

The Routledge Companion to the Philosophies of Painting and Sculpture



Edited by Noël Carroll and Jonathan Gilmore

THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO THE PHILOSOPHIES OF PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

Comprising 45 chapters, written especially for this volume by an international team of leading experts, *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophies of Painting and Sculpture* is the first handbook of its kind. The editors have organized the chapters across eight broader sections:

- I Artforms
- II History
- III Questions of form, style, and address
- IV Art and science
- V Comparisons among the arts
- VI Questions of value
- VII Philosophers of art
- VIII Institutional questions

Individual topics include art and cognitive science, evolutionary origins of art, art and perception, pictorial realism, artistic taste, style, issues of race and gender, art and religion, art and philosophy, and the end of art. The work of selected philosophers is also discussed, including Diderot, Hegel, Ruskin, Gombrich, Goodman, Wollheim, and Danto. With an introduction from the editors and comprehensively indexed, *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophies of Painting and Sculpture* serves as a point of entry to the subject for a broad range of students as well as an up-to-date reference for scholars in the field.

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Designed cover image: Caravaggio, *Bacchus* (c. 1598), Gallerie degli Uffizi,

First published 2023

by Routledge

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

and by Routledge

4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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ISBN: 978-1-138-23381-2 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-32071-7 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-31272-7 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003312727

Typeset in Bembo
by codeMantra

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INTRODUCTION

Noël Carroll and Jonathan Gilmore

The oldest extant examples of what we call art are prehistoric works of painting and sculpture, such as the cave paintings of Lascaux and statuette of the Venus of Willendorf. Although we cannot be certain of the fine-grained meanings that these objects held for their creators, we can infer to some degree their general communicative intent, since their representational content addresses us across the ages. As human history advanced, these arts continued to play a role, participating in the conversations of the cultures in which they emerged nearly universally and expressing the religious, ethical, and even metaphysical commitments of the societies they helped bring into existence.

This history has been long and complicated, as the visual arts mutated into a range of artforms, especially in the 20th century. Thus, we begin this anthology with a section devoted to a catalogue of some of these many permutations. Although the title of this companion refers to only two kinds of artforms, it addresses the larger domain of those fine arts that were once called the “plastic arts;” the kinds of art in the creation of which the aims, materials, and methods of painting and sculpture have played a central role. The companion also addresses movements, practices, and theoretical projects in the arts that defined themselves by contrast with how—historically and conceptually—the fine arts have been identified.

As the history of the visual arts is complex, in the second section, we present surveys of (selective) episodes in the development of Western art, including antiquity, the middle ages, the renaissance, and the modern period, along with discussions of contemporary art.

Not only is the history of visual art complex; so are the concepts we use to describe, explain, and understand it. Thus, we have canvased such concepts as style, realism (in the sense of representation), the avant-garde, functional art, pictorial organization, and philosophical art. Moreover, the visual arts have also recently become objects of scientific scrutiny both in terms of the cognitive/perceptual operations they engage and the challenges they present to evolutionary psychology. For that reason, we have included a section on cutting-edge research into the visual arts in the cognitive and affective sciences.

One way to better understand a given phenomenon is to contrast it with its near neighbors. Thus, we present a section of substantial comparisons between painting, photography, comics, printmaking, dance, theater, and architecture.

Art, as already mentioned, has perennially played an integral role in the dissemination and reinforcement of values—both for good and for ill. This is perhaps most obvious in its recurring partnership with religious practice. In our section on art and value, we have included an overview, not only of art in relation to religion, but of its intersection with questions of race, gender, and

eros. Finally, along with an account of the value of authenticity in relation to forgeries, we include an account of the relevance of truthfulness to art-appreciative discourse.

Though not as vast as the history of art, the history of the philosophy of art is also long lived. So, starting in the modern period, we review a number of our distinguished forebears, including Diderot, Hegel, Ruskin, Gombrich, Goodman, Wollheim, and Danto.

We conclude with a section on art institutions and audiences, including discussions of the museum and the issues involved in the restoration and preservation of art, the placement of sculpture in exhibitions, and, finally, the concept of taste as it applies to an audience's response to painting and sculpture.

Perhaps needless to say, the entries presented here cover only a small part of the territory identified with the philosophy of painting, sculpture, and the vast variety of arts that have found an impetus in relation to those earlier artforms. In that respect, this anthology is only a companion for part of the way forward. But, it is hoped that it has introduced enough of a sense of the terrain that one can continue reliably on one's exploratory journey alone.

PART I

Artforms



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1

PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO PAINTING

Jonathan Gilmore

1 Definition

We are concerned here not with all kinds of painting, but only with the works produced by what, following Richard Wollheim (1987), we will call *painting as an art*. So central to our discussion are works of such overlapping kinds as frescoes, encaustics, altarpiece panels, landscapes, portraits, still-lifes, depictions of historical events, and abstractions. We might also extend the concept with qualifications to more peripheral kinds of paintings, *inter alia*: those created in novel or idiosyncratic media, such as Chuck Close's portraits composed with small paper disks and Andy Warhol's *Oxidation* canvases created with urine and copper-based paints; works whose conditions of creation are essential to what they convey, such as street art; and objects that result from equipping non-human animals or machines with tools and materials of fine art. Whether or not the creative mechanisms, and conceptual and performative aims, of such works count against their status as paintings is a question a proper understanding of the core concept of painting should help illuminate. In any case, in what follows, reference to painting will be assumed to include the qualification “as an art” except where indicated.

The extraordinary variety of instances, contemporary and historical, of painting would seem to render futile any attempt to find an essence to the art form, or a definition adumbrating necessary and jointly sufficient conditions under which an object is a painting. However, some structure might be given to the concept when it is construed as referring to a cluster of individually weighted properties. No single one of these considerations would be dispositive in answering the question of a given artifact, “is this a painting?” But the presence or absence of such properties would help to explain not just why core cases seem prototypical of paintings, but why there is reasonable disagreement or uncertainty about the identification of those on the periphery. A non-exhaustive list of such properties whose possession would tend, perhaps with different weights, toward the identification of an object as a painting includes being:

- A visual product of intentional activity
- An artifact that endures beyond a viewer's experience of it
- A visual representation that is most naturally seen via its vertical and horizontal axes being perpendicular to a spectator's line of vision
- A surface composed of discrete marks so as to realize a cumulative visual effect
- A surface covered in a viscous medium, such as oil paint, tempera, gouache, or acrylic, the recognition of which as such is of artistic or aesthetic interest

- A depiction that permits its content to be recognized in a configuration of lines, shapes, and colors
- A work of art
- An artifact created in light of and with reference to other artifacts identified as paintings and
- A marked surface that serves as a conduit via which “the mental state of an artist makes itself felt within the mind of a spectator...” (Wollheim, 1987: 22).

Not only might there be many other properties, the possession of which would point toward something being a painting, but some properties might count against an object’s inclusion. For example, some theories of forgeries question whether they are works of art or even paintings aspiring to be art, rather than merely objects designed to give viewers a false experience of being such (see Hick, “Forgery and Authenticity,” this volume). In this way of thinking, forgeries are no more what they purport to be than a visualization of a mountain provided by a virtual reality headset is a real mountain. Furthermore, even the most widely shared properties on that list admit exceptions of bona-fide paintings. Most paintings are appropriately viewed head-on, with a picture plane perpendicular to a spectator’s line of vision, but anamorphic paintings such as Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* require a sideway point of view for their content to be revealed, and Michelangelo’s fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel ceiling has been described as resolving into a coherent image only when seen from a position that foreshortens otherwise disproportionately large figures (Steinberg, 2019).

Finally, some works are both paintings and art but may not exemplify painting as an art. For example, Sol LeWitt’s *Red Square, White Letters* of 1963, a conceptual critique of the visual autonomy attributed to late-modernist painting, is indeed painted in oil on canvas but asks for its content to be read off of its colored and shaped textual labels, not its visual presentation. Lucio Fontana’s brightly painted slashed canvases (*Cuts*) of the late 1950s and 1960s are aesthetically and artistically compelling but may only incidentally belong to the genre whose conventions the works aim to critique.

As we will see, historical and contemporary theories of painting have typically seized on one or more salient property of works in the genre and defended that or those properties as central to the concept, often at the expense of diminishing other properties that would be salient in different contexts. With few exceptions, such theories do not merely describe or define paintings but seek to advance a view of what makes them artistically or aesthetically valuable. In some cases, these theories, although purporting to address the nature of painting generally, are introduced with the more specific aim of vindicating critical judgments of a given style, movement, or artist’s work, particularly those that challenge heretofore conventions of the practice. Thus Roger Fry, seeking to defend his judgment of the new style that he found in such diverse artists as Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Cézanne, argued that the highest value of modern art was to be found in its aim through formal means to express and arouse the emotions, not in its recording of the visual aspects of nature—a project he attributed to the Impressionists and which he claimed “had been pushed to the point where further development was impossible.” Although none of these theories survives philosophical scrutiny, considering them is instructive for understanding the nature and artistic value of their respectively privileged property, even if we withhold commitment to its essentialist role. Here we will also discuss aspects of paintings that are sometimes identified as explaining the nature of paintings, even if playing that role is not characterized as essential.

2 Representational vs. Configurational Dimensions

Most paintings involve the representation of something via marks on a two-dimensional surface. Abstract paintings are not, in virtue of their abstraction, excluded from this group. For just as

figurative painting might represent a landscape, so an abstract painting might represent a mood or an idea. What distinguishes figurative from abstract is more specifically that abstract paintings, although sometimes representational, are not *depictive*—they don’t offer an experience as if of the visual properties of what they represent. More specifically, *qua* abstraction they don’t offer that experience (i.e., an abstract painting of fire might not be abstract with respect to its use of the hues of red and black). Sometimes this is because what they represent has no visual property, as in the case of abstract ideas. Other times, an abstract painting is presented so as to elicit an aesthetic interest in its formal qualities—the appearance and relations among its shapes, colors, lines, how its elements are arranged, and its decorative qualities—without an attribution of content or meaning to those marks. And, finally, an abstraction may represent a nonperceptual feature of a perceptible thing, such as a portrait sitter’s institutional status or emotional fragility. We may, for example, need to infer such contents of the representation from what *is* indeed visually represented, or be elicited to attribute such nonperceptual contents to the representation through its arousal of the relevant feelings in viewers.

Let us focus for the moment only on paintings understood as visual representations of their objects (as opposed to symbolic or expressive representations). They can be characterized under two kinds of descriptions. Under one description, we refer to a painting’s *configurational* dimensions: the design and arrangement of its marks, colors, shapes, and other features of its literal surface. Under the other description, we refer to the painting’s *representational* dimensions: the object of which it presents a visual experience (where this object is something other than an element of the configurational properties that we literally see). So, under the first description we can refer to the lines, brushstrokes, shapes, and colors of Caravaggio’s c.1596 *Bacchus*; under the second description, we can refer to the boy dressed as the god, the grapes and wine leaves in his hair, and the goblet he holds. Registering the appearance of the painting under both descriptions, we can then attribute certain other symbolic and expressive properties to its content, such as that it presents us with a non-idealized human form (the boy’s fingernails are dirty and there is a hint of stubble on his cheek) and that it perhaps refers to an actual human model, Caravaggio’s pupil or assistant, not the deity of which he bears the accoutrements.

Although the terms have been employed in many ways, we will refer here, by stipulation, to theories that attend to the first kind of dimensions as a source of painting’s distinctiveness and value as *formal accounts* and refer to theories that attend to the second kind of dimensions as *mimetic accounts*. Although the difference between these kinds of accounts may lie merely in what kinds of properties each seeks to emphasize or explain, the accounts have often been articulated as exclusive rivals. So we will first discuss each approach separately and then turn to theories that seek to show how the nature and value of painting can be understood only through attending to the joint contribution of what those two accounts treat as exclusive foci. Yet we will also see the inadequacy of speaking of the nature and value of paintings exclusively in terms of what they depict and the formal means by which that depiction is achieved. For that we will need to consider how the medium or material, *as such*, of a painting may sometimes contribute to its contents and effects.

3 Mimetic Accounts of Painting

Individually or as a class, paintings may have many sorts of values, *inter alia*, historical, cognitive, religious, monetary, status-signaling, and functional values. These and other values could in many circumstances be realized in other art forms and in artifacts that are not identified as art (see Parsons, “Functional Art,” this volume).

Theories that attribute a distinctive value to painting thus try to show that it has some capacity for the realization of value that other art forms and artifacts do not. The natural candidates for such a capacity are found in the visual experience that painting affords. The thought here is that

there is something unique or at least especially effective in that visual experience through which a painting realizes certain values, perhaps, including such values as those cited above. Where such theories differ is in how they characterize that experience and the means by which it is produced.

Mimetic accounts of painting see that experience as primarily constituted by our perception of a certain kind of *content*: the visual properties of the object, scene, state of affairs, and so on, that the painting represents. Such theories acknowledge that a painting may engage in several different kinds of representation. A painting may represent (to borrow language from Saussure, 1983) something *indexically*, as footprints do. We see this in how Robert Ryman's canvases composed of repeated and parallel brushstrokes instantiate physical traces of the movement of his hand as he applied them; and in how Jackson Pollock's works register the gestures he employed as he poured and dripped paint onto canvas. Other paintings represent symbolically, via conventions, as the bird in Raphael's *Madonna of the Goldfinch* represents the Passion. Yet those forms of representation don't reflect what makes painting a specifically *visual* art. For tactile information could tell us information about the movement of an artist's hand in creating a work, and symbolic descriptions are employed in verbal art forms as well. Thus, the mimetic account seeks to ground its answer to what is distinctive and valuable in painting in some dimension of how paintings communicate their contents in the first instance via visual representation. Here, what matters is how an artist's gesture is presented visually, whether or not the visual representation is genuinely caused by the movement it seems to be a trace of, and how a symbol is itself visually depicted, e.g., how the bird in Raphael's *Madonna of the Goldfinch* is painted such that it can serve as a reminder to audiences literate in such symbols of Jesus' later suffering.

One version of the mimetic theory holds that the visual experience paintings offer is one of an actual object—where, that is, what a painting allows us to see is what we would see if we could confront the object face-to-face. But that account is too crude, not only because paintings often offer a visual experience of something that doesn't exist but also because paintings show us their subjects represented in ways that may or may not correspond to how those subjects look in the flesh.

A more sophisticated version of the mimetic theory recognizes that paintings do not represent their subjects “transparently.” Rather, paintings offer us a visual experience as if it were of their subjects, without that visual experience necessarily aspiring to conform to what a visual experience would in fact be of the subject encountered extra-pictorially. Thus, a painting of a beautiful movie star—like De Kooning's *Marilyn Monroe* (1954)—can represent her as grotesque; a painting of a populated industrialized countryside—like Impressionist landscapes that edit out the evidence of the railroad—can represent it as pristine and pastoral. And Caravaggio's *Bacchus* can represent his model as the god of wine, or as a young man just past the flush of youth dressing up as the mythological character. Here, the value of the visual experience a painting offers is to be found in the value of the visual experience of the painting's content—the object or scene *as it is represented* by the painting.

The mimetic account of painting has a long pedigree and gains a *prima facie* support from histories of the arts (at least those of Western Art) that purport to trace a progressive mastery of techniques by which visual aspects of the experience of real things can be registered in a representation. We can see intimations of such a historical account in Vasari's 1550 narrative of the progress of painting from Giotto through Michelangelo, “the end and perfection of art” and in the (perhaps apocryphal) anecdote told about the academic history painter Paul Delaroche who, upon seeing a daguerreotype in 1839, exclaimed “from today, painting is dead” (Bann, 1997).

How paintings depict their objects so as to give us an experience as if it were of those objects has historically been answered through a particular theory of depiction that we can call *illusionism*. (We will see in a moment not only why that theory is unsatisfactory as a theory of depiction but also why mimetic approaches need not be saddled with a commitment to illusionism.) The idea

that paintings fool viewers into thinking they actually stand before the subjects the paintings depict is most dramatically illustrated in the Roman writer Pliny's narrative of the contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasius over who is the greater painter (see Pappas, "Antiquity," this volume). There, Zeuxis presents a painting of grapes that is so realistic that the birds descend from the trees to peck at the panel. Yet, when he asks Parrhasius to remove drapery covering his painting, the latter reveals that his creation is only a depiction of drapery. Whereas the one contestant succeeds in causing mere birds to confuse a painting with what it depicts, the other triumphs by fooling a celebrated artist. Plato presents a similar but much dimmer view of how painting works in the *Republic*:

a painter, we say, will paint us a cobbler, a carpenter, and other craftsmen, though he himself has no expertness in any of these arts. But, nevertheless, if he were a good painter, by exhibiting at a distance his picture of a carpenter he would deceive children and foolish men, and make them believe it to be a real carpenter.

(598b–c)

Finally, in *Art and Illusion*, Ernst Gombrich offers a comparable theory that paintings depict their objects through aiming to cause an experience like that of the object being present before the viewer (see Seeley, "E.H. Gombrich," this volume). However, Gombrich doesn't suggest, like Plato, that such illusionism causes viewers to form the false belief that a painting is actually what it depicts. That would be a theory of painting as prompting *delusion*, which outside of invented stories, is rarely instantiated in our encounters with works of art. There is some controversy over whether Gombrich's analysis of depiction is committed to paintings actually achieving such illusionism, but a plausible interpretation of his theory is that for a picture to depict some content X is for the picture to be composed in such a way that it tends to cause audiences to have an experience as if they are viewing X itself. Such illusionistic accounts of depiction have been heavily criticized, principally on the grounds that, outside of genres such as *trompe l'oeil*, we rarely experience what a painting depicts as if it were there in the flesh. We do not even experience, say, a tendency that is overridden by our recognition that we stand before a representation, to see paintings this way.

However, the failure of illusionism as a theory of depiction hardly undermines the mimetic theories of painting. Indeed, a proponent of such a theory may appeal to a number of other highly developed, if rival, theories of how paintings depict their contents. (For a full discussion of such theories, see Hyman, and Bantinaki, 2021.)

One alternative theory of depiction appeals to the notion of *visual recognition*. In this account, developed in Schier (1986) and Lopes (1996), we recognize the things pictures depict via the same mental capacities we employ in recognizing those things outside of pictorial contexts. Here, for a picture to visually represent X is for us to recognize X in the picture just as we would an actual X, not for us to necessarily have the experience we would of X in the flesh. A painting depicts, e.g., a bridge insofar as we can recognize a bridge in the painting using the same capacities involved in seeing a real bridge.

A second alternative is the theory that a painting depicts some extra-pictorial thing insofar as viewers experience a *resemblance* in certain respects between the painting's surface and that thing. Thus, for Robert Hopkins (1998) and Catharine Abell (2007), who have each developed resemblance theories of depiction, a painting depicts, say, a bridge through affording an experience of its surface as resembling in certain respects a bridge. One of the more important respects identified here is an object's outline shape: something O is seen in a surface P iff P is experienced as resembling O in outline shape (Hopkins: 77).

A third kind of theory, *conventionalism*, dispenses with notions of perceptual resemblance between a painting's surface and what it depicts. Instead, conventionalist theories (such as that

introduced by Nelson Goodman [1968] and developed by John Kulvicki [2006b]) treat pictorial depiction as a function of the role a symbol plays in a certain system.

Goodman thus argues that a picture does not visually represent something by providing a mimetic appearance or resemblance to it. Rather, a painting of X visually represents x in virtue of the semantic and syntactic conventions that constitute the symbol system to which the painting of X belongs (1968: 42). Such a system (Goodman refers to “the traditional Western system of representation” [1968: 226] as an example) is made up of rules that associate symbols with certain denotata. So just as the noun “boot” refers to a boat in German but a boot in English, a “Blue Nude” painting might represent a woman with an ordinary appearance in a system associated with a Fauvist style or one with an unusual complexion in a system associated with a realist style. Here, depictions of the sort addressed by perceptual and resemblance theories are construed as just as arbitrarily related to what they depict as linguistic descriptions are to what they represent.

While the conventionalist approach has been found to be much more controversial than recognition or resemblance views, it is important to note that none of these theories limits itself to explaining just painterly depiction; in principle, they aspire to explain depiction across many different domains, including that found in photographs, diagrams, and maps. Thus, worries over a theory such as conventionalism when it is restricted to painting may be compensated for by a strength in the theory’s general applicability over many kinds of depiction beyond painting.

Even when a mimetic theory does not explicitly identify a commitment to one of the above explanations of depiction, it must offer some account of what specifically it is in the experience of a painting’s depicted contents that can supply painting’s distinctive value.

In some cases, that value might be identical to the value of experiencing a painting’s object in the flesh. Prior to the invention of photography, paintings were one means by which people could experience what were presented as realistic depictions of such things as foreign locales, historical events, deceased relatives, and for the aristocracy, even marriage prospects. However, that documentary function cannot of course be the only source of painting’s value. For if the value of paintings is found in the appearance of something that, in principle, we might confront directly, unmediated by a representation, it is hard to explain why we often savor the visual experience of a painting of a landscape more than seeing that part of nature in person.

Relatedly, we often take pleasure in seeing things depicted in paintings that we would suffer from seeing for real. Aristotle puzzled over that latter phenomenon, suggesting in the *Poetics* that “we enjoy looking at the most exact portrayals of things whose actual sight is painful to us” (he refers to pictures of corpses as an example) because of the pleasure we take in acquiring knowledge of those things (Aristotle, 1987). Even if this is true of the first occasion, it isn’t clear that such compensation is available upon subsequent viewings of the same image, in relation to which the putative knowledge has already been acquired. Also, we need an explanation of why, when paintings depict things that could just as easily be represented via photography, we do not necessarily value the latter experience over the former.

Finally, while viewers of a painting might take pleasure in its success in depicting a three-dimensional reality on a two-dimensional surface—that is, just its being an *achievement* of a visual representation—this can be only a partial answer to what is distinctive of value in painting. For that kind of value attaches to any successful painterly depiction, irrespective of what content it makes available to viewers. An explanation of what makes the experience of a painting valuable should, by contrast, recognize some role played by the specific properties of its contents, not merely that any given contents are represented. Whereas the defect there is to find value only in a representation qua representational vehicle, without regard to the specific contents represented, a contrary defect attends 17th and 18th century academic theories committed to the hierarchy of genres. There, a painting that portrayed a historical event or monarch would, by virtue merely of that subject, be attributed a higher value than one that depicted a domestic scene or arrangement

of flowers (see Wrigley, 1993). That is, these theories located the value of paintings in their extra-pictorial subjects themselves, not in the subjects-as-represented by the paintings.

More illuminating versions of the mimetic approach to painting identify, not the value of the visual experience of the bare subjects that paintings present, but what is special about painting's visual content across many different kinds of subjects. Such theories aim to tell us what is distinctive in painting's specifically visual mode of representing things. Renaissance defenders of painting in the *paragone*, or contest of the arts, thus typically pointed to what they claimed painting could show or achieve that sculpture, poetry, and, by extension, other arts could not, such as the color and texture of things, or how all elements of some state of affairs look at the same time (sculpture, by contrast, requires one to shift one's position to take in all that it represents). For other theorists, such as Lessing, the capacity to represent a certain kind of beauty is painting's essential function (Lessing, 1766/1962). For later theorists, such as Ruskin (1906), paintings serve as visual prosthetics: showing us more of what can be seen in what we see. And artists as varied as Chardin, Cezanne, and modernist Photorealists have been interpreted as engaging in the representation of objects not for their visual properties alone but in order to convey some thesis—only conveyable through painting—about the nature of vision and representation itself (Gilmore, 2005).

4 Formalist Theories of Painting

Of course, a theory of painting that focused solely on the genre's represented contents would ignore a fundamental feature of such works—that they are representations in paint. In other words, a theory of painting ought to explain our interest in, and the capacities for representation afforded by, such painterly resources as lines, shapes, contours, brushstrokes, hues, glazes, scumble, granulation, washes, and textures of the canvas, linen, plaster, or wood support. A staunch defender of the mimetic account might argue that all such painterly means are of interest solely for their contribution to a painting's capacity to present a visual experience as being of what it depicts. But as noted above, this would fail to explain why the visual experience a painting provides of a subject-as-represented can have aesthetic or artistic values that, say, a photograph of, sculpture of, or actual encounter with, the subject does not. Often a representation of something is of greater aesthetic interest to us than a visual experience of the actual thing itself. Other theories thus focus on aspects of painting whose artistic and aesthetic value is not exhausted in their contribution to the presentation of the depicted object. Emphasis on the distinctiveness and value of such configurational aspects of painting in the history and criticism of art is associated with the concept of *formalism*.

Some versions of formalism evolved as a reaction against the earlier mimetic theories and yet, like those earlier theories, often turn out to be accounts of painting's value masquerading as accounts of its essential nature. What they stress, and this is particularly so once technical achievements of realism are largely mastered and widely demonstrated, is the artistic value that is to be found in painting's configurational aspects (see Nanay "Pictorial Organization" for a discussion of surface pictorial organization and its relation to formalism, this volume).

Thus Clement Greenberg asserted that the history of painting from Manet and his contemporaries to the Abstract Expressionists, whom Greenberg championed in his own day, was painting's progressive shedding of all that wasn't essential to it, including that which could be achieved by other art forms such as literature and sculpture. This culminated, he asserted, in painting achieving a kind of "flatness," one that, in excluding three-dimensional space, is to be appropriately experienced and evaluated only for its configurational aspects (Greenberg, 1940). Greenberg allowed that paintings after Manet might seem deeply committed to mimetic aims but argued that it was only in virtue of their reference to their two-dimensional picture plane that they are to be judged as paintings (1960/1993).

The historical and explanatory commitments a theory such as Greenberg's must take on render it highly implausible as a theory of painting's essence or value. It would have to claim that naturalistic painters outside the particular modernist tradition Greenberg narrates were misguided in what dimension of their craft best realized artistic or aesthetic values peculiar to painting. However, Greenberg's theory can be charitably interpreted (against his intentions) with much more limited scope: as a critical analysis of the aims of some of the painters he championed, making salient which of their properties are relevant to artistic appreciation of works in light of their aims or purposes (see Gilmore, 2011). In the same way we might respond to Roger Fry's justification of Post-Impressionism before a skeptical audience accustomed to traditional realist and academic modes of representation: we can consistently reject the claim that the investigation of form is central or essential to painting and yet acknowledge that such investigation might have a comparatively greater potential for the realization of artistic value in certain periods, for example, when the alternative project of naturalistic depiction seemed to reach a limit, or when abstraction seemed capable of communicating content that figuration could not.

5 Dual Aspect Accounts

When proposed as exclusive theories of painting, neither configurational nor representational accounts succeed. Configurational theories that focus on formal features and representational theories that focus on mimetic features each identify important dimensions of painting. Where they fail is in treating their favored dimension as central to the nature and value of the art form. *Dual aspect* accounts attempt to improve on those partial theories by attending to both those dimensions and how they interrelate.

One way to account for the dual aspects of a painting is to treat each dimension described above as contributing to a work's value additively: the value of a painting is the sum of the values of our visual experience of the configurational elements and the represented content. Ernst Gombrich's description of our experience of paintings as involving aspect perception seems to endorse this additive approach. He suggests that we flip back and forth in viewing a painting between seeing it as presenting its represented content and seeing it as a formal configuration of lines, patches of color, and so on. There, our experience of a painting involves a cognitive and perceptual operation of *seeing as*: preferentially attending to some of a painting's features lets us see it as one thing, preferentially attending to other features has us see it as another, as in the experience described in a novel by Jack London:

An oil painting caught and held him... There was beauty, and it drew him irresistibly. He forgot his awkward walk and came closer to the painting, very close. The beauty faded out of the canvas... He stared at what seemed a careless daub of paint, then stepped away. Immediately all the beauty flashed back into the canvas. 'A trick picture,' was his thought, as he dismissed it...

(London, *Martin Eden*)

Although one could, like London's character, attend to a single daub of paint to the exclusion of registering whatever object or scene it serves the representation of, the *seeing-as* account doesn't explain how our in-principle distinct forms of attention to configurational and representational elements of a painting can--and perhaps in some cases must--interrelate. On the one side, we cannot see a painting's represented content without literally seeing features that belong to a description of the painting's configuration. We can't, for example, see a red ball without seeing whatever lines, colors, and shapes constitute the representation of the red ball. On the other side,

at least with figurative paintings, one of the non-arbitrary ways to see the relevant configurational properties of a painting as constituting a formal design or pattern is to see those properties in light of the structure given to them by the object or scene they serve to represent. That is, among the ways in which to objectively individuate lines, shapes, brushstrokes, and so on, on the surface of a painting into distinct groups or patterns of color is to refer (if only implicitly) to their contribution to a visual experience of the painting's represented object. It should be said that this is not the only non-arbitrary way to individuate such configurational elements, for a painting's surface may reveal a pattern, e.g., a grid or a systematic direction of brushstrokes, that is of visual interest independent of whatever the painting represents.

Richard Wollheim's concept of *seeing-in* supplies a better characterization of our *prima facie* experience of seeing a represented object in and through configurational elements, and of seeing such configurational elements via their role in representing an object (Wollheim, 1980). For Wollheim, it is essential to the way pictures depict that they provide a "twofold" experience: we are aware of both a picture's surface and what it depicts, and the latter is seen in the former. In Wollheim's proposal, the phenomenon of seeing-in comprises not two visual experiences between which we flip back and forth, but one visual experience with two simultaneous dimensions: that of a picture's (literally present) surface configuration and that of the (not literally present) three-dimensional space the picture depicts. Seeing-in occurs in contexts outside of our encounters with representations, as other phenomena—such as a cloud or a stained wall—permit us to see things in their configured surfaces. But what distinguishes those experiences from pictorial depiction in Wollheim's view is that only the latter involves a form of normativity. There is no right or wrong way to see a figure in a cloud, whereas there is plausibly the possibility of misrecognition and failure to see altogether what is represented in a painting.

The source of the normativity Wollheim attributes to seeing-in is tendentious. He suggests that what is to be seen in the marked surface of a painting is constrained by what its creator intended, but other accounts leave room for unintended depictions that are nonetheless recognizable via seeing-in. Whether all paintings invite seeing-in is also controversial. Trompe-l'oeil paintings aim to diminish attention to their surface properties, even as those properties must be visually registered to see the playing cards, letters, and so on, that the trompe-l'oeil represents. And some paintings, such as minimalist works and those of purely decorative design, frustrate attempts to attend to any visually represented content, excluding even the appearance of a shallow spatial depth that obtained in the most austere non-figurative abstract expressionist works. Denying that they offered a window onto some virtual scene, Frank Stella quipped of his paintings (often mounted on thick stretchers to emphasize their status as objects), "what you see is what you see" (Stella, 1966). While the tautology is of course true of even traditional figurative paintings that invite seeing-in, a theory that posits seeing-in as an essential dimension of the experience of any painting either excludes many instances of what *prima facie* are paintings or invites the wrong kind of experience of those works—wrongly recommending, say, that we seek to discover some hidden object or scene emerging from a purely abstract design.

A third approach that recognizes the dual aspects of painting, a theory that is consistent with Wollheim's notion of seeing-in, holds that sometimes our awareness of a painting's subject or content is *inflected* by our awareness of the formal aspects of how it is rendered. Robert Hopkins describes the purported phenomenon of inflection this way: "[s]ometimes, what is seen in a surface includes properties a full characterization of which needs to make reference to that surface's design (conceived as such)" (Hopkins, 2010: 158; see also Nanay, 2010). Demonstrations of inflection typically feature cases in which our awareness of how paint and brushstroke are handled shapes our perception of what is represented by those means. Thus, Michael Podro remarks of a painting by Veronese of a woman turned away from us (later titled *Unfaithfulness*) "the sense of the brush across the heavy weave canvas intimates the physical immanence of the woman's back" (Podro,

1998: 13). Here, Podro speaks of how features of the form or design of a painting are “recruited” into the scene visible in the picture (Podro, 1998: 13, 26). Comparably, we can say that our awareness of the mottled, textured, scored, and roughened surfaces of Lucien Freud’s paintings conditions our perceptual experience of the represented flesh of the people he portrays. Thus, in works that exhibit inflection, there can be an aesthetically or artistically valuable relationship between our awareness of the represented object and of the nature of the particular configurational elements used to render it. In proposing the existence of that relation, the theory of inflection offers a way of understanding how the visual experience of an object within a painting might not be available, even in principle, outside of that form of representation.

However, it is not clear what the theory that some or all paintings exhibit inflection adds to the already noted point that it is in virtue of our literal perception of a painting’s surface qualities (its configurational qualities) that we see its represented object (Hopkins, 2010). Not all properties literally seen on the surface of a painting (such as creases in a canvas or areas where pigment has faded) appropriately enter into our visual experience of its represented object. In this sense, paintings exhibiting inflection are not different in kind from those that do not. In all cases, viewers must at least implicitly decide which of a painting’s surface features properly constitute the work of art (and which do not), and thus belong to it as a representational vehicle that determines how we see its object (see Danto, 1981).

Perhaps (as some of the figurative language characterizing its instantiation suggests) the phenomenon of inflection should not be construed as solely visual, but covers any case in which the content of a painting is in part constituted by an awareness of one or more of its physical properties—e.g., the gestures or tools it bears the traces of, the materials it is composed of, the textures of its painted surface or canvas support. Understood that way, inflection describes one of the ways in which the manipulation of the standard materials of the art form can contribute to its contents. That is, inflection shows one way in which aspects of what David Davies calls painting’s “vehicular medium”—the materials that are operated on to produce a work—can count as aspects of painting’s “artistic medium”—materials or the manipulation of which, as such, supply a work’s meaning (see Davies, 2005). As Davies (“Sculpture,” this volume) writes, “artistic medium mediates between the vehicular medium and the artistic content” (see also, Boyce, *The Medium(-Re)viewed*, this volume).

That recognition that the content of a painting is not merely causally dependent on, but constituted by an awareness of, its material constitution is registered in one of the founding texts in the history of painting, Alberti’s *della pittura* (1436), where the Renaissance humanist and artist instructs painters to foreswear using actual gold leaf in the rendering of such things as angel’s haloes or blond hair, but to achieve the same effect through pigmented paint. In effect, Alberti, seeking to establish painting as a liberal or intellectual art, not a merely manual one, asks that such paintings convey the holy status of their subjects through solely representational and symbolic means, not via material with extra-pictorial value. Comparably, when certain materials in painting could be recognized both for their symbolic and actual value, they could serve dual roles as artistic media, qua those materials. In, for example, certain paintings by Sassetta, the blue cloak Saint Francis gives to a poor knight is rendered in paint made from precious lapis-lazuli, not to merely present the bright blue color of the Saint’s gift, but to elicit in viewers a symbolic association between the significance of the Saint’s charity and the value of the gemstone (Baxandall, p.11). More recently, Kerry James Marshall describes how he renders the skin of Black individuals in his paintings chromatically, through an exclusive use of black pigment, without any of the adjustments in tone (lightness or darkness) that white or lighter pigments would offer. In these paintings, he notes “blackness is non-negotiable....unequivocal...,” implying a contrast with those works in the Western canon in which the appearance of Black people is marginal or diminished (Mason, 2016).

6 Conclusion

In the limited space given to this discussion, we followed philosophical accounts of the nature of painting that address the distinctions between, and potential interactions among, visual representational properties and visual configurational properties. Thus, we surveyed certain attempts to characterize the nature of painting by appeal to its traditional representational role; its literal surface appearance; and how the content of a painting may be constituted by a simultaneous awareness of its representational content and its literal surface. Yet, as we saw in the discussion of inflection and artistic medium, the content of a painting can be a function of more than its visual properties, and what those visual properties express or symbolize. Indeed, in principle, any physical property of a painting—the materials it is made of, the tactile nature of its surface, the thickness of its supports—may be such that an intended recognition of it can enter into the painting’s content. In this respect, the above discussion provides only a preliminary account of the nature of painting. That is, whereas we may be able to identify some of the prototypical properties of a painting under configurational or representational descriptions, these descriptions do not capture all the contributions to the work’s content made by its artistic medium. For recognizing what a work represents in and through its formal and material features may be only the first step in identifying the preconditions of further sources of content, such as what a work expresses or symbolizes. Finally, only through recognizing how paintings represent, express, and symbolize can we begin to address such larger questions as how they can have cognitive values, elicit the emotions, be subject to moral and political critique, and normatively constrain how they are conserved, displayed, and interpreted.

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2

SCULPTURE

David Davies

1 Introduction

It is customary to begin recent philosophical discussions of sculpture by remarking upon how little philosophers have had to say on this subject as contrasted with the attention given to the other arts (see, for example, the opening sentences of Vance 1995, Carter 2001, Hopkins 2005, Zuckert 2009, and Irvin 2013 – for a recent attempt to remedy this lacuna, see Gjesdal et al. 2020). It is also notable that, as both Hopkins and Zuckert note, this philosophical neglect of sculpture is not merely a recent development, even though sculpture has, at least since the inauguration of what Kristeller (1951) termed ‘the modern system of the fine arts’, been listed, along with painting, literature, music, and architecture, as one of the five major arts. Some authors have not only noted the relative inattention given to sculpture but have speculated on the reasons for this. Certainly, given that until the 20th century most of those things classified as works of sculpture were representational and served broadly commemorative, and thus utilitarian, rather than specifically aesthetic, functions, it might be thought that sculpture was taken to raise no interesting philosophical questions not raised in more tractable forms by the other arts. Consider, for example, the representational capacities of traditional works of sculpture: while the manner in which three-dimensional subjects can be depicted on a two-dimensional surface might interest philosophers, the representing of the three-dimensional by the three-dimensional seems less puzzling. An alternative explanation of the relative philosophical neglect of sculpture is that, like the equally neglected dance, sculpture seems to work through the physical properties of bodies and has been taken to appeal to the ‘non-cognitive’ sense modality of touch rather than to the ‘cognitive’ modality of vision. A third suggestion (Martin 1976) is that sculpture has been thought to fail to be an autonomous art, being essentially related to works of architecture.

Whatever one thinks of these explanations, a different kind of motivation for the neglect of sculpture has emerged with the development, in Modernism, of non-representational sculpture, and then the broadening, in the post-Modernist period, of the professed extension of the term. As we shall see in Section 2, this fosters the suspicion that the term ‘sculpture’ fails to pick out an artistic domain whose denizens share properties that fund a class of distinctive philosophical problems. In Section 3, I shall consider various issues relating to the appreciation of sculptural art, even if these issues do not ground a definition of the art form. In Section 4, I shall briefly survey some further philosophical issues – metaphysical and ethical – presented by works of sculpture. The ethical issues relate to the ‘public’ nature of many works of sculpture and the ways in which they might be held accountable to the public in whose lived environments they are located.

2 The Definitional Project

In the opening chapter of his 1987 book, *Sculpture since 1945*, Edward Lucie-Smith remarks on the difficulty of delimiting the artistic field to be surveyed in such a book:

As matters stand at present, one can only say that virtually anything at all can now be described as ‘sculpture’, ranging in format from three-dimensional forms made of traditional materials – wood, stone or cast metal – to photographs, diagrams, verbal formulations or the actions and gestures of the sculptor himself.

(8)

Lucie-Smith for the most part honors this liberal understanding of the term ‘sculpture’ in his book, incorporating separate chapters on Kinetic Art, Conceptual Art, Land Art, and ‘Salvage Art’. But one can sense a certain frustration with some of the examples he feels compelled to include. For example, discussing Daniel Spoerri’s Dadaist *Tableaux- pièges*, made from things such as a discarded breakfast tray in a hotel room, where ‘every object, down to the empty shell of a boiled egg, is fixed in the position where chance placed it at the end of the meal’, he comments that such works, while three-dimensional objects, do not really fit ‘even the loosest definition of sculpture’ (66). And, remarking that works by Richard Long, Gilbert and George, and Joseph Beuys are usually designated as ‘sculptures’ both by the artists and those who analyze their work, and that all of these artists had a background training in traditional sculpture, he expresses a concern that, in so terming their works, such artists have created a confusion in the minds of the general audience for art (126).

In trying to come to terms with the extensional intransigency of the term ‘sculpture’ in late Modernist contexts, Lucie-Smith follows in the more celebrated footsteps of Rosalind Krauss, whose 1979 article, ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’, sought to bring the diverse elements within the contemporary extension of the term into some kind of intelligible order. Citing the traditional relationship between sculpture, commemorative representation, and the monumental, and attempts to relate Modernist works to this tradition by finding earlier analogues of the latter, she addresses the more recent extension of the genre to include assemblages of objects and installations. She reflects that

The very term we thought we were saving – *sculpture* – has begun to be somewhat obscured. We had thought to use a universal category to authenticate a group of particulars, but the category has now been forced to cover such a heterogeneity that it is, itself, in danger of collapsing.

(33)

Krauss offers a historical diagnosis of how we have arrived at what she terms the ‘post-Modernist’ form of sculptural practice. She begins with the tradition encompassing Greek and Renaissance works and enduring until the turn of the 20th century. It is these works that fit our ordinary idea of sculpture, and that idea has an inner logic vested in a number of conventions that enable sculptures to serve the purpose of ‘commemorative representation’ in three-dimensions: a sculpture ‘sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolical tongue about the meaning or use of that place...Sculptures are normally figurative and vertical, their pedestals an important part of the structure since they mediate between the actual site and representational sign’ (*Ibid*). With Modernism, however, sculpture as an art repudiates this representational and monumental role and the work becomes an abstraction or a pure marker, ‘functionally placeless and largely self-referential’. Krauss rejects attempts to explain how such works can still be sculpture by linking them to earlier

three-dimensional artifacts. Rather, we need to take account of the negative nature of the Modernist conception of sculpture. As three-dimensional artworks that do not represent or commemorate something else, Modernist sculptures (e.g. works by Brancusi, Moore and Giocametti) can be seen as defining themselves in terms of what they are not – they are to be contrasted with the natural landscape and with works of architecture. But once this way of thinking about sculpture is in place, it enables the ‘post-Modernist’ idea of a matrix of conceptual oppositions relative to which works can be classified according to how they situate themselves in a conceptual space. This space is structured by the binary distinctions landscape/not landscape, and architecture/not architecture. It is in terms of occupying other positions on this matrix – positions she terms ‘site construction’, ‘marked sites’, and ‘axiomatic structures’ – that we can understand the range of things now labeled ‘sculpture’ in the post-Modernist context.

In *Sculpture Now*, however, which focuses on developments since the publication of Krauss’s article and Lucie-Smith’s book, Anna Moszynska (2013) takes Krauss’s efforts to impose some categorical order on the variety of things now counted as ‘sculpture’ to have failed: ‘the enormous range of cross-fertilization and experimentation she observed has now become ubiquitous and highlights the ongoing difficulty of defining “sculpture” as a distinct category. Rather than an “expanded” field, the range of concerns in the new sculpture may perhaps more aptly be described as an “exploded” field’ (12). The crucial development here, for Moszynska, is the proliferation of installation art starting in the early 1990s.

This presents the philosopher with a problem if she feels some obligation to preface her discussion of particular philosophical issues associated with an art form by giving the reader some sense of the distinguishing features of works in that art form – features by reference to which our understanding of such issues might be clarified. This duty is normally discharged by providing something like a definition, albeit one that may pick out a class with decidedly fuzzy edges. Recent attempts to survey the philosophical dimensions of sculpture have adopted diverse strategies in the face of this problem. Robert Hopkins (2005), for example, identifies but then sets aside the definitional project in the case of sculpture, stating in another piece written at the same time that ‘there are grounds... for doubting that sculpture admits of any interesting definition’ (2004, 164). Curtis Carter, however, whose primary concern is to do justice to the philosophical tradition and, to borrow Krauss’s term, to ‘salvage’ the traditional category of sculpture, starts with a definition that fits those pre-Modernist and Modernist works of sculpture that precede the ‘expansion’ of the term, in the hope that this definition might be modified to accommodate modern pretenders to that title. He takes as his stalking horse a definition offered by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: sculpture is ‘the art of representing observed or imagined objects in solid materials and in three dimensions’. Carter makes it clear that, while such a definition aims to distinguish sculpture from natural objects and from other kinds of artifacts, it is only through the reference to the *art* of sculpture that this might be achieved. The *art* of sculpture involves a practice embodying norms whereby treating materials in a certain way confers a determinate ‘artistic’ content on the product. But he also admits that this definition, while it is useful for thinking about pre-Modernist sculpture and fits well with traditional views of sculpture presented by writers such as Lessing and Hegel, requires serious modification if it is to accommodate not only Modernist works that eschew representational goals, but also post-Modernist works such as kinetic and light sculptures. Such works do not make artistic use of solid materials and use methods other than casting, modeling, and carving.

A third approach begins by granting the legitimacy of the ‘explosion’ in the concept of sculpture described by Moszynska and then attempts to craft a definition that can encompass such a plethora of works. Sherri Irvin (2013), for example, begins by accepting that the term ‘sculpture’ is correctly applicable not just to traditional works serving representational and broadly commemorative functions, but also to kinetic works, installations, and earthworks such as Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*. All of these developments, she maintains, ‘are outgrowths of earlier sculptural

traditions and practices' (606). One might wonder whether this in itself is a sufficient reason to treat such developments as sculpture. We may recall Lucie-Smith's concerns about the use of the term 'sculpture' to describe works by Beuys and Richard Long even though they were trained as sculptors, and we might also consider that film is treated as a distinct art form, even though it developed out of photography. We may also recall Krauss's attempts to think the relationship between pre-Modernist, Modernist, and post-Modernist three-dimensional works that does not appeal to historical precedents but seeks an 'extended' sense of sculpture that preserves the traditional sense as a proper part.

Irvin acknowledges that subsuming all of these developments under the same category of art presents a problem for the definitional project and also stresses the importance of preserving accepted distinctions between sculpture, painting, architecture, and performance art. She offers the following tentative definition in the interests of clarifying where further work needs to be done: 'sculpture is the art form consisting of the articulation or presentation of objects geared centrally toward appreciation in three spatial dimensions (and possibly the temporal dimension), excluding substantially constructed buildings and works involving the living human body' (607).

The final exclusion might be difficult to reconcile with the principle of inclusion cited to justify classifying installations and earth art as sculpture, given that the 'living sculpture' of Gilbert and George is very much an outgrowth of sculptural practices by artists trained as sculptors. The bulk of the definition relies on two features central to traditional definitions of sculpture: the three-dimensionality of sculpture which differentiates it from painting, and the distinctive kinds of appreciation for which sculptural works call (see Section 3).

There are obviously complementary concerns associated with the kinds of definitional projects considered thus far. If, on the one hand, we start with established pre-Modernist sculptural works, this promises to identify a class of works that can be expected to present distinctive kinds of problems for philosophical consideration. One such problem, obviously, is the way in which such works are able to function as representations, and another, to be examined below, is the distinctive kinds of engagement for which they call, as contrasted with paintings and architecture. However, even Modernist sculpture is difficult to explain in terms of the pre-Modernist project, as Krauss points out. On the other hand, a definition that embraces the contemporary 'explosion' of purportedly sculptural works threatens to delimit a field of entities that cannot be expected to share aspects calling for philosophical reflection, and thus threatens to make the philosophy of sculpture a field of little interest once the definitional project is complete.

With this in mind, an alternative approach offered by Eric Koed (2005) is attractive. Koed proposes that we start by trying to define not sculpture, as a class of works, but rather the sculptural, as a property that certain artworks – including works of sculpture – have. We can then appeal to aspects of artistic practice to explain why some sculptural works are rightly classified as works of sculpture. Talk about the sculptural, for Koed, is closely tied to the traditional idea that works fall into a given category of art in virtue of sharing an 'artistic medium'. The latter is taken to be a set of understandings in virtue of which carrying out specific operations on a physical (or, in the case of arts like music or literature, non-physical) material of some kind – what might be termed (Davies 2005) a 'vehicular medium' – can count as articulating a particular artistic content. (As Walton's much cited example (1970) of 'guernicas' illustrates, a given vehicular medium can be associated with different artistic media.) Talk of artistic media is really talk about how a given class of works *work*, how an artist is able to articulate a particular determinate artistic content by doing something in a vehicular medium.

Koed applies this general approach to sculpture, defining the sculptural not in terms of the three-dimensionality of the artwork, but in terms of the particular kind of role played by three-dimensional aspects of the artistic vehicle in the articulation of its artistic content. This way of thinking about works of sculpture – as a subset of those things that are sculptural in the relevant

sense – has the added virtue, according to Koed, of explaining those more immediately apparent properties of sculptures upon which traditional attempts at definition have focused. These attempts have sought to delimit the field of sculpture in terms of either:

- a The physical properties of the work – in particular, its being three-dimensional as contrasted with the supposed two-dimensionality of pictures – or
- b The distinctive role of our cognitive and perceptual faculties in the appreciation of the work.

Koed argues that three-dimensionality in itself is a property of all artworks whose artistic vehicles are physical objects, and that all of the other definitional approaches fail to apply to at least some accepted works of sculpture, even if they capture aspects of the ways in which the sculptural functions as an artistic medium.

The crucial difference between sculptural and pictorial representation, according to Koed, is that, while the artistic vehicles employed in both kinds of representations have three-dimensional properties to which we may need to attend to properly appreciate the representational contents of the works, in sculptural representation these properties are employed as a representational artistic medium rather than, as in the case of pictorial representation, as a ‘material condition’ for such a medium. While the two-dimensional array whereby pictures have their representational content is causally grounded in the accumulation of pigment on a surface – sometimes, as in the works of Van Gogh and Auerbach, the use of thick impasto – three-dimensionality here serves the interests of a two-dimensional artistic medium. In the case of sculptural representation, however,

The thickness or weight of the material itself plays the role of artistic medium....For example, [we] take the protrusions and ridges of the material art-object themselves to represent the protrusion of brow and cheekbones... A work will be sculptural, on this account, just to the extent that the use of the three-dimensional properties of materials functions as a medium in this way.

(151)

One might ask whether Koed’s distinction between the sculptural and the pictorial, if it is intended to distinguish the artistic medium in sculpture from the artistic medium in painting, operates with an artificially narrow conception of the role of an artistic medium. As I expressed this above, the artistic medium mediates between the vehicular medium and the artistic content of a work, but a work’s artistic content goes beyond its representational content and also comprises its expressive and exemplificational content. Koed’s distinction between the sculptural and the pictorial, however, seems to restrict artistic content to representational content. If, on the other hand, we operate with a broader concept of artistic content that includes expressive content, paintings by van Gogh and Auerbach might qualify as sculptural rather than pictorial because it is in virtue of the three-dimensional properties of the pigmented canvas that the work has the *expressive* content that it does.

Koed tries to address some related worries. He maintains that, while in the pre-Modernist tradition in Western art, the sculptural and the pictorial were coextensive with sculpture and painting, respectively, this association was always contingent. In the present context, sculptural artworks include not only what we would normally classify as works of sculpture but also some works of architecture, jewelry, and Installation Art (which Koed seems to assume, pace Moszynska, is not sculpture). Citing the range of works encompassed by sculpture in Krauss’s ‘extended’ sense, Koed concludes that

The conception I propose of sculpture in terms of the sculptural is compatible with this kind of diversity within sculpture, and also with the fact that we can and do speak of the sculptural

elements of mixed-media works that we would not, perhaps, classify as “sculptures.” [Krauss’s] examples are sculptural works, or have significant sculptural elements, but are they sculptures? The answer, on the proposed account, will depend on the facts of the works’ relationship to the traditions of art practice out of which they emerge.

(153)

3 The Appreciation of Sculpture

We noted in part I that some writers have taken the defining property of sculpture, as contrasted with other art forms, to be the kind of artistic appreciation for which it calls. Such claims are expressed in various ways in the tradition that focuses on pre-Modernist and/or Modernist sculpture. But, even if we accept that sculpture is not be defined in terms of distinctive kinds of cognitive or perceptual capacities that are mobilized in its appreciation, the literature on sculptural appreciation is of great philosophical interest in its own right and continues to occupy the attention of philosophers. Three themes have predominated in the discussion: (1) the idea that the primary sensory modality through which we engage with works of sculpture is *touch*, as contrasted with the predominantly *visual* nature of our appreciative engagement with paintings; (2) the related idea that, in appreciating works of sculpture, we engage in distinctive kinds of imaginings grounded in our embodied response to the three-dimensionality – the ‘volume’ – of the artistic vehicle; and (3) the idea that to appreciate a work of sculpture is to experience not merely the artistic vehicle per se, but the manner in which the work’s physical manifestation articulates the gallery space in which it is located. I shall look at these points in turn.

3.1 Sculpture and Touch

The association between sculpture and touch is central to Herder’s work on sculpture and is discussed at some length in a recent article by Rachel Zuckert (2009). While the contemporary inclusion of sculpture amongst the major fine arts ensured that it received at least some attention in 18th- and 19th-century German aesthetics, Herder’s account (2002) is one most interesting of these treatments. While a particular work of sculpture is central to the argument of Lessing’s *Laocoön*, Lessing (1984) uses this example to represent visual artworks in general, drawing a contrast with literary works that, so he claimed, are better fitted for representing events that succeed one another in time. Lessing’s choice of a sculptural work like the *Laocoön* might reflect two contingent facts: the lack of classical works of visual art that could help to make Lessing’s auxiliary point about the difference between Greek and Roman culture, and the existence of both a visual and a literary representation of the very same event, supporting his principal claim about the different proper representational domains of the different arts. Herder, however, wrote a treatise specifically on sculpture in support of a claim about its distinctiveness from painting. His central contention was that to grasp the three-dimensionality of a work of sculpture requires that it be apprehended in terms of concepts given to us not through vision but through touch – concepts such as ‘mass, weight, solidity, three-dimensional space (depth and volume), and three-dimensional form’ (Zuckert 2009, 287). Zuckert summarizes Herder’s view as follows:

Through vision, we do not attain experience of the sculpture as a whole, as unified, but only experience a series of surfaces from different viewpoints, which inferentially and incompletely add up to a representation of the work as a whole.

(*Ibid.*, 289)

Herbert Read (1956) also argues that the principal sensory modality involved in the appreciation of sculpture is touch and offers similar reasons in support of this claim:

For the sculptor, tactile values are not an illusion to be created on a two-dimensional plane: they constitute a reality to be conveyed directly, as existent mass. Sculpture is an art of *palpation* – an art that gives satisfaction in the touching and handling of objects. That, indeed, is the only way in which we can have direct sensation of the three-dimensional shape of an object.

