CrossMark

Modern Intellectual History (2022), **19**, 1157–1181
doi:10.1017/S1479244321000445

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

Art and Indiscernibility: Arthur C. Danto and the Dynamics of Analytic Philosophy

John Erik Hmiel*

Independent scholar
*Corresponding author. E-mail: erikhmiel@gmail.com

(Received 12 October 2020; revised 18 February 2021; accepted 21 June 2021)

Arthur C. Danto was one of the most influential and prolific philosophers of art of the second half of the twentieth century. More particularly, his encounter with the art of Andy Warhol in 1964 became a crucial moment that would catapult his lifelong attempt to spell out the theoretical conditions of contemporary art, and the implications those conditions held for art history and criticism. In this article, however, I show that Danto was in fact primed for his encounter with Warhol by the newly emerging identity of Anglo-American analytic philosophy at mid-century. Using unpublished archival material, I show that Danto's fundamental insights in his first two major essays in the philosophy of art, "The Artworld" (1964) and "Artworks and Real Things" (1973), were in place at least two years before his chance meeting with Warhol's artwork. In making this more modest historical claim, however, I argue that Danto was part of a broader generation of philosophers who were attempting to work through some of the fundamental problems raised by the naturalist tradition of American thought since the late nineteenth century, problems that became central to the emerging identity of analytic philosophy in its early stages. Among the most pressing of these problems was how values functioned in a naturalistic universe absent theological or metaphysical grounding. Drawing from this philosophical space, Danto's account of art deeply influenced the direction of Anglo-American philosophy of art during the second half of the twentieth century. In the process, he became one of the most significant theorists of contemporary art in the English-speaking world.

Introduction

In late April of 1964, a young philosophy professor named Arthur C. Danto walked into a small art gallery on West Fifty-Eighth Street in New York. Run by Eleanor Ward, the Stable Gallery was featuring new sculptures from a young Andy Warhol. Warhol had fabricated wooden and silk-screened replicas of supermarket items, like those taken from his recent Campbell's soup can prints and the cardboard packaging holding Brillo sponges.[1] These sculptures appeared virtually identical to the tin and carboard consumer packages containing their real-life products. For Danto, Warhol's artistic provocation was particularly transfixing. Danto himself was also a young artist, an abstract printmaker working in the tradition of German expressionism. But it was the *philosophical* implications of Warhol's

[1]On Warhol see Victor Bockris, *Warhol: The Biography* (London, 1997).

© The Author(s), 2021. Published by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Brillo Box, Danto believed, that represented a sea change in the way philosophers and critics now had to define art. For Danto, Warhol had shown that eyesight alone was not sufficient to distinguish works of art from ordinary objects. If Warhol's *Brillo Box* was an artwork on display in a gallery, but visually indistinguishable from its counterpart in the supermarket, then something profound had to account for their difference, something beyond the senses.[2]

Danto devoted the rest of his career to articulating this difference and its implications. More than any other thinker of his generation, he spent his life theorizing the nature of art and its relationship to art history after American artists like Warhol, Jasper Johns, and Robert Morris altered erstwhile notions of what an artwork could be. During the 1950s and 1960s, pop artists, the music of John Cage, the experiments of the Fluxus group, and, later, minimalist sculptors and 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.[3] What's more, as this criterion was demoted, it was replaced by artists' posing the question of art's relationship to life, as Warhol had unwittingly done. 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. If aesthetics were irrelevant, moreover, then the extant notions of art-historical progress, or the modernist paradigm of an avant-garde, were likewise incoherent. In the wake of art-historical progress, Danto argued, contemporary art thus 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, likewise, had logically to 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.[4]

[2]To be sure, Warhol's "Brillo boxes" were not *exactly* identical to those found in the supermarket. They were slightly larger. This was largely irrelevant to Danto's larger philosophical claim, however, which was supported by other examples of indiscernibility among artists during the 1950s and 1960s.

[3]On the profusion of unprecedented activity in the arts in the wake of abstract expressionism see Barbara Haskell, *BLAM! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance, 1958–1964* (New York, 1984); Richard Candida Smith, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Power, and Politics in California* (Berkeley, 1996); Smith, *The Modern Moves West: California Artists and Democratic Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, 2009); Thomas Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent* (London, 1996); Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970* (Chicago, 1989); Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago, 1996); Jennifer C. Lena, *Entitled: Discriminating Tastes and the Expansion of the Arts* (Princeton, 2019).

[4]While the category of "contemporary art" is still a hotly contested marker, good starting points in the literature include Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art* (Chicago, 2009); Richard Meyer, *What Was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge, 2013); Corrine Robbins, *The Pluralist Era: American Art, 1968–1981* (New York, 1984); and Hal Foster, Julia Bryan-Wilson, Grant Kester, James Elkins, Miwom Kwon, Joshua Shannon, Richard Meyer et al., "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'," *October* 130 (2009), 3–124.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Danto developed and defended these positions in his widely read book *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981) and his series of essays during the mid- to late 1980s explaining his "End of Art" thesis and its implications.[5] But it was in his first articles on art, published just months after seeing Warhol's exhibition, that the basis of Danto's philosophy of art took shape. Indeed, Danto reiterated throughout the remainder of his life that seeing Warhol's *Brillo Box* was his "ur-moment" in thinking about the philosophy of art. As he recalled in one of his final books, "My philosophical preoccupation with art began when I visited that [Warhol] exhibition."[6] In an important sense, however, Danto's recollection of this encounter was more self-mythologizing than historical fact.[7]

Danto had been "primed" for this chance meeting with the "Brillo boxes" years before 1964 by his emerging identity as a philosopher in the fledgling analytic tradition. Danto represented a new generation of American philosophers who were grappling with some of the fundamental consequences of the naturalist tradition in American thought inaugurated by Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). During the first decades of the twentieth century, one of those consequences for naturalist philosophers was the problem of how values functioned in a universe now bereft of theological or metaphysical support.[8] Providing solutions to this problem formed a crucial part of the philosophy of American pragmatism, especially the thought of John Dewey. But, for many philosophers of Danto's generation, Dewey's pragmatism ultimately reintroduced new metaphysical knots in his attempt to reify the connection between value and nature with the concept of "experience." The logical empiricists, by contrast, who had emigrated to the US to escape National Socialism and who influenced the early trajectory of analytic philosophy, skirted the problem altogether by excluding values from the order of knowledge *tout court*.[9] This article builds on recent research on the historical emergence of analytic philosophy by showing how a particular subfield within Anglo-American analysis—the philosophy of art—was characteristic of a broader concern among the first generation of American analysts to provide more compelling, and rigorously argued-for, answers to the question of how values functioned in a world no longer explicable in

[5]Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, 1981); Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York, 1986); Danto, "The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense," *History and Theory* 37/4 (1998), 127–43; Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton, 1997).

