of permanence we find among those that made it to the second floor of the Whitney.[309]

Danto shared with cultural critics and art critics alike the sense that art had become largely a branch of fashion, attuned more to the 1980s art world of auction houses and high-finance, to the worship of youth and fame, than to artistic integrity. Reviewing an exhibition of the painter David Sawin, for example, Danto complained that young, new artists "are expected, wave upon annual wave, to bring the revolution that the economics of the art market requires in order to advance the hoopla of the Historical New and Important."[310] The very idea of the historically important represented for Danto the lingering desire for directionality in art history, anxiety over which fueled a renaissance of the myth of the romantic artistic genius during the 1980s.[311] Like the patronage system of artistic production that encouraged the illusion of the libertarian artistic sage, the finance driven art market of the 1980s promoted the "internalization of the competitive freedom of the art market."[312]

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[309] Ibid.
[310] Arthur C. Danto, "David Sawin," *The Nation* 243 no. 12 (October 18, 1986): 386.
[311] For a more complex assessment of the 1980s art world, see Allison Pearlman, *Unpackaging Art of the 1980s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
[312] Arthur C. Danto, "Art," *The Nation* 239 no. 19 (December 8, 1984): 626.

Likewise, what Danto characterized as the phenomenon of the "Hot Artist," referring to young, "neo-expressionist" painters such as Julian Schnaebel and David Salle, described a moment where artists' sense of scale and content was proportionate to their own self-aggrandizement, virtues deeply amenable to a media driven, individualistic culture. Such artists, Danto wrote, made "no room for the deepening awareness, for the painfully awakened secrets in the soul of a person's art, for the despairs, the heavy sense of one's own *limits*, for the redeeming moment of breakthrough and transfiguration, in that intimate and mutual communication between artist and work that resembles a long, *difficult* and rewarding relationship. Today there is only the fret about finding the right gallery, the right collector, getting good reviews, hitting the right formula, making it. Either artists re-hash the trends and fashions found in last-season's art magazines, or they languish in obscurity."[313] The artworld of the 1980s had become a commercialized version of counter-cultural politics, free of the 'limitations' and 'difficulty' cherished by postwar liberal intellectuals.

Yet Danto's reservations about the internalization of what he perceived to be the inherently subjective aestheticism of the 1960s generation are *precisely* what impelled his project of a liberal-pluralist criticism. His entrenched belief in the virtues of age and experience over youth and intuition, in the importance of limitations and reason over irrationality and subjective whim, was reflected in the sober defense of artistic pluralism he essayed in the pages of *The Nation*. Such virtues acted as an antidote to the political and cultural dangers of a teleological art history. Danto viewed his pluralistic approach as an example of modesty and openness, attempting to put aside his own "likes" and "dislikes" lest he appear dogmatic in his view of what art can be.

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[313] Arthur C Danto, "David Sawin," *The Nation* 242 no. 12 (October 18, 1986): 386-87. Emphasis mine.

Early on Danto could sense that such an approach was an affront to other critics and historians. During an otherwise pleasant dinner with the art historian Gail Levin, Danto wrote in a private letter, "I think she finally found herself furious with me, asking whether there was anything being done today that I did not like. I said I did not like any of it, but that I also did not feel the task of the critic to let things rest with that. Here it is, the art of our times, and we should do something to rise to its occasions, whatever our likes and our hates."[314] Danto was wary of his own "likes" and "hates" as a model of criticism because it seemed to reflect the twin authorities of the self and the aesthetic that had emerged after the 1960s. During the 1980s and 90s, however, his answer in the form of pluralism only grated on an art-critical establishment eager to restore the historical vitality of the avant-garde. Indeed, pluralism was the avant-garde's whipping boy.

By the late 1970s, the eclipse of formalism and the acceptability of multiple artistic styles and mediums came for many critics on both the right and the left to represent both the exhaustion of standards of artistic taste and art's revolutionary potential. From both ends, the very notion of an avant-garde, on this reading, had been dispersed into a politically and culturally passive pluralism. For the neo-conservative art-critic Hilton Kramer, the avant-garde had historically been the "conscience of bourgeois civilization." Attempting to chart its history in a 1972 essay for *Commentary* magazine, Kramer noted that the avant-garde's best exemplars--Picasso, Matisse, Elliot—had revolted against tradition not for its own sake, but to "place tradition under the pressure of a constant revaluation" to maintain its vitality. By contrast, what passed for an avant-garde by the 1970s had assimilated itself so firmly within bourgeois consciousness that it had no fixed tradition from which to stake its claim as a transgressive, ontologically "vital,"

[314] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, Undated (likely sometime in 1989), Box 12, Folder 5, Series 2. ACD Papers.

authority. The progressive mission of the avant-garde had become dispersed in myriad styles representing nothing but transgression for its own sake, torn from its "obligations" to the past. "If, then, the age of the avant-garde can definitely be said to have passed, as I believe it can, it is not because the will to innovation has abated its course - it has, if anything, accelerated its pace and grown more desperate -but because it no longer has any radical functions to perform."[315]

The sense of 'function'—radical or otherwise—had been a cornerstone of the modernist conception of art for much of the twentieth century. For the modernist avant-garde, moreover, art carried with it a sense of historical directionality. Whether as the 'advance' of human achievement or a symbol of political emancipation and critique, modernist art had borne an "urgency" that had seemingly disappeared during the 1970s and 80s. "By 1979," wrote *Time* magazine's art-critic Robert Hughes, "the idea of the avant-garde had gone." In its place emerged a cultural "glut" of styles, of ephemeral artistic success, and with it a sense that the past and the present had become synonymous without a progressive claim to the future. "The ideal—social renewal by cultural challenge—had lasted 100 years, and its vanishing marked the end of an entire relationship, eagerly sought but not attained, of art to life."[316] Like Kramer, Hughes's vision of the "ideal" was bound up in the historical 'mission' attached to painting—and in particular, the notion of the "masterpiece," a notion that had since been "drained" in a pluralist climate. "This draining of the sense of the masterpiece affects both present and past. It makes past art look ghostly and value-free, so that it can be quoted and shuffled at will, without deference to the values it once embodied. Hence the postmodern assault on the chief form of classical modernist painting, abstract art. A general culture glut opens the present to a limitless

[315] Hilton Kramer, "The Age of the Avant Garde," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 7 no. 2 (April, 1973): 49. Originally published in *Commentary* 54 no. 4 (1972): 37.
[316] Robert Hughes, "A Farewell to the Future That Was," *Time* 117 no. 7 (February 16,1981): 52.

eclecticism and disarms taste by making everything "interesting.'" For Hughes, the sense of the masterpiece was indexed to a time and place, and by sense of historical achievement that made the present an advance over the past. Of course, such 'advances' were only possible when indexed to a mystical sense of taste.

For art writers on the left, however, the sense of the "masterpiece" was a spurious holdover of Enlightenment humanism. Rallying largely around the journal *October*, critics such as Douglas Crimp, Rosalind Krauss, and Benjamin Buchloh viewed both painting and the "Artist" (*him*)self as founding mythologies of a politically repressive notion of art. For Crimp, for example, painting represented "a historical essence, the essence of a universal, univocal "man", tied to a progressive historical mission." Inspired by the work of French post-structuralist theorists like Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, Crimp and other regular contributors to *October* argued that such notions "sustain[ed] the dominant bourgeois culture. They are the very hallmarks of bourgeois ideology."[317] Unlike Hughes and Kramer, for the regular contributors to *October*, bourgeois humanism was the problem plaguing art all along; postmodernism in art meant the end of humanism as a repressive political ideology.

Ironically, however, *October*'s postmodernism found common cause with art critics on the right in their wariness of pluralism. As the art-historian Buchloh warned in 1981, if artists and critics remain "assured from all sides that the avant-garde has completed its *mission* and has been accorded a position of comfort within a pluralism of meanings and aesthetic masquerades, then it will become complicit in the creation of a climate of desperation and passivity. The ideology of postmodernism seems to forget the subtle and manifest political oppression which is

[317] Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting," *October* 16 (Spring, 1981): 75.

necessary to save the existing power structure."[318] Likewise, for Crimp, there was "a danger in the notion of postmodernism which we begin to see articulated, that which sees postmodernism as pluralism, and which wishes to deny the possibility that art can any longer achieve a radicalism or avant-gardism."[319] For some writers, the critical attempt to shore up the avant-garde made "pluralism" its most explicit target. Hence, in an essay titled "Against Pluralism," critic and art historian Hal Foster could claim that "the many postures of pluralism suggest a cultural stalemate, an assured status quo." With the advent of pluralism, both art and art criticism had devolved to a state of incoherent political quietude. "We believe (or did) that culture is somehow crucial to political hegemony; as such, we insist (or did) that the avant-garde be adversarial. And yet how render art impotent but through dispersal, the franchised freedom of pluralism?"[320] Endless possibilities and styles in art served only to mask a sense of political exhaustion.

The anxiety over pluralism expressed by art writers on both the left and the right betrayed a deep sense of art's supposed political and cultural "mission." If the avant-garde served both as the arbiter of bourgeois civilization and the enemy of that civilization, it nevertheless represented for critics during the 70s and 80s a sense in which art should be tied to a particular ideology. For Danto, however, the avant-garde, or for that matter any artistic iteration, could no longer be bound up in a historically progressive project because it dictated an ontology of art that was inevitably dogmatic. Not only did such conceptions of art limit the range of acceptable artistic media. They also failed to consider how the artistic developments of the past 30 years had

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[318] Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting," *October* 16 (Spring, 1981), 41. Emphasis mine.
[319] Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (Spring, 1979): 87.
[320] Hal Foster, "Against Pluralism," in idem, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), 23.

radically underdetermined *any* didactic project for art making once aesthetics had lost its centrality in the production and analysis of art.

What for Danto had initially been a nuanced defense against claims made on the future in *Analytic Philosophy of History* henceforth became, by the 1980s a rallying point for artistic pluralism. "Pluralism in art implied…a fundamental transformation of artistic self-consciousness; a revolution, almost, in how artists were beginning to think about the future of art." By 1981, "it was not yet a settled transformation, but the fact that it seemed viable at all meant that artists were no longer certain that there was one correct next move in the history of art."[321]

Danto's philosophy of art emerged as part of a broader intellectual and cultural shift in the U.S. The prophetic nature of the aesthetic that seemed to emerge during the 1960s was tied to the gnawing sense that history needed a direction or an essence as it was crumbling in the light of Vietnam and Watergate. For Danto, however, the sobriety of his liberalism, his aversion to ideology, dogmatism, and intolerance, was rooted in his belief that history required no direction at all. Belief that it did led to the aggrandizement of self over world, the present over the past, fascism over individual freedom. Hence, while Danto shared many of the same cultural reservations as other critics of his time, he remained steadfast in his commitment to a liberal conception of pluralism that owed at least as much to his changing perceptions of American thought and culture as it did to his formal philosophical arguments. Rather than a position solely dictated by a carefully worked-out ontology of art, Danto's pluralism had been there from the beginning, in his opposition to dogmatism, to ideology, to irrationality. It was an integral part of his writing for *The Nation* as much as his identity as a philosopher. As he wrote to David Carrier,

[321] Arthur Danto, "Learning to Live with Pluralism," in idem., *The Wake of Art: Criticism, Philosophy, and the Ends of Taste* (Amsterdam: G&B Arts, 1998), 82.

"the Nation is deeply liberal, the way I am. Liberalism means among other things constrained by truth."[322]

[322] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, Undated, Box 12, Folder 4, Series 2. ACD Papers.

Approaching the End of Art: The Afterlife of *Analytical Philosophy of History* and the "Narrative Turn" in the Human Sciences, 1970-1990

> *The "end of art"…is a theory of consciousness-of how a developmental sequence of events terminates in the consciousness of that sequence as a whole."*
> -Arthur Danto, 1998.[323]

"The center was not holding," Joan Didion opined in an essay during the "cold late Spring of 1967." The country's youth had sloughed "off both the past and the future as snakes shed their skins." Having spent a number of weeks in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, interviewing the Bay's disaffected, sometimes self-indulgent, vagrant youth, Didion chronicled a culture united by a sense of disregard for all forms of tradition, a turning inward away from the authority of the past and regard for the future.[324] It was a feeling with which Danto was all too familiar. Didion's "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" captured more than the contradictions of the period's radical visions, however. In October of that year, Danto had pointed out to a young, visiting scholar at Columbia how William Butler Yeats, from whose poem "The Second Coming" (1919) Didion had taken her title and first line, tended to conflate the past and the

[323] Arthur C. Danto, "The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense," *History and Theory* 37 no. 4 (1998): 137.
[324] Joan Didion, "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," in idem., *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1968), 84.

present in particular acts of aesthetic prolepsis.[325] Written at the end of World War I, "The Second Coming" concluded:

> The darkness drops again; but now I know
> That twenty centuries of stony sleep
> Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?[326]

Yeats's image evoked an unbroken stream of linear progress, upended by the birth of a "stony beast" at the very site inaugurating the procession of Christian time. Yet the dark side of "progress" made bare by the war could only be "born" in the mind of the narrator (Yeats himself), having only revealed itself as the ugly culmination of a story logically unavailable to those present at its beginning. For Danto, Yeats's conflation of the past with the present achieved a potent critique of the ideology of progress in aesthetic language.

As traditional languages of art were being dismissed by the 1960s, however, they became a critical resource for academic intellectuals in the social sciences and the humanities during the next two decades, particularly among those anxious about the relationship of the past to the present. Curiously, Danto's *Analytical Philosophy of History* (1965), a text devoid of considerations of art, offered a means to allay that anxiety during the 1970s and 80s. *APOH* was written during a brief moment in post-war Anglo-American philosophy in which certain philosophers had devoted significant attention to the epistemic and ontological problems associated with history as both a discipline and a form of knowledge. As Anglo-American philosophy of history declined in popularity by the mid-1970s, however, it had become a critical

[325] Email from Quentin Skinner to Author. December 16, 2017.
[326] W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," in Richard J. Finneran ed., *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats, Vol 1.: The Poems* (New York: Scribner, 1989), 190.

resource for humanists and social scientists on both sides of the Atlantic, who were concerned with the foundations of their respective disciplines. In particular, what had first emerged as a technical issue among philosophers of history, the role, function, and status of *narrative* came to occupy the minds of sociologists, psychologists, historians, literary theorists, and philosophers concerned to move beyond the methodological confines of empiricism and behaviorism. By the 1980s, moreover, many academic intellectuals had adopted 'narrative' as a fundamental hermeneutic through which concepts tethered to the arts (broadly construed) collapsed into those traditionally associated with humanistic and social-scientific thinking. And while historians and theorists have emphasized the *critique* of narratives common to this period[327], this chapter shows that Danto's discussion of "narrative sentences" and their epistemic implications in *APOH* provided a critical point of reference for a short-lived yet veritable academic obsession with narratives that came to be dubbed the 'narrative turn'.

But this larger context in which the discussion of narrative occurred in the human sciences is also a critical background against which Danto's philosophy of art began to evolve. More particularly, his theorization of art as a concept, without its tether to traditional aesthetics, began to have significant implications for the philosophy of art history. Both *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981) and the essays that combined to form his "End of Art" thesis partook of the same collapse of art and 'reason,' which characterized the narrative turn, by hinging art's "definition" to the means of its history and narration. In presenting that definition as the culmination of a conflict-fueled, dramatic narrative, Danto presented art as a character in a cosmic drama. He also presented that drama as a teleological narrative of how aesthetics, the traditional languages and concepts of art, took root in the history of art criticism. The strategy

[327] See, for example, Hoeveler, *The Postmodernist Turn*, 173-184; and Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987).

through which he constructed such a narrative was an outgrowth of a broader attempt, which he first outlined in *The Transfiguration*, to demonstrate an ontological parity between the structure of art and language itself. In this way, I argue that the context of the "narrative turn" presents a fundamental point of continuity between Danto's *APOH* and his later philosophy of art and art history around which his theorization of contemporary art revolved.

It was also in these writings that Danto moved away from aesthetics as a mode of artistic analysis rooted in sensory impressions, and began characterizing aesthetics as a rarefied metaphysical realm with its own 'autonomy'. During the 1980s, Danto sought to understand how the language and concepts historically associated with art—particularly beauty, novelty, and technique—served to insulate art from other modes of reasoning. As he attempted to philosophically disabuse his readers of this extant conception of art, his writings reflected a broader trend in the humanities and social sciences, which he had helped to inspire, attempting the same feat. In the first section of this chapter, I attempt to provide a critical context for that influence by tracing how *APOH* developed an important "afterlife" in the 'narrative turn' among the human sciences during those decades. In the second, I examine how that background also provides a connecting thread between his philosophy of art history and his philosophy of art contained in the *Transfiguration*, arguably his most developed and rigorous attempt to offer a philosophical definition of art.

From Analysis to Narrative

It was perhaps more than fortuitous that Danto's interlocutor that day in October was a young British political historian named Quentin Skinner, who had begun teaching at the University of

Cambridge in 1962. Up until his semester-long appointment, Skinner had primarily been focused on the history of political thought, with a nascent interest in the conceptual and philosophical problems associated with intellectual history more broadly. But coming to Columbia seemed to offer a "clean break" with his research. Skinner would eventually become one of the most influential voices in the field of intellectual history and political theory in the English-speaking world.[328] However, in the Fall of 1967 his ideas about the philosophy of history were still inchoate. As he explained in a letter to Danto in July of 1969, "Up till then all my stuff had been on the history of political theory, but I'd been becoming increasingly obsessed by the problems raised by the claims historians characteristically make about understanding statements and explaining them, and felt I had to get that right in my own mind before going on."[329] Above all, Skinner began to sense a problem in the way that historians characterized and explained the statements made by canonical political thinkers of the past such as Hobbes or Locke. More specifically, he became vexed by historians' claims to knowledge of those thinkers' *intentions*, and the continuity between the language used to represent ideas in the past and our understanding of them as abstract ontological entities.

In other words, Skinner became confounded by the connection between the language of the historian to the "past itself." Danto had also taken as his point of departure in *APOH* the epistemic dimension of the use of historical language and its relationship to the past, particularly in his analysis of what he called "narrative sentences." Narrative sentences were those used by

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[328] Examples of some of Skinner's most influential works include Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Political Thought, Volume 1: The Renaissance* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978); ibid., *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and ibid., *Visions of Politics, Volume 1: Regarding Method* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For an assessment of the historical and philosophical significance of Skinner's work, see Kari Palonen, *Quentin Skinner: History, Politics, Rhetoric* (New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2003).

[329] Quentin Skinner to Danto, July, (I've been taking these commas after month out. Check CMS) 1969. Arthur C. Danto Papers, Box 11, Folder 11.

historians to describe the meaning or significance of one event in terms of another, later event. For example, the sentence, "The Thirty Years War Began in 1618," could not have been uttered by someone at any point during that year as a true statement, though the sentence itself is true. What makes that particular sentence true is the unfolding of a story, the outcome of which could not be known to the witnesses of the "outbreak" of the war itself. To illustrate the point, Danto proposed an intriguing thought experiment. Suppose that there existed something we might call an "Ideal Chronicler (IC)," an omniscient entity who would be present at every point in history, and who could describe every moment exactly as it happened. What would be left for the historian to do? For Danto, the IC could offer a complete inventory of events as they occurred, but not a *history*. For every historical statement in the form of a narrative sentence presupposes two time-separated events, the former of which is given its significance in terms of the latter. "If we describe an event *E-1* by making reference to a future event *E-2* before *E-2* occurs or is supposed to occur, we will have to withdraw the description, or reckon it false, if *E-2* fails to happen. But the I.C. is so constructed as not to be mistaken at any point…it can make no such claims [on the future], and cannot, accordingly, employ…*narrative sentences*."[330] The Ideal Chronicler could not provide the sense of beginning, middle, and end, which stories and histories share as common features of explanation.