(348)

Critics, however, have argued that our appreciative practices in respect of works of sculpture do *not* accord a central role to touch. Indeed, standard gallery practice prohibits such forms of engagement. Rhys Carpenter (1960), for example, claims that ‘sculpture is a visual and not a tactile art, because it is made for the eyes to contemplate and not for the fingers to feel’ (34). And the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand claimed (1932) that it is through the two-dimensional visual manifolds presented to us as we move relative to a work of sculpture that the work’s artistic nature is given to us.

3.2 Sculpture and Embodied Response

A related approach grants that a work of sculpture is not given to us through acts of touching but maintains that our visual engagement with such a work is inflected by our embodied responses to its three-dimensionality, eliciting in us imaginings grounded in its presence as something with volume and mass. The sculptor L. R. Rogers (1962), for example, implicitly counters Hildebrand in offering the following account of what he terms ‘sculptural thinking’:

Sculptors think through the mass; the movements on the surface, the surface forms, are the outward manifestation of movements that must be thought of as continuing through the mass. There is an internal structure which has to be sensed in order to appreciate a work as a three-dimensional design. Sculptors who think only of the outer defining planes of their work are not thinking in a fully three-dimensional way.

(298)

Robert Vance (1995) offers a more extreme development of this idea. ‘Sculptures’, he maintains, ‘are objects designed in three dimensions to occupy spaces related to the spaces we ourselves occupy. In contrast with mere objects in real spaces, sculptures somehow depend on the appreciator’s bodily self-awareness for their presence to us as sculptures’ (224). In appreciating a given sculpture, he argues, we begin by moving around the work, registering how it looks and feels from various perspectives. These observations evoke ‘certain non-propositional somatic imaginings’, including ‘tactile imaginings’ of how it would feel to be touching or holding it, ‘haptic imaginings’ as to how it would feel to stretch or lift it, and ‘kinaesthetic imaginings’, for example, imagining oneself sliding on or moving with it. These imaginings invoke somatic sensations, and these, in turn, engender ‘identifications with the sculpture’:

My being aware of motor sensations of resistance and imbalance, within a context of imagining what it feels like to lift (a part of) a sculpture, is tantamount to imagining my *being* (the part of) the sculpture...The appreciator then identifies with the sculpture by imagining it as an extension of her own body.

(225)

Finally, this identification with the sculpture affects how we see it: ‘The sculpture will look dynamic, threatening, or inscrutable, because it feels dynamic, threatening, or inscrutable’ (*Ibid.*).

3.3 Sculpture and Space

F. D. Martin (1976) also maintains that what are distinctive of our appreciative engagement with works of sculpture are our embodied responses to their physical presence: ‘with sculpture tactful feelings come into play in a much more direct and important way than with painting’. But he ties this not to an identification with the sculptural object itself, but to our engagement with the space that the object defines:

The space around a sculpture, although not a part of its material body, is still an essential part of the perceptible structure of that sculpture. And the perceptual forces in that surrounding space impact on our bodies directly...With a sculpture... even though we do not actually touch the material body, we sense its power penetrating the surrounding space and pressing on our bodies...The forces of a sculpture, since they are generated by three-dimensional material, activate the surrounding space, making us explicitly aware of the impacting surrounding space as part of the perceptible structure of the sculpture.

(283) (*Hopkins (2003, 277) finds a similar idea in Hegel.*)

The idea that sculptures work aesthetically through their ability to articulate the space in which they are located is central to the thinking of Susanne Langer (1953), but Langer provides a clearer account of how such articulation enters into our experience of a work. She begins (87) by criticizing Hildebrand for assimilating sculpture to painting. It is important, she maintains, not only to acknowledge what painting, sculpture, and architecture have in common – they operate through a primary illusion of ‘virtual space’ – but also the different ways in which they do this. While paintings create a virtual ‘scene’ in three-dimensions, works of sculpture, which are already three-dimensional, make ‘visible’ the space around them, as part of the volume of the work. The space made visible by the work of sculpture ‘is more than the area which the figure actually occupies’. The illusion depends upon ‘the fundamental principle of sculptural volume: the semblance of organism’ (88). Organisms, she maintains, have structures that fit them to the environments they inhabit, and they in turn experientially structure their environment by reference to the ways in which it speaks to their needs. An organism experiences its environment as

A space whereof he is the center; his body and the range of its free motion, its breathing space and the reach of its limbs, are his own kinetic volume, the point of orientation from which he plots the world of tangible reality.

(*Cf J. J. Gibson's talk (1979) of 'affordances' and Merleau-Ponty's characterizations (1962) of a logic shared by a body and its world.*)

The space that a work of sculpture makes visible to receivers is then its ‘virtual kinetic volume’, created by ‘the semblance of living form’. ‘A piece of sculpture is a center of three-dimensional space. It is a virtual kinetic volume, which dominates a surrounding space, and this environment derives all proportions and relations from it, as the actual environment does from oneself’ (90). Langer stresses that this does not require that works of sculpture *represent* natural organisms, and that the primary illusion of sculpture is given not to vision but to touch, since it is through touch that volume is originally presented to us. The business of sculpture, she claims, is ‘to make tactful space visible’ (90). But we experience the virtual space of the statue as something objective, distinct from our own lived space even as we engage experientially with it:

Though a statue is, actually, an object, we do not treat it as such; we see it as a center of space all its own; but its kinetic volume and the environment it creates are illusory – they exist for our vision alone, a semblance of the self and its world.

(92)

In a series of papers, Robert Hopkins (2003, 2004, 2005) has elaborated upon, critically assessed, and defended Langer's views as a more plausible account of sculptural experience than the other views just discussed, although, as we have seen, this does not provide us with a definition of sculpture.

4 Other Issues – Sculptural Representation, Metaphysical Questions, and the Public Nature of Sculpture

While we have focused on questions pertaining to the nature of sculpture and of sculptural appreciation, it is important to note some other aspects of sculpture that have elicited philosophical attention. I shall briefly survey three such issues:

4.1 Sculptural Representation

While the nature of depiction has been a central issue in the philosophy of painting, relatively little philosophical attention has been paid to the nature of representation in sculpture. In the case of traditional representational works of sculpture, this may stem from the assumption that such works unproblematically represent their subjects by reproducing their three-dimensional shapes, but, as Goodman (1968) pointed out in Chapter 1 of *Languages of Art*, resemblance in itself cannot explain how visual artworks function as representations. One philosopher who has looked at how contemporary work on depiction in painting might be extended to representational sculpture is Robert Hopkins (2003, 2004, 2005), but he takes these issues to be interconnected with the issues of sculptural appreciation discussed in the previous section. It is also worth noting that, as Hopkins points out, the kinds of 'relief' sculptures that predominated in historical contexts where works of sculpture complemented works of architecture employ techniques that stand in an intermediate position between painting, on the one hand, and the kind of full-bodied sculpture in the round discussed by Langer, on the other.

4.2 Metaphysical Questions

As Sherri Irvin notes (2013), works of sculpture have served as a running example in metaphysical debates about the relationships between artifacts more generally and the material of which they are composed (see, e.g., Thomson 1998). One issue in such debates is whether artifacts such as statues have a legitimate place in our ontology or whether our ontological commitments should only be to the 'stuff' of which they are made. Adherents of the former view hold that a statue at a given time is *constituted* by the physical stuff with which it is colocated but is not identical with that stuff: the statue – 'Goliath' in a famous example – and the lump of clay – 'Lumpl' – are different entities, so it is claimed, because they differ in their modal and persistence properties. For example, Lumpl, but not Goliath, might survive being placed in a very hot oven, whereas Goliath, but not Lumpl, might survive restoration work to repair damage caused by vandalism.

Traditional sculptures raise further metaphysical questions because of the different ways in which they can be made, and, as a consequence, the different metaphysical status of the work itself. In the literature on traditional works of sculpture, a distinction is drawn between three ways in which such works can be initiated: the artistic vehicle may result either (i) from the *carving* of some material, or (ii) from building up some material so as to *model* what is represented, or (iii) from the prior construction of a *cast* into which some liquid material is poured so that, once the material has set, the vehicle can be removed from the cast. In the latter case, it is usually possible to produce multiple instances of the work from the same cast. In this sense, carved and modeled works of sculpture are *singular* – they admit of at most one correct 'instance' that can play the 'experiential

role' in the appreciation of the work – that is, that can provide the experiences necessary to fully grasp the manifest content of the work. Works of cast sculpture, however, are *multiple*, admitting at least in principle of more than one such correct instance. Works of carved and modeled sculpture, like paintings, are most naturally thought of as physical objects, but, while the *instances* of works of cast sculpture are also most naturally taken to be physical objects, the works themselves surely are not. They must be things that can have other multiple things as their instances and, in a tradition going back to Richard Wollheim's *Art and its Objects* (1968), such works have been taken to be types. But arguably (see Dodd 2007, chaps 2–3), types exist eternally and cannot be created but can only be discovered. So, it might seem, had Rodin produced *The Thinker* as a work of carved sculpture, it would have been his creation, whereas his use of a cast in the production of this work means that it was not created but discovered. Some have found this conclusion highly problematic (see, e.g., Davies 2013) and have sought an alternative account of the nature of such multiple artworks (see Davies forthcoming).

4.3 *The Public Nature of Sculpture*

As noted earlier, it was long taken for granted that the primary role of works of sculpture was to represent and commemorate individuals or events accorded particular significance in the community where the work was located. To play this role, sculptural works have traditionally been located in a *public* space and this raises issues as to the accountability of the work to the public. But we need to distinguish at least two senses in which a work can be said to be a work of 'public sculpture'. First, this can mean that the work is *situated in a space* that is public, where the latter might in turn be taken to mean a space the use of which within a given society is open to (appropriate) use by all duly recognized members of that society. Second, it can mean that a work is publicly *funded*, rather than funded by some private interest, corporate or individual. Dubuffet's *Group of Four Trees* in the forecourt of the Rockefellers' *Number One Chase Manhattan Plaza* is public in the first sense but not in the second, *Nelson's Column* in London is public in both senses, and commemorative works commissioned by individuals for their private grounds are public in neither sense. For any work of sculpture that is private in the first sense, there might be concerns about the way in which this work might impact on the well-being of those whose lives require that they use the location in which it is installed. For any work that is public in the second sense, there might also be questions about the accountability of the work to the public in whose name, and with whose resources, it was built.

As some have noted (e.g. Hein 1996), the second question becomes particularly acute in multi-cultural societies where different communities may have different values. Traditionally such issues were ignored, the values of the majority generally ruling at the cost of the values of the minority. For example, the publicly funded statue of Robert E. Lee erected post-bellum in Richmond VA celebrated the values of the defeated confederacy but, presumably, not those of the ones liberated as a result of that defeat. But current moves to replace or destroy statues taken to commemorate the colonial legacy in various countries indicate the potentially problematic nature of commemorative representational works that are 'public' in either of the above senses. Related issues are at the center of the very acrimonious debates over Richard Serra's publicly funded abstract work *Tilted Arc*, installed in the plaza outside the Javits Federal Building in Manhattan in 1981, but then removed following a public inquiry. While the latter events were clearly in part an expression of political sentiments at the time, a principal reason given for removing the work of sculpture was that it was unacceptable to those whose ordinary lives required that they use the plaza. One of the more interesting philosophical issues surrounding this case relates to Serra's claim that his work, in addressing aspects of the existing architecture of the Plaza, was 'site-specific' and would therefore

be *destroyed* if moved. In a very interesting paper, Michael Kelly (1996) explored what it would mean for a work of sculpture to be both public, in our first sense, and site-specific, arguing that, while it should not be up to the public to determine which works of public sculpture should be installed (pace Carter 2001), the public *uses* of the site partly identify it as the public site it is, and these uses must therefore be taken account of by an artist if her work can legitimately claim to be site-specific to a public site.

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3

PRINTMAKING

Impressions, Editions, and Reproductions

Roy T. Cook

1 Introduction

In this essay, we will, for the most part, concentrate on traditional forms of printmaking, understanding such forms to involve a process that can be described roughly as follows:

A work is a *print* if and only if it involves the transfer of pigment from a matrix (e.g. etched plate) to a support (e.g. paper).¹

The variety of distinct printmaking methods that fall under this description is too wide to describe in any detail but includes intaglio (including aquatint, drypoint, engraving, etching, and mezzotint), lithography, screenprint, woodblock, and more. Note that this description leaves out many contemporary processes that fall under the informal use of the terms “print”, “printed”, and “printmaking”, such as digital prints of various kinds. Note also that it includes works that are not necessarily artworks, such as screen-printed t-shirts and newspapers.²

Christy Mag Uidhir (2009, 2015) makes much of the observation that, unlike painting and sculpture, prints and printmaking have been resistant to serious academic investigation and analysis.³ He identifies a number of related reasons for this. First, printmaking has traditionally been a commercial, rather than purely artistic, enterprise: while there have been artists making what we would now term *original prints* in Europe since the 15th century (e.g., Albrecht Dürer) and as early as the 7th century in China (e.g., *The Great Dharani Sutra*), printmaking was nevertheless associated more with the reproduction of paintings, and less with the idea of prints as themselves being independent original artworks. This print-as-copy tradition goes back to 15th-/16th-century engraver Marcantonio Raimondi, who was strongly influenced by Dürer, and who has the distinction of being the first artist whose body of work consists primarily of prints that copy pre-existing paintings. We will return to consider such *reproductive prints* in detail later in this essay.

Second, the practicalities of the printmaking process itself, where the “artist” oversees the production of prints but often turns over the actual work of physically creating the impressions to a master printmaker in his employ, further exacerbates the idea that with printmaking, as opposed to painting, sculpture, or photography, the aesthetic and artistic is firmly subordinated to the commercial. As Mag Uidhir notes, printmaking was not included in traditional art school curricula until the latter half of the 20th century, and the regular inclusion of prints alongside paintings and sculptures in exhibits and academic studies is an equally recent phenomenon (2015: 2). As a

result, printmaking has in the past been viewed as a commercial trade as much or more than as a skilled artistic endeavor.

As printmaking transformed during the 20th century, emphasis was placed on the novel notion of an *original print*, in contrast to reproductive prints, largely due to the need to properly situate this ostensibly commercial enterprise within existing art world culture and extant marketing practices. This process has been neither simple nor equitable: Peg Zeglin Brand (2015) traces the development of this concept of originality in the 20th century and argues that it was mobilized not only to legitimize the status of (non-reproductive) prints as fine art but also to continue the aesthetic devaluation of art made by women (based on supposed failures to create sufficiently original work) and indigenous people (based on apparent tensions between originality and adherence to cultural tradition).

In addition, printmaking has been widely hailed as the most democratic art form, as is evidenced by the following passage from the website of the Library of Congress:

Prints have been referred to as the “democratic art” because they provide a means of making works of art widely available. As with some of the other popular art media, such as posters and book and magazine illustrations, prints have historically been a democratic medium in the sense that they early offered a field in which women artists could flourish.

(*Library of Congress, n.d.*)

Unfortunately, this is only half true. Brand also provides a detailed historical account of the plight of women printers, which supports the first point but refutes the second, concluding that:

Printmaking may be a more democratic art because impressions occur in multiples and can be sold or distributed more widely, but it does not follow that women are more democratically represented or are invited to participate with men, who continue to dominate the profession when measured in terms of commercial success and recognition.

(*Brand 2015: 42*)

As attitudes and exhibition practices have changed, providing prints (mostly by men, but happily, also including an increasing number of women) their own space in the exhibition hall and in the public consciousness, aestheticians and philosophers of art have slowly risen to the occasion, exploring various interesting and unique questions that the processes and products of fine art printmaking raise.⁴ In the remainder of this essay, we will address a cluster of issues of this sort that distinguish printmaking from painting and sculpture in various ways. Each of the issues addressed here involves, in one way or another, the multiply instanced nature of prints.

First, we will explore the fact that prints are typically not, like most paintings and sculptures, individual physical objects that have unique locations in space (monotypes being obvious exceptions). On the contrary, a single print (like a single opera or musical work) seems to inhabit more than one place at the same time, in virtue of the multiple, physically distinct impressions of the print, whose status as instances of the work is usually indicated by their numbering in a series or edition (e.g., “1 of 250” or “1/250”).

Second, we will ask questions about the artwork status of individual editions of a print (and the impressions making up the edition), and the artwork status of individual impressions over and above their status as instances of the print artwork in question.

Third, we will consider the connections between printmaking and paintings, addressing the role that prints and printmaking have played in providing surrogates for paintings, where experience of the surrogate print is meant to be a suitable alternative to direct experience of the painting so surrogated.

Finally, in the conclusion, we will focus a bit more on the official subject matter of this volume, looking more closely at the similarities and differences between the ontology of painting, sculpture, and prints.

2 Prints, Editions, and Impressions

At first glance, prints look ontologically very different from both paintings and sculptures (and, in the relevant sense, look more like theatrical and musical works) in that they are *multiply instanced*: for instance, the 250-impression 1964 edition of Warhol's *Flowers* appears to be a single work of art, but one which has 250 multiple instances, located where the 250 impressions in the edition are located.⁵

Before moving on, it is worth noting some complications that arise in distinguishing prints from paintings and sculpture in terms of multiplicity. First, the multiply instanced status of fine art prints (or printing in general) does not provide anything like the sharp division between printmaking and either painting or sculpture suggested in the previous paragraph. On the one hand, there are printmaking methods that produce single unique works (e.g., monotypes). On the other hand, there are sculptural techniques that generate multiple (often numbered) instances in ways that look at least superficially similar to the multiplicity common, but not universal, amongst prints. The most obvious such method is cast metal sculpture.⁶ Nevertheless, it seems right to say that prints are *standardly* multiple, while paintings and (most forms of) sculpture are not. The word "standard" is used here in the sense introduced by Kendall Walton, where a property is a standard feature of a category of works if it is "among those in virtue of which works in the category belong to that category" (1970: 339).

The widely (but by no means universally) accepted philosophical account of such multiply instanced entities invokes the *type-token distinction*. According to this story, a multiply instanced entity involves both a single abstract *type* and at least a potential multiplicity of *tokens* of that type. Thus, the sentence "Snow is white" involves both multiple physical tokens, such as the one mentioned at the beginning of this sentence, and a single presumably abstract type, of which the individual tokens are instances. The multiply instanced nature of printmaking can be understood along similar lines: there is the (singular and presumably abstract) Warhol print *Flowers* 1964; and then there are 250 instances of that artwork, the physical objects (impressions) denoted by *Flowers* #1/250 through *Flowers* #250/250.⁷

Of course, this account of multiply instanced works might be rejected for any number of reasons, but the most obvious such reasons are connected to familiar metaphysical puzzles that plague abstract objects more generally. For example, one might just reject the existence of abstract objects altogether, preferring the desert landscape of nominalistic metaphysics (Mag Uidhir's nominalistic *basic print ontology*, discussed below, is such a view). Or one might not be averse to abstract objects in general, but instead have worries, in the present context, regarding the apparent mismatch between the fact that artworks have beginnings (and possibly endings) in time (i.e., there is a time at which they are created, and possibly a time in which they are destroyed, in virtue of all instances, and perhaps also the matrix, being destroyed), while abstract objects have traditionally been understood as atemporal or eternal.⁸

David Davies (2015) mobilizes a somewhat different objection to the print-as-abstract-type account. He notes that if the instances of a multiply instanced work are instances of an abstract type, but singly instanced works are concrete, then the creator of a multiply instanced lithograph is *discovering* an abstract object, while the creator of a monotype is *creating* a concrete object. Finding such lack of uniformity in the ontology of printmaking "deeply counterintuitive" (2015: 86), Davies concludes that what unifies distinct impressions of a print is not that they instance some abstract type, but rather that they share a history of production. Hence, on Davies account, there

is no artwork referred to by “the print *Flowers* 1964”. Rather, there are just the 250 individual numbered impressions, each of which is a distinct and self-subsistent object. These prints are related to each other in a particular and special way and are not related to any prints by, for example, Rembrandt, in that same way, but on Davies account we can explain this relationship in terms of the history of creation shared by the 250 prints that make up *Flowers* 1964 without needing to posit any additional, singular, abstract artwork of which these impressions are instances.

Another account that retains the idea that prints are distinguished from (most) paintings and sculptures in virtue of their multiplicity, but reject the traditional type-token account and its apparent commitment to abstract objects, is Christy Mag Uidhir’s *basic print ontology* (2009, 2012). For our purposes, two main aspects of this view are salient. First:

Basic print ontology, I claim, is nominalistic – the works of printmaking (that is, the products of printmaking forms, processes, or techniques) are concrete, individual, and distinct prints. [...] To be a print is to be the individual and distinct concrete product of a printmaking process (typically operating over a template and onto a support). Furthermore, prints are characterized according to and have their character largely determined by the processes of which they are the products (for example, a lithograph is the print product of the printmaking process known as lithography, a screen print is the print product of the printmaking process known as screen printing, and so on). Most importantly, being a print itself entails neither being a copy nor being a reproduction. Thus, prints are individual, distinct works, and this fact remains consistent across the vast majority of printmaking processes, save the varieties of monotyping, being capable of producing multiple (what I call) *relevantly similar prints*.

(2012: 32–33, emphasis in original)

Mag Uidhir fleshes out what he means by relevantly similar prints as follows:

[...] two prints are relevantly similar to one another if and only if they share all constitutive appreciable properties in common in virtue of sharing a causal history. Two prints share a causal history if and only if they are printed from the same template (e.g. a particular etched copper plate), by the same process (e.g. intaglio), onto the same support (e.g., paper).

(2009, n.p., see also 2012: 33)

Thus, Mag Uidhir, like Davies, concludes that there is no additional object – the print – in addition to the individual impressions.

In addition, Mag Uidhir goes on to argue for a claim he calls *permissive art ontology* – the claim that the artwork status of a particular print depends solely on its causal history in the sense sketched above: if a particular impression (say, an impression contained in the 250 numbered impressions in Warhol’s *Flowers* 1964) is an artwork, then any other print created (i) from the same template, (ii) via the same process, and (iii) onto the same support will also be an artwork. Thus, although being an editioned print (or trial proof, or hors de commerce, etc.) – that is, being an impression that is one of the impressions included in an edition such as the 250 sanctioned impressions of *Flowers* 1964 – requires certain intentions on the part of the artists (in particular, the intention to include *this*, rather than *that*, as one of the 250 impressions in the edition), whether or not a particular impression is an artwork is, on Mag Uidhir’s account, independent of the artist’s (or master printmaker’s, or anyone else’s) intentions over and above the intentions involved in creating the matrix and selecting the relevant process and support. In particular, prints that are generated illicitly (e.g., by a thief who breaks into the printmaker’s shop for the purpose of printing additional copies of *Flowers* to sell) or even prints that are generated accidentally (e.g., by a thief who breaks into the printmaker’s shop for the purpose of stealing tools, but who accidentally jars the press, resulting in

an impression being created) are works of art in exactly the same sense as are prints intentionally created by the artist or the master printer (2009: n.p.).

It is here where Mag Uidhir's and Davies nominalistic print ontologies differ: with respect to the art status of the individual impressions: Mag Uidhir thinks that each impression (authorized or not, intentional or not) transferring pigment from matrix to support in the right manner is an individual work of art, while Davies is skeptical that impressions (rather than, say, editions) are themselves works of art, arguing that distinct impressions from an edition do not typically admit of sufficient (non-accidental) variation to count as distinct works of art (Davies 2015: 90). We shall return to this idea regarding the role that variation plays in artwork status below.

While Mag Uidhir's permissive print ontology is controversial (see, e.g., Gover 2015 for some objections specific to prints, and Aliyev 2016 for objections to Mag Uidhir's application of these ideas to photography), it highlights an important aspect of printmaking that raises further questions. Unlike many other multiply instanced art forms (and independent of the ontological status of the print of which the impressions are instances), prints are not only instances of an artwork (if, contra Mag Uidhir (2009), there is an object – the print – over and above the individual impressions), but, arguably, are works of art themselves.

Cook and Meskin (2015) argue that prints are *art-instances*: each individual impression of a particular print is a distinct artwork, over-and-above the singular artwork of which they are instances (again, if, contra Mag Uidhir, such a singular type exists). This contrasts with the status of many other multiply instanced artworks. Novels, for example, are multiply instanced, but my copy of *Moby Dick* is not an artwork in-and-of-itself, distinct from the artwork that is your copy of *Moby Dick*. Instead, there is a single art work – *Moby Dick* – which can be experienced via many different instances of it.

As Cook and Meskin note, the mere fact that instances of a multiply instanced artwork are themselves artworks need not imply that the artwork admits of art-instances. Rather, whether an artwork (or art form more generally) allows for art-instances amounts to something like “whether actual or possible instances of the work can (or typically would) be artworks themselves *solely in virtue of being instances of that artwork*” (2015: 58). Cook and Meskin go on to argue that what makes it the case that some multiply instanced forms allow for works that are not only multiply instanced but involve art-instances (e.g., music, theater, and printmaking), while other art forms that are multiply instanced do not allow for art-instances (e.g., literature and film) are the practices of production and reception within which the artwork (and the art form more generally) are embedded. They argue in some detail that the practices and attitudes embedded in both the production and the consumption (by dealers, buyers, critics, and the like) of fine art prints support the treatment of individual impressions as distinct works of art (60–61, see also Mag Uidhir 2012). Hence, it follows that distinct impressions are (typically) distinct works of art and should be treated as such.

Cook and Meskin defend this production/reception approach from other accounts of the nature of art instances, including (i) the idea that art instances arise via performance, and (ii) the idea that art instances arise via interpretation (2015: 59–60), since, if either of these ideas were correct, then prints – in virtue of involving neither performance nor interpretation in their production – could not be art instances.⁹ Finally, they scrutinize Jerryold Levinson's claim that:

[...] individual impressions, castings, and so on are occasionally regarded as works of art in their own right, which may be appropriate where there are striking differences among authorized instances.

(1996: 134)

As we have seen, Davies (2015) objects to the idea that individual impressions are art instances on similar grounds. Cook and Meskin argue, on the contrary, that whether or not an art form admits

of art instances is independent of whether and to what extent works in that form admit variation. Rather, whether an art form allows for art instances depends on the practices of production and reception appropriate to that art form. Hence, if an art form (e.g., printmaking) standardly admits of art instances, then we can and should treat individual instances (i.e., individual print impressions) as distinct *sui generis* art works, even in cases where the authorized instances vary little if at all.¹⁰

We have, until now, only addressed in passing the fact that prints are not merely multiply instanced, but editioned: print artworks do not merely involve a hodge-podge of instances but instead are intimately tied up with the practice of authorizing certain such impressions as members of an edition. Thus, the impressions included in *Flowers* 1964 were authorized by Warhol as elements in that edition (and their status as such indicated by being labeled #1/250 through #250/250, distinguishing them from impressions not in that edition). Timothy Van Laar (1980) argues that editions are not merely collections of instances but *consist* of the instances – the particular impressions that make up an edition of a print are *parts* of the print:¹¹

A primary function of printmaking is to create flexible, constantly changing spatial structures which exist through the necessary repetition of a visual idea. Each print in an edition is part of the overall structure which is an edition

(1980: 101, *emphasis in original*)

While Karen Gover finds this idea implausible, arguing that typically:

[...] there is no structural principle uniting the prints in an edition beyond their shared history of production and whatever particular circumstances led the artist to include a certain number of prints within it.”

(2015: 77)

Nevertheless, she emphasizes that Van Laar is correct in taking the edition to be an important – perhaps *the* important – unit of assessment when considering the ontology of printmaking and notes further that artist’s intention – and not mere relevant similarity in the sense outlined by Mag Uidhir – is critical to determining whether or not a particular impression is included in a particular (or any) edition of the print. As a result, Gover argues that Mag Uidhir’s permissive print ontology, although perhaps correct as far as it goes, misses an important aspect of the metaphysical nature of prints. While relevant similarity might be sufficient for an impression to be an artwork – hence, any impression, intentional or accidental, taken from the matrix used for *Flowers* 1964 is an artwork – this is not, in fact, the interesting and important issue. Rather, what is desired is an account of what, exactly, makes a particular impression an instance of *this* artwork – that is, of *this* edition – and Gover argues that this requires more than mere similarity. It requires the authorization of the impression by the artist.

Gover’s essay makes clear the fact that the ontology of printmaking is not merely a simple one of singular type versus multiple impressions instancing that type. Instead, prints are doubly articulated. At the most coarse-grained level, we have the print, the singular work of art, which might or might not be an abstract type (or some other sort of abstract object). At the most fine-grained level, we have the (potentially infinite) collection of individual impressions (authorized or not). In the middle, however, we have the division of prints into distinct editions (some authorized by the artist, and some, such as post-mortem editions of Rembrandt prints, not). This distinguishes prints from other multiply instanced art forms such as novels, films, and music that lack an analogous, intermediate editioning stage in their ontology.¹²

Finally, we will investigate a phenomenon that was mentioned in the introduction: the use of prints as affordable or more easily accessible substitutes for original (typically singly instanced)

paintings (and other works). While the prevalence and popularity of this sort of reproduction may have been one of the factors hindering recognition of fine art printing as a self-subsistent art form in and of itself, the use of prints as replacements of a sort for direct experience of the painting on which the print is based raises interesting philosophical questions regarding the relationship between printing and painting, and between pictures (of pictures) and what is pictured in both.

A *reproductive print*, according to Robert Hopkins (2015), is a print “that takes another picture as its source, and that attempts to depict whatever the source does, at least insofar as difference in medium allows” (2015: 11). Not all reproductive prints reproduce paintings, although we will focus on this special case here. As we have already noted, one of the main uses of printmaking technology has been to create reproductive prints, which have served as a primary source of epistemic connection to famous works of art since the 15th century. Even in a world of intercontinental travel and digital connectedness, this remains true: the vast majority of persons have not travelled to the Louvre to see the Mona Lisa, but many of those who have not nevertheless believe that they know what the painting looks like based on their experiences of prints (photographic or not) of the painting in question.¹³

This example highlights a number of issues that arise with regard to the use of a reproductive print as an epistemic surrogate for the painting upon which the print was based. The first, and most obvious, is that such reproductions can be misleading: the Mona Lisa is a striking example, since the over-sized role that this painting plays in popular culture, coupled with the fact that most people’s exposure to the painting is mediated primarily by photographic print reproductions (e.g., in books) that are not one-to-one in scale, lead many viewers at the Louvre to be surprised – sometimes even disappointed – by the comparative smallness of the actual 21 by 30 inch painting. But it is obviously not just with regard to matters of scale that prints of paintings can mislead: prints do not reproduce texture, do not allow one to view the painting from different distances or angles, and often utilize methods particular to printmaking (e.g., crosshatching in an etching) to mimic other methods particular to painting (e.g., shading achieved by various methods of blending pigments).

Nevertheless, reproductive prints have been and continue to be one of the main ways that those interested in paintings gain knowledge about how particular paintings look.¹⁴ Hopkins (2015) focuses on this aspect of prints – what he calls *aesthetic surrogacy* – and asks two inter-related questions which he calls the *articulation question* and the *explanation question*. The articulation question arises when we ask: What kind of engagement can one have with the aesthetic properties of an original painting Π via experiencing the reproductive print R_{Π} based on Π ? The explanation question arises when we ask: What kind of explanation can we give of the fact that a reproductive print R_{Π} based on Π can facilitate a genuine experience of aesthetic properties of painting Π (if, in fact, R_{Π} can facilitate such experience in the first place)?

Hopkins then surveys a number of potential answers to these questions. The view with which he begins (and, as we shall see, with which he ends) is the *simple view*: the reproductive print R_{Π} facilitates experience of the aesthetic properties of the original painting Π via sharing those properties with Π . This view, however, faces a serious challenge: reproductive prints, in virtue of the fact that they are, obviously, prints and not paintings, are easily distinguishable from the paintings on which they are based. And this, in turn, holds because a painting Π and a reproductive print R_{Π} that is based on Π instantiate very different non-aesthetic perceptual properties. As a result, any account that attempts to explain how a reproductive print R_{Π} can allow for experience of the aesthetic properties of painting Π must reject widely accepted anti-generalist theses of the sort endorsed by Mary Mothersill (1986) and Frank Sibley (2001), according to which artifacts can only share aesthetic properties in virtue of sharing (all of) their perceptual non-aesthetic (Mothersill) or determinate non-aesthetic (Sibley) properties.¹⁵

Hopkins considers a number of other ways that one might attempt to explain how it is that a reproductive print R_{Π} might afford access to the aesthetic properties of print Π , including the

Waltonian-inspired idea that the reproductive print R_{Π} serves as a prop in a fiction-like game of make-belief (2015: 15–16), the idea that the reproductive print R_{Π} is a translation of an image from one medium to another (2015: 14), and the idea that a reproductive print R_{Π} serves as a source of testimony regarding the original painting Π (2015: 16), finding each of them wanting.

Perhaps most interesting alternative he considers is based on the idea that pictures are transparent: pictures of objects do not typically have all or even many of the properties had by the objects pictured, yet they give us epistemic access to those object and their properties. Thus, is it possible that pictures, in general, and reproductive prints, in particular, give us access to the aesthetic properties of the works pictured in a similar manner? Hopkins suggests not. Reproductive prints do share at least some of the content of the work being reproduced. Thus, a reproductive print of Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* provides epistemic access to the appearance of the same woman to which Da Vinci's painting gives us access. But this woman presumably does not possess the aesthetic qualities had by the painting – these are properties that hold in virtue of the way Da Vinci painted the woman, not properties inherent in the woman who was painted. In short, the transparency account provides us with a story regarding the manner in which reproductive prints provide us with access to the objects depicted in the painting being reproduced, and to the properties possessed by those objects, but does not provide an explanation of how we might access the aesthetic properties of the painting itself (2015: 15).¹⁶

Given the failures of these accounts, Hopkins concludes that the only viable means to explain the fact – if it is indeed a fact – that a reproductive print R_{Π} based on painting Π can facilitate access to the aesthetic properties of Π is via some version of the simple view. We are left, however, with the following challenge: if, as seems to be the case (and, as we have already noted, as seems to be assumed by centuries of art education based on exposure to reproductive prints as aesthetic surrogates) we can somehow access the aesthetic properties of an original painting Π via direct experience of a reproductive print R_{Π} , then we need to formulate a more nuanced account of the connection between aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties according to which two objects can share many of their aesthetic properties (i.e., they can afford similar *types* of aesthetic experiences) while exhibiting very different non-aesthetic perceptual properties (i.e., they are very different physical tokens).¹⁷

3 Conclusion

The accounts of the ontology and epistemology of printmaking surveyed above are enough to convince the skeptic that philosophical consideration of prints and printmaking has and will continue to yield significant rewards. The multiply instanced nature of prints, the division of the particular impressions that are instances or parts of a print into various editions (as well as the setting aside of some impressions as outside any edition), and the status of individual impressions as art instances (independent of interpretation or performance), all contribute to a rich and significant structure. In short, prints and printmaking has its own distinctive ontology and epistemology and hence differs in important ways from other art forms, such as painting and sculpture.

But learning that printmaking is quite different from painting and sculpture is not merely a lesson regarding the ways that printmaking works. In addition, seeing the significant ways that printmaking differs from painting and sculpture also helps to highlight important connections between these initially quite different looking art forms.

To see this, we need only consider the fact that a feature that is standard for an art form need not be standard for all its sub-forms. Printmaking and sculpture both provide examples of this. Some kinds of printmaking (monotyping) standardly produce singular works, while there are sub-categories of sculpture that seem to exhibit a tripartite ontological division into work/editions/-castings similar to the standard work/editions/impressions structure we have explored above

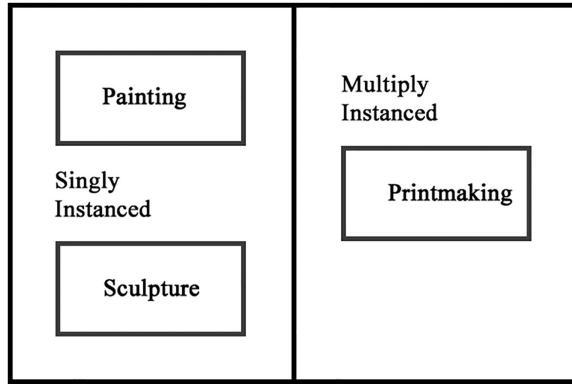


Figure 3.1

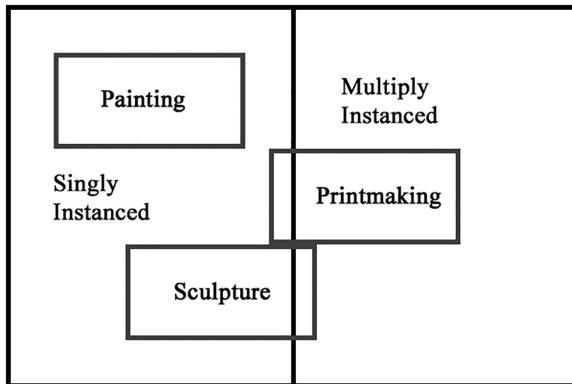


Figure 3.2

with regard to printmaking (and where, in addition, the individual sculptural castings are art-instances).¹⁸ Thus, multiplicity is standard for printmaking, but contra-standard for monotypes, while singularity is standard for sculpture, but contra-standard for some types of cast sculpture.

Had we restricted our attention solely to multiply instanced prints (and were we to ignore similar “non-standard” cases in sculpture), we might have begun this essay with a simple ontological map that grouped paintings and sculpture squarely on the one side, and prints on the other, based on whether they are singly or multiply instanced, as in Figure 3.1:¹⁹

As just noted, however, the ontological picture is in reality more like Figure 3.2:

By attending not only to the differences, but also to the similarities and overlaps between the ontologies of these distinct art forms, we see that the relevant divisions are not merely between those forms that produce singular works and those that are multiply instanced. Instead, the reality is that there are more complicated relationships between these art forms, their sub-forms, and the various ways that an artwork can have multiple physically and spatially distinct instances. As a result, learning more about the multiplicity of (non-monotype) prints will likely provide us with insights into the ontology of some forms of sculpture (e.g., editioned, cast sculpture), and learning more about the singularity of painting and (non-cast) sculpture will, for similar reasons, provide us with insight into the singularity of some prints (e.g., monotypes).²⁰ There remains much work to be done.

Notes

- 1 The term “print” is ambiguous, referring both to multiply instanced artwork and to the individual instances. Here, we shall use “impression” for the latter, and “print” for the former.
- 2 Of course, this is not intended to imply that t-shirts or newspapers could not be art, but rather to merely point out that we rarely take them to be such. Of course, as the recent explosion of work on comic studies attests, the comics page of the newspaper is an obvious exception.
- 3 I will not here address skeptical worries regarding the artistic status of printmaking (e.g., the claim that printmaking is not an art form distinct from drawing or painting but instead consists merely of the mechanical reproduction of drawings or paintings). For a compelling refutation of such skeptical worries, see Abell (2015).
- 4 One notable contribution to this process is the excellent 2015 special issue of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* devoted to printmaking, and edited by Christy Mag Uidhir. As a quick glance at the bibliography of the present essay will attest, is no exaggeration to say that, did the essays in that special issue not exist, the present essay would have been nearly impossible to write!
- 5 Within the philosophy of art, the distinction between multiply instanced and singly instanced artworks is often tied closely to Nelson Goodman’s (1976) autographic/allographic distinction. Goodman’s distinction, however, is spelled out in different ways at different points in *Languages of Art* – for example, in terms of works that can/cannot be forged, or in terms of works that can or cannot be codified via a notation – none of which are obviously equivalent to the single/multiple instance distinction (nor obviously equivalent to one another). See Meskin (2012) for relevant discussion.
- 6 In addition, there are works, such as Warhol’s *Campbell’s Soup Cans* (1962), which are technically screen-prints but are often treated as if they are paintings in much popular and critical discussion.
- 7 In addition, there may be artist’s proofs, printer’s proofs, exhibition proofs, hors de commerce, and trial proofs. There are obvious, and complicated, issues that arise when asking if these are also instances of the artwork – and, further, if they are art-instances in the sense discussed by Cook and Meskin (2015) and below. Space considerations preclude a detailed examination of this question, but see Mag Uidhir (2009) for some discussion.
- 8 For an insightful discussion of the connection between the destruction of the instances of a multiply instanced artwork and the destruction of that artwork, see Rossberg (2013). For general discussions, the type/token distinction and artworks as abstract objects, see Howell (2002), Levinson (2012), and Walters (2013).
- 9 Gover (2015) argues that printmaking can be usefully thought of as a kind of performance. If this is right, then the idea that art-instances only arise via performance would, contra Meskin and Cook (- 2015), be compatible with the fact that printmaking involves the creation of both the print itself and impressions as art-instances of that print.
- 10 It is worth noting that Cook and Meskin (2015) is primarily concerned with comparing the status of prints and the status of comics – a hybrid art form with its roots in both printmaking and literature – vis-à-vis the production of art-instances.
- 11 Van Laar explicitly notes that, on his view, where the edition is the primary site of aesthetic appreciation, to destroy an impression within the edition (or even to move it) is to irrevocably alter the artwork (1980: 102).
- 12 Cook and Meskin (2015) briefly examine whether the various sorts of “editions” produced in mainstream comics publishing amount to editions in this sense, concluding that they typically do not.
- 13 Hopkins notes that it is not only pictures that are experienced via surrogates: architectural models are another particularly interesting case (2015: 12).
- 14 Of course, with the rise of the internet, the primary role of prints as aesthetic surrogates for paintings has likely been superseded by images displayed on computer screens. Since such images are usually themselves digital reproductions of reproductive (photographic) prints, however, we will set this complication aside.
- 15 There are subtle differences between Mothersill’s and Sibley’s account regarding the kind and extent of agreement with regard to non-aesthetic properties that is required in order for two objects to share aesthetic properties. Space limitations preclude a detailed discussion of these issues here.
- 16 Another way to see the issues at hand: as Hopkins notes later in the paper, if the transparency account is right, then one’s aesthetic experience of a reproductive print that one knows is reproductive (a print depicting a painting depicting a woman) will be very different from one’s aesthetic experience of that print if one does not know it is reproductive (i.e., a print depicting a woman).
- 17 For other useful discussions of the epistemic relationships between original artworks and surrogates, see Scott (2018), Ravasio (2018).

- 18 It is worth noting that there are other kinds of sculpture that might be multiply instanced but do not exhibit the work/edition/casting structure. For example, some ready-mades such as Duchamp's *Fountain* or *Bicycle Wheel* seem multiply instanced in virtue of the fact that distinct objects have served as the *whole* of the work at different times. There does not seem to be any analogous way that two different print impressions could each serve as the *whole* of a print at different times.
- 19 Of course, in contrast to the simplistic picture about to be sketched, and summed up in Figure 3.1, we carefully reminded ourselves numerous times that much of the discussion above failed to apply to monotypes, and hence the arguments considered were at best arguments regarding what metaphysical features were standard for prints, and not what features universally hold of prints.
- 20 Thanks are owed to Christy Mag Uidhir, Aaron Meskin, and Marcus Rossberg for helpful discussions on issues connected to this essay. In addition, thanks are owed to the other speakers and attendees at the 2013 Printmaking and the Philosophy of Art workshop at the University of Houston, who taught me a lot about the philosophy of prints and printmaking.

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4

EROTIC ART AND THE NUDE

Hans Maes

While there are countless art historical studies of the nude and of erotic art, philosophy has largely remained silent on the subject. This is regrettable, not only because it means that a longstanding and very popular tradition in painting and sculpture is being ignored, but also because erotic art raises all sorts of interesting philosophical questions. Given the scope of this essay I can only address a few of those here. Section 1 focuses on the conceptual issue of what erotic art is and how it relates to the genre of the nude. Sections 2–4 investigate how aesthetic experiences are connected to, or different from, erotic experiences. Section 5 explores the boundaries between the erotic and the pornographic with attention to notions such as harm, objectification, and medium.

1 The Erotic, the Sexual, and the Nude in Art

In *Sex and Reason*, Richard Posner proposes to use the word “erotic” to describe “presentations and representations that are, or at least are taken by some viewers to be, in some sense ‘about’ sexual activity” (Posner 1994: 351). This characterization needs some narrowing down if one wants to arrive at a definition that captures the extension of what we ordinarily think counts as erotic art. For one thing, such a definition should exclude scientific-behavioral studies or medical illustrations of sexual activity (which tend to be neither erotic nor artistic in nature). Furthermore, it’s not the case, simply because some viewers take a painting or a sculpture to be about sexual activity, that we are ipso facto dealing with an erotic representation. Someone who is unfamiliar with the story of the Bible might take a crucifixion painting to be a depiction of a sado-masochistic act, but that would be insufficient grounds to call, say, Tintoretto’s *Crucifixion* (1565) a work of erotic art.

Peter Webb’s definition of erotic art as “art on a sexual theme related specifically to emotions rather than merely actions, and sexual depictions which are justifiable on aesthetic grounds” (Webb 1975: 2) is already closer to the mark. But even though Webb’s emphasis on emotions is understandable from an etymological point of view – the term “erotic” derives from the Greek word “eros” meaning love or passion – his definition is still too broad. Max Beckmann’s *The Night* (1918–1919) depicts the horrors of a rape and so does qualify as “art on a sexual theme related specifically to emotions” and yet it would be very misleading to label it as an erotic painting.

Instead of claiming that erotic art is *about* sexual feelings or desires, one could say that erotic art *elicits* sexual feelings or desires. But this characterization would also be too broad. A pious Madonna and Child painting may elicit sexual feelings or desires in some people, but that in and of itself does not make it erotic art. The *intention* to be sexually stimulating appears crucial, as Jerrold

Levinson acknowledges in his definition of erotic art as “art which aims to engage viewers sexually through explicit sexual content, and that succeeds, to some extent, in doing so” (Levinson 2006: 252). But does erotic art really need to be explicit? Camille Claudel’s sculpture *The Waltz* (1889) is suggestive, rather than explicit, and yet it is often described as an erotic masterpiece.

The definition I propose is the following: erotic art is art that is made with the intention to stimulate its target audience sexually, and that succeeds to some extent in doing so. This raises the further question what sexual stimulation precisely entails. According to Guy Sircello (1979: 119), it is the inducing of sexual feelings where the latter might be (1) feelings in our sexual parts, or (2) feelings in other erogenous parts. However, a kick below the belt will give a man certain feelings in his sexual parts, but not of the sort that erotic art is supposed to engender. So, an important qualification is needed. Sexual stimulation is probably best understood as the inducing of sexual feelings, desires, and imaginings, that would generally be regarded as pleasant in themselves.

If a *nude* is traditionally defined as a work of fine art that has as its primary subject the unclothed human body, it should be clear that many but not all nude paintings and sculptures qualify as erotic art; and *vice versa*. As to the broader category of *sexually themed art*, it could be argued that all works of erotic art have a sexual theme, but not the other way around: many artworks with a sexual theme are not works of erotic art (e.g. Max Beckmann’s *The Night*).

Anti-erotic art could be defined as art that (successfully) aims to induce *negative* sexual feelings, thoughts, and imaginings in its target audience. For example, many feminist artists have explored the dark, violent, abject aspects of sexuality in their work (see, for instance, Kiki Smith’s *Tale* 1992, and *Blood Pool* 1992). Finally, because censorship and moral policing have often prevented artists from making work that is openly erotic, it is worth drawing attention to the existence of *covertly erotic art*, that is, art made with the *covert* intention to stimulate its target audience sexually and that succeeds to some extent in doing so. A good example are the woodblock printed and hand painted “sukashi shunga” (hidden shunga) that were popular in Japan at the beginning of the 20th century. What at first sight appear to be beautifully drawn postcards depicting landscapes with some space in the middle and at the corners to write one’s message, when held up to the light, turn out to be sexually explicit lovemaking scenes (Aki 2013: 47).

2 The Aesthetic Disenfranchisement of the Erotic

Are there *überhaupt* any works of erotic art? This may seem a silly question, especially to anyone who is familiar with art history and with the well-established tradition of erotic art in particular. But to students of modern aesthetics, that is, the philosophy of art and beauty from roughly the beginning of the 18th century to the end of the 19th century, that question will not appear absurd at all.

Modern aesthetics famously built a wall between aesthetic pleasure, on the one hand, and sensual or sexual pleasures, on the other hand, leaving precious little room for works that aim to combine the two. The problem becomes clear when we consider Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (1790), arguably the most influential work of that period. According to Kant, a judgment of beauty is based on a feeling of disinterested pleasure, i.e., a pleasure that does not depend on or generate a desire for the object. But since works of erotic art are precisely meant to tap into and stimulate our sexual appetites and desires, it is hard to see how they can be the object of an aesthetic judgment. They are rather primed to be the object of what Kant calls a judgment of the agreeable, based on an “interested pleasure,” in this case the titillation provided by the alluring depictions of attractive bodies and seductive poses. The sensual pleasure offered by such representations is very different from the enjoyment that occurs in an aesthetic experience and which results from the free play of the cognitive faculties of imagination and understanding. According to Kant, it is because aesthetic judgments are grounded not in any interest, but rather in the subjective conditions

of cognition, which are shared by all rational beings, that they can lay claim to universality. The pleasure solicited by erotic art can obviously not lay claim to such universality since it will depend on one's sexual preferences and inclinations.

Kant was not the first to introduce disinterestedness as hallmark of the aesthetic and isolate it as such from what is merely sensually or sexually appealing. Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, is often credited with this insight. In his *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711) Shaftesbury already stated that the response solicited by beauty is one of rational and refined contemplation, far removed from the crude pleasures that we receive through our senses.

A problem that immediately arises for Shaftesbury's account is the one posed by the "dazzling form" of a beautiful woman (1964: 136). Here, beauty and sensual appeal, far from being antithetical, actually seem to go hand in hand. Still, Shaftesbury insists that the two kinds of pleasure are utterly distinct, even though, in this particular case, erotic pleasure may indeed follow in the wake of aesthetic pleasure. One could make a comparison, he writes, with someone who goes from contemplating the beauty of a tree to fantasizing about its tasty fruits. Both activities are pleasurable, but the pleasures involved are very different: one is a disinterested aesthetic pleasure, the other is a pleasure informed by our self-interest. It points to a sensual joy, based on an appetite that we have in common with animals, or "brutes" as Shaftesbury prefers to call them. The contemplation of beauty, by contrast, is unique to us rational beings. That's because beauty is exclusively an object of the mind.

But can one really draw the distinction in such absolute terms? When we admire an attractive man or woman, isn't it precisely their *beauty* that activates the senses and gives rise to certain bodily passions? Shaftesbury dismisses this line of thought almost out of hand. After all, we wouldn't say that it is the *beauty* of the fruit that attracts and brings joy to the prowling animal in search of food. What whets and satisfies appetite of both humans and animals is not the striking form, but what lies beneath that striking form, that which is mere matter. Just as it is not the material that makes a sculpture beautiful, but rather the artistic intentions and designs that shape the material, so it is not the body in itself, something that is mere matter, that is beautiful: "What is it you admire but mind, or the effect of mind? Tis mind alone which forms. All which is void of mind is horrid, and matter formless is deformity itself" (1964: 132). Mind is the only true object of beauty. Moreover, it is only *through* the mind that beauty can be apprehended and appreciated, for if animals can't know and enjoy beauty precisely because they have only senses, it follows that man can't conceive or enjoy beauty through his senses (the "brutish part").

It is evident that, for Shaftesbury, erotic art, which is all about presenting desirable bodies and stirring up sensual pleasures, can have no legitimate place within the realm of the aesthetic. Yet, apart from a brief passage in which he denounces the "self-improving artist" who makes a fortune by "studying bodies" (1964: 144), Shaftesbury does not explicitly criticize or attack any kind of art or artist. (Like Kant, his primary focus is not art, but beauty.) Someone who does explicitly take up such a critical stance, however, is Arthur Schopenhauer. If Shaftesbury is the philosopher who inspired Kant to develop the theory of disinterestedness, then Schopenhauer is the philosopher who, inspired by Kant, has taken this notion of disinterestedness and worked it up into a fully fledged philosophy of art.

This is not the place to discuss all the minutiae of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* (1818). Crucial, for our purposes, is his concept of "das Reizende," which will here be translated as "the stimulating." The stimulating is "that which excites the will by directly presenting to it satisfaction, fulfillment" (Schopenhauer 1969: 207). It ought to be shunned at all price in art, says Schopenhauer, because it

draws the beholder down from pure contemplation, demanded by every apprehension of the beautiful, since it necessarily stirs his will by objects that directly appeal to it. Thus the

beholder no longer remains pure subject of knowing, but becomes the needy and dependent subject of willing.

(1969: 207)

This is contrary to the aim of art, which is to facilitate will-less contemplation of the Ideas.

Schopenhauer is quite specific about what the stimulating consists in: “In historical painting and in sculpture (it) consists in nude figures, the position, semi-drapery, and whole treatment of which are calculated to excite lustful feeling in the beholder” (1969: 207–208). It is important to note that he does not object to depicting the nude figure as such – after all, the ancients did so “almost always free from … fault” (1969: 207–208). What he objects to is a particular *treatment* of the nude, one which is designed to excite lustful feelings in the beholder. In other words, what he targets and denounces is erotic art. Like Shaftesbury and Kant, he is drawn to make a comparison with food. Fruit is admissible as a subject matter for paintings “for it exhibits itself as a further development of the flower, and as a beautiful product of nature through form and colour, without our being positively forced to think of its edibility” (1969: 207–208). But what is not admissible are prepared and served-up dishes, depicted with a high degree of realism. Dutch still life paintings depicting oysters, herrings, crabs, bread, butter, beer, wine excite the appetite and are objectionable for the exact same reasons as erotic paintings and sculptures, which excite sexual appetite, are objectionable: they stimulate the will and as such put an end to any aesthetic contemplation of the object. Given that the function of art is to facilitate aesthetic experience, it follows for Schopenhauer that “the stimulating… is everywhere to be avoided in art” (1969: 208; see also Neill 2012).

3 The Legacy of Modern Aesthetics

Modern aesthetics has cast a long shadow into the 20th and even the 21st century, and the idea that the aesthetic and the erotic are fundamentally incompatible has proved to be very influential throughout.