[6]Arthur C. Danto, "The End of the Contest: The *Paragone* between Painting and Photography," in Danto, *What Art Is* (New Haven, 2013), 99–115, at 114.

[7]Accounts of Danto's philosophy consistently cite his encounter with Warhol as the ultimate point of departure for Danto's philosophy of art. See, for example, Paul Mattick, "The Andy Warhol of Philosophy and the Philosophy of Andy Warhol," *Critical Inquiry* 24/4 (1998), 965–87; Noël Carrol, "The Age of Danto," *American Society for Aesthetics Newsletter* 33/3 (2013), 2–19, at 2.

[8]Paul F. Boller Jr, *American Thought in Transition: The Impact of Evolutionary Naturalism, 1865–1900* (Washington, DC, 1981); James Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1994); James Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (Oxford, 1986); Trevor Pearce, *Pragmatism's Evolution: Organism and Environment in American Philosophy* (Chicago, 2020).

[9]John McCumber, *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Evanston, 2001); George C. Reisch, *How the Cold War Transformed the Philosophy of Science: To the Icy Slopes of Logic* (Cambridge, 2005); Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America: 1720–2000* (New York, 2002).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

theological or metaphysical terms.[10] Danto developed his philosophy of art under the guise of this dispensation.

As Joel Isaac has convincingly argued, analytic philosophy emerged in large part in the context of a renewed contest between scientific explanation—which, for the logical empiricists, meant privileging the role of *sensation*—and the skeptical dilemmas that befell "sensation-talk" when faced with the normative practices associated with ordinary human behavior and its description.[11] Another way of understanding this *agon*, which became definitive of a great deal of Anglo-American philosophy from roughly 1950 to 1970, is to appreciate how it came to represent a new period in the history of naturalist thought in the United States in its attempt to reconcile the place of value in a world without metaphysical or religious ballast.[12]

Danto's novel strategy in theorizing this reconciliation was in his recognition that artists of his generation, such as Warhol, John Cage, Robert Morris, and Frank Stella, had shown the relevance of the avant-garde fantasy of bridging the gap between art and life to a broader accounting of the conceptual structure of art as a human practice. In making this case in his early essays, he invoked one through-line of the nascent analytic tradition, drawing on the work of Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* (1949) and, especially, Ludwig Wittgenstein's posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), which attempted to show how linguistic *use* was constitutive of the values that supervened on mere practices alone. In this sense, Danto offered an answer to one of the consequences of naturalism plaguing American thinkers since the late nineteenth century that was, in many ways, characteristic of the first generation of American analytic philosophers during the 1950s and 1960s. Drawing on unpublished undergraduate lectures that Danto delivered in 1962–3, I show that what I am calling an "indiscernibility paradigm," which played a crucial role in the analytic philosophy of art, was fundamental to Danto's thought prior to his encounter with Warhol. Both in the works of artists like Cage, Frank Stella, and Allan Kaprow, and in the philosophical positions inspired by Ryle and Wittgenstein, Danto exploited an affinity that betrayed the inadequacy of sensation (perception) alone to understanding both the normative dimension of art as a social practice and the conceptual foundations of its

[10]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*, vol. 1, *The Dawn of Analysis* (Princeton, 2003). In a notable exception to this tendency, Joel Isaac has written about the history of analytic philosophy in a much more judicious and thoughtful manner. Joel Isaac, "W. V. Quine and the Origins of Analytic Philosophy in the United States," *Modern Intellectual History* 2/2 (2005), 205–34; Isaac, "Donald Davidson and the Analytic Revolution in American Philosophy, 1940–1970," *Historical Journal* 56/3 (2013), 757–79; Isaac, "The Many Faces of Analytic Philosophy," in Warren Breckman and Peter Gordon, eds., *The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought* (Cambridge, 2019), 176–99.

[11]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, 2016), 202–16.

[12]In this sense, my argument stands in contrast to the claim that naturalism in American thought was an inevitable bedfellow for a "value-free," relativist turn in the human sciences by the 1930s and 1940s. See, for example, Edward A. Purcell Jr, *The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism and the Problem of Value* (Lexington, 1973)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

regulatory functions as a concept. These ideas came to fruition in his early essays "The Artworld" (1964) and "Artworks and Real Things" (1973), which fundamentally shaped the direction of Anglo-American philosophy of art for the next two decades. Those essays formed the foundation of Danto's theorization of contemporary art, which was arguably more parsimonious than, and in many ways anticipated, the more widely read theorists of art that emerged during the 1970s and 1980s.

Up from naturalism

After graduating from Wayne State University in 1948, Danto moved to New York to pursue a life as both an artist and a fledgling philosopher. That year, he applied to graduate study in the Department of Philosophy at Columbia University, notable as the recently erstwhile home of John Dewey, and was accepted on the condition of probation, given his lack of philosophical background. As he later remembered it, "largely because of Dewey, who believed philosophers should be able to do something else, the philosophy department was impressed that an artist wanted to study philosophy."[13] For the three decades prior to Danto's arrival at Columbia, Dewey loomed large over the philosophy department. His pragmatic naturalism sought to reconcile a commitment to the experimental ethos of scientific, empirically grounded inquiry with the belief that minds, values, and goal-directed actions were fully compatible with the picture of the universe supplied by Darwin. Moreover, Dewey's vision was tied to a larger conviction that philosophy should be conducted in the service of solving the problems of American democracy.[14] During the 1950s, Danto's teachers, philosophers such as John Herman Randall Jr, Irwin Edman, and Justus Buchler, carried on this vision and sought to "canonize" Dewey's pragmatic naturalism. Spurred in part by the threat of European logical empiricism on American shores and what they perceived as its narrow, technical vision of philosophy, the Columbia naturalists enshrined Dewey's vision in their own work, taking off from his open-ended commitment to empirical inquiry, the provisionality of knowledge, and his refusal to distinguish between facts and values. For men like Randall and Buchler, Dewey provided a metaphysical support to the pluralism of American democracy.[15]