For Skinner, Danto's insights in *APOH* held relevance to the sorts of issues he was attempting to work through in intellectual history, particularly as it concerned our knowledge of the *intentions* of historical actors. Yet he was "too defensive to try to talk about it when I had nothing to show for it, while I was at Columbia." As he began to confront those issues more philosophically upon returning to Cambridge, however, Skinner began to realize that he may

[330] Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, 152.

have missed a valuable opportunity. As he wrote to Danto in the same letter, his inchoate positions on issues concerning intentionality in the history of ideas seemed "now so close to some of the things in Analytical P of H that I terribly wish I'd had the courage to ask a bit more at the time (Is it impertinent to add how much I've used, and admired the more I've used, that book?)."[331] Danto's analysis of narrative sentences seemed particularly to illustrate the consequences of a phenomenon that Didion captured only unintentionally.

In an influential article published later that year titled, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," Skinner labeled this phenomenon the "mythology of prolepsis." His primary concern in that article was the often-erroneous attribution of intentions, made by historians, to past historical actors. Following Danto, Skinner maintained that there was a necessary asymmetry between the past and the present in making true historical statements, such as the sentence "With Petrarch's ascent of Mt. Ventoux, the age of the Renaissance began." Such statements, romantic as they might be, can still be considered "true" in a relevant sense. What they do not admit of, however, is Petrarch's "intention" to have inaugurated an abstract historical period. "No account under this description could ever be a true account of any action Petrarch intended, or hence of the *meaning* of his actual action."[332] Because an action (among which Skinner, following J.L. Austin, included speech) "has to await the future to await its meaning," [333] the "mythology of prolepsis" can best be described as "the conflation of the necessary asymmetry between the significance an observer may justifiably claim to find in a given statement or other action, and the meaning of that action itself."[334]

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[331] Quentin Skinner to Danto, July, 1969. Arthur C. Danto Papers, Box 11, Folder 11.
[332] Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8 no. 1 (1969): 22. Emphasis mine.
[333] Ibid., 24.
[334] Ibid., 22.

In essence, Skinner was concerned that historians, and historians of ideas in particular, often confused historical significance with the meaning of past events for historical actors themselves. Treating an historical action as a token of a timeless or transcendent essence seemed to rob the past of its specificity, its local and contingent circumstances. Conversely, however, many historians, social scientists, and literary theorists had wrongly claimed that the meaning of a past utterance could only be understood as the *causal* product of a larger social, political, or institutional context. For the contextualist, the meaning of a statement presupposed a grasp of how historical actors *themselves* viewed the meaning of their actions, what it was they believed they were doing *in* acting. A study of social contexts themselves, however, could not fully grasp this particular essence, what Austin called an utterance's *illocutionary force*. "Every statement made or other action performed must presuppose an intention to have done it - call it a cause if you like - but also an intention *in* doing it, which cannot be a cause, but which must be grasped if the action itself is to be correctly characterized and so understood."[335] Correctly characterizing an action in the past, then, depended not merely on determining its meaning, but "a force co-ordinate with the meaning of the utterance itself, and yet essential to grasp in order to understand it."[336] In other words, actions (or texts) and their contexts were mutually constitutive in the act of historical interpretation insofar as they were "to be interpreted within a field of assumptions and conventions to which it contributes and from which it derives its distinctively meaningful character." [337] For Skinner, actions and utterances had a specific *point* for their producers, which the historian could then determine by canvassing the various uses to which such utterances were put within a given time period. The equation of meaning and use, for Skinner, offered the means

[335] Ibid., 45.
[336] Ibid., 46.
[337] Quentin Skinner, "Hermeneutics and the Role of History," *New Literary History* 7 no. 1 (1975): 210.

by which to bypass mere *explanations* of past events, instead "providing the means to *understand* them."[338]

Skinner's distinction between "meaning" and "understanding" reflected a larger, emerging concern among academic intellectuals from the mid-1960s to the 1980s to ground explanations of social and cultural phenomenon in terms outside of those provided by natural science. Indeed, this agonistic stance became a critical moment for those in the academy who, since the 1950s, had been struggling to "ground" the explanation of human behavior in terms that subsequently came to be known as the "human sciences."[339] Following Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, books such as Peter Winch's *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (1958) Elizabeth Anscombe's *Intention* (1957), and notable essays by Alasdiar MacIntyre and Charles Taylor, converged on the suggestion that both behavioral and linguistic actions were not something that could be reduced to mere behavioral regularity or analytic meaning alone.[340] Rather, they existed within the context of wider cultural practices, conventions, and norms that themselves could not be reduced to *a priori* rules or foundational principles. Skinner had followed in this direction, noting with Wittgenstein and Austin that the meaning of actions presupposed some sense of the *point* in doing them, rendering their meanings more practical than merely intellectual.

From the late 1960s into the 1980s, however, the question of how to properly *interpret* those meanings from either a vertical (i.e., historical) or horizontal (i.e., cross-cultural)

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[338] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," 46. Emphasis mine.
[339] On the emergence and epistemological identity of the "human sciences" in the U.S., see Isaac, *Working Knowledge*.
[340] Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2008, 1958); G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957); Alasdair MacIntyre, "A Mistake About Causality in the Social Sciences" in Peter Laslett and W.G. Runciman (eds.), *Philosophy, Politics, and Society* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 48-70; Charles Taylor, *The Explanation of Behavior* (New York: Humanities Press, 1964).

perspective, became an abiding concern for the human sciences. One of the most influential approaches to this problem was in emphasizing the centrality of *narrative* to the interpretative process. During these decades, a trans-disciplinary conversation emerged within literary theory, history, psychology, sociology, and anthropology over the role and status of narratives as a form of human explanation not only of our knowledge of the past, but knowledge more generally. Narrative came to represent everything from a practical heuristic for writing history, to offering a model of human cognition, and even a mode of understanding knowledge *tout court*. Indeed, the art-historian W.J.T. Mitchell, in a 1980 edition of *Critical Inquiry* devoted to the problem of narrative, could claim that "the study of narrative is no longer the province of literary specialists or folklorists borrowing their terms from psychology and linguistics but has now become a positive source of insight for all the branches of human and natural science."[341] As Mitchell observed, the aesthetic resources associated with narrative had, by 1980, collapsed into more traditional forms of reasoning and analysis typically associated with the human sciences.

What had become a genuinely coherent thread running through the human sciences by the 1980s, however, began in the relatively marginal subfield of Anglo-American philosophy of history during the 1950s and '60s. Largely in response to the émigré logical-empiricist Carl Hempel's essay, "The Function of General Laws in History," (1942) which argued that historical statements were reducible to general scientific laws, philosophers such as Morton White, William Dray, Louis O. Mink, and William Walsh began to challenge the idea that the "explanation" of past events was reducible to either laws, or to a general theory of historical development.[342] Instead, this work reflexively examined the structure of how historians used

[341] W.J.T. Mitchell, "Editor's Note: On Narrative," *Critical Inquiry* 7 no. 1 (1980): 3.
[342] Carl G. Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History," *The Journal of Philosophy* 39 no. 2 (1942): 35-48.

language to construct the past itself, primarily in the form of stories with a beginning, middle, and end. Challenging the scientific presuppositions of writers like Hempel, Walsh, for example, made a critical distinction between what he termed "plain" and "significant" narratives, the latter of which were distinguished by a narration of events that went beyond merely reciting them as they happened. On this account, the cognitive dimension of historical recitation shared more in common with understanding a story, insofar as its meaning emerged from human actions that were made intelligible through a "plot-like" structure. Dray and Mink went further with this line of inquiry. Dray, for his part, argued that philosophers of history had grafted relatively static conceptions of concepts such as causality onto historical change, suggesting instead that causality was a "polysemic" process in history more amenable to "rational explanations" or constructions of a plausible story, than it was to causal laws. Mink had even gone so far as to suggest that narrative was a primary mode of cognition not only in history, but an innate "mode of configuration" in our understanding of reality as such.[343]

It was Danto, however, whose influence proved most influential in translating this philosophy of history outside of the relatively narrow confines of analytic philosophy. In the first instance, professional historians in the United States became interested in *APOH* largely because it seemed to provide a philosophical scaffolding for historical research and writing as it was actually *practiced*. In April of 1968, for example, Brandeis University historian David Hackett

[343] W.H. Walsh, "'Plain' and 'Significant' Narrative in History," *The Journal of Philosophy* 55 no. 11 (1958): 479-484; W.H. Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957); Morton White, *Foundations of Historical Knowledge* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); Louis O. Mink, "The Autonomy of Historical Understanding," *History and Theory* 5 no. 1 (1966): 24-47; idem., "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," in idem., *Historical Understanding*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 182-203; For historical treatments of the analytic philosophy of history see Kerwin Lee Klein, *From History to Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 35-58; F.R. Ankersmit, "The Dilemma of Contemporary Anglo-Saxon Philosophy of History," *History and Theory* 25 no. 4 (1986): 1-27; and Samuel James, "Louis Mink, 'Postmodernism', and the Vocation of Historiography," *Modern Intellectual History* 7 no. 1 (2010): 151-184.

Fischer wrote to Danto, inviting him to speak at the Organization of American Historians' annual conference the following year on the grounds that there were "an increasing number of historians—particularly of a younger generation—who are developing a lively and sustained interest in the analytical philosophy of history." Fischer himself had recently read *APOH* "with enthusiasm," suggesting that it was "better balanced and more sensitive to what historians do than much of the earlier literature in the field."[344] Indeed, historians of all persuasions seemed attracted to Danto's work on history. In offering edits on a colleague's article, noted historian of ancient Christianity Robert M. Grant wrote that "before you say anything more about what happened or what influenced what or what Professor X says about abc, you must read a book I have just been reading (it's murder for those of us ((me)) who don't think philosophically by nature; but it's worth the trauma): Arthur C. Danto, Analytical Philosophy of History (Cambridge University Press, 1965, $10!) This may change your life. It shows that we who like history don't need to go out and buy big gobs of greasy philosophies of history; but it shows us that we too—regrettably—have to think…"[345]

Philosophers, too, were congenial to Danto's early work on the philosophy of history. Even before the publication of *APOH*, Grant's colleagues in the philosophy department at the University of Chicago, Sylvain Bromberger and Robert Paul Wolff, had written to Danto requesting multiple copies of his essay "Narrative Sentences" to teach in a graduate seminar, thinking "of it as a paper with which anyone interested in the philosophy of history must come to terms."[346] And no less a figure than Hempel himself, who had largely set the agonistic terms of debate in Anglo-American philosophy of history during the postwar period, wrote to Danto after

[344] David Hackett Fischer to Arthur C. Danto, July 19, 1968. Box 11, Folder 11. ACD Papers.
[345] Robert M. Grant to Robert Adamson, 1966. Box 11, Folder 7. ACD Papers.
[346] Sylvain Bromberger to Arthur C. Danto, March 28, 1963. Box 11, Folder 5. ACD Papers.

having "derived so much pleasure and stimulation from reading your essay on narrative statements that I called it to the attention of the students in my graduate seminar." Two days before writing that letter, the Princeton-based émigré claimed, one of those graduate students, whom he regarded as "especially bright," "came in and told me he thought this was the most brilliant essay in the philosophy of history that he had ever read."[347] While historians and philosophers found much to commend in Danto's analysis of narrative sentences, however, their early enthusiasm portended a larger shift within the human sciences that bore much of his imprint.

The reception of *APOH* in both Anglo-American and European philosophical circles reflected a moment in which the line dividing the "scientific" and the "manifest" (or humanist) images of human nature became increasingly blurred among the human sciences.[348] Among philosophers, one of the primary reasons for the loosening of that divide had come from a dissatisfaction with the narrow role accorded to the *use* of language in much of the early analytic project. In the wake of various attacks on the twin dogmas of 'analysis' and empiricism by the likes of W.V.O. Quine, Wittgenstein, and Austin, theorists of history, literature, and culture followed suit. Human scientists during the 1960s and '70s increasingly placed the burden of language on its extrication with both the symbolic systems of cultural norms, as well as human psychology broadly construed. Moreover, this line of analysis provided a pivotal connecting thread between Anglo-American philosophy and the tradition of German Hermeneutics, based in

[347] Carl G. Hempel to Arthur C. Danto, January 16, 1963. Box 11, Folder 5. ACD Papers.
[348] I borrow the distinction from the American philosopher Wilfrid Sellars. In his essay "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," Sellars noted that the traditions of Ordinary Language Philosophy and existential hermeneutics were engaged in an importantly related project of doing justice to the image of human 'being' conveyed through history, literature, anthropology, and their overlap in the formation of wider cultural patterns. Wilfrid Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," in idem., *Science, Perception, and Reality* (Atascadero: Ridgeway Publishing Company, 1991, 1963), 1-40.

the interpretation of texts. Indeed, what had emerged as a response to a misguided ideal of science animating early analytic philosophy, the analysis of ordinary language offered by Austin and the later Wittgenstein shared many of the same assumptions as those of an older, humanistic tradition of philosophical anthropology beginning in the writings of Friedrich Schleiermacher, and continuing through the work of Wilhelm Dilthey and Martin Heidegger.[349]

Somewhat paradoxically, both traditions tended to treat the inheritance of contingent languages, customs, and traditions as a *transcendental* condition from which meaning emerged. Indeed, the sense of "understanding," which Skinner had opposed to mere "meaning," reflected the residue of an older tradition of German historicist thought that was central to the hermeneutic tradition, that of *Verstehen*, in which historical reconstruction of the past often depended on a sympathetic "re-enactment" of the thoughts of past actors, made possible by a transcendental horizon of shared human experience. By the 1950s, that "horizon" had become increasingly synonymous with "language."[350] Moreover, it became a critical point at which the 'manifest' image of human behavior, to gain a sense of intelligibility, began to rely more heavily on descriptive concepts typically associated with the arts, particularly literature, poetry, and rhetoric.

It was primarily over debates surrounding history's intelligibility in the present, however, in which such concepts began to emerge. In works such as Hanson's *Patterns of Discovery* (1958) and Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), both of whom drew heavily from Wittgenstein, the question not only of the continuity of the past with the present, but the

[349] On the Hermeneutic tradition and its relation to historicism, see Charles Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).
[350] On the tradition of German Historicism see Frederick C. Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Cf. Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1968).

past's 'intelligibility' within the strictures of our present language and conceptual schemes, became a focal point of discussion among the human sciences in the English-speaking world from the 1960s onward. How one came to 'know' or 'access' the past (or other cultures) through the historian's language subsequently made historical knowledge as such central to the broader issue of meaning among the human sciences.[351] But it was in European debates over the relevance of hermeneutics to such issues, particularly concerning the philosophical import of narrative and rhetoric for historical intelligibility, where a broader, trans-Atlantic conversation began to form.

Arguably the most significant text in the post-WWII revival of hermeneutics in Europe was Hans Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960). In that text, Gadamer had largely followed his mentor, the Marburg philosopher Martin Heidegger, in moving beyond hermeneutics as, primarily, a practice of textual interpretation. For Heidegger, the apprehension of meaning was constitutive of human "being as such," not an "intellectual" matter in which meanings existed as distinct essences. That is, in contrast to a view of knowledge based on the comportment of mind with a set of pre-given rules or methods, our understanding of the world was always based on certain "prejudices" or "pre-judgements" as indelible strains of both our individual and collective histories. All understanding, in this sense, presupposed a larger context of meaning, what Gadamer called a "horizon." Such horizons were fundamentally linguistic, but were always inherited, and therefore never something one could 'get behind' or understand from a vantage point from without. Not language, but the existential fact of its inheritance as the

[351] For the importance of Kuhn's contribution of historicism to broader questions of meaning, see John H. Zammito, *A Nice Derangement of Epistemes: Post-Positivism in the Study of Science from Quine to Latour* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 52-122.

precondition for all understanding, became for Gadamer the transcendental condition of meaning.[352]

Danto's analysis of "narrative sentences" became a focal point for European philosophers continuing in the wake of *Truth and Method*. Paul Ricoeur's influential *Time and Narrative* (1983), for example, took the narrative sentence as containing the logic of a "plot in miniature."[353] Ricoeur had followed Danto's work for nearly two decades, and had often incorporated his work on history and action into his graduate seminars.[354] But it was Danto's work on the "narrative sentence" that had helped him to clarify the extent to which narrative disclosed the fundamentally *poetic* and *metaphorical* aspects of historical knowledge. For Ricoeur, the retroactive re-alignment of the past "brought about by the properly narrative description of action"[355] was constitutive not only of historical language, but our sense of time as such. Moreover, narrative was a metaphor for what he described as the fundamentally 'poetic' reconciliation of the past with its present inheritance in the form of language. "In large part, the epistemological problem posed by metaphor or by narrative consists in tying the explanation set to work by the semio-linguistic sciences to the prior understanding resulting from an acquired familiarity with the use of language, be it poetic or narrative use. In both cases it is a question of accounting at the same time for the autonomy of these rational disciplines and their direct or indirect, close or distant filiation, beginning from our poetic understanding."[356] For Ricoeur,

[352] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. (London: Bloomsbury, 1975), parts II and III.
[353] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative vol. 1* trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1983), 148.
[354] Paul Ricoeur to Arthur Danto, August 12, 1972. Box 11, Folder 18. ACD Papers.
[355] Ibid., 147.
[356] Ibid., xi.

traditionally rhetorical and aesthetic concepts like "metaphor" and "poetry" were ineliminable from a properly historical consciousness.

Chief among the critics of Gadamer's view of historical consciousness was the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who had drawn largely on Danto's writings to clarify the potential pitfalls of Gadamer's position. Indeed, for Habermas, Danto had gone further than any other thinker in bringing "analytic philosophy to the edge of hermeneutics." [357] In *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (1967) he had proposed that the purpose of historical explanation was the reconstructing of "a context of events that are mediated by the intentions of acting subjects."[358] Such intentions were best explained, moreover, through the use of narrative form. "We explain an event in narrative form when we show how a subject was involved in a story."[359] For Habermas, historical explanation in the terms of "universal expression of laws" failed to capture "the concrete generality of everyday language and the value system" by which that 'involvement' was articulated. "In the unity of a story, which always tells of changes in the situation of a world held together by an ego-identity, however, this concrete generality is maintained."[360]

On Habermas's account, the retrospective construction of stories was not only the purview of historians, but a transcendental condition of knowledge as such. Gadamer, however, had robbed that condition of its capacity to criticize potentially dangerous connections to the past by relying on the authority of 'tradition' as a primordial site of understanding. Following Danto's analysis of narrative sentences, Habermas criticized Gadamer on the grounds that retrospective

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[357] Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* trans. Shierry Nicholsen and Jerry A. Stark. (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), 33.
[358] Ibid., 32.
[359] Ibid., 33.
[360] Ibid., 161.

interpretation provides a critical point of "reflection" with the power to thwart the dogmatism of blind authority. "Authority and knowledge do not converge. Certainly, knowledge is rooted in actual tradition; it remains bound to contingent conditions. But reflection does not wear itself out on the facticity of traditional norms without leaving a trace. It is condemned to operate after the fact; but, operating in retrospect, it unleashes retroactive power."[361] For Habermas, Danto's analysis of narrative events had vindicated the potential of hermeneutics to remain politically relevant, without falling into the trap of Fascism that had seduced both Gadamer and his teacher Heidegger.[362] More significantly, he had shown the deep relevance of the traditionally 'rhetorical' devices of narrative structure to a critical analysis of culture and society.