Clive Bell, the great champion of aesthetic formalism, inscribes himself neatly in that tradition. In his landmark book, *Art* (1914), he begins by drawing a sharp contrast between the aesthetic emotion, which is provoked by works of art in virtue of a certain pleasing combination of lines and colors, and sexual feelings and desires which are provoked by sensually appealing bodies. The two could not be more different, he thinks:

Let no one imagine, because he has made merry in the warm tilth and quaint nooks of romance, that he can even guess at the austere and thrilling raptures of those who have climbed the cold, white peaks of art.

(1961: 42)

Nevertheless, Bell acknowledges, as did Shaftesbury, that the two emotions are often confused partly because in everyday speech the word “beauty” is used indiscriminately for items that fall in each of the two categories (beautiful works of art, attractive men and women). To prevent any further confusion, he insists therefore on using the word “significant form,” instead of beauty, for the combination of lines and colors that produces the aesthetic emotion. (Shaftesbury, one will recall, was revisionist in the opposite direction, refusing to employ the word beauty for that which is merely desirable.)

What about those works of art that appeal to our sensual feelings and desires and that are so popular with the man in the street?

The art that they call ‘beautiful’ is generally closely related to the women. A beautiful picture is a photograph of a pretty girl; beautiful music, the music that provokes emotions similar to those provoked by young ladies in musical farces; and beautiful poetry, the poetry that recalls the same emotions felt, twenty years earlier, for the rector’s daughter.

(1961: 28–29)

Bell has no patience with ignorant folks who seek out pictures, poems, or music for these reasons. They are simply confusing the sensual and the aesthetic.

For Bell and his fellow formalists, significant form is the only important artistic criterion. Where it comes to insulating the aesthetic from the erotic, many prominent philosophers in the 20th century have followed in Bell’s footsteps, even when they do not subscribe to his formalism. In *The Principles of Art* (1938), R. G. Collingwood observes how “the words ‘beauty,’ ‘beautiful,’ as actually used, have no aesthetic implication” since they often indicate “the satisfaction of some desire or the arousing of some emotion” (1938: 38–41). For Collingwood, a beautiful man or woman ordinarily means one whom we find sexually desirable. And he firmly states that this “has nothing whatever to do with aesthetic experience. It has to do with that other kind of experience that Plato called *eros*” (1938: 41). Similarly, Monroe Beardsley insisted on a strict divide between the two sorts of responses and revised his theory of aesthetic experience when it was pointed out to him that it did not exclude sexual experiences from the realm of the aesthetic (Beardsley 1982). Edward Bullough famously posited “psychical distance” as a prerequisite for experiencing art and concluded that “explicit references to organic affections, … especially to sexual matters, lie normally below the Distance-limit, and can be touched on by Art only with special precautions” (1969: 403).

Even in the 21st century, one will find philosophers who are deeply skeptical about the aesthetic and artistic potential of the erotic. Mohan Matthen, for instance, states that “erotic art tends not to be great art” because “even when erotica are artistic … they have too direct an effect on sexual response, and this distracts the viewer’s attention away from the work itself” (2011: 354). The more erotic a work of art, the more difficult it is to appreciate aesthetically. Matthen makes this claim in an essay review of *The Art Instinct* (2009), a book on evolutionary aesthetics written by Denis Dutton, who also claims that eroticism is best avoided in art, though for different reasons than Matthen. While the latter considers the sexual response too distracting, Dutton argues that it is rather too crude and too basic to count as a proper aesthetic response. A high degree of meaning-complexity is the hallmark of all great art, according to Dutton, but while love is complex, “[s]ex itself is just too simple” (2009: 238). As a consequence, “love is the most pervasive theme for representative arts everywhere, [whereas] explicit eroticism does not tend to figure importantly in the greatest masterpieces” (2009: 238). Just like a bowl of corn syrup and a plate of sugar will never be dinner, Dutton flippantly observes, erotic paintings and sculptures will never qualify as art of the highest order. (It is certainly noteworthy that Dutton, who is the antipode of modern aesthetics in doing away with the very notion of a disinterested pleasure and assuming that matters of sexual reproduction are vital in explaining our interest in art and aesthetics, actually finds himself in the company of Schopenhauer, Kant, and Shaftesbury where erotic art is concerned.)

To recapitulate: if (disinterested, contemplative) aesthetic responses are indeed irreconcilable with (interested, bodily) sexual responses, as so many philosophers of art in the past have thought, then there hardly remains any conceptual space for works that aim for both kinds of response. Yet, we do, as a matter of fact, have this longstanding tradition of erotic art, not just in the West but also in many non-Western cultures. How to account for this?

Proponents of modern aesthetics could simply bite the bullet here and argue, as Mohan Matthen does, that erotic art tends not to be great art, or, following Bell, that erotic paintings can only attain art status in spite of their erotic content. But that is a big bullet to bite, by any standard.

Not only are there so many outstanding works of erotic art, but the eroticism of these works is also more often than not an integral part of their status and value as art. To be sure, there are nude paintings and sculptures which seem to qualify first and foremost as studies in formal beauty. But anyone who would regard, say, the *Rokeby Venus* by Velázquez (c. 1647–1651) or *Philip Golub Reclining* by Silvia Sleigh (1971) as a mere formal exercise would entirely misunderstand and fail to appreciate what these works are about. That is why the great majority of aestheticians today prefer the other horn of the dilemma. Instead of denying the existence of genuinely erotic art, they will deny that aesthetic and erotic responses are antithetical and hence reject the basic tenets of modern aesthetics.

4 The Aesthetic Rehabilitation of the Erotic

Modern aesthetics and its 20th-century formalist and experientialist heirs have come under attack from many sides. But instead of offering a general critique, let us consider briefly some of the philosophers who, in attacking modern aesthetics, have explicitly pleaded for the inclusion of the sexual within the domain of aesthetics.

One of the most vehement early critics was Friedrich Nietzsche. In an oft-quoted passage in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), Nietzsche shifts attention to the artist's point of view to reveal a fundamental flaw in modern aesthetics: "When our aestheticians tirelessly rehearse, in support of Kant's view, that the spell of beauty enables us to view even nude female statues 'disinterestedly' we may be allowed to laugh a little at their expense. The experiences of artists in this delicate matter are rather more 'interesting'; certainly Pygmalion was not entirely devoid of aesthetic feeling" (Nietzsche 1956: III.6).

Pygmalion fell under the spell of the beautiful statue he had created, but his enjoyment was certainly not bereft of any desire. For Nietzsche, the case of Pygmalion is not exceptional, but rather emblematic: "All art works tonically, increases strength, inflames desire" (1968b: §809). And, as he writes in *Twilight of the Idols* (1889), "all beauty incites to procreation – ... precisely this is the *proprium* of its effect, from the most sensual regions up into the most spiritual..." (1968a: IX.22). To believe, as Schopenhauer, Kant, Shaftesbury seem to have done, that in matters of beauty and art there is such a thing as "immaculate perception" (an aesthetic regard pure of any desire) is simply to deceive oneself.

Within contemporary aesthetics, both Alexander Nehamas and Richard Shusterman have made a serious and sustained effort to make room for the erotic within aesthetics and art. In the first few pages of his book *Only a Promise of Happiness* (2007), Nehamas lays his cards on the table. Mentioning Kant and Schopenhauer as his adversaries, he states uncompromisingly that "the only reaction appropriate to beauty is *eros* – love, the desire to possess it" (2007: 6). While *eros* should not necessarily be understood in a sexual sense here, Nehamas does think that erotic encounters provide an instructive model for aesthetic experiences in general: "The most abstract and intellectual beauty provokes the urge to possess it no less than the most sensual inspires the passion to come to know it better" (2007: 7). Each judgment of beauty is future oriented, is identical with the spark of desire, and contains, in the words of Stendhal, a promise of happiness (Stendhal 1926: 74; Nehamas 2007: 55).

For Nehamas, too, erotic art is not at all a recalcitrant exception in need of explanation. Quite the contrary, it offers the best possible inroad to understanding what beauty and art are all about. It's not a coincidence that the touchstone work of art, to which Nehamas returns again and again, is Manet's *Olympia*. Far from being an exercise in formal beauty, this is a painting that is precisely designed "to jolt the audience, especially the men, into acknowledging that what they were enjoying was not a painted canvas or an idealized figure with an edifying message but a naked woman of their own place and time" (2007: 27). It is erotic in every sense of the word, forever sparking the audience's desire – as all great art should do.

If Nehamas mainly takes issue with the disavowal of desire within modern aesthetics, Richard Shusterman's main target is the "idealist-rationalist repugnance for the body" which he finds is permeating the entire tradition of Western philosophy (2005: 324). To counter this, Shusterman proposes a new discipline, "somaesthetics," which aims to study the body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation and which has as one of its main subsidiary ambitions to "(i)mprove our appreciation of the artistry, beauty, meaning that sexual experience can offer" (2008: 85). In several of his essays, he argues that sexual experience itself can qualify as an aesthetic experience, since most of the crucial features attributed to aesthetic experiences are also attributable to erotic experiences: they are pursued and valued for their own sake, they are rich in intensity and stand out distinctively from the flow of ordinary humdrum experience, they display harmonies of structure and developing form, they are being subjectively savored but also intentionally directed at an object, they deeply engage thought, feeling, and imagination, and stimulate both body and mind (2007: 57; 2008: 93). Hence, instead of ignoring or disenfranchising the tradition of erotic art, Shusterman pleads for the reassertion of an "ars erotica" which would not just involve a renewed attention for certain works of the past, but would entail the development of genuine erotic art forms that could help increase our understanding of the relation between aesthetics and sex (2007: 57). Other philosophers have since followed suit and continued the rehabilitation of the body and the erotic within aesthetics (e.g. Irvin 2016).

5 The Erotic vs. the Pornographic

Scholars who write about erotic art are often quite anxious to draw a strict dividing line between "high-brow" erotic art and "low-brow" pornography (Maes 2012). The eminent art historian Kenneth Clark notoriously stated to the Longford Committee Investigating Pornography: "To my mind art exists in the realm of contemplation... the moment art becomes an incentive to action it loses its true character" (1972: 280). This was his main objection to pornography: that it was in essence an incentive to sexual acts. However, as a justification for the radical separation of art and pornography this will not do. For one thing, Clark seems to overlook the fact that there are numerous religious or politically inspired masterpieces that call on people to change their lives or perform certain actions (Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, 1830, comes to mind).

Erotic art, according to Roger Scruton, relies on suggestion and, instead of focusing on certain body parts, will try to capture the individuality, personality, and subjectivity of the represented person. In Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538), for instance, it is not the sexual organs but the face, as "window to the soul," that provides the focus of attention (2009: 149). A pornographic image, by contrast, "is like a magic wand that turns subjects into objects, people into things – and thereby disenchants them, destroying the source of their beauty" (2009: 163). As part of his project to rehabilitate beauty as the central aesthetic and artistic category, Scruton also appeals to the distinction between "the nude" and "the naked" made famous by Kenneth Clark (1956). The artistic nude constitutes, as the subtitle of Clark's book indicates, a "Study in Ideal Form": the body is beautifully shaped and framed by the conventions of art. The people in pornographic images are not nude, but naked. They are deprived of clothes, and as such exposed in an embarrassing way.

However, when Scruton praises the self-assured way in which the *Venus of Urbino* looks directly at the spectator, thereby signaling that she possesses her own body in a confident way instead of just being an object on display, he conveniently disregards other masterpieces by Titian, such as *Venus and Adonis* (1554) and *Danaë* (1544–1545), where quite the opposite is true. Furthermore, some commentators have argued, *pace* Scruton, that it is "the nude" and not "the naked" which implies objectification and dehumanization. According to John Berger, "to be naked is to be oneself," whereas a naked body has to be seen as an object on display for the spectator in order to become a "nude" (Berger 1972: 54; see also Hammer 1997).

Perhaps pornography is harmful in a way that erotic art is not? We know that harm may occur in the making of pornography, and take the form of coercion, brutality, violence, or rape. But even if no harm takes place in the production phase, and models are treated fairly and with respect, there can still be post-production harms. Some have argued that the pornographic materials themselves *constitute* harm because, as a form of hate speech, they silence and subordinate women (MacKinnon 1987, Langton 2009). Others have emphasized that exposure to pornographic material may *cause* harm (Eaton 2007). By systematically eroticizing aspects of gender inequality, so-called egalitarian pornography is thought to cause harm to a third party, in particular women, through the pernicious effect it has on its consumers (Eaton 2007).

But could the same not be said of certain works or kinds of erotic art? First, harm may be inflicted when erotic art is being produced (Brown (2002) tells the harrowing story of Cellini and the Nymph of Fontainebleau). Second, some erotic art may also *constitute* harm. At least, Langton and MacKinnon's arguments seem to carry over seamlessly to (certain strands of) erotic art. One of the difficult questions for Langton and MacKinnon – do pornographers possess the appropriate authority to perform the speech acts of silencing and subordinating women? – appears even easier to answer in the affirmative in the case of artists since their perceived authority is much less contentious. Third, some erotic art may cause harm in the same way as pornography, that is, by eroticizing aspects of gender inequality and thus shaping people's sexual preferences in such a way that sustains the current inequality between genders (Eaton 2012).

“Objectification” is a term that is often used to describe what is wrong with pornography. Martha Nussbaum (1995), for instance, has written a seminal essay on different forms of objectification and how they apply to pornography. However, a detailed case is made by Eaton (2012) that objectification is not unique to pornography and is present in many works of erotic art – a presence that is frequently unacknowledged precisely because critics tend to focus exclusively on pornography and too often consider art to be above (moral) criticism. Eaton (2012) also offers a philosophical re-interpretation of the influential but strongly psychoanalytically informed concept of the “male gaze” (Mulvey 1989). To say that a work embodies the male gaze, Eaton suggests, is simply to say that it prescribes that its audience perceives the woman represented as primarily a sex object. And:

To describe this “way of seeing” as “male” is not to claim anything about how all, or even most, men respond to such pictures; rather, it is to note that this is the “way of seeing” proper to someone in the masculine social role, a role which, it should be noted, is avowedly heterosexual.

(Eaton 2012: 293)

In a response to Eaton's paper, Lavallee (2016) has drawn attention to the different ways in which non-white women are objectified in art – something which has often remained unacknowledged in the scholarly literature. Finally, one should consider differences in artistic media and social class in distinguishing between erotic art and pornography. For instance, Adil Mustafa Ahmad notes in relation to Islamic art that “practically all that is perceived as erotic (acceptable, sublime) when described in literature is seen as pornographic (off-putting and vulgar) if projected in painting and sculpture” (Ahmad 1994: 281). In Western art, too, there appear to be different degrees of permissibility depending on the medium that is used. While Giulio Romano's sexually explicit drawings and paintings were collected and revered as art, the print run that Marcantonio Raimondi made of those works, known as *I Modi* (1524), was reviled and all but destroyed by the censors. What made such erotic representations exceed the boundaries of acceptability, Eaton (2018) suggest, was not its extreme libidinosity but, rather, its widespread availability and, thereby, its threat to one of the mechanisms of sustaining class privilege.

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5

ON REGARDING DIGITAL ART

Shelby Moser

1 Introduction

It is evident from this volume that the contemporary arts have challenged well-established artistic practices, including ways in which art is produced, curated, and appreciated. Therefore, it should come as little surprise the digital arts yield no exception to this tendency. But whilst transgressions against artistic norms create little fractures in the history of art, they also, over time, tend to motivate new ways of appreciating art. This tendency to accept avant-garde practices into an established art canon is apparent among even the most experimental of contemporary artworks. However, altogether, the digital art form—as prevalent as digital media has become in and outside of the artworld—has yet to be fully embraced by the fine arts, mainly because it has yet to be adequately understood. This chapter investigates the role digital art has played within the broader context of traditional art appreciation and the challenges it has encountered, and suggests that, like other genres before it, requires a new form of regard.

Before beginning an analysis of digital art, it is worth a brief comment on “digital art” as a category and to note a few of the taxonomic variations that have emerged since the 20th century. Other related art categories such as “new media”, “new genre”, and “emerging media” share similarities with digital art but, in addition to the interchangeability between the categories, the terms themselves cause some ambiguity. For one, digital processing systems have been around for nearly a century so there is nothing necessarily new about some of the media within these categories, nor are there clear points at which certain artworks should be reclassified because their media has become old (or expired) and are, therefore, no longer emerging. Likewise, it is important to bear in mind that digital art includes works from a broad range of appreciative art practices such as experimental installation, film, literature, music, video, internet art, video games, and more. In short, many different kinds of works utilize digital media in some capacity, either in the making, presenting, or preserving of an artwork. However, if there is any consistency to be found, it is that all such processes require assistance from a computer.

Most simply understood, the digital realm stands in opposition to the analog; digital media relies on a computer processing system that encodes information into a machine-readable format, or the 1s and 0s commonly referred to as binary code. Artists have used digital technologies as artistic tools since the 1950s to help generate works like A. Michael Noll’s *Gaussian-Quadratic* (1963). But it is worth noting that while these sorts of computer-generated images originally garnered a curiosity for human-like capabilities of computing machines, they, unknowingly, set a precedent that digital works did not belong in the artworld. Works like *Gaussian-Quadratic* were

not necessarily intended, nor were they appreciated as works of fine art, but instead viewed as creative technological experiments to push computer manufacturing and programming to their outer limits. Noll himself, an engineer and pioneering digital “artist”, noted an early aesthetic limitation of computer-generated works since computers, at the time, merely copied the effects of traditional media. Noll’s doubts about a computer’s creative abilities are clear with his statement that computers had “yet to produce anything approaching entirely new aesthetic experiences” (Noll 1970: 11). In other words, he found *Gaussian-Quadratic* to be technologically interesting from an engineering perspective, but artistically derivative from an aesthetic perspective, specifically of Cubist works by Picasso.

An early skepticism of a computer’s ability to be *artistically* innovative was compounded by other circumstantial factors in the mid-20th century. For one, during the Cold War, the public held strong negative associations between the computer and military defense systems, which synonymized computers, not with art, but with warfare, government control, and espionage. For another, computers were both inaccessible and unaffordable to general consumers and to the arts; even if artists gained access to a computer, they often lacked the necessary programming skills to produce artistic works, including pastiche ones like *Gaussian-Quadratic*. Noll was, after all, first and foremost a computer engineer with privileged access to laboratory computers.

While there is nothing digital about the display of *Gaussian-Quadratic*, it reveals an early tendency of the artworld to keep computer-generated works at arm’s length. Digital media has since become more popular in the arts and, now that digital technology is more accessible, established art forms such as photography, film, and music welcome the expanding capabilities of digital media and networked devices. Movies can be created and projected digitally, Medieval illuminated manuscripts can be digitized for posterity, musical concerts can be live-streamed from digital devices at home, and artists can use GUI (guided user interface) software to create digital works without any knowledge of computer programming languages. Technology’s far reaches speak to the significant impact digital media has had, and increasingly continues to have, on the collective arts, to say nothing of how entrenched digital technology is in our daily lives. However, as pervasive and accepted as digital technology has become in the production and archival of various artworks, digital art, as an artform, remains in the margins. To be clear, it is not merely an incorporation of digital media that classifies something as a work of “digital art” in any appreciative sense. A digital film is, after all, appreciated in a more conventional manner *qua* movie than for any salient digital features. In this chapter, digital art will be employed to reference artworks that use digital media, not just in their creation or preservation, but in the *presentation*, or *display* of a work. Narrowing our focus to art that incorporates digital media in this way makes our present task more manageable, but the category remains relatively broad. Consider the following three examples.

Les Immatériaux (1985) was the first computer exhibition held at the. Among other projects, artists and intellectuals, including Continental philosophers Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida, collaborated on a writing project which, by participating from computers in their own homes, and before the existence of email, would appear on a single computer monitor housed inside the museum.

Walter Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1998) is an example of Net.art, otherwise known as online or Internet art. This work, created anonymously, features a website page of words and numbers that flash so quickly, the user is unable to identify what they are reading. At the bottom of the screen, a note from the artist reads “a translation meant for readers who do not understand the original”¹, a clear commentary on the ever-increasing speed of reproducibility of art in the *digital* age, since Benjamin’s famous essay in 1936 on the age of *mechanical* reproduction. Net art is distinctive of museum-based works because they can be accessed remotely, by many users at once, and wholly outside of the museum.

The Rock where People Gather (*where People Gather*, hereafter) (2018) is an example of an interactive, immersive digital installation. *Where People Gather* “is reproduced in a virtual three-dimensional space. Water is simulated to fall onto the rock, and the flow of the water draws the shape of the waterfall. The water is represented by a continuum of numerous water particles and the interaction between the particles is then calculated. Lines are drawn in relation to the behavior of the water particles. The lines are then “flattened” using what teamLab considers to be ultrasubjective space.

When a person stands on the rock or touches the waterfall, they too become like a rock that changes the flow of water. The flow of water continues to transform in real time due to the interaction of people. Previous visual states can never be replicated, and will never reoccur.

(TeamLab 2018)

The first two examples are loosely attributed to one of three digital transformations that have occurred thus far. The final example points to a potential fourth transformation currently in progress. Computer-generated images, such as the aforementioned *Gaussian-Quadratic*, became a possibility during the first digital transformation with the emergence of the first lab-based computers. A second digital transformation is marked by a shift from the lab to commercial world, which made personal computers common in the 1980s and allowed for the production of digitally displayed images such as those famously created by Gilbert & George. A third digital transformation introduced networked computers with the emergence of the Internet in the 1990s, which allowed for art’s connectivity and mobility. Technology has continued to improve upon the capabilities of the computer, giving us immersive works such as *where People Gather*. This latter example gives credence to the claim that we are currently undergoing a fourth transformation with an ever increasing blend between our physical spaces with virtual objects and environments (Florid 2010: 12).

The combined developments from these transformations have shown the artworld that digital media *can* produce new aesthetic effects and experiences, not merely copy those of older media. But, to reiterate, new media sometimes requires new ways of appreciating art. When a work of art consists of digital features, it is important that we not only understand a display’s formal features but also how those features *behave*. That brings us to the primary objective of this chapter, which is to explore the ways in which digital art has been perceived in the past and to take a deeper look at the unique capabilities of digital media. Section 2 analyzes the materiality of digital art, which, significantly, mostly comprises immaterial media. Although immaterial art is common in other art forms, it is not so typical among the plastic arts. Section 3 considers how space factors in our appreciation of digital art and presents a number of ways in which the customs of a museum might inappropriately condition the viewer to regard digital art, as though it were a painting or sculpture. Section 4 summarizes the ways in which digital art has been broadly categorized in the past and suggests digital art needs a new form of regard; unlike most plastic art forms, it is a digital artwork’s *behavior* that should come to the foreground.

2 The Materiality of Digital Art

Every art form takes advantage of a specific medium or media, which, in turn, means an artwork cannot always be separated from its materiality. As characterized by New Media curator Michael Rush, “[with] painting or sculpture, it is the concepts and uses of materials that change in the art. With technology-based art, the medium itself radically changes when the technology changes” (Rush 2005: 193). If sculpture makes some sort of critical commentary about the clay, bronze, or other sculptural substance it comprises, digital art relies on ever changing capabilities

of algorithms, programming languages, software, and the affordances they bear, not to mention the necessary hardware required for proper instantiation.

Just as experimental materials like rope, latex, and newspaper challenged the privileges of paint and clay, digital technology continues to challenge the (predominantly static) object-hood of the plastic arts. But there is a difference in how digital media is perceived compared to the physical media that continues to dominate. The perceptual features of digital artworks are merely the effects of the media, which are generated by algorithms, programming languages, and layers of data and instructions that perform specific functions. But these media are not typically encountered firsthand by the viewer.² For example, although we have a potential to perceive the digital water particles moving from place to place in *where People Gather*, the algorithms and programming languages that generate those features function internally.

Since digital media is not physical in any traditional sense, neither are digital images fixed to a single location.³ A culmination of digital “materials” mentioned above allows for one of the foremost features typically associated with digital artworks, their transmissibility. In other words, digital technology allows information (the work) to be stored, accessed, and instantiated from more than one location, where each accessed instance is, in principle, authentic. An ability to transmit data in this way is remarkable because, historically, philosophical aesthetics and, indeed the artworld, have focused on the plastic arts as commodifiable, singular, unique objects, yet, the transmissible nature of digital media allows some art to be replicable, immaterial, and mobile. Such features further challenge an enduring reliance on art and rarity. Although the transmissible nature of digital works makes it more troublesome for them to fully assimilate in the traditional artworld, it also minimizes their need to assimilate, a point I will return to in the final section of this chapter.

It is unsuitable to discuss digital art at any length before discussing another key feature, their potential for interactivity. Whilst not all digital works are interactive, interactivity has increasingly become a standard feature since computers are, by default, interactive machines. Interactivity marks a point of departure from digital images like those created by Gilbert & George, but there is precedence in earlier art forms. In discussing his interactive work from 1920, *Rotary Glass Plates (Precision Optics)*, Marcel Duchamp characterized the significance of viewer interactivity because, unlike non-interactive works, they rely on viewers to “complete” them. In other words, whilst many artworks prescribe a level of viewer participation, interactive artworks prescribe users to alter a work’s display features. For example, Duchamp’s electro-mechanical piece prescribes users to flip a switch to set the glass plates into rotation. Such an example makes it clear that the digital age did not initiate interactive art, but there is perhaps no other medium that has so greatly inspired the kind of philosophical inquiry currently occurring across a broad range of disciplinary fields. This is largely because, more significantly than works like (*Precision Optics*), interactive digital works mainly require users to instance the works themselves, not just certain features of them.

Transmissibility and interactivity are paragon features of many digital artworks, but, while they pose no real problem for the arts in and of themselves, there is a theoretical tension with the combination of the two features because traditionally, a given work is constituted by a single, fixed display type. Unlike static works, the displays of interactive digital artworks are “customizable” and “dynamic” because the sounds, sights, and environments of the work can change numerous times depending upon the user’s input, forcing a work to appear much different over the course of time (Paul 2008). Since interactive works prescribe users to change their display—to varying degrees—there is no single correct display type, but multiple correct display types, and each display type consists of their own constituent displays.⁴ Although a concept of multiple display types and differing displays preserves a well-embraced philosophical type-token distinction, it also reveals that interactive works do not consist of a traditional single, fixed display type, an aspect of their immaterial nature that further marginalizes them from the norms of the plastic arts.

3 Digital Art & Space

A central achievement of early contemporary art was to contest the physical parameters of the museum space, as well as museum-oriented items such as frames and pedestals, features that customarily demarcate artistic objects from everything else that surrounds them. Following Rosalind Kraus, Jason Gaiger says, “for modernist sculpture the pedestal fulfilled a similar function to the frame insofar as it marked the separation of the sculptural object from its environment, allowing the work to be apprehended as ‘functionally placeless and largely self-referential’”(Gaiger 2009: 53). This sort of demarcation does not disappear altogether with contemporary art—consider, for example, the plexiglass that encases outlier works like Koons’ vacuum cleaners at MoMA—but, pedestals and frames are less commonly needed with digital artworks because their effects are not as bound to specific locations as are physical objects. Nevertheless, the museum is the most prevalent site for aesthetic appreciation and if frames and pedestals help to distinguish artworks from the ordinary world, it is easy to comprehend why their absences from digital art can lead to some confusion about what the work is and what it prescribes of the user.

One customary feature that continues to accompany digital art is the traditional museum label, which, interestingly enough, is commonly referred to as an *object* label. Objecthood notwithstanding, museum labels normally default to traditional standards, which, for digital art, can make them overly technical and laborious to read. For example, while a list of materials for, let us say, a collage by Rauschenberg or performance by Joseph Beuys can be useful for a better appreciation of certain experimental works, such content is usually less relevant for works of digital art. Consider the label for Grahame Weinbren and Roberta Friedman’s digital artwork entitled *The Erl King*:

Interactive installation with code, reproduced video, and duplicable hardware and materials:
SONY computer ca.2004, bitmapped video frames, PASCAL source code and Java interpreter, two monitors, two speakers, and wood and cardboard construction

(Ippolito 2008: 121)

This sort of information is rarely useful to the average appreciator of museum art. On its own, a lengthy list of sponsors and incorporated digital media and hardware says nothing of the work’s functionality and behavior, which *would* help users better understand that a digital work is more than the technology it comprises (Ippolito 2008: 121). Because museum labeling systems typically rely on traditional curatorial practices, they condition viewers to appreciate interactive digital art in a similar manner as a painting, but with less effective outcomes.

Net art does not rely on indoor museum space for exhibition, but museum-oriented artworks like *where People Gather* are often displayed in a more traditional custom because, although comprising digital, transmissible media, gallery-driven works can be controlled by an artist (or collective), so viewers can only access the work from a single location at limited times, much like traditional objects. This brings location to the foreground because, to a degree, all digital works, including net art and museum installations, are site-specific, but their specificity functions very differently than many traditional site-specific works. Although the meaning of site-specificity is not entirely decided upon, it is typically understood that site-specific works are created for a particular location or certain kinds of qualifying token locations that usually extend beyond the museum walls. It is in this respect that space and location become an appreciative feature and medium. Likewise, a specificity of place is often important for many digital works because, at a minimal level, successful instantiations of digital installations depend upon the physical spaces that determine information like the work’s brightness and dimensions. Because digital media are customizable, works can be reconfigured for different spaces to maintain correct appearances, a feature that contrasts with paradigmatic site-specific works such as *Spiral Jetty* (Smithson 1970) or *Tilted Arch* (Serra 1981–1989).

More significantly, digital installations depend upon space because they comprise both material and theoretical spaces, where physical places are connected to virtual ones. But relating the virtual realm to the physical is a complicated task. When virtual reality was less prevalent, the term itself tended to characterize objects, environments, relationships, and currencies, among others, as things that are less legitimate than their physical counterparts. Virtual technologies have since progressed in both capability and affordability, which has given the public greater exposure to the effects of virtual reality than was possible decades past. Our conceptions of the virtual have thus shifted, at least to a degree, because we no longer tend to view things like virtual libraries, currencies, and games any less significantly, effectively, or predominantly than physical ones.

However, there is some discrepancy about the degree to which we might appreciate the genuineness of virtual art objects in comparison with physical art objects. A broader implication is usually cashed out in this way—we perceive virtual objects as fictional and illusory, or, in the words of David Chalmers, “as if X but not X” (Chalmers 2017: 312); this conception often de-values digital objects in comparison to physical objects, which means the former may yield less genuine aesthetic experiences. The immateriality of *Les Immateriaux*, for example, initially caused confusion about how computer-generated works were intended to be appreciated because, once the project was complete, nothing of the individual works remained in any perceptual state. Consequently, people began to question what, exactly, were the commodifiable features of such works and if they even belonged in the museum alongside the plastic arts in the first place (it is more customary, after all, to discuss the ephemeral nature of the performing arts). The immateriality of early computer art, including fax performances, telephone concerts, and the like, is largely why such little historical attention was given to digital art when it was in its infancy, and why there is still much ground to cover retrospectively (Rush 2005: 213).

However, the way we experience digital objects may change depending on our level of familiarity with the media. Chalmers argues that “visual experience may alter for experienced users of [virtual reality]” and the more sophisticated we become in interpreting virtual objects, the more distinctive our phenomenology of such objects becomes (Chalmers 2017: 331). With a similar statement, digital curator Christiane Paul says, “[n]ew media art requires media literacy” (Paul 2008: 5). The points that Chalmers and Paul make lead us to the central objective of this chapter, which is that if digital art is to be adequately appreciated, then they require a different manner of appreciation than what the contemporary arts have produced thus far.

4 A New Form of Regard

The interplay between digital art and technology is undeniable and it is one of the central issues among ongoing challenges between digital art and museum-oriented practices. Although historically, technology has been more broadly associated with STEM disciplines than with the arts, one has only to think of Stonehenge or the Great Pyramids of Gizeh to acknowledge that technology, in some capacity, has been incorporated into artistic practices for centuries. But a successful merger between digital media (as a display) and the artworld requires, at the very least, an array of technical and artistic understanding among artists, curators, and viewers.

To grant museum patrons greater exposure to art and technology, curators have increasingly begun to incorporate digital art into their exhibitions. The Whitney, for example, installed a number of computers so guests could access certain works of net art in the museum environment, but the endeavor was met with varying responses. For one, museum-goers found the desktops to be both temperamental and unsightly in comparison with the surrounding works of fine art. For another, curators and museum staff noted a tendency among museum guests to use the laptops for surfing the net rather than appreciating art (Baumgartel et al. 2008: 233–250). More to the point made in the first section of this chapter, net art can be easily accessed from any other location

(including from our smartphones on the Metro, for example) and in its own media (the Internet), which further highlights a redundancy of the museum for certain digital artworks.⁵

Gallery-based works have encountered their share of setbacks as well. Another initial tendency that continues to frustrate our attempts at digital art appreciation today has to do with the specific features we tend to focus on. Often times, successful digital works of art direct our attention to the technological features *qua* impressive technology, rather than as artistic achievements. Alternatively, when there is a failure with a work, it is not always clear whether the failure is from artistic reasons, or from problems with the technology, or the display environment, or some combination thereof. Once again, *Les Immateriaux* is a good case in point. The included computer installation *SOUND = SPACE*, contributed by artist Rolf Gehlhaar, suffered from overheating due to practical challenges of the museum's infrastructure. Being the first exhibition of its kind, the Pompidou was not prepared to provide sufficient supplies of electricity or ventilation that such an endeavor required (Cook 2008: 26). Of course, digital technology is more pervasive today than it was in 1985 and museums are now better equipped to handle works like *SOUND = SPACE*. However, as technology develops at an exponential rate, so too do the financial demands of museums. The rapid nature of technology's evolution also raises questions about how to correctly handle older digital works whose media has since expired.

Overtime, practical issues like those mentioned above will continue to work themselves out. That being so, our difficulty to embrace the digital arts to the degree we have embraced other contemporary art forms has perhaps never been chiefly about the works or infrastructure per se, but about the manner in which we regard them.

Initially, digital art was perceived as a form of conceptual art, an idea propounded by Lucy Lippard in the 1970s due to computer art's immaterial nature.⁶ While a conceptual characterization might be truer of virtual text-based works created in a time when computers were relatively limited in their perceptual capabilities, or of contemporary digital works that are straightforwardly conceptual, it misses the mark for a digital category as a whole. After all, in addition to the theoretical features of digital art are the perceptual properties that tend to be elevated to much stronger degrees than what is standard of a conceptual art category. In other words, the immaterial and ephemeral nature of digital media is not enough to classify digital art as conceptual, even if the final product is not predominantly object-based.

As digital technology has progressed, philosophers have suggested that, unlike conceptual art, the interactive nature of many newer digital works, videogames in particular, makes them a kind of performance art (Gaut 2010; Tavinor 2017; Kania 2018). A category of performance inches us nearer to understanding digital art if we consider users to act in a similar manner as, for example, musicians or dancers, but it still fails to fully emphasize their distinctive nature. As it turns out, using extant concepts of art appreciation for works of digital art has not necessarily been the best course of action, which emphasizes, as Jerrold Levinson states, that newer art forms sometimes require new manners of appreciation (Levinson 1989, 1993).

So, how should we regard digital art? Our original examples show us that digital artworks vary in many ways, but a few underlying features, when present, distinguish them from other art forms.

It was stated earlier that digital media is "dynamic" and "customizable" (Paul 2008: 1), which means, digital art has a behavior. Differently than the "off-on" option with interactive works like (*Precision Optics*), digital media allows works like *where People Gather* to collect data about users so their inputs customize the resulting outputs. But in order to understand a work's behavior, it needs to be explored, a prescription which becomes self-evident if we understand that interactive mechanics of digital art are often borrowed from videogames, works that require hours upon hours of playing, exploring, and revisiting. However, exploration in this respect is antithetical to the standard amount of time a viewer typically spends with any given artwork in a museum, which some research suggests is no longer than 15–30 seconds (Smith & Smith 2001).⁷

Greater exploration of a digital work's function and behavior reveals that the perceived virtual spaces are connected to physical spaces, which make both the virtual and physical locations relevant to our understanding of a digital work. The specificity of space is especially true of particular works that incorporate a specific kind of digital media, or media referred to as "locative-specific". Locative-specific art is a relatively newer subcategory of interactive digital art; since the term "locative" pertains to "location", we can presume site-specificity, once again, plays a significant role in our appreciation of such works and, this time, to a much higher degree. A general concept of locative art can be characterized by Satnav apps accessed on phones, for example, which allow users to perceive a physical location when certain geographical coordinates are applied to virtual, locative media. Since the functions of locative media are connected to actual physical spaces (or objects), one of the primary interests of locative projects, including locative based art, is the social interactions that result directly from the interactive technology. Locative-specific media inspire projects like *where People Gather* which communicates algorithmically (in real time) from social human interaction. New Media scholar, Caroline Bassett, roughly defines locative media in this way: "connecting a position in physical space with a position, or node, in virtual space" (Bassett 2007: 53). Where *Spiral Jetty* is a standardly material site-specific work and tied to a specific geographic location in Utah with the precise coordinates 41.4377° N, 112.6689° W, digital objects have a similar geographical relationship because they are located at a specific xyz coordinate in virtual space as well as connected to a hardware address that specifies its location in the virtual realm, such as an IP address. In other words, *where People Gather* is bound to the merged physical and virtual coordinates and, whilst the properties pertaining to virtual water differ from the properties of actual water there is nothing inherently fake about the digital particles or their locations. What is more, the experiences afforded by the social interactions have the potential to be equally rich and genuine as the experiences from physical objects, albeit different. This kind of site-specificity is unique to site-specific art and one that warrants more attention from philosophical aesthetics.

If not understood properly, digital artworks, particularly interactive digital installations, risk becoming broadly associated with environments of entertainment, or spectacles for social media; the generated aesthetic and perceptual properties of works such as *where People Gather* verge on the sensational and, if not properly explored, encourage little more than Instagrammers to capture selfies within the representational space rather than explore the work to get a clearer understanding of how the artistic and aesthetic merits contribute to its overall meaning.

Exploring a work of digital art improves our understanding because exploration better acquaints us with digital objects, just as we typically do in our ordinary lives, as our physical realm becomes more enmeshed with the digital. Instead of perceiving virtual objects as merely illusory, some philosophers suggest we adopt a newer concept, one that stresses virtual objects as genuine, actual objects, not because they are physically real, but because they are virtually real, existing *digital* objects (Chalmers 2017). The examples of digital art described at the beginning of this chapter show us that digital interaction can be very real even if the objects and locations are intangible, resisting a historical notion that claims proof of existence relies on an object fulfilling perceptibility through the five senses and being "subject to interaction" (Floridi 2010: 12, following Aristotle).

In summary, digital artworks should be regarded as mobile, dynamic, customizable, and, especially, behavioral. In order to understand these features, users need to explore the works. Over time, the more familiar users become with digital technology and its effects, the more we will be comfortable with new ways of appreciating a digital work. As technology progresses and our physical realm becomes more and more enmeshed with the virtual, users will have greater creative opportunities to shape the environments they find themselves in and influence social interaction. Over time, it will be interesting to discover the positive and negative consequences of digital technology on our environments, particularly of locative spaces.

Notes

- 1 In Rush 2005: 216.
- 2 To clarify, programming languages are essential for functionality, but everything integral to the ontology of a work-type is specified by the algorithm. Due to an algorithm's significance, interactive digital works like net art, videogames, and digital installations such as *where People Gather*, are sometimes appropriately referred to as 'algorithmic art'.
- 3 I use the phrase 'not physical any traditional sense' because digital representation is often discussed in terms of being a physical implementation of information. I put physical properties of computer engineering aside for the sake of how analytic aesthetics typically refers to materiality of digital media with, let us say, the physical properties of a painting.
- 4 For a greater analysis on interactivity and displays see Lopes 2001, 2010; Preston 2014; Thomson-Jones & Moser 2019.
- 5 Now, Artport, their internet art repository, can currently be accessed from Whitney's Museum website: <https://whitney.org/artport>.
- 6 See also Binkley 1990; Tamblyn 1990.
- 7 Researchers Smith and Smith discovered the median time to be 17 seconds per painting and the mean time to be 27.2 seconds per painting.

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6

PERFORMANCE ART

David Davies

“Performance art” is a category of art of which most art-afficionados are aware, but it is much less clear how this category is to be delineated, and what conditions a work must meet if it is to fall into this category. While being art and being literature might seem sufficient for being literary art, being art and being a performance are clearly not sufficient for being performance art, as we shall see shortly. This suggests that, to get a clearer understanding of “performance art,” we must first ask what kind of a category of art this is. As we shall see in Section 1, categories of art group artworks in a number of conceptually distinct ways. After looking in Section 1 at some ways in which we might understand the principle upon which things are grouped as performance art, I examine, in Section 2, the idea that works of “performance art” are best understood in terms of the relations in which they stand to certain developments in the artworld in the 20th century: such developments saw artists seeking to overcome the perceived narrowness of what were taken to be the defining conditions for other categories of art. In Section 3, I shall explore a way of identifying and differentiating different kinds of works of performance art by reference to how they *work as works*. This will also allow us to examine the sometimes puzzling relationship between performance art and conceptual art.

1 What Kind of Category of Art is ‘Performance Art’?

Like all labels for categories of art, “performance art” groups together certain artworks in virtue of something they are taken to have in common. It is tempting to think that, as a way of grouping artworks, the category “performance art” functions like other groupings such as literary art, sculpture, cinematic art, and painting. In the latter cases, we assume a fairly robust intrinsic connection between the works grouped together under these categories. Take, for example, works of visual art such as Piero’s *The Resurrection*. Our appreciative interest in any work of art is at least in part an interest in what we may term the work’s *artistic content*. The latter is made up of those broadly representational, expressive, or formal properties rightly ascribable to the work. The pigment-covered surface is the means whereby the artistic content of *The Resurrection* was articulated through Piero’s actions. We can think of that surface as the work’s *artistic vehicle*. We are able to grasp the work’s artistic content by bringing to bear, upon the artistic vehicle, our understanding of how different kinds of artistic contents can be articulated in the physical medium of paint in the artistic tradition to which Piero belongs. This analysis can be generalized to other arts such as literature and music. An appreciative interest in an artistic artifact (or an event) is an interest in the artistic content for which that artifact (or event) serves as the artistic vehicle. Such an interest

may be thought of as “interrogative”: it seeks to make sense of observable features of the artifact (or event) in terms of *reasons* for their being ordered in the way that they are.

This general framework gives us a way of thinking about what leads us to group works into the kinds of categories just distinguished. Suppose we ask what makes something a work of literary art. It cannot be merely that it incorporates language in some way, for some works of non-literary art do this – some collages and some conceptual pieces, for example, such as Fiona Banner’s *Break Point* (1998). Rather, it is because a work’s *artistic vehicle*, in the sense just specified, is a (contextualized?) textual structure that we classify it as a work of literary art. Similarly, a work of musical art has as its vehicle a (contextualized?) acoustic structure of some kind. To generalize, a work of art is classified as falling under a particular medium-specific category just in case the work’s artistic vehicle – that is, the primary means whereby the work’s artistic content is articulated – is a manifold or structure in that medium. As we know from Walton’s discussion of artistic categories (Walton 1970), medium-specific categories cannot be restricted to the physical medium employed: they must also incorporate shared understandings as to how doing things with that physical medium results in particular artistic contents. We engage here with what has been termed an “artistic medium” in one of the senses of that term (see Davies 2003).

There are other ways of classifying and grouping artworks, however. “Street art,” for example, classifies works in terms of the milieu in which they are intended for display, not in terms of their artistic medium, although any individual work of street art will be in a medium of some sort – simple or compound – and will articulate its artistic content in virtue of the manner in which that medium has been deployed in generating the work’s artistic vehicle. “Outsider art,” in contrast, groups artworks by reference to the social profile of their creators, and “innuit art” according to the cultural context in which works originated and the uses to which they were put in that context.

Suppose we try to understand “performance art” in the way that we just understood the categories of “literary art” and “visual art.” A work of performance art, it might be suggested, is a work that articulates its artistic contents, whatever they may be, through an artistic vehicle that is a performance. The most obvious problem with this proposal is that even if it might be *necessary*, if something is to be a work of performance art, that its artistic vehicle be a performance, this is clearly not sufficient. For such a condition is also satisfied by works in the *performing arts* more broadly construed, including standard works of theatrical and musical art. The artistic content of a work of music, or of an individual musical performance, is articulated at least in part through the experienceable properties of musical performances, but it would run strongly counter to our practice to classify standard musical performances, or the works thereby performed, as works of performance art. Furthermore, consider how we distinguish between different kinds of works in the performing arts. Works of music, theater, and dance are grouped according to the *aspects* of performances taken to be instrumental in the articulation of a work’s artistic content. It is the sounds generated through the movements of a group of musicians, for example, rather than the physical properties of those movements, that is the primary means whereby the artistic content of a musical work or performance is articulated. Even if, as argued by Jerry Levinson (1990), the physical movements of the musicians sometimes contribute to the expressive content of the music, these movements serve to expressively inflect the content articulated by the primary vehicle – the sounds generated by those movements. Similarly, it is primarily through the actions and utterances of a troupe of actors that the content of a theatrical work or a theatrical performance is articulated.

Consider, however, the “noise music” of Russolo which is listed by Rose-Lee Goldberg (2001, Chapter 1) as an early example of “performance art.” In the case of Russolo, it might be said, the artistic content of a performance of the work seems to be articulated not by the sounds produced per se, but by the manner and medium through which such sounds are produced. Different “performances” by Russolo might plausibly be viewed as performances of the *same* work even

though the noises produced are different, as long as those noises are produced through the manipulation of the specified instruments. To appreciate such works, what we need to grasp is the resonance, given standard musical practice, of producing sounds by the means prescribed. This suggests that what distinguishes those performances that we take to be examples of performance art from performances of works in the performing arts is the *aspects* of the performances to which we need to attend if we are to properly appreciate those works. In the performing arts, it might be said, what matter are the experienceable manifolds generated by performers, but in performance art what matters at least as much is the nature of the actions themselves whereby such perceptual manifolds are produced, and perhaps also the very idea of doing what the performers are doing. I'll further explore this suggestion in Section 3.

2 Can ‘Performance Art’ be Defined Historically?

Given the kinds of concerns just addressed, some theorists have suggested that the category of “performance art” is better defined not in terms of a specific kind of medium used to articulate an artistic content, but, rather, in terms of the relation in which works stand to certain historically situated traditions of artistic making, traditions from which such works emerge or by reference to which they define themselves. This is the approach taken by two prominent writers on this issue, RoseLee Goldberg (2001), who has authored an authoritative history of performance art, and Noël Carroll (1986), who situates performance art in relation to theoretical and practical innovations in the visual and theatrical arts in the latter half of the 20th century. Both authors resist the invitation to *define* “performance art,” on the grounds that the phenomena we seek to capture under that label are too diverse. Goldberg stresses that much 20th-century performance art originates in dissatisfaction on the part of artists, individually or collectively, with more established artistic practices, and with working within the limitations of particular artistic media (2001, 9). Early performance artists often drew in a single work upon different art forms and different media – literature, poetry, theater, music, dance, architecture, and painting, as well as video, film, slides, and narrative – and this has continued to be a characteristic feature of performance art. Artists deploy these various resources in ways that by their very novelty defeat any attempt at definition. All that can be said is that performance art is “live art by artists.” But, as we have seen, this is at best a necessary condition for being performance art in the accepted sense. And it is by no means necessary that a performance by a performance artist be presented live *to an audience*. Acconci’s *Following Piece*, to be discussed in Section 3, might demonstrate this, as would other pieces by Acconci that are available to us through film but that were performed privately. And the works of the contemporary performance artist Matthew Barney are made available to audiences only in highly complex cinematic presentations. A further issue, as we shall also see in Section 3, is that some widely accepted works of performance art have never had, or even never could have, live performances.

Goldberg traces the roots of performance art in the second half of the 20th century to such earlier movements as Italian Futurism, Russian Constructivism, Dada, Surrealism, and Bauhaus. In each case, she maintains, the “object” works customarily associated with these movements come out of an artistically revolutionary impulse whose initial, but now widely ignored, expressions were in performance. This often involved theatrical performances that stressed provocation, interaction with the audience, and the rejection of the traditional theatrical idea that performance is work-performance. Such performances drew upon non-artistic practices such as the circus, vaudeville, cabaret, and puppet shows, and sought to relocate art in public space rather than in galleries. The focus was not, as in theater traditionally conceived, on the representation of action and the rendering of a text, but on the performers themselves and the visual aspects – the spectacle – of the performance. The conjoining of different traditional artistic media in such performances is

well illustrated in the Bauhaus conception of the “total art work,” something echoed in the “happenings” of the 1950s and 1960s and also in later works by artists such as Robert Wilson.

Carroll takes avant-garde theater, as represented in particular by Artaud, to be one of two sources of the interest in performance in the art of the 1970s and 1980s. He distinguishes between what he terms “art performance” and “performance art.” The former originated in the 1960s as a reaction to perceived problems with the ways in which visual artworks were presented in galleries. The doctrine of “medium specificity,” promoted most forcefully by Clement Greenberg (1993), was seen as denying the relevance of the artist’s “performance” in creating a work, something exemplified in the action painting of Jackson Pollock. “Art performance” manifested itself initially in “happenings” that rejected both the idea of the purity and autonomy of different artistic media, and the focusing of artistic interest on formal properties of objects divorced from the activities of artists. One of the most famous such performances took place at Black Mountain College in North Carolina in 1952, and involved collaborations, under the aegis of John Cage, between musicians, choreographers, poets, painters, and film-makers. Later exponents of “art performance” included individual artists such as Acconci, who used his body as a medium for exploring and expressing themes relating to human interaction, and Gilbert and George, who produced works of “live sculpture.” While their artistic vehicles are actions, these works, like traditional visual artworks, are made accessible to audiences in art galleries, but only through the visual or verbal records or documentations of the performances. Carroll, like Goldberg, stresses the awareness, on the part of those involved in the development of “art performance,” of the earlier traditions of Futurism and Dada.

“Performance art,” in Carroll’s sense, developed out of traditional theater, as a reaction against the idea that dramatic performance should be a vehicle for a literary text. It stressed, rather, the performative aspects of group or individual activity on a stage, and the values, such as spectacle, realizable through such activity. The orientation of traditional theater toward representation, spectatorship, and fidelity to the text was replaced by a concern with the presentational, the participatory, and the visual and gestural. In dance, this manifested itself in the interest in the body in motion explored in the work of choreographers like Yvonne Rainer – something that echoes the interests of the Futurists in the body as mechanism. Rather than the performer mediating between the audience and a character that she represents, there is a focus on performativity, the unmediated interaction between the performer and her audience. Recent work in “performance art” in Carroll’s sense has generated, and in turn been influenced by, philosophically inflected studies of performativity by those working in “performance studies” (see, for example, the papers collected in Parker and Sedgwick 1995, and the entries in Cull O’Maoilearca and Lagaay 2020).

Jonah Westerman (2016, no pagination) offers a more recent attempt to survey the field of “performance art” by reference to themes in its historical development rather than a distinctive medium. The development of the idea of performativity in art since the mid-20th century, he argues, has culminated in a tendency to think of all art as performance. The problem is that such a ubiquitous usage of “performance” “can obscure, by way of generality, more than it illuminates.” To address this concern, Westerman identifies four key “dimensions” of performance along which works can be situated relative to one another in revealing ways. The dimensions span the conceptual spaces “between ephemerality and the archive, between action and idea, between collaboration and estrangement, and between reality and representation.” Each of these dimensions, Westerman claims,

Describes a tension between seemingly opposed, yet intrinsically related concerns... Pursuing how a given work negotiates each of these tensions allows us more clearly to see how a given work’s formal organization understands the nature and purpose of art, positions its audiences and articulates its social, political and spatial situation.

Westerman's discussion of how individual works can be fruitfully related along these dimensions resembles in some ways my attempts to map the same terrain in the following section.

3 Performance Art, the Performing Arts, Conceptual Art and the Role of the Audience

While the detailed studies of examples in Goldberg, and to a lesser extent in Carroll, provide a cautionary lesson for anyone drawn to the idea that performance art is a medium-based category, we can nevertheless identify at least some distinctive features that may allow us to more clearly map the field of performance art in ways less dependent on historical situation, and to identify some of the central traits in performance art since the 1960s.

In looking earlier at the relationship between performance art and the performing arts, I noted that it seems to be a defining condition of the latter that the object of our appreciative attention is a performance, and that it is through the manifest properties of that performance that the focuses of artistic or more narrowly aesthetic appreciation are made available to receivers. Thus, at least on what I have termed (Davies 2011, Chapter 2) the "classical paradigm," music is a performing art in which musical works are appreciated at least in part through the experienced properties of their performances, and in which, arguably, the performances themselves may be objects of artistic or aesthetic appreciation. It has traditionally been assumed that this same model captures what goes on in other performing arts such as theater and dance: there are performed works and performances of those works, and the proper appreciation of both of these things as art is essentially tied to the experiences elicited in receivers by performances. This provides the background to some prominent recent philosophical debates about the performing arts: (a) To what extent does the "classical paradigm" obtain outside of the tradition in classical music to which it owes its name? Much has been written challenging the extension of the classical paradigm to Rock Music, Jazz, Theater, and Dance. (b) To what extent is live attendance at a performance necessary in order to appreciate a work in the performing arts? Might it be possible to fully appreciate a work or a performance of a work if a receiver's access to that work or performance is *epistemically mediated* by some kind of technological apparatus? Can we appreciate jazz improvisations through recordings, for example, or appreciate works of dance through screened (or even live-screened) representations of performances of those works (see Davies 2019)?

But this central assumption about the performing arts does not seem to hold for many canonical works of performance art. There seems to be no requirement, for the proper appreciation of such works, that the appreciator have an unmediated experiential engagement with a performance at least partly definitive of that work. As we shall see, it is in the case of such works that the border between performance art and conceptual art seems to be most difficult to draw. This point can be made initially by reference to different works by one of the more celebrated performance artists. We can then see how distinctions drawn in the case of these works of a single artist map onto significant differences between individual performance artists and their works.