Danto's graduate adviser, Ernest Nagel, shared Dewey's larger, metaphilosophical commitments.[16] But he attempted to steer a middle ground between pragmatism and the more scientifically engaged views of the émigré logical empiricists such as Rudolph Carnap, Hans Reichenbach, and Morris Schlick, who had recently found haven at American universities like the University of Chicago, UCLA, and Stanford respectively.[17] While Danto was more than likely introduced

[13]Arthur C. Danto, "Intellectual Autobiography," in Randall E. Auxier and Lewis Edwin Hahn, eds., *The Philosophy of Arthur C. Danto* (New York, 2013), 1–132, at 7.

[14]On Dewey see Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, 1991).

[15]Andrew Jewett, "Canonizing Dewey: Naturalism, Logical Empiricism, and the Idea of American Philosophy," *Modern Intellectual History* 8/1 (2011), 91–125.

[16]See, for example, Ernest Nagel, "Nature and Convention," *Journal of Philosophy* 26/7 (1929), 169–82.

[17]Ernest Nagel, "Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe. I," *Journal of Philosophy* 33/1 (1936), 5–24; on the migration of the logical empiricists see Herbert Feigl, "The Wiener Kreis in

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to the logical empiricists via Nagel, his first real engagement with the issues that would come to define analytic philosophy in the US came while he held a lecturer position at the University of Colorado in 1952–3. There, Danto met John Nelson, a student of Norman Malcom, the latter of whom was one of the most influential American interpreters and promoters of the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein in the US, as well as an American student of the eminent Oxford philosopher Gilbert Ryle.[18] "Through … Nelson, we were able to read monographic editions of [Wittgenstein's] *The Blue and Brown Books*, as well as of the *Math Notes*, all of which the three of us discussed endlessly."[19] When Danto returned to Columbia in 1953 to begin a permanent teaching position, however, he found a department that now seemed outdated and insufficiently rigorous relative to the sophistication he found in the questions raised by Wittgenstein and Ryle. Aside from his teacher Nagel, the philosophy department at Columbia suddenly seemed "like a kind of Tibet. It was just an awful scene dominated by the fuddy-duddies of early twentieth-century thought."[20] For Danto, the best philosophy was technically rigorous and, by implication, eluded any grander metaphysical or political scaffolding such as "democracy."[21]

Between the early work in philosophy of science he gradually veered towards under the direction of Nagel, and his exposure to the works of Wittgenstein and Ryle, Danto began his professional career determined to champion the virtues of clarity and logical rigor that had become central to the nascent identity of analytic philosophy.[22] Within this frame, he pursued the naturalistic stance that was common to both the pragmatists and the logical empiricists. Against both the antediluvian vision of the former and the restrictive scope of the latter, however, he began to approach a decidedly non-metaphysical vision of philosophy inspired by the most up-to-date problems in the discipline's leading subfields, philosophy of science and the philosophy of language.[23] For Danto, leaders in the discipline like Harvard's W. V. O. Quine and Oxford's Ryle were "clarifying" inspirations who seemed to be making genuine progress in a field of inquiry generated by the extant problems of naturalism.[24]

Initially, however, Danto found little encouragement for this vision from many of his new colleagues. In 1960, 1966, and 1969, he nearly left Columbia to accept other offers from institutions including the University of Pennsylvania and Yale, with at least one instance precipitated by a perceived departmental "move to ruin

America," in Bernard Bailyn and Donald Fleming, eds., *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930–1960* (Cambridge, 1969), 630–74.

[18]Normal Malcom, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford, 2011).

[19]Arthur C. Danto, "Hayden White and Me: Two Systems of Philosophy of History," in Robert Doran, ed., *Philosophy of History after Hayden White* (London, 2013), 109–118, at 110.

[20]Ibid.

[21]On the zeal for "rigor" in the postwar human sciences see Carl E. Schorske, "The New Rigorism in the Human Sciences, 1940–1960," *Daedalus* 126/1 (1997), 289–309.

[22]Arthur C. Danto, "Philosophy of Science," Arthur Coleman Danto Papers, Box 7, Folder 17, Series 1, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Hereafter ACD papers.

[23]Arthur Danto and Sydney Morgenbesser, eds., *Philosophy of Science* (New York, 1964).

[24]Arthur C. Danto, "Art and Analysis: Interview with Peter Osborne," at www.radicalphilosophy.com/interview/arthur-c-danto-art-and-analysis (accessed 3 March 2021). On the centrality of the Harvard–Oxford nexus to the emergence of analytic philosophy in the US, see Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America*, 243–58.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the futures of most of the assistant professors."[25] While the details of such a move are unclear, it is plausible that it emerged from a fundamental difference in vision between the older members of the department, who were wedded to a nationalistic version of Dewey's naturalism, and younger members, like Danto and his friend Sydney Morgenbesser, who sought a more rigorous, if parochial, approach to the discipline. Like both his "fuddy-duddy" colleagues and their naturalist successors, the logical empiricists, Danto eschewed a metaphysical approach to philosophy. But in establishing himself as part of a new generation of analytic philosophers, he sought a more systematic approach to the naturalist tradition by making language and its "logic" central to philosophical analysis.

For Danto, the philosophy of art provided a particularly auspicious forum for this undertaking. After coming to feel that the classical texts in philosophical aesthetics he first encountered as a graduate student were both philosophically outdated and increasingly irrelevant to the New York art world he inhabited, Danto began to cultivate a novel approach. In practice, this meant, first, breaking with the restrictive vision assigned to problems of value by the logical empiricists, who held the position that artworks 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 English logical empiricist A. J. Ayer and the American philosopher Charles Stevenson.[26] For Ayer and Stevenson, only statements that could be empirically verified held cognitive significance; that is, counted as genuine *knowledge*.[27] 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."[28] Dewey's more capacious, "experiential" view of science qua naturalism, however, offered its own set of problems.