Throughout the human sciences during the immediate post-WWII period, there was a growing interest in the ways that individual and cultural stories, myths, and symbols came to constitute values through language. Not surprisingly, the most significant examples of this work emerged first from literary theory, in works such as Kenneth Burke's *A Grammar of Motives* (1945) and Northrop Frye's *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). Burke in particular, was one of the most influential figures to make narrative and rhetorical structure central to larger frames of cultural analysis. In his *A Grammar of Motives* and *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950), for example, he emphasized the ultimately rhetorical and performative nature of all language use, claiming that the inherently "dramatic" aspects of language implicated human beings in narrative tropes such as tragedy, comedy, and romance. Understanding the consequences and significance of human action, both intended and unintended, allowed such tropes to function as loose metaphors,

[361] Ibid., 170.
[362] The classic statement of this view is Richard Wolin's *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

or what Burke called "equipment for living" with the vagaries of human communication.[363] For the Harvard philosopher Stanley Cavell, those literary and aesthetic tropes provided such equipment in the form of illustrations of the human temptation to skepticism. That is, the forms of tragedy contained in plays such as *Othello* and Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* reflected the natural human desire for language to provide an infallible certainty in our connections to others, while showing the tragic or ironic consequences of its breakdown. Such illustrations made the link between language and historical retrospection contained in the narrative form fundamental to the aesthetic dimension of selfhood and character.[364]

Over the next two decades, 'narrative and rhetoric' became critical points of departure for the broader incorporation of aesthetic and literary resources into disciplines struggling to formulate a response to the perceived hegemony of empiricism and formalism in the human sciences. *Critical Inquiry*'s special issue devoted to narrative in the Fall of 1980, for example, had shown the extent to which narrative had become a central concern for those in disciplines as diverse as history, psychology, linguistics, ethnography, and philosophy. In addition to issues of *New Literary History* and *Poetics Today* devoted to the "narrative turn" in literary studies, books and essays appeared throughout the 1980s that dealt with the importance of narrative to a wide variety of disciplines, including Edward Bruner's influential essay, "Ethnography as Narrative," Roy Schaffer's *Narrative Actions in Psychoanalysis* (1981), Claudia Brodsky's *The Imposition of Form: Studies in Narrative Representation and Knowledge* (1987), and Jeff Adams's *The*

[363] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); idem., *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969). On Burke's reformulation of pragmatism on "aesthetic" grounds, see Brad Baranowski, "The Unending Conversation: Kenneth Burke and Richard McKeon's Aesthetic Pragmatism, 1920-1960," *Modern Intellectual History* 15 no. 1 (2018): 153-184.
[364] See, in particular, Cavell's first collection of essays, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

Conspiracy of the Text: The Place of Narrative in the Development of Thought (1986), to name just a few.[365]

The constructive, rhetorical, and retrospective dimensions of narrative in understanding the self and its relationship to society and culture united many of these works. Moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, for example, argued for the importance of narrative to our understanding of the actions of others in his landmark book *After Virtue* (1981). "It is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others."[366] For MacIntyre, character and selfhood were disclosed, fundamentally, through this basic human act of retrospection. For other moral philosophers like Martha Nussbaum, the working through of a story provided an illustration of the operations of moral reasoning that more 'axiomatic' philosophical examples lacked. In *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986), she had singled out the tragic drama, in particular, for its capacity to make plain the "complexity, the indeterminacy" of human deliberation in a way that it could not when taken as a mere example in a thought experiment. "A whole tragic drama, unlike a schematic philosophical example making use of a similar story, is capable of tracing the history of a complex pattern of deliberation, showing its roots in a way of life and looking forward to its consequences in that life."[367] The tracing of a

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[365] Contributors to the *Critical Inquiry* special issue, titled "On Narrative" included eminent names from the fields of History, Psychoanalysis, Sociology, Literary Theory, Art History, Philosophy, Sociology, and Film Studies. "On Narrative" *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 7 no. 1 (Autumn, 1980): 1-236; Likewise, 3 volumes of the Journal *Poetics Today* from 1980-1981 were devoted to issues in the study of "Narratology." *Poetics Today* 1 vols. 3, 4 (1980): 1-208, 1-229, and *Poetics Today* 2 no. 2 (1981): 1-218; Edward M. Bruner, "Ethnography as Narrative," in Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner eds., *The Anthropology of Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 139-55; Roy Schafer, *Narrative Actions in Psychoanalysis* (Worcester: Clark University Press, 1981); Claudia J. Brodsky, *The Imposition of Form: Studies in Narrative Representation and Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Jeff Adams, *The Conspiracy of the Text: The Place of Narrative in the Development of Thought* (New York: Routledge & Kagan Paul, 1986).

[366] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*

[367] Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 1986), 14.

story, the consequences of human action, and the retrospective dimensions of narration united knowledge, art, and history in a common enterprise.

The discipline of psychology was a prime example of that union during the 1980s. As part of a larger response to the behavioristic program of B.F. Skinner and J.B. Watson, narration became an important vehicle for American psychologists who had only recently returned to treating human cognition as a meaningful endeavor, but who nevertheless found a discrepancy between empirical research and clinical practice. In the preface to his *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (1988), for example, U.S.C. psychologist Donald Polkinghorne recalled the sense in both himself and his graduate students that there was a profound disconnect between the results of empirical psychology, on the one hand, and the narrative histories provided by actual patients, on the other. Practicing, clinical-psychologists "are concerned with peoples' *stories*: they work with case histories and use narrative explanations to understand why the people they work with behave the way they do."[368] For Polkinghorne, narrative was not only beneficial as a clinical tool, but "the primary scheme by means of which human experience is rendered meaningful."[369] Likewise, Jerome Bruner's *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (1986) made that scheme essential to the formation of the "powerful and haunting stories" through which character was construed. "Our construal of character, indeed, is our first and perhaps most important step in dealing with another. It is this that makes the very act of interpreting a person—whether in fiction or in life—inherently dramatic. It is what makes the narrative of character so much more

[368] Donald Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), x.
[369] Ibid., 11.

subjunctive than the folktale or the myth…The anomaly of personhood—its consequential alternativeness—cannot be caught save through the vehicle of narrative."[370]

Arguably, however, the more fundamental dimension underlying the "narrative turn" was its recursive focus on language itself. Language became an important dimension of narrative construction through which some of the fundamental epistemological issues introduced by Danto in *APOH* were introduced to the human sciences more broadly. For the psychoanalyst Donald Spence, for example, the meaning conveyed through the unity of a narrative was an important part of clinical therapy. However, such meanings were not to be confused with historical fact. As he argued in *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis* (1984), the setting of psychotherapy was mediated by the linguistic structures of narrative explanation that constitute our explanation of the past. As such, psychoanalysts should not treat themselves, as Freud had intimated, as "historical archaeologists" mining their patients' life histories for the "Truth." As opposed to the goal of *historical* truth in which the facts somehow speak for themselves, Spence proposed that psychoanalysts rest content with discerning *narrative* truth, the creation of which was a fundamentally creative, even literary matter. Psychoanalysis was not a science, but, rather, a *metaphor* for the construal of meaning through the pragmatic and imaginative device of narrative construction in order to bridge the therapeutic gap between analyst and analysand.[371]

This discrepancy—between the language contained in narrative and historical fact—was taken up most significantly by the intellectual historian Hayden White in his 1973 book *Metahistory*. Inspired by the work of Danto and other analytic philosophers in the narrative

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[370] Ibid., 42.
[371] Donald P. Spence, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 296.

mold, White sought to collapse the ontological distinction between historical language and historical reality, the latter of which was in fact *constituted* by the former. In examining the rhetorical structure of the great philosophers of history of the nineteenth century—Hegel, Marx, Toqueville, Nietzsche, Croce—White argued that each had employed varying combinations of rhetorical "modes of emplotment" that functioned along an axis of argumentative structure and "ideological implication." All historians, White concluded, *prefigured* historical data along these lines in constructing a "pre-critical," and ultimately *poetic* mode of explanation in the form of significant narratives. "Before the historian can bring to bear upon the data of the historical field the conceptual apparatus he will use to represent and explain it, he must first *pre*figure the field—that is to say, constitute it as an object of mental perception. This poetic act is indistinguishable from the *linguistic* act in which the field is made ready for interpretation as a domain of a particular kind."[372] For White, the prefigurative act of poetic narration was "constitutive of the *concepts* he [the historian] will use *to identify the objects* that inhabit that domain and to *characterize the kinds of relationships* they can sustain with one another." This allowed for no properly *epistemic* grounds on which to choose between one "mode" of history, a particular narrative configuration, and another. Rather, "the best grounds for choosing one perspective on history rather than another are ultimately *aesthetic* or moral."[373]

For the philosopher Richard Rorty, those grounds were purely pragmatic. In many ways, Rorty represented the culmination of the narrative turn in the human sciences. Deeply inspired by the work of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Dewey, and Kuhn, Rorty attacked the central picture of language as a *medium* between the self and reality in his watershed book *Philosophy and the*

[372] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 30. Emphasis mine.
[373] Ibid., xiii. Emphasis mine.

Mirror of Nature (1979) and his collection of essays *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (1989). On Rorty's view, there was no metaphysical *thing*, "Language," whose essence could be determined, any more than there was an essence to Truth outside of the relationship between sentences, themselves part of historically contingent language games. The intellectual histories of science offered by writers like Kuhn, moreover, had shown how even our firmest model of objectivity, the natural sciences, were subject to radical re-descriptions of causality. Such re-descriptions seemingly forced a choice between competing narratives, the appeal to whose internal criteria would show one or the other to be a more adequate model of reality, of history or language. Choosing between such narratives, however, was a purely pragmatic matter of coping with the world as it was found in the present, re-describing it in novel ways. Such novel re-descriptions were what linked the work of the historian with that of the novelist and the poet: both found novel ways to *describe* the world, *making* rather than *finding* truth, in the name of richer, more complex, satisfying narratives in the present.[374] Rorty's "ironist", in this regard, was someone aware of the contingency of her inherited language and descriptions of her past, but who took that awareness as an opportunity for solidarity with others in the present through the metaphoric, novel use of language shared by poets, novelists, and historians alike.

It was no coincidence, then, that the most controversial advocate of the "narrativist" position had taken his cues from German Hermeneutics, Ordinary Language Philosophy, Pragmatism, Literary Theory, Intellectual History, and Science Studies. Each of these approaches to language, culture, and ideas had all, in the past three decades, contributed profoundly to the turn towards narrative in the human sciences. That 'turn', moreover, was part

[374] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); idem., *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

of a broader intellectual shift in which the autonomy of purely 'aesthetic' categories had collapsed. As a pivotal context for Danto's later thought, that collapse emblematized the fact that the traditional language of artistic analysis was no longer the exclusive domain of art; rather, its application to all forms of reasoning was made explicit by academics across the humanities and social sciences. As such, the purely artistic application of aesthetic language was shown to be a historically contingent development; art had been arbitrarily inoculated from other modes reasoning and thought. This fact became an abiding theme for Danto during the 1980s as he attempted to explain how a decline in the *autonomy* of aesthetics—the sequestration of art and its concepts from other areas of life—necessitated a new philosophy of art and a philosophy of art history. It was from this position, moreover, that he constructed his own grand narrative that would constitute both the description and argumentation for his "End of Art" thesis.

Slouching Towards the End of Art

In the same year that Didion warned of a youth culture that had spurned the value of history, the art historian Michael Fried had sounded another warning. In his now canonized essay "Art and Objecthood" (1967), the Greenberg protégé intimated that the virtues of high modernism had been infected by the blurring of the boundaries between artistic mediums. Somewhat irascibly, Fried argued that the turn to conceptual art during the 1960s was illegitimate on the grounds that it represented art's degeneration into a form of "performance." On this account, the works of conceptual artists like Donald Judd and Robert Morris represented an obsession with "duration" and "temporality itself" and were, as a result, questionable *as* artworks on the grounds that

temporality was what distinguished mere "theater" from high-modernist art. Fried's conservative demarcation of the boundaries between medium stood as perhaps the last grasp at a modernist dogma. But not only had his essay failed to appreciate the boundless forms that the 1960s artworld bequeathed to the matrix of future artistic possibilities; he was also woefully out of step with the extent to which broadly humanistic thinking had jettisoned the boundary separating human reasoning from the rhetorical and aesthetic concepts typically associated with the temporal arts of theater and literature.[375]

The narrative turn in the human sciences to which Fried was so blind was significant for many reasons, not least of which was the self-consciousness with which it underscored the inadequacy of models derived from the natural sciences to explain human behavior. But in turning to narrative and rhetoric, broadly speaking, the formal autonomy of a realm comprised of *distinctly* aesthetic concepts had all but collapsed. It was not simply that concepts derived from the arts had come to 'influence' disciplines whose legitimacy was based on a conception of reason walled off from art. Rather, in significantly weakening the distinction between aesthetic concepts and those associated with knowledge *tout court*, the formal autonomy of the former had come to an end. This was one of the fundamental presuppositions underlying Danto's key writings from the 1980s and early 90s: it was on the argument that art's history, and the means of its narration, was ultimately tied to its ontology, that he supposed art had reached its terminus.

Art had been assigned a marginal status as a form of knowledge at the inception of the Western philosophical tradition. For Plato, art was conceived as mere 'imitation' of the essences of reality, the apprehension of which was only possible through philosophy. Thus, art occupied

[375] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in idem., *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148-72.

an inferior status in the metaphysical hierarchy. For Danto, Plato's was a distinctly *political* metaphysics, meant to insulate the "philosopher king" from potential threats. "It is important for Plato to quarantine art against the practico-political sphere in which the philosopher may deign to descend (himself imitating the relationship in which Forms stand to appearances), and the thought that art is arrested in the realm of second-order appearances assures that it can make nothing happen in even the slightly less degenerate realm of first-order appearances, being radically epiphenomenal, like a dream or a shadow or a mere reflection."[376]

In fact, much of the narrative of art history since the Renaissance was bound up with its "disenfranchisement" by philosophy. But it was precisely this "philosophical disenfranchisement of art" that had, from the beginning, linked its historical narrative to the fulfilment of an ontological definition. On Danto's account, the fulfillment of that definition, from the Renaissance to the beginnings of modernism at the end of the nineteenth century, began with the progressive conquest of visual representation. The Italian painter Giorgio Vasari had enshrined this view in one of the most foundational texts in art-historical writing, *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550). Deeming Michelangelo and the Florentine painters of the Renaissance as the most advanced renderers of visual reality, Vasari had tethered art (specifically painting) to the view that its fundamental 'mission' was to capture visual reality as closely as possible. Thus, the virtuosity of Michelangelo represented, for Vasari, the culmination of art insofar as it fulfilled the highest ideals of its own self-understanding.[377]

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[376] Arthur C. Danto, "The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art," in idem., *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 6.
[377] Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists* trans. Julia Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Danto saw Vasari as the earliest proponent of the notion that art had a particular story, the narrative drama of which was the gradual refinement of techniques to conquer visual reality. The problem, however, was that Vasari's narrative ended with the Renaissance. "Vasari's certain claim that Michelangelo had given the 'final form' to the three noble arts [painting, sculpture, and architecture] saw Caravaggio and Rubens, Velazquez and Rembrandt, Poussin and El Greco, in all of whom painting attained heights that must be reckoned sublime even against Vasari's daunting paradigms of Michelangelo, Raphael, Leonardo, and Tian." [378] If Vasari saw the drama of art history culminating in the Renaissance, no less a thinker than Hegel made a similar claim of the Romantic period, arguing in his lectures on Aesthetics of 1828 that Romanticism in the arts represented art's coming to consciousness of itself in its realization of *Geist*, or Spirit. For Danto, Vasari, and then Hegel, were the first theorists of "The End of Art."

By the early 1980s, Danto began to surmise that Hegel, in particular, had something more to offer his own philosophy of art history. As he began to feel that art's definition was linked to its historical narration, Hegel provided a model for his most provocative essay to date. In "The End of Art" (1984) Danto presented a narrative structure of art that was based in a developmental sequence beginning from the Renaissance onward. The imitation theory proposed by Vasari had made the conquest of visual representation (i.e., verisimilitude) art's initial developmental imperative, the progress of which was undergirded by various advances such as chiaroscuro and perspective.[379] The story of art as the progressive conquest of visual representation, however, came to an end with the advent of photography and the motion picture during the early-twentieth century. As a result, Danto speculated, artists, beginning with the Post-Impressionists, gave up

[378] Arthur C. Danto, "Narratives of the End of Art," *Grand Street* 8 no. 3 (1989): 171.
[379] Danto, "The End of Art," idem., *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 86-99.

on the task of replicating human perception in painting and sculpture and began instead to focus on conveying *emotion* through various means of distorting perspective, embodied variously in the work of the Fauves, Cubists, Supremacists and, by the 1950s, the Abstract Expressionists. Such a shift effectively nullified the conception of art as a progressive enterprise, Danto argued. But as the twentieth century wore on, the expression of emotion seemed increasingly inadequate as an exclusive *definition* of art in light of its proliferating guises.[380]

The advent of the "expressionist theory," however, was also the moment of its demise, for it prompted a fitful "period of manifestoes" characteristic of modernism during the first half of the twentieth century.[381] That is, as the expression of emotion appeared increasingly inadequate as a *definition* of art, various answers emerged from artists and critics championing Surrealism, Dadaism, or Abstract Expressionism as styles whose emergence represented a historical culmination, and hence ultimate definition, of art.[382] On Danto's view, such answers repeatedly raised the question of art's essence, but were hampered by their confusion of contingent, stylistic choices with a transcendent definition of art's essence. It was only when Warhol raised the problem of indiscernibles in his "Brillo Boxes", Danto claimed, that the true philosophical question of art—what distinguished it from reality--revealed its essence.[383]

The Danto of *APOH* had little use for such grandiose historical speculations. By the mid-1980s, however, he had loosened those strictures, particularly when he began to read and teach Hegel's aesthetics. Prior to 1985, Danto had taught courses in aesthetics and the philosophy of

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[380] Ibid., 103-4.
[381] Arthur C. Danto, "Three Decades After the End of Art," in idem., *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 27.
[382] Danto, "The End of Art," idem., *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 109.
[383] Ibid., 110-114.

art, courses titled, simply, "Thought" and "Feeling," as well as courses in "Philosophical Psychology" and the philosophy of action and knowledge. During the 1986 Fall semester, however, he offered his first course on Hegel's aesthetics, the content of which included "The dialectical method; the place of art and literature in Hegel's system; the sense in which they are superseded as ways of formulating experience, Hegel's theories of symbolism, metaphor, genres, etc. [and] appraisals of Hegel's aesthetics by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Derrida."[384] For Hegel, art was one of the three fundamental means through which *Geist* came to realize itself in the course of determining its own essence through the dialectical unfolding of history. Once such an essence had been determined, revealed to itself through itself, art no longer had any use in the cosmic unfolding of self-consciousness, nor did it bear any progressive, historical significance; it had come to an end.