The works of Vito Acconci in the late 1960s and early 1970s are often taken to be a paradigm example of performance art. In her monograph on Acconci, Kate Linker (1994) identifies two central themes in Acconci's work of this period: (a) the breaking down of the barriers that traditionally separate artist from receiver, and the attempt to integrate the receiver into the work itself, and (b) the mediation of the cultural distinction between personal and private spheres. Two works that explore both of these themes are *Proximity Piece* (1970) and *Seedbed* (1972). In the former, the performance is defined as follows:

Standing near a person and intruding on his or her personal space. During the exhibition, sometimes each day, I wander through [the Jewish museum in New York] and pick out, at

random, a visitor to one of the exhibits: I'm standing beside that person I'm standing behind that person, closer than the accustomed distance – I crowd the person until he/she moves away (I crowd that person until he/she moves me out of the way).

(Acconci 2004, 206)

In the latter (see Acconci 2004, 220–221), Acconci lay under a raised section of the floor in the Sonnabend Gallery in New York: “I’m crawling under the floor over which viewers are walking. I hear their footsteps on top of me...I’m building up sexual fantasies on their footsteps, I’m masturbating from morning to night.” In both cases, the performance engages with people attending the exhibition in which Acconci’s work is being presented. In the former case, there will usually have been no awareness of this fact by the persons engaged, and thus no appreciation of the work on the part of those persons at the time. In the latter case, viewers might have been aware of Acconci’s voiced fantasies and of the identity of the piece in the gallery. Both performances are preserved through minimal documentation in the form of a few photographs. If we think that the artistic vehicle for each work is Acconci’s live performance, few if any of the details of that performance are available to those seeking to appreciate the work after the fact, and as just noted those present at the time had very limited opportunities to take account of these details. If, on the other hand, the work’s artistic vehicle is a performance of which the receiver is to be made aware through the documentation, the performance so construed is very thin in its manifest features, in striking contrast to the way in which performances function as objects of appreciation in the performing arts. Indeed, it seems that the work’s artistic contents are articulated more by the *idea* of doing what Acconci did than by the manifest properties of that doing.

This analysis seems even more apposite in the case of another of Acconci’s works, *Following Piece* (1969):

Activity, 23 days, varying durations. New York City. Choosing a person at random, in the street, any location, each day. Following him wherever he goes, however long or far he travels. (The activity ends when he enters a private place—his home, office, etc.).

Since the actions making up this performance occurred unpredictably and unannounced on the streets of New York, those seeking to appreciate this work could only accidentally and unknowingly have experienced his performances, and must rely on the documentation of the manifest features of what Acconci did. Furthermore, this documentation is both very limited and was in fact staged, after the completion of the “performance.” Here even more clearly the actual performance-event seems to enter into the identity of the work only by instantiating the *type* of performance characterized in the performative constraints set out by Acconci. The photographic record serves only to imaginatively enliven the performance for the receiver, to help her to imagine what the performance was like in virtue of satisfying those constraints. The use of photography in such a minimal documentary role should presumably be taken by the receiver to indicate that visible features of the actual performance not preserved in the documentation are not important for the appreciation of the work. Such a work therefore has an essential conceptual dimension, if we follow Sol LeWitt’s claim, in his “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” (1967), that “in conceptual art, the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair.”

Acconci’s *Following Piece* has an essentially conceptual dimension – what matters is the *idea* of doing the *type* of thing that Acconci did – but it also has an essentially performative dimension – it also matters that he actually *did* something of this sort. But this raises the possibility of works of “performance art” that are in fact purely conceptual. In such works, there is no requirement that

the artist actually executes a performance satisfying a given description. In some cases, in fact, it seems that the described performance *could not actually be executed* because of physical or even conceptual obstacles. Consider, as an example of the latter kind of impossibility, this piece by Yoko Ono: “Draw an imaginary map … Go walking on an actual street according to the map” (Contribution to the exhibition *Information* staged at MOMA in New York, Summer 1970 (see Goldberg 2001, 154)). Or consider one of the pieces contained in La Monte Young’s *Compositions 1960*: a prescription to “draw a straight line and follow it,” In other cases, it doesn’t seem to matter whether a described performance has been executed or not. Given the exhibition for which it was proposed, it is reasonable to assume that the following performance piece was not actually executed: “Drill a hole into the heart of a large tree and insert a microphone. Mount the amplifier and speaker in an empty room and adjust the volume to make audible any sound that might come from the tree” (Bruce Naumann, “Amplified Tree Piece” which featured in a 1970 exhibition entitled *Art in the Mind* (see Lippard 1973, 162–163)).

The examples cited thus far of pieces by Acconci and others illustrate ways in which works of performance art can be partly or wholly conceptual: in such works, it is not, as in the performing arts, the manifest properties of an actual performance that articulate the artistic content of the piece, but, rather, the very idea of carrying out a particular performance. But other performances by Acconci were deliberately preserved in detail by unedited recordings made at the time, and therefore seem closer to the model familiar from the performing arts. Consider, for example, his *Conversions I, II, and III* (1971), described in an exhibition catalogue as follows: “Acconci attempts to alter his sexual boundaries and, by implication, his sexual identity by turning himself into the image of a woman” (I draw here on the booklet for an exhibition including this piece at the Duke Street Gallery, London 2001). One of these attempts involves using a candle to burn the hair off his chest, something that was recorded without sound on Super 8 film. We can observe the entire unedited performance, and this, it might be thought, provides us with the same access to the relevant perceptible properties of a performance as we would get from observing a filmic representation of a performance by a dancer or a musician. Are such works by Acconci, then, properly seen as performance works that share the central features of works in the performing arts?

That the answer to this question should be a negative one becomes clear when we realize that the filming of Acconci’s actions did not just serve the purpose of recording the details of what he did, but was also *internal* to the work itself as a work of performance art. Writing of Acconci’s use of super-8 and other filmic representations of his performances, Linker states that

In its capacity as a record, the photograph has the capacity to re-present and make public an activity that would otherwise go unremarked: it provides a means of transforming private acts into public information, accessible to multiple channels of distribution.

This inclusion of the photographic presence within the performance that serves as artistic vehicle also figures in the articulation of one of the central themes in Acconci’s work of this period noted above: the mediation between personal and private spheres. Linker writes that

In its capacity as a record, the photograph has the capacity to re-present and make public an activity that would otherwise go unremarked: it provides a means of transforming private acts into public information, accessible to multiple channels of distribution.

(1994, 18)

Thus, again, rather than being a documentation of the performance which serves as artistic vehicle for the work, the filming of Acconci’s self-manipulations is itself a crucial part of that artistic vehicle.

It might be thought that to focus on an artist like Acconci, whose performances are almost never *for an audience* present at the time of the performance, is to suggest a more rigid distinction between performance art and the performing arts than is in fact the case. For there are other equally renowned works of performance art whose performances do take place in a public setting where those present are aware of this fact. And, indeed, in some case, the performances are clearly treated by both the artist and the public as performances of *multiply performable works*. Would not such performances fall under the aegis of the performing arts as normally understood, being separated only by the kinds of art-institutional considerations cited by Goldberg and Carroll? Let us take as an example the Serbian performance artist Marina Abramović. Abramović is known for live performances, beginning in the 1960s, that involve subjecting her body to various tests of both physical and psychological endurance. In one of the most notorious of these pieces, *Rhythm 0* (1974), she remained completely passive in the performance space for six hours while members of the audience were invited, without any responsibility for their actions, to use on her various objects. The objects included a feather, a jar of honey, a whip, scissors, olive oil, a scalpel, a gun, and a single bullet. After displaying an initial reluctance to participate in the performance, audience members became increasingly aggressive. The performance was intended to explore the relationships between a performer and an audience in a situation where there are no (apparent) social consequences attached to actions. Another work performed in front of a live audience that tests the endurance of the performer, *Luminosity* (1997) involves the following performance: "the performer, naked, holds her balance for thirty minutes on a bicycle saddle, her feet dangling above the floor, while she slowly moves her arms and legs" (Palazzo Strozzi, 2018). Interestingly, as the description of the performance suggests, this piece can be performed on multiple occasions and by individuals other than Abramović. It was so performed by hired performers as part of *The Cleaner*, a recent retrospective of Abramović's work held at various European galleries, and the retrospective also involved similar reperformances of three other of her works. Another piece, however, seems to require Abramović's own participation and may not be reperformable by others. The work, *The Artist Is Present*, was performed at another retrospective of her work held at MOMA in New York in 2010. On the MOMA website, the piece is described as follows:

The work was inspired by her belief that stretching the length of a performance beyond expectations serves to alter our perception of time and foster a deeper engagement in the experience. Seated silently at a wooden table across from an empty chair, she waited as people took turns sitting in the chair and locking eyes with her. Over the course of nearly three months, for eight hours a day, she met the gaze of 1,000 strangers, many of whom were moved to tears.

[https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/marina-abramovic-marina-abramovic-the-artist-is-present-2010/ [accessed 05/05/21] Recordings of this parts of this performance were screened in those galleries where *The Cleaner* was presented in 2018–2019.]

But, as should already be apparent, neither the public nature of these performances nor their potential multiple performability brings them into agreement with the understanding of performances in the performing arts sketched above. For, just as the presence of the camera was internal to the artistic vehicle of Acconci's *Conversions* as discussed above, so the presence of the "audience" and its engagement with the performer is internal to the artistic vehicle of Abramović's performance works. Just as a proper appreciation of Acconci's *Conversions* requires that we take as our artistic vehicle his actions *as captured by the camera*, so a proper appreciation of Abramović's pieces requires that we take the artistic vehicles to be interactions with members of an audience: the experiences and responses of the audiences are *elements in the work* rather than elements in the appreciative understanding of the work. Thus, I think, while the attempt to define performance art in a medium-specific way, as a kind of performing art distinguished by those aspects of a

performance that are constitutive of the artistic vehicle, is misguided, we can still identify certain distinguishing features of those performances generally viewed as works of performance art other than their location in art-historical and art-institutional space.

The renegotiation of the relationship between the artist and those attending a performance event exemplified in Abramović's pieces is central to Erika Fischer-Lichte's claims, in her rich and detailed study (2008) of what she terms the "performative turn" in the arts, about the "transformative" nature of performance art. Using as an example Abramović's *Lips of Thomas*, an event which was terminated by the intervention of members of the audience to "rescue" the performer from further physical suffering, Fischer-Lichte talks first about the way in which such events transform the "spectator" into an actor whose actions are integral to the staged "event." More generally, she argues that the key aspect of the performative turn in Western art since the 1960s has been the replacement of the "work of art," which mediates between the creativity of the artist and the receptivity of the audience, by "an event set in motion and terminated by the actions of all the subjects involved – artists and spectators" (2008, 22). This serves to undermine, or at least redefine, two core ideas of traditional aesthetics: the distinction, mediated by the work of art, between the artist and the receivers of the work, and the distinction between the materiality of the work and its semioticity, the former being of interest only so far as it realizes the latter. Speaking of the first of these ideas, she claims that "instead of a work of art that existed independently of [the artist] and of the recipients, [Abramović] created an event that involved everyone present." While Fischer-Lichte's very rich study brings out the artistic diversity and originality of performance art in its many forms, I have preferred to preserve, in my discussions of the same body of works, a broader notion of "work of art" that I think can accommodate both traditional works in Fischer-Lichte's sense – things created by the artist and presented for appreciation to receivers – and what she terms "events" – things that incorporate interactions between an artist and an audience *within* their artistic vehicles and articulate an artistic content through vehicles so conceived. I take the analogy drawn above between Acconci's integration into the work of the process of filmic documentation and Abramović's integration into the work of her interactions with the audience, as a suggestion as to how it might be helpful to preserve the model of the work of art developed earlier while also recognizing the striking "transformations" that are at the center of Fischer-Lichte's analysis.

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7

YOU HAD TO BE THERE

Installation as Art Form and Argument

Karen Gover

Installation art is paradoxical. It can be seen as a rejection of modernist values, such as aesthetic autonomy, self-sufficiency, formalism, and the primacy of medium. At the same time, however, it fits within the modernist project to make art that self-reflexively refers back to itself as an artwork that draws attention to its own animating conditions and assumptions, and asks the audience to do the same. Another way to look at the paradox of installation art is to consider the ways in which it is both radically innovative and at the same time a throwback to a much older mode of artistic activity, a “return to the cave,” as one practitioner provocatively puts it (Kabakov, 1999; 58). While it has many historical antecedents, “installation art” as we use the term today refers specifically to the form as it developed from the radical anti-establishment sensibility of the 1960s and 1970s. There is no single clear-cut definition of installation art (a point to which we will return later), but the term is often applied in two kinds of cases: either the artwork’s installation at a particular site or in a particular way is part of the work’s meaning, or the artwork is a built environment that the visitor must enter and temporarily inhabit in order to apprehend it. For this reason, installation art is sometimes seen as an extension of sculpture, since the installations usually involve three-dimensional constructions or arrangements of found objects that the viewer must inhabit and circumnavigate. Nevertheless, installation art, along with Minimalism, Conceptualism, Pop Art, and other important art movements of the 1960s, was often made with the intention of confounding certain expectations about sculptural works of art and about the importance of artistic medium in general (Krauss, 2010; xii).

As curator Hans Ulrich Obrist has observed, a common feature of theories of installation art is that it rejects the ideal of an artwork as an autonomous, self-sufficient object (Obrist, 2001; 24). The locus of aesthetic appreciation is pointedly *not* a single object, paradigmatically a painting or sculpture, viewed as indifferent to and independent of its location in time and space. Brancusi’s sculptures are emblematic of the modernist ideal of self-sufficiency and autonomy insofar as he had custom-built pedestals for the works and presented the objects as something special and set apart from their surroundings. Even in the case of works without specially designed pedestals or frames, we often assume that artworks, insofar as they are embodied in discrete objects, have meanings that are indifferent to the circumstances of their location in time and space. Installation art stands as a challenge to that assumption, and the art form that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s often attempted to undo the expectations and assumptions set by the modernist paradigm.

Hence, when viewed in relation to the historical moment in which it emerged as an important mode of artistic activity, installation art as a kind of staged, sited, often impermanent art experience offers not just a different kind of artwork for viewers to consume, but can be seen as a rebuke

to certain cultural ideals and norms. The installation art that developed in the middle of the last century was a self-conscious assault on several features of the art establishment of the time: first, it pushed against the notion that a work of visual art properly consisted in a singular, self-contained object; second, by making environments or temporary sites rather than unique and durable objects, installation art also resisted commodification and exchange on the art market; third, it also offered an alternative model of aesthetic appreciation to the disinterested contemplation that was articulated by Kant and enshrined in practice with the norm of the “white cube” gallery. Of course, as with all things that were once avant-garde, his once-radical rebellion against modernist ideals and the institutions that promulgated them has become a fixed feature of the art establishment. Major contemporary art institutions, such as Tate Modern or the Guggenheim, often commission artists to create installations for their dramatic, soaring atria. This has led some critics to complain that the contemporary art installation is just another form of “spectacle,” designed to please crowds but ultimately superficial (Bishop, 2005; 63). Artists in recent decades have taken some of the innovations of installation art and pushed them further with artworks that demand active audience participation, which we find in works grouped under the term “relational art,” coined by curator Nicholas Bourriaud, and which more recently has been put under the rubric “social practice art” (Voorhies, 2017; 8). In this regard, installation art as a form has lost some of its radicality and iconoclasm, but is an important precursor to the critical art movements of the 21st century.

1 What Does “Installation Art” Mean?

Any theoretical discussion of installation art must begin with a reflection on the term itself, since its meaning is more complex than it may at first seem. As many scholars have pointed out, the term “installation” when applied to art is vague. All art is in at least a trivial sense installed somewhere, somehow.¹ Some artworks are placed with great intention and care for the way in which their arrangement will enhance or affect the reception of the work, but this would still not be considered “installation art,” strictly speaking. To take an extreme example, consider the Barnes Foundation Collection, in which Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterpieces hang alongside ordinary household objects and non-Western artifacts in what Albert Barnes referred to as “ensembles.” While many of the objects that make up his collection are themselves masterpieces, Barnes’ storied assemblages of artworks and artifacts are celebrated as an accomplishment in their own right. However, the installation of art, no matter how thoughtful or innovative, is not the same as “installation art” in its contemporary sense, which treats it as a distinctive mode of art-making.² Even within this narrower scope of the term’s meaning, however, there is some slippage between the notion of installation as an exhibition practice and as an art form in its own right.

Indeed, it is perhaps entirely appropriate that installation art, as an art form that rejects the paradigm of the work as a self-sufficient, clearly bounded object, has a correspondingly open-ended range of applications. The label “installation art” has been applied to such a wide range of cases that it is probably impossible to provide a definition that would cover all necessary and sufficient conditions. While the term often brings to mind large-scale, immersive sites, it can be applied in widely varying kinds of cases. Sometimes, for example, the term “installation art” is applied to an artwork that consists of an object positioned in a specific place, so that the circumstances surrounding the location of the object are essential components of the work. One notable example is Banksy’s installation of a blow-up doll representing a Guantánamo detainee next to Disneyland’s Rocky Mountain Railroad Ride in 2006 (Nath, 2013; 185–192). The artwork consists not just of the blow-up doll, but its illegal placement at Disneyland, in the Frontierland section. Does that make Banksy’s guerilla installation a work of “installation art”? In a sense, yes, even though Banksy did not construct for us an immersive environment in the way that artists such as Ilya

Kabakov or Nick Cave have done. Insofar as the artwork consists not simply of an object, but of that object's location, as well as the circumstances of its placement, one could argue that it counts as a work of installation art. On the other hand, one might call it a site-specific artwork, rather than an art installation per se.

Or consider Martha Rosler's *The bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems*, 1974–1975, which on the surface seems to be a mere grouping of photos on a wall—an installation of art, but not “installation art.” Rosler herself acknowledges this, but in her reflection on the work three decades after its creation, she says that she considers the work to be essentially an installation. She intended it for a specific kind of space, she explains, and intended it as a whole to transcend “the idea of a mere series of prints” (Rosler, 2001; 59). From Rosler's perspective, then, the work is not just the collection of photos, but their location in a particular environment. It is difficult, in such cases, to maintain the sense of installation art as an immersive site that must be physically navigated, while at the same time we can respect the fact that the work involves installation as a key element of its meaning. Hence, the term “installation art” is, in practice, so open-ended that it can be applied to a wide range of works, some of which may not seem on the surface to embody its key components.

In its paradigmatic sense, however, “installation art” installations are site-specific, temporary, and require that the audience encounter the artwork as unfolding through space and time. Because of their immersive character, the viewer physically moves through and around the installation in order to have an adequate experience of it, and the installations often appeal to multiple senses rather than just the visual. This feature is intentional, and stands as an alternative, if not a pointed rebuke to the distanced contemplation that the modernist work of visual art implicitly requires of its viewer. As Claire Bishop puts it, installation art

addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space. Rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance, installation art presupposes an *embodied* viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision. This insistence on the literal presence of the viewer is arguably the key characteristic of installation art.

(Bishop, 2005, 6)

While this may seem like a straightforward distinction—the disembodied ideal viewer of modernist painting and sculpture versus the fully embodied audience member that installation art calls forth—we find in Bishop's characterization what seems to be another puzzle about installation art's supposed difference from other modes of visual art: just as all artworks are installed, it would seem to be an analytic truth that all works of art, insofar as they are made by someone with the intention that they be experienced with one or more of one's bodily senses, assume the presence of an embodied viewer, even though Bishop identifies this as a key point of distinction. It is not clear why works of visual art involve a “disembodied gaze” as opposed to an embodied one. (Even high-modernist works of painting or sculpture often relate in their scale to the body of the viewer, which is one reason why it is taken as given in art circles that seeing reproductions of artworks in books or on the internet is not the same as seeing them in person.)

In a way, however, this is precisely the point: installation art targets certain fundamental elements of artwork appreciation in the Western tradition that have been presupposed or taken for granted, such as placement, or the embodied subjectivity of the viewer, and makes them central to the experience of the work. Theorist Juliane Rebentisch explains this by pointing out that “inclusion of the beholder,” which is

often cited as an innovation of Minimal art and installation art... is a characteristic of all experiences of art. The true innovation in Minimal and installation art would be the fact that

the self-reflective and performative structure of the aesthetic object relation seems to emerge with particular clarity in the various spatial *mise-en-scènes* of the object.

(Rebentisch, 2012, 56)

In other words, what was new or radical about installation art in the 1960s and 1970s is not simply that it consisted of artworks made to be viewed by an embodied subject. Rather, the innovation consisted in the foregrounding of these elements in a way that calls attention to them as such—this is the “self-reflective and “performative structure” that Rebentisch refers to in the quote above. By making apparent an aspect of our engagement with artworks that is suppressed or ignored in so-called autonomous works of art such as easel paintings and sculptures on pedestals, installation art appears to break with the modernist tradition that preceded it.

2 Nick Cave's *Until* (2016)

A salient, recent example of a contemporary work of installation art that exemplifies the potential of the medium is Nick Cave's *Until* (2016), which was on display in the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art from October 2016 to September 2017. *Until* ranged over the museum's football-field-sized Gallery 5, and was Cave's largest and most ambitious installation at the time. The very fact that the work took up so much space, and had multiple components, meant that it could not be taken in with one single view, but had to be explored from within in order to experience it. A visitor to *Until* typically approached the installation from the southern door of Gallery 5, and encountered an expanse densely hung with metallic whirligig lawn ornaments, which then opened on to the center of a space in which sat a raised platform densely encrusted with chandelier crystals. Visitors could ascend one of four staircases to view what lay hidden in the canopy, which consisted of an elaborate assemblage of found objects, including black-face lawn jockeys, pigs, birds, flowers, tennis rackets, and gewgaws of all kinds. Other areas of the installation included a wall of foil strips that spelled the word “FLOW,” and a space for live performances by musicians, dancers, poets, and others who were invited to participate in the work.

Cave's installation, in both its materiality and its political meaning, engaged and implicated the visitor on many levels. It called upon multiple physical senses; it required the physical participation of the audience members as they moved through the space, brushing up against some elements, climbing a ladder-like staircase to see others, and it is assumed that these multi-sensory, multi-media, and even multi-authored aspects of the installation are not simply incidental to its meaning, but that they are constitutive elements of it. As one article on the piece noted, “viewers are meant to be included—and implicated—in the work, as they will be able to see one another in peekaboo vistas across the installation” (Loos, 2016; 12). Of course, visitors can see one another looking at artworks of any kind when they are sharing gallery space. But the default presumption, at least until relatively recently, is that those glances that viewers exchange when looking at an artwork are ancillary to the work itself. Another presumption would be that their race and social position would be irrelevant to the meaning of the work. Cave's installation draws our attention to those relations. He includes racist pop-culture artifacts, such as lawn-jockeys, and embeds them in a glittering, bead-encrusted, alluring composition that both attracts and disturbs the viewer. For these reasons, we might consider *Until* to be an exemplary work of installation art, making use of the medium's potential to make meaning with features that are not generally available to more traditional art forms.

3 Does Installation Art Predate Modernism?

While paradigmatic works of contemporary installation art like *Until* can indeed make different demands of their audience than a painting or a sculpture, it is important to take a longer historical

view when assessing its significance as an art form. When considering its “radical” origins in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, one is tempted to point out that the practice of site-specific, immersive environments designed for aesthetic appreciation, and not concentrated on a single object, have been around for a long, long time. In fact, seen in a certain light, something resembling installation art is much older and more fundamental to the way in which artworks have been arranged and offered for aesthetic experience than it may seem if we take modernism to be the paradigm for all art appreciation. Ancient Greek temples and their sculptures, palaces and churches with their frescoes, sculptures installed as part of the architecture of a renaissance plaza, all predate the archetypal self-contained, autonomous art object. Indeed, we could say that the easel painting and the sculpture in the gallery or museum are in fact relative newcomers in terms of modes of artistic expression, and that the postmodern art installation draws on a much more established and ancient artistic practice than the modernist paradigm against which it positions itself.

Pre-modern artistic practices aside, there is another reason not to overestimate the radicality of the installation art that developed in the 1960s and 1970s: the important art installations made during peak modernism that served as precursors and inspiration. Kurt Schwitters’ *Merzbau* (1923–1937), which ranged over eight rooms in his studio and home, and was destroyed by a British air raid in 1943, is an iconic example of a built sculptural environment that included found objects. For the 1938 *International Surrealist Exhibition*, Marcel Duchamp hung 1,200 coal bags stuffed with newspaper in the main hall over a stove, lit by a single light bulb. Visitors were handed a flashlight and asked to navigate a space filled with found objects contributed by other artists, including Man Ray and Salvador Dalí. Among the objects were a coffee-roasting machine, a pond, and a Louis-XV-style bed. Four years later, in 1942, André Breton organized the first major exhibition of surrealist art in the United States, called *First Papers of Surrealism*. Duchamp festooned the exhibition space with his so-called mile of string, which enmeshed the paintings and sculptures in an elaborate web of twine. These were influential forerunners to the practice that would come to be considered “installation art” proper a few decades later.

While these examples share many of the key features that make later instances of installation art distinctive, scholars generally agree that the term properly applies only to those works made beginning in the 1960s and 1970s in the spirit of an anti-establishment break from modernism. Alex Potts acknowledges that installation art must be understood within a longer historical view than some theorists who emphasize its rejection of modernism have wanted to take. Nevertheless, he says, “the move to installation needs to be understood in part in localized historical terms as a reaction against the increasingly formulaic and restrictive privileging of the autonomous object in mainstream post-war, high modernist conceptions of sculpture” (Potts, 2001; 15). Hence, installation art is part of a larger dialectical movement within the Western art tradition, and at the same time, its emergence in the post-war era makes those more recent iterations distinctive and definitive of the form as we currently engage with it.

4 What Is Wrong with the Self-Sufficient Art Object, Anyway?

Not all artists and critics regard the rebellion against the ideology of modernism that installation art and other “postmodern” art movements of the 1960s embodied as a good thing. Art critic Michael Fried famously decried this kind of art, which he called “literalist” art, as “incurably theatrical.” One might suppose that theatricality is conceptually opposed to the literal, insofar as “theatricality” connotes the realm of illusion and make-believe. But what Fried meant by these terms is that makers of “literalist” art claim simply to be offering an experience to the viewer, stripped of convention or illusion. Insofar as this kind of art is explicitly addressed to an audience, and in fact requires an audience to complete the work, it is theatrical. Unlike the self-sufficient modernist work, which ignores the presence of a viewer, literalist work overtly requires one.

Theatricality, Fried says, “is a function not just of the obtrusiveness and, often, even aggressiveness of literalist work, but of the special complicity that that work extorts from the beholder.” He contrasts this with the “presentness and instantaneousness of modernist painting and sculpture,” by virtue of which they “defeat theater” (Fried, 1998; 155). Fried’s analysis was first presented in *Artforum* in 1967, and has remained a touchstone of contemporary art history and criticism when discussing post-modern art movements. What is striking about his argument is that he basically agrees with the fundamental premise that modernist painting and sculpture are committed to the ideal of the self-sufficient, autonomous work of art—it is just that he views the modernist sensibility as a good thing, and sees art that attempts to undo or deny this, such as installation art, as not simply bad art, but as non-art.

Modernist critic Rosalind Krauss focuses on installation art’s altered relationship to artistic medium as the locus of her criticism of the form. She follows Clement Greenberg in understanding artistic medium to be the mechanism by which artists generate meaning. Under modernism, painters make paintings that address the essential conditions of painting itself, such as “flatness.” Similarly, in the case of sculpture, modern artists make works that not only embody but are in some way about the essence of sculpture: three-dimensionality. The problem with installation art, for Krauss, is that it does not have a medium of its own which the artist can then leverage to generate meaning. As she puts it, “installation is relentless in its refusal of specificity, filling galleries with mixtures of video images and taped narratives,” and she refers to her “conviction as a critic that the abandonment of the specific medium spells the death of serious art” (Krauss, 2010; xiii). Hence, Krauss and Fried agree that installation art falls outside of the modernist paradigm for what counts as important or serious art, insofar as it pointedly rejects certain ideals, such as the primacy of medium and the apparent indifference of the work to its audience.

What Fried and Krauss may not have anticipated in the late 1960s as they took their respective critical stands is the extent to which these initially radical gestures of rebellion would be comfortably subsumed over the ensuing decades into the very art system that they struck out against. For example, while some installation artists may have sought to make artworks that could not be commodified because they did not consist in a single, portable, easily transferrable object, artists and galleries have found ways to sell works of installation art, and collectors have proven willing to acquire them. Museums, curators, and critics have devoted considerable attention to the unique problems that surround preserving and displaying works of installation art (Van Saaze, 2013). While certain norms and practices must be adjusted to accommodate installation art, the basic values of provenance, authenticity, and felicity to artistic intention are still operative. Hence, when viewed from a distance of several decades, installation art does not represent as radical a break from the art that preceded it as it may have seemed in the years immediately following World War II. The fundamental paradox that underlies installation art is the following: its rejection of certain modernist ideals also constitutes its continuity with other aspects of the modernist project.

When we look at the claims made in favor of installation art as a rejection of the autonomous, self-sufficient work, we can discern at least two lines of argument: an ontological argument and a political one. Each purports to be making overt or explicit a key aspect of the artwork that is hidden by the modernist ideal of the self-sufficient work. The ontological argument made by installation art is that the so-called self-sufficiency of the artwork is merely a posture, an illusion: even if a work of art, a painting or a sculpture, say, seem indifferent to our presence or to its placement in a specific location, and even if it seems to be immediately and fully present to us in a single glance, in fact it is not. Underlying this idea seems to be a normative claim that artworks should not engage in this kind of pretense. By making artworks that do not coalesce in a single object, installation art, in theory, makes explicit the fact that any art object derives its meaning from its relation to other objects, situated in both space and time. No art object, just as no human subject, is an island unto itself. Because installation art draws the viewer into the frame and requires her to step

inside and inhabit the artwork rather than to gaze at it from a distance, it forces a self-awareness of the mutual relation not just between artwork and audience but also their embeddedness in a web of relations across space and time.

The political dimension of this “drawing in” of the viewer and the dispersal of the artwork over a site rather than concentrated in a single object is that the audience cannot remain a passive consumer of the work but must actively and physically engage with it. This activation of the viewer as an embodied subject is presumed, then, to have implications not just for the viewing of art but for the viewer more generally. As Bishop points out, installation art’s requirement that the viewer be physically engaged with the work in order to perceive it fully is

Regarded [by many artists and critics] as emancipatory, since it is analogous to the viewer’s engagement in the world. A transitive relationship therefore comes to be implied between ‘activated spectatorship’ and active engagement in the social-political arena.

(Bishop, 2005; 11)

There seem to be two different ideas embedded in this idea of “activated spectatorship” that installation art suggests: the first is that such artworks require an engagement by the viewer that more closely approximates the movements of daily life, and hence, they are truer to our experience, as opposed to an artificial stance of disinterested contemplation. The second thought here stands in some tension to the former, as it involves the utopian wish that such an activation on the part of the spectator will carry over into political activism. But why and how, we might ask, would one’s engagement with a work of art have any effect on our behavior as citizens, especially if such activated spectatorship is simply mirroring what we already do in the rest of our lives as we engage with the networks of people and things in our world? Such an idea can only gain traction if we assume that our engagements with artworks are somehow special or exemplary. And in that sense as well, installation art does not represent a break from modernist sensibilities but simply extends and reinforces them.

Notes

- 1 As Alex Potts notes, “The idea of a non-installation would be something of an oxymoron,” Potts, A. 2001. Installation and Sculpture. *Oxford Art Journal*, 24, 7–23.
- 2 Bishop, C. 2005. *Installation Art: A Critical History*, New York, Routledge. I am greatly indebted to Bishop’s book for informing this essay.

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PART II

History



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8

ANTIQUITY

Nickolas Pappas

Though not in anything like today's profusion, the Greeks and Romans did live among visual imagery. They saw paintings, mosaics, pottery drawings, and statues around them, and they found such images worth remarking on.

Moreover visual imagery seems to have been treated as central to aesthetic experience. Plotinus, writing in Greek during the Roman Empire, reminded his reader that sounds and melodies too could be beautiful – to say nothing of virtues and kinds of knowledge – as if in acknowledgment that most people associated what is *kalos* “beautiful” exclusively with sights.¹

The culture's fascination with visual art comes through in anecdotes, like one about a contest between the painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius, contemporaries of Socrates.² Zeuxis displayed his painting of a child carrying grapes, the grapes so lifelike that birds flew down from the sky to peck at them. But when Zeuxis demanded that Parrhasius draw back the curtain on his own painting to see whose was better, Parrhasius revealed that his “curtain” was a painting. He had deceived not ignorant birds but a savvy fellow painter.³

The story comes from that unreliable Roman encyclopedist Pliny the Elder; it is harder to arrive at a systematic description of how the visual arts of antiquity were understood and valued in their time, especially during the classical period. To some degree our difficulty results from incomplete evidence about the art itself. Artists in the ancient Mediterranean made everything from engraved temples of marble and granite to the drawings on clay bowls and vases, and much of this has disappeared in the last few thousand years. Anything painted especially has faded, therefore any proof of what Zeuxis and Parrhasius could do. Ruins and potsherds, mosaics and the occasional intact sculpture or pottery drawing, suggest what the visual environment once looked like. But even this evidence can't easily show what the ancients thought about their own art.

And so when philosophers in the ancient world theorize about the art of their time, and even when we have both their arguments to consider and the visual arts they're talking about to look at, we have to make an additional effort to give their theories the context they need, above all the beliefs and practices of non-philosophers. Not only what someone like Plato says about sculpture concerns us, but also how what he says fit with the uses and functions of sculpture and the other arts around him.

1 Clement of Alexandria

Clement was a Christian bishop living during the first centuries of the Roman Empire. He belonged to a religion that had reached the point of organizing itself as an institution, though not

the point of achieving legal toleration, and that now accelerated its work of persuading polytheists away from their old religions. As Paul the apostle had done traveling through Greece a century earlier, Clement both assimilated aspects of Greek culture together into one great mistaken old ideology, *and* counted on the Greeks' good sense in recognizing the errors of their erstwhile ways. Some fragments from the earliest philosophers, like Heraclitus and Xenophanes, survive to the present because Clement quotes them approvingly in his polemical writings – which doesn't mean that he quotes them appositely, but does show how he thought a dialogue might develop between Christianity and pre-Christian philosophy.⁴

Clement's *Protrepticus pros Hellēnas* “protreptic address to the Greeks,” or exhortation to turn them out of the old paths, begins with samples from music, sculpture, and drama. People's moral compass has ceased functioning to such a degree that terrors bring them joy. Look at the plots of Greek plays. “Even I, for whom this is only a myth, am distressed by the misfortunes that have been worked up into tragedies. But at your hands those ills become drama”; and as drama they bring pleasure.⁵ Clement solves what we call the tragic paradox, the problem that we seem to take pleasure watching distress and suffering, by simply denying that anyone of balanced mind *would* enjoy a tragedy. No pleasure (for the sane), no paradox.

Plato and philosophers before him had already argued against Greek arts and religious practices, and Clement quotes them to support his position. And given Clement's willingness to enlist Greek philosophers as allies, it can feel natural to identify his arguments with theirs and in particular with the arguments in Plato, whom Clement treats with special respect.⁶

Clement develops at least three lines of attack on the visual arts, all of which lead to his dismissing them as “playthings.”⁷ He focuses on sculpture rather than on painting, because of its uses in ritual.⁸ (1) A representational statue, somewhat like a dramatic performance, deceives its audience; so we can call its maker a deceiver. The statue creates the appearance of a young man alive and running when what there actually is before them is an insensate stationary rock. (2) Such forms and figures bewitch their viewers; thus, we may also speak of wizardry at work. Clement puts the deceivers together with sorcerers, and associates the successful deception in visual art with *goēteia* “sorcery.” As if in a spirit of concession he finds skill residing in drawing. It is *homoia* “similar to” its original. But taking image for original, let alone valuing the image-making act, again bespeaks a mind overthrown. The thoughtless people he is speaking to are like those who have drunk *mandragoran* “mandrake,” in other words are bewitched.⁹

(3) On top of the charges of deception and sorcery, we find the accusation that images participate in the polytheistic rites that Clement is trying to wean his readers from. What the Greeks have done with their votive objects amounts to superstition. Before Clement, Paul had told the Athenians that he saw them as *deisidaimonesterous* “very superstitious” in the ignorant respect they paid to a god they didn't know of. Their altar to an “unknown god” at least chanced to refer to someone existent, Paul tells them; but that god does not dwell in *cheiropoiētois* “handmade” dwellings or resemble a graven image.¹⁰ For Clement the lesser misstep that comes when one admires a graphic likeness in drawing and sculpture (3) leads many people – led the Greeks – to the greater and depraved error of imagining those works to depict gods and spirits (1), and imagining that by depicting those gods and spirits those works could connect us with them.

Clement's argument takes an obscure turn when it combines two attacks, even given some truth to the criticisms considered individually. His diagnosis that the enchantment by art began with admiring likenesses mystifies the very descent into polytheistic pathology that he is trying to expose. Had the experiential pleasure of appreciating images suggested the idea of powers beyond sensory experience? Then images would have had to arouse interest in themselves and simultaneously deflect that interest toward absent objects. No clear causal mechanism makes that possible.

What's more, and fatally for his argument, Clement identifies the earliest objects of worship in Greece: blocks of wood, stones, planks.¹¹ Such aniconic items, often called *xoana*, could not

have instigated pagan ritual with the power of their verisimilitude, however much they swayed the Greeks' minds. Clement sees visual depiction, sorcery, and superstition all at work at once in Greek religion, but his desire to bring a new worldview to the Greeks seems to have made him find a single worldview there (and one aesthetic view) to be supplanted, when there may have been several.

2 Early Talk of Art's Images

What the Greeks did do originally with their visual arts is still subject to debate. Some scholars argue for a pointedly aesthetic response to the arts in Greek culture before Plato, of a sort that modern readers have failed to appreciate. James Porter describes a materialist reception of artworks that includes the first appearance of a general idea "art," and an aesthetic sensualism that has been blocked from sight by the influential formalist art-philosophy in Plato and Aristotle.¹² Porter should be kept in mind as a rebuttal to my take on the subject. Nevertheless his interpretation of early antiquity, compelling though it is, downplays the dominant tradition in those first years that responded to and addressed itself to artistic images.

Homer composed his epics almost a millennium before Clement, at the beginning of the Mediterranean's literary tradition; and already in Homer one element of visual art that Clement will attack comes in for special attention. That element may be seen in the most celebrated artifact of the *Iliad*, which is the shield that Hephaestus makes for Achilles. Achilles' mother Thetis visits Hephaestus and requisitions armor for her son, and out of affection for her the god makes this elaborate shield. He emblazons its face with a double scene: city in peacetime, city at war. Homer dwells on the scenes in an extended first example of ekphrasis.¹³

Several features of this passage qualify it as containing an early articulation of how to understand visual art. The passage's attention to the human world reinforces the sense of visual depiction as a referential relation between objects of experience and the images of them. The cities on the shield matter because human life matters, and because they bring real-life cities before the viewer's eyes.

The scene also points to the parallel or kinship between visual art and poetry. What Hephaestus depicts on the shield, Homer depicts in his epics.¹⁴ Homer describes the image-making as an art comparable to his own, thus hinting at the analogy between visual imagery and verbal depiction that Plato will exploit in the *Republic*. The ekphrastic attention claims for epic the same praise of awe that we imagine Achilles' shield arousing on the Trojan battlefield.¹⁵

After Homer, the poet Simonides would compare the art forms explicitly. "Painting is silent poetry, and poetry is painting that speaks."¹⁶ Ostensibly setting the two arts side by side as equals, this epigram gives the advantage to poetry, the one that possesses words. Simonides does not finish by saying that "poetry is invisible painting," which would have left poetry and painting each missing something.¹⁷ Not yet a theoretical taxonomy of art into verbal and visual forms, still the comparison establishes the defining feature of visual art to be the work through which it resembles poetry, namely its denotativeness.

A crucial phrase in Homer's ekphrasis humanizes the image-making art in another way, this time with reference to the work it does. Hephaestus inserted a "dance" or "dance floor" on the shield, "like the one that Daedalus produced in sprawling Knossus for beautiful-haired Ariadne."¹⁸ This is the lone appearance of the name "Daedalus" in Homer, and the comparison contains a whiff of impiety: Hephaestus underground at the foundry does what Daedalus had done on Crete, as if the god were inspired by the human. Significantly, Hephaestus and Daedalus were both credited with having made statues imbued with life, moving and speaking as people do.¹⁹ Even if the simile in Homer innocently illustrates the great skill of Hephaestus, this comparison between his work and Daedalus' signifies that the shield belongs among human artifacts, speaking to mortals about mortal society and important to its audience for that reason.²⁰

A fragment from one of Aeschylus' satyr plays should be mentioned here, for its use of the terminology that figures so prominently in Plato and Aristotle: *mimēsis* “imitation, representation, emulation” naming the process of copying, the *mimēma* the copy or likeness. In a scene from this lost play, perhaps *Theoroi*, someone has given a group of satyrs some masks that resemble them. (Of course the satyrs are played by humans wearing satyr-masks.) One speaker marvels at the *Daidalou mimēma* “Daedalic likeness,” and might be saying that the similarity to his face would delight his mother. Another satyr-play joke: satyrs have faces that only their mothers can love. Still the speaker’s evident pleasure, and perhaps his mother’s, evoke an experience of enjoyment at the sight of well-made visual arts.²¹

3 *Mimēsis* in Plato and Aristotle

When philosophers come to speak of the visual arts, they too understand examples in terms of likeness or similarity of representation. Sometimes they do so without using a word for specifically artistic representation – the pre-Socratic philosopher Xenophanes, for instance, complaining about anthropomorphic artworks of the gods. “If oxen or lions had hands and drew with their hands and produced works as men do, horses would draw the forms [*ideas*] of the gods that are like [*homoias*] horses and oxen [forms that are like] oxen.”²² You may think that these images pay tribute to the unseen gods, but in fact (Xenophanes is saying) human beings have been making them, their eyes on other humans, representing visible faces and bodies. The drawings do no more than reflect the bodily features of the beings that make them.

Plato’s dialogues do not invariably analyze art as likeness and representation. Many passages speak in approving terms of painting and sculpture or at least call one’s skill at making them a *technē* “profession, craft.”²³ But these passages tend to be about something else, with visual art illustrating some point by analogy. When Plato actually wants to explain how a visual likeness works, he appeals to intentional resemblance.²⁴

Indeed Xenophon and Plato both report Socrates talking about *mimēsis* as that applies to the visual arts, and beginning with those Socratic conversations the word becomes something of a technical term.²⁵ *Mimēsis* names a relationship between a visible original and its visible likeness. Philosophical treatments of *mimēsis* will range from abusive to celebratory, but either way the representing act takes place among visible objects.²⁶

For Plato the problematic art form is always “poetry,” that word in his time comprising epic, song, and tragic and comic drama. So when the *Republic* develops an idea of *mimēsis* meant to apply to poetry and painting together, it is only to be expected that the concept puts painting in the worst light possible. Likewise, when Plato’s *Sophist* analyzes *mimēsis* with an eye to explaining sophistry, it will leave representation in the visual arts looking, as Plato wants sophists to look, simultaneously insubstantial and mendacious.

Of the four passages in Platonic dialogues that treat *mimēsis*, two speak exclusively about poetry (*Republic* Book 3, *Laws* Book 4), and equate the mimetic act in poetry with the dramatic or impersonatory effect: writing and performing a character’s words.²⁷ Nothing follows by an obvious route from dramatic representation to the visible likeness that Homer describes on the shield of Achilles. It will take someone with Plato’s animus to broaden character-impersonation to contain visual depiction, by making both artistic acts species of the image-making that presents appearance. He makes that connection in Book 10 of the *Republic*, speaking of poetry, and then along different lines in his *Sophist*.

In *Republic* Book 10, painting becomes the argument’s stalking-horse. The shortcomings of painting are to show what goes wrong in poetry. Plato might be speaking of drawing and painting as such, or could have a particular style of painting in mind. Alongside generic talk of painting the argument refers to *skiagraphia*, arguably *not* (despite its name) painting that uses shadows – in

contour drawing or with cross-hatches – but perhaps a pointillistic application of paint that enhanced bright contrasts and vivid coloration.²⁸ Whichever method is at stake, the image that results is compared to a mirror that reflects all visible things – “making all things,” Socrates says, to which Glaucon replies, “Yes, their appearance.”²⁹ For regardless of whether *skiagraphia* is the only species of painting that Plato means to attack, any painting that tries to capture the look of things faces the same criticism.

Whereas a carpenter thinks about the Form of the table or couch in order to fabricate a wooden table or couch – thereby producing something of lesser worth yet still informed by understanding – the painter presents a table after doing no more than look at, looking at without thinking about, one particular table (as opposed to the Form), and worse yet, after looking at it from a single angle: looking at its appearance. The one who uses a flute or bridle has to know the most about it. A painter possesses neither knowledge nor correct opinion but merely keeps an eye open for what the flute and bridle look like, or rather for what they *seem* to look like. Given that the reasoning part of one’s soul seeks to know what is real about its object, for example by measuring; and given that the part of the soul charmed by appearances shows no interest in measuring or knowing reality; it must follow that something other than the soul’s best part enjoys visual *mimēsis*.³⁰ Built on the spongy ground of ignorance, visual representation welcomes those content to live in unreality.

A competent spectator of painting will want to object. “When you look at the painting of a couch you *know* it’s not going to teach you what a couch is. You don’t look on the other side of a painting expecting to see the other side of the couch.” For Plato this educated viewership sounds like the self-deluding apology of the perverted mind, offering as self-defense what ought to be understood as the damning admission. The problem is exactly that visual art makes appearance more satisfying than reality and so stimulates a desire for ignorance. The admiring spectator would rather see the representation than the thing represented, hence chooses lie over truth. Visual art, although in one respect possessing no worse than the lowly ontological status of shadows and reflections in still water, poses a threat to reason that those barely-beings do not, by encouraging the preference for appearance over reality. What one learns to do, when becoming sophisticated about painting, is to enjoy an appearance that makes no promise of reality.

The enjoyment is very much to the point. Xenophon already depicted Socrates identifying accurate representation in sculpture as a source of the *terpsis* “pleasure” it provides.³¹ For Plato the art makes ignorance enticing because of the pleasure it brings. Clement is taking himself to follow Plato when he declares pleasure at adept representation to be the cause of all subsequent idolatry.

Republic Book 9, just before Book 10’s analysis of *mimēsis*, has followed the decline of a soul to its lowest possible condition, when it is the soul of a tyrant. This worst of all souls, standing as it does at the opposite extreme to the reality-loving philosophical soul, feeds itself on appearances.³² Love of visual and dramatic representation follows from the debased state a soul is in and also worsens that debasement, by encouraging the preference for incomplete, empty, erroneous image over knowledge and reality.

In the *Sophist*, Plato’s other analysis of visual *mimēsis*, the dialogue’s main speaker the Eleatic Stranger accuses sophists of making images. He grants that some images are blameless, like trees reflected in water, registering as they do real properties of the thing being represented. The pernicious variety is the image that the Stranger calls *phantastikē* “fantastical, phantasmagorical.” The makers of such likenesses are trying to stimulate the eye illusionistically, and they will falsify the properties of the represented thing to do so. The head and upper parts of a large statue would look disproportionately small from below if the statue were cut to human proportions. To look right to its viewer, it has to be cut wrong, head and upper parts outsized, because the sculptor seeks to mimic the visual experience a viewer would have looking at a person.³³ The statue becomes false to its referent to become truer to the spectator’s experience of that referent.

When the *Sophist* refrains from calling all *mimēsis* bad, it qualifies what Book 10 of the *Republic* says about visual art.³⁴ The *Sophist* refines the *Republic's* accusation, discovering which subtype within the category of *mimēsis* most interferes with rational thinking. Having found that culpable subspecies, the *Sophist* passage reinforces the *Republic's* more basic claim that the visual art that captures a likeness loses touch with the depicted thing's reality. Just as the furniture-artist gives the look of a couch or table as seen from one side, the sculptor gives the look of the human form as seen from below. How the thing is being seen is part of the art of representing it. What the object looks like remains distinguished from what it is.

Again *mimēsis* sets up a transition from what a thing looks like to what looking at it is like, in other words from the representation's resemblance to the depicted object to its resemblance to – its simulation of – one's perception of that object. We are in the realm of visibility as such, moving away from visibility as link to reality. Thus, *mimēsis* understood as one visible object's reference to another, which after all could be a *truthful* reference, turns into illusion, something inclined to deceive.

The illusion also suggests sorcery. That type known as the sophist who is the object of this dialogue's investigation practices *mimēsis* and also appears as a magician-figure. Why shouldn't his conjuring have rubbed off on the sculptor?

The *Republic* itself qualifies Book 10's attack on painting. First we have to consider that painting often carries a positive potential in the *Republic*. Socrates says that describing an ideal polity resembles what a painter does in depicting a fine-looking man. He compares the establishment of a new constitution to drawing a portrait with constant looks back to its subject.³⁵ The comparisons to painting swing one way and then another enough that attempts to make its attitude coherent sound *ad hoc*.

Similes aside, the education proposed for guardians offers the *Republic* an opportunity to identify what is good in painting. After cataloguing the faulty moral lessons modeled in poetry and the dangers that lurk in poetic *mimēsis*, Socrates proceeds to educational experiences that can shape and strengthen virtue in the city's rulers. Comely paintings that depict acts of courage and moderation join the pleasure that comes of looking at beauty with the sight of virtuous actions, thus contributing to a psychological condition in which one finds virtue attractive. This training for the guardians is not an alternative to visual *mimēsis* but a use that the good city makes of *mimēsis*. The visual representation refers to visible events just as in the deleterious cases, but this time to the manifestations of serious, brave, insightful, and pious character traits.³⁶

Aristotle speaks of similar edification through visual arts, even if sculptures can give only *sêmeia* "signs" of character. An ethical sculptor like Polygnotus, he says, is the kind for young people to learn from.³⁷ But such edification amounts to a secondary, perhaps occasional effect of visual imagery, whose broader benefits are built into the nature of *mimēsis* and the nature of visual experience. For in general Aristotle understands the look of an object as an approximation to its reality. What is visible communicates an object's perceptible or sensible form, from which one may infer its intelligible form.³⁸ Thus, *mimēsis* becomes an engine for human learning. The *Poetics* finds occasions for learning and the transmission of knowledge at numerous points, culminating in a tragedy's presentation of a causal regularity. The learning begins with *mimēsis* as such, the broad genus that poetry shares with music and visual art.

Visual art grounds Aristotle's account of *mimēsis*. Human beings learn from a visual likeness, and they enjoy drawings inasmuch as drawings teach, and tragedy and poetry at large likewise teach and please.

In two unsurpassably vague words *houtos ekeinos* "This that," i.e. "This here is that man," Aristotle encapsulates what one learns looking into a drawing.³⁹ The artwork facilitates recognition of the depicted object's essential characteristics. That is an ox: spreading horns, thick neck. And Aristotle distinguishes this cognitive content from any of the other properties that one might

believe to account for a visual rendering's pleasures. A white-line figure drawing brings more pleasure than a disarray of attractive colors does, so it must not be the color that pleases in visual art.⁴⁰ Nor can you attribute the aesthetic value of a drawing or painting to the attractiveness of its object, for one dislikes the sight of a corpse or an ugly animal, yet likes seeing such things depicted.⁴¹ So referential accuracy explains pleasure. Where the enjoyment had been for Plato a side effect that made spectators prefer ignorance, Aristotle treats it as almost a guarantor of mimetic knowledge.

The mention of animals considered repulsive reminds Aristotle's reader of his extensive zoological research, and his drive to arrive at knowledge disregarding what people commonly want to look at. Aristotle's compendious *Parts of Animals* opens by admonishing students not to turn away from animals thought to be beneath a gentleman's consideration. These beasts are beautiful too if you learn how they work.⁴² By the same reasoning a drawing is beautiful too, assuming that it teaches something about the animal's nature.

4 Plotinus

Plato's metaphysics does permit progress from perceived objects toward objects of knowledge. Properly guided, Diotima says, the pursuit of beauty ends up transcending the beautiful bodies a lover seeks and reaches Beauty itself.⁴³ So there is logical space in Platonic philosophy for a vindication of *mimēsis*. What if a drawing transmitted to the eye not the mere appearance of a thing but its higher reality, so that an enterprising thinker could begin amid artistic imagery and end up with knowledge? Suppose a painting or sculpture imitated not one particular human being but the general term "human being"?⁴⁴

Plotinus writing in the 3rd century of our era (a little after Clement) takes up the possibility in one comment. As a rule Plotinus treats Plato – sometimes a Plato amplified by Aristotle – as the arbiter and terminus of philosophical theorizing. He is slow to deny a tenet of Platonism. But he does propose one emendation where *mimēsis* is concerned. "If someone disrespects the arts on the grounds that they work by imitating nature, one must first answer that natural things themselves imitate something else."⁴⁵ Imitation describes the Forms' relationship to the Good, and natural objects' relationship to the Forms that are present in them. For imitation to be at work in a painting or sculpture does not suffice to condemn visual art.

That qualification to Platonic arguments takes some of the sting out of what *Republic* Book 10 said, even naturalizing art by showing it to engage in the same relation found in the visible world at large; but it still retains the essential Platonic approach to *mimēsis*. And despite this passage's conciliatory tone, Plotinus also makes derogatory remarks about visual art. The mimetic arts "take hold of sensory paradigms," he says, sounding as stern as Socrates did in the *Republic*; and evidently following the Eleatic Stranger from Plato's *Statesman*, he calls mimetic art a *paignion* "plaything."⁴⁶

When Plotinus amplifies the way in which art and nature both imitate, however, he takes his description into fresh territory. A sculptor may work from an intelligible pattern. The legendary Pheidias did not make his statue of Zeus "on the basis of a sensory object" but represented how Zeus would become if he wanted to appear to human eyes.⁴⁷ Pheidias begins with a philosophical conception of a god, much as the *Republic* says that a carpenter looks to the Form of Table and represents it in the table he constructs.⁴⁸ The sculpture represents not a mere visibility from the material realm but something higher and invisible.

Plotinus is putting a Platonic spin on another famous anecdote about the ancient artist Zeuxis, that Zeuxis used five different human models to create his painting of Helen, selecting the best part of each one's body so that he could compose the perfectly beautiful woman.⁴⁹ Plotinus imagines this act of composition as akin to the philosopher's movement toward intelligible form. The artwork that results from an artist's higher knowledge, far from distracting the soul downward

into unformed matter and the chaos of the world, will contain and can impart insights that the senses customarily miss.