In his 1934 book *Art as Experience*, 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 were not, a priori, tethered to any specific objects or institutions.[29] The aesthetic qualities

[25]Arthur Danto to Adolf (last name unclear), 2 Feb. 1960, ACD Papers, Box 11, Folder 3, Series 1; Sidney Morgenbesser to Arthur Danto, 1966, ACD Papers, Box 11, Folder 6, Series 1; Bruce Danto to Arthur Danto, 30 Oct. 1966, ACD Papers, Box 11, Folder 6, Series 1.

[26]Both Ayer and Stevenson's account of value was influenced by that offered in C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards's *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism* (London, 1923).

[27]A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York, 1952); Charles L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (New Haven, 1962).

[28]Herbert Feigl, "Naturalism and Humanism," *American Quarterly* 1/2 (1949), 135–48, at 140.

[29]"Esthetic" is Dewey's idiosyncratic spelling.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of ordinary life formed the basis of 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.[30]

Dewey appealed to a notion of aesthetic experience that, as Danto would later emphasize in his undergraduate lectures, made art into a metaphysical abstraction akin to mysticism, despite its democratic aspirations. More pointedly, Dewey also represented a staid relic of both Danto's department and American philosophy's benighted past.[31] After teaching a course on American philosophy to high-school teachers at Bennington College in 1960, for example, Danto wrote to his colleague in the philosophy department, James Guttman, stating that teaching Dewey, "whom I am trying to treat as sympathetically as I can, requires effort."[32] Against Dewey's gauzy take on art, staking out a non-metaphysical yet antimaterialist position on art became the impetus for Danto's emerging position as an American analyst.

Ironically, however, *Art as Experience*, and pragmatism more broadly, were particularly influential for the American avant-garde during the 1950s and 1960s, whose attempts at bridging the gap between art and life were particularly important to Danto's developing philosophy of art. In 1934, Dewey became a board member of Black Mountain College in Asheville, North Carolina, a fundamental incubator of the emerging avant-garde in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. Black Mountain's students and faculty included such eminent figures of the American avant-garde as Robert Rauschenberg, Franz Kline, Ruth Asawa, Merce Cunningham, and John Cage.[33] The college's contemporary art program fully embraced Dewey's imperative 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."[34] As many of Black Mountain's members migrated to New York and sought to make their artistic voices heard during the 1950s, Deweyan pragmatism gave young American artists a language through which a more holistic version of naturalism could speak to the pretense of aesthetic formalism, which had become a leading critical position in the art world thanks to critics like Clement Greenberg.[35]

[30]John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York, 1934).

[31]Danto, "Hayden White and Me," 110.

[32]Arthur C. Danto to James Guttman, 27 July 1960, James Guttman Papers, Box 1, Series 1, Folder 8, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

[33]On the Cage–Cunningham–Rauschenberg nexus see Louis Menand, *The Free World: Art and Thought in the Cold War* (New York, 2021), 225–90.

[34]Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 259.

[35]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, 2013), 67–9. 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 States see Christopher Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition* (Boston, 1998); and George J. Leonard, *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (Chicago, 1994). On Greenberg see Caroline Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago, 2006).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Abetting this vision of naturalism, one of Black Mountain's most influential teachers during the 1950s and 1960s was the composer John Cage. In 1952, Cage had shocked the art world 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 thirty-three seconds, without touching the keys. For Cage, the piece was not meant to be pure silence, but to engender a state of awareness of the sounds in the hall itself, obliterating the distinction between traditional music and pure sound. Inspired by Dewey, Cage approached music as a way of bridging the gap between art and life. 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."[36] 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. Here, 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, Cage 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.[37] Running from 1955 to 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.[38]

Like Cage, many of these artists attempted to reinvigorate the avant-garde fantasies of European Dada and surrealism during the 1920s by producing works that explicitly challenged the seemingly arbitrary boundary between art and life.

One of the most influential strategies in this attempt was to explicitly question the priority of the senses alone in distinguishing between artworks and real things. Cage's *4′33″* was arguably the most direct of these attempts, begging the question of the difference between art and pure silence. Many of Cage's students followed his lead. Allan Kaprow's *Happenings*, for example, called for his performers to simply execute arbitrary tasks simultaneously: jumping through props made from lumber and plastic sheets, rattling various noisemakers inside chicken coops, and group painting. His *18 Happenings in Six Parts* (1959) divided New York's Reuben gallery into three sections with translucent sheets of plastic while performers variously bounced balls, played records, read from placards, and moved their bodies while

[36]John Cage, "Experimental Music," in Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, 1973), 8.

[37]Haskell, *Blam!*, 32.

[38]To be sure, the "break" from abstract expressionism was much more fluid than is often portrayed. See, for example, Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (Cambridge, 1991); Robert Genter, *Late Modernism: Art, Politics, and Culture in Cold War America* (Philadelphia, 2010); Vallerie Hellstein, "Grounding the Social Aesthetics of Abstract Expressionism: A New Intellectual History of the Club" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Stony Brook University, 2010); and Casey Nelson Blake, Howard Brick, and Daniel Borus, *At the Center: American Thought and Culture in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Lanham, 2020), 173–210.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

programmed sequences of lights flickered on and off.[39] The difference between these simple, coordinated movements and their status as "art" could not be discerned by merely looking.