Danto justified his own rendering of this narrative by attempting to show how it was that *Geist* (or, in this case, the 'essence' of art), revealed itself historically. In the first instance. to think of the history of art as a sequence of increasingly more precise attempts to imitate nature necessitated the view of art as progressive at its outset. "Only…if we first think of art as representation can we think of art as having the sort of history which fulfills the progressive model."[385] However, to later entertain the idea of art as, exclusively, the expression of emotion would preclude such a view, primarily because there could be no "progress" in the expression of human emotion, so to speak. The view of art as fulfilling a progressive mandate for perceptual equivalence, then, was a necessary "waystation" in conceiving of the essence of art as tied to its narration. But this was only one half of a dialectic that, beginning with the expressionist theory,

[384] Columbia University Graduate School of Arts & Sciences Course Bulletin, 1986/87, 75. Columbia University Rare Books Library.
[385] Danto, "The End of Art," idem., *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 106.

also mandated a *definition* of art. "What emerges from this dialectic is that if we are to think of art as having an end, we need a conception of art history which is linear, but a theory of art which is general enough to include representations other than the sort illusionistic painting exemplifies best: literary representations, for example, and even music."[386]

To think of art as "having an end," moreover, also required that it contain a beginning and a middle—in other words, a narrative. Danto's narrative of art contained precisely the metaphorical and rhetorical language used to convey the drama of a story whose outcome was only attained after the drama of a conflict. "Art" became a character embroiled in the historical drama of self-discovery, "a model narratively exemplified by the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of self-education which climaxes in the self's recognition of the self."[387] In this sense, Danto had jettisoned his strictures on abstract historical speculation that initially motivated his analysis in *APOH*, and that motivated his animus towards student protests in the late '60s. In another, however, his Hegelian analysis was perfectly consistent with both the logic of the "narrative sentence" contained therein, and the broader "narrative turn" to which that work gave rise. Danto's philosophy of art history required the imposition of a narrative to give coherence, and indeed to prefigure, the protagonist of his Hegelian drama: the 'essence' of art. Metaphysical as it was, such an 'essence' nevertheless required the discrepancy between the past and the present to make, what Danto believed, was both a true statement about a contingent past and a philosophical concept. The point, however, was that one could not separate one from the other. In this way, Danto's philosophy of art history was part of a larger intellectual moment during the 1980s that collapsed the distinction between aesthetic concepts—in this case, narration itself—

[386] Ibid., 107.
[387] Ibid., 110.

and that of apodictic reasoning. The boundary between aesthetics on one side, and analysis or metaphysics on the other, was blurred.

Language as Art as Metaphor

The blurring of that boundary was particularly important to the analytical strategy Danto pursued just a few years earlier in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981), his most systematic attempt at providing a *definition* of art. *The Transfiguration* was a text whose relevance was buttressed by the often-vitriolic polemics that had emerged around the issue of 'appropriation' in art during the 1980s, an issue that he and other philosophers of art, such as Cavell and Goodman, had begun pursuing since mid-60s. During the 1980s, artists began to appropriate contemporary and historical images to attack the various notions associated with Western art that equated terms like 'Genius', 'Masterpiece', and painting itself with the implied superiority of straight, white men. Artists like Robert Colescott, Yasumasa Morimura, and Cindy Sherman, for example, appropriated extant images from the historical past to show how particular aesthetic choices were tied to the historical exclusion of minorities and women.[388] Indeed, for the critic and art-historian Douglas Crimp, who organized the influential New York exhibition "Pictures" at the Artist's Space Gallery in 1977, the strategy of appropriating existing cultural images represented the vanguard of "radical innovation" in the wake of modernism's demise.[389]

[388] Sharon Matt Atkins, "Art, Appropriation, and Identity Since 1980," (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2014).
[389] Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (1979): 75.

But Danto was particularly interested in the response to those artists who, following in the wake of Warhol, had appropriated images so like their originals as in some cases to be nearly or completely indiscernible. Artists like Mike Bidlo, for example, painted nearly direct replicas of the works of Jackson Pollock, Pablo Picasso, and Giorgio Morandi, to the consternation of critics like Kay Larson who, writing in *New York Magazine*, described his work as a "calculated subterfuge against art."[390] The artist Sherrie Levine, likewise, caused considerable outrage and confusion as to whether her photographs of the original photographs of the American photographer Walker Evans could even be considered art, or simply "intentional and shameless plagiarisms," as another critic put it.[391]

Transfiguration was concerned primarily with this issue insofar as it helped to reveal the necessary conditions for a definition of art. Those conditions were two: 1) artworks are necessarily *about* something, and 2) they embody what they are about in a particular way. At first glance, the necessary condition of "embodiment" seemed to contradict Danto's insistence that a definition of art had to be based outside of sensory perception. After all, if an artwork is "embodied", would this not entail that identifying such embodiment would depend on something imminent to the senses, making that immanence a part of art's definition? Danto's answer to this potential rejoinder was embedded in his discussion of the conceptual and historical dimensions of representation itself. Representations, Danto argued, fundamentally presupposed a logical space between language (broadly construed) and the world. On a traditional view, our representations 'stand for' or 'denote' things in the world. However, when one considers that there are representations that do not 'denote' anything in the world, pictures of unicorns, for

[390] Kay Larson, "Copycats," *New York Magazine* 21 no. 5 (1988): 48.
[391] Paul Richard, "Zap! Flash! The New York Look at the Whitney," *The Washington Post* (March 24, 1985)

example, then the traditional view seems to give way. "As we are reluctant to suppose that it [a non-denotational view of representation] is meaningless for that reason, something other than its denotation or extension must be invoked in order to account for this."[392]

The important factor accounting for the discrepancy, particularly in the case of works of art, was that artworks were "intensional" or, rather, that they were *about* something. A picture, for example, could exactly resemble another picture without it following that the latter denoted the former, because the two contained different intensions. Using an example from the early Wittgenstein, Danto argued that language illustrated this principle in the same way. "In the *Tractatus* a sentence will resemble a sentence under parity of logical form as much as it resembles the fact it is supposed to mirror; but it will not mirror, unless made to do so, that other sentence. And a picture may resemble another picture as much as it resembles what it denotes when it denotes, without its following that it will denote that other picture. In many cases pictures have no intended denotation at all, are not used in the relevant sense to *represent* anything."[393] In other words, the logical architecture of representations was silent about its content; indiscernibles might share the same *logical* structure yet have two distinct meanings.

This led Danto to consider the nature of representation more speculatively, and further along the lines of narrative. In this he found the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, a thinker to whom he had devoted a small book as a young professor, an amenable companion.[394] Danto had followed Nietzsche's account of representation in *The Birth of Tragedy*, a narrative of the history of art *par excellence*, in claiming that art had emerged with the Western and Indian philosophical traditions of separating language and the world. Representation came eventually to supplant the

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[392] Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 71.
[393] Ibid., 76. Emphasis mine.
[394] Arthur C. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, 1965).

magical relationship that had imbued language, symbols, and icons with the literal 'presence' of the things they later came to merely denote. "This is not at all to say that art is a language, but only that its ontology is of a piece with that of language, and that the contrast exists between reality and it which exists between reality and discourse."[395] Art and language, once of a piece, were separated with the advent of a concept of representation that put its symbols at a remove from reality.

That remove, however, the positing of a gap between language (and art) and the world was what first allowed philosophy to emerge. Inherent to that view, moreover, was a similar distinction between pure observation, and what Danto termed "appreciation." It was this distinction that Danto sought to elucidate in showing the necessary condition that artworks are "about" something, the identification of which involved a value-laden, two-way relationship between individuals and artworks. The Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* had cryptically claimed that values (like artworks) were not a natural feature of the world, or else they could not be considered values (or artworks) at all. They were something that human beings had come to confer importance upon. Danto had followed this line of reasoning in claiming a parallel structure for art, insofar as its identity depended not on something observable, but, rather, something constitutive of its terms of appreciation. "This contrast between observation and appreciation is certainly part of what Wittgenstein must mean when he claims that values are not in the world. If they were, he argues, they would be of no value, implying that we do not simply note that something is valuable ('observation will not do'): values involve a relationship between ourselves and the world." [396] A definition of art, on this account, had to necessarily incorporate

[395] Ibid., 83.
[396] Ibid.,97.

the evaluative dimension within which artworks implicate their consumers in particular modes of response; it was the *history* of those modes, contained in their narration, from which a definition emerged.

The distinction between appreciation and observation, moreover, gave the necessary condition of embodiment in artworks its distinctiveness from both non-artworks and, moreover, mere representations. "Works of art, in categorical contrast with mere representations, use the *means* of representation in a way that is not exhaustively specified when one has exhaustively specified *what* is being represented. This is a use that transcends semantic considerations."[397] Indeed, it was the fact that works of art used the means of representation in a particular way, distinct from non-intensional discourse, that led Danto to ultimately speak of works of art as *metaphors*. Metaphors resist traditional semantic considerations insofar as they use the same content or "means of representation" as ordinary statements but retain an ontologically distinctive identity. For example, two people might utter the phrase, "Frege is a great philosopher." The first utterance is sincere, while the second may be used ironically. Moreover, when taken sincerely, the identity of 'Frege' *contained in that particular expression* cannot be reduced to its constituent parts without changing the Truth-value of the statement, because Frege is being referred to in a *particular way*. "Thus when we say that m believes that Frege is a great philosopher, this will not be the same as saying that m believes that the author of the Begriffschrifft is a great philosopher, though Frege is he. This is not simply because he may not know that Frege wrote that thing, for he may know that and in fact believe that the author of the Begriffschrifft is a great philosopher. It is that we are referring neither to Frege nor to the author of the Begriffschrifft, but to a constituent of the way m happens to be representing something.

[397] Ibid., 147-48. Emphasis mine.

The sentence we assert is about that fragment of a representation, about (in this instance) the way the world is taken to be by m."[398]

Here, Danto recalled the insights of Sibley and the indiscernibility paradigm upon which he drew for inspiration in his undergraduate lectures. Insofar as he distinguished between "traditional semantic considerations" and works of art, he remained wedded to a frame of reference that contrasted surface with depth, artifice and sincerity, an antinomian relation illustrated in the "constituent" of m's view of the world as opposed to his belief that the author of the Begriffschrifft is a great philosopher. In this way, artworks shared the ontological structure of language in the complexities of their representational possibilities.

Because artworks functioned in this way, as metaphors, appreciation of their particular means of embodiment was tantamount to the recognition both of a particular *style*, and how that style was achieved through its mode of *expression*. Lichtenstein's *Portrait of Madame Cezanne*, for example, was a 'copy' of a diagram rendered on top of Cezanne's famous portrait of his wife, in a book written by the French artist and critic Erle Loran. On Danto's account, Lichtenstein had rendered on canvas a photo of a diagram, itself not a work of art, and had made a particular statement about that content, perhaps about the means of representing love, distinct from itself. "A photograph of a work of art may very well be an artwork in its own right, if it presents content in a way that shows something about the content presented."[399] Moreover, Lichtenstein had presented his content in a way that elicited a certain emotion, a function of the ultimately *rhetorical* implication contained in the metaphor. It *expressed* its content in a way that a mere photo of the diagram taken, say, for the purpose of reference, could not.

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[398] Ibid., 181.
[399] Ibid., 147.

In this way, for Danto metaphor was the conceptual thread tethering an artist's *style*, and the way that style was achieved, to her distinctive mode of *expression*. Beyond Danto's work, moreover, metaphor and rhetoric more broadly became the primary means by which the concept of expression in the arts came to be decoupled from a naïve form of artistic intuitionism among some of the most influential philosophers of art at the end of the twentieth century. That is, in positing the ultimately rhetorical structure of works of art relative to their merely semantic implications, artworks were removed from an autonomous domain of "aesthetics" associated with vision, taste, and intuition, and shown to admit of the same ontological and semantic questions as those associated with representation itself.

Danto's contemporary Nelson Goodman had adumbrated these conclusions concerning metaphor and representation contained in *Transfiguration*, in claiming that artworks, as metaphors, were no less part of the structure of knowledge than the natural sciences. Goodman, who had received his PhD at Harvard and spent much of his career at the University of Pennsylvania, had already made profound contributions to the philosophy of language and epistemology before his writings on art. More particularly, Goodman was interested in the philosophical problems raised in linguistic reference and classification. In the essay "The New Riddle of Induction" (1955), for example, he drew attention to the problems associated with induction as a particularly acute example of that problem. Hume had famously argued that our inductive knowledge of fundamental 'laws' such as causation was based on nothing more than the observation of regularities, and our projection of those regularities onto predictions about the future. For Goodman, however, the very notion of observed "regularities" posed an even deeper problem for our picture of induction. To illustrate this point, he used the example of emeralds, which are typically classified using the predicate 'green.' For Goodman, because we have no

way of predicting the future, emeralds could also be classified with the predicate 'grue'—i.e., green up to time *t*, and *blue* thereafter. But because we have no way of knowing that emeralds might not be blue after time *t*, then the observation admits of two different inductions—that emeralds will remain green after time *t*, or they will be blue. The problem, then, is how to account for the predicates that we do *in fact* use. For example, if we use the predicate 'green' and there is a change at time *t*, its application is false. Conversely, if we employ the predicate 'grue' and there is no change at time 't', *that* predicate is, likewise, false. For Goodman, then, our projection of certain predicates onto the world, rather than others, was not a matter of observed regularities, but a matter of habit or 'entrenchment', dictated, in the case of artistic predicates, by the history of art and its connoisseurship.[400]

Artworks, like linguistic predicates, were symbols by which we gained cognitive access to the world through that route of historical and cultural 'entrenchment', not least of which, as Danto argued, in the construction of narratives. Moreover for Goodman, art, while a distinct *form* of knowledge, was no different in its symbolic structure than natural science, or indeed any representational system. In his landmark book *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (1968), Goodman defined artworks (and symbols more broadly), as things that *refer* in particular ways to the world. The particular ways in which artworks referred could be either simple or invoke more complex chains of reference. The ways in which artworks referred, how they did so, and under what cultural set of rules, however, were determined through *interpretations* constrained by a particular knowledge of the cultural history of art. Metaphors were a particularly salient example of the ways in which artworks referred through that chain of

[400] Nelson Goodman, "The New Riddle of Induction," in idem., *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983, 1979), 59-83.

cultural history, which Goodman, more narrowly than Danto, defined as the application of a symbol belonging to one 'schema' to that of another belonging to a distinctive, incompatible one (i.e., the phrase, "Purple Prose"). Other rhetorical devices such as irony, synecdoche, or hyperbole, moreover, operated as various "modes of metaphor", which depended for their force on a particular knowledge of the predicates traditionally used to identify, describe, and evaluate works of art.[401] What Goodman shared with Danto, however, was the analytical conviction that the "language of art", as a fundamentally cognitive mode of engagement with the world, was of a piece with the value-laden structure of representation itself, a structure tied to its cultural history, rather than a privileged site of purely "aesthetic" import.

While Goodman spoke of the "entrenchment" of predicates used to describe, evaluate, and categorize representations, not least of which included works of art, Danto had become particularly concerned, by the 1980s, with how such entrenchment was reflected in the structure of art history. Somewhat perversely, Danto had constructed his own narrative of what art since the Renaissance had been inching towards: a definition of itself. On this view, Greenberg's model of art—the pure expression of the medium of paint—was less incorrect than it was a transition point on the way to a truer (or, rather, Danto's) definition of art. In this sense, he had constructed a teleology no less sweeping than Hegel's or Vasari's. On another reading, however, he had shown how contemporary artists in the wake of Warhol had *internalized* the narrative of Western art in a way that made the connection between art historical periodization and aesthetic choice a central theme of art's historical indeterminacy and, hence, its radical state of pluralism. That is, the internalization of the narrative of Western art had made the consciousness of art as

[401] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1968).

metaphor an internal feature of its connection to the art-historical past. Danto's "End of Art" thesis, then, was "a theory of consciousness-of how a developmental sequence of events terminates in the consciousness of that sequence as a whole."[402] It was only on that theory that art's definition could emerge.

Conclusion

Danto's "End of Art" thesis and his definition of art essayed in *The Transfiguration* emerged during a short-lived moment in the 1980s in which the human sciences collectively looked to sources drawn from the aesthetic categories entailed by narration, particularly those of rhetoric and metaphor, in order to rethink the foundations of its various disciplines. In what was a striking parallel to the artworld in the decades preceding that moment, literary theorists, historians, psychologists, philosophers, and sociologists all undermined the distinction between artistic tropes and concepts and those associated with traditional forms of reasoning and empirical inquiry. Art and life had not merged in this instance. But they had come close enough to a point of convergence, in the form of the narrative turn, to show that the autonomy of artistic concepts and language was an illusion. This became the underlying assumption on which Danto's most significant writings on the philosophy of art and art history rested. In the *Transfiguration*, he hinged art's intelligibility to an analysis of *representation* inextricable from the concept of 'metaphor'. To speak of the "metaphorical" act of narrative, then, was to show how the semantic features of representation, and indeed the definition of art itself, was dependent on making the history of art and its development intelligible in the present. Danto's "End of Art" thesis had followed this line of reasoning in treating art as a concept with the same ontological

[402] Arthur C. Danto, "The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense," 137.

scaffolding as language, only to show that the consciousness of this fact precluded any notion of artistic progress or hierarchy. In other words, the consciousness of narrative "require[d] an internal connection between the way we define art and the way we think of the history of art."[403] It was only once that history had ended, Danto argued, that artists were truly free to do what they wanted.

Once this state truly came to fruition, the prophylactic that had insulated art in the name of aesthetic autonomy for hundreds of years was removed with mixed consequences. In assessing those consequences during the late 1980s and 90s, however, Danto's theorization of art began to reveal its own mixed implications.

[403] Arthur C. Danto, "The End of Art," in idem., *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, 106.

The 'End of Art' and the Philosopher as Intellectual

In 1979, the Government Services Agency (GSA) commissioned a public sculpture to be erected in front of its regional office in Federal Plaza in New York City. The GSA had hired a panel of three art professionals from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to select the artist, who eventually recommended to the commission the New York sculptor Richard Serra. After two years of fielding potential concerns about the piece and its location in the plaza, Serra erected a massive, winding wall made of corrugated steel, which he titled *Tilted Arc* (1981). Although the work was intended as an aesthetic boon to the space, Federal Plaza workers by and large grew to resent the sculpture in the years following its installation. By 1985, GSA regional administrator William Diamond convened and presided over a public hearing in which the opinions of 180 "art experts" were canvassed regarding *Tilted Arc*'s merit and appropriateness to the space. Of the 180 witnesses at the March hearing, 120 were supportive of keeping the structure in place. Yet despite the art-critical support, and legal challenges from Serra that his first amendment rights had been violated, *Tilted Arc* was eventually moved to a warehouse in Brooklyn in 1989.[404]

Unlike the overwhelming support of *Tilted Arc* among the artworld cognoscenti during the 1980s, Danto saw the controversy as an example of art overriding the public will. Indeed, he viewed Serra's argument that his art could be edifying to the public, if only they would take the time to attempt to understand it, as an affront to the notion of democratic accountability inherent to the concept of public art itself. "One of the great failures in our public art programs, as

[404] Harriet F. Senie, *The Tilted Arc Controversy: A Dangerous Precedent?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 21-54.

dramatized by the strife over 'Tilted Arc,' is that the public has been radically under involved and all the main decisions have been left to panels of 'authorities.' The assumption has been that art is good, so it must be good for people to have it, without anybody making much of an effort to translate the goodness of works that are not self-evidently good into terms people can grasp and respond to. If art is as irreducibly difficult as defenders of serious art have maintained, a considerable barrier exists between it and the public it is supposed to benefit."[405] In treating art (public or otherwise) as the sacred purview of educated "aesthetes", Danto suggested, artists and critics reinforced the view that art, by dint of its own exalted status, reserved the right of coercion. "Serra says that the workers 'can learn something about a sculptural orientation to space and place.' Philistines agree, but ask whether lessons in art appreciation ought to pre-empt other uses to which space and place might be put. And, more politically, with whether such lessons ought to be coerced—a person has a right not to be edified if he or she does not want to be."[406] By virtue of its public-ness, the metaphysical imperative of art-for-art's sake was inappropriate to a public for whom such art purportedly exists.