Visual art recovers some of its dignity now; it can join in philosophical enlightenment. Plotinus has had to transform *mimēsis* to get that effect. More accurately we can say that somewhere between classical Greece and Roman-era neo-Platonism, the word for how visual art functions took on a crucial ambiguity. In this sense Clement has company, despite the ground-level difference between his castigation of all Greek art and Plotinus' sometime indulgence. For whereas both Plato and Aristotle treated the mimetic image as the visible denotation of something else visible, Plotinus reconceives visual art so that it stands in a referential relationship to *invisible* reality. What appears to depict the visible in fact connects to the intelligible, as Clement feared when considering the statues of divinities.

Plotinus can even be thought of as reversing the simplification implicit in Xenophanes. Xenophanes complained that statues purportedly depicting gods belonged among merely mimetic works, reflecting and referring to humanity. Plotinus sees the contrary possibility, that even what would seem to speak of matter has a way of referring to *nous* "mind." To the degree that Plotinus does shift away from Plato's writings, he may be returning to and expanding the supernatural function of visual art.

5 The Non-Mimetic Tradition of Ancient Visual Art

In amplifying the possibility that visual art relates itself to an unseen reality, Plotinus harks back to something that Plato and Aristotle seem to acknowledge: that visual *mimēsis* fails to tell the complete story about art for the reason that such art, sculpture especially, is treated as communicating with divine realms. Such communication, and the consequent supernatural effect that statuary possesses, has little to do with resemblance. Plotinus' innovation then consists in his attempt to cover both phenomena with the single term *mimēsis*, despite that term's having originally described the relation between visual signifier and a signified visible thing.

Homer may foretell the mimetic analysis that philosophy will emphasize with his imagined shield engraving that reflects the epic poetry's universe. But he also speaks of other objects, whether portable like the shield or fixed in the ground, that belong to a tradition independent of representation and likeness.

Agamemnon the high king carries a staff or scepter that Hephaestus had once made for Zeus, that Hermes had then passed to the human king Pelops, from whom it finally reached Agamemnon.⁵⁰ The scepter represents Agamemnon's command by reason of its divine origin. Later in antiquity the Roman travel writer Pausanias reported that the people of Chaeroneia treat it as an object of ritual attention, offering sacrifices to the scepter every day.⁵¹ It is an object we could classify as sculptural today, but without iconic or visible resemblance.

The tombs of heroes count as sculptures in a looser way. They are artifacts set upon the ground to pay tribute to a hero and mark the presence of his bones. Consisting of a mound and a *stèle* "grave marker stone," a tomb becomes a sign for people of the future to see, its value independent of any mimetic effect in either mound or stone. (The Greek *séma* "sign" is often used in the specialized sense to mean "tomb.") The place comes to be charged with significance, attracting worshipful attention that keeps the hero's name in human circulation and even seeks to reach beyond the human world. Thus, remarkably the *Iliad*'s narrator (who knows more than other humans do) refers to one elevation outside Troy that human beings call Thorn-hill, "but the immortals the tomb [*séma*] of Myrina." People today may think it's part of nature. The gods continue to treat it as additionally meaningful.⁵²

To the extent that modern scholars can know how the ancient world regarded its sculpture, these Homeric examples may be said to reflect a long tradition independent of assumptions about image and likeness. Tellingly, and as Clement was already seen to imply, the sculptures most

associated with supernatural communications, possession, and divine action were those that least revealed human workmanship. (Once Christianity began developing its own art, it too defined a special category, the *acheiropoiēta* “not made by hand,” icons that come into existence miraculously: Shroud of Turin, Mandylion, Veil of Veronica.⁵³)

Commonly, and in the most recognizably *worshipful* practices, a *xoanon* or other elemental sculpture served as the god’s presence. A plank that washed ashore or a stone of human proportions could link you to the greatest of the gods and channel their power, as a piece of wood (signifying Hera) did on Samos, or the *omphalos* stone at Delphi, navel of the world but also, as they said, the stone that Rhea had wrapped in swaddling clothes and given to Cronus in place of Zeus.⁵⁴ Such objects referred to unseen powers and permitted contact with those powers. “Prayer was addressed to cult statues... because direct communication with divinity could take place through them.”⁵⁵ Those who mistreated a dedicated statue, or looked when they shouldn’t, courted blindness or other disabilities.⁵⁶

In another form of reference to the invisible, stone and wooden figures for human beings could be treated as those very humans, as when the body of someone presumed dead was irrecoverable and mourners buried an effigy in its place.⁵⁷ Similarly, a grave marker would be anointed with oil on the festival of the dead or symbolically clothed in strips of wool.⁵⁸

The headstones of those killed before their time received special attention, because of the belief that the spirits of those dead remained close to the grave markers, then traveled to the underworld.⁵⁹ When people inscribed wishes or curses on strips of lead, they would bring their desires to the attention of chthonic powers by burying the rolled-up lead near one of those markers.⁶⁰ This practice persisted for a thousand years of Greek and Roman antiquity, giving grave-statuary a role in an underworld-wide web.

Where the sculptures stand in for human beings, some mourning is at work, as in the story told in the lost play of Euripides the *Protesilaus*. A warrior’s widow comforts herself with a wax likeness of him, which (in some versions of the story) comes to life and recreates their marriage, until a misunderstanding leads to the destruction of the statue and then the widow’s suicide.⁶¹

Euripides’ *Alcestis*, which survives whole, both dramatizes mourning and associates one occasion of mourning with a sculpted double. The play dwells on acts and signs of mourning⁶²; and in Admetus’ good-bye promises to Alcestis about how extravagantly he will lament her passing, he promises to have craftsmen make a *demas* “figurine” of her and lay it on their marital bed. He will clasp it and call it Alcestis. And who knows? She might come visiting to comfort him in dreams, as if in magical communication between living and dead.⁶³

Later Heracles fights Death and seizes Alcestis and leads her back to her husband, who says the veiled arrival comes close to having the *demas* “form” of Alcestis (the word he had used for the replacement sculpture his craftsmen were going to make).⁶⁴ Heracles reveals that it is Alcestis. The statue has come back to life. And these and other examples, e.g., from Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, suggest that to the degree that a conception of statuary appears in Greek tragedy, it is a non-mimetic conception.

6 Signification of the Invisible

In all the magical thinking that surrounds cultic uses of statuary, one common theme contrasts such uses with what both Aristotle and Plato say about *mimēsis*. For better or worse the mimetic visual object refers to another visible object. The replacement figure in stories of mourning, the magical votive object, and the headstone as dread mailbox, are understood to communicate from the visible realm to an invisible world of ghosts and gods.

The difference shows why deceptiveness does *not* elide into superstition where ancient visual art is concerned. We worry about deception when one object purports to simulate the look of

another, hence makes a statement about how the other visible thing looks that may be true or false; and that in any case can be checked, for instance by putting object and representation next to each other. Discrepancies make resemblance fail. But resemblance is beside the point when an object purports to connect to invisible forces. The contact might turn on a more oblique association, as when a stone rooted in earth conjures up the spirit that roams everywhere, or when the eyelessness of a surrogate corresponds to the invisibility of its object. As Deborah Steiner has said, those associations are often *metonymic*.⁶⁵

Where the visible refers to the invisible, Plato's worries lose their bite. The imitative arts may well tempt the mind away from intelligible realities to visible appearances with their significations between one visual experience and another. Their mode of signification makes the viewer's sensory organs the mode of engagement, and that fact is troublesome. But arts that aim at communication with unseen powers and potentates surely avoid that failing.

Aristotle's anti-Platonic defense of *mimēsis* similarly fails to apply in such cases. Aristotle praised representational art for its role in learning; this justification with reference to the signified object becomes fantastical when the signified thing can't be seen or known by ordinary means. One can't be said to learn from a plank that this is a god, or what a god or departed soul looks like.

The philosophers acknowledge non-mimetic uses of statuary. The Athenian in Plato's *Laws*, amid pieties about the care due to parents, contrasts the aged mother and father at home with statues on which people lavish their attention. For the gods we do not see, "we set up statues [*agalmata*] that are images [*eikones*], that we pay tribute to believing that although they are lifeless [without souls, *apsuchous*], those living gods feel great gratitude and benevolence toward us." But if you have an old parent in your home, the Athenian says, you must accept that no statue will outrank this figure, if you care for it correctly.⁶⁶ The worth of the statue had been thought to inhere in its power to lead to an unseen realm, as does the worth of the treasure that is an old parent.

The Athenian's need to remind people of the relative values of parent and statue, as if they had neglected their parents while venerating the votive figures, recalls some dyspeptic hyperbole in Heraclitus: "They pray to statues [*agalmasi*] as if someone were to gossip with houses, not recognizing what gods and heroes are."⁶⁷ Had Heraclitus known people who talked to houses? It is the image of a rustic's ruckus at his friend's window, raving about some personal concern even though no one's home to hear. But for Heraclitus this is what people's use of statuary is like.

The *Laws'* Athenian seems to be making the same point in another aside. He mentions the anxiety that some people feel "seeing wax likenesses on doorways, at a crossroad, or on some ancestors' tombstones,"⁶⁸ this last example suggesting a magic practice resembling that of curse tablets.

Aristotle's student Theophrastus sketches *deisidaimonia* "superstition" directly, as it is embodied in the man who fears every bad sign and propitiates every imaginable *daimonion* "spirit." Theophrastus' character sketch emphasizes ritual uses of sculptural artifacts. When the superstitious man sees a smooth stone set up at crossroads, he anoints it with oil and kneels to worship it; he takes pains not to step on a tomb; puts crowns on the "hermaphrodites," presumably anthropomorphic figures (given that they have heads to hold a wreath of branches); runs to consult a priest if he chances to see "a Hecate with garlic garland," again evidently a statue, this time one on which garlic has been laid.⁶⁹

Chronologically between these two disapprobations of superstition is Aristotle, sounding more entertained than anything else, when he reports an anecdote about the statue of a murdered man, Mitys, that topples over to kill Mitys' murderer. There is a pleasure in hearing this legend because it doesn't sound like an accident. The enjoyment that Aristotle finds in such a story doesn't lend itself to explication in terms of the pleasure of learning that *mimēsis* facilitates, which is the treatment of pleasure early in the *Poetics*.⁷⁰ A placard with a murder victim's name written on it could have fallen on the murderer and produced the same idea that the event has meaning, without reference to any resemblance between two visible things, rather because you wonder whether some invisible power under the sign of the murder victim has exacted this revenge.

Plato's dialogues sometimes join in the act of seeing statuary refer to the invisible. In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades compares Socrates to a little clay Silenus, a votive figure of a misshapen satyr that opens to reveal beauties within. The large-scale homely satyr face of Socrates opens itself and shows beautiful sights within, which is to say beauty unavailable to the eyes. Alcibiades is contrasting the statuesque version of Socrates with a referent not to be seen. It is not too much to call this the magical effect that Socrates has, an effect that Alcibiades also compares to snakebite.⁷¹ And the *Symposium* presents this in-seeing insight by Alcibiades as redounding to his credit. For a moment (before reverting to his vanities and his love of the crowd) Alcibiades looks at a sculpted form the right way.

The *Charmides* inverts the *Symposium*'s problem about Socrates as sculpture, again without qualms about *mimēsis*. The young man Charmides is said to be looked at as if he were an *agalma* "statue." Socrates introduces the question whether Charmides' glamorous exterior corresponds properly to *sôphrosunê* "moderation, temperance" within.⁷² What if he resembled Pandora, who had a face like a goddess but a "thievish" character?⁷³ A mismatch between the body and soul of Charmides is not a matter of *mimēsis*, given that the relationship between outside and inside could not be a mimetic relation to begin with. *Sôphrosunê* may or may not fit with and complement some property of the body, but whatever that property is it will not be the body's *sôphrosunê*, for we are talking about virtues of the soul. Thus, Charmides-as-statue invites an inquiry into a statue's non-mimetic referentiality.

7 The Senses of Sculpture

According to one source, Aeschylus had already contrasted old and new statues of the gods, the old ones simple but *theia nomizesthai* "considered divine," the new statues fussily worked and therefore marveled at, yet creating less of a sense of the gods.⁷⁴ Following Aeschylus we may speak, cautiously, of the "aesthetic" and "religious" uses of visual art, depending on whether an artifact is being placed among appearances, mimicking or otherwise representing them; or on the other hand is taken to communicate with unseen worlds and creatures.

One cause for caution about this terminology is the overlap between the two uses. Where poetry is concerned, Plato's dialogues sometimes distinguish between the deleterious mimetic type and the type that has proper purposes in worship.⁷⁵ The dialogues do not distinguish similarly between types of painting or sculpture. There will be visual artworks that both exhibit verisimilitude and play a role in ritual practices. Clement may have supposed that one's enchantment with deft lifelike art led to a sense of the demonic pantheon's enchanting our world, but even without that mimetic sorcery there could have been statues (like the huge Zeus at Olympia that Plotinus speaks of) that possessed both kinds of power. Even though divine images and replacement-figures could be bare and featureless they did not have to be. Communication with the other world sometimes took place even where an image was a likeness. Gravestone carvings could be clothed and washed and venerated even when they looked like the deceased.

That said, the understanding and treatment of statuary did change over time, religious uses coming first and *mimēsis* later, which helps to explain why Plato expends such energy on *mimēsis*. He finds the new development more worrisome and in greater need of correction. Even if the pious attention to surrogates for gods and lost humans inclines toward superstition, it does not subvert a subject's attempt to pass from lesser to greater knowledge.

Whether as new development or a perennial aid to learning, the ancients treated consciously produced ersatz visual experience as the one to be explained; while to us it is what the Greeks thought they were doing with god-planks and dummy corpses that calls for theoretical analysis, their "realistic" visual art valuable in a straightforward way. And in this respect, and despite Clement's exhausting himself to bring pagan antiquity to an end, he remains closer to the ancients than to

moderns. Clement can erroneously run together artistic representation and practices of pagan worship as he does only because he continues to see something compelling, intriguing, even charmed, about visual representation. When you take looking at pictures for granted as we do you will never imagine the practice to inspire religion. Clement may have misused the theories of *mimēsis* he took from philosophy, but he took those theories to explain what now hardly calls for explanation.

Notes

- 1 Plotinus *Enneads* 1.6.1.
- 2 In Plato's *Gorgias* Socrates refers to Zeuxis as a painter, and in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, he argues with Parrhasius about visual art and representation: Plato *Gorgias* 453c–d; Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.10.1.
- 3 Pliny *Natural History* 35.36.10.
- 4 For Heraclitus (for instance), see Clement *Protrepticus* 2.19, 2.30.
- 5 Clement *Protrepticus* 1.2.
- 6 Clement *Protrepticus* 6.59: "Well done, Plato!" Clement attributes Plato's insight to his having learned about God from the Hebrews; he names Antisthenes, Xenophon, Cleanthes, and Pythagoras as Greek philosophers with true insights about God, *Protrepticus* 6.61–62. Elsewhere he praises Euhemerus, Nicarnor of Cyprus, Diagoras, Hippo of Melos, and Theodorus the Cyrenian for disputing Greek religion despite their lacking knowledge of the truth: 2.20. In the same spirit, he quotes Empedocles: 2.23.
- 7 Clement *Protrepticus*: artworks *athurmata* "playthings," 4.51; see his reference to putting away childish things, 10.85, an apparent allusion to *ta tou nēpiou* "the childish things" in 1 Corinthians 13.11.
- 8 Paintings do not seem to have played such a role. Indeed the main surviving examples of two-dimensional mythic depictions, painted vases, "were mainly used in a purely secular and domestic context." H. A. Shapiro, *Myth into Art: Poet and Painter in Classical Greece* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 7.
- 9 Clement *Protrepticus*: sculptor deceives, 1.4; sorcerers, 1.4; *goēteia, homoia*, 4.51; *mandragoran*, 10.81.
- 10 Acts of the Apostles 17: respect for unknown god, 22–23; handmade dwellings, 24; graven images, 29. Paul's *deisidaimonesterous* can be taken in either the pejorative sense ("very superstitious") or neutrally ("very religious," "observant"). English translations split on this word, with the New International Version, Good News Translation, and others rendering it "very religious," while "too superstitious" appears in the King James, Jubilee Bible 2000, and Douay-Rheims Bible; the variation "somewhat superstitious" is in the English Revised Version. But even if Paul intends to leave the word ambiguous, Clement is unwilling to ascribe legitimate piety to the polytheistic Greeks.
- 11 Clement *Protrepticus* 4.40.
- 12 James I. Porter, *The Origins of Aesthetic Thought in Ancient Greece: Matter, Sensation, and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For fuller discussion of Porter see my review, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70 (2012): 323–326.
- 13 Homer *Iliad* Book 18: Thetis visits smithy of Hephaestus, 369–390; requisitions armor for Achilles, 429–461; the shield, 479–609.
- 14 The point has been made frequently. See James A. Francis, "Metal Maidens, Achilles' Shield, and Pandora: The Beginnings of 'Ekphrasis,'" *American Journal of Philology* 130.1(2009): 1–23. at 12: "the scenes on the shield are emblematic of the story of the *Iliad* itself, so that the shield is a multilayered image of the poem, created by and embedded within the poem." On earlier discussions of this relationship, see Francis 12n.3. And see Francis 12–15 on a parallel in Hesiod with something like ekphrasis of Pandora (*Theogony* 570–615, *Works and Days* 60–109) and the audiences' responses to Hesiodic poetry.
- 15 "[E]kphrasis celebrates the wonder, the miracle, the shock of art ... The prophetic word of the ekphrastic mounts a kind of sermon on the power of art as thaumaturgy." Valentine Cunningham, "Why Ekphrasis?" *Classical Philology* 102.1(2007): 57–71, at 65.
- 16 Quoted in Plutarch *The Glory of the Athenians* 3.1, 346f–347a. See the similar comparison between *zōgraphia* and writing at Plato *Phaedrus* 275d. Writing before Plutarch but well after Simonides Horace Latinized and abbreviated the sentiment into *ut pictura poesis*.
- 17 With a similarly asymmetrical comparison, Simonides' contemporary Pindar proclaims himself "not a sculptor." A statue stands in one place; his poem can travel everywhere to proclaim Pytheas' victory, *Nemean* 5.1–5.
- 18 Homer *Iliad* 18.590–592.
- 19 For Hephaestus, see the golden girls, Homer *Iliad* 18.418–420; but the famous example is Pandora, Hesiod *Theogony* 581, 584. For Daedalus see Euripides *Hecuba* 836–838, Plato *Meno* 97d. Antonio Corso,

- "Ancient Greek Sculptors as Magicians," in J. C. B. Petropoulos (ed.) *Greek Magic: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 21–27.
- 20 See Sarah P. Morris, *Daidalos and the Origins of Greek Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): words related to the name "Daedalus" in epic poetry, pp. 3–35; the name Daedalus itself in Homer, pp. 13–14.
- 21 Oxyrhynchus papyrus frag. 78a1–22, in Stephan Radt, *Tragicorum Graecorum*, vol. 3 (Vandenhoeck: Göttingen & Ruprecht, 1985): *Daidalou mimēma*, 78a7. This passage is taken to reflect 5th-century Athenians' interest in "realistic" art: Mary Stieber, "Aeschylus' *Theoroi* and Realism in Greek Art," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 124(1994): 85–119. I base my reference to a mother's delight on my speculation that when the text says "my mother ... would turn," this phrase *trepoit'an* (78a15) "would turn" that puzzles translators could be a transposition error for *terpoit'an* "would delight." For a satyr to say that his mother would turn at the sight of his mask has no apparent point; that she would delight has immediate punch.
- 22 Xenophanes Fragment B15 (Diels), quoted in Clement *Stromata* 5.110. My translation.
- 23 Painting is a *technē* at Plato *Ion* 532e–533a; *Gorgias* 430c (and see 448b, 453c–d, 503e); *Protagoras* 318b–c. In different forms this point is made by both Nancy Demand, "Plato and the Painters," *Phoenix* 29.1(1975): 1–20; and Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 37–43.
- 24 To the extent that we can be sure of the chronology of Plato's dialogues, the first appearance of an analysis of *mimēsis* in his works seems to be the *Cratylus*. See 424d–425a, 430e.
- 25 Earlier uses of the root include Aristophanes *Frogs* 109 and *Thesmophoriazusae* 156, and the fragment from Aeschylus *Theoroi* cited above. I argue for a link between *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Republic* Book 3: "Mimēsis in Aristophanes and Plato," *Philosophical Inquiry* 21(1999): 61–78.
- 26 On *mimēsis* see Göran Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art* (Bonniers: Scandinavian University Books, 1966); Alexander Nehamas, "Plato on Imitation and Poetry in *Republic* 10," in Julius Moravcsik and Philip Temko (eds.) *Plato on Beauty, Wisdom, and the Arts* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1982), pp. 47–78. Also see Elizabeth Belfiore, "A Theory of Imitation in Plato's *Republic*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 114(1984): 121–146; Leon Golden, "Plato's Concept of Mimesis," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 15(1975): 118–131; Willem Jacob Verdenius, *Mimesis: Plato's Doctrine of Artistic Imitation and its Meaning to Us* (Leiden: Brill, 1962).
- 27 For these discussions, see Plato *Republic* 3.392c–398b, esp. 393b–c on impersonation; *Laws* 4.719c–d.
- 28 Plato *Republic* 10: generic *zōgraphos* "painter," 596e, 597b, 598a, 598c; *graphikē* "art of painting," 598b; *skiagraphia* 602d. On *skiagraphia* as the use of shading for contour see Demand, "Plato and the Painters": 5–7; as a technique resembling pointillism, with color-juxtaposition, Eva Keuls, "Plato on Painting," *The American Journal of Philology*, 95(1974): 100–127. More recently see Zacharoula Petraki, "Plato's Metaphor of 'Shadow Painting': Antithesis and 'Participation' in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*," *Classical Journal* 114.1(2018): 1–33. Other dialogues sometimes refer to *skiagraphia* by name: *Phaedo* 69b, *Parmenides* 165c–d.
- 29 Plato *Republic* 10.596d–e.
- 30 Plato *Republic* 10: carpenter and table or couch, 597b–d; flute and bridle, 601c–602a; lower part of soul likes erroneous images, 602d–603b.
- 31 Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.10.7–8. This *terpsis* contains the same root found in the verb *terpoit'* that I proposed for the quote from Aeschylus' *Theoroi*, above.
- 32 Plato *Republic* 9.585a–586c. The phantom pleasures in this passage are even said to be *eskiagraphēmenais* "shadow-drawn," using the verb associated with the noun *skiagraphia*.
- 33 Plato *Sophist* 235d–236c. See Noburu Notomi, "Image-Making in *Republic* X and the *Sophist*: Plato's Criticism of the Poet and the Sophist," in Pierre Destree and Fritz-Gregor Hermann (eds.) *Plato and the Poets* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 299–326.
- 34 Halliwell, *Aesthetics of Mimesis*, pp. 62–65, stresses the disagreement between the dialogues, indeed more than I would. It seems to me safer to read the *Sophist* as having discovered what it is that really goes wrong within the genus of *mimēsis*, and bringing that forward.
- 35 Plato *Republic*: describing ideal city like depicting good-looking man, 5.472d; establishing constitution like drawing, 6.500e–501c. See Demand, "Plato and the Painters."
- 36 Plato *Republic* 3.400d–401a.
- 37 Aristotle *Politics* 8.5 1340a33–40; "signs" 1340a34.
- 38 Aristotle *De Anima* 3.4–7, esp. 3.7 431b2: "that [in the soul] that thinks conceives the forms [*eidē*] in the images [*phantasmā*]." See Robert Bolton, "Perception Naturalized in Aristotle's *De Anima*," in R. Salles (ed.) *Metaphysics, Soul, and Ethics in Ancient Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005),

- pp. 209–224; T. Ebert, “Aristotle on What is Done in Perceiving,” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 37(1983): 181–198.
- 39 Aristotle *Poetics* 4 1448b18.
- 40 Aristotle *Poetics* 6 1450b1–2. Note that this point comes up not in a discussion of drawing but as an analogy to dramatic plot. Only by indirection does Aristotle explain visual art. For an attempt to extrapolate from his analogies to an account of visual representation, see Graham Zanker, “Aristotle’s *Poetics* and the Painters,” *American Journal of Philology* 121.2(2000): 225–235.
- 41 Aristotle *Poetics* 4 1448b10–13. David Socher argues that this comment about ugly animals creates an inconsistency in Aristotle’s theory: “Aristotle on Pictures of Ignoble Animals,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 39.2(2005): 27–32.
- 42 Aristotle *Parts of Animals* I.5 644b23–645a37.
- 43 Plato *Symposium* 211b-d.
- 44 Stephen Halliwell reads Plato *Cratylus* 431b–d to allow for this possibility: *Aesthetics of Mimesis*, p. 45. Halliwell may be right, but this elusive passage does not emphasize that one may draw and represent the general term; one probably has to look in the passage for the possibility (as Plotinus may well have done).
- 45 Plotinus *Ennead* 5.8.1.
- 46 Plotinus *Enneads*: mimetic art attuned to sensory objects “here,” 5.9.11; art as *paignion*, 4.3.10. The Eleatic Stranger uses *paignion* in this same context in Plato *Statesman* 288c; see Halliwell, *Aesthetics of Mimesis*, p. 318. The connection between Plato and Plotinus is clear enough here; does it account for Clement’s use of a different word *athurma* “toy, adornment” to the same effect? It is possible that Clement’s *athurma* merely substitutes a near-synonym for *paignion*, but not something to be insisted on given the precedent of 1 Corinthians. See note 7 above.
- 47 Plotinus *Enneads* 5.8.1.
- 48 Plato *Republic* 10.596b.
- 49 Cicero *De Inventione* 2.1.1; also see Pliny *Natural History* 35.36. The story and its reception are the basis for discussion in Elizabeth C. Mansfield, *Too Beautiful to Picture: Zeuxis, Myth, and Mimesis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
- 50 Homer *Iliad*: scepter from Zeus to humans, 2.101–118; commented on by Nestor, 1.233–239.
- 51 Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 9.40.11–12.
- 52 Homer: tomb comprising mound and stone, e.g., *Odyssey* 12.14; long-lasting marker of remains, as described by Hector, *Iliad* 7.85–91; also by Elpenor, *Odyssey* 11.76; Thorn-hill a.k.a. tomb of Myrina, *Iliad* 2.813–814.
- 53 Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 47–59. The word looks to imply a contrast with the *cheiropoiētoi* temples that Paul objects to (Acts 17.24; cf. 19.26), and to the *cheiropoīeta* idols that Isaiah 2.18 LXX promises the end of. Such images are sometimes spoken of as the first icons – already in Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, volume 5, chapter 49. I am grateful to Rackstraw Downes for directing me to this chapter.
- 54 For *omphalos*-stone as swaddled rock, Hesiod *Theogony* 498–500, Pausanias *Description of Greece* 10.24.6. That stone was also called the tomb of Dionysus: Tatian *Oration against the Greeks* 8.4. On the Hera plank at Samos see Callimachus *Aetia* fragment 100.
- 55 Derek Collins, “Nature, Cause, and Agency in Greek Magic,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 133(2003): 39. Collins cites Herodotus 6.61 as one example. Also see Jeremy Tanner, “Nature, Culture and the Body in Classical Greek Religious Art,” *World Archaeology* 33(2001): 257–276; Christopher A. Faraone, *Talisman and Trojan Horses: Guardian Statues in Ancient Greek Myth and Ritual* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). For cautions against overstated interpretations of the rituals in question, see Sarah Iles Johnston, “Animating Statues: A Case Study in Ritual,” *Arethusa* 41(2008): 445–477.
- 56 Plutarch *Moralia*: Ilos blinded at Troy, Antylus in Rome, 309f–310a. Pausanias *Description of Greece*: the Trojan Eurypylos driven mad by statue of Dionysus Aisumnetes, 7.19.6–7.
- 57 An example appears at Herodotus *Histories* 6.58. See Jean-Pierre Vernant, “The Figuration of the Invisible and the Psychological Category of the Double: The Kolossos,” in *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*, translated by Janet Lloyd and Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2006), pp. 321–332, at 322. For more recent discussion of the *kolossoi* in burial practices, see Christopher A. Faraone, “Binding and Burying: The Defensive Use of ‘Voodoo Dolls’ in Ancient Greece,” *Classical Antiquity* 10(1991): 180–181. Faraone does not however endorse all aspects of Vernant’s reading of the *kolossoi* as double. Thus, e.g., “Binding and Burying”: 183n.65; and see Georges Roux, “Qu’est-ce qu’un *kolosso*?” *Review des Études Anciennes* 62(1960): 5–40.

- 58 Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, translated by John Raffan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 193–194; cf. Collins, “Nature, Cause, and Agency”: 38.
- 59 Plato’s Socrates expresses the same belief concerning unquiet unphilosophical souls: *Phaedo* 81c–d.
- 60 John G. Gager (ed.), *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); and see Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 18. Luck (90–91) quotes Tacitus: “The names of victims had been written on tablets and the tablets had been buried near some tombs” (*Annals* 2.69).
- 61 *Protesilaus* is only known through surviving remarks about the play and later tellings of the story, most famously in Ovid *Heroides* 13. It is not known whether the Euripidean version has Protesilaus’ soul coming back to animate the effigy that his widow Laodamia made. On the story independent of Euripides see Laurel Fulkerson, “(Un)sympathetic Magic: A Study of *Heroides* 13,” *American Journal of Philology* 123(2002): 61–87. Fulkerson finds Ovid’s narrative about Laodamia to match a “standard poetic description of a woman performing magic”: 76.
- 62 This play is a trove of references to classical funeral customs, with emphasis on shorn hair, silenced music, and black clothing: 98–104, 142–143, 215–217, 425–430, 540, 618, 923–924.
- 63 Euripides *Alcestis* 348–356. For text and accurate translation, see Mary C. Stieber, “A Note on A. Ag. 410–28 and E. Alc. 347–56,” *Mnemosyne* 4th s. 52(1999): 150–158, at 151.
- 64 Euripides *Alcestis* 1063. Cf. *demas* at 1133.
- 65 Deborah Tarn Steiner, *Images in Mind: Statues in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature and Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 5, 49–50; but really the point is made throughout this book, which picks up Vernant’s insight and documents it across a broad span of ancient writings and sculptured objects. Many more instances of the non-iconic figures discussed here may be found in Steiner.
- 66 Plato *Laws* 11.931a. My translation.
- 67 Diels-Kranz fragment B5. My translation. One of the ancient sources for this aphorism is again Clement *Protrepticus* 4.44. On a variant reading this fragment does not apply to worshipers’ beliefs about statues at all: Mantas Adoménas, “Heraclitus on Religion,” *Phronesis* 44.2(1999): 87–113. But note that in Clement’s use of the fragment in *Protrepticus*, the point is entirely about statues and worship.
- 68 Plato *Laws* 11.933b.
- 69 Theophrastus *Characters* 16 [*Deisidaimonias*]: man who fears *daimonion*, 16.1; anoints stone, 16.5; tomb-stone, 16.9; hermaphrodite, 16.10; Hecate with garlic, 16.14.
- 70 Aristotle *Poetics*: statue of Mitys, 1452a3–10; *mimēsis* pleasant because it teaches, 1448b4–20.
- 71 Plato *Symposium*: Socrates like Silenus, 215b, 216d–e; snakebite, 217e–218a.
- 72 Plato *Charmides*: Charmides looked at as if *agalma*, 154c; exterior and *sóphrosuné*, 157d–158c.
- 73 Hesiod *Works and Days*: face of an immortal, 62; *epiklopos* “thievish” character, 67, 78.
- 74 Porphyry *On Abstinence from Animal Food* 2.18; quoted in Steiner, *Images in Mind*, p. 102. Translation my own.
- 75 The *Republic* excuses hymns to the gods and praise for good people from the new rules excluding poetry from the city (10.607a). The *Phaedrus* draws the same distinction implicitly, on the one hand praising the divinely inspired verse that honors and glorifies past great achievements (245a), on the other hand ranking the mimetic poet quite low among types of souls (248e). The one possessed by the Muses is not this unimpressive type.

9

IDEAS OF ART IN THE MIDDLE AGES AND THE RENAISSANCE

Carole Talon-Hugon

The first difficulty encountered when talking about ideas about art in the Middle Ages is that the concept of “art” then had neither the meaning nor the extension that it has for us. Coming from the Latin word “*ars*” which denoted talent, skill, as well as what these skills apply to, the term “art” was valid for painting and sculpture, as well as for boiler making, shoemaking, or carpentry. From Aristotle to Duns Scotus, all the authors repeat that these know-how suppose two elements: one cognitive (the knowledge of the rules allowing to produce), and the other operational (they relate to doing and not to acting). Art is above all a profession and has no metaphysical autonomy; it is far from divine creation and inferior to nature: “art is deficient in comparison with natural operation, because nature provides this substantial form, that it is not in the power of art to procure”, writes Saint Thomas (*Summa Theologica*). Thus, in the Middle Ages, painting or sculpture were arts in the sense of perfect mastery of the norms of a doing.

Within the whole of the “arts” thus understood, the medieval distinction between liberal and mechanical arts is for us just as strange. Invented in the 5th century by Martianus Capella, the category of “liberal arts” (grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music) brought together learned disciplines, taught in schools, and aimed at understanding the order of discourse and the universe. In front of it, the category of “mechanical arts”, proposed in the 12th century by Hugues de Saint-Victor, brought together practices which, for their part, involved manual work carried out in return for payment. There are not only weapons, various crafts, surgery, but also painting and sculpture.

If, within the very broad set of medieval “arts”, we only retain the activities that we call “arts” today, a second type of strangeness, this time concerning the forms of these activities, appears. Thus, the theater in the Middle Ages did not have much to do with the Greek theater, any more than with the classical theater: in the 11th and 12th centuries the, “liturgical dramas”, staging texts sacred within the confines of a church, or later, the “Games” (The game of Saint Nicolas, Adam de la Halle), the “Miracles” (The Miracle of Théophile, de Rutebeuf), the “mysteries”, played on the church square, or in the town squares, constitute non-literary, unprofessional dramatic forms, and most of the time built on anonymous and collective canvas.

Medieval “literature” is first of all made up of hagiographies, stories of exemplary lives, moral or moral anecdotes, on the model of the ancient exemplum (of the “remarkable life”) (*The Way of Paradise*, by Raoul de Houdenc, 13th century, for example).

As for painting and sculpture, the difference that we moderns make, between artistic image and religious image, is meaningless. Before being a painting, a Madonna was the Virgin, and before being a statue, a Christ on the cross was the Son of God and the Savior of men. The distinctions we make between subject and form were outright ignored.

Finally, a third source of change of scenery: within the field of plastic arts, goldsmithing, illumination, tapestry, or the art of stained glass occupied a place at least as important as painting and sculpture, and no subcategory of “applied arts” did not come to give them an ancillary status which would have meant their lower value.

In such a context, the artist, in the modern sense of the term, did not exist. Anyone who practiced sculpture, goldsmithing, or carpentry was, in Latin, an “*artifex*”, in other words a tradesman. His status was that of an artisan; he practiced manual skills, against payment, and belonged to the same lower social category as shoemakers, butchers, or carpenters. This means that the nobles could not practice these activities without derogating from them unless they did it as amateurs, out of simple personal taste and in a selfless way.

Like all mechanical arts, painting and sculpture were organized into corporations, which provided mutual assistance between their members and, above all, helped to regulate the rules of competition in the areas of economic activity concerned. Such a corporate system also supported the training of apprentices in workshops. The apprentice painter or goldsmith or glazier received an eminently practical and progressive training there. For the apprentice painter, this meant performing tasks ranging from the simple to the complex (grinding the pigments, preparing the colors, then painting the backgrounds, the secondary characters, finally representing those in the foreground, the drapes, the hands, and the faces). The learning was done by direct imitation of the workshop master’s models, by borrowing from a repertoire of forms and subjects. In this way, skills were repeated and passed on from generation to generation.

From the craftsman, the painter and the sculptor thus have the social status, the training, the type of remuneration, the anonymity, and the inscription in a tradition.

But unlike the boilermaker or the butcher, the medieval painter and sculptor carried out most of their production in a highly spiritualized context which was that of religion. Their art was mainly deployed in Benedictine monasteries, Cistercian abbeys, Romanesque churches, and Gothic cathedrals. The salient feature of these thousand years, which stretched from the 5th to the 15th century, is the fact that the arts developed around the Church, and that their works were overwhelmingly objects of worship. Also, the experience of these works by their contemporaries should not be considered under the modern category of “aesthetic experience”. From the *Reliquary statue of Saint Foy de Conques* (9th century) or of the *Virgin Imad of Paderborn* (11th century), the man of the Middle Ages did not expect a pure aesthetic delight, but an aid to prayer, a form of edification, and a bringing into the presence of the divine.

Because the modern idea of art and the constellation of notions related to it (artist, aesthetic experience, taste, disinterestedness, genius...) did not exist in the Middle Ages, there was nothing that resembles it either to a “science of art” or to a “philosophy of art”. But if by “aesthetic” one understands the style of an era, the principles which underlie it, the way in which one speaks of the arts, of creation and of the experience of works, then, undoubtedly, the Middle Age, like any historical period, has an aesthetic of its own.

During the first two or three centuries of the Christian era, early Christian art developed on the basis of the Roman art of the Lower Empire, but with a major shift: the concern for the exterior form, strictly aesthetic, regresses. The evolution is moving toward less realism in representation, and more spirituality: forms flatten out, lose their volume, faces and bodies are less individualized, more solemn. We are very far from the ancient ideal of naturalism, from the illusionist representation of reality, and from the interest in perfect technical mastery.

There is no doubt that these developments are linked to a certain spiritual and intellectual climate.

This climate is that of Christianized Neoplatonism. Plato had conceived the beauties of the sensible world as the imperfect reflection of the intelligible Idea of beauty, which itself knows no changes, no degrees, no degradation, and remains identical to itself. The human soul, which has been in contact with this Idea of the beautiful during its supraterrestrial sojourn (*The Timaeus*), retains a confused knowledge of it which can be revived by the sight of sensitive beauty.

To this Platonic legacy, Plotinus added an idea of great consequence for art: that of contemplation. To attain the essence of the beautiful, he argues, man must accomplish a “purification”, a work on himself which allows him to abandon the “eye of the flesh” and become “pure vision”. Contemplating is therefore not just a sensitive activity: it is not just opening your eyes and looking; but neither is it a discursive activity: to contemplate is not to reflect. Contemplation is situated between a sensory activity and an intellectual activity. The experience of painting or sculpture thus has a spiritual dimension, and a metaphysical utility since it contributes to the conversion of the gaze and facilitates the ascent of the soul to the regions of the Intellect.

But to accomplish this task, the work must not be chained to the sensible; far from claiming to be the simple and most faithful replica of the things of nature, it must manifest the victory of spirit over matter, the triumph of spirit over the materials used.

These Plotinian themes were developed in a remarkable way by Christian thinkers, among whom Saint Augustine (fourth- to fifth century) and also Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (fifth- to sixth century) who carried out a synthesis between Greek thought and the Fathers of the Church by pouring the principles of Christian thought into the neo-platonic form which he did by identifying beauty, not with an Idea, but with God. Beyond all the beauties of sensible things, there is the beauty of God, of which these things are a reflection. To imitate the perfect beauty of the Plotinian theme, which we find unchanged, then means to imitate God. In his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies*, the Pseudo-Dionysius writes:

In the order of sensitive images, if the designer keeps his eyes constantly fixed on the original, without allowing himself to be distracted by any visible object, without sharing his attention in any way, it will multiply by two, if one dares to speak thus, the very object, whatever it is, that it intends to reproduce, just as at this price only it obtains an authentic resemblance which allows the model to appear under the image which allows the two copies to merge, on the sole condition that their essence remains distinct.

The “authentic likeness” that the artist must seek must therefore manifest both the presence of the object and that of God. Painting and sculpture have a theophanic function.

This theoretical atmosphere had certain plastic consequences. First on the subjects represented; these must be in such a way as to promote contemplation and to help the soul turn toward the invisible. For this, the painter must avoid any overly sensitive representation that would distract the spirit of the divine: he must dematerialize bodies, make the volume, weight, movement disappear, in short, everything that refers to matter, everything that refers to the sensitive world and that classical Greek art had taken so much care to restore meticulously. But he must also avoid all references to feeling, which refers to this mixture of senses and affectivity that is sensitivity; abandon the pathetic expressiveness of Greek art and paint inexpressive and hieratic figures.

The interweaving of the history of art and that of ideas can be read particularly clearly in the “Quarrel of Images”, which was the prelude to the schism of the Churches of East and West, and in which played the destiny of the performing arts for several centuries.

The case began symbolically in 726, when Emperor Leo III, hostile to the visible representation of the invisible God, had the image of Christ that adorned the main door of the imperial palace in Constantinople destroyed and replaced by a cross. The iconoclasts, of whom he is a representative, invoked in favor of their position passages from the *Old Testament*, in particular the

well-known episode of the Golden Calf and the second of the words of the Alliance saying “Thou shalt not do ‘graven image or any representation of the things which are above in the heavens, which are below on the Earth, you will not bow down to them and you will not serve them’. Marked by the Platonic thought for which it is always to be feared that the images will seduce the soul and divert it from the truth, the first Fathers of the Church (Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian...) were wary of the representation of the visible. Such is the theological climate favoring the arguments of the iconoclasts.

However, a new idea came to complicate the debate terribly: that of the *Imago Dei*, the image of God. *The New Testament* affirms in effect that Christ is the incarnate image of God. The word image does not mean here a diminished copy but designates a bond of filiation (cf. Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, “the incarnation of the Word”, fourth century). We understand the new deal introduced into art and into the universe of material images by this Christology: could the material image not in turn embody the mystery of the *imago Dei*? Yes, and it goes by the name of the icon. The Christian icon thus opened a middle way between Jewish aniconism (total absence of images) and pagan idolatry (multiplication of images). The one who draws the most precise conclusions from this new Christological situation is undoubtedly John Damascene (seventh- to eighth centuries), who delivers the first Christian theory of the cult of images. Incarnation authorizes representation. The image of Christ has a theophanic value: it is the place of divine Revelation, and in its very materiality, must allow the downward current through which something of the model has passed into its representation to be traced. So it can be admired and be the object of a worship of *dulia*, which is not the worship of *latria* only due to God; it being understood that the first leads to the second. The function of the icon is to establish a spiritual relationship between the devotee who contemplates, and the reality contemplated. Iconophiles make great use of a formula borrowed from Saint Basil of Caesarea (fourth century): “The honor given to the image passes through to the prototype, that is to say to the model, that is to say, that is to say towards God”. It is precisely this translation which, according to iconophiles, makes it possible to differentiate between the idol and the icon: the idol, the final object of worship; and the icon, to which is carried an adoration which passes through it, beyond it. The Council of Nicea II (787) thus put an end to this medieval quarrel by restoring the cult of images.

But if the representation of the sacred was authorized, it was subject to a certain number of stylistic constraints which can be deduced from this principle: the plastic expression must maintain sufficient dissimilarities with regard to the world below, and of “resemblances” to the world beyond. These conventions give the pictorial genre of the icon its so deeply stereotypical character: the characters are not individualized; bodies disappearing under the clothes that cover them; the face, mirror of the soul, is painted from the front; the eyes are wide open and look at the one who contemplates them; the forehead is high and rounded, as a sign of spirituality, wisdom, and intelligence; the nose is long and thin in contrast to the flared noses which refer to animal life; the mouth is fine so as not to signify sensuality and closed because the exchange of looks takes place against a background of silence; the space of the painting is not constructed according to the rules of unified perspective but according to those of inverted perspective, the vanishing point being located in the eye of the beholder to signify that the icon is addressed to the one who has it contemplate; the colors are used according to their symbolic value and not for the sake of realism; icons do not know shadow, since the key word of this aesthetic is light; this light, which is not material but intelligible, is represented by gold which bathes the painting in a supernatural light.

This set of extremely precise conventions resulted in a faithful perpetuation of the tradition. In such a theological framework, there is not the slightest place for innovation or originality. All that matters is the repetition of the same constraints and the same spiritually necessary rules.

If the Council of Nicea II made it possible to draw up the charter of Byzantine art, a set of treatises known as *Libri Carolini*, written in the years 792–794, constitutes the charter of sacred art

on the western side. There is a critique of iconophile positions, which does not necessarily mean a return to iconoclastic positions. This middle position, expressed in the *Libri Carolini*, was of great importance for the development of Western art.

For its authors, the icon fails to avoid the trap of idolatry. The cult of icons, even if it is said that it only passes through the image to go back to its prototype, is suspect. The only way to avoid any form of idolatry is to desecrate the image, to consider it independent of the prototype. The image is no longer a relic; being no longer sacred, will not be the object of any kind of worship, not even of a dulia worship. This does not mean that it no longer has religious utility: it educates the illiterate, revives the memory of those who already know, and rekindles the flame of faith. From sacred, art thus becomes religious.

This Western position dramatically changes the status and nature of the image, shifting it from metaphysical and theological ground to that of psychology and rhetoric. But it is on the artistic and aesthetic consequences of these theoretical positions that we must insist: the strict constraints to which the Byzantine icon was held are no longer valid. Paintings and sculptures should be instructive and uplifting, but a new freedom in the manner of carrying out this program is granted. All kinds of new possibilities open up to representation.

No doubt this is not unrelated to the gradual appearance at the end of the Middle Ages of new subjects (as we can see, around 1350, with the development of new genres of portrait and landscape), and, even more, new ways of painting.

Whoever reads Vasari's texts on the reception of paintings by Duccio (13th–14th century) or Giotto (13th–14th century) cannot doubt that the contemporaries of these painters indeed had the impression of attending a pictorial revolution. Duccio's *Madonna Rucellai* broke with the conservative formulas of painting: it shows new chromatic research, a new linearity of contours (in the sinuous movement of the golden border of the Virgin's mantle, or in the flexibility of her head bearing), a new way of making the Virgin child look at each other, an unpublished composition of the whole painting, the angels surrounding the Virgin no longer constituting, as in the painting "in the Greek way" (according to Vasari's formula), a solemn and static background.

A greater attention to reality, an attentive observation of nature are particularly noticeable among the painters of northern Europe who compete in the precise and meticulous restitution of interiors (Van Eyck) or, of course, in Italy with Giotto. The latter, which alone concentrates the profound renewal of Western art of image, implements a whole new conception of space giving the illusion of three-dimensionality. It is about representing the visible as such, and no longer providing a symbolic means of guiding toward the invisible, with all the necessary distortions that we have seen at work in icon painting. Not that painting has abandoned its links with religion: the frescoes in the Basilica of Assisi which paint episodes from the life of Saint Francis represent, for example, angels, who have no earthly existence; but these are painted according to the visible, that is to say take the features of small asexual children. This attention to the visible can be read in the careful reproduction of the attachment of the cross of a church, of the interlacing formed by ropes, or of the caissons of a ceiling; and also in the painting of the external signs of emotions, of the gestures and their attitudes which translate them: the inexpressiveness of the icon gives way to the representation of feelings.

This new way of painting had its theorists. Thus, Alberti in his *De pictura* writes that "The painter applies himself to imitating only what is seen under the light", affirming, after centuries of refusal of naturalism, the requirement of resemblance to nature. This imitation of nature presupposes the practice of observation, and no longer of borrowing from a pre-existing repertoire

of forms and images. Originality takes precedence over conformity. An imperative of direct observation that we also find is formulated by Cennini in *Il libro dell'arte* (1390), who, for example, advises those who want to paint a mountain to first observe the way in which the light is reflected on a broken rock. Or even in Dürer who, in the *Four Books of the Proportions of the Human Bodies* (1528), invites the painter not to be satisfied with agreed formulas transmitted by the tradition, but to imitate truthfully by observing the reality attentively and by learning to know it scientifically. For all these theoretical painters, the artist must open his eyes to exercise his gaze; to use the eye of the flesh, and no longer the eye of the spirit, as Plotinus wanted.

Learning to represent reality in the most exact way is also to apply the laws of optics to the construction of the space of the painting. The famous experiment of Filippo Brunelleschi which consisted in placing a man in a precise point of the place of the Church of Santa Maria dei Fiori in Florence by asking him to look at the baptistery through a plank pierced with a hole at the height of his eye, then to substitute for this direct vision that of a painting representing the square, so that the one who looks through the pierced board does not know when he is looking at the painting and when he is looking at the square, perfectly sums up the objective sought by the artists of the time: create a perfect visual illusion. Dürer, an excellent geometer, borrows a lot from Alberti's "legitimate construction" who defined the painting as a section of the visual pyramid whose top is in the painter's eye, and adds a technical invention to this science of artificial perspective: the "Dürer window", a device consisting in inserting between the painter and the object or the scene to be painted, a squared glass on which the salient points of the contours of the object are transferred.

But new ideas about painting are not just about painting; they also relate to the very nature of this activity and more generally of those of the drawing arts. This new type of thinking is given in new types of writing.

Until then, the writings that interested painting and sculpture were of two kinds. Either they were texts by philosophers or theologians, bearing, as we saw above, on the legitimacy of the representation of the divine, on beauty, or on the functions and effects of the image. Alongside this textual production touching on the arts in a way laterally and within the framework of a larger reflection, there were know-how manuals, collections of techniques, and practical advice intended for painters and sculptors.

However, at the beginning of the 14th century in Italy, we saw the emergence of an unpublished literature, bearing on the very activity of the painter and the sculptor and on the singular status of those who engage in it.

Il libro dell'arte (1390) by Cennino Cennini is a good example of this development. Part of the work is in the medieval genre of the recipe book (we learn how to make ultramarine blue, prepare a fresco panel, paint a fishy river, depict wounds, and even keep the squirrel tails intended for to make brushes without being eaten by the worms). But it also includes more theoretical reflections presenting the painter's activity as a vocation, and relying on Horace's *Ars Poetica*, to compare painting and poetry, and grant them equal dignity.

However, it is above all in the work of Leon Battista Alberti, (1404–1472), and more particularly in these three major works that are the *De pictura* (1435–1437), the *De statua* (c. 1445), the *De re ædificatoria* (1452–1472), that is formulated for the first time the humanistic and classic theory of the arts of *diseño*. Alberti is aware of the novelty of his enterprise: it is not a question, he writes, of making, "as with Pliny, a history of painting, by focusing on the first painters or the inventors of painting, but rather to conduct a completely new examination of the art of painting". If these

three works deal with problems specific to painters (perspective, composition, lines, light, colors, etc.), sculptors (how to enlarge models, etc.), and architects, it is remarkable to read also the enhancement of the design arts which takes place there through their rapprochement with the liberal arts.

The same theoretical ambition is found in Dürer's *Four Books of the Proportions of Human Bodies* (1528). He too leans the considerations on pictorial practice to a theoretical reflection which affirms the nobility of this activity: the apprenticeship of the young painter should no longer be confined to the acquisition of artisanal know-how. We must take into account the stars under which the apprentice was born and his humoral temperament; he must be educated in temperance, chastity, and love of God, learn Latin in order to have access to humanist culture, but also anatomy and perspective.

We use the formula of the Epistle to the Pisces of Horace which affirms that poetry is like painting (*Ut pictura poesis*), to confer on painting the dignity of poetry. The latter has always been very far from craftsmanship, manual know-how, and the plastic arts that came under it, and it touched, since the Ion of Plato, on the divine. To declare that painting is a sister of poetry, and that it shares its ends (to move, to please, and to educate, according to Horace), was to ennoble it.

Thus, after the Italian humanist Ludovico Dolce (1508–1568) who described the three parts of painting (invention, drawing, and color) on the model of the three parts of rhetoric (*inventio, dispositio, elocutio*), the painter Lomazzo (1538–1592) states in his *Trattato dell'arte de la pittura* (1584) that there is no true painter who is not a poet: "To paint or verse is to be carried away by the fury of 'Apollo. One cannot have a painter who does not also have some spirit of poetry". It is to emphasize the need for painters to have a literary culture: to make the most expressive and appropriate compositions about them (the notion of convenience plays an important role), the painter must know the history and ancient and modern literature.

Before the 15th century, there was no theoretical sum on the arts of sight which was equivalent to the great treatise that Aristotle's *Poetics* was for the letters. By maintaining that painting and poetry are sisters, the doctrine of *Ut pictura poesis* gives the former the theoretical program of the latter. The categories of *Poetics* are thus imported into painting.

This desired ennoblement became effective, as evidenced by the fact that, in his Decameron (mid-14th century), Boccaccio makes Giotto dialogue with a lawyer in other words puts on an equal footing a representative of a liberal art and a representative of what was, until a short time ago, a mechanical art. Or the fact that in the decoration of the room of Constantine of the Vatican palace, begun by Raphael and completed by the studio of Giulio Romano in 1524, the four allegories of Fame are not only Physics and History, but also, very new, Painting and Sculpture.

This ennobling of the activity means ennobling of those who practice it. The painters and the sculptor must now have Letters and master knowledge (anatomy, optics, botany...). Their goal, says Alberti, is not to get rich, but to gain fame and recognition. This amounts to emphasizing emphatically that painting is not a profession, a simple mechanical art, paid. It is a liberal art in the full sense, therefore disinterested. The great painter is a great man in his own right, who has a right to glory, and, possibly, to posterity. In this way, we come out of the artisanal regime where anonymous painters and sculptors are paid according to the time spent on the work, in the traditional way.

This glory, however, only halos very few artists then; Giotto, Masaccio, Michelangelo, Leonardo, and Raphael remain exceptional cases. In the shadow of the workshops, the majority of painters and sculptors continue to work without ever departing from anonymity. But several signs attest that the status of painter and sculptor is indeed in the process of changing in depth. For example, the appearance of the self-portrait. The artist first represents himself by lending his features to a character from the painted scene (like Masaccio (1401–1428) who, in the Brancacci Chapel in

Florence, painted himself among the crowd assembled around the throne of Saint Peter), then by making self-portraits assumed as such (like Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455), sculpting his face on the portal of the Baptistry in Florence).