This style of provocation, what I'll call the strategy of indiscernibility, was famously introduced by the French Dadaist Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp's most famous work, *Fountain*, was simply a white urinal signed "R Mutt" and was submitted to the Society of Independent Artists exhibition in New York in 1917. Duchamp's work and writings were disseminated among the American avant-garde during the 1960s via the work of his friend, French art historian Robert Lebel.[40] Many artists working in the wake of abstract expressionism followed both Duchamp and Cage's lead in making indiscernibility central to their practice. The same year as Kaprow introduced his *18 Happenings*, for example, the American painter Frank Stella described his *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor* (1959) paintings—monochrome black with exposed white lines of canvas—as work that utilized the "tools and techniques of the housepainter," begging the question of the line between Art with a capital "A" and the quotidian practice of painting one's home.[41] Other artists made the indiscernibility strategy even more explicit. In 1953, Robert Rauschenberg took a sketch by the abstract painter Willem de Kooning, erased it in its entirety, and then presented it as art.[42] And in 1964, the same year as Warhol displayed his "Brillo boxes," Robert Morris's *Untitled (Pink Felt)* asked visitors of New York's Green Gallery to contemplate the difference between a pile of pink felt on the floor in a corner and the same, indistinguishable arrangement presented, as Morris had done, as a work of art.[43]

While by no means exhaustive of the strategies of the postwar American avant-garde, those artists who utilized the indiscernibility paradigm posed the question of the relationship between art and life most explicitly. Rather than concede their victory in fully fusing art with life, however, Danto saw the strategy of indiscernibility as fortuitous source material for staking out a definition of art that vindicated the insights of postwar analysis. In making this connection in his undergraduate lectures during the early 1960s, he began to develop this definition in accord with the imperatives of analysis as he carved out a philosophy of art distinct from both American pragmatism and logical empiricism, one that would show how art, rooted in human value structures, functioned without metaphysical or theological support.

Art and analysis

The philosophy of art in the analytic tradition was and remains a somewhat marginal subfield. But during the 1950s, it reflected an emerging strategy of analytic philosophers in the English-speaking world more broadly in its privileging of

[39]Haskell, *Blam!*, 32.

[40]Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York, 1959).

[41]Frank Stella, "Pratt Institute Lecture," in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory, 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford, 1992), 806.

[42]On Rauschenberg see Branden Wayne Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-avant-garde* (Cambridge, 2003).

[43]On Morris see Maurice Berger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* (New York, 1989)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

natural, rather than formal, languages in solving philosophical problems. The logical empiricists had rejected natural language as a basis for their "scientific philosophy" during the 1930s and 1940s on the ground that it reflected certain prejudices inherited from Immanuel Kant's transcendental ego.[44] The senses, translated to logical language, became their basic unit of philosophical analysis. By the 1950s, however, many English philosophers, along with their American students and interlocutors, found deep problems with this approach. When faced with questions of *value* that ordinary psychological and anthropological considerations raised in the analysis of language *use*, an emerging generation of English-speaking philosophers made natural—or, as they described it, *ordinary*—language and its analysis a constitutive feature of the newly emerging identity of analytic philosophy.[45]

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 marriage.[46] Another eminent "don" of Oxford philosophy, Gilbert Ryle, built on and elaborated certain themes central to Austin's work in his *The Concept of Mind* (1949). In attempting to refute the image of the mind promoted by René Descartes as an ethereal entity enveloped by a body, Ryle developed a variant of linguistic behaviorism to show how such an image was a "category mistake" resulting from a confused application of language to idealist philosophical assumptions.[47] Even more influential, however, was the posthumous publication of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* in 1953 by his British student Elizabeth Anscombe.[48]

In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein criticized the implications of his earlier views in the *Tractatus Logicus Philosophicus* (1922), particularly regarding the issue of linguistic meaning. In the *Tractatus*, he had urged that knowledge was tantamount to the truth-functional composition of elementary propositions that "pictured" the facts of the world. While ambiguous about how exactly that "picturing" occurred, it was clear that the basic elements composing propositions were empirically verified by sensory 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"

[44]On "scientific philosophy" and its relation to Kant see Joel Isaac, *Working Knowledge: Making the Human Sciences from Parsons to Kuhn* (Cambridge, 2012), 16–22.

[45]Isaac, "Donald Davidson and the Analytic Revolution in American Philosophy, 1940–1970"

[46]J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, 1975; first published 1962).

[47]Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago, 2000; first published 1949).

[48]On Wittgenstein's importance to the introduction of psychological and anthropological concepts in 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* 14/1 (2017), 153–85; Joel Isaac, "Pain, Analytical Philosophy, and American Intellectual History"; Brad Baranowski, "America's Moral Conscience: John Rawls and the Making of Modern Liberalism" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin–Madison), Ch. 2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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."[49]

In his posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), however, Wittgenstein held that we should look, inductively, to the actual *use* of our language in its various human contexts. Here, he 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, did not operate based on a manual or rigid instruction book. Rather, 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 leading figures of the philosophy of art during the 1950s and early 1960s seized on this insight, particularly as it applied to the problem of *defining* art. Influential papers by the American philosophers Morris Weitz, William Kennick, and Paul Ziff converged on the view that, because there was no set of necessary and sufficient conditions that *all* artworks could fulfill, and given the fact that new artworks or styles often come into being that confounded more recognizable instances, then the task of providing a definition of art itself was futile. Rather, artworks existed in various classes of what Wittgenstein called "family resemblances": there was no discoverable *definition* of art, but rather overlapping classes of works of various types, occurring in different contexts.[50] On this account, the manifold *uses* of ordinary language to describe art and its tokens precluded an analytic definition of art itself.

In a broad sense, the "anti-definitional" stance among early analytic philosophers of art conformed to the vision of analytic philosophy that Danto was cultivating as his own, early in his career, in that it was resolutely anti-metaphysical. But it also smuggled in an ill-defined recognitional capacity that yoked art to a *perceptual* ability to recognize its various instantiations.[51] For Danto, this reinstated many of the original skeptical dilemmas that befell the logical empiricists in their emphasis on sensory impressions alone as the baseline of knowledge, critiques that formed the basis of his introduction to linguistic analysis at the University of Colorado. Such dilemmas yielded a larger strategy that came to be invoked by English-speaking philosophers who followed Wittgenstein more deeply down his linguistic rabbit hole in their search for an inductive, naturalistic basis for meaning that could compel logically sound definitions outside the domain of both idealism and materialism.

[49]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuiness (London, 1922), 69, original emphasis. The definitive biography of Wittgenstein is Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York, 1990). See also Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York 1973).