In one sense, Danto's dissent from the panel of artworld "authorities" was an argument against a still rarefied conception of art as a domain removed from other areas of life and immune from moral or political evaluation. The notion that Serra's *Tilted Arc* should be defended against the workers of the plaza was tantamount to a defense of art for its own sake, an idea deeply rooted in modernist notions of artistic progress. In another, arguably more important sense, however, Danto's attempt to hedge his own *philosophical* authority in the matter betrayed

[405] Arthur C. Danto, "Public Art and the General Will," *The Nation* 421 no. 9 (1985): 288.
[406] Arthur C. Danto, "Tilted Arc and Public Art" (Draft) (ACD Papers, Box 4, Folder 29, Series 2). Originally delivered as a lecture at the Whitney Museum, then published in *The Nation* and reprinted in *The Wake of Art.*

a peculiar sense in which his argument was at odds with the pluralism his "End of Art" thesis entailed.

For Danto, if ideas mattered more than either mere perception or the autonomy of artistic concepts in the hierarchy of contemporary art, then philosophy necessarily served as the arbiter of all other ideas in its production and analysis. By the 1980s, the decentralized and pluralistic nature of the contemporary artworld demanded explanation, definition, and defense; it stood to reason to Danto that philosophy should step in where artists themselves proved inadequate to the task. If the decline in the centrality of traditional aesthetics was central to Danto's theorization of the emergence of contemporary art, however, it also served to vault philosophy and, in particular, Danto's own sense of intellectual authority *qua* philosopher, to a place that unwittingly denigrated art itself. This was one of the fundamental points made by critics of Danto's philosophy and his "End of Art" thesis at the end of the twentieth century. More broadly, however, the critical reception of Danto's theories also presaged a larger ambiguity in the authority of "art-critical intellectuals" in the age of contemporary art. Danto was arguably the most significant theorist of the emergence of contemporary art. But, to many, his authority on the matter, by dint of his status as a philosopher, ultimately rang hollow in an environment where, as Danto himself acknowledged, art no longer carried the same metaphysical baggage it was once thought to bear. Without that weight, theorizations of its absence translated, for many, as misplaced arrogance, rather than profundity.

The first part of this chapter traces the cultural contexts in which Danto applied his "End of Art" thesis and some of the fundamental contradictions inherent to his unyielding denigration of so-called aesthetic autonomy. In the second, those contradictions are elaborated by showing how Danto's self-conception as a philosopher, and the reception of his "End of Art" thesis,

reveals a larger ambiguity in the status attached to intellectual authority over the nature of art itself at the end of the twentieth century.

Whither Aesthetics?

By 1990, the analysis of art by critics and other intellectuals had seemingly vindicated Danto's thesis that aesthetics alone had been significantly demoted in the artistic hierarchy. The de-regulation of capitalism, the challenges of multi-culturalism, and the AIDS crisis of the 1980s had made aesthetics appear a quaint and antiquated notion. The novelist Carole Maso, for example, made this point central to her 1990 novel *The Art Lover.* Maso's novel begins when its protagonist, Caroline, returns to New York from an artist's colony in Cummington, Massachusetts to confront the recent passing of her father Max, a prominent art historian at NYU. In the process, moreover, she watches her best friend Stephen lose a slow, agonizing battle with the AIDS virus at the age of thirty-two. Caroline, a novelist, had inherited from her father the belief in the transcendent power of art, "its ability to help distance," a belief only heightened by the success of her first novel.[407] As she returns home and struggles to write a second book, however, she runs up against the *limitations* of art—indeed the inadequacy of art as an escape into a transcendent realm—when faced with the tribulations of loss.

"Please don't leave me, Caroline," Stephen enjoins in the winter of that year, as he withers away in a hospital bed. He can feel Caroline's quickening mental and emotional distance as she sits by his side.[408] Quickly she comes back. "I flesh him out. I will not turn him into paint

[407] Caroline Maso, *The Art Lover* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 185.
[408] Stephen was based on Maso's friend, the New York painter and assemblage artist Gary Falk, who died of AIDS-related complications in 1986.

and canvas, where he'll be manageable… 'I'm sorry,' I tell him. 'I'm here.' It's something I learned from Max. To leave like this. How to make pictures of leaving in my head."[409] After Stephen passes, Caroline recalls an evening spent with her father before departing for Cummington. With the aid of multiple cognacs, their conversation turns to Caroline's mother, who committed suicide when she was only six. She wonders whether her father, like she had inadvertently done with Stephen, held her mother at a reserve in the name of artistic delectation. "Did you try to keep her at a distance by putting her on canvas, turning her into something else? She needed you to treat her other than an object of beauty, of art." [410] In the course of their conversation, Caroline realizes the extent to which she has internalized this idealization of art's sanctity, which Maso incorporates into the structure of the novel itself. *The Art Lover* begins with a picturesque scene of a countryside family picnic, accented with the pastoral accoutrements of fresh picked vegetables, goat's cheese, and champagne. But the initial aesthetic conceit of the novel's form is revealed, in the wake of death and loss, to be stuff of Caroline's pernicious remove from reality in the name of art.

> Did we ever have a garden in the country, Max? Sometimes I have this image of Mom and I out there growing all kinds of things—vegetables, tulips. Planting seeds. I seem to remember spending hours there with her. Could that be true?'
> 'I'm afraid not, Caroline. Your mother never gardened. Your mother never grew anything."[411]

The Art Lover emblematized a period during the 1980s and 90s when the line between art and life became an increasing topic of concern for the artworld. Conceptual artists like Robert Morris, Donald Judd, Alan Kaprow, Robert Smithson, and Judy Chicago had challenged this line during the 1960s and 70s in the wake of high modernism, seemingly casting the autonomy of

[409] Ibid., 142.
[410] Ibid., 185.
[411] Ibid., 187.

aesthetics to the dustbin of art history. But by the 1980s, the AIDS crisis, the extreme financialization and de-regulation of capitalism, and the challenge of so-called multiculturalism made the hostility to aesthetics, as the defining purpose of art, central to its analysis.

As Maso's novel suggested, the AIDS crisis was one of the most critical junctions from which artists and critics challenged the centrality of aesthetic autonomy to contemporary art. In the introduction to a special issue of *October* tiled "AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism" (1987), for example, the art-critic and activist Douglas Crimp argued that the response to the crisis on the part of artists and critics demonstrated an atavistic, if harmful, understanding of the role of art in the face of social and cultural crisis. For Crimp, coverage of the "creative response" to the AIDS crisis suggested an idealistic, anesthetized view of art that neutered it of its capacity for cultural change in the name of aesthetic escape.[412] Likewise, fundraisers for AIDS research and support, while unquestionably important, reinforced platitudes about the importance of art and the "triumph of the human spirit" in the face of brute death and illness. As Elizabeth Taylor, the national chairwoman of the American Foundation for Aids Research opined at the Art Against AIDS gala held New York in 1987, "Art Lives on Forever."[413] Likewise, AIDS activist and *Village Voice* columnist Richard Goldstein exclaimed at the same event that "In an ironic sense, I think that AIDS is good for art. I think it will produce great works that will outlast and transcend the epidemic." For Crimp, "it would appear from such…statement[s] that what is at stake is not the survival of people with AIDS and those who might now be or eventually become infected with HIV, but rather the survival, even the flourishing, of art."[414]

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[412] Crimp's use of the phrase "creative response" was in reference to David Kaufman, "AIDS: The Creative Response," *Horizon* vol. 30 no. 9 (November 1987).
[413] Taylor quoted in Douglas Crimp, "Introduction," *October* 43 (Winter, 1987): 5
[414] Ibid.; Anne-Marie Schiro, "Artists Rally to Fight AIDS," *New York Times* (1987): A17.

Crimp's call for a "critical, theoretical, activist alternative to the personal, elegiac expressions that appeared to dominate[d] the art-world response to AIDS"[415] was echoed in more philosophical considerations of art during those decades. In an essay titled "Art in a Box" (1993), the American philosopher Richard Shusterman argued for a "pragmatist aesthetics" that, like Crimp's, would flout "the whole philosophical tradition of defining art as a separate domain sequestered from and opposed to reality and practical life."[416] But here, Shusterman had a different target in mind: Arthur Danto. "This tradition remains so strong in Danto that although he inveighs against philosophy's disenfranchising definitions, he ultimately encourages them by his presumption that art must have a distinct essence that demands and justifies essentialist definition, whether this be what he calls art's 'own historical essence,' or some still deeper metaphysical essence that he later suggests is 'extrahistorical.'"[417] By sequestering art from reality, Shusterman argued, Danto had made art both socially irrelevant and politically ineffective.

Philosophy, Aesthetics, and the End of Art

Shusterman's response to Danto was telling of a larger contradiction in both the latter's philosophy of art and its reception during the 1980s and 90s. In many ways, this contradiction centered on the primary implication of his "End of Art" thesis: namely, that it unwittingly disenfranchised art by declaring its philosophical and historical *impotence*. This first became

[415] Crimp, "Introduction," 15.
[416] Richard Shusterman, "Art in a Box" in idem., *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 183. See also, Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).
[417] Shusterman, "Art in a Box, 183.

apparent when Danto began to contemplate the broader cultural and political consequences of the moral evaluation of artistic content during the highly public controversies surrounding the National Endowment for the Arts in the 1980s.[418] Indeed, Danto's theory of the illegitimate autonomy of the aesthetic would soon be tested by some of the most strident claims to the nature and purpose of art in the wake of these public melees.

The first of these began with a traveling exhibition, partially funded by the NEA, titled AVA-7, which featured a photograph by the artist Andreas Serrano in which a blurred image of Jesus on the cross is depicted as though submerged in Urine, titled *Piss Christ* (1987). The image provoked immediate outrage. Only a year later, another NEA supported exhibition by the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, titled *The Perfect Moment*, fueled the flame of moral indignation even further. Many of Mapplethorpe's photographs were formally delicate, composed, largely black-and-white images of homosexual men engaged in graphic acts of sadomasochism. By the time the exhibition was scheduled to be shown at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., the museum had decided to cancel it for fear of political and cultural reproach, leading to a demonstration outside the museum in its support. [419]

Somewhat predictably, the reaction to artistic censorship by liberals and leftists centered on the issue of first amendment rights and the importance of art to a healthy democracy. As the National Association of Artists' Organizations argued, "the freedom to create art is a form of free speech protected by the First Amendment." Consequently, "those who receive public funds deserve the freedom to create…regardless of its possible interpretation by some as disagreeable

[418] On the NEA controversy and the "Culture Wars" on the 1980s more generally, see Andrew Hartman, *A War For the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
[419] Mark Bauerlein and Ellen Grantham eds., *National Endowment for the Arts: A History, 1965-2008* (Washington D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 2008), 89-110.

or offensive."[420] Likewise, for *Time* magazine critic Robert Hughes, censorship of the NEA would make it "hostage to every crank, ideologue and God botherer…[leading to] a loony parody of cultural democracy in which everyone becomes his or her own Cato the Censor."[421] Art, on this view, was a sanctuary of the same order as the rights enshrined in the constitution.

The reaction to these works from those on the political right, however, mainly conservative politicians and evangelical Christians, cloaked the language of fiscal responsibility in the garb of moral panic. As Robert Bolton puts the matter, many conservative politicians, concerned about taxpayer money being used to fund 'immoral' art "found in the artworks under question proof that artists were trying to introduce a progressive agenda into society, an agenda based upon multiculturalism, gay and lesbian rights, feminism, and sexual liberation."[422] Astonishingly, the figurehead of the movement to censor the NEA, Jesse Helms registered the more restrained response relative to some other members of congress and so-called religious authorities. "I do not propose that congress 'censor' artists. I do propose that congress put an end to the use of federal funds to support outrageous 'art' that is clearly designed to poison our culture," a stance which flatly contradicted the title of his article "It's the Job of Congress to Define What's Art."[423] Televangelist Patrick Buchannan, however, made Helms's remarks appear tame.

> Barbarism! The precise word, as we observe journalistic yahoos hailing poor, pathetic Robert Mapplethorpe for having photographed, for their amusement, the degraded acts by which he killed himself. What's to be done? We can defund the poisoners of culture, the polluters of art; we can sweep up the debris that passes for modern art outside so many public buildings; we can discredit self-anointed critics who have forfeited our trust."[424]

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[420] National Association of Artist' Organizations, "statement Regarding Censorship" August 3, 1991, quoted in Robert Bolton ed., *Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts* (New York: New Press, 1991), 3.
[421] Robert Hughes, "A Loony Parody of Cultural Democracy," *Time* 134 no. 7 (August 14, 1989):82.
[422] Bolton, *Culture Wars,* 5.
[423] Jesse Helms, "It's the Job of Congress to Define What's Art," *USA Today* 8 (September, 1989): 100.
[424] Patrick Buchanan, "Pursued by Baying Yahoos," *Washington Times* (August 3, 1989): 86.

Despite the vitriolic and hateful positions taken by critics like Buchannan and (to a lesser extent) Helms, however, they shared with liberal defenders of artistic freedom a belief in the autonomy of art based on a shared, if inverted vision of aesthetic sanctity. For liberals, art should be immune to moral or political evaluation on the grounds that it existed as a liberal freedom, inviolable through a kind-of aesthetic prophylaxis. For conservatives, the strictures of that prophylaxis were narrowly defined and reactionary; but they still defined the terms for a concept, *art*, whose boundaries it was deemed necessary to police in order to maintain a particular cultural order, thereby seeking to protect society from the political and cultural sedition latent in artistic potential. In other words, both sides to the debate maintained a view of art that sought to immunize it against political, cultural, or moral evaluation (or enervation) in the vestigial name of art-for-art's sake.

Danto's more "public-facing" position on the matter was unequivocal support of artistic freedom, especially when the arts were underwritten by taxpayer money. To this end, in a 1989 editorial for the *Nation*, he distinguished between "taxpayers and individuals who pay taxes…As individuals, we have divergent aesthetic preferences…But aesthetic preference does not enter into the concept of the taxpayer, which is a civic category."[425] What federal tax dollars represented, even beyond practical applications, was a symbolic support of individual freedom. "However divided individuals are on matters of taste, freedom is in the interest of every citizen…The taxpayer does not support one form of art and withhold support from another *as a taxpayer*…"[he or she] supports the freedom to make and show art, even when it is art of a kind

[425] Arthur C. Danto, "Art and Taxpayers," *The Nation* 249 no. 6 (August 21, 1989): 192.

this or that *individual* finds repugnant."[426] Here, his position was relatively unremarkable relative to other liberal champions of artistic freedom.

But as he was completing "The End of Art" Danto privately began to raise questions about the more philosophical impetus behind artistic censorship, and how, implicitly, both liberal and conservative positions on artistic censorship both redounded to the position of aesthetic autonomy. "Why is art considered dangerous enough to suppress? Consider how little it matters when it is not. Consider how the traditional aestheticians agree on some form of the division between the aesthetic and the purposive. Consider how even the artists incline to the view (Auden) that 'poetry makes nothing happen.' So why the fear? Of <u>what</u>? And is there an internal connection between its repression and its nature? What are the premises of this?"[427] Determining the premises of that potential connection, Danto believed, was a task suited for philosophy rather than artists. Moreover, it seemed increasingly incumbent on himself to delve deeper into such questions, in his role as a philosopher, in light of the fact that art's meaning and purpose had reached the level of political referendum.

Danto began that philosophical excavation in an essay delivered as the Lindley Lecture at the University of Kansas in 1987, titled "The Politics of Imagination." In that essay, he sought to understand how the modern conception of aesthetics laid down by Kant, which treated artworks as the site of 'disinterested' contemplation for its own sake, immunized art from the real-life consequences of practical, moral, or political evaluation. For Kant, aesthetic judgement engaged the concepts of the understanding without direction towards anything in the practical world--it occurred outside the "conflictive' realm of politics and formed the basis for the universal exercise of 'taste'. For Danto, moreover, it was no accident that this 'disinterested' faculty of

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[426] Ibid. First emphasis mine.
[427] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, June 28, 1983. (ACD Papers, Box 12, Folder 3, Series 2).

taste emerged during the eighteenth century alongside the principal declarations of liberal rights and freedoms. "When the new schedules of rights and freedoms emerged as politically urgent, forming the political foundation of the great enabling documents in the history of human rights, making persecution for beliefs and feelings a violation of human dignity, aesthetics was ready to hand to insure that what artists said would have no adverse political effect."[428] Conceived in terms of disinterest and immunization, the *content* of art, particularly as it was conveyed in literature, came to enjoy a particular protection that it would not otherwise have held outside of its precincts. From a political perspective, it seemed that such a protection had only been amplified by the recent controversies over art roiling the congress and the broader punditry.

To further illustrate his point, Danto used the example of Western artists' romanticized view of art under cultural dictatorships. In the days before *Glasnost*, for example, Danto noted that artists from the West who visited the Soviet Union as cultural emissaries relished a climate in which government censorship of art made its furtive production both dangerous and exciting. As *Glasnost* came to exercise its liberalizing influence, however, the political rebelliousness attached to art began to decline. Soviet rock bands like "Time Machine," for example, whose political danger was precisely in their circulation through black-market cassette tapes and illegal clubs, was diminished in proportion to their toleration by the state; now conceived of in terms of the autonomy of aesthetic distance, Rock music lost its edge. In this sense, Danto's essay suggested how *both* the reactionary impulse of censorship and the liberal defense of artistic freedom denied art of the connection to lived reality that many artists during the 1980s sought to achieve. "Those writers excited by the vision of art as dangerous when abroad have failed to recognize how dangerous art must be perceived at home if our way of dealing with it is to insure,

[428] Arthur C. Danto, "The Politics of Imagination (Draft)" (ACD Papers, Box 7, Folder 20, Series 1, 1987), 15.

by conceptual repression, that it cannot but be innocuous if art."[429] In other words, the sequestration of art to an autonomous or transcendent realm of 'aesthetics' was an implicit admission of its potential danger.