A new word was needed to designate this humanist who practices painting or sculpture. The appearance of the term “artist” which, we repeat, has no Latin equivalent, corresponded to this need. The first attestation of the word (“*artista*”) is found in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (completed in 1321). It will take two centuries for the term to take hold, and even longer for it to enter common vocabulary in Europe.

It was in this context that the creation of the Academy of Drawing Arts took place in Florence in 1563. In this new institution, these arts are no longer learned in a purely empirical way and by imitation of the workshop master, as was the case in medieval corporations, but presuppose theoretical lessons. The very name of “Academy” says a lot about the intellectualization of these practices: to have chosen the name of the philosophical school founded by Plato, it was to place oneself under the aegis of the one who, in the fresco by Raphael, *The School of Athens*, shows the sky, while Aristotle points to the earth; in other words, to put the world of art under the sign of Ideas and the Intelligible, and to make the art of *designo*, in the words of Leonardo da Vinci, a “cosa mentale” far removed from the mechanical arts.

We cannot say enough about the role played among these theorists by the philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499). His synthesis of ancient Neo-Platonic thought and Christian revelation had a considerable influence throughout Europe on the way in which artistic activity, works, and artists were thought about; particularly because of his theory of creation.

According to Genesis and Christian theology, the notion of “creation” refers to the divine action which is at the absolute beginning of all things and produces the world ex nihilo, unlike the demiurge of ancient Greek thought, which organized a state of the world already there. The activity of creating therefore belongs only to God since it means making something happen out of nothing. This is to say the novelty introduced by Ficino when he introduced the notion of creation into the lexicon of art. There are men, he asserts, who are endowed with a power of creation which enables them to produce the microcosm of human work as God produced the macrocosm of the world. And this is because their soul is not only the anima that connects them to earthly life, but also the lie turned to God and open to his inspiration. It is this divine enthusiasm that animates the artist: the *Commentary on the Banquet* makes poetic fury one of the four forms of divine fury which uplifts the soul and leads it to great deeds. Love, the desire for beauty, becomes a creative power. Divine inspiration and the memory of the beautiful that the soul retains from its vision of essences are thus accorded in the soul of the artist.

This idea of creation not only has the effect of establishing an analogy between the work of the world and the work of art, and between the macrocosm and the microcosm which are their respective products: it also establishes a kinship between all the arts. Poetry, architecture, sculpture, and painting feed on the same source, and the latter two should no longer be placed in the subordinate category of the arts of imitation. Specifically, imitation has changed meaning; it is no longer that of natural nature but that of natural nature: “Art imitates nature. Art performs its works in this order, namely that it prints in a given material such and such forms, none of which is specific to the material (*Platonic Theology*). The artist imitates nature in its functioning, thus relays the work of divine creation, and in doing so provides it with a new fulfillment. This is to say the totally new metaphysical power that Ficino grants to human creation. Complementing divine creation, it increases the glory of the universe by contributing to its beautification.

The sacredness of the work thus migrates to the artist. In his *Treatise on Painting* Alberti declared: “The painter being able to share something of the divine creator, he can sometimes even be compared to a god” and in 1512, Dürer wrote:

This great art of painting has been, for many centuries, held in high esteem by mighty kings. They made the fortunes of eminent artists and treated them with honor, understanding that great masters have some kind of equality with God.

This passage, which reads the combined influence of Ficinian Neoplatonism and German mysticism, shows the rise to power of the figure of the genius artist whose creative power joins that of God. Dürer also left a sensitive image of it by representing himself in his *Self-portrait* of 1500 under features which are those attributed to Christ.

10

WHAT WAS FINE ART?

Painting and Sculpture Before and After the Reign of the Fine Arts

Larry Shiner

Although bone flutes have been found dating from 35,000 years ago, the oldest surviving physical examples of what we would unquestionably recognize as art seem to be paintings and sculptures. Some of the cave paintings from Chauvet and elsewhere go back almost 40,000 years as do some carved figures, and Gregory Currie suggests that if we accept a broad understanding of “art,” some stone axe heads that look like they were shaped primarily for aesthetic reasons mean that the roots of sculpture go back a half million years.¹ Of course, some art theorists and philosophers who take the term “art” to designate primarily those arts traditionally gathered under the concept of “fine art” might exclude handaxes from “art” with a capital “A.” But that traditional, highly restricted, category of fine art that included painting, sculpture, and architecture along with poetry and music at its core was not only a late emergence; consolidated around 200 years ago, it has largely run its course as an organizing category. As a leading historian of Western schemes for classifying the arts has remarked, the reign of a relatively “homogeneous and autonomous group of fine arts was brief.”²

This essay will not only sketch the story of the emergence and subsequent dilution of the category of fine art as a social category and practice, foregrounding the role of painting and sculpture as we go, but will also consider the recent arguments of those who deny that “fine art” was a late emerging phenomenon, and will close by suggesting some implications of the decline of “fine” art for theories of art and aesthetics. Before embarking on those investigations, I need to make two general comments on the nature of art categories.

First, categories of art and the aesthetic are subject to a process of historical sedimentation. Concepts and ways of acting that were once dominant do not simply disappear but live on in modified form, sometimes partially blending into newer ways of thinking and acting, sometimes simply surviving alongside them. The oldest and still most pervasive use of the term “art” in Western cultures is what we might call the generic or small “a” sense which goes back to the Greek *techne* and Latin *ars*, as when we refer to cooking, teaching, medicine, or politics as arts. In such uses, “art” can refer to almost any human activity done with an appropriate level of skill, intelligence, and grace. (I use “grace” to avoid the fraught associations attaching to “style” or “beauty.”) But in addition to this extremely broad concept of “art,” and to the highly restricted and hierarchical concept of fine art or “Art” with a capital “A,” there has been a third general way of using “art” that will play a role in what follows. This is the use of “art” with a modifier that identifies groups of arts that have often been regarded as closer to the “fine” arts than to small “a” arts such as cooking or carpentry, yet are typically contrasted with the fine arts and regarded as lower in

status—and consequently have often been ignored by philosophical aesthetics.³ These “marginal” categories have gone by a variety of names: applied arts, crafts, decorative arts, design, commercial arts, industrial arts, popular arts, etc.

The second, and equally important methodological point, is that concepts such as art, artist, or aesthetic are best understood when they are seen as embodied in social behaviors, practices, and institutions. To treat painting, sculpture, and the other arts as social practices means that if we want to understand the emergence of the category of fine art and its subsequent development and decline, we must set it in the context of larger cultural, social, and economic changes on the one hand, and at the same time, trace the ways in which fine art’s component concepts have been embodied in specific behaviors, practices, and institutions. Sometimes, philosophers like George Dickie or Arthur Danto have referred to this complex of concepts, practices, and institutions as “the artworld,” but, as the sociologist Howard Becker showed long ago, there are actually many “art worlds” and I will avoid the term in what follows.

Unfortunately, most of those who have put forward (as well as those who have criticized) the thesis that the category of fine arts or Art with a capital “A” is a late historical emergence have treated it almost solely in terms of the history of concepts and classification schemes. The classic and often reprinted statement of this ideational approach that focuses on systems of classification as developed by a few leading thinkers is Paul Oscar Kristeller’s essay, “The Modern System of the Arts.” Kristeller exhaustively examined the innumerable scholarly groupings of the arts from Ancient Greece through the end of the 18th century, closing his account with Kant. Kristeller showed, among other things, that throughout most of Western history, painting and sculpture were lumped together with the vast span of lower ranked activities that were called “servile arts” in the Ancient world and “mechanical arts” from the Middle Ages to the 18th century and, contrasted to them, were those more cerebral arts worthy of a “free” person and thus called “liberal” arts. Even though the status of painting and sculpture rose sharply during the Renaissance, both were still struggling for recognition as “liberal” arts throughout the 17th century. Kristeller argues that it was not until the mid-18th century that painting and sculpture were widely joined with architecture, poetry, and music under a single category. Then, in the work of Charles Batteux and others, a core of painting, sculpture, poetry, and music, along with one or more other arts such as architecture, dance, engraving, rhetoric, or landscape gardening, came to be treated as a unified group under the name beaux-arts or fine arts. The great French *Encyclopédie* edited by D’Alembert and Diderot then helped spread this new way of grouping the arts across Europe, encouraging a continuing quest for a unified theory or definition of art and the arts.

Kristeller’s essay first appeared in 1951, but in 2009, Giuseppe Di Liberti revisited the history of the emergence of the fine art category, confirming Kristeller’s results and extending the story through the 19th and 20th centuries. Among Liberti’s more interesting contributions was to divide the traditional ways of organizing the arts into four types: catalogs, comparisons, classifications, and systems. *Catalogues* operate on the basis of intuition or even some external feature, such as Charles Perrault’s 1690 *Cabinet des Beaux-Arts*, which mixed things like optics and mechanics with painting, sculpture, poetry, music, dance, and rhetoric since he needed eight items to match a set of paintings that were the conceit for his essay.⁴ *Comparisons*, on the other hand, do not attempt to organize the whole field of the arts since they usually assume some given classification, within which the comparison of specific arts is intended to illuminate important similarities and differences. Some of the most memorable comparative efforts have involved painting and sculpture, such as the comparison of painting to poetry, first articulated in Ancient Greece and given its most influential form by Horace’s famous *ut pictura poesis*. In the 18th century, Lessing influentially used a comparison of sculpture and poetry in his *Laocon*, contrasting sculpture as structured by simultaneity with poetry as structured by succession. In the Renaissance *paragone* debates, painting and sculpture were compared to each other with respect to which was most “noble.” Leonardo

weighed in for painting as the more intellectual and gentlemanly, whereas Michelangelo argued that each is excellent in its own way.⁵

Liberti then distinguishes between *classifications*, which, like comparisons, also typically operate on some already existing general idea of art, and *systems*, which seek a unifying principle(s) around which various component concepts are gathered. As Liberti notes, classifications and systems are not mutually exclusive. When Batteux made imitation the unifying principle of his system of the fine arts, he actually presupposed a more general classification of the arts based on the old liberal arts vs. mechanical arts criteria of pleasure vs. utility.⁶ As Liberti's survey of the many subsequent 19th-century classification schemes reveals, classification by itself can become a rather dreary academic business. In the late 19th century, however, it was enlivened by more systematic historian-theorists such as Wolflin, Riegl, and Panofsky, each of whom sought principles for a *Kunstwissenschaft* or "science of art," drawing their primary examples from painting and sculpture.⁷ But as later theorists in the 20th century attempted to incorporate more and more new arts into the category of fine art, it finally became so bloated and unwieldy that the entire classificatory and systematizing enterprise has come to seem untenable.⁸ Of course, as Dominic Lopes points out, there were skeptics about the cogency of the "fine art" category from early on. Goethe wrote in 1772, that the arts "classified for purposes of theoretical trickery under the rubric 'fine arts' [are] no more closely related than the seven 'liberal arts' of the old seminaries."⁹

Paradoxically, it has only been in this century that the widely accepted Kristellerian claim that the system of fine arts is a modern development barely 200 years old has been vigorously attacked. There have been three major critiques of the Kristeller thesis each varying in tone and perspicuity, although all argue that the modern category of fine art (and the aesthetic) can already be found in Ancient Greece and therefore that "Art" is not "modern" after all. The most contentious attack has been by the classicist, James I. Porter who, among other things, strikes at Kristeller's rather casual use of the term "system" as well as at Kristeller's stress on a core of five arts as constituting that system.¹⁰ Whereas Porter is primarily concerned to demolish the credibility of Kristeller's account in order to make way for his own exploration of aesthetic experience in Ancient Greece, the two other critiques of Kristeller argue that the modern category of fine art was already present in Aristotle. James O. Young's version of this argument is that since Aristotle calls painting, sculpture, and music as well as poetry imitative arts Kristeller's supposed "modern system" was already there in Aristotle and simply revived by Batteux and others. The only thing new in Batteux, according to Young, was the term Beaux-arts. Unfortunately, Young tries to reinforce his claim by offering a highly selective list of 18th-century theorists who seem to support his view, but Young ignores the numerous 18th-century writers who proposed categories of the fine arts consisting of six, seven, eight, or more arts, and also ignores the fact that several of Batteux's contemporaries (Diderot, Mendelssohn, Lessing) rejected imitation as a unifying principle of the arts.¹¹ Indeed, as Liberti's history of classifications shows, the "modern system of the arts" has been unstable and constantly changing from the beginning.

A far more convincing and balanced critique of the Kristeller thesis than either Porter's or Young's is Stephen Halliwell's *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* which not only offers a thorough study of mimesis in both Plato and Aristotle, but traces Aristotle's category of "mimetic arts" down through leading art theorists to the Romantics. Halliwell convincingly argues that Aristotle's idea of mimesis combined a "world-reflecting" (imitative) aspect with a "world-creating" (representational) aspect that even included an expressive dimension.¹² On this basis, Halliwell believes that when Aristotle ascribed this dual sense of mimesis to painting, sculpture, music and poetry, it implied a category of "imitative arts" that closely resembles the modern concept of the fine arts.¹³ Yet Halliwell himself notes that the persistence of the idea of imitative arts did not "at all mean underestimating the significance of eighteenth century developments" such as the "turning point" marked by the "model of aesthetic autonomy."¹⁴

Yet even Halliwell's critique of Kristeller's argument for the modernity of the category of fine art suffers from a handicap shared with the critiques of Porter and Young: all three make the same error as Kristeller himself. They focus on chains of ideas and intellectual influences and ignore not only the broader cultural, social, and economic context from which such ideas emerged, but also the changes in patterns of social behavior, practices, and institutions that embodied them. These social and institutional changes gave the category of "fine arts" as it emerged in the 18th century a much more complex and "modern" meaning than Aristotle's "imitative arts." Even so, Halliwell's claim for the persistence of imitative views in theoretical classifications of the arts is not inconsistent with the emergence of new meanings tied to new practices and institutions. Thus, one can accept an aspect of continuity in the concept of art from Aristotle to the present, while at the same time recognizing that there has been an even more important discontinuity with respect to many component concepts, behaviors, practices, and institutions.

As I argued in *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History*, there was a profound transformation in ways of acting as well as thinking with regard to the arts in the 18th century and both the new behaviors and new ideas came to be embodied in distinct new institutions. Together these changes led to the emergence of "art" as a semi-autonomous realm within society alongside science, religion, politics, commerce, etc.¹⁵ Driven by the rise of a market economy and a growing middle class, these broad changes in the way the arts were produced, circulated and thought about and housed reached a critical mass over the course of the late 18th and early 19th century. From a 17th-century world in which most arts were integrated into daily life and there were few separate art institutions, we find most of the modern concepts, practices, and institutions of art in place by the early 19th century.

Whereas Kristeller and his critics focused on the concept of fine art with a side glance at the parallel emergence of the concept of the aesthetic, I believe one should also attend to the emergence of the modern concept of the artist and the ways the post-romantic ideal of the artist was also expressed in new practices and institutions. Consider, for example, the status of painters, who despite the increased prestige of court painters and a few outstanding individuals in the Renaissance, were still struggling for "liberal arts" status throughout most of Europe in the 17th century. Even at the beginning of the 18th century, some painters we now celebrate as fine artists might decorate carriages or make shop signs alongside their easel works. By the end of the century intellectual arguments contrasting genius to rule and creativity to invention had become embodied in a variety of practices and institutions leading to a clearer division between easel painters and decorative painters. For example, academies of painting and sculpture, which first emerged in Renaissance, now proliferated across Europe, at the same time that the development of commercial paints meant decorative painters did not even need to understand how to create their own colors. Or consider that during the earlier part of the century, catalogues of salon paintings listed paintings by their placement on the walls, but toward the end of the century paintings began to be listed by the artist's name. Thus, it is no surprise to discover that at the beginning of the 18th century the dictionaries of the major European languages used the terms "artist" and "artisan" interchangeably, but by the end of the century, the two terms were beginning to be defined as opposites.¹⁶

The other major conceptual and behavioral turn toward the modern complex of practices and institutions we call "Art" was the emergence in the 18th century of the term "aesthetic" as the name for a distinctive kind of reflective experience unlike the many traditional ways of appreciating art works made for a particular purpose or place, such as Horace's "please and instruct." The new idea of the aesthetic came in many versions, of which the Kantian "disinterested contemplation" of art or nature "for itself," was only one. Yet of equal importance to the purely conceptual aspects of the idea of the aesthetic is the fact that the aesthetic like the new ideal of the artist was also embodied in new practices and institutions—such as the appropriate behaviors that

were being established for contemplating painting and sculpture in the newly emerged public art museums. The transformation of the Louvre into an art museum during the French Revolution is particularly instructive for understanding the way in which concepts of art and the aesthetic and social practices of art are intertwined. The overthrow of the French monarchy in 1792 precipitated a crisis for the conservation of painting and sculpture, since not only citizen mobs, but also many revolutionary officials, began destroying paintings and sculptures representing the monarchy. During the intense debate in the National Assembly between the advocates of preservation and the champions of destruction, a deputy named Pierre Cambon argued that by creating a museum and putting images related to the royalty in it, “we will destroy the idea of royalty” and at the same time, “preserve masterpieces.”¹⁷ Cambon recognized that a museum would neutralize the signs of royalty, leaving paintings and sculptures only works of art to be appreciated for their formal, or aesthetic value.¹⁸ The neutralizing and aestheticizing power of the museum, of course, had a similar effect on religious works, which is why the art theorist Quatremère de Quincy denounced Napoleon’s stripping of Italian Churches for the benefit of the Louvre. Quatremère’s objection was not that Napoleon treated art works as spoils of war but that he wrenched paintings and sculptures from the places for which they were created and where they could speak to people’s deepest feelings. But in the art museum, he wrote, one will consider only their formal and technical merit, “bodies without soul, empty simulacra.”¹⁹

By the 1830s, “Fine Art,” or “Art” in the singular had become the name of a multi-dimensional cultural complex involving such things as: new statuses (the definitive separation of “artist” from “artisan”), new normative concepts (creation, originality, aesthetic), new practices (an end of recycling and borrowing in music, a new importance for the signature in painting), new institutions (secular concert halls, separate art auctions, art exhibitions, art museums), and new ideals of behavior (silent listening and contemplative looking). By the 1830s and 1840s, the conjunction of these new concepts, practices, institutions, and behaviors resulted in the emergence of a recognizable social domain paralleling the domains of religion, politics, commercial life, etc. Intellectuals in both Germany and in America began to note the existence of this new social domain called “art” (the term was already beginning to be used without the modifier “fine”). Heinrich Heine wrote in 1830 that parts of the cultured elite in the Germanys “regard art as an independent second world which they rank so highly that all activities of human beings – their religion, their morality – course along below it.”²⁰ And Ralph Waldo Emerson declared in his 1841 essay “Art” that “a true announcement of the law of creation... would carry art up into the kingdom of nature, and destroy its separate and contrasted existence.”²¹

As Heine’s and Emerson’s comments suggest, from the Romantic period on, this new complex of (fine) art, artist, and aesthetic, and its institutions achieved a kind of apotheosis for parts of the cultured elite. By the turn of the 20th century, the ideal figure of the artist as creative genius and prophet of the new religion of Art was paralleled by views of aesthetic experience such as those of Marcel Proust or Clive Bell that treated Art as a species of spiritual revelation. Obviously, large parts of the middle class public did not fully embrace the extreme perspective that treated art as a religious substitute. Moreover, it took most of the 19th century to teach the lesser strata of the new art public the proper aesthetic behaviors of reverent listening and contemplative looking appropriate to concert halls and art museums.

If the new cultural complex of “art” in its various conceptual, social, and institutional aspects was firmly in place by the last half of the 19th century, the more restricted set of arts that had formed the original core of the fine arts category began to expand by the century’s end. In the case of the novel, for example, Henry James argued in an 1884 essay that the contemporary novel is not merely “*an art*,” but “one of the *fine arts*.²² In the case of photography, although some writers had claimed that the best works of photography should be considered fine art since the 1850s, it was only between 1890 and 1910 that a few art museums began to show photographs “as art,” and it

took another three decades for art photography along with its canon of masters and masterpieces to be widely accepted as fine art. Then came the turn of film, which faced the complaint that it was aimed at entertainment rather than at deep aesthetic appreciation, but soon film was also accepted as a potential medium for fine art. Yet these new arts did not displace the established role of painting and sculpture as the leading visual art forms until the 1960s when the once relatively restricted fine art category itself began to unravel.

Although the “anti-art” experiments of Dada and Futurism in the early 20th century had momentarily caught the attention of a few in the art world, in the early 1960s Duchamp-inspired experiments with ready-mades and mixed media began to radically expand the category of fine art. As Pop Art, Happenings, installation art, performance art, earth art, video art, and conceptual art movements burgeoned, painting and sculpture began to lose their supremacy among the visual arts, although in an influential 1979 essay, the critic Rosalind Krause spoke of some of these post-modern tendencies as “sculpture in the expanded field.”²³ Twenty years later Krause coined a more general term, “post-medium,” that nicely suggests the wide-open experimentation with new materials during the second half of the 20th century, as artists used everything from fat, felt, and food, to store-bought objects or their own bodies as media, or, in the case of some conceptual art, employed no material at all.²⁴ At the same time, practitioners and admirers of many of the once lesser ranked applied, craft, decorative, design, or popular arts came knocking at the door of the fine arts club. Serious theoretical claims have been made in recent decades for everything from comics to perfume. As a result of these continuing additions to what might count as works of fine art, the category has become so diluted as to be almost unrecognizable and would seem even less likely to offer a basis for a theory of art or the arts than it did in Goethe’s day. Of course, the demise of “fine art” as a coherent list of arts, has not affected the existence of “art” as a distinct, if vaguely circumscribed, social domain of beliefs, concepts, behaviors, and institutions.

In *Beyond Art*, Lopes offers a useful clarification of this outcome by distinguishing a *theory* of art or the arts, which attempts to say what makes anything a work of art, from our folk *concept* of the arts. The latter helps us “detect” art, something Noel Carroll has also observed, by allowing us to apply a variety of conventional criteria developed over time, but without attempting to unify them in a philosophical theory. As Lopes concludes, “what a close investigation of the history of admissions and expulsions from the club of the arts might reveal is not what makes an activity an art but rather what features we happen to be looking for in acknowledging it to be an art.”²⁵ Thus, when it comes to the question of deciding whether some new candidate art (comics, video games) should be admitted into the panoply of the arts, Lopes proposes that instead of seeking a global theory of art to do the job, we should pursue local analogies with similar arts that have already been accepted. Arguments based on an analogy with painting, for example, were one of the ways photography, and later quilts, got into the art club. It is a rough and imprecise method and Lopes concludes that it may even lead us to suspect that “the clique” of the (fine) arts “is not much more than a matter of convenience.”²⁶

Nicholas Wolterstorff’s *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art* locates the failure of the modern “fine art” category elsewhere. For Wolterstorff, the problem is not that the fine art category has become so diluted as to be of little use as a guide to art theory, but that a particular version of the fine art tradition has misled philosophical aesthetics to overlook certain arts and especially certain responses to art that have never fit the idea of contemplative appreciation appropriate to the art museum.²⁷ Like a latter day Quatremère de Quincy, he is sensitive to the ways other than aesthetic contemplation that art works made for a purpose and place invite us to engage with them, e.g. touching, kissing, crying, working, meditating, praying. With respect to painting, he considers in depth the practice of touching and kissing icons in the Orthodox tradition of veneration. With respect to sculpture and architecture, he writes sensitively about the purposes and ways of engagement with memorial art such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington

where the responses of touching and crying or of meditating at the same time as we notice our own image reflected in the polished surface are more appropriate responses than a focus on the formal qualities of the design. Through an analysis of many other types of art, such as work songs or hymns, that have also been generally ignored by philosophical aesthetics, Wolterstorff drives home the point that the mainstream tradition of philosophical aesthetics has for too long missed the bulk of the art that surrounds us. The many kinds of arts Wolterstorff discusses are a reminder of the point I made at the beginning of this essay about the process of sedimentation. Although these arts have been largely ignored by philosophical aesthetics until recently, they have been there all along, but since they were outside the pale of “fine art,” they were not believed worthy of attention, unless wrenched from their original contexts and uses and treated purely as “art” intended for contemplation.

Given the continuing dilution of the category of fine art today, it is no surprise that Lopes calls for working on theories of the individual arts and Wolterstorff calls for recognizing other kinds of arts and other ways of engaging with them. But as different as Lopes’ and Wolterstorff’s responses are to the fate of the “fine art” category, both share a belief that all arts should be understood as social practices, a belief that many other contemporary aestheticians have also embraced, and that transforms the question of classification from one of making lists based on conceptual criteria as both Kristeller and his critics have done, to examining how such concepts play out in norms, behaviors, and institutions. As for painting and sculpture, which once stood high above all other visual arts along with architecture, the abandonment of the exclusiveness implied by the category “fine art” has not resulted in demotion but liberation. Traditional forms of religious painting and sculpture can now be approached by aesthetics in a richer and more holistic way. And both contemporary art sculpture and painting (the latter periodically declared “dead” from the time of the invention of photography) have responded with astonishing alacrity to the constant arrival of the many new experimental art forms.

Notes

- 1 Gregory Currie, “The Master of the Masek Beads: Handaxes, Art, and the Minds of Early Humans,” in Elisabeth Schellekens and Peter Goldie (ed.), *The Aesthetic Mind: Philosophy and Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10–11.
- 2 Giuseppe Di Liberti, *Le Systeme des Arts: Histoire et Hypothese* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2016), 71. This is a somewhat modified version of the Italian original published in 2009.
- 3 David Davies speaks of these sorts of art as living on the “margins” of (fine) art proper. See his *Art as Performance* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2004).
- 4 Liberti, *Le Systeme des Arts*, 63–64.
- 5 Liberti, *Le Systeme des Arts*, 46–47.
- 6 Liberti, *Le Systeme des Arts*, 154. Batteux actually has a tripartite scheme in which the fine arts are set in opposition to the mechanical arts based on the pleasure vs. utility criterion, but architecture and rhetoric are given an intermediate status since they combine pleasure and utility.
- 7 Liberti, *Le Systeme des Arts*, 69–180.
- 8 This does not prevent Liberti from proposing his own “open” system of concepts that he says are “for” art, rather than “of” art. Liberti, *Le Systeme des Arts*, 201–226.
- 9 Cited in Dominic McIver Lopes, *Beyond Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 119.
- 10 As I show in my rebuttal of Porter, Kristeller did not make the mistake of reifying a “core” of only five arts, but Kristeller did invite misunderstanding by his rather casual use of the term “system.” Some of the same problems cling to Liberti’s use of “system,” although he shows an acquaintance with the classical “systems theory” of L. von Bertalanffy and Norbert Wiener. For my commentary on Porter’s essay, see “Continuity and Discontinuity in the Concept of Art,” *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 49:2 (2009), 159–169.
- 11 For details see Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 80–87.
- 12 Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2002), 22–24, 159–64.

- 13 Halliwell, *Mimesis*, 8.
- 14 Halliwell, *Mimesis*, 12.
- 15 Had Halliwell's book appeared a year before mine rather than a year after, I would have integrated his argument into my discussion. Of course, there are other things I would have to modify were I writing the book today. For example, I would have to revise aspects of my treatment of the concept of "the aesthetic" since, as Paul Guyer has pointed out, both Kristeller and I treat a certain view of aesthetic autonomy as more normative than it was. See Paul Guyer, *A History Modern Aesthetics, Vol. I: The Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 28–29. Another strategic error I would have to correct would be to find an alternative to the way I use the term "craft," which I anachronistically treated as equivalent to "mechanical arts" prior to the 19th century. But as Glenn Adamson shows, "craft" only got its contemporary meaning in the late 19th century when it emerged along with terms like "applied arts," "decorative arts," and "minor arts" as replacements for the long defunct "mechanical arts." See Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft* 2012.
- 16 Shiner, *The Invention of Art*, 99–105.
- 17 The deputy was Pierre Cambon. The relevant texts of the debate can be found in Edouard Pommier, *L'Art de la Liberté: Doctrines et Débats de la Révolution Française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 104, 106.
- 18 Of course, Cambon did not use the term "aesthetic" which only came into general circulation decades later.
- 19 Quatremère de Quincy, *Considerations Morales sur la Destination des Ouvrages de l'art* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), 26.
- 20 Heinrich Heine, *The Romantic School and Other Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1985), 34.
- 21 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Modern Library, 1950), 313–314.
- 22 Shiner, *The Invention of Art*, 227.
- 23 Rosalind Krause, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring 1979), 30–44.
- 24 Rosalind Krause, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000).
- 25 Dominic McIver Lopes, *Beyond Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 116.
- 26 Lopes, *Beyond Art*, 124.
- 27 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

11

EARLY MODERN EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHY OF PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

J. Colin McQuillan

1 Introduction

The early modern period in European philosophy (c. 1600–1800) was characterized by invention and transformation. The most famous philosophers from this period – Thomas Hobbes, René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant – all claimed to have invented new sciences or to have dramatically changed the method, content, or classification of scientific knowledge. Hume’s science of human nature stands as a prominent example of the former tendency (invention), while Kant’s claim to have finally made metaphysics a science through his critique of pure reason could serve as an example of the latter tendency (transformation) (Hume 1978: xiii–xix; Kant 1998: 109–120). Either way, whether through invention or transformation, early modern philosophers took themselves to have changed the face of human knowledge.

Aesthetics was one of the new sciences that were introduced during the early modern period, though, in its original form, it was very different from what philosophers today would call aesthetics.¹ The German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten introduced aesthetics in his dissertation *Reflections on Poetry* (1736) as a science of confused sensible cognition that would complement logic, understood as the science of distinct intellectual cognition (Baumgarten 1954: 77–79). It was only through considerable disagreement among philosophers – notably Kant, who considered aesthetics a critique of taste; Schelling, who first identified aesthetics and the philosophy of art; and Hegel, who insisted that its proper name is not aesthetics or the philosophy of art, but the philosophy of fine art – that aesthetics finally became the part of philosophy concerned with questions about art, beauty, and criticism (Hegel 1975, Vol. 1: 1; Schelling 1989: 8; Kant 1998: 156). These disagreements lasted throughout the 19th and 20th centuries and, to a certain extent, continue today, as philosophers try to define what aesthetics is; to distinguish aesthetic objects, properties, experiences, and attitudes from other kinds of things; to identify the methods aesthetics should employ; and to explain how aesthetics relates to other parts of philosophy.

Painting and sculpture were implicated in the wave of invention and transformation that changed the face of European philosophy during the early modern period, even though none of the most famous philosophers from this period wrote treatises on the plastic arts.² The introduction of aesthetics also had important consequences for philosophical debates about painting and sculpture, though Baumgarten and Kant had little to say about them. In what follows, I will consider a series of works by and debates among less well-known philosophers from the early modern period that deal with painting and sculpture more directly. I will focus on accounts of

the origins of painting and sculpture and the light they shed on the nature of the plastic arts; the implications of the comparative judgment of ancient and modern art for the evaluation of painting and sculpture; and, finally, the classification of painting and sculpture in the new systems of science, philosophy, and human knowledge that were proposed during the early modern period. My goal, in each of these sections, is to identify philosophically novel and relevant features of early modern discussions of painting and sculpture that will clarify for the reader what is distinctive about this period.

2 The Origins of Painting and Sculpture

Early modern philosophy was not as clearly distinguished from other scientific and humanistic pursuits as philosophy is today, so we should not be surprised to find several early modern philosophers engaging in quasi-historical speculation about the origins of painting and sculpture. These speculations are important, because they illuminate the nature of the plastic arts and the specific differences between painting and sculpture, as they were understood at the time.

Some early modern philosophers sought the origins of painting and sculpture in human nature and, in particular, in the pleasures of the senses. In his essay “Pleasures of the Imagination” (1712), Joseph Addison follows Aristotle in maintaining that “our sight is the most perfect and most delightful of all our senses” (Addison 1891: 713). Addison remarks that

The sense of feeling can indeed give us a notion of extension, shape, and all other ideas that enter at the eye, except colors; but at the same time, it is very much straitened and confined in its operations, to the number, bulk, and distance of its particular objects.

(Addison 1891: 714)

“Our sight,” he continues,

Seems designed to supply all these defects, and may be considered as a more delicate and diffusive kind of touch, that spreads itself over an infinite multitude of bodies, comprehends the largest figures, and brings into our reach some of the remote parts of the universe.

(Addison 1891: 714)

Because sight and touch, in particular, are the source of the majority of our ideas, Addison concludes that they are also sources of pleasure. He defines the pleasures of imagination as those that arise “from visible objects, either when we have them actually in view, or when we call up their ideas into our minds by paintings, statues, descriptions, or any the like occasion” (Addison 1891: 714). This casts the plastic arts as representations of objects “that are actually before our eyes, or that once entered in at our eyes, and are afterwards called up into the mind” (Addison 1891: 730). The pleasures of painting and sculpture are, consequently, “secondary pleasures” that follow from the “primary pleasures” of seeing and touching. This is confirmed in later parts of the essay, where Addison distinguishes the kind of representations found in statuary, painting, and poetic description. He holds that statuary is the most natural form of representation, because it most closely resembles the object it represents, presumably because it is three-dimensional. Painting is less natural than sculpture, in terms of representation, because it is two-dimensional; yet it is more naturalistic than poetic description, because a painting resembles an object in a way that language does not. In every case, Addison concludes, the pleasures of painting and sculpture derive from the representation of objects, which appeals to our senses and to our nature.

Other early modern philosophers, like Johann Joachim Winckelmann, sought to explain the origins of painting and sculpture through religion. Like Addison, Winckelmann grants priority

to sculpture over painting and poetry in his *History of Ancient Art* (1765); however, he does so for a very different reason. Winckelmann grants that art remains “a daughter of pleasure,” but he also contends that, at the heart of aesthetic pleasure, there is necessity. This necessity inspired artistic invention “in a similar way among all the nations by which it has been cultivated,” beginning with the ancient Egyptians and Chaldeans. Winckelmann maintains that the first works of art created by these ancient peoples “probably represented for worship, under a material form, the higher powers, whose existence they had imagined at an earlier period than the Greeks” (Winckelmann 1873: 193). This implies, and Winckelmann confirms, that sculpture is the first of the arts to emerge, prior to painting, poetry, or music. And, even though he thinks it arises from an essentially religious impulse, Winckelmann recognizes that sculpture soon took on a life of its own. His *History* traces the progress of sculpture from the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Persians, and Etruscans to its perfection by the ancient Greeks, describing how their first sculptures were made from clay, carved from wood, cast in brass, and, later, covered in gold leaf. Concerning their form, Winckelmann suggests that the first sculptures represented the gods through “a rude block or square stone,” to which heads were later affixed. “At the commencement,” Winckelmann says, “there was observable on the middle of these stones with heads merely the difference in sex, which an ill-shaped face probably left doubtful” (Winckelmann 1873: 197). In time, however, sculptural representations of the human form became more refined and gradually gave rise to drawing, which began as an outline or delineation of sculptural forms in two rather than three dimensions. Painting emerged as these outlines became more complex and color was added to form. Among the Egyptians, the figures represented in both sculpture and painting remained “straight and motionless,” while later, with the Greeks, they expressed “a noble simplicity and sedate grandeur in gesture and expression” that represents for Winckelmann the perfection of the plastic arts (Winckelmann 1767: 30; Winckelmann 1873: 199).

Winckelmann does not credit any particular nation or people with the invention of art, because, he says, “every nation has found within itself the first seed of those things which are indispensable” (Winckelmann 1873: 193). Johann Gottfried Herder challenges that assumption, reflecting the rising tide of historicism and nationalism at the end of the 18th century. An early expression of Herder’s view can be found in his fragment “On the Transformation of the Taste of Nations in the Course of the Ages” (c. 1766), which compares geological transformations in the Earth to historical changes in the race, form of life, mentality, and taste of different nations; and in his *This Too A Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity* (1774), which argues that the character of different races and peoples is shaped by their environment, giving rise to diverse cultural forms, artistic styles, and tastes (Herder 2002a: 255–266, 272–361, esp. 291–299). Winckelmann took an interest in the same subjects, though he thought geography and climate affected the form that artistic expression takes and the degree of perfection it attains, instead of seeing them, as Herder does, as the conditions of particular art forms. While, in his *Sculpture* (1778), Herder will claim that the forms of sculpture “are as constant and eternal as pure and simple human nature,” his subsequent remarks suggest a more radical thesis: “God gave to one people... the space, time, and leisure to divine and give shape to things that would remain as permanent monuments for all subsequent ages and peoples” (Herder 2002b: 60). Greek sculpture remains “a model of good form,” in a way that Chinese and European fashion does not, because Herder credits the Greeks with an appreciation of nature, sensitivity, and simplicity that was not found in other peoples. He is even more explicit about the historical and cultural specificity of painting, whose forms he calls “an image of their age and vary in accordance with history, peoples, and times” (Herder 2002b: 60). The only thing that unifies them is light, which Herder describes as “an enchanted ocean” that “flows in every direction from a single point of light on a flat canvas, binding together every object into a new and unique creation” (Herder 2002b: 62). Still, the unity that light bestows on painting is offset by the diversity achieved by *chiaroscuro*, which, “as long as it is not made to depend

on the fixity of sculpture, borrowing from what is dead, creates a magic panel of *transformation*, a sea of waves, stories, and figures, each of which dissolves into one another” on the canvas (Herder 2002b: 62). The play of unity and diversity that Herder identifies in these passages seems to mirror the dynamic tension between universal form, the character of different nations and peoples, and the cultural forms of their artistic expression that characterizes his understanding of the origin of the plastic arts.

3 Ancient and Modern Painting and Sculpture

Alongside their speculations about the origins of painting and sculpture, which, we have seen, also concern the nature and specific differences of the plastic arts, many early modern philosophers engaged in comparative qualitative judgments about the relative merits of ancient and modern painting and sculpture. These comparative judgments set the stage for more wide-ranging debates about the principles of critical judgment and the standards of taste with which contemporary philosophers are more familiar, but which often focused on literature and neglected the plastic arts.

When they turned their attention to the difference between ancient and modern art, some early modern philosophers rated modern painting and sculpture quite highly, in some cases declaring them superior to their classical predecessors. In “The Century of Louis the Great” (1687), the poem that set off the “quarrel between the ancients and the moderns” in the French Academy, Charles Perrault took a rather extreme position, dismissing the “trifling” skill of ancient painters, who, he says, “knew no more than their admirers do now” (Perrault 1714: 193). Instead, he praises “the masters of the latter age,” including the “immense genius” of Raphael, whose “lively pencil had a matchless turn,” and the “inimitable hand” of Charles Le Brun, whose “famous works in ages yet to come, shall be admired by posterity” (Perrault 1714: 194–195). Perrault goes on to mock ancient sculpture, particularly the *Laocoön*, because it is so poorly proportioned, and because Laocoon’s sons look more like dwarves than children. He contends that an “impartial judge, who dares believe his eyes,” will find the sculptures by Girardon that Louis XIV had installed at Versailles to be vastly superior to the works of any of the ancient masters (Perrault 1714: 195–196). The judgment of William Wotton, a distinguished classicist and member of the British Royal Society, is more tempered. After surveying ancient achievements in grammar, rhetoric, and poetry in his *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning* (1694), Wotton says he was initially inclined to grant the superiority of ancient painting, sculpture, and architecture. He feels obliged to defer to the judgment of those who are most knowledgeable about these arts, particularly masters like Michelangelo and Bernini, who, he says, “did always ingenuously declare, that their best pieces were exceeded by some of the ancient Statues still to be seen at Rome” (Wotton 1694: 62). But then Wotton quotes long passages from Perrault’s *Parallel of the Ancients and Moderns* (1688–1696) on the shortcomings of ancient sculpture and the beauties of modern painting – particularly the works of Raphael, Titian, Poussin, and Le Brun – that he finds both authoritative and compelling. In the end, Wotton concludes that “we have had masters in both these arts, who have deserved a rank with those that flourished in the last age, after they were again restored to these parts of the world” (Wotton 1694: 79). He considers this quite an accomplishment for the modern art, given the great reputation of ancient painting and sculpture during the early modern period.

Other early modern philosophers defended the ancients and rejected claims about the equality, much less the superiority, of modern painting and sculpture. William Temple, in his *Essays on Ancient & Modern Learning* (1690), mourns the loss of the wisdom of the ancients with as much vehemence as Perrault had mocked them in “The Century of Louis the Great.” At one point,

Temple even uses (what he takes to be) the general agreement about the perfection of ancient art as evidence of the philosophical, scientific, and literary achievements of antiquity, asking

May there not have been, in *Greece* or *Italy* of old, such prodigies of invention and learning in *philosophy, mathematics, physics, oratory, poetry*, that none has ever since approached them, as well as there were in *painting, statuary, architecture*, and yet their unparalleled and inimitable excellences in these are undisputed?

(Temple 1909: 20)

Later, he acknowledges that the moderns had made some progress in the arts of painting and sculpture during the renaissance but insists that this was a “great but short flight” (Temple 1909: 30). Temple laments that “we have not had one master in either [painting or sculpture] who deserved a rank with those that flourished in that short period after they began among us” (Temple 1909: 30). Not all of the early modern admirers of the ancients were as pessimistic about the prospects of modern art as Temple was. We have already seen that Winckelmann thought the ancient Greeks perfected the art of sculpture, but that does not mean he thought modern painting and sculpture was corrupt or inferior. In his *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, Winckelmann insists that “there is but one way for the moderns to become great, and perhaps, unequalled; I mean, by imitating the ancients” (Winckelmann 1767: 2). He goes on to praise Michelangelo, Raphael, and Poussin for having studied “the performances of the ancients” and imbibing “taste at its source” (Winckelmann 1767: 3). Yet he does not think these artists slavishly copied ancient models, out of deference to tradition, or conforming their own taste and skill to those who came before them. Instead, he thinks that great modern artists learned to imitate the ideals of beauty they found in Greek and Roman art. The imitation of the ancients is, for Winckelmann, just an effective way to learn to imitate what is beautiful.

Early modern debates about the relative merits of ancient and modern art did not just dwell on generalizations about the perfection of the arts, their progress or decline at one time or another, or the need to imitate classical models. The participants in these debates often appealed to specific characteristics of ancient and modern painting and sculpture, as well as numerous examples, to justify claims about the relative superiority or inferiority of one period or another. In passages from his *Parallel* quoted by Wotton, Perrault focuses on the inability of Greek sculptors to shape the folds of clothing and drapery, as well as their failure to observe the rules of perspective in bas-relief. Winckelmann, in his *Reflections*, emphasizes the naturalism of Greek painting and sculpture, their contours, drapery, and the moderation we find in their expressions of emotion. Discussions about these qualities and comparative judgments about them inspired a great deal of critical debate among early modern philosophers. Winckelmann is, for example, more charitable in his judgment of clothed figures in ancient sculptures than Perrault; yet his claims about the expression of emotion in ancient art were fiercely contested by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in his *Laocoön* (1766) (Winckelmann 1767, 30, Lessing 2003: 28–36). These debates cannot be settled here, and, even if they could, the results would probably be more interesting to critics and historians of art than to philosophers. It is worth noting, however, that critical debates are extremely relevant to discussions about the principles of critical evaluation and the standards of taste that we find in early modern philosophy. These discussions often appealed to specific examples of critical judgments about works of art to support their claims that beauty should be judged according to a work’s perfection, the agreement of its parts, the degree to which it exhibits unity amid variety, its ability to express emotion or arouse the passions of a spectator, the social authority of the critic, or the place and time where it was produced. That is why comparative judgments of ancient and modern art are so important for early modern philosophy of painting and sculpture; they are the supporting evidence that justifies more general philosophical claims about criticism and taste.

4 The Classification of Painting and Sculpture

In addition to accounts of the origins of the plastic arts and the comparison of ancient and modern painting and sculpture, early modern philosophers made a concerted effort to construct systems of the arts that mirrored the systems of philosophy and the sciences that they were developing at the same time. Indeed, the more comprehensive of these systems included philosophy, science, and the arts in an ambitious attempt to order all of human knowledge.

Charles Batteux is often credited with inventing “the modern system of the arts,” but his most famous work, *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle* (1746), has little to say about painting and sculpture.³ Batteux begins by dividing the arts into three types, distinguishing each one “on the basis of the ends towards which they are directed” (Batteux 2015: 3). The first type of art is designed “to serve the needs of the people, whom nature seems to abandon as soon as they are born” (Batteux 2015: 3). The second type, which Batteux calls “the fine arts *par excellence*,” is a source of pleasure, while the third type combines utility and pleasure. The mechanical arts are identified with the first type of art; music, poetry, painting, sculpture, and dance constitute the second type; and rhetoric and architecture belong to the third type. The discussion that follows focuses on the fine arts or those arts that serve no other purpose than pleasure. Batteux first presents a general argument supporting the claim that the fine arts “select the beautiful parts of nature and form them into an exquisite whole, more perfect than nature, without ceasing to be natural” (Batteux 2015: 4). The imitation of *belle nature* is thus, for Batteux, the single principle that governs both the production of fine art – genius – and its critical evaluation – taste. When he considers the application of this principle to painting later in the work, Batteux says that he has little to add to what he has already said about poetry. Painting and poetry are, he claims, “so similar that in order to have discussed both of them at once, we need only change the names and put *painting*, *designing*, and *coloring* in the places of *poetry*, *story*, and *versification*” (Batteux 2015: 125). The two arts are created by the same genius and judged by the same taste, so Batteux thinks it is obvious that if he has successfully demonstrated that the principle of the imitation of *belle nature* applies to poetry, then it must also apply to painting. Sculpture is given even less attention than painting in *The Fine Arts*. Early in the work, in a passage meant to demonstrate that the fine arts are meant “to capture the properties of nature and represent them in an artifact,” Batteux says “the chisel of the sculptor depicts a hero in a block of marble” (Batteux 2015: 6). A few pages later, in a discussion of the manner in which arts imitate, Batteux says sculpture imitates *belle nature* by means of three-dimensional figures (Batteux 2015: 19). He has nothing to say about sculpture in the final section of *The Fine Arts*, where he tries to verify the principle of the imitation of *belle nature* by applying it to the arts of poetry, painting, music, and dance, suggesting that Batteux’s system is neither as complete nor as comprehensive as it is reputed to be.

Despite his neglect of the plastic arts in *The Fine Arts*, Batteux was a major influence on the *Encyclopedia, or Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences* (1751–1772), edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert.⁴ This is evident, first, in the way poetry, music, painting, sculpture, and architecture are grouped together in the “Map of the System of Human Knowledge” that d’Alembert includes in his *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot* (1751). This map, which purports to classify all human knowledge, is divided, first, by the mental faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, to which correspond the sciences of history, philosophy, and poetry, respectively. Poetry is, generally, a work of fiction, something made rather than found, so d’Alembert feels comfortable grouping the arts together under this heading. He even says

It is no less true to say of a painter that he is a poet, than to say of a poet that he is a painter, and of a sculptor or an engraver that he is a painter in relief or in depth, than of a musician that he is a painter through his sounds.

(d’Alembert 1995: 156)

The only significant differences between poets, painters, sculptors, engravers, and musicians concern the mediums they employ. According to d'Alembert, “the poet, the musician, the painter, the sculptor, the engraver, etc., imitate and counterfeit nature; but one uses *discourse* the other, *colors*, the third, *marble, bronze*, etc., and the last, the *musical instrument or the voice*” (d'Alembert 1995: 157). The influence of Batteux is also evident in the distinction Diderot draws, in his entry on “Art,” between the mechanical arts and the fine arts. Diderot focuses mainly on the mechanical arts, and even calls on the liberal arts to “raise their voice in praise of the mechanical arts,” which have been disparaged and disdained by philosophers’ prejudices against utility; yet he accepts Batteux’s distinction between those arts that are pursued on the basis of need and those that are cultivated for the pleasure they provide (Diderot 2003). The same distinction informs the article on painting by Louis de Jaucourt and the entry on sculpture by the sculptor Étienne Maurice Falconet. Jaucourt defines painting as “an art which, through the use of line and color, depicts on a smooth and even surface all visible objects,” though he goes on to insist that

Whatever else it may be, painting should be put among the purely agreeable things, since this art bears no relation whatever to the things called the necessities of life and exists entirely for the pleasures of the eye and the mind.

(Jaucourt 2003)

Falconet acknowledges that sculpture possesses a “seemingly less useful” side that serves “simply to decorate or embellish,” and counts it among “the pleasing arts,” but he still insists that “this does not prevent it from inclining the soul toward good or evil” (Falconet 2003). The “worthiest goal” of sculpture is, thus, “from a moral point of view... to perpetuate the memory of famous men and to provide models of virtue...” (Falconet 2003). Even if he does quibble about the degree to which sculpture is to be counted among the “fine” arts, Falconet’s entry helps to compensate for the neglect the plastic arts, and sculpture in particular, suffered in Batteux’s treatise.

One more attempt to determine the place of painting and sculpture in a system of the arts should be mentioned, because it was taken up by later philosophers, particularly the German idealists and romantics, and remains the subject of much debate today. The division of the arts that we find in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) follows in the wake of the “Analytic of the Beautiful” and the “Analytic of the Sublime” that constitute the first part of his “Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment.” When he introduces the concept of art, Kant argues that it is to be distinguished from nature, science, and handicrafts; that art is the product of genius, understood as an innate, unteachable predisposition bestowed upon the artist by nature; and that “beautiful art” exhibits or expresses aesthetic ideas, which Kant defines as “representations of the imagination that occasion much thinking through without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible” (Kant 2000: 182–192). An aesthetic idea is, in other words, something that cannot be adequately described in language or thought determinately through an intellectual concept. As such, a work of art may approximate the content of the idea it expresses, but it cannot fully articulate the idea it presents, so it always points to something beyond itself. Kant then distinguishes three kinds of art according to the way they express aesthetic ideas and the cognitive faculties to which these different modes of expression correspond. Kant associates poetry and rhetoric with the art of speech, which expresses aesthetic ideas through the free play of the imagination and the understanding; music with the art of the play of sensations, which, as its name suggests, expresses aesthetic ideas through the impressions of the senses; and, finally, the pictorial arts of sculpture, architecture, and painting, which express aesthetic ideas through the “form” of sensible intuition, rather than through concepts (the art of speech) or the “matter” of sensibility (music) (Kant 2000: 198–202). Sculpture is, for Kant, “the mere expression

of aesthetic ideas” in a form that “could exist in nature,” while painting consists of a “beautiful depiction of nature” that is ultimately illusory, because the artist arranges natural forms to please the eye, instead of representing them in three dimensions, as the sculptor does (Kant 2000: 199–201). The main difference between painting and sculpture is, consequently, the way they arrange forms in two- or three-dimensional space, not the ideas they express. The ideas they express are aesthetic, which are common to all the arts, so it is the form in which these ideas are expressed in painting and sculpture that distinguishes them from poetry and music. This might not seem like a revolutionary insight; yet, in the 20th century, it would become the cornerstone of one of the most influential theories of artistic modernism – the idea that each art becomes modern when it identifies what is unique about its medium, devotes itself to the exploration of that uniqueness, and purifies itself of extraneous elements.⁵

5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed a number of contributions to the philosophy of painting and sculpture from the early modern period in European philosophy. I have passed over the most famous early modern philosophers, with the exception of Kant, because they had little to say about the plastic arts. The works I have discussed also differ in important ways from many of the philosophical treatises that were published during the early modern period. Instead of formal philosophical arguments or theories, I have focused on reflections on the origin of painting and sculpture, the comparative evaluations of ancient and modern art, and attempts to classify the arts in poems (Perrault), essays (Addison), histories (Winckelmann), and encyclopedias (Diderot). The fact that these works do not present formal philosophical arguments does not, however, mean they are devoid of philosophical content. I have tried to show that the accounts of the origin of the painting and sculpture that we find in Addison, Winckelmann, and Herder contain claims about the nature of the arts and the specific differences between them; that evaluative principles of critical judgment are articulated in the debates about the relative merits of ancient and modern painting and sculpture that we find in Perrault, Temple, and Wotton, as well as in debates about more specific features of ancient and modern art that we find in Winckelmann and Lessing; and, finally, that the attempts to distinguish and classify the arts that we find in Batteux, d'Alembert, Diderot, and Kant help to define the relationship of painting and sculpture to one another, to the other arts, and, ultimately, to the rest human knowledge. Whether they traced the origin of works of art back to human nature, religion, or culture; maintained that the principles according to which we judge artworks are universal or particular; asserted that the works of one period are superior to those of another; assimilated the plastic arts to poetry or distinguished pictorial art from the art of speech; insisted that they imitate beautiful nature or express aesthetic ideas, early modern philosophers addressed painting and sculpture with the same rigor and the same revolutionary spirit as they did their contributions to other parts of philosophy. They did not see the philosophical implications of their discussions of painting and sculpture as uniquely “aesthetic” problems or as problems of “the philosophy of art,” but that is only because these were not recognized as distinct parts of philosophy for most of the early modern period.

Notes

- 1 I defend the novelty of aesthetics as a new science and a new part of philosophy, which is to be distinguished from the critique of taste and the philosophy of art, in McQuillan 2015: 101–133. An alternative view, which holds that all of these discussions are continuous and belong “to the same subject,” is defended by Paul Guyer in Guyer 2014: 1–29.
- 2 The neglect of painting and sculpture by early modern philosophers should not be mistaken for an indifference to art in general. Many early modern philosophers, including Hobbes, produced editions and

translations of classical poetry and drama; Descartes' first publication was about music; and Hume wrote a number of important essays about ancient and modern literature. See Hobbes 2008; Descartes 1961; and Hume 1987. See also McQuillan 2015: 18–22.

- 3 Paul Oskar Kristeller's article "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics" (1951–1952) remains the most common source for discussions of systems of the arts. Kristeller credits Batteux with taking "the decisive step toward a system of the fine arts" in Kristeller 1952: 20.
- 4 In fact, a passage from Batteux's *The Fine Arts* was included, without attribution, in the entry on "Good" by Claude Yvon in Diderot's *Encyclopedia*. See Batteux 2015: xxviii, 47.
- 5 I refer, of course, to Clement Greenberg's account of modernism in "Modernist Painting" (1960). Greenberg traces his account of modernism back to Kant, though not to Kant's classification of the arts. Instead, he focuses on Kant's conception of critique, which Greenberg understands as a kind of imminent self-criticism.