[50]Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15/1 (1956), 27–35; William Kennick, "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?", *Mind* 67/267 (1958), 317–34; Paul Ziff, "The Task of Defining a Work of Art," *Philosophical Review* 62/1(1953), 58–78; Noël Carrol, "Introduction," in Carrol, ed., *Theories of Art Today* (Madison, 2000), 3–23.

[51]Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 62.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

One such dilemma can be summed up thus: how were the tacit rules of linguistic use found in natural languages—what Wittgenstein described as our various human "forms of life"—grounded in something outside the mere consensus of a community, beyond the *observable* fact of simply "acting correctly"? To illustrate this point, Wittgenstein offered the example 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 1,000, he adds four, and proceeds: 1004, 1008, etc. And yet, even though he has added four, the pupil claims that he has been following the *same* rule throughout the series, before and after reaching 1,000.[52] The upshot is 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."[53] 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.[54]

This distinction—between mere physiological or sociological description of behavioral regularity on the one hand, and the normative grounding of such descriptions and behaviors on the other, formed the basis of many early analytic philosophers' attempts at showing how values functioned in a naturalistic universe. Likewise, it formed the basis of Danto's undergraduate lectures in the philosophy of art leading up to the publication of "The Artworld" in 1964.

Unlike many of his counterparts in the philosophy of art, however, many of Danto's assumptions were informed by the profusion of radical art then emerging in New York and elsewhere, which were flatly calling into question staid conventions of artistic "taste." Indeed, Danto had interacted with some of the leading figures spearheading that charge, including Cage, as well as the painters Ad Reinhardt and Phillip Guston, during classes on Zen Buddhism given at Columbia by the renowned Japanese philosopher D. T. Suzuki.[55] Accordingly, in 1961 he began an undergraduate course on the philosophy of art with an apt question: 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 contemporary era, when works of art could appear the same as an ordinary

[52]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford, 2009), §185.

[53]Ibid., 87.

[54]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, 1996).

[55]Ellen Pearlman, *Nothing and Everything: The Influence of Buddhism on the American Avant-Garde, 1942–1962* (Berkeley, 2012), 14–16; Arthur C. Danto, "Upper West Side Buddhism," in Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacobs, eds., *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004), 49–60, at 51.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

object, Danto argued, their appreciation seemed less and less connected to their purely perceptual features. The same year as Danto began his lecture, for example, Roy Lichtenstein had taken panels and speech balloons from comic strips and presented them in the form of his original art, an achievement not easily explained by appeal to its jejune imagery.[56] The key to explaining this watershed, however, seemed to lie 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 the 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 attributes like grace, then, required *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 order to have the aesthetic features we are able to recognize—that we cannot find recipes, either for recognizing or for producing aesthetic qualities."[57]

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."[58] What such sensitivity required, rather, was something that evaded both inborn ability and, more significantly, a rigid book of rules or prescriptions. For Danto, art making and art appreciation rested, rather than on 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."[59]

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 1960s in both America and Europe.[60] More often than not, moreover, that conflation yielded a view of art that yoked together its so-called autonomy with a rarefied intellectual capacity necessary for its discrimination. The American 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

[56]On Lichtenstein see Michael Lobel, *Image Duplicator: Roy Lichtenstein and the Emergence of Pop Art* (New Haven, 2002).

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

[58]Arthur C. Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics—Fall Semester, 1962–1963," Lecture 7, ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1.

[59]Ibid.

[60]On liberal intellectuals during the 1950s see Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 50s* (Middletown, 1985).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

accessible only to those fit to recognize its purity.[61] Likewise, German philosopher 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 forms of American vernacular.[62] By contrast, Danto was developing a notion of "taste" in a register that left 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.[63]

> 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.[64]

Danto's rejoinder was a rebuke to intellectuals like 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.[65] Against this way of thinking about art, Danto sought to decouple the centrality of the senses from the concept of art altogether.[66]

The modified conception of "taste" by which he sought to do so was derived largely from the English philosopher Frank Sibley and his recently published paper "Aesthetic Concepts" (1959). Sibley was a student of Gilbert Ryle's and, though not wholly uncritical of his work, had drawn on some of Ryle's fundamental insights about language to illustrate his take on artistic concepts. In *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle made the contrast between the bare, physiological descriptions of behavior such as playing chess, or sculpting, on the one hand, and their significance in a larger cultural web of meanings, on the other, central to his larger theoretical

[61]Dwight Macdonald, "Masscult and Midcult," in Macdonald, *Masscult and Midcult: Essays against the American Grain*, ed. John Summers (New York, 2011), 3–71. Cf. Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, 1988).

[62]Theodor Adorno, *Essays on Music*, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley, 2002), 470–500.

[63]On the centrality of spontaneity to this aura see Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago, 1998).

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

[65]Norman Mailer, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the White Hipster," *Dissent* 4/3 (1957), 276–93.

[66]Here, Danto was arguing against the "aura" associated with what the historian Daniel Belgrad has described as the postwar avant-garde's "culture of spontaneity," posed in opposition to the stultifying rhythms of corporate liberalism. Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

claim that the workings of the mind were not immaterial processes to be inferred from mere physical behavior. Here, Ryle's point was that, though such acts admitted of both physiological and cultural descriptions, the person engaged in such acts was not performing two types of processes, one physical and the other mental. Thought simply *was* behavior, though the difference between, say, winking and the mere contraction of one's eyelids was not discernible through mere perception.[67] Sibley applied this line of reasoning to the nature of artistic description by attempting to show the underdetermination of aesthetic concepts by perception alone. 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."[68] 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 judgment. 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.[69] Training, exposure, repetition, and guidance were the prerequisites for what appeared to some as the mysterious faculty or taste or artistic sensitivity. Artists like Warhol and Lichtenstein had made even the possibility of such a faculty moot.

Danto had drawn on the same resources used in Wittgenstein's skeptical dilemma and Ryle's quasi-behaviorism in his initial attempts at illustrating the inadequacy of perception alone to grounding art appreciation. To illustrate this point to his students, he used the analogy of "politeness." The polite person, he claimed, may *act* politely, may conform to the accepted rules of decorum for treating others with politeness. But if his *motives* for acting politely 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*

[67]Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 51–3, 245–7.