For Danto, the recent "conceptual repression" of the artist Hans Haacke seemed to further validate this point. In 1971, Haacke and curator Edward Fry organized an exhibition at the Guggenheim that featured photographs of documents related to Shaplosky et al., a Manhattan real estate group whose holdings included numerous slum properties throughout the city of New York. In response, the Guggenheim's director, Thomas Messer, cancelled the show on the grounds that the museum's trustees "have established policies that exclude active engagement toward social and political ends."[430] Like those who rallied around the proposed censorship of the NEA the following decade, the artworld fully supported Haacke on the grounds that art should not be repressed due to content. For Danto, however, both the decision to cancel the show and the resistance to the cancellation were two sides of the same coin. "The art world rallied around Haacke, insisting that art should never be censored, the position being the mirror image of Messer's. My sense is that Haacke's work was dangerous only because it was art, and that it was intentionally aggressive, using the sanctity of art as a moral shield to infiltrate a politically important space."[431] Danto equated the reaction to Shaplosky to that of the reactions of both liberals and conservatives to the uproar surrounding Serrano and Mapplethorpe—both sides had failed to appreciate that their reactions had missed the more *philosophical* stakes of the controversy. Haacke had exploited the extant power of aesthetic autonomy in the attempt to mount a potent political critique. But repression, and the support thrown behind him in response,

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[429] Arthur C. Danto, "The Politics of Imagination," (Kansas: The University of Kansas Department of Philosophy, 1988), 5.
[430] Grace Glueck, "The Guggenheim Cancels Haacke's Show," *New York Times* (April 7, 1971): 52.
[431] Arthur C. Danto, "The Politics of Imagination (Draft)" (ACD Papers, Box 7, Folder 20, Series 1, 1987), 26.

broached a paradox. Had Haacke been allowed to show his art, then it likely would have not had the impact *as* art that he had intended. But in being repressed, its message took a back seat to the injunctions of art-for-art's sake marshalled in its defense, thereby blunting his message in a different register.

Danto's attempt to bring a philosophical perspective to bear on what was otherwise a problem of civic import reflected the contradictions in his position as a philosopher in the guise of public art-intellectual by the late 1980s. He had disproportionately attributed the decline in the centrality of aesthetics to contemporary art to his own intellectual pronouncements as a philosopher, rather than treating it as a descriptive fact. But Danto struggled to offer a compelling defense for why philosophy should take the place of aesthetics as the central axis on which the analysis of art should rotate. In his attempts to explain why art had been treated with a prophylactic shielding the content of art, moreover, he unwittingly denigrated art itself as a meaningful human practice. This was particularly apparent in his reasoning around the case of Haacke and Messer.

For Danto, Messer had erred in censoring artwork on the grounds of political content. But, he reasoned, this was an inevitable consequence of a view of art that refused it immunity from moral or political evaluation in the name of aesthetic autonomy. "Once the power [of art] is understood, the next task is a moral one, to remove the merely formal freedom the concept of art has acquired, through which artworks can represent anything in any way without effect 'because it is art.' This is an empty freedom."[432] Once he relinquishes this 'empty freedom', "the artist gains the possibility of direct political action, *but has to recognize that this makes counter-action possible and acceptable*," as was the case in Messer's decision to cancel Haacke's exhibition.

[432] Arthur C. Danto, "The Politics of Imagination" (Kansas: The University of Kansas Department of Philosophy, 1988), 15.

Such counter-action, by this logic, also made the reactions of critics like Helms and Buchannan equally inevitable. "The rest of society loses what is perhaps the best weapon it has for dealing with dangerous art, namely the theory that art is in its very nature innocuous. That theory is our acknowledgement that art in its very nature is dangerous."[433]

But here Danto had worked himself into a contradiction. On the one hand, he argued, to censor art would be to censor the deep divisions and differences that are concomitant with freedom in a liberal democracy. "To censor art on the grounds of its content would be to censor not simply Freedom, but the meanings that individual artists make paramount to life."[434] On the other, he had conceded that "counter-actions," of which censorship was but the most exigent, were both "possible and acceptable" once the prophylactic of autonomy was removed from art. This offered no protection, in theory, to the "meanings" that such artists made paramount, or to the importance of art itself in the cultural hierarchy of Western values. If traditional aesthetics gave art a fulsome exaltation, philosophy, by this reasoning, seemed to consign it someplace much lower on the hierarchy of human goods and needs once it had vanquished its aesthetic other. Rather than an implicit consequence of Danto's philosophy, this unwitting disenfranchisement of art by philosophy was, rather, a deliberately cultivated outgrowth of his own self-exaltation as a philosopher.

[433] Arthur C. Danto, "The Politics of Imagination (Draft)" (ACD Papers, Box 7, Folder 20, Series 1, 1987), 27.

[434] Ibid.

Aesthetic Denigration and the Persona of the Philosopher

On Danto's narrative of recent art history, when traditional aesthetics became irrelevant to defining art, philosophy became the only appropriate medium in which such a definition could emerge. Liberal and acute philosopher that he was, his own definition, essayed in *The Transfiguration,* was meant to be indemnified against any counter-instances in the future of art, ostensibly assuring both himself and the artworld that nothing but an endless state of pluralism in the arts would continue as a matter of course. Both philosophically and culturally, he felt assured that he had secured not only a rigorous definition of art and a sound philosophy of art history, but that both accommodated a liberal, pluralistic, and open field for artists. In the wake of these achievements, Danto believed, art was left not with problems of its own nature or essence but, rather, with individual artists' confrontation with the world.

By this same reasoning, however, he also consigned the *analysis* of art to the exclusive purview of the exalted philosophical mind. "Most of what I critically admire I am numb to in my heart. What I most like, what I most respond to, is the way of the brush, in Boucher, for example, or in Morandi. Or in Guston. But I cannot make a canon out of that: my mind alone tells me of excellences to which my spirit is unresponsive," Danto wrote to David Carrier in 1994.[435] Danto's isolation of his philosophical "mind" as the sole arbiter of artistic excellence, removed from the "spiritual" (read aesthetic) attraction to art he otherwise personally preferred, reflected the sense in which he viewed artistic evaluation as the domain of philosophical acumen alone.

Since the early 1980s, Danto had become a prominent public intellectual through his reviews in the Nation. Those reviews allowed him to engage with the world of contemporary art

[435] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, August 24, 1994. (ACD Papers, Box 12 Folder 9. Series 2).

without having a stake in the fate of any particular artist or movement. In his role as a philosopher, however, he attempted to impose a theoretical order over the otherwise chaotic and contingent world of contemporary art. As a self-professed authority on the nature and essence of art, moreover, his irreverence towards aesthetics often manifested itself in a projection of intellectual authority and outright hostility towards art itself. Ironically, this position placed him at odds with the decentralized nature of contemporary art, which by its very nature, made his authority as a public art-intellectual ambiguous at best.

Danto's spiritual response to "the way of the brush," held in abeyance to his philosophical mind, manifested in multiple ways. Though it was particularly apparent in his relationship with the abstract expressionist painter Robert Motherwell. Motherwell was part of the second generation of the "New York School" of painters that Danto so admired in his youth, which also included Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko, for many the high watermark of artistic modernism. But in 1985, when Danto received a rather fawning letter from Motherwell, the latter was no longer at the height of a vanguard; rather, he was a towering figure of the recent art-historical past whose abstractions were simply one among many options available for artists, albeit one to which Danto felt especially drawn. Upon reading Danto's review of his recent show at the Guggenheim, Motherwell wrote to Danto "haunted" by his words. "After 40 years of publicly exhibiting, someone finally grasped what I am about…You have also illuminated aspects of myself to myself in a way that I could not, being unable to get out of my own mind."[436] Aside from being an appreciative admirer of Danto's criticism,

[436] Robert Motherwell to Arthur C. Danto, February 20, 1985. (Robert Motherwell Papers, Daedalus Foundation. V1.038) Hereafter cited as RM papers.

Motherwell was also a former philosopher, having earned a graduate degree from Harvard. It was no surprise then that his letter quickly turned to philosophy.

In his otherwise glowing review of the exhibition, Danto had included an aside regarding Motherwell's painting "In Plato's Cave no. 1" (1972). Referring to the demure, grey and black brush-stroked canvas, Danto suggested that Motherwell had reversed Plato's famous, philosophical metaphor of the Cave. "Just because Motherwell thinks philosophically, he should know better than to show the wall of Plato's cave in this way. Plato's cave is our world, full of the colors and shapes whose absence makes the world of the Spanish elegies-so wasted. To see that this very world, noisy and bright and warm, is also as insubstantial as a show of shadows is to grasp the great dislocating force of Plato's stunning image."[437] Though Motherwell had drawn inspiration from the painting from the poet Delmore Schwartz more than Plato, he was only too happy to receive Danto's edification, which the latter had continued in his response.[438] "What an ideal teacher you must be, and it makes me blush that I so misunderstood the Plato's Cave image. But that misapprehension is worth it to have your eloquent exegesis."[439]

What Danto likely found more striking, however, was Motherwell's strategy for teaching painting while an instructor at Hunter College during the 1950s. "In the graduate painting class, I used to insist, to their astonishment, that there is no such thing as art in general with rules, but only specific works, by specific men, in specific times and places."[440] Even more striking was the way that Motherwell described his strategy of analyzing images in language more typically used to describe the attributes of people. This was the same strategy Danto had used in his

[437] Arthur C. Danto, "Robert Motherwell (at the Guggenheim)," *The Nation* 240 no. 2 (January 19, 1985): 60.
[438] Arthur C. Danto to Robert Motherwell, March 10, 1985. (RM Papers, Daedalus Foundation. V1.038)

[439] Robert Motherwell to Arthur C. Danto, March 26, 1985. (RM Papers, Daedalus Foundation. V1.038)
[440] Robert Motherwell to Arthur C. Danto, February 20, 1985. (RM Papers, Daedalus Foundation. V1.038)

undergraduate lectures on aesthetics, drawing on the resources of OLP to broaden the terms of artistic analysis beyond the aesthetic categories associated with beauty. "I would talk about their pictures (and any other pictures) in exactly the vocabulary one would use to describe people—gross, heavy, light, airy, grave, exuberant, sensual, dry, timid, aggressive, moral, immoral, witty, literal, poetic, prosaic, agile, clumsy, male, female, and so on. By the end of the year they were all using such vocabulary as naturally as they always had about people, and it made our discussions not only lively, but crystal clear…They saw the ethos *behind the aesthetic,* the character of a man, not the mind of a designer…"[441] In this sense, Motherwell was Danto's ideal interlocutor; he disavowed the traditional language of aesthetics in favor of the personal idiosyncrasies of the artist, unmoored from the strictures of an "art-historical" movement. He offered a vindication of Danto's philosophy embodied in painting.

Danto and Motherwell became fast friends during the following year. Over the course of 1986, he and his second wife Barbara Westman often travelled to Greenwich Connecticut to visit Motherwell's studio, frequently dining together at a local French bistro while discussing art and philosophy. On January 30th of that year, Danto wrote to Motherwell exclaiming that "Barbara and I returned from our afternoon with you and Renata feeling as though we had been through something wonderful and golden (not simply to be ascribed to infusions of champagne), and talk about it as a great experience for us both. In my own case, it was the creative energy in the studio, and the great mystery of touch."[442] Danto's friendship with Motherwell, moreover, reinforced his sense that art (more specifically, painting) and philosophy were of a piece. "There is, on my view, not as vast a distance between painting and philosophy as painters and philosophers at times have insisted upon—our histories as disciplines are too mysteriously

[441] Ibid. Emphasis mine.
[442] Arthur C. Danto to Robert Motherwell, January 30, 1986. (RM Papers, Daedalus Foundation. V1.038)

symbiotic for that."[443] But what sort of symbiosis did Danto have in mind? And why make the connection between philosophy and *painting* specifically?

Danto failed to elaborate more on this speculation in the remainder of his letter. But it presents an interesting problem given that painting, on his view, had so little to do with art's definition, as the conceptual revolutions of Warhol and Duchamp has ostensibly shown. Arguably, what the disciplinary histories of painting and philosophy shared most closely however, and especially in the case of Motherwell's generation, was the predominantly male belief that painters and philosophers had a special penchant for representing reality. In the case of the former, those representations were idiosyncratic and individualistic, while the latter were, purportedly, universal. But both converged in the belief that the structures of thought could only be represented by an elect type of person—namely, a certain sort of man. For many of the abstract expressionist generation, those structures of thought were typically diffused via quasi-philosophical frames purporting to connect the artists' libidinal self to a cathected object or representation, a view derived from the theories of the American psychologist Wilhelm Reich.[444]

The philosophy to which Motherwell subscribed most closely in his art was that of "psychic automatism," which shared in this basic orientation. Psychic automatism was a term coined by the surrealist poet Andre Breton, in his 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism*, and referred to the translation of 'pure', or unconscious thought into art, divorced from moral or aesthetic concerns.[445] During his youth, Motherwell acted as something of an American liaison to the European surrealists who had immigrated to the U.S. during the interwar years.[446] And though he

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[443] Robert Motherwell to Arthur C. Danto, October 31, 1985. (RM Papers, Daedalus Foundation. V1.038)
[444] Caroline A. Jones, "Finishing School: John Cage and the Abstract Expressionist Ego," *Critical Inquiry* 19 no. 4 (1993): 628-665.
[445] Andre Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* trans. Helen R. Lane & Richard Seaver (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan press, 1972)
[446] On Motherwell, see the essays collected in Jack Flam, Katy Rogers, and Tim Clifford eds., *Motherwell: 100 Years* (New York: Skira, 2015).

never identified as a surrealist as such, psychic automatism informed much of the spontaneity and 'free association' that Motherwell incorporated into his painting, a principle that found expression in much of the masculine connection that many abstract expressionist painters made between the spontaneous act of the brush and the expression of libidinal male sexuality during the late 1950s.[447] In many ways, Danto exemplified this persona of the cathecting male genuius in his conception of philosophy; "the way of the brush" found expression in the will to philosophy as a ponderously male intellectual vocation.

An unpublished short story titled "Once in July", likely written sometime between the late 1960s and late 1970s, gives a remarkable sense of this view of himself as philosopher qua foreboding male intellectual. In the story, the unnamed narrator, a professor of mathematics, finds himself sitting in a local cafeteria when he overhears three men plotting what seems to be a crime, the digging of a tunnel somehow in the service of a robbery. At first hesitant about their motives, given that the men look "more like painters I know than like criminals,"[448] he continues to eavesdrop. Upon further inspection, he learns that the "crime" to be committed will take place at the backstage of a play "given by a group of young people dedicated to some political and aesthetic ideals."[449] As the men continue to discuss whether a certain "Page" was to be trusted to supervise this crime, he also learns that the play is to take place a few blocks from where he grew up. Further, he speculates that "Page" might in fact be an old college friend, a sculptor who may or may not know these artist-criminals.

Taking it upon himself as his "civic duty" to investigate the crime, he returns to his old neighborhood and stumbles upon a small, bucolic courtyard with once-used stables and ample

[447] Genter, *Late Modernism*, 197-235;
[448] Arthur C. Danto, "Once in July," (ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 30, Series 1), 1.
[449] Ibid.

greenery. Through the window of a corner building in the courtyard, he hears two young women "intoning lines at one another, as though rehearsing a play"; miraculously, he had found what he was looking for. As he questions the young women about Page, they summarily rebuke him and treat him with the suspicion reserved for a narc or a spook. As he turns around to leave, one of the young women asks, "Did someone send you?", to which he replies yes. Reassured that the man is now "in the know" the young woman admits to knowing Page and agrees to give him directions to his studio. As she recites them, however, the professor notices a sign that hangs above the gate to one of the stables: "LEVENSTALL REPERTORY GROUP…YOUTH* BEAUTY* ART*" "'Do you belong to that?' I asked. 'Or rather, do they belong to you? The principles I mean. Youth, beauty, art. They are my principles as well." The narrator admits to lying, but also that "it seems to have been just the right thing to say. The girl was amazed." [450]

As the professor insists that he was himself once a member of her group, and that many outside of the group shared those ideals, save for the "many disbelievers, many—enemies", he finds himself "rather pleased" in his conceit to "speak the language of one so young and dedicated." So pleased, in fact, that he felt to himself, "I must have seemed brilliant to her and by the end of it I saw that she was in love with me."[451] As the man realizes that the girl must have been coveted among other male members of the group, he "felt it a triumph that I had made this *conquest* with so little effort...everyone here must be astounded that she had so quickly succumbed to me, a man older and of the 'outside world.' Of these thoughts the girl could know nothing. She was in a daze of love, *pliant, quiet, utterly without will*."[452] As other members of the group now descended upon the man and the young woman, he begins to realize that he is viewed

[450] Ibid., 5.
[451] Ibid., 6.
[452] Ibid., 7.

again with suspicion, and that his presence is resented. And as he goes to leave, the young woman cries, apparently conveying to him that "it was now physically impossible for her to leave me…for the first time an awesome sense of responsibility had filled my heart. But I did not know what to do. I had intended nothing of the sort." The story ends.[453]

It does not take a large stretch of the imagination to infer from "Once in July" that the mathematics professor was Danto. Aside from the inherent clumsiness of the story's structure, moreover, it clearly betrays the extent to which he equated his intellectual, professorial authority with a sense of masculine chauvinism tied to the "heroism" of intellectual vision. Indeed, this is often how Danto privately referred to himself in relation to his perceived philosophical acumen during the 1980s and 90s. Preparing his address to the American Philosophical Association in 1983, for example, he wrote to Carrier expressing his sense of male "security" in being able to write something on art rather than a more traditional philosophical subject. "I think I want it to be on art if only for political reasons: it is not the sort of thing APA presidents typically talk about, but I have decided I am secure enough in my manhood to take it on, and forego the temptation to write something muscular and acceptable."[454] The sense that philosophy was "muscular," and that it required security in one's "manhood" to depart from its institutional strictures reflected not only Danto's equation of philosophy and masculinity, but his deep sense that art was intellectually marginal relative to philosophy. "Like Hegel, I really do think philosophy greater than art…because of truth."[455]

Truth, however, became more of a proxy for the vaunted intellectual esteem Danto accorded to philosophy relative to disciplines like art history and literary theory. After having

[453] Ibid., 8. Emphases mine.
[454] Arthur Danto to David Carrier, June (again, check CMS), 1983. (ACD Papers, Box 12, Folder 3, Series 2).
[455] Arthur Danto to David Carrier, December 24, 1983. (Box 12, Folder 8, Series 2).

returned in early 1986 from the annual APA meeting and the convention of PEN America, an organization promoting the intersection of literature and human rights, Danto felt assured of the virtues of philosophy against art. "I was pretty fed up with the philosophers, as the program seemed rather bland and the level of inspiration dispiriting, but after a few days with the great writers of the world, philosophers have come to look like titans—masters of thought, deep probers all. The writers are, mainly, windbags, clowns throwing firecrackers into crowds of clowns. Once my own session was over, I retired to Riverside Drive resolved to think better of my profession and those who practice it."[456]

The "deep probers" of philosophical analysis likewise stood apart from the increasingly politicized world of art history. Female art historians in particular were, to Danto, simply "fierce", irrational creatures. The art-historian Svetlana Alpers was a "fierce sort of woman, as it seems to me all female art historians appear to be (Nochlin, Krauss)."[457] Indeed, Danto's friend, the male art-historian Leo Steinberg had confessed to not looking forward to a residency at the Getty museum in 1987 "as there will be three of these fierce women in attendance there, including two who have criticized him [Steinberg] with great severity."[458] Four years later Steinberg's "plight" in the face of the art-historians seemed only to continue, impinging on the equanimity of reasonable, intelligent men like himself and his colleagues in philosophy.