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12

AN ART HISTORY MADE FOR AND BY ARTISTS

David Carrier

To substitute a temporal narrative, already presenting a name, for the physical work of art is to give up those features of the thing that were transient and unrepeatable, bound to a moment that is irrevocably ended; the unique instance is, for the moment at least, sacrificed on the altar of continuity.

Thomas Crow¹

Artists make artifacts. And so the task of the art historian is to construct a narrative describing and relating those objects, in a history telling that art's development and explaining its meaning and significance. One important form of art history writing is the monographic account of an important individual figure. But often we seek, also, larger scale accounts: descriptions of period styles (the Southern baroque; Impressionism; Abstract Expressionism); accounts of national traditions (Chinese painting) or trans-national visual cultures (Islamic art); and, indeed, large scale world histories like E. H. Gombrich's *The Story of Art* (1950) or Julian Bell's *Mirror of the World: A New History of Art* (2010).

The organizing principles of these art history narratives are very diverse. Some are formalist accounts, while others are Marxist social histories or psychoanalytic commentaries. And their political perspectives are equally varied. Some are politically conservative, others liberal or radical; some claim to be apolitical. But what they almost all share is a basic narrative structure: they describe earlier/latest art in that order. So, for example, almost every life of Jackson Pollock takes us from his early Picasso-esque figurative paintings to his great all-over abstractions to end with his late experiments with figuration. *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600 to 1750*, Rudolf Wittkower's pioneering history of the Italian baroque, starts with Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio, who enter the Roman art world circa 1600; surveys the mature art of Bernini, Borromini and Pietra da Cortona; and concludes with the Baroque architecture in Turin. *The Story of Art* starts with cave painting and ends in the mid-20th century with Pollock's abstractions and Lucian Freud's figurative works. *Mirror of the World* begins with a rock painting, 5000–2000 BCE, and ends with a recent abstraction by the Korean-born Lee U-fan. And my own *A World Art History and its Objects*, which offers a revisionist critique of Euro-centric art histories, supposes that histories of other visual cultures, in China, India and the Islamic world, as in the West, involve forward-looking narratives.²

Otherwise very varied art writers all construct forward-looking narratives. Vasari begins his *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, from Cimabue to Our Times* (1550) with Cimabue and Giotto and ends with his contemporary Michelangelo. Giovanni Pietro Bellori's

The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects (1672) adopts a similar structure for an account of the next century. And Arthur Danto, after telling the story of modernism, takes us to the later post-historical period. Before Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* (1964), art was in a time of development; after that, the history of art no longer had any direction. T. J. Clark's *Farewell to An Idea. Episodes from a History of Modernism* (1999), which offers a novel commentary, takes us from Jacques-Louis David to Cézanne, Picasso and Pollock; except in the Introduction and the Conclusion, it moves strictly in historical order. *Art since 1900. Modernism. Antimodernism. Postmodernism* by Rosalind Krauss and her fellow historians associated with the journal *October* offers a radically revisionist account. Presenting four different, conflicting methods, they refuse to tell the "story unified by a single voice," and they make some novel judgments of taste.³ But they, too, tell the story in chronological order.

Just as art writers usually present forward-looking narratives, so the same is true of museums, which offer historically organized hangings. I know of no museum which places its Abstract Expressionist works in the first gallery; the modernist pictures in the following rooms; and finally, the old master art in its last rooms.

Exactly the same forward-looking structure is usually found in history writing. We expect that a political history of France will discuss the upheavals, the Fronde, 1789 and 1848 in that order. After all, earlier events may influence later ones, but not ever vice versa. It would be strange to write a history presenting, say, World War Two *and then* World War One, because in such a narrative, it would be difficult to describe the obvious ways in which the earlier war heavily influenced the later one but not, of course, vice versa. With history, as with art history, a forward-looking history is taken for granted—it's hard to imagine any alternative. Ferdinand Braudel and his fellow Annales historians offered radically innovative histories—so too did Michel Foucault. But their books, too, present forward-looking narratives.

This familiar forward-moving form of art history narratives relies upon, and reconstructs the pattern of, real causal connections. In Vasari's story, Cimabue comes before Giotto, and their successors take the story up to Michelangelo. In Clement Greenberg's account of modernism, the old masters come before Manet, who in turn influences Matisse who influences the Abstract Expressionists. The life of a visual culture is akin to the life of an individual, who is first a child, then adult and, finally, an old person. Of course that is only an analogy—but it is a suggestive one.

When Vladimir Nabokov tells the life of Gogol in reverse order, starting with the novelist's death and ending with his birth, we recognize his mischievous creativity.⁴ Creative writers have developed such playful revisions of traditional forward-moving narratives. Those accounts are self-conscious challenges to the norm, which means that to be plausible they always require some motivation. Just as historians first present the earliest, then the later events; and intellectual historians typically move from earlier to later to latest scholars; so art history writers present the earlier, later and then the latest artists. The reason for adapting this way of narrating is so obvious as to hardly need explanation. What comes earlier has some effect upon what comes later—that's the inevitable order of historical causation. The wars of Philip II of Macedonia influenced his son Alexander the Great, but not vice versa. And Kant influenced Hegel, who studied him, but not vice versa. When the cultural historian George Lichtheim entitled one of his books *From Marx to Hegel*, that title alone makes it clear that an interesting revisionist analysis is being developed.⁵ The recent history of Marxist thought, Lichtheim suggests, involves a retreat from Marx's own focus on activism back historically to a return to Hegelian ways of thinking.

My book about art historical narratives, *Writing About Visual Art*, takes it for granted that forward-moving accounts are the natural, indeed the inevitable structure for art writing.⁶ But now I will amend that account. Here I follow the lead of several recent art historians, who have questioned this important convention. In *Patterns of Intention on the Historical Explanation of Pictures*,

Michael Baxandall notes the problems inherent in speaking of influences.⁷ To say that an artist is influenced by some earlier work, he argues, is to attribute the power to that art from the past, imagining it to as it were reach into the present and bring about new art. Thus, for example, claiming that “in 1920 Picasso was influenced by Ingres” suggests that it was Ingres, or, at least, Ingres’ art, which was doing the acting. But of course that activity actually involved Picasso looking at Ingres, and making art in response. The past cannot act on the present—it’s always the case that someone in the present acts in response to the past. The psychology implicit in this statement is revealing: “influence” implies that the present artist merely makes explicit what was implicit in the past, with Picasso guided by Ingres. That very misleading Hegelian way of thinking treats Picasso as if he were passive. Saying rather, “in 1920 Picasso responded to Ingres” gives a more accurate view, for it acknowledges Picasso’s active response to earlier art. Picasso’s use of Ingres involves developing the earlier painter’s concerns in unexpected ways, in a fashion, which Ingres could hardly have imagined. This, then, is why Baxandall’s book is titled “patterns of intention,” not “patterns of influence.”

In his important treatise *Cézanne/Pissarro, Johns/Rauschenberg. Comparative Studies on Intersubjectivity in Modern Art*, Joachim Pissarro, with reference at one crucial point to Baxandall’s book, develops a highly distinctive analysis of artistic historiography. As he explains in the Introduction, Pissarro is interested in artistic collaboration:

What happens when artists work together? More specifically, what is the role of the viewer of an artist’s work when the viewer happens to be another artist and the two of them work closely together... What is the status of a work of art that is the result of communal thinking?⁸

Part V, “An Art History Made for and by Artists,” gave me the title for this essay.

Pissarro’s book served as the basis for his MoMA exhibition, *Pioneering Modern Painting: Cézanne and Pissarro 1865–1885* (2005).⁹ Not surprisingly, the present-day New York art world was not prepared, mostly, to understand the implications of this very original analysis. In his review, Peter Schjeldhal, for example, the *New Yorker* critic complained:

In terms of a viewer’s chief experience, “Pioneering Modern Painting: Cézanne & Pissarro, 1865–1885,” at the Museum of Modern Art, is a show about Paul Cézanne: what he did, how it works, and why it’s classical. Camille Pissarro, a likable man and a delightful artist, important in any number of contingent ways, is not in the same league as that driven revolutionary. Not since the similarly titled “Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism,” in 1989–90, has MoMA, or any other museum that I can think of, produced such a pitiless comparison of stylistically related painters, one great and one just very good, with results that are instructive—providing vigorous exercise for the thinking eye—while sort of painful.¹⁰

As an artist friend, the painter Sean Scully, observed to me, this account missed the point entirely. Preoccupied with a very New York fascination (or obsession) with artistic rivalry, Schjeldhal fails to understand the role of collaboration: Cézanne’s greatness, the show claimed, depended in part upon collaboration with Camille Pissarro in which, working together the two men developed a novel visual language.

The central concern of Pissarro’s book, as its title indicates, is to explore the ways in which artistic creativity involves collaboration—what he calls, with reference to the philosophical arguments of Kant and Fichte, “intersubjectivity.” To be deeply original, he argues, it very much helps to have an intimate intellectual relationship with another person. Here I deal with just this one portion of *Cézanne/Pissarro, Johns/Rauschenberg*, the implications of his account for art history

writing. For my present purposes, this account of historiography can be discussed apart, mostly, from evaluation of Pissarro's more general claims about intersubjectivity. In the present account, then, I note only briefly here the reliance of Pissarro's argument upon his reading of Kant and Fichte, and his critique of the Hegelian-Marxist tradition of art history writing.¹¹

Pissarro writes:

The past, usually seen through the categories of traditional art history, presents a different appearance when we approach it from the perspective of our present. It appears to be less uniform, less simple than we are wont to expect.¹²

Inspired by Pissarro's account, let us think of the historiography of art history in two ways.

First: You are a curator or art historian and your task is to organize a presentation of a group of artifacts in a narrative or an exhibition. So you have, let's say, paintings by Giotto, Raphael, Caravaggio and Poussin; or, perhaps—if you are a modernist—works by Picasso, Pollock and Rauschenberg, and your task is to identify and describe their relationships. It's natural that you would adopt the usual art historical perspective and present or describe them in historical order of making. Giotto influenced Raphael who influenced Poussin, and Picasso influenced Pollock, who influenced Rauschenberg. This forward-looking narrative is the approach of traditional art history writing and of most large art museums, which have historical organizations. And as I noted, talking about influences supports thinking about history in these forward-looking terms.

Second: Your aim is to present art in a way which demonstrates how artists have made use of the past. You want to demonstrate what Poussin learned from Caravaggio and Raphael; or, alternatively, what Rauschenberg discovered of use for his purposes in the works of Picasso and Pollock. Then your exhibition or text would present Caravaggio and Raphael to identify Poussin's uses of their art, and Picasso and Pollock, to locate them as sources for Rauschenberg's visual thinking. This second approach is suggested by Pissarro's proposal that art writing take the point of view of artists. For an artist, he notes, the past is less a given than a field of art which can inspire creativity here-and-now. How we then understand the past depends, often, upon how recent artists respond to it.

In comparing forward and backward looking histories, there is no disagreement here about the facts. Both forward and backward-looking accounts include the same artists and both may describe the ways that Poussin and Rauschenberg learn from prior art. But the diverse narratives certainly suggest very different ways of understanding the facts. Traditional art history assembles objects, which have already been made. We have a group of artworks and assemble them in a narrative or exhibition in a revealing order. The forward-looking presentation offers the perspective of the curator or a traditional art historian. Pissarro, however, starts from the perspective of the working artist. A painter comes into the art world; surveys art of the past; and uses that experience to create new art. The goal is to explain how that new work makes use of older art, in a backward-looking reconstruction of the creative process. Think of this parallel. A person can look at their life in the past and consider what they have done up to the present. Or they can, rather, look to their future, and imagine how, starting from the present, given their talents and situation, they might choose to act. Narratives of the history of art have a similar structure. We can organize information about art, which has been completed—or analyze the way that new works are being made. Looking backwards, it's natural to seek out law-like descriptions of art's development; by contrast, looking forward historically involves focusing on the artist's freedom to make use of the past as he or she chooses.

In writing art history from the artist's viewpoint, Pissarro would have us reconstruct the process in which an artist looks at the history of art, and chooses how to employ it. The history of art is open, which is to say that no one can predict exactly how a creative personality will make use

of this history. Here we find the anti-Hegelian dimension of his thinking. Look just at the two near-contemporaries discussed by Pissarro: no one could have predicted in the 1950s how Johns or Rauschenberg would have creatively used their circumstances. Now, of course, we are looking backward at an unchangeable past when we describe this situation. An innovative contemporary artist changes how we see earlier works. As Baxandall says: “we will never see Cézanne undistorted by what, in Cézanne, painting after Cézanne has made productive in our tradition.”¹³ Thanks to cubism, now we see Cézanne’s art differently. In starting with the present and working backward, we do not change what has happened. The past *is* past and so of course cannot be changed. But what is changed is our present here-and-now experience of older art. Now we cannot but see Cézanne’s paintings as proto-cubist pictures. And so our art history should acknowledge as much.

Here there is an important, interesting difference between history proper and art history. Historical events really are only in the past, and so can only be reconstructed in our books; but art works exist here and now. Obviously, as I have said, we cannot change the past. Nothing can change the events or outcome of the French Revolution, which was finished long ago. But thanks to more recent events we may, however, perhaps better understand the French Revolution—that is: we may interpret it differently. By comparing it to the Russian Revolution, we may that comparison to gain additional knowledge of the past. For example, Lenin’s and Stalin’s totalitarian employment of undemocratic terror may help us better comprehend the Thermidorian Reaction in Paris, 1794. Political revolutions, we may conclude, have a tendency to overreach. When considering that claim, what we interpret differently are the events of the past. Art history writing has an essentially different structure because we understand art differently. When we can set a Cézanne portrait right now next to a cubist Picasso portrait, we may see the older work in new ways, which were not available before cubism.

What perhaps is paradoxical is Baxandall’s claim that in looking at Cézanne, we cannot undo our awareness of the effect of cubism. If that is true, how can we know that cubism has had this effect? After all, we cannot see the Cézanne as it appeared in 1906 in order to compare it to that picture as we look at it now, after cubism. We cannot, that is, undo our experience of recent art. To say that Cézanne’s portraits look different implies that we can compare them as they appear now and looked before cubism. But no such comparison is accessible to us. So far as I can see, Baxandall never addresses that important question. One answer to this query is that pre-cubist commentary allows us, to some extent, to retrieve the pre-cubist experience of Cézanne. These written accounts allow us to imagine how his paintings used to look. Another answer is that we know there has been change even if we cannot directly see it. History, I believe, reveals other partly similar cases. When a political culture changes dramatically, we may find it difficult to imagine life before that change. It is difficult today, for example, to imagine a society in which the rightness of slavery was taken for granted by most people. And yet, we certainly recognize that a dramatic change has taken place even if we cannot unthink our present circumstances. We cannot, perhaps, really imagine a culture in which slavery was generally accepted; as, less dramatically, we cannot imagine a visual culture without cubism.¹⁴ We may acknowledge that radical change has taken place without being able to really imagine its effects.

Within the present art historical literature, we can find accounts developing backward-looking narratives, without (so far as I can tell) offering a systematic perspective on their implications. Let us consider examples from the writings of Arthur Danto, Kelly Grovier and Daniel Abad.

As I mentioned earlier, Danto’s art historical historiography is basically forward-looking. After surveying the forward-looking narratives of Gombrich and Clement Greenberg, he introduces his own variation on their accounts—the claim that now we have moved forward to the end of history. But in one place in his criticism, he offers an innovative backward-looking narrative. In his 1998 review “Abstracting Soutine,” after naming Chaim Soutine’s own admired precursors, Rembrandt, Chardin and Courbet, Danto discusses Willem de Kooning’s admiration for Soutine:

What de Kooning might have seen in Soutine was how it was possible to paint like a New York artist—with slabs and strokes of thick paint—and do the figure: to be abstract and referential at once.¹⁵

There were at this time, Danto concludes, two modes of painting abstractly: the abstraction without recognizable subject like the art of Pollock or Rothko, circa 1950; and de Kooning’s painting of figurative subjects without the traditional “isomorphism between the image and the subject’s visual form as traditionally sought.” Very often de Kooning was criticized for painting a figurative subject, women, after he and the other Abstract Expressionists made their breakthrough into abstraction. How, it was asked, could he return to the past—to an exhausted tradition, which his peers aspired to leave behind? Danto offers an original response to this question. Inspired by Soutine, de Kooning developed a distinctive form of abstract-like painting of figurative subjects. His art was in fact as innovative as Pollock’s and Rothko’s—though not, I grant, also always completely abstract. To put this claim in the terms of our backward-looking history, de Kooning teaches us to see Soutine’s art differently. Now we can see how he made an original style of painting possible. Here, then, Danto adopts the perspective of an art history made for and by artists. But he never discusses the general implications of this claim.

In his lively compendium *100 Works of Art that will Define Our Age*, Kelly Grovier notes that the British portraitist Jenny Saville is indebted to the massive female nudes of Peter Paul Rubens.¹⁶ Then he adds: “influence is not a river that flows in only one direction.” Her nude self-portrait *Propped* (1992), he notes, “induces nascent meaning in another work (though perhaps unexpectedly in a predecessor, not successor): the fifteenth-century Flemish artist Jan Van Eyck’s *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1434).” She shows in an exaggerated way the perspectival distortions of the Flemish artist: “In a ricochet of mountain significance, the later work reflects telling back on the earlier one, complicating Van Eyck’s vision.” In this marvelous example of backward-looking art history, Grovier argues that Saville changes our experience of *The Arnolfini Portrait*. And he goes on to give other such examples.

In a recent exhibition catalogue for Sean Scully, an artist who has very self-consciously written about his art historical interests, in both modernist and old master art, the critic Daniel Abadie describes this situation in way that is most suggestive:

When a painter evokes another artist’s work, most often he is in fact speaking of his own work: the apparent distance—the other—allows him to analyse, to make assertions, which in fact reveal the deeper springs of his own personal work and to develop, under the chosen subject, what the painter would have deemed to be narcissistic, even indecent, to examine so minutely were it his own work.¹⁷

To offer a backward-looking narrative, he suggests, is a way of an artist taking the allowance needed to adopt a critical perspective on his own work.

It’s quite a normal experience, then, and not at all unusual, to find ways in which contemporary art influences our experience of prior work. But this procedure is not usually identified as such—in a self-conscious analysis like ours. Nor, so far as I am aware, have fully developed backward-looking art histories been presented. This present account raises many questions, all of the greatest interest. It would be most useful to seek models of this art history; to explore its implications for aesthetic theory; and to discuss its relationship to the traditional practice of art history. And it would be instructive to relate it to my previous publications done in collaboration with, or in response to Pissarro.¹⁸ Backward-looking histories are extremely challenging because they require fundamental rethinking of how to do art history. And so they deserve careful extended discussion. Here, however, because space is limited, I consider briefly just two themes, which deserve

(and will receive) extensive future development: I discuss a philosophical concern posed by these narratives, and I consider their relationship to our present preoccupation with contemporary art.

In the examples in Joachim Pissarro's book, the links made by Cézanne, Camille Pissarro and also Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg are, I think, convincing. Even when the works cited looked rather different, we could understand the connections being offered. Once we accept (Joachim) Pissarro's analysis, we don't require that such visual relations be based upon visual similarities. Similar looking pictures may not be connected—and rather different looking pictures may be. That said, the question that interests me is what happens when an artist, looking backward claims affinities which we, after due reflection, are unable to accept?

In the 1960s and 1970s, many art critics constructed what I have called genealogies, accounts of contemporary painting linking it to older art.¹⁹ Just as historians of old master art explained how Signorelli, Rubens and Caravaggio quoted from Michelangelo, so these commentators linked contemporary works with earlier painting. For example, the quasi-minimalist works by the prominent painter Brice Marden were linked with the paintings of Manet, Cézanne, Ellsworth Kelly, Frank Stella and Zurbaran. (And, also, the writings of Brecht and Kafka, the songs of Dylan and the films of Jean-Luc Godard were associated with Marden's art.) Because Marden's pictures could appear to be relatively simple, it was natural for his champions to argue that, when properly seen, they truly are visually complex. But this procedure may be problematic. It's one thing, I think, to associate related pictures in which some artist quotes his precursors, or makes obvious use of their accomplishments, and another to make connections between paintings, which look very different. The connection between Cézanne's paintings and Picasso's portraits is visually obvious; but the relationship between the planes in Cézanne's landscapes and Marden's monochrome panels is, by contrast, surely problematic. To the extent that the function of such commentary is to validate novel contemporary art, it's easy to be suspicious. What, a critic might plausibly ask, is the actual relationship between Marden's severe abstractions and these figurative works. It's one thing to identify the visually obvious ways in which Caravaggio quotes Michelangelo, and quite another to make these inherently vague comparisons.

The test for the connections proposed in a backward-looking history is their visual suggestiveness. It's not sufficient, in other words, merely that an artist (or art critic) claims to make work with a connection to prior art. What's required is that this connection be visually convincing to other people. If, to take an extreme example, a monochrome painter claims to be responding to Giotto, we need some explanation of that claim. Here we find a connection with a familiar philosophical issue, dealt with by Ludwig Wittgenstein—the problem of private languages. (I summarize very briefly much discussed, controversial claims.) When someone describes their sensations, is it possible for them to be wrong? When you or I identify objects or describe our experiences, we can validate our responses by making intersubjective comparisons. That some people are color blind, for example, is revealed by their inability to make the discriminations of the normally sighted. We can thus demonstrate that color-blind people fail to see what is there. But when I describe my inner experience, using what Wittgenstein calls a private language, no one can validate my claims. And so, if there is no way we can know that I am wrong, then the claim that my judgments are right makes no sense. Analogously, when in a backward-looking art history makes comparisons of his works to prior art, we need to be able to validate those claims. What's required is some independent sense that the connections identified by the artist are plausible. Here, I believe, the situation is no different from that involved when judging any statement by an artist or commentator. If we cannot see that an artist's (or critic's) account is plausible, then we will not accept that judgment. In the case of Marden, for example, the mere claim that his paintings can be linked with Cézanne's does not necessarily establish the truth of that claim.

Vasari believed that Michelangelo was the great living artist; Greenberg that the Abstract Expressionists were the successors to the modernist tradition of Impressionism and cubism; and

Danto that Warhol's *Brillo Box* ended the history of art's development. Because they had legitimate confidence in these judgments about what contemporary art mattered, they could with confidence compose forward-looking narratives. Today we really cannot, for it seems surely impossible to offer a convincing account of the canon of contemporary art. At present, all judgments about what recent art matters are up for grabs; any account identifying the present successors to the great tradition is sure to be highly controversial. And this means that it is extremely hard to write a forward-looking art history extending into the present. No one can say with confidence identify the legitimate heirs to the old masters and the major modernists. A backward history resolves this problem, for instead of focusing on how the tradition leads up to the present, it instead starts with the very recent art and then looks back at prior, earlier art works. Writing the narrative from the viewpoint of the here-and-now thus corresponds with way in which so much attention is devoted to contemporary art. Saying this is not necessarily to assert that contemporary art is more important than art from the recent or—even—the distant past, but it is to adopt a style of art writing which does justice to the seemingly unprecedented situation in which so much attention is given to the display, sale and study of contemporary art.

Here, in conclusion, the story of the origin of this essay may be revealing. Some years ago an editor who generously supported the book that Joachim Pissarro and I wrote together, *Wild Art*, asked us to pitch other projects. As publisher of Ernst Gombrich's famously successful *The Story of Art*, she was interested in a successor to that volume, a book that would carry the history further, toward the immediate present. We offered her a plan for a reverse art history. Instead of telling the story from early art to the present, with a narrative coming early/later/latest, we proposed rather to move from the present backward toward the past.²⁰ That book remains to be written, but here I offer its philosophical core, which is a suggestive original historiography. Pissarro, in turn, I should note, gives credit for this way of thinking to his friendship with Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, and to his study of the art and thinking of Paul Cézanne and Camille Pissarro, who was his great grandfather.

Notes

- 1 *The Intelligence of Art* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 1.
- 2 (University Park and London, 2008).
- 3 "Preface: a reader's guide," Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *art since 1900. Modernism. Antimodernism. Postmodernism* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), Vol. 1, 13.
- 4 I discuss this example and others in my *Writing About Visual Art* (New York: Allworth Press, 2003), Ch. 1.
- 5 George Lichtheim, *From Marx to Hegel* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).
- 6 See my *Writing About Visual Art*.
- 7 Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 85.
- 8 Cézanne/Pissarro, Johns/Rauschenberg. *Comparative Studies on Intersubjectivity in Modern Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.
- 9 Joachim Pissarro, *Pioneering Modern Painting. Cézanne & Pissarro 1865–1885* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2005).
- 10 <https://www.questia.com/magazine/1P3-868789561/two-views-the-art-world>.
- 11 Here see our co-authored publication *The Blind Spots of Art History: How Wild Art Came to Be - and Be Ignored* (University Park and London: Penn State University Press, 2017).
- 12 Cézanne/Pissarro, Johns/Rauschenberg. *Comparative Studies on Intersubjectivity in Modern Art*, 226.
- 13 Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, 61–62.
- 14 This argument perhaps deserves critical discussion, which might consider Steve McQueen's movie *12 Years a Slave* (2013) and other forceful presentations of slave culture.
- 15 Reprinted in Arthur C. Danto, *The Madonna of the Future: Essays in a Pluralistic Art World* (Berkeley. Los Angeles. London: University of California Press, 2000), 317.

- 16 Kelly Grovier, *100 Works of Art that will Define Our Age* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2013), 13.
- 17 Daniel Abadie, “Sean Scully and the Mirror of Masters,” *Sean Scully. Metal* (Paris: Galerie Lelong, 2016), 47.
- 18 See my book co-authored with Joachim Pissarro, *Wild Art* (London: Phaidon, 2013); our co-authored essay “How Modernism Revolutionized Taste. But Left the Art World Prone to the Judgments of the Few,” *The Art Newspaper* 239 (October 2012): 21; and also my “The Blind Spots of Art History: How Wild Art Came to Be –and Be Ignored,” http://www.predella.it/images/35/Predella_35_Miscellanea_02_25–37_III-VI_Carrier.pdf Friday, October 9, 15.
- 19 See my *Artwriting* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 52–54; an account of Marden appears on 120–123.
- 20 I say “we” for Pissarro and I developed this material together, but initially he proposed this marvelous idea, which here, with his permission and advice, I borrow and develop.

13

END OF ART AND THE PLASTIC ARTS

Stephen Snyder

In common usage, the “end of art” describes art’s late 20th-century shift away from a representational format to the less structured and more conceptual format of contemporary art. Explanations for this change in stylistic preference run from a simple shift in taste or preference to socio-cultural changes, reflecting the politics, philosophy, or economy of a new historical era. Independent of the reason, the stylistic transformation that is referred to as the “end of art” had significant ramifications for the plastic arts, in terms of morphological transformation and philosophical understanding.

1 Temporal

End-of-art claims are generally associated with the aesthetic and social upheavals of the so-called counter-culture revolution that occurred in North America and Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. For the most part, assertions that art has ended roughly overlap with the close of the modern and the opening of the postmodern eras. Nonetheless, no particular date can be placed on what is referred to as art’s end. Hegel, to whom the topic is often attributed, first mentioned the possibility of art’s end in his *Lectures on Fine Art* delivered between 1818 and 1829. The first deviations from the representational style in western art could be seen in the late 19th-century works of impressionists, and later, more explicitly in Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917). There are many who reject outright the claim that art has ended, simply noting that art production appears in no way curtailed. Though this is true, a change in the style in which art was made is empirically undeniable.

2 Art’s End as a Historical Phenomenon

There is no determinate cause for the shift in stylistic representation associated with the end-of-art claim. However, there are numerous contributing factors, including the invention of the camera, which had a direct effect on the painter’s task of portraiture. It is claimed that in 1839, painter Delaroche, upon seeing a number of early daguerreotype photos, declared that “painting is dead.” Beyond portraiture, the camera could depict objects or scenes more realistically, making the painter’s job redundant. Though the camera appears not to have presented any competition for the sculptor, the same shift away from optical fidelity occurred in this field. In the late 1900s, artists in Europe sought to reformulate their style. By expanding their style to include new influences, they were able to move to a domain where the camera could not go. Gombrich (1995)

cites the introduction of Japanese water prints, which flooded into the European world, often as packing material (523–525). The colors and perspectives used in these prints were thought to have strongly influenced the Impressionists. At the same time, the trend for European artists was to look for alternatives to the classical models they had used for so long. This in itself signals that representational art was losing its “expressive power.” Many painters, Picasso among them, sought to incorporate forms from outside of the western tradition. Kenneth Clark, in his 1935 essay “Future of Painting” wrote, “in the western world the plastic spirit is really exhausted and... art will be lost for many decades.” At this time, he argued that a “new myth” was needed that manifested “inherently pictorial” symbols (Hammer). Though he seemed to change his tone with his embrace of British Modern painters, the trend of the plastic arts moved decisively away from the classical models of the past.

The standards of the museum also became suspect. Museums housed national treasures that were acquired through conquest. These national treasures became symbols of imperialism that were rejected by some in the avant-garde. The artistic standards of the academy were seen as gatekeepers used to reject forms of folk art or art of minority groups whose style did not match those of the dominant class (Cahan, 2016, 5; Snyder, 2018, 249–250). Thus, the standards of the academy, and with them the museums, were decried, despite the ostensive efforts of some of the same critics to gain access to the museum. One downside for post-representational art, according to critic Robert Morgan (1999), was that the notion of quality to which the academy adhered was discarded along with the bourgeois sensibilities that upheld an ethnocentric standard of taste (12).

Art critic Donald Kuspit (2004) argues that the end of art arrives when modern art is replaced by “postart.” In postart, the signifiers of quality present in a masterpiece are completely lacking, and the “autonomous” power of art, which the avant-garde evoked by showing the audience the “unwitting” puppet strings of the unconscious, is leveled into the everyday (175–177). If everything becomes culture, the differentiation between culture and art is erased, stripping art of its transformative power (10–11). The modernist inclination to rebel against the aesthetic, perhaps initiated by the Dadaists, succeeded in ending art, but not on its own terms. The freeing transformation that abstract art strove for in turning its back on the everyday was “assimilated by the materialistic mass society it repudiated” (172–173). Though art became accessible to a far larger audience, for Kuspit, the cost of wresting art from the elites was that when severed from its power to access the sublime, art was also lost to the masses. Having lost a clear concept of meaning, art could no longer assist as a critique of culture (8, 13).

The trend of art’s progression toward the perfection of the representational format—artistic creations that adhered optically to the objects they represented—to an alternative format of depiction that might be better described as conceptual is documented by numerous art historians. Ernst Gombrich analyzes this trend, applying his theory of “making and matching” to the history of artistic imagery. Gombrich’s theoretical take on the history of pictorial image-making explains the development of representational art as a progression of trial-and-error attempts to perfect the mimetic image. Gombrich showed how, over the course of centuries, artists learned to trick the eye, creating “schemata” that could be passed on to generations of future artists, forming a practice that mastered the craft of making illusionistic images. Though Gombrich (2000) made no explicit end-of-art claim, he recognized that with the rejection of their schematic tradition, the modern artists’ move away from representational depiction pointed to the end of a historical narrative. Arthur Danto (1995, 198; 1983) argued that Gombrich’s inability to recognize Duchamp’s ready-mades was a clear falsification of his theory defining art as a trial-and-error process of mimetic depiction. Though Gombrich seemed to falter when applying his making-and-matching model to contemporary art, his theory can be employed to explain the art of “our time” if we are willing to use Gombrich to look beyond Gombrich. Gombrich’s theory of art was widely interpreted as pertaining only to pictorial representation, and though most of his major works deal with mimetic

art, nowhere in his work does he commit to the notion that all art is representative (Horowitz, 1998, 318).

Crucial to Gombrich's (2000) account of art is the recognition that reciprocal communication occurs between artist and beholder via the ever changing and evolving set of artistic schemata. For art to be effective, the beholders must recognize, or at least be cognizant of, hints of meaning planted in the work. If there is nothing recognizable, then its draw may be lost. One indicator that art was becoming conceptual, he notes, is that "The artist gives the beholder increasingly 'more to do,' he draws him into the magic circle of creation and allows him to experience something of the thrill of 'making' which had once been the privilege of the artist" (202). The conditions of artistic creation and interpretation are linked to what Gombrich refers to as the "mental set." This presupposes that "the beholders' identification with the artist must find its counterpart in the artist's identification with the beholder" (234). Gombrich notes that when a new word is added to a language it is understood within the context of an already developed language. But language made up of only new words and new syntax would be unintelligible (240). The downside of the vast array of choices that the artist has today is that the language of art comes close to being unintelligible. Limits, according to Gombrich, do serve a purpose in achieving communicability because "where everything is possible and nothing unexpected, communication must break down" (376).

Hans Belting (1987), who sees the end-of-art phenomenon as a kind of methodological failure, notes the "methodological controversy" that Gombrich faced (22–23). Belting writes that "contemporary art indeed manifests an awareness of a history of art but no longer carries it forward." This phenomenon is compounded by the problem that art history, as a discipline, "no longer disposes of a compelling model of historical treatment" (3). Belting does not see art as ending, but he observes two art histories emerging: the internal sense of history employed in the creation of art and the art historical method used to describe the current state of the arts. Because art history cannot coherently trace the notion of history used in the process of artistic creation, the two accounts diverge. "Thus to the rupture of art in the modern era corresponds an analogous breach in art-historical scholarship" (35). Belting predicts a solution in a new methodology, one that takes into account the artistic process within its historical context. Nonetheless, he recognizes there are many processes at play in the creation and interpretation of art, and that no one unidirectional process will be found (94).

3 Philosophy and the End of Art

The end-of-art theme, as it is understood in contemporary philosophy, stems from Hegel's *Aesthetics*. The topic, however, can be traced to Plato's questioning of the place artists should take in the ideal republic. In *Republic*, Plato's primary criticism of the mimetic arts was that they were copies of copies, diminished versions of the real. Lacking any real connection to the forms, Plato made that case that any appreciation of the mimetic arts would negatively affect one's ability to educate and to convey truth and aggravate the emotions by deceiving the rational capacity. Even for thinkers who advocate the aesthetic medium, such as Hegel, the form of art they propose employed Plato's visual model, which defines the artwork as a degenerate copy of something in the world. The most favorable philosophical accounts of art still frame its cognitive or developmental advantages such that it ultimately remains below the "real" or the philosophical articulation of truth. Nietzsche may be the exception to this rule, insofar as he held that with all truth claims beyond the grasp of the human mind, the aesthetic claim might be the most amenable to our well-being.¹ Still, most philosophical end-of-art claims turn on an unbridgeable gap that exists between the artwork as a copy of some perceived reality, ideal or otherwise, and the object it represents.

The end-of-art thesis is the merger of the idea that art is a lesser version of the real and Hegel's "end-of-history" claim, which is found in Hegel's writings on the philosophy of history. Hegel

(1953) suggests that history will end as a developmental process as the ideal and final form of a cultural totality is approached (Snyder, 2018, 63–65, 161–166). But unlike history, which continues insofar as time does not halt, the end-of-art claim entails art as we know it ceasing to be. Though highly controversial, historical evidence supports the claim that art as a discipline that progressively moves toward the goal of creating images that mimic the “real” is no longer the norm. Contemporary philosophers, most notably Danto, have pursued this Hegelian theme in some form, examining 20th-century western art’s transformation, painting, and sculpture in particular, into disciplines that for better or for worse seem to have jettisoned the conventions of the past.

4 Hegel’s Aesthetics

Hegel’s (1975) wide-reaching philosophy postulates a unified dialectical process driving the concept’s actualization in nature through the “idea.” The idea is the unity of real existence and the concept that manifests itself in time through subjective (individual minds separate from their social contexts), objective (institutions of state and civil society), and absolute spirit. The focus of his aesthetic philosophy is absolute spirit, articulated in art, religion, and philosophy. It is outside of finite history per se, but in order to have objectivity, spirit’s message must be subjectively grasped. The process through which spirit is subjectively grasped is transformative. The absolute confronts a world “which must be built up, adequately to the Absolute, into an appearance harmonizing with the Absolute and penetrated by it” (623). Art prepares and transforms actual reality for dispersion of the absolute. Though absolute spirit is art’s creative driver, in its final form, spirit seeks expression in a form that is beyond art. When the preparation of the world is complete, art is no longer required by spirit.

Hegel follows Aristotle (1997) who held the poem had cohesion and unity not extant in history (Chapter Nine, 41). This approach to finding meaning in history through art leads Hegel to privilege the more highly developed, conceptual forms of matter over those with lower conceptual content, or, simply put, form over matter. Lamenting the passing of the age of art, Hegel (1975) claims that the time comes in every civilization at which “art points beyond itself,” (103) and “thought and reflection … spread their wings above fine art” (10). Hegel envisions spirit’s form of expression moving from the concretely sensual in art to the conceptual in philosophy. Ostensibly, Hegel’s prognosis reflects the transition from the sensuous to the conceptual, from the eye to the psyche, which typifies contemporary art.

5 Hegel and the Individual Art Forms

Hegel (1975) explains the transition of art from sensual to conceptual through historical stages, the symbolic, classical, and romantic. The level of articulation the concept finds in the material varies according to the maturity of the concept, unfolding initially through art’s seeking out and finding adequate content, eventually transcending its formal incarnation as the idea becomes more determinate (967). The first of the five forms of art Hegel recognizes is architecture, the most material form of art, which he associates with the symbolic stage. The idea is externally manifest in architecture, the material structured according to mechanical rules that are not internal to the object (84, 624). The symbolic phase—epitomized by the architecture of Eastern antiquity—expresses sublimity. Architecture is fulfilled through spirit’s transition to the sculpture of the classical stage. In sculpture, the idea corresponds perfectly to the material; the highest form of the idea in the classical period is the individual human form manifested by the Greek gods. Hegel considered artworks of this era to be the incarnation of ideal beauty (85, 624–625). The perfect balance of inner and outer brings art to its highest level of fulfillment. Spirit, however, does not rest in its most perfect state. The passing of Hellenistic culture effects the transition to the romantic stage.

Romantic art infuses the individual god of the classical stage into the community. A higher notion of unity is brought to the individual's inner self, re-articulating spirit through the mediums of color, sound, and speech in painting, music, and poetry (86, 625). Hegel defines the romantic arts in terms of the progressive expression of spirit in history, each unfolding according to the dialectical task of transforming the world such that it becomes adequate for the absolute. Each art has a specific location in the dialectic, manifesting the higher and lower organization of substance according to its balance of form and matter, concept and real existence.

Painting loses its third dimension in the transition from sculpture, ostensibly offering viewers less. But color is used to represent three dimensions in two.² The sculptural image is self-sufficient; the spiritual and the sensuous coexist in material form. Transformed into pure appearance, the materially sensuous experience is cancelled in painting. Nonetheless, painting does not lose its dimensionality; it is articulated in the higher conceptual realm of mind.

Passing beyond the spatial form, music moves further toward the pure expression of spirit, manifesting itself in the inner self. Seeking more concrete expression beyond the inner self, the dialectical movement brings art to the highest phase in the final form of poetry. Although poetry cannot attain the descriptive definiteness that painting achieves through sense perception, poetry is not restricted to one moment. Unlike painting, poetry generates an image for the imagination through a succession of portrayals drawn together into a single unity spanning time. Despite poetry being the highest form of spirit's expression, it is lacking as a balanced art form and cannot attain the harmonious equilibrium of sculpture. Thus, spirit moves on, seeking articulation in the higher, less material, forms of religion and philosophy, and in Hegel's eyes, art ends as the highest form of spirit's expression.

6 Hegel and the Plastic Arts

The dialectical process compelling art's end predicates the manner of spirit's articulation in sculpture and painting. Architecture and sculpture are defined by their three-dimensional physicality. In the case of classical sculpture, the balance is perfect, but the external imbalance of symbolic-phase architecture causes it to be more sculptural, often representing forces of nature, taking the form of an animal, plant, or god. The great pyramids and the Sphinx were architectural and sculptural. Despite being presented in human form, in classical-phase sculpture, the Greek gods are not anthropomorphized, showing neither human emotions nor frailty.³ The emotion, the anxiety, the pain of humanity is embodied through the inward trend of romantic art. While the Greek goddesses rarely display maternal attributes, it is epitomized by the mother and child bond embodied in the Madonna and child motif (Snyder, 2018, 45–49).

Hegel (1975) theorized that the inward dialectical trend of romantic art relinquishes outer form to the harsher elements of materiality. The representation of external form, when decoupled from its inward spirituality, tends toward the shocking. The ideally balanced combination of universal and particular found in sculpture is presented as a unified whole. Because the particular elements of the dialectic are presented separately in painting, it branches into two extremes, represented by depth of topic and the skill of the artist (863). At this phase, painting passes its peak, and ugliness becomes more prevalent. In paintings typified by depth of content, the subject matter is religious, and ugliness is embodied in the suffering of martyrs and the evil of sinners (864, 883).⁴ The other camp, which exemplified the artist's skill, took the everyday as its subject matter. Typical of the works of the Dutch masters, these paintings naively portray life of the common people as merry and enchanting, counteracting elements of the bad with the comical, illuminating the universal human spirit in the commonplace.⁵ In his time, Hegel witnessed the comical and cheery presentations of the Dutch masters give way to the merely vulgar: "in modern (*heutigen*) pictures, a painter tries to be piquant in the same way, what he usually presents to us is something inherently

vulgar, bad and evil without any reconciling comicality” (887). Recognizing vulgar reality as the dominant theme of painting in his day, for Hegel, painting ceased to be a vehicle of spirit’s higher message.

7 Philosophy and the Death of Painting

Clement Greenberg, one of modernism’s foremost art critics, chronicled, and perhaps influenced, the succession of modern art from abstract to flat to the essential monochrome. The progress of modern art, by some accounts, followed the Hegelian prolepsis to a T.⁶ Greenberg’s narrative explanation for the development of Jackson Pollock’s style could hardly have been more Hegelian. Pollock echoed the voices of his day, claiming the death of easel painting was imminent. He asserted that an unconscious force was driving modern art to a new form of expression: “It seems to me that the modern painter cannot express this age, the airplane, the atom bomb, the radio, in the old forms of the Renaissance or of any other past culture. Each age finds its own technique” (1999, 20).

Greenberg (1988) saw the leveling of hierarchical distinctions at the core of this new technique. Having done away with beginning, middle, and end, this “decentralized” art had become monotonously uniform as painting dissolved into “sheer sensation” (222–224). Painting’s “polyphonic” transformation—a term Kurt List and Rene Leibowitz used to describe Schoenberg’s 12-tone compositions—infected “the notion of the genre with a fatal ambiguity” (223). Greenberg also saw this polyphonic trend in literature. Seeing a sea change in how art was being made, he concluded, “the future of the easel picture as a vehicle of ambitious art has become problematical.” Artists such as Pollock were “destroying” this convention (225).

In Greenberg’s eyes, the search for art’s essence stems from Kant. As Kant used reason to purify thinking, modern artists sought to purify painting (Danto, 1995, 67). Greenberg (1993) called Kant “the first real Modernist” because “he was the first to criticize the means itself of criticism” (85). The focus of Enlightenment was the external, so the outer form was the subject of criticism. Modernity turns the critical sense inward, directing criticism toward procedures that create art objects. Hence, Greenberg read Kant’s inward criticism, establishing the limits of logic as a move toward purification. Over the centuries, the individual art forms borrowed heavily from other styles, adopting stylistic attributes that evolved into other disciplines: entertainment, therapy, etc. Subsumption under these derivative forms threatened to strip the individual arts of socially redeeming values unique to them. This drove leading-edge artists of the modern era to refine and employ techniques specific to their individual art. When painting shed much of what had been incorporated from the other arts, what remained was essentially its own. Seeking its own essence, painting imposed progressively stricter limitations on what it could be; moving from attempts to recreate three dimensions in two, to the impressionist’s removing shading and modeling to depict the literal optical experience, and the cubist’s image-flattening abstractions. Finally, self-definition led to merely compositional or monochrome paintings (86–89).⁷

8 Danto and the End of Art

Greenberg (1993) asserted that “Art is—among other things—continuity, and unthinkable without it” (93). Despite the dissolution of the conventions of the past, art was still at one with its history. Yet, Danto (1995) notes, in 1992, Greenberg insisted that no significant art had been made in over 30 years (105). For Danto, this demonstrated the end of continuity with the past, insofar as Greenberg was unable to recognize the significance of Warhol’s pop art. Danto and Greenberg were in agreement that modern art sought a kind of purification through an attempt at self-definition. But, as Danto interpreted the progress of art’s history, when art became aware of

its own definition, the narrative of art that had dominated since the 14th century was at an end. Art was now free to be anything it wanted, free to choose from any style of the past.

For Danto, art's awareness of its self-definition indicated the achievement of some form of self-consciousness. Taken literally, this means art has become self-aware (Hilmer, 1998, 73). The process of self-discovery, upon which painting, sculpture, and each of the several arts embark, ends in their understanding of themselves as art. This led to a kind of freedom insofar as the artistic conversation was no longer driven by the narrative of modernism, signaling, per Danto, the end of the era of art. For Danto, art's tectonic shift seemed to come with Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box*, a sculptural work "identical" to its commercial counterpart. Danto (1986) notes a parallel with Hegel's notion of absolute knowledge, the point at which knowledge of an object is at one with the object itself (113), but the analogy is deceptive. Despite Danto's peculiar claim that art achieves self-consciousness, his approach differs significantly insofar as it is pre-Kantian (Snyder, 2018, 153–167, 208–213; 2019).

Danto, as Hegel, sees one era of world history transitioning into the next when the era of art ends and post-history begins. But for Hegel, there is a dialectical transition through which a higher level of mind gradually manifests itself in the world, transforming the real into the ideal, closing the gap between nature and the concept. For Danto, the representation does not transform the world, it mediates, existing in the gap between the world and language; relations of the world never collapse into truth (Snyder, 2018, 151). Danto defines "world," as opposed to world, as an individual's interior social and historical context. The "world" we inhabit, in Danto's terms, is a network of belief propositions existing in the form of representations: texts, symbols, images, some machines, or any medium that can embody these propositions (1999, 90–92). One's "world" forms one's belief system and what one believes the world *is*. Though one is more likely to survive if one's "world" more closely resembles the world, the two diverge widely. This gap is the area of existence that we occupy, and our "world" representations bridge it; we are embodied representations, words made flesh (x, 80, 93, 144, 222). Referring to "representational causality," Danto (1989) argues we are moved to action more frequently by our "world," than by the physical world (271–273; Snyder, 2018, 179, 190–191). Art, Danto tells us, is also an embodied representation, and we as humans share much with art in terms of our philosophical origins. The ramifications of this for art are many, but two main points fall out of this that help to understand Danto's account of the end of art. First, "worlds" change, and when they change, if one does not change with it, one stays in the old "world"; the new "world" passes on. In Danto's view, this was Greenberg's fate; the critic of modernism stayed in the modern "world" as the posthistorical "world" moved on. The art of modernism ended, and the new era of free art opened. The second critical piece is Danto's notion of the "artworld." The artworld is analogous to our "world," but its reference is art. As the "world" of modernism changed, so changed the "world" of art; hence, though art is still made, the narrative, or conversation, that drove artistic creation shifted. Though there is an analog to Hegel in Danto's account of narrative historical development, the teleological end is not the same as what Hegel envisioned. In fact, outside of art striving to understand itself philosophically, Danto either did not "see" or did not think art could make assertions regarding any other teleological aims.

Danto's (1999) construal of humans and artworks as embodied representation (x) is the key to understanding how art could be self-consciousness. To some degree, "world" predisposes an individual's agency. As Hegel saw *Geist* predisposing an individual's possibilities within historical eras, for Danto, one's "world" mitigates one's connection to the physical world. "The mind, construed as embodied—as *enfleshed*—might perhaps stand to the body as a statue does to the bronze that is its material cause, or as a picture stands to the pigment it gives form to" (197). The artist's "brush" imprints the artwork with the same "world" stamped on the artist (Snyder, 2018, 182–189). Through interpretation, artworks are activated, and through the activity of human interpretation and creation, a conversation among artworks occurs; much like a virus is not really alive before

infecting its hosts, at which point it comes to life, mutates, and passes to the next host. Similarly, when art becomes self-conscious through interpretation, artistic conversations can shift, branch off, or end. As Danto sees it, art is free, but freedom in this case may mean being decoupled from the constraints of the prior conversation because the last conversation is over, the “world” it refers to is different, or the representative vocabulary expanded to the point that conversation’s story is no longer “tellable” (Snyder, 2018, 186, 264). In this way, changes to the “world” representation that are embodied in humans would carry over to the artworld of sculpture and painting, starting a whole new way of art-making.

9 Sculpture after the End of Art

Responding to the wide range of artifacts being classified under the rubric of sculpture, Rosalind Krauss (1979) writes

Nothing, it would seem, could possibly give to such a motley of effort the right to lay claim to whatever one might mean by the category of sculpture. Unless, that is, the category can be made to become almost infinitely malleable.

(30)

Krauss surmises that the inclination of historicism is to incorporate diverse forms, subsuming them under one category comprehensible in terms of continuity with the past. But this, she holds, stretches the category too far. Danto (2007) writes in his philosophy of history, that through the expansion of a “class-type” an artist can “class, as works of art, things which do not necessarily resemble objects already classed as such” (226–227). This allows artists to create novel forms that are not “automatically” disqualified from the class of artworks. For Danto, though, art’s freedom comes from being unmoored from the constraining internal logic of the modern era: that of finding a self-definition through visual and then textual means. Without constraints, art is free, but freedom in this sense is also unintelligibility, a story no longer tellable (Snyder, 2018, 158). Krause sees the same phenomenon but understands the “postmodern” situation differently. Sculpture is not a universal category; it is “historically bounded” with “its own internal logic, its own set of rules” (37). In the modern context, these rules are not easily altered. The internal logic of sculpture still applies when expanded to mediums previously outside of the sculptural. Krauss argues,

Within the situation of postmodernism, practice is not defined in relation to a given medium—sculpture—but rather in relation to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms, for which any medium—photography, books, lines on walls, mirrors, or sculpture itself—might be used.

(42)

Rather than posthistorical art being a “Babel of unconverging artistic conversations” (Danto, 1995, 148), art is applying an internal logic to aims other than achieving optical fidelity or self-definition.⁸ The dimensionality that once defined painting and sculpture, though not irrelevant, is no longer essential. Sherri Irvin (2013), referring to Duchamp’s readymades, questions whether a work that “does not have appreciation in three dimensions among its central aims” needs to be considered sculpture, especially if the aim is to question the boundaries of sculpture and art itself (607–608). For the plastic arts a creative logic still remains, but severance from the narrative of modernism has caused ostensible chaos insofar as the traditional categories have either collapsed or are too malleable to be of practical use. Clearly, Danto is correct that all styles are open; the boundaries of the plastic arts are blurred as they reclaim ancillary features stripped away in the

search for purity. Porous boundaries that grasp all that is new do not require jettisoning an artwork's internal logic; it means artworks do not aim to stay within the bounds of any preconceived category. There are myriad examples of painting or sculpture striving to solve problems imposed by adhering—or not adhering—to the constraints of placement, material, purpose, or tradition (Snyder, 2018, 238–262); leaving hints showing the viewer that the work is not meant to trick the eye changes the game by abandoning mimetic aims.⁹ If we accept Danto's assertion, that we are the representational embodiment of the gap between our "world" and the world, and that we share this feature with art objects, insofar as they also inhabit this gap, we see how the shift from one era to the next, from one "world" to the next, is externalized in the artwork. Sculpture leaves the museum and integrates with film, music, hikers, or even skateboarders with Simparch's installation art; it embodies philosophical texts in Thomas Hirschorn's duct-tape and foil structures; it puts the viewers in the reflection of Chicago's skyline in Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate*; copies commercial objects with Warhol's pop art; and separates the creative act from the artist in the works of Gonzales-Torres. The internal logic of painting and sculpture, if we can still use these categories, articulates something of our own living representations and the institutions of our time, in whatever material that seems available for the task. The conversation strives to continue, albeit in a drastically expanded form.

Notes

- 1 Derrida also advocated for prioritization of the aesthetic aspects of language, placing the powers of rhetoric over logic, suggesting that it should be independent of its mooring in the everyday (see Habermas, 1990; Snyder, 2018, 263–264).
- 2 Hegel was not aware that the sculpture at the height of the classical era was painted. He was misled by reading Meyer. See Knox's note (706).
- 3 An exception would be *The Laocoön Group* and other works by the Pergamene School.
- 4 See Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment*, 1536–1541, on the frontal wall of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Torment in religious art is exemplified by Grünewald's *The Crucifixion* and *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, both panels from the Isenheim altarpiece, 1515.
- 5 The realistic portrayals of events from daily life by the Dutch painters Jan van Eyck and Pieter Breugel provide good examples of this trend.
- 6 David Hopkins (2000) raises the question as to what influence the early political orientation of Greenberg, and other artists and art critics who took part in the artist's union, may have had on the theoretical content and the progression of art (34).
- 7 Another element shed by painting in its quest for purity was the narrative context. Objects in the frame no longer needed to be part of any particular story (Gombrich 2000).
- 8 Noël Carroll makes a similar argument in "The End of Art?" (1998).
- 9 The machined stumps left on Antony Gormley's "Event Horizon" (2010), for example.

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14

THE AVANT-GARDE

Noël Carroll

Introduction. “Avant-garde” is a label applied to members of a collection of artistic movements and works, dating from roughly the mid-19th century onwards, that were committed to innovation, primarily in terms of challenging the conventions – of both style and content – of the presiding “mainstream” artworld practices of the day. First and foremost, these challenges were directed at artistic practices, narrowly construed, but on occasion could be extended to social and cultural norms of behavior (e.g., Surrealism) and could even sometimes embrace political agendas (e.g., Soviet Constructivism).

The term “avant-garde” is military in origin. It is French for the “advance guard” of an army which scouts out enemy territory and leads the attack. The battle cry of the early avant-garde was “épater le bourgeois” – or “outrage the bourgeois.” That is, bourgeois taste and the art that satisfied it was the enemy that the avant-garde intended to attack, along with, in many cases, bourgeois mores.

Examples of avant-garde movements include Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, Symbolism, the Art-for-Art’s Sake Persuasion, Fauvism, German Expressionism, Futurism, Cubism (Analytical and Synthetic), Suprematism, Constructivism, Dadaism, Surrealism, De Stijl, Abstract Expressionism, Situationism, Color Field Painting, Conceptual Art, Pop Art, Minimalism, Postmodernism, and Neo-Expressionism.