[68]Frank Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," *Philosophical Review* 68/4 (1959), 421–50, at 427, original emphasis.

[69]Ibid., 443.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

expression of his character."[70] 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.[71] 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.[72]

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 English-speaking analytic philosophers seeking philosophical 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.[73] Such basic facts helped Danto to illuminate the inadequacy of sense perception alone to explain why certain objects or presentations could be considered art, while others, perceptually indistinguishable from them, 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. 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 the cultural significance of artists like Warhol and Lichtenstein and became a fundamental point of departure in "The Artworld."

[70]Arthur C. Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics—Fall Semester, 1962–1963," Lecture 4, ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1, original emphasis.

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

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

[73]One of the most influential and representative works in this vein was P. F. Strawson's *Individuals* (London, 1959). Indeed, *Individuals* was an important source of Danto's thinking leading up to his publication of "The Artworld."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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.[74] 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 in which 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 deceive me, might lead me to doubt whether another really *was* in pain, or whether such pains resembled my own.[75]

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." The Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* 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 more broadly had important consequences for the development of the analytic philosophy of art during the 1960s. More particularly, it offered philosophers the resources to deal with certain conceptual problems raised by the nature of artistic appreciation, particularly in "hard" cases by artists such as Warhol. Warhol had shown the inadequacy of perception in art in order to undermine existing hierarchies between high and low art. For many critics during the 1960s, however, the denigration of perception alone to appreciating and classifying art was a dangerous precedent. For the British poet Julian Symons, 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."[76] 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" art while the other was "true" art. For American philosophers working on 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 than the initial wave of anti-definitionalism.[77]

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

[75]Isaac, "Pain, Analytical Philosophy, and American Intellectual History," 202–16.

[76]Julian Symons, "Cardboard Revolution," *New Statesman* 2/75 (1968), 146.

[77]On the anti-definitional turn in Anglo-American aesthetics during the 1950s see Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored* (New York, 1984), 33–73.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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.[78] For Cavell, the seeming evasion of human intention in such music raised the question of how to treat such a radical departure from established musical and artistic traditions.

Throughout "Music Discomposed," Cavell presented the indiscernibility paradigm as an antinomy 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."[79] 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."[80] 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 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."[81]

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

[78]On Schoenberg see Walter Frisch, ed., *Schoenberg and His World* (Princeton, 1999).

[79]Stanley Cavell, "Music Discomposed," in Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge, 1976), 180–212, at 187, emphasis mine.

[80]Ibid., 190.

[81]Ibid., 189.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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."[82] Likewise, we feel differently about a painting created by a person than about one, otherwise indiscernible, 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 antinomy of artifice and sincerity was a theme that became fundamental to the analytic philosophy of art 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. Indeed, as early as 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 titled "The Psychology and Aesthetics of 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."[83] 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 philosophy of art during the 1960s, the Harvard University 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."[84]

Although Goodman's views were not directly indebted to Wittgenstein, he had followed a broader trend in the analytic philosophy of art that revolved around the

[82]Ibid., 198.

[83]Hans Tietze, "The Psychology and Aesthetics of Forgery in Art," *Metropolitan Museum Studies* 5/1 (1934), 16–17.

[84]Nelson Goodman, "Art and Authenticity," in Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis, 1968), 99–126, at 104.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

indiscernibility paradigm. For Goodman, Cavell, and Danto, this was a novel philosophical strategy to illustrate the inadequacy of perception alone to concepts, like art, that were fundamentally grounded by value judgments. More than just a scholastic exercise, however, their stance echoed a broader trajectory in contemporary art in which the primacy of sensory impressions to art appreciation was being explicitly called into question.

From indiscernibility to interpretation

As Danto further developed his philosophy of art in his undergraduate lectures during the early 1960s, he sought to explicitly articulate a non-metaphysical view of art distinct from both logical empiricism and pragmatism. In doing so, he drew heavily on the indiscernibility paradigm to make his case for why the value-laden act of *interpretation* enfranchised works of art as such, undermining the necessity of perception to establishing a work's ontology. 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. All 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 say: there are four (at least) artworks here, but only one physical object."[85] Distinguishing between the four artworks, on this account, required interpretation, in this case aided significantly by the *titles* of the individual works. Titles 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.

Rather than a change in interpretive lens, a different way of seeing each painting based on the interpretation one marshalled from its title, Danto suggested that each interpretation fundamentally changed the object itself.

> For each change in interpretation is a change in the object: it is *not that we are seeing it in a different way*, 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 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.[86]

Interpretations in this sense were not simply *readings* of a particular artwork; they prefigured an ontological change in the object itself.[87]

[85]Arthur C. Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics—Fall Semester, 1962–1963," Lecture 3, ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1.

[86]Ibid., original emphasis.

[87]On this point, Danto was indebted to recently published works in the philosophy of science inspired by the "Wittgensteinian turn" in Anglo-American philosophy, particularly Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1962); and Norwood Russel Hanson's *Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science* (Cambridge, 1958).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

During the 1960s, interpretation itself had become an increasingly suspicious concept among a new generation of American intellectuals growing wary of its claims to a universal humanity.[88] This was particularly true for a younger generation of emerging art critics. In her 1964 essay "Against Interpretation," for example, the American critic and novelist Susan Sontag 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, 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."[89] 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 Things," a portion of its draft from 1971 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 *interpretation*. 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 *is* 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.[90]

But Danto had already been broaching this path with his students in the spring semester of 1963. Insofar as artworks became conterminous with ordinary objects for artists like Lichtenstein 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 Duchamp's *Fountain*, confounded both the noncognitive view of artworks and its corollary, that their appreciation depended on some sort of mystical "aesthetic experience," as Dewey had suggested. To that end, Danto posed a dilemma that befell both the noncognitivist (logical empiricist) and the mystic (Dewey) 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 they are having an "aesthetic experience"—they "get" 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 the American artist 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 Duchamp's "urinals," one having an ostensibly mystical "aesthetic experience," and the other seeing merely an ordinary tie or lowly urinal?