This was particularly apparent in his confrontation with the "New Art History." During the 1980s and 90s, proponents of what emerged as the "New Art History" began to question the terms of traditional art historical practice on the grounds that it had historically excluded

[456] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, January 16, 1986. (Box 12, Folder 2, Series 2).
[457] Danto was referring to the art historians Linda Nochlin and Rossiland Krauss.
[458] Arthur Danto to David Carrier. August 19, 1987. (ACD Papers, Box 12, Folder 4, Series 2).

questions of race, gender, and class.[459] Steinberg, a more "traditional" art historian, had been the subject of recent feminist attack from "New" art historians like Carol Duncan, by whom Danto as philosopher-king was less than inspired.[460] "I felt rather sorry for Leo…that he has to deal with all that feminist baying and nipping: as you say, the quality of intelligence in philosophy is of a kind people in art just cannot imagine. Leo is too intelligent, one wants to say, to be an art historian. And when I read about critics like Carol Duncan I sometimes think feminist response has not greatly advanced beyond the 'What are little boys made of? Snips and snails and puppy dog tails' that girls used to chant in schoolyards as a kid and we were all the targets of girlish condescension and scorn, sullied o'er with the Nya Nya s of those convinced they were made of sugar and spice and everything nice."[461] "Intelligence" in philosophy had no use for the juvenilia of feminist art history.

The "New Art History" was deeply influenced by the post-structuralist writings of French philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Michelle Foucault, and Jacques Lacan. And as the language of post-structuralism merged with the concerns of feminist and so-called "multiculturalist" academics during the late 1980s and early 1990s, this only reinforced Danto's sense that philosophy remained the singular, albeit embattled site of true intelligence left within the academy. In early February of 1991, for example, he was invited by five female art advisors to discuss "the question of whether there is a crisis in American art." For Danto, these art advisers "were really nice women, well meaning." They had internalized "a fair amount of what passes for theory, which enables them to function at a very high level in the world of exhibitions

[459] On the "New Art History" see Jonathan Harris, *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2001).
[460] See, for example, Carol Duncan, *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
[461] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, November 27, 1992. (ACD Papers, Box 12, Folder 7, Series 2).

and even of catalog essays." Indeed, they were "smart, modern women filled with feminist thought…so fiercely feminine that I felt like hugging them." They were, however, no match, on Danto's account, for his own philosophical intellect. "I was grateful not to have to struggle for a foothold where they have to, thinking themselves high on slopes they have scarcely broached."[462]

As the underlying through-line in his theoretical corpus, the decline in the centrality of aesthetics was only revealed when art manifested in the form of a philosophical problem, giving philosophy pride of place in defining art. In practice, however, Danto viewed philosophy as superior to other intellectual and cultural pursuits, including art itself. The sense in which Danto equated philosophy with a certain male bravado and preponderance, moreover, was directly bound up in his feelings about art and its subordination to philosophy as the ur-discipline of the humanities. As Danto recalled of his early career in 1995, it was "not that we did not know marvelous female philosophers, like Elizabeth Anscombe or Phillipa Foot—or Judy [Jarvis] Thompson. But one never thought of pretty girls as getting to be like them, but, just like the polemics say, as sex objects."[463] This was the corollary undercurrent to the flagrant misogyny in "Once in July." It was not only that Danto imagined young women as naïve and vapid, susceptible to the power of his intellect. That assumption was also rooted, in the context of the story, in his abiding feeling that art was a frivolous, "sensuous" thing associated with the naivete of both young people and women. Ultimately, he believed philosophy to be the antidote to such sensuous concerns; it was the only mode of knowledge sufficient to deal with both art's definition and its evaluation. Philosophers stood at a remove from the immanent world to

[462] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, February 6, 1991. (ACD Papers, Box 12, Folder 6, Series 2).
[463] Arthur Danto to David Carrier. January 26, 1995. (ACD Papers, Box 12, Folder 10. Series 2).

"plumb" its depths through the power of mind, breaking through the mere surface matter of the senses.

In this regard, Danto was an example of what the historian Ian Hunter has termed the "persona of the philosopher." For Hunter, the characterization of this "persona" functions as a means of viewing past philosophies as empirical entities--rather than stories in the history of "reason"--cultivated in distinctive institutional and pedagogical settings by a particular type of self.[464] Studying the history of philosophy as a branch of intellectual history, rather than philosophy, Hunter argues, reveals that the history of early modern and modern philosophy emerged through the cultivation of this particular type of self from which the desire to practice philosophy becomes a means to attaining a higher order of being removed from the distractions of the empirical world. The moral anthropology taught in early modern Aristotelian metaphysics, for example, presented man's image as a composite being in which the spiritual substance of God was joined to the corporeal being that men shared with animals. On this basis, the exhortation to philosophy by Jesuit professors such as the seventeenth-century Thomist-Aristotelian professor Clemens Scotti was predicated on the transcendence of the "obstacles" of the "perverse passions" inherent to man's susceptibility to his senses and material perceptions. For Hunter, this was an important precursor to the image of philosophy put forth by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he presented "philosophizing" as something that cannot be learned, the obstacles to which being the merely "sensuous" or "external" forms of learning that distracted from the "inner derivation of 'rational cognitions' from the 'universal sources of

[464] Ian Hunter, "The History of Philosophy and the Persona of the Philosopher," *Modern Intellectual History* 4 no. 3 (2007): 571-600.

reasons—that is, from principles' constitutive of philosophizing."[465] In both instances, the cultivation of reason became a means to the spiritual cultivation of a higher order self.

On Hunter's account, the desire to philosophize comes not from reason reflecting on its own nature and limitations. Rather, it is generated, historically, from the mode of "self-problematization" that emerges when a "higher" self is sought via the strictures that particular philosophical doctrines attach to self-transcendence. For Danto, those strictures came in the form of the merely aesthetic attachment to, and analysis of art. His insistence that only philosophy was sufficient to determine the nature of art after the decline in the relevance of aesthetics, and in particular the philosophical problem of indiscernibles, reflected the importance he attached to philosophy as a spiritual vocation through the cultivation of a particular kind of higher-order (or superior) self. Practically speaking, however, Danto's philosophical persona butted up against his role as an art critic and public facing art intellectual. Moreover, it revealed a deep sense of ambiguity in the authority of such intellectuals more broadly at the end of the twentieth century.

In a review of work by the minimalist-conceptual artists Eva Hesse and Robert Mangold, for example, Danto criticized the art historian Rosalind Krauss and art critics Hilton Kramer and Joseph Masheck on the grounds that their interpretation of these artists rested too heavily on methods of *perceptual* affinity to previous artists in both renaissance, modern, and recent art history. In other words, their reviews hewed to closely to the imperatives of traditional aesthetics, rooted in perception alone. Kramer, Danto argued, had dismissed Hesse as "second

[465] Ibid., 584. Interestingly, Hunter sees this same mode of self-cultivation in the persona of the philosopher at work in the rise of "theory" during the 1960s in the U.S. and Britain. As a response to the inadequacies of empiricism in the various disciplines of the human sciences, "theory" emerged, on this reading, as a mode of presenting various transcendental devices (disguised as referenda on the anti-metaphysical nature of reality revealed through the instability of representational meanings) that very closely resembles German university metaphysics. Hunter, "The History of Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 1 no. 33 (Autumn, 2006): 78-112.

rate" on the grounds that her sculpture "Metronymic Irregularity" (1966) was simply a rehashing of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings because the two bore a perceptual resemblance. Similarly, Mangold's paintings had "recalled" to Krauss a fifteenth century painting by the Italian painter Andrea del Castagno, while Masheck compared his work to paintings by Charles Sheeler and Pierro della Francesca.[466] While insisting in his published review that he meant not to be critical or condescending, in private Danto described Masheck's own review as "awful." The senses precluded the higher-order of philosophy. [467]

For Danto, both art critics and historians were ill-equipped to deal with the art that had emerged during the 1960s and 70s; that art, having seemingly made aesthetic considerations irrelevant, redounded to the method of indiscernibles for proper interpretation. "My own method of indiscernibles yields a critical agenda, namely, look for the underlying differences. On the other hand, if one drops the method of affinitation, most of [the] critical literature dissolves. I mean: it vaporizes. Thesis: affinity is the consolation prize when ascriptions of influence fail."[468] If one could not find a proper source of "influence," already an insufficient method based on the senses alone, one turned to mere perceptual affinities as consolation. Such a consolation led art historians and critics in the wrong direction: the method of indiscernibles led one to ask not about questions of influence or affinity but, rather, what made the difference between artworks non-artworks. Whether or not Danto was correct about the fitness of his own critical agenda is irrelevant, if not obviously, and grossly, exaggerated. What is more striking, however, is the teleological sense in which philosophy had emerged, in his mind, as the method supremely apposite to understanding the contemporary art world by the 1980s. "I have come to the view

[466] Arthur C. Danto, "Institutionalism and Interpretation," *Kunst & Museumjournaal* 1 no. 4 (1990): 18-30.
[467] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, October 10, 1989. (ACD Papers, Box 12, Folder 5, Series 2)
[468] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, November 17, 1989. (ACD Papers, Box 12, Folder 5, Series 2).

that a history of criticism should go: in the fifties, it was written by poets, in the sixties and seventies by art historians, in the eighties by philosophers…I have decided the worst are the art historians. They are always the victims of resemblance."[469]

Danto's disavowal of methods of art analysis still rooted in aesthetics, however, was curious relative to his own views about the writing of philosophy itself. In his 1983 address to the APA, he had broached the then-common assertion by post-structuralist philosophers like Derrida that philosophy was simply another form of writing on the same plane as literature. On that view, philosophy papers, like every other form of writing, suffered from the "Referential Fallacy''—they referred only to other texts and references in an endless web of signification unmoored from reality. While strongly disagreeing with Derrida's premise, Danto argued that philosophy and literature, however, held in common a certain indexicality in their both being read by individuals whom they are *about*, and whose meaning the individual reader and her act of reading is necessary to complete. Philosophy functions as literature does "not in the sense of extravagant verbal artifacts, but as engaging with readers in search of that sort of universality I have supposed to characterize literary reference: as being about the reader at the moment of reading through the process of reading."[470] On this account, Danto criticized the standard mode of contemporary philosophical writing—the philosophical paper modeled on the scientific report—on the grounds that its lack of "literary" panache precluded this sort of indexicality inherent to the "universality" of philosophy. "Science…can get away with this, largely because, even when about its readers, it is not about them as readers, and so lacks the internal connection philosophical texts demand, being about their readers *as* readers.[471]

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[469] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, October 10, 1989. (ACD Papers, Box 12, Folder 5, Series 2)
[470] Arthur C. Danto, "Philosophy and/as/of Literature," in idem., *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 159.
[471] Ibid., 161.

By this logic, the *aesthetic* dimension of philosophy (its mode of presentation) was necessary to its purported universality. If the nature of art, however, was exclusively a philosophical question, and if the aesthetic dimension was necessary to philosophy's universality, then it remained an open question why aesthetics was necessarily irrelevant to art's definition if it was necessary to philosophy's identity. Such was the contradiction in the purported "disinterest" with which Danto approached art in his capacity as a philosopher. Art's sensuous or material dimensions became the mode of "self-problematization" by which his philosophy of art was generated, while becoming a necessary "truth-condition" for the universality of philosophy or, more accurately, his persona as philosopher. In this way, Danto had unwittingly disenfranchised the art that he believed his philosophy of pluralism had liberated.

In many ways, this line of analysis was consistent with some of Danto's more strident critics during the 1980s who felt that his role as philosopher-critic was disingenuous in an era where art was so decentralized. For the art critic and literary theorist Elizabeth Frank, Danto was "so unable to desist even momentarily from his habitual privileging of philosophy, that no sooner does he attempt to separate art from philosophy than he finds the question of whether art 'makes anything happen' no longer philosophically interesting!"[472] To be sure, Danto's position did not entail the inertia of art; as the controversies surrounding artists like Mapplethorpe, Serrano, and Haacke made clear, he had made just the opposite case as a consequence of the decline in aesthetic autonomy after the 1960s. But it was his stance as a *philosopher*, an outsider academic, that irked more than a few artists and critics. At a party in May of 1993 hosted by the artist Sean Scully, for example, Danto was "really scared about [Richard] Serra, since he has made so many

[472] Elizabeth Frank, "The End of Art According to Arthur Danto," *Salmagundi* no. 76/77 (Fall, 1987-Winter, 1988): 270.

menacing noises about my position on the arc."[473] Because Danto had dissented from many of the artworld cognoscenti on the issue of *Titled Arc,* Serra even refused him permission to use an image of the piece for a forthcoming essay on the public artist Robert Irwin. "So much, by the way, for one's First Amendment rights according to him!"[474]

Serra was not alone in viewing Danto's position as hostile to contemporary art. For the critic Elizabeth Frank, Danto's denigration of aesthetic response in the name of philosophy was not only contradictory, but also condescending. A 1988 appraisal of Danto's "End of Art" thesis in *Salmagundi* magazine is worth quoting at length for the invective such condescension inspired.

> What bothers me the most is not that Danto's analysis and accompanying prophecies may turn out to be true, but his tone of detachment, as if he were describing a natural catastrophe like a flood or an earthquake, in which human accountability plays little or no role. This tone is all the more irritating because it comes clothed in his stylistic *niceness*, his extreme amiability. There he is, critic and philosopher, softly deploying his wonderfully trained intelligence with unoffending cordiality, a mere bystander to an era not just ordinarily bad but terminally so, as it were, and purveyor of philosophy's Hellenic sweetness and light, simply soaking up things as they are, as opposed, it may be inferred, to the gloomy Hebraic fulminations of those pitiful souls (wherever and whoever they are) who care desperately about the future of art and have only their irrelevant and contingent aesthetic convictions to live and die by.[475]

Even friends were suspicious of Danto's sense of aesthetic detachment. In 1991, the American sculptor Harold Tovish wrote to Danto warning him that "Some will take your philosophical approach as placing yourself above the fray ("Who the hell does he think he is?!')"[476] Likewise, for the critic Hilton Kramer, Danto wrote as though what mattered more to him was the philosophical concepts to which certain works gave rise, rather than the experience or critical

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[473] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, May 11, 1993. (ACD Papers, Box 12, Folder 8, Series 2).
[474] Ibid.
[475] Frank, "The End of Art According to Arthur Danto," 273-74..
[476] Harold Tovish to Arthur C. Danto, June 27, 1991. (Arthur Coleman Danto papers, 1979-1988, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Correspondence).

judgment of the art itself. "One has the impression, in fact, that in isolation from these theoretical interests, the experience of art—perhaps even the work of art itself—is somehow deemed to lack sufficient ontology to merit a central role in shaping his critical thought."[477]

While both Frank's and Kramer's fulminations were harsh, however, neither were they entirely unfair. For as much as he genuinely loved and appreciated art and individual artists, he was often given to disparaging their universe. "The artworld is just vaudeville," he wrote in a letter to Carrier in March of 1990.[478] Neither were they entirely off the mark in their sense of Danto's exaggerated feelings of self-importance to the recent history of art. Shortly after he published *The Transfiguration*, Danto wrote to carrier expressing his sense of its historical import. "I really do think the book will survive and prosper—I feel disgustingly confident of its stature, and that it must change everything, and will, sooner or later. Philosophers of course will have to deal with it, but people in the artworld need it more urgently, just now, as minds and money are at stake. I mean the book is a kind of medicine for the mind of the times: I probably will never write anything as useful. So I feel the frustration one must feel when no one knows the cure is within reach, at a mere seventeen bucks."[479] That Danto portrayed his philosophy as "medicine" for the entirety of the art world conveys the deep sense in which his philosophical persona was predicated on its superiority to, and remove from, art itself.

It is not altogether unsurprising, then, that Kramer could claim of Danto that he had implicitly deigned himself a sort-of high priest of art writing. "Professor Danto also writes…that 'criticism', in its highest vocation, identifies the thoughts that give life to a work or set of works. In this view, clearly, the art criticism written by non-philosophers is

[477] Hilton Kramer, "The Happy Critic: Arthur Danto in 'The Nation'," *The New Criterion* 6 no. 1 (September, 1987): 25.
[478] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, March 18, 1990. (ACD Papers, Box 12, Folder 6, Series 2).
[479] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, Undated. (ACD Papers, Box 12, Folder 2, Series 2).

automatically debarred from the "highest vocation" that such criticism can hope to attain."[480] Privately, Danto could not "fathom…[Kramer's] motivation" or, rather, why someone could launch an attack filled with such "bluster and hatred—and so personal."[481] But his confusion reflected the often-sheltered ethos of academia, finding it baffling why anyone could have such real, affective, or *aesthetic* attachments both to art and its analysis, rather than approaching it with the so-called dispassionate temper of the philosopher. Yet neither was it lost on him that his status as a philosopher left an unsavory taste in the mouths of certain artists and critics. "Whatever she may have gotten wrong, Elizabeth Frank got right my status as interloper and outsider."[482] Danto stood at a remove.

Ultimately, that sense of removal revealed how the connection between art and philosophy made little sense in the context of Danto's role as a public intellectual. As discussed in the last chapter, Danto argued that the philosophical sequestration of art by philosophers--beginning with Plato, continuing through to Kant and culminating in the logical empiricists—had the adverse effect of "emasculating" art by relegating it to the realm of the ineffectual (i.e., the aesthetic). Danto's stated goal in essays like "The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art" was thus to show that art was necessary to philosophy's identity in that the latter's self-definition was dependent upon the denigration of the former. But when art finally revealed its essence in the form of the proper philosophical question, as in the works of Warhol and Duchamp, Danto's definition robbed art of the very efficaciousness it was argued to contain if it was, in both the beginning and end, itself a

[480] Kramer, "The Happy Critic," 25.
[481] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, November 4, 1987. (ACD Papers, Box 12, Folder 4, Series 2).
[482] Arthur C. Danto to David Carrier, March 18, 1990. (ACD Papers, Box 12, Folder 6, Series 2

disguised form of philosophy. His definition of art, and its ostensible ending, was parasitic upon a still extant practice (art) that, if in fact only the purview of philosophy in the end, and indeed *itself* philosophy, would make Danto's philosophy of art simply a philosophy of philosophy, or a meta-philosophy. In more empirical terms, however, this contradiction was borne out not only in Danto's tendentious view of philosophy's superiority to art, but in his own self-fashioned, and at times self-serving "persona" qua philosopher. That persona was buttressed by a sense deep sense of philosophy's superiority to both art and other disciplines in the humanities and social-sciences and supported by more than a dose of not-so-subtle misogyny. Indeed, this persona was a significant motivating factor in his denigration of aesthetics. But in a broader sense, it also revealed the deep limitations and ambiguity in the nature of intellectual authority over art's definition and purview in the era of contemporary art that Danto himself had gone to such lengths to theorize. This was arguably the most glaring contradiction in Danto's "End of Art" thesis and his lifelong demotion of aesthetics: it made room for the position of philosophical authority over art at a time when, by Danto's own accounting, the nature of contemporary art had rendered such authority suspect.