[88]On the suspicion of universality in American intellectual and literary life during the 1960s see Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man* (Princeton, 2016), 255–315; George Cotkin, *Feasts of Excess: A Cultural History of the New Sensibility* (Oxford, 2015).

[89]Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York, 1966), 23.

[90]Arthur C. Danto, "Artworks and Real Things, Draft," March 1971, 20, ACD Papers, Box 1, Folder 28, Series I, emphasis mine.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

On what does the first individual's aesthetic experience rest? On the view that art is *either* a noncognitive or a mystical experience, having an aesthetic experience would seem to rest on noticing a perceptible feature of an artwork. This put the noncognitivist 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."[91] What constituted an object as a work of art, rather, was a theory indexed to a certain moment in history.

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."[92] 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."[93] On the theory that artworks could directly resemble ordinary objects, this made interpretation indispensable to establishing the ontology of artworks distinguishable from ordinary objects.

For Danto, the "Artworld" was a loose assemblage of artists, galleries, museums, curators, critics, philosophers, collectors, and museumgoers. "Membership" in that world, moreover, required a knowledge of art history, contemporary art, and, significantly, the *theories* of art through which certain objects (or actions, or performances) 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 art world, 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."[94]

[91]Arthur C. Danto, "Lectures in Aesthetics—Fall Semester, 1962–1963," Lecture 7, ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1.

[92]Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy* 61/19 (1964), 571–84, at 580.

[93]Arthur C. Danto, "The Artworld—Draft," 12, ACD Papers, Box 6, Folder 5, Series 1, emphasis mine.

[94]Danto, "The Artworld," 581.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

One of the striking features of Danto's argument in "The Artworld," however, was that works that, logically, could "not have been art fifty years ago" contributed to an ontological reconfiguration of those that were. That is, on Danto's account, whenever new works came into being that confounded existing theories of art—such as artworks indistinguishable from ordinary objects—they added to the relevant set of predicates used to describe both contemporary and historical works. Here, in what he dubbed the "style-matrix," was a scheme in which the introduction of "ordinariness" (o), as a theory predicable of certain works, also made historical works, like bronze sculptures, "non-o." As new artistic developments were introduced, then, the combination of artistically relevant predicates increased exponentially. With the introduction of (o) into the world, works that preceded it, such as Renaissance portraits, suddenly gained the relevant predicate of (non-o). For Danto, it was

> this retroactive enrichment of the entities in the art world that makes it possible to discuss Raphael and De Kooning together, or Lichenstein and Michelangelo. The greater the variety of artistically relevant predicates, the more complex the individual members of the art world become; and the more one knows of the entire population of the art world, the richer one's experience with any of its members.[95]

Here, Danto had provided a logic-in-miniature for upending fundamental aesthetic concepts such as "taste" and art-historical "progress," rooted in the primacy of perception to artistic appreciation. Crucially, however, artists like Warhol and Lichtenstein had merely given legs to a philosophical paradigm that Danto had already been working within. In his attempts to provide a naturalistic account of art as a concept rooted in the value structures that supervened on language use, Warhol allowed Danto to run with them.

Conclusion

Following its publication, "The Artworld" laid the foundation for what came to be known in the analytic philosophy of art as the "institutional" theory of art, which would become the dominant position in that subfield for decades.[96] But the paper's legacy extends beyond its scholastic hegemony. In the following decades, sociologists built on its core assumptions to produce descriptive accounts of the inner workings of the "artworld" itself, conceding the predominance of art as an institutional practice, the necessity of theory to its enfranchisement, and the wildly ecumenical nature of its production.[97] What's more, however, Danto's early

[95]Ibid, 584.

[96]The "institutional theory of art" was largely promulgated through the work of the American philosopher George Dickie. George Dickie, "Defining Art," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6/3 (1969), 253–56; Dickie, "Defining Art II," in Matthew Lipman, ed., *Contemporary Aesthetics* (Boston, 1973), 118–13; Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca, 1974).

[97]Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley, 1982); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, 1987); Gary Alan Fine, *Talking Art: The Culture of Practice and the Practice of Culture in MFA Education* (Chicago, 2018); Lena, *Entitled*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

philosophy anticipated, and in many ways elaborated more carefully, a number of the broader theoretical stakes that came to define the intellectual history of contemporary art from the 1970s to the 1990s. The centrality of theory and interpretation to "The Artworld," for example, which undermined the basis of purely aesthetic claims to artistic legitimacy, became fundamental to several more high-profile theorists of art during the 1970s and 1980s such as Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp, and Benjamin Buchloh. Moreover, Danto's "style-matrix" committed him to a position that radically undermined the notion of art-historical progress and a faculty of "taste" based on either aesthetics or content, a commitment that many of these theorists explicitly clung to in their defense of an avant-garde and their attacks on artistic "pluralism" during these decades.[98]

Taking these claims into account, however, is not meant to engender mere invidious comparison. Rather, they speak to the need to understand how the intellectual history of contemporary art intersected with broader, and longer-range, developments in the history of American thought, in this case the unresolved legacy of naturalism and its attendant problem of providing a non-metaphysical account of value. The history of analytic philosophy is just one area where intellectual historians have overlooked these points of intersection. What the case of Arthur Danto shows more generally, however, is how the histories of academic professionalization, on the one hand, and the wider issues of cultural hierarchy, art-historical progress, and the changing stakes of criticism, on the other, are braided into the web of contemporary art's intellectual history.

Acknowledgements. I am extremely grateful to the three anonymous reviewers for *Modern Intellectual History*, and to Angus Burgin and the coeditors of the journal, for their extraordinarily helpful feedback and guidance in helping this article come to fruition. I also owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, Joel Isaac, Viren Murthy, and Richard Candida-Smith for helping me guide it through many inferior iterations.

[98]Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface," in Foster, ed., *The Anti-aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle, 1983), ix–xvi, at xv; Foster, "Against Pluralism," in Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle, 1985), 13–32, at 23; Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, 1985); Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (1979), 87; Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting," *October* 16 (1981), 39–68.

Cite this article: Hmiel JE (2022). Art and Indiscernibility: Arthur C. Danto and the Dynamics of Analytic Philosophy. *Modern Intellectual History* **19**, 1157–1181. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244321000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press