Coda: Pluralism and Contemporary Art

> *"Compare a concept with a style of painting. For is even our style of painting arbitrary? Can we choose one at pleasure? (The Egyptian, for instance) Is it a mere question of pleasing and ugly?"* -Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1953.[483]

> *"Contemporary art manifests an awareness of history but no longer carries it forward"*—Hans Belting, 1987.[484]

On October 5th, 2018, Sotheby's auction house in London sold a painting by the enigmatic and elusive street artist known simply as Banksy. The painting, titled "Girl With Balloon," depicts a small girl grasping at the string of an accidentally released, heart-shaped balloon, as it ascends into the distance of the painting's blank white canvas. Just seconds after the painting was sold for the whopping sum of $1.4 million, however, it slowly receded out of the bottom of its frame, which contained a hidden paper shredder. An anonymous patron had paid over a million dollars only to watch her esteemed purchase immediately destroy itself.[485]

"Girl With Balloon" exemplified, perhaps more than any other work, the underlying conditions of contemporary art. Its price tag signaled the imbrication of the arts with the world of

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[483] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 230.
[484] Hans Belting, "The End of the History of Art: Reflections on Contemporary Art and Contemporary Art History," in idem., *The End of the History of Art?* trans. Christopher S. Wood (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 3.
[485] Andrea K. Scott, "The Empty Gesture in Banksy's Self-Destructing Art Work," *The New Yorker* (October 8, 2018) https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-empty-gesture-in-banksys-self-destructing-art-work. Accessed 5/13/2019.

high-finance and the auction house; its self-destruction was as strong a metaphor for the irrelevance of traditional aesthetics to understanding or appreciating art as any in recent times. It contained the revolutionary seeds of the transgressive artists working during the 1960s and 70s in its blurring of the distinction between the plastic arts and performance, and in its radical sense of novelty. But shocking as Banksy's gesture was, it could not germinate with any art-historical force. It was simply one among millions of other works of art that now coexist, none of whose contingent novelty can contain the art-historical significance that once drove progressive narratives of art history.

In 1962, the art-historian Leo Steinberg intimated this condition in an essay penned for *Harpers* magazine titled "Contemporary Art and the Plight of Its Public." Steinberg sought to examine the "shock of discomfort, or the bewilderment, or the anger, or the boredom, which some people always feel, and all people sometimes feel, when confronted with an unfamiliar new style."[486] A meditation on his initial reservations about the early work of Jasper Johns, Steinberg suggested that a mark of contemporary art was the anxiety, both personal and collective, over the lack of direction or precedent for interpreting unfamiliar art. If the consciousness of this anxiety seemed to be a defining marker, however, it also risked becoming, like Banksy's painting, self-negating. "This rapid domestication of the outrageous is the most characteristic feature of our artistic life, and the time lag between the shock received and the caress returned gets progressively shorter."[487] The domestication of novelty seemed, to Steinberg, to switch the art-historical metaphor of forward movement to that of lateral acceptance. Novelty was losing its art-historical purchase.

[486] Leo Steinberg, "Contemporary Art and the Plight of Its Public," *Harpers* (March, 1962): 32.
[487] Ibid.

In our own time, novelty in art is self-contained. That is, it reflects a certain ambivalence, and in many cases circumspection, about the connection between novelty and art-historical progress.[488] In many ways, the 1970s and 1980s were the first decades to reflect the suspicion of this connection and its attendant art-historical consequences. A 1977 edited volume of artists' writings, titled *Individuals: Post-Movement Art in America*, for example, signaled that the metaphor of movements, once seen as the driving forces of art-historical progress, had seemingly become irrelevant to understanding contemporary artistic practice on a broad scale. For the volume's editor, the American poet Alan Sondheim, the works represented therein were not defined by a common "movement, style, or coherent grouping," representing an artistic apex.[489] Rather, they expressed a common sensibility that was "personal, eclectic, intellectual, literary, antiredutive, historical."[490] Such a capacious definition resisted traditional conceptions of art-historical periodization that were dependent upon notions of style and influence, rooted in perception alone. Instead, it reflected the pluralism entailed by individual artists' navigation of their relationship between self and society.

For the art critic Corrinne Robbins, the pluralism of the 1970s characterized this relationship in its distinctive break from art as an autonomous domain of thought and practice. "For the era of the seventies, unlike the painter Ad Reinhardt's prescription, 'Art is art,' art in fact was everything else."[491] The "Pluralist Era" spelled out the ending of an era that yoked aesthetics and erstwhile narratives of art history; it concerned "artists' personal lives, the fate of the earth, one's sex, the idea of individual and natural perceptual changes, and the making of

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[488] For an insightful history of the concept of 'novelty' and its implications for understanding progress in the arts, see Michael North, *Novelty: A History of the New* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
[489] Alan Sondheim, *Individuals: Post-Movement Art in America* (Toronto: Clark, Irwin, and Company Ltd., 1977), xiv.
[490] Ibid.,vii.
[491] Corrine Robbins, *The Pluralist Era: American Art, 1968-1981* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 2.

technology into a natural tool of vision."[492] Likewise, this "passing of modernism took with it the passing of successive major visions, and of art history itself as any kind of sequential story."[493]

In the same year that Robbins published these remarks in her history of *The Pluralist Era* (1984), the German art-historian Hans Belting diagnosed a similar condition. In *The End of the History of Art?,* Belting claimed that the line between aesthetics and other domains of life had been breached to such an extent that a linear, teleological sequence of art history was no longer possible. From its beginnings in Vasari, and its institutionalization as a scholarly discipline during the early-nineteenth century, the very idea of art history had been indexed to internal, stylistic features of artworks themselves, features which provided art-historians with the "logic" of a developmental sequence or narrative. When art's autonomy was attacked, however, art-history was torn asunder. "The old antagonism between art and life has been defused, precisely because art has lost its secure frontiers against other media, visual and linguistic…All this opens up new possibilities but also new problems for a discipline which has always had to legitimize the isolation of its object—art—from other domains of knowledge and interpretation."[494] If the boundary separating the "aesthetic" from other forms of thought had come into disrepute, Belting argued, then the very discipline of art history on which it rested had to be fundamentally rethought.

In an important sense, both Belting and Robbins echoed Danto's parsimonious definition of contemporary art as the condition of inexorable pluralism. As Belting noted, "One must live

[492] Ibid.
[493] Ibid., 1.
[494] Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art?* trans. Christopher Wood (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), xi.

with this pluralism of styles and values which apparently characterizes our society, if only because there is no exit in sight."[495]

Like Belting, Danto's diagnosis of this condition of pluralism, which he also believed "characterized our society," straddled the line between synthetic description and analytic definition. His later writings about the nature of art history took for granted that the discipline of art history itself had since the sixteenth century constituted art as an object of knowledge. Art with a capital A was indexed to the histories describing not only its objects, but also constructing cultural and artistic hierarchies based on the contingent (or arbitrary) significance attached to certain aesthetic choices over others. Once aesthetics left the picture as the primary node of artistic analysis, however, then the fate of art-history as a narrative of progress necessarily had to end. Pluralism and diversity would reign indefinitely.

Such diversity was reflected in a 2009 questionnaire in *October* that solicited the opinions of over 100 artists, critics, art-historians, curators, theorists, and philosophers on the nature of "The Contemporary" in art. Convened by Hal Foster, the utter lack of consensus reflected in the survey seemed, if nothing else, to reflect the pluralism of contemporary art as much as its commentary, to which it has given academic fodder. As Foster noted in his introduction to the questionnaire's findings, "the category of 'contemporary art' is not a new one. What is new is the sense that, in its very heterogeneity, much present practice seems to float free of historical determination, conceptual definition, and critical judgment. Such paradigms as 'the neo-avant-garde' and 'postmodernism,' which once oriented some art and theory, have run into the sand, and, arguably, no models of much explanatory reach or intellectual force have risen in

[495] Ibid., 56.

their stead."[496] The arch-enemy of pluralism during the 1980s, by 2009 Foster seemed hard-pressed to offer any alternative.

More recent and systematic attempts to define contemporary art, however, present a different set of problems. Terry Smith's *What is Contemporary Art?* (2009), for example, offers three conditions that characterize the current moment in the arts. The first is artwork that both confronts (in both celebration and condemnation) the reality of "neoliberal economics, globalizing capital, and neoconservative politics." With artists like Jeff Koons, Julian Schnaebel, Richard Serra, Damien Hirst, and Takashi Murakami in mind, this cohort of contemporary artists works at the nexus of what Smith, somewhat ambiguously, refers to as the "aesthetic of globalization."[497] The second condition is art generated in the wake of the "post-colonial" turn. For Smith, these artists are shaped by "local, national, anticolonial, independent, anti-globalization values," and have contributed profoundly to the turn away from Western-dominated values and narratives of art. [498] Finally, Smith sees a third, defining trend of contemporary art in works that exploit the "interactive potentialities of various material media, virtual communicative networks, and open-ended modes of tangible connectivity." For Smith, these artists "raise questions as to the nature of temporality these days, the possibilities of placemaking vis-à-vis dislocation, about what it is to be immersed in mediated interactivity and about the fraught exchanges between affect and effect."[499]

Smith's schematic attempt to define contemporary art, however, too easily conflates description with definition. That is, he confuses aesthetic trends in recent art, in both Western

[496] Hal Foster, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'," *October* 130 (2009): 3.
[497] Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 7.
[498] Ibid.
[499] Ibid., 8.

and non-Western contexts, to be definitive of a certain historical condition, in essence ignoring the anti-aesthetic impulse that has rent the tether indexing art and its history to stylistic choice. Oddly enough, Smith rejects the "post-historical" condition of art propounded by writers like Danto and Belting in favor of a definition of the contemporary as a continuation of the "unresolved" legacies of the 1950s and 60s. "The artists most thoroughly committed to making art in the condition of contemporaneity know that they carry unresolved legacies from the history of art, especially those that shook art to its roots during the 1950s and 1960s. Many of these innovations were, at their core, extraordinary efforts to grasp the contemporaneity of things, others, images, and self."[500] As Danto argued, however, the broader legacy of these decades was to sever the necessary connection between art as a concept, and aesthetic choice, bequeathing to future generations a capacious sense of artistic possibility. If the contemporary is defined, rather, by the attempt to "grasp the contemporaneity of things," however, then it becomes a covertly normative injunction to particular stylistic choices or artistic content, a condition that flies in the face of the empirical fact that contemporary art is, at its core, utterly diffuse, and without any core.

In a more properly historical mode, the art-historian Richard Meyer has sought to upend the notion that contemporary art is simply that concerned with the condition of "now-ness," as Smith's book subtly intimates. Drawing on the writings of Alfred Barr, the art historian, curator, and founder of the Museum of Modern Art, Meyer shows how Barr's commitment to catholicity in art curation--showing contemporary and historical works under the same roof and in deliberate juxtaposition--was an important harbinger of the contemporary moment of pluralism that defines

[500] Ibid., 246.

artistic practice in our own time.[501] In a certain sense, Meyer's argument about contemporary art resonates with that of Danto's. "The basic perception of the contemporary spirit was formed on the principle of a museum in which all art has a rightful place, where there is no *a priori* criterion as to what that art must look like, and where there is no narrative into which the museum's contents must all fit."[502] But Meyer's work elides the fundamental shift that occurred in art-*historical* thinking when the relationship between art and traditional aesthetics was severed during the second half of the twentieth-century, undermining the sense that art history was a forward march of progress driven by beauty, technique, or novelty.

On Danto's account, by contrast, contemporary art—as the condition of unmitigated pluralism that emerged during the 1970s —was unprecedented in the history of art. "As the history of art has internally evolved, contemporary has come to mean an art produced within a certain structure of production never, I think, seen before in the entire history of art."[503] Contemporary art represented such a radical break, however, because a certain view of the narrative of Western art-history had come to an end. In this sense, Danto's argument was resonant with a larger critique of the normativity of broader, Western narrative structures that emerged across the humanities during the 1980s. Jean Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), for example, declared an end to the "meta-narratives" used to justify the centrality of certain forms of knowledge, while the literary theorist Frederic Jameson declared

[501] Richard Meyer, *What Was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).
[502] Arthur C. Danto, "Modern, Postmodern, Contemporary," in idem., *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 5.
[503] Ibid., 10.

that late-capitalism had rendered such narratives fungible, postmodern cultural products floating free of historical determination for Western cultural reference.[504]

For Danto, however, postmodernism (in the arts, at least) quickly ossified into an identifiable aesthetic choice, recognizable through certain stylistic choices and convictions. The deeper significance of "The End of Art" and its post-historical wake, rather, was the liberation of style from its role as an engine in both the narrative construction of art history and cultural hierarchy more broadly. "Artists [by the 1970s], liberated from the burden of history, were free to make art in whatever way they wished, for any purposes they wished, or for no purposes at all. That is the mark of contemporary art, and small wonder, in contrast with modernism, there is no such thing as a contemporary style."[505] Danto saw this lack of stylistic imperative as both a sign of chaos and liberation. "So the contemporary is, from one perspective, a period of information disorder, a condition of perfect aesthetic entropy. But is equally a period of quite perfect freedom."[506]

For some critics, such 'freedom' represents the acquiescence of the independence of artistic thought to the dominant structures of society. Donald Kuspit's version of the "End of Art," for example, signifies an end to the necessary "alienation" of artists. In contemporary art, Kuspit argues, "aesthetic experience is in fact discarded as a rhetorical, idiosyncratic effect…of a socially conditioned, even culturally mandated, impersonal construction. The artist becomes, without irony, the willing representative of society's everyday values, losing the integrity of his alienation, and art becomes an instrument of social integration—a sign of social belonging—

[504] Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*: *A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).
[505] Ibid., 15.
[506] Ibid., 12.

losing aesthetic purpose and power."[507] For Kuspit, the decline of the aesthetic means the loss of artistic integrity.

Kuspit's prognosis offers a one-sided, conservative defense of the artist as a romantic lone wolf. And while it is worth noting the rather flagrant appropriation of the "End of Art" thesis to that end, it also begs a more nuanced interpretation if one is to understand its broader historical significance and, arguably, its deeper appeal. One of Danto's most gifted students, Jonathan Gilmore, offers an incisive sense of guidance on this front. For Gilmore, Danto's thesis posits the ending of a sequential development *internal* to art. But, he asks, what precisely was developing within that narrative such that it came to end? For Gilmore, the progressive narratives of Western art history reveal that internal development in the outlines and limitations of its overarching paradigms (i.e., movements, dominant aesthetic choices). Moreover, those paradigms underwrote the normative statuses attached to artistic creation in the production of art history. Gilmore calls this conferral of normative status in the production of art history, and the canons it creates, the life of a 'style.'

On Gilmore's account, the internal features of a style, and hence the parameters of its narrative development, emerge once its limitations have been reached. That is, rather than a contingent aesthetic attached to art, 'style' here refers to the particular goals of art—mimesis until the advent of modernism, self-definition until modernism's end—which dictated particular aesthetic choices tied to the imperative of artistic 'progress.' When it became clear during the 1950s and 1960s that such progress could no longer be made, for Danto through Warhol's positing of the question of indiscernibility, then artistic progress revealed itself as the particular

[507] Donald Kuspit, *The End of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 11.

'style' of Western art history as a whole, which was seemingly coming to an end. On this point Gilmore is worth quoting at length.

> The end to this development [the "End of Art] occurs when the style's limits are reached in such a way that we can say the style has, in the work of artists in the West, come into perspicuity. Here the development along naturalistic lines was just one direction in which the limits to the style were probed and exposed, and the development toward self-definition reached another limit to the style. At this point the shape of the style can be discerned both because these limits—these borders—have been reached and, just as important, because an essential feature of the style has been exposed: *that it demanded art be part of a historical development, one defined by the notions of progress, of breaking down barriers, of carrying history forward*. In short, the style incorporated a certain narrative of what art history was. Art reaches an ending, not because it reaches the limits to the naturalistic or modernist developments, but because the style of art that mandated those developments has emerged into view. If contemporary art really is not part of the modernist paradigm, this is reflected in the fact that there no longer is a mandate in the style or styles of this art that it enact a narratively structured development.[508]

Gilmore's trenchant reading of Danto's "End of Art" implicitly equates the autonomy of the aesthetic with the notion of progress in the arts. On this account, once aesthetics, as a normative stricture, becomes irrelevant to the definition of art--or less didactically to the practice of artists themselves—then it reveals itself to have been a feature internal to the development of Western art. In this way, we can make sense of Danto's claim that the art of the 1950s and 60s represented such a fundamental break in art history. Moreover, as the 'style' of art-as-progress "emerged," in Gilmore's language, then the artworld entered a new phase in which a consciousness of that style fundamentally altered artists' relationship to the art-historical past.

Danto's diagnosis of the decline in aesthetics—defined first as the centrality of sense perception, and secondly as a form of transcendence attached to art—emerged from a unique set

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[508] Jonathan Gilmore, *The Life of a Style: Beginnings and Endings in the Narrative History of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 139-40.

of circumstances in American intellectual and artistic life from the 1950s to the late 1980s. As a product of these circumstances, Danto's theorization of contemporary art was arguably the most systematic and significant diagnosis of contemporary art at the end of the twentieth century. As a historian, I have attempted to spell out the historical contexts of the development of his thought. These contexts from which Danto's theorizing emerged are vitally important to the larger argument of this dissertation, though they do not function as "containers" of his philosophy. That is, they offer little in the way offering causal explanations that reduce his ideas to more "external" forces.[509] Rather, they represent a broader development in American academic, intellectual, and artistic culture in which aesthetics lost its force as a) a driver of art-historical progress, b) its dictation of the line between high and low art, and c) its sequestration from other modes of philosophical, cultural, political, and moral reasoning. My dissertation does not pretend to a comprehensive or definitive account of this development, however. Instead, it offers a beginning-point in a larger story that is, I argue, given cultural and intellectual salience by Danto's philosophy. That is, it offers a reading of the development of Danto's thought based in broader intellectual and cultural trends that cohered in unique and surprising ways from circa 1950-1991. It is in this sense, rather than in the suggestion that Danto's writings somehow directly "influenced" the broad and diffuse condition of pluralism definitive of contemporary art, that I suggest his importance to understanding the present moment in the arts and intellectual life.

To see this development as part of a broader intellectual shift, in which the very idea of the artwork is now so diffuse as to be often indistinguishable from other expressions of intellectual and cultural life, is to rethink the divide between art-history and history 'proper'. In

[509] On the philosophical difficulties with treating context as metaphor of "containment" for ideas, see Peter Eli Gordon, "Contextualism and Criticism in the History of Ideas," in Darrin McMahon and Samuel Moyn eds., *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 32-55.

many ways this is not a novel conjecture; it is one marker of the ambiguous boundary between art and life definitive of contemporary art. Consequentially, art historians have wondered aloud over the past decades about whether that ambiguity threatens the autonomy of their discipline as its objects of study become indistinguishable from 'culture' and 'society.'[510] Whether this condition is a cause for lament or celebration, however, is irrelevant. What is more important is that it reveals something fundamental about the emergence of contemporary art in its distinctive reorientation towards disciplinarity as such, underwritten by a decline in the autonomy of aesthetics. On Danto's account, this decline reinforced a weakened boundary between art and life that marked the apotheosis of modernism in the work of New York artists of the late-1950s and 1960s. As I have attempted to demonstrate, however, the porous boundary between art and life definitive of contemporary art tells us something broader about the contingent demarcations of modes of thought-- particularly aesthetic thinking-- that were called into question during the second half of the twentieth century. In this way, the emergence of contemporary art was coterminous with a broader reorientation towards disciplinary thinking that characterized intellectual and academic life more generally during the second half of the twentieth century. The development of Danto's was one synecdoche of that moment.

[510] See, for example, Svetlana Alpers, "Is Art History," *Daedalus* 106 no. 3 (1977): 1-13.

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