Although these movements and their accompanying styles of articulation differ radically, they nevertheless typically share a recurring mode of address – or, perhaps more accurately, a mode of *dual* address.

On the one hand, these works are characteristically meant to bewilder the plain viewer who comes to the avant-garde artwork equipped with conventional stereotypes of what an artwork is or is supposed to “look like.” For example, the viewer who presupposes that art is, by definition, representational is befuddled by being confronted by an abstract drip painting by Jackson Pollock. That viewer is intended to be taxed by what he/she encounters when she confronts it and is, in consequence, prompted to ask questions like “what is this?” or “why is this art?” or maybe is even so perplexed that enraged, he/she declares “This isn’t really art at all!”

Thus are the bourgeoisie outraged.

But, on the other hand, the avant-garde work is also designed to communicate simultaneously a theme, a thesis, an expressive quality – or some other kind of formal invention or content – to the prepared viewer who is able in virtue of his/her grasp of the lay of the artworld (its history, theories, debates, and preoccupations) to interpret the work’s deviations from the norm in context so as to comprehend the meaning, significance, and/or purpose of the work.

Of course, in some cases – perhaps in the ideal case – these two viewing positions need not be inevitably opposed. For a viewer may begin by having his/her expectations subverted, but then graduate from that state of confusion as he/she works his/her way toward an understanding of the work. So even if the avant-garde work leaves the mass of casual viewers in disarray, some may ideally be able to gradually join the visionary company of the cognoscenti.

For a concrete example of the sort of usual communicative address that the avant-garde specializes in, consider the case of Edouard Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863), an inaugural work of avant-garde practice. It is a large painting, depicting an arbor. In the foreground, a threesome is picnicking. There are two men, both dressed in contemporary garb, one engaged in conversation, the other seemingly distracted, and also a naked woman; she is gazing out of the painting toward the viewer.

In the background, there is another woman bathing in a pond or a lake. The humans are framed by trees. The distance between the picnickers and the woman in the pond is difficult to determine due to the lack of perspective. To this viewer, it reminds him of a movie back-projection. The colors are somewhat brighter than usual for the period.

The general public was incensed by the painting. Many were scandalized by the nudity. Some complained of its obscurity. What did it mean? In short, the painting succeeded in bewildering plain viewers and outraging the bourgeoisie.

But informed viewers had the resources to make sense of the painting. First, they could see its relationship to art history where there were famous examples of ensembles of men dressed in the company of naked women, such as Titian's *Concert in the Open Air* (1510). Indeed, given that the population of nude women, especially in the genre of mythological paintings, was so vast, it was somewhat astounding that the public was surprised by the appearance of the naked lady in Manet's painting. But triggering that kind of somewhat anomalous response was part of the trap Manet planned for the bourgeois audience.

Moreover, the relation of Manet's painting to art history afforded the prepared viewer with a clue to at least part of the meaning of the work. The allusion to art history signaled that Manet's painting was part of a conversation – a conversation about the nature and role of art. The way that Manet's painting broke with the conventions of that conversation involved placing a traditional motif in a contemporary setting – juxtaposing the men in modern attire with a nude woman of the sort one might find in scenes of Olympian goddesses. In this way, Manet asserted not only his commitment to portraying modern life but also claimed that to be a function of art by connecting it to art history by means of his eccentric reference to established iconography.

As well, like Gustave Courbet's *A Burial at Ornans* (1849–1850), the large scale of *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* reminded viewers of the proportions of paintings not just in the mythological genre, but also the history genre, suggesting that an appropriate role of art was something like the history of contemporary life – that is, the documentation of life in the present. That the woman at the picnic, staring at us like the subject of Manet's *Olympia* (1865), may be taken to be a prostitute also fits nicely with Manet's ambition to catalogue the cast of his contemporaneous lifeworld.

If this is a persuasive example of the way in which avant-garde artworks generally address audiences, further philosophical clarification of the structure of this mode of dueling communications is in order. In the next section, it will be hypothesized that this structure is a form of implicature.

Avant-garde implicature. The ambition of the avant-gardist is nicely suggested by Friedrich Nietzsche, an author much admired by many of them. In his book *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes

It is not by any means necessarily an objection to a book when anyone finds it impossible to understand: perhaps that was part of the author's intention – he did not want his book to be understood by just anybody. All the nobler spirits and tastes select their audience when they wish to communicate; and choosing that, one at the same time erects barriers against the 'others.'¹

But how can the avant-gardist realize this form of double address? One way of explaining this involves extrapolating from Paul Grice's notion of conversational implicature.²

As Grice points out, much communication is achieved not by outright saying but by eliciting inferences based upon understanding the relevant context in accordance with a principle – the co-operative principle – and four maxims.

The co-operative principle holds that one should make one's communication such as is required to be relevant at the stage of the exchange in which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the interchange in which you are engaged.

Briefly, the four maxims are:

First: The Maxim of Quantity – Do not make your contribution more informative than required.

Second: The Maxim of Quality – Do not say what you believe to be false.

Third: The Maxim of Relation – Be relevant (which is arguably a restatement of the co-operative principle).

Fourth: The Maxim of Manner – Be perspicuous. Avoid obscurity. Avoid ambiguity. Be brief (avoid prolixity). Be orderly, etc.

Abiding by the above makes communication work smoothly. However, communication can still succeed when maxims are violated. For example, my partner and I go to a party. From experience, my partner knows that when I say "I'm tired" that is a sign that I want to leave. So, when I say "I'm tired" at the faculty reception, my partner infers that I want to go home, even though what I've said is literally false (I'm really ready to go out dancing) and thus violates the Maxim of Quality.

So, what I've actually communicated goes beyond what I've straightforwardly said. I've communicated by *implicating* that I want to leave the party by saying something utterly different and, in point of fact, false. But my partner is able to infer my intention given the pragmatic context of our exchange – party-going and our history thereof – and the requirement that my utterance be relevant to the situation in which it occurs (i.e., in accordance with the co-operative principle and the Maxim of Relation).

Grice himself gives a similar example of implicature. In response to a request for a recommendation for a student applying to graduate school in philosophy, his professor writes that the student is punctual and has excellent penmanship but adds nothing else. Since the context of this exchange is a recommendation to graduate school, the professor's letter is strikingly uninformative – a violation of the Maxim of Quantity – since neither punctuality nor penmanship has anything to do with one's promise as a philosophy student.

Yet, the admissions committee will infer that the professor intends to implicate something that is relevant to the context (of an application to graduate school), viz., that the student has no particular talents when it comes to philosophy. That is, the professor's omitting the expected information is taken to be relevant to his implicated assessment of the student's lack of philosophical talent.

What does this have to do with avant-garde communication? Notice that most avant-garde artists would appear to stridently violate many of the aforesaid Maxims. Avoiding obscurity or/and ambiguity are hardly the hallmarks of most classic avant-garde works (e.g., Dada and Surrealism). Likewise, many avant-garde works are neither perspicuous nor orderly (e.g., Robert Morris' 1968 *Untitled {Threadwaste}*). Some supply a surfeit of information (e.g., Nancy Holzer's *Truisms* {1977–1979}). Nor is Andy Warhol's 1964 film *Empire* brief. Because such works transgress various of the Maxims, plain viewers are overwhelmed. But prepared viewers, apprised of the pertinent, pragmatic, and dialogical contexts, are able to mobilize the co-operative principle and the Maxim of Relation, to identify the relevant avant-garde implicatures.³

For example, in the context of rendering social commentary by departing from perfect verisimilitude (the graphic correlate of being perspicuous) and portraying the plutocrats in his drawings

of Weimar businessmen in a brutishly distorted fashion, Georg Grosz implicates his perception of the corruption of German society for the viewer attentive to what is relevant to the kind of exchange – a comment upon the state of the nation – that Grosz has initiated, given the genre he has chosen.

Likewise, in the pragmatic context of disputes about what counts as a work of art, Marcel Duchamp's presentation in 1914 of a bottle-drying rack as a work of art, while puzzling plain viewers as an utterly obscure gesture, could be interpreted by reflective viewers, informed of the work's relevance to the dialogical context, as implicating Duchamp's conviction that artworks, properly so called, need not be the handiwork of its creator, despite that being the conventional stereotype.

Of course, some avant-garde artworks may not completely demoralize the pedestrian viewer. Most will laugh or, at least, smile at the humor of Pablo Picasso's sculpture *Bull's Head* (1942) – assembled with surpassing visual wit from the combination of the handlebars and seat of a bicycle. But even in this case, it will not be evident to such audiences why this is a work of art, rather than merely a clever joke. They will not appreciate that, in the context of plumbing that very question about the nature of art, Picasso is, pertinent to that arena of discourse, addressing the problematic and implicating that sculpture be best understood as fundamentally an art of construction.

Similarly, at one level, most of its contemporary viewers comprehended Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* (1964), but many were still left wondering why it was an artwork, while the identical-looking cartons in the storeroom of the local grocery store were not. For most casual viewers, the answer to that question was obscure.

In contrast, what the informed viewer brought to the gallery was a sense of the relevance of Warhol's move in the ongoing debate about the nature of art. In that discussion, as Arthur Danto has demonstrated, Warhol closed off one line of speculation – namely, the Modernist notion that the nature of art could be defined reflexively by artworks. For artworks proceed through the medium of appearances and whatever made Warhol's *Brillo Box* an artwork was indiscernible from an ordinary Brillo carton and, thus, not a matter of appearances.⁴

As the Warhol example illustrates, the intended audience of avant-garde artworks comes equipped with knowledge of the histories, traditions, debates, theories, discursive atmosphere, and even gossip that constitute the form of life of the artworld. Rather than wedded to stereotypes or even prototypes of what counts as art, when the Maxims of artworld communication are violated, the reflective viewer ponders what those transgressions might implicate as relevant to the concerns of the ongoing artworld culture, past, present, and future.

The Avant-Gardes. Although we have identified a recurring approach found across characteristic avant-garde endeavors, different avant-garde practices employ that approach to different ends. Broadly speaking, we can divide the avant-garde into two broad groups, the Autonomists and the Integrationists. The Autonomists regard avant-garde artworks and/or the experience thereof as belonging essentially to the domain of art and/or the aesthetic, a domain separate from other precincts of society.

One strand of Autonomism is Formalism as represented by Clive Bell in his book *Art*, which, among other things, was a spirited defense of Neoimpressionism.⁵ For Bell, what identified something as a work of art was its possession of significant form; and what counted as significant form was its capacity to engender aesthetic emotion. “Aesthetic emotion,” in turn, was a species of what is more commonly called “aesthetic experience,” that is, experience distinct from ordinary emotions and their associations with religion, morality, politics, commerce, and everyday affairs. Indeed, echoing Schopenhauer, the essential function of art was to liberate the individual from mundane concerns by affording a release or escape from the prevailing demands of human life.

Although Bell avoided invoking “beauty,” because he worried about its suggestion of sexuality, his idea of aesthetic emotion was clearly a descendant of the concept of beauty, especially as that

was linked to “*disinterested pleasure*” – that is, a kind of pleasure decoupled not only from self-interest and personal bias but as well from the interests of practices such as religion, philosophy, morality, politics, and so forth. Furthermore, Bell’s notion of significant form itself bears a striking resemblance to Kant’s idea of purposiveness *without* a purpose – again an affirmation of autonomy or independence of art from the other realms of human society, each of which is dedicated to discharging purposes. Whether avant-garde projects are endorsed on explicit Formalist grounds (as one might applaud the work of De Stijl) or in the less specific and even more vague language of beauty (e.g., as applied to Whistler’s *Nocturne in Black and Gold* {1875}), such endeavors solicit commendation on the grounds of asserting their autonomous status with respect to the surrounding society and its claims.

Perhaps the most influential case of the Autonomous avant-garde in the 20th century is what David Carrier called “American-Type Formalism,” and which is more commonly referred to as just “Modernism.”⁶ Associated primarily with the critic Clement Greenberg, this avant-garde tendency putatively regarded the essential role of modern art as critique – specifically as the critique of the conditions of possibility of, for example, painting. This critique was to be conducted in the medium of painting by foregrounding its essential features, such as flatness, the shape of the support, including the edge, the relation of color and line, and so on.⁷

In terms of the two-dimensionality of painting, Greenbergians traced a historical trajectory beginning with Manet’s eschewal of perspective, Impressionism’s dissolution of the picture plane, and Cezanne’s reduction of images to geometrical forms as steps toward Cubism’s further flattening of the surface of the picture, Fauvism’s foregrounding of color, Pollack’s parsing of the image into line and color, and finally color field painting as painterly contributions to the isolation of the essential features of the medium.

That is, by foregrounding central features of the art of painting by means of painting, avant-gardists were, on this account, supposedly able to propose an inventory of the properties that made painting painting, and they were congratulated lavishly for doing so. Abstraction, perhaps needless to say, held a special pride of place in Modernism’s historical itinerary insofar as it regularly made the surface of the painting unavoidably visible.

The Modernist movement belongs to the Autonomous wing of the avant-garde not primarily because it affords experiences distinct from those characteristic of other realms of culture, but rather because it is so avowedly cognitively centripetal or inward looking, concerned with little more than the discovery of the quintessence of its medium. As discussed earlier, the Modernist project was stopped in its tracks by works such as Warhol’s *Brillo Box* and his *Campbell’s Soup Cans* (1962) which, by raising the issue of indiscernibility, canceled the prospects for art’s being defined by means of appearances via strategies like visually emphasizing features such as flatness.

Throughout the history of the avant-garde, in contrast to the Autonomous wing, an alternative aspiration resurfaced persistently. We can call it Integrationism. As the label indicates, it is committed to integrating art – avant-garde art – with other social practices. Indeed, one of the very reasons this family of movements can lay claim to being avant-garde is its resolve to reunite art and other elements of society in the face of longstanding Autonomous dogma.

Integrationists are determined to challenge the boundary between art and life. Whereas the Autonomous maintains that distinction is absolute, the Integrationist aspires to dismantle it. In this regard, there are at least two different forms of Integrationism. One version, in a manner of speaking, launches its attack on the boundary between art and life from the direction of life in order to level the distinction. Call these avant-gardists Levelers.

Duchamp’s readymades and the tradition that it inaugurated is a seminal development for Integrationism. As a result, the informed art-goer will scarcely be surprised upon walking into a gallery to find an array of tchotchkies boldly displayed. Likewise, Robert Rauschenberg’s *Automobile*

Tire Print (1953), Jasper Johns' *Painted Bronze* (1960), Robert Morris' 1968 *Untitled (Dirt)*, and Martha Rosler's *Meta-Monumental Garage Sale* (2012) thrust everyday objects into the spotlight to be interpreted and appreciated qua art. Likewise in the paragallery artworlds of dance and performance, commonplace activities like eating a sandwich were transfigured into artworks by Judson Dance Theater and Fluxus, respectively.

Whereas the Levelers introduce life into the artworld, other Integrationists aim to bring art into the everyday – that is, to extend the reach of art into daily life by modifying ordinary objects and processes so that they transcend the boundary between art and life in a way that transforms certain quotidian types of objects and processes into artworks. Call these avant-gardists *Transformers*. Two particularly well-known examples of this tendency were Soviet Constructivism and the Bauhaus. Whereas the Levelers aspired to import the everyday into the artworld, the Transformers intended to turn the lifeworld into an artworld.

For instance, echoing Marx, the Soviet Constructivists argued that whereas in the past artists had merely depicted the world, their brief was to change it. In order to carry out this program, they rejected the distinction between applied and pure art. They not only made movies and posters in the service of the Soviet State's efforts to transform Russian society. The Constructivists brought to bear their artistry upon many aspects of everyday life including interior decoration, clothes, worker's meeting halls, sidewalk kiosks, and even dishes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, their very avant-gardism engendered resistance from those whose allegiance to pre-existing art stereotypes led them to suspect the Constructivists project.

Avant-garde Transformers have not only attempted to reconstruct the social world. Some avant-garde Transformers have also intended to change consciousness. Here, one example that comes to mind is Surrealism. Surrealism, among other things, aimed at changing people's attitude to the world – at encouraging us to experience the world in our everyday lives *surrealistically*, that is, as saturated with unconscious desire, and swathed in affect (especially, in terms of curiosity and ecstasy): in short, to acknowledging the dimension of subjectivity in human existence purportedly occluded by “enlightened” reason. Surrealism, in this respect, was predicated upon the recuperation of the sense of the marvelous in everyday life once possessed in childhood, a state the Surrealists privileged as did the Romantics of yesteryear.

Because of their commitments to engaging with life outside of the district of the artworld, the Transformative avant-garde, as represented by movements of Constructivism and Surrealism, was exiled beyond the pale of history by Modernists. However, with the demise of Modernism, room for the emergence of the Transformative avant-garde is ripe once again – that is, if the very notion of an avant-garde is still plausible.

Whither the Avant-Garde? A cursory look at leading art journals or a quick visit to a biennale almost anywhere almost immediately will confirm that what we call avant-gardism is nowadays the dominant art approach in the upper echelons of the artworld. This raises the question of whether there are any genuine art-goers anywhere left to be bewildered by the so-called avant-garde.

Is it that we should suppose the targets of the avant-garde are the stereotypes of mass art and the consumers thereof? But, by this late date, mass art and the avant-garde seem to have made peace with each other.

Undoubtedly, some viewers are still puzzled by contemporary artworks. Yet at the same time, reflective viewers, of whom there are more and more every day, know how to go about negotiating their perplexity; they know how to use their apprehension of what deviates from their expectations to track what the artwork implicates. They are in no way as at sea as were the plain viewers of the historical avant-garde. They know the drill, so to speak. Most, save school children dragooned for a day trip to the museum, know what they are in for when they pass their way through the doors of a museum of contemporary art.

So, in what, if any sense, is there still an avant-garde?

Originally, the label “avant-garde” suggested something in advance of the rest of the army. But how with respect to high art (museum art, gallery art) can we make a distinction between the what’s in the lead and the rest? So, does it make sense to call the entire army “avant-garde?”

Maybe not.

However, even if the label “avant-garde” has lost its traditional descriptive content, the label still applies rigidly to an enduring approach and its history – one that generally involves problematizing communicative maxims as a means of implicating its messages, be they thematic or formal, pragmatic, purposeful, or programmatic.

Notes

- 1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 381.
- 2 See Paul Grice, “Logic and Conversation,” and “Further Notes on Logic and Conversation” in his *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 22–40 and pp. 41–57.
- 3 See Noël Carroll, “The Avant-Garde and Creativity: A Gricean Account,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Volume 55, Number 1 (Spring, 2021), pp. 1–12.
- 4 Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- 5 Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1914).
- 6 David Carrier, “Greenberg, Fried and Philosophy: American-Type Formalism” in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, edited by George Dickie and Richard J. Sclafani (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), pp. 461–468.
- 7 Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

PART III

Questions of Form, Style, and Address



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STYLE

Frank Boardman

Style in art has everything you could want in an object of philosophical inquiry. It is both easy to recognize and difficult to understand. It is central to many practices (historical, creative, curatorial, critical and otherwise), yet it is not clear that we're operating with the same concept in all of these contexts. And the various questions concerning style are interrelated enough to warrant joint attention, but distinct enough that answers to one do not always entail answers to the others.

Discussions about style also face some headwinds. The price of engaging with a subject that admits of so many potential positions is having to navigate a congested landscape of actual positions. Worse than that, though, is the difficulty of providing even a minimal theory-neutral characterization of "style." In other challenging segments of philosophical aesthetics such as attempts to define "art" or characterize individual art forms, we have a relatively stable set of base cases with which to operate, even if disagreements over borderline cases prove intractable. At least we enjoy widespread agreement that there are artworks and paintings, and that distinguishing these things from other kinds of things serve worthwhile practical or theoretical ends. The same cannot be said of style.

Without anything like consensus on the most fundamental issues, our first task will be to make explicit some of the criteria we should use to evaluate theories of style. We'll then consider five central questions along with some available answers to them. I'll then articulate what I'll (only somewhat self-servingly) call a "simple theory" of style.

1 What Do We Want from a Theory of Style?

The usual criteria for theory selection – explanatory power, consistency, simplicity, utility etc. – all have a role in evaluating theories of style. It will be worth taking a moment to consider the present application of a few of these.

One thing we want from an account of (just about) any concept is that it captures all and only those things that in fact fall under the concept. Let's call this the "extensional adequacy" of a theory. An extensionally adequate characterization of chairs ("furniture designed for one person to sit upon" maybe?) would be true of all and only chairs. The primary reason that "style" presents more difficulties than "chair" in this regard is that it just isn't as clear where we should look for the extension of "style." However, we are not without resources. Our data should come from those practices where style is most important: artistic creation, curation and criticism. That is to say, we ought to begin by asking which (if any) properties of artworks artists, curators and critics treat as stylistic.

Intensional (or “modal”) adequacy is a little more difficult. Typically we want to capture some concept not only as it is, but also as it might be, could be or would be under different historical circumstances. We want to articulate its essence, independent of what is accidentally or contingently true of it. Style, however, is determined by actual histories much more than other concepts. As such, we should want an account of style that allows for a maximum range of possibilities. Therefore, we should prefer theories of style on which any property of an artwork *could* be, and no property *must* be stylistic, and individual styles could be (in some appropriately limited way) different than they are.

We should also prefer the simpler theory of style over the more complex, privileging the one that forces us to take on fewer new beliefs. Practically, this means that – all else being equal – we should choose the theory that requires fewer new terms, senses and entities. As Elizabeth Anscombe usefully observed, positing a new sense is sometimes our recourse when we are simply unclear about a concept (Anscombe, 1963; 1). But at the same time, we shouldn’t read that admonition as a prescription for equivocation when more than one sense is genuinely in play. This tension will need to be worked out from within theories of style. For instance, Richard Wollheim’s distinction between general and individual style (Wollheim, 1987; 183–184), crucial to his own account, may dissolve on others’. Still other theorists of style may not think this distinction fine-grained enough, and insist on a theory of the styles of works, oeuvres and artists instead of a broader theory of individual style, or separate theories of style in eras, schools and movements instead of general style.

Finally, we want to be able to *do* things with a theory of style. We should prefer the theory of style that not only captures our past and present artistic creation, curation and criticism but also aids the development of these practices. Important as this sort of utility is, it can be overemphasized as a criterion. James Ackerman, for instance, thought that “It is meaningless to ask, as we usually do, ‘what is style?’; the relevant question is rather ‘what definition of style provides the most useful structure for the history of art?’” (Ackerman, 1962; 228). While I am largely sympathetic with the account of style at which Ackerman arrives, insisting on this sort of utility from the beginning above all other considerations presupposes that the most useful art history and the most accurate art history are the same, and they may not be. When we severely discount other criteria – especially extensional adequacy – we run the risk of imposing rather than discovering historical narratives.

2 Five Questions

If the preceding discussion provides us – albeit in a somewhat suggestive manner – with some desiderata for a theory of style, we still have yet to say what form such theories ought to take. Various accounts will have different emphases and priorities, and some may exclude or even preclude certain questions altogether. Even so, we can think of answering five central questions as a kind of minimal requirement for complete theories of style.

2.1 Are Styles Genuine Properties?

The first thing to notice about style in art is that it involves an ascription of some property or set of properties to something. When I say “Caravaggio was a baroque painter,” “*The Calling of St. Matthew* is a baroque painting” or “The seventeenth century saw a flowering of baroque painting in Italy and Germany” I’m saying something about, respectively, Caravaggio, *The Calling of St. Matthew*, and the 17th century.

However, not every such claim points to a genuine property. The moral skeptic, for instance, thinks that predicates like “is wrong” or “is ethical” don’t correspond to anything that is actually

in an action or rule. And the skeptic about romantic love similarly thinks that there is nothing distinct between lovers and beloveds. Could we be similarly skeptical about styles in art? Such an account would win on our simplicity criterion. The questions of style that require complex answers don't arise if there's no such thing as style to begin with.

The problem with such skepticism is that it doesn't explain our everyday practices. It is, in fact, inconsistent with them. The moral skeptic owes us an explanation for the significance we place on alleged moral values – typically that we are romanticizing or weaponizing our personal interests. And the romantic skeptic must account not only for our reports of being in love but also for the ubiquity and recognizability of love stories – perhaps by suggesting our conflation of love and lust. Similarly, the skeptic about style must provide a diagnosis for the massive error we seem to be in with our approaches to art history and criticism, where style ascriptions play a central role. Then we also need some alternative and preferable way of engaging in these practices. In the absence of either of these, we can (at least provisionally) set skepticism aside.

2.2 Are Styles Simple or Complex Properties?

Philosophers have long (but not uncontroversially) made a distinction between complex properties, which are reducible to or definable via more fundamental properties, and simple properties, which are not. Our next question is whether a style ascription like “is baroque” is pointing to a simple or a complex property.

Let's call the position that style is simple in this way “primitivism” about style. Such a view would preserve the simplicity of skepticism while allowing much of our common discourse about styles to go forward. We could, for instance, continue to use style predicates even if we'll never provide necessary and sufficient conditions for their applications. However, we do lose out on a couple key criteria on such a theory. The first is intensional adequacy. We might be able to make sense of claims like “Caravaggio might not have painted in a baroque style” which keep facts about the style fixed and posit counterfactual conditions of the artist. But we can't make any sense of claims like “Without the influence of Caravaggio, baroque style would have been somewhat less naturalistic than it turned out to be.” If style is primitive, it could not have properties that it does not – as it does not really *have* properties at all. Second, such an account would be sorely lacking in utility. We could apply style predicates but do very little to characterize styles themselves. And without the latter, our prospects of adjudicating between competing style predication would be pretty bleak.

2.3 What Are Styles Properties Of?

The brief treatments above are not adequate to preclude all versions of skepticism or primitivism about style. But they are enough, I hope, to warrant our turning to some theories of style that we're more likely to hold. The primary fault line among theorists of style concerns the *kinds* of properties that determine style. Let's focus for the moment on individual style – that of Caravaggio and *The Calling of St. Matthew* – rather than the Italian Baroque. On what Wollheim calls “generative” theories – for instance, his own and Jonathan Gilmore's – style properties are ultimately psychological facts about artists (Wollheim, 1987/1995; Gilmore, 2000). On “materialist” or “taxonomic” accounts, style properties are to be found in or determined by the artwork. Ackerman and Nelson Goodman, for instance, hold views of this kind (Ackerman, 1962; Goodman, 1978).

We should briefly mention and set aside another sort of answer to this question. We might think that rather than the artist or the art object, stylistic properties are ultimately features of our reception of artworks. Receptive views have pretty severe problems to overcome regarding

extensional adequacy and utility. If style is a function of reception and our responses to paintings can be as varied as our psychologies, then there is no fact of the matter about a painting's style. And if that is the case, then there is something deeply mistaken about so many of our standard artworld practices. There may indeed be, but until we've exhausted our theoretical resources, it is better to try and explain than to try and explain away our typical behavior. If for no other reason, such a move would forestall all sorts of conversations many of us find valuable.

The practical difference between generative and materialist theories of style is an inversion of object and evidence. Both are able to make sense of the claim that *The Calling of St. Matthew* is – to borrow Heinrich Wölfflin's famous distinction (Wölfflin, 1950) – more painterly than linear, without being a classical case of either. On the generative account, we are saying something about Caravaggio and his creation of the painting, using the painting itself as evidence for that claim. On a materialist account, the stylistic facts attach to the painting, though we may look beyond it to facts of its creation for evidence for a particular style ascription. So the same creative, critical and art-historical (at least concerning individual style) judgments can be vindicated on either view. Extensional adequacy, then, will not help us adjudicate between the two.

Neither, ultimately, will intensional adequacy. Gilmore is more specific than Wollheim in characterizing the kinds of psychological facts that can determine styles. For Gilmore, the relevant intentions involve an artist's "brief," the "specific way a group of painters represents the purpose of their activity as painters and the means to realize that purpose" (Gilmore, 2000; 77). Now, given infinite variety in possible briefs, any psychological fact about artists in and around their creative activity *could* count as stylistic, and no psychological fact *must* count as stylistic. Similarly, it is open to the materialist to allow that any feature of a painting could be but no feature of a painting must be stylistic. Had the next generation of painters further north not embraced painterly style, we may correctly see Caravaggio's work quite differently (more on this issue in a moment).

Utility may be more helpful to us in adjudicating between these two kinds of theories, though their advocates will likely disagree about what this criterion demands. In brief, the generative theorist can point out that the material theorist ties style to something – the physical features of a painting – that can be correctly understood and accurately described too many ways. A style description of the material conception is not a bare physical description, not the sort of thing at which we could arrive from the perspective of pure science. The claim that *The Calling of St. Matthew* is more painterly than linear cannot be reduced to, for instance, chemical descriptions of the paints or their relative force on the canvas. There are irreducibly experiential claims involved. And those experiences can vary by time, culture, individual or even subsequent interactions. As such, the material conception of style may not be so material after all. The generative theorist is likely, then, to think the material account guilty of the same unhelpful relativism that besets receptive theories.

On the other hand, the material theorist can point out that our access to the physical properties of a painting is much more accessible than the psychological facts of its production. We can look at and experience the physical properties of *The Calling of St. Matthew*. If its painterly style depends (conceptually and not just causally) on Caravaggio's mental state while painting, there will always be room for skepticism about the style ascription no matter how unanimous and justified our judgment about the painting itself. You may notice that these arguments mirror those typically made by anti-intentionalists about meaning in artworks. It is worth mentioning here that one could be an intentionalist about meaning and hold a material theory of style just so long as meaning is not determinative of style. Or, like Goodman, we could think that meaning is at least partially constitutive of style and that neither is reducible to artists' intentions (Goodman, 1978). Though, as Stephanie Ross points out, when we import meanings into styles, we end up with some other problems – most notably a difficulty distinguishing between style and genre (Ross, 2005; 5).

Our choices, then, seem to be between identifying style with a definite but inaccessible object and identifying style with an accessible but indefinite object. Neither of these are obviously true of style. It seems that you and I can share a meaning of “painterly” while maintaining relatively non-inferential access to its instances. Jenefer Robinson offers a kind of combined view that avoids both of these consequences (Robinson, 1984; Ross, 2005). Extending the view to painting from the literature on which she focuses, the psychological state in question is that of a presumed artist whom we know only descriptively as (something like) “the artist who painted *The Calling of St. Matthew*. ” Of course we know Caravaggio uniquely satisfies this description and don’t have to pretend otherwise. I take the idea here to be that for the purposes of identifying styles we treat the description – to use Keith Donnellan’s distinction (Donnellan, 1966) – attributively rather than referentially. That is, when we say that the predominantly painterly style of the painting is a function of the artist’s creative mental state, we refer to the mental state of whoever happened to paint the painting. So while whatever is true of this posited person is causally connected to what Caravaggio actually did, there may be some things true of the latter that are not true of the former. Specifically, we are not allowed to attribute anything to the artist that is not accessible via interaction with the painting itself. So style ascriptions ultimately depend on an object that is definite – as someone or other actually painted the canvas – and also accessible – because we need not and in fact cannot go very far beyond what we see in the painting.

As Ross argues in greater detail than I will here, Robinson’s view makes style ascription an awfully complex activity (Ross, 2005; 12). We must always infer just enough and never too much from the painting, and keep distinct the artist to whom we attribute a work from the artist we know painted it. These acts seem to require a kind of second-order attention to our attention to the painting that I for one don’t recognize as being part of the way I attribute styles. In the absence of a simpler version, I think we can say in general that this sort of synthesis of generative and material theories resolves their impasse at too great a cost.

2.4 What Determines Style Properties?

We individuated families of theories above by the kind of property to which style ascriptions refer. We can also characterize theories of style by their account of how those properties are picked out, leaving it up to individual theories of style to say exactly which properties of the right kind and picked out in the right way are the style properties. In another context (the valuation of artworks), Wollheim provides categories that may be useful to us here (Wollheim, 1980).

First, a realist about style thinks that identifications of style properties can be truly independent of any psychological facts about the identifiers. Generative accounts are most obviously at home with such realism. Caravaggio’s mental state in creating *The Calling of St. Matthew* is untouched by our attitudes, beliefs or knowledge of it. But there may be room for a material realism as well, so long as we can block the argument above that such views collapse into a kind of relativism. I for one am not optimistic about the success of this strategy, as it would seem to require that there is, for every painting, one privileged description of it.

Relativism, the view that the truth of style ascriptions depends on some condition of their utterance – for instance, the interests of those making them – appears more amenable to material theories than generative ones. Yet again, one could think that the psychological states of artists relevant to style depend on our stylistic interests.

Somewhere between realism and relativism is what Wollheim calls “objectivism.” Applied to style, this is the position that style ascriptions depend on the most general kinds of widely (though not necessarily universally) shared psychological facts. We are, on an objectivist view, disposed as the kind of creatures that we are to see *The Calling of St. Matthew* in a way that will include its stylistic features – whether those are ultimate facts about the painting, Caravaggio or an assumed artist.

Finally, we could think that style ascriptions are non-cognitive expressions of our attitudes toward paintings. This kind of view, which Wollheim calls “subjectivism,” may provide the kind of explanation that (as we said earlier) the skeptic owes us. Perhaps I’m inclined to call *The Calling of St. Matthew* more painterly than linear because I am moved by the painting and think I’m more likely to be moved by painterly paintings. A similar subjectivism about artistic value may be plausible, but this strategy does not seem to fit questions of style. Notice, for instance, that if we are expressivists of this kind about both style *and* value, there are no substantive differences between the two kinds of claims, and it is not possible for me to have radically different evaluations of works in the same style.

2.5 What Is the Relationship between Individual and General Style?

We have for now focused on individual style. Our last important question for a theory of style is the relationship between this and general style. Again, we have a few options that cut across the theories we’ve been discussing. First, we could deny any close connection between them. Call this the “discontinuity” view. Wollheim, for instance, is a generative realist about individual style and a relativist about general style – which he takes to be reason enough to be relatively dismissive of the latter (Wollheim, 1987).

Gilmore departs from Wollheim on this point, as he suggests that general styles emerge from shared beliefs among groups of artists (Gilmore, 2000; 96). This sort of view on which individual styles determine general styles we might call “individual-first” positions on style.

Naturally, we could also have “general-first” theories on which general styles are fundamental to individual styles. In favor of such positions, we might notice that it would likely never occur to us to use style predicates without a sufficiently large number of paintings that instantiate them, and that only very rarely do artists create works without awareness of their place in a larger history of general styles.

Finally, we have what we might call “continuity” theories in which the determinants of individual style and general style are the same without either depending on the other.

3 A Simple Theory of Style

There are at least two kinds of self-flattery that philosophers sometimes have trouble avoiding. The first is a tendency to overrate the originality of a relatively standard idea, and the other is to cover what would be a controversial claim in the banner of standard common sense. If I’m risking one of these mistakes here it is the latter. I don’t pretend to be offering a novel theory – indeed I’m not going to offer a specific account at all. Rather, I’ll use – primarily as an example, but with cautious endorsement – a set of answers to our five questions that I think help us satisfy the criteria we discussed earlier. Let’s call this the “simple theory” of style, though its tenets as I’ll lay them out more plausibly describe a family of related theories.

The simple theory is neither a skepticism nor a primitivism about style. In the absence of some compelling reason to think otherwise, we should be guided by the fact that in our standard creative, critical and art-historical practices we act as though there are styles and that those styles can be analyzed and characterized.

Setting a course through the more contentious questions, we can call the simple theory I have in mind materialist, relativist and continuous. First, recall that the primary advantage of materialist accounts was the accessibility of the style properties they posit, but their major disadvantage was the indefiniteness of them. What we need, then, is some way of maintaining the former while avoiding the latter. One way, mentioned above, would be to combine a materialist theory with realism about styles. But again, this move seems implausible. A more profitable strategy will be to

become clearer about what exactly style ascriptions are relative to. If they're relative to individual interests, indefiniteness is unavoidable. But if instead we take them (as I think we should) to be relative to the accurate art-historical narratives into which the relevant works feature, there will be definite, universally recognizable facts about style so long as there are definite, universally recognizable facts about art history. It may be, then, that it is only true that *The Calling of St. Matthew* is more painterly than linear given subsequent artworld developments. Had the history of art gone another way – if, say, there was no Rembrandt – the claim might be false. But those developments actually happened as much as Caravaggio's mental events at the time of the painting's creation actually happened. Thus the simple theory achieves both extensional adequacy in that it accounts for standard artworld practices and intensional adequacy as any artistic property *could* be but no artistic property *must* be stylistic.

What I owe at this point is an account of how a painting could gain or lose style properties when those properties are determined by material properties of the painting that don't change. The details of such an account of style change would take us too far afield (For more on the topic see Danto, 1964; Carroll, 1995; Bacharach, 2005; and Levinson, 2011). I hope it will suffice for now to suggest that being in a particular style may be thought of as a second-order property – a property of material properties of painting. Were it not for later developments in Northern Europe, Caravaggio's subtle dissociation of linear and figurative boundaries might never have been “painterly” per se. That is to say that certain material properties of the painting may not ever have become stylistic, not that they might have been materially different from what they are.

Finally, the simple theory is both useful and (as it had better be) simple by virtue of the continuity it allows between individual and general style. The same sort of material properties of individual paintings (or among an artist's oeuvre) that determine those styles also determine their inclusion in or exclusion from general style categories. With such an account, we are able to tell and analyze both broad and narrow art-historical narratives and make sense of the mutually effective relationship between those narratives and artistic creativity. We are also able to vindicate our standard critical practices of contextualizing the properties of individual paintings within larger narratives and characterizing those larger narratives via features of individual paintings. Just as importantly, we can do all of this without positing any new entities or unrecognizable senses of everyday terms.

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16

PICTORIAL ORGANIZATION

Bence Nanay

1 Introduction: What Is Pictorial Organization?

Suppose you are trying to take a photograph of an apple and a pear. You put them on the table, directly next to each other. This will be the photographed scene. You still have a lot of decisions to make (and I'll ignore decisions about filters or exposure time). If you take the photo from far away, the fruits will hardly be visible. If you come really close, they will take up the entire photo. If you shoot from the side, the pear will completely or almost completely occlude the apple. If you shoot head-on, both will be fully visible. And depending on how you direct your camera, the fruits may end up at the middle of the photo or in the top right corner.

All these decisions are decisions about pictorial organization. Even if the depicted scene is fixed, the picture can come out very differently depending on the pictorial organization. Some of these will be ugly, others less ugly. In the first approximation, the problem of arranging a three-dimensional scene on a two-dimensional surface is the problem of pictorial organization.

I said that this is the problem of pictorial organization in the first approximation, because things are a bit more complicated. Painters and even photographers often arrange the depicted scene in such a way that it would provide a better pictorial organization. So the depicted scene is often not fixed at all and the painter/photographer does not look for the best pictorial organization to capture this fixed scene with, but the depicted scene is arranged in a way that would make for the best pictorial organization. Further, we can and do talk about pictorial organization in the case of abstract pictures, where there is no depicted scene to capture – in this case, the two-dimensional pictorial elements are organized.

Much of the aesthetic merit of a picture comes from its pictorial organization. And according to some extreme formalist views, all aesthetic merit of a picture does. As a result, one would think that this is a key theme of philosophical aesthetics and philosophy or art. But it is not (see Wollheim 2002, Gaiger 2002, Nanay 2015 for some exceptions). Much more has been written on pictorial organization in art history, film studies, and empirical aesthetics. I will discuss accounts from all these traditions below.

Before I get started, I should acknowledge that the chapter has a bit of a Western or Eurocentric bias. This is not because the question of pictorial organization is a Western or Eurocentric topic. In fact, pictorial organization is aesthetically significant in all cultures. One of the key concepts of Yoruba aesthetics (the aesthetic tradition of the people of Southwest Nigeria) is that of ‘ifarahan’, which is often translated as visibility – as the requirement that all parts of the person are clearly formed and visible. While this concept initially applied to sculptures, it has also become the most

important virtue photographers should aim for (where it would, for example, imply that the both of the sitter's eyes should be visible, see Sprague 1978). Further, in the most detailed early work of Chinese aesthetics of painting, the 6th-century Chinese painter and critic Xie He outlined the six laws of painting. The fifth one is about placing and arranging on the surface the pictorial elements in space and depth (which became a central topic in all Chinese treatises on paintings from then on, see Saussy 1993). The third Khanda of *Vishnudharmottara Purana*, the extremely detailed encyclopedic Hindu text on painting, written about the same time, is also full of references to pictorial organization – who should be behind or next to or in front of whom (Kramrisch 1928). And pictorial organization has been a central topic of Japanese aesthetics as well. Given the scope of the present volume, I leave these traditions aside in this chapter, but I deal with the issues of pictorial organization in the non-European tradition at great length in Nanay forthcoming.

2 Scene-first Pictorial Organization vs. Surface-first Pictorial Organization

On a very abstract level, there are two different and distinctive modes of pictorial organization, which I call 'surface-first organization' and 'scene-first organization' (Nanay 2015).¹

Surface-first pictorial organization: pictorial elements are organized and grouped according to their outline shape on the picture surface, and

Scene-first pictorial organization: pictorial elements are organized and grouped according to their position in the depicted space.

Suppose you need to depict seven identical spheres. On the most general level, there are two ways of doing this: you can arrange the seven spheres in space and then choose a vantage point in this space from which you want to depict them. Or you can arrange seven circles (the outline shapes of the seven spheres) on the two-dimensional surface of the picture. The former method is an instance of scene-first pictorial organization, whereas the latter one is an instance of surface-first pictorial organization.

One can completely ignore the surface-first pictorial organization of the picture and focus entirely on the scene-first organization – this is the way most of us take snapshots at parties. Or one can ignore the scene-first pictorial organization and focus entirely on the surface-first organization – children's drawings often have this kind of pictorial organization.

But most often one pays attention to both – in fact, when taking a snapshot at a party, we often try to fit everyone into the frame and we also often try not to have someone's face completely occluded by someone else's hair – in short, we pay attention to the surface organization. What makes the distinction between surface-first and scene-first pictorial organization especially interesting is that even in those cases where both of these ways of composing a picture are taken into consideration, as it is most often the case, one tends to dominate – in case there is a conflict between the surface-first and scene-first pictorial organization, one of them tends to win out systematically (see also Nanay 2018, 2022).

The distinction between scene-first organization and surface-first organization is not a distinction about how pictures are made. It is about what the spectator is supposed to attend to (Nanay 2016, 2019). Some pictures are organized in a way that they evoke attention to their surface organization. Some other pictures demand attention to their scene-first organization.

It is important that both surface-first pictorial organization and scene-first pictorial organization are about arranging a three-dimensional scene on a two-dimensional surface. The difference between them concerns how the three-dimensional elements are organized to give us a two-dimensional composition. So the distinction has nothing to do with the invention of linear perspective. A picture can use linear perspective and still have surface pictorial organization – in fact, this is true for most late 15th-century Italian paintings.²

Whether surface-first or scene-first pictorial organization was dominant clearly changed in the course of the history of painting. And one can give a (by necessity, oversimplified) narrative about how the way surface-first and scene-first pictorial organization was traded off characterized various art historical periods. Importantly, most accounts of pictorial organization throughout history have focused on one or another of these two different ways of understanding pictorial organization. In Section 3, I give a (non-exhaustive) overview of accounts of scene-first pictorial organization and in Section 4, I do the same for surface-first pictorial organization. I then turn to accounts that combine these two ways of understanding pictorial organization in Section 5.

3 Scene-first Pictorial Organization

The first systematic discussion of pictorial organization in (European in European art history art history is in Alberti's *De Pictura* (1435). This is also where the widely used term for pictorial organization, namely, the concept of composition originates. Alberti's work contains a lengthy analysis of *compositio*: what we would now call pictorial organization (see Greenstein 1997). The *compositio* of pictures, according to Alberti, consists of organizing planes to members, members to bodies, and bodies to pictures (or to *historia*). This organization of elements into higher units has their rules: for example, according to Alberti, at most nine elements should be organized into the higher unit and there should be a certain degree of variety between the elements. Michael Baxandall compared Alberti's concept of pictorial *compositio* to the humanist concept of *compositio* in rhetoric (that Alberti, like any educated quattrocento Italian, would have been very much aware of): organizing words into phrases, phrases into clauses, and clauses into sentences (Baxandall 1971).

What counts as *compositio* in Alberti's sense is a matter of the depicted scene (see Section 4 for some caveats). The basic unit of pictorial *compositio* is the surface of depicted objects (not the surface of the painting). Not the pigment, that is, the mark on the surface, but rather something that is depicted. Thus, the equivalent of words, which serves as the basic units of rhetorical *compositio*, is, in the case of pictorial *compositio*, part of the depicted scene. For Alberti, in other words, pictorial *compositio* is in the domain of what is depicted – the picture surface seems to play no essential role in pictorial *compositio*.

An influential concept of 17th-century French art writing was the concept of 'mode'. It was the painter Nicolas Poussin who introduced the term in a letter dated November 24, 1647 (Poussin 1911, pp. 373–374). The 'mode' of depiction covers the variety of the elements of the composition, the differences between them as well as proportion between these elements. Poussin took this concept from music theory, more precisely from Chapter 1 of Part III of Giuseppe Zarlino's *Istitutioni Harmoniche* (1553) (see Alfassa 1933). In spite of the musical origins, which might appear to suggest otherwise, as Puttfarken 1985 (pp. 30–34) argues, the 'mode' of a composition is a matter of scene-first pictorial organization, that is, the organization of three-dimensional elements that are to be depicted (and not of two-dimensional elements) on the picture surface (see also Freedberg 2006).

In spite of the prestigious origins of this way of thinking about pictorial organization, that is, as the arrangement of three-dimensional elements in three-dimensional space in order to depict them, one may wonder whether focusing on this scene-first pictorial organization really addresses the original question about pictorial organization. After all, scene-first pictorial organization, as the two historical examples make it clear, is not specific to pictures. In a theatre performance, for example, the director also needs to organize three-dimensional elements in three-dimensional space. And some aspects of pictorial organization are lost if all we mean by pictorial organization is scene-first pictorial organization.

I mentioned the theatre analogy because the most vivid and extremely influential way of distinguishing two different forms of pictorial organization also takes theatre as its departure point. Sergei Eisenstein appropriates the theatrical term 'mise-en-scene' to describe something very

much like scene-first pictorial organization in the case of film images and contrasts it with ‘mise-en-cadre’, which would be the equivalent of surface-first pictorial organization. As he says, “The ‘Mise-en-scene’ is an interrelation of people in action, ‘mise-en-cadre’ is the pictorial composition of shots” (Eisenstein 1934/1957, pp. 15–16). By a ‘shot’ Eisenstein means “a single piece of celluloid. A tiny rectangular frame in which there is, organized in some way, a piece of event” (Eisenstein 1934/1957, p. 36).

Eisenstein’s thought is that even if one fixes the mise-en-scene, there are still a lot of decisions one needs to make when it comes to the mise-en-cadre. And, to go back to the original considerations about the importance of pictorial organization, even if we keep the mise-en-scene fixed and vary the mise-en-cadre, some of the resulting images will be ugly, whereas some others will be beautiful. If we want to understand pictorial organization, we need to understand mise-en-cadre. That is to say, we need to supplement the analysis of scene-first pictorial organization with an analysis of surface-first pictorial organization.

4 Surface-first Pictorial Organization

While Alberti’s concept of *compositio* is clearly an example of scene-first pictorial organization, he did sometimes make some comments that could be taken to refer to surface-first pictorial organization. For example, he says that “I blame those painters who, where they wish to appear copious, leave nothing vacant. It is not composition but dissolute confusion which they disseminate” (Alberti 1435/1956, Book Two, pp. 75–76). In short, already in Alberti, we can find indications of the two central ways of thinking about pictorial organization: how to arrange the elements in the scene that is to be depicted and how to arrange them on the canvas. Not leaving any part of the picture vacant is a matter of the latter way of understanding pictorial organization. The humanist rhetoric-inspired organization of the depicted elements is a matter of the former way of understanding pictorial organization.

To jump forward two centuries, one of the most important concepts in 17th-century Dutch art writing was the concept of ‘houding’ (see Taylor 1992). Willem Goeree writes in 1668 that ‘houding’ means “placing each thing, without confusion, separate and well apart from the objects which are next to and around it” (*Inleyding tot d’Algemeene Teykenkonst*, p. 129) – this sounds very much like a matter of organizing pictorial elements on the canvas (see also the contemporary Roger de Piles’ oeuvre for a similar approach, see Puttfarken 1985, see also Stumpel 1988, Taylor and Quiviger 2000 for the wider historical background of 17th-century theorizing about pictorial organization).

In the 20th century, we find more and more discussion of surface-first pictorial organization, no doubt because of the prominence of abstract painting, where scene-first pictorial organization is not applicable.

Many artists in the first half of the 20th century thought of the most important aspect of pictorial organization as some form of a balance between two-dimensional pictorial elements. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy talks about the “most delicate distribution of rays to the point of a perfect balance between the values of very small and very great tensions” (Moholy-Nagy 1928, note 2). He uses the following evocative example: “A small quantity of white is capable of keeping in balance by its activity large areas of the deepest black” (Moholy-Nagy 1928, appendix). Or as Robert Adams wrote, composition is “tension so exact that it is peace” (Adams 1977/2009, p. 8). The origin of these approaches is likely to be Paul Klee’s extremely influential *Pedagogisches Skitzenbuch* (Klee 1925), which aims to teach the basic principles of modernist composition in very simple terms (and mainly appealing to the balance between abstract shapes on the canvas).

Much of the emphasis on surface-first pictorial organization in the 20th century comes, maybe surprisingly, from film studies, or, more broadly, from thinking about cinema. This may

be surprising as on the face of it cinema is all about scene organization: you need to arrange the (three-dimensional) actors in front of the camera. Nonetheless, the history of cinema is rife with claims about the importance of surface-first pictorial organization (see Ward 2003). Boris Kaufman, Dziga Vertov's brother, who was the director of photography of many classic Hollywood movies as well as all of Jean Vigo's films, talked about 'the space within the frame' and the way that is used in the composition (his view was that this space within the frame should be used in its entirety, see de Laurot and Mekas 1995, p. 5). And the most important advice the French film director Robert Bresson gave to directors and cinematographers was to "treat your film image as a surface to cover" (Bresson 1975/1977, p. 13).

And it is not just the film makers who emphasize the importance of surface-first pictorial organization. Film theorists are equally vocal about this. The key concept of Noel Burch's analysis of composition is the frame and the way pictorial elements are organized inside, outside, or around the frame (Burch 1973). And Andras Balint Kovacs, in his study of cinematic modernism, appeals to the distinction between continuous and discontinuous visual texture (where continuous texture means large homogenous expanses and discontinuous texture means the lack thereof), which is entirely a feature of the way two-dimensional elements are organized on the surface (Kovacs 2007, p. 125).

Another field of research where surface-first pictorial organization has been studied systematically is in empirical aesthetics. This tradition goes back to the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, to the dawn of empirical psychology (see, e.g., Pierce 1894), but the most vocal proponent was Rudolf Arnheim, who was interested in the psychological effect of different kinds of compositions (Arnheim 1954, 1983, see also McManus et al. 2011). After decades of moderately successful experimental designs, this research program has matured considerably in the last couple of decades.

One old and venerable topic under this heading is the golden section. This blatantly surface-first pictorial organizational feature has been widely discussed for several centuries and it has been argued that putting key pictorial elements in the golden section adds to the aesthetic merits of the picture. The current consensus is that claims about the importance of this specific surface-first organizational feature may have been vastly exaggerated (see Green 1995 and McManus and Weatherby 1997 for summaries).

Another important phenomenon that has been widely studied empirically is how balanced the picture is. As we have seen, balance has been a major topic in the first half of the 20th century among visual artists, but also among art theorists (like Arnheim). As a result of the growing unpopularity of both Gestalt theory and pictorial formalism, the concept of balance has not received much attention in the next couple of decades, until recent development of empirical methodologies for assessing the psychological impact of balanced compositions (Gershoni and Hochstein 2011, McManus et al. 1985, Wilson and Chatterjee 2005, but see also Leyssen et al. 2012 for a skeptical take).

Much of the empirical aesthetics studies of pictorial organization are conducted on very simple compositions, often consisting of one or two simple shapes against a blank background (Palmer et al. 2008, 2012, 2013, Shimamura and Palmer 2012, Sammartino et al. 2012). This not only makes the empirical comparison of compositions that differ in one single dimension easier, but it also raises problems about the applicability of this research program to the kind of complex compositions we encounter in a museum or in the cinema.

But recent empirical studies aim to bridge this gap. One way of doing so is to compare complex but formally similar pictorial features, like views of Mount Fuji from a distance (and examine how placing this pictorial feature at different parts of the canvas influences aesthetic appreciation (see, e.g., Bruno forthcoming). Another way is to examine how the placement of simple but salient pictorial features (like eyes in portraiture) influences aesthetic appreciation (see Tyler 1998, McManus and Thomas 2007, Bruno et al. 2019).

An especially promising branch of empirical aesthetics addresses the cross-cultural variations in the aesthetic evaluation of surface-first pictorial organization. Observers in Japan, for example, are more appreciative of large unfilled expanses of the picture surface than Western observers (Carbon and Fingerhut 2017) – again, very much a difference in surface-first pictorial organization.

5 Combining Scene-first Pictorial Organization and Surface-first Pictorial Organization

I have examined theories of (or considerations about) scene-first pictorial organization and surface-first pictorial organization separately in the last two sections. But the most important accounts of pictorial organization talk about the relation between these two forms of pictorial organization.

Scene-first pictorial organization and surface-first pictorial organization are brought together by the late 19th- and early 20th-century formalist tradition, especially by Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin. I will focus on Wölfflin here (but see Riegl 1901/1985). Wölfflin famously gave us five pairs of concepts, which he called the fundamental concepts of art history, to make it easier to talk about pictorial organization: Linear vs. Painterly, Plane vs. Recession, Closed vs. Open form, Multiplicity vs. Unity, and Absolute vs. Relative clarity. Here is a brief characterization of these pairs of concepts:³

- a Linear vs. Painterly:
 - Linear*: “the sense and beauty of things is first sought in the outline” (Wölfflin 1915/1950, p. 18)
 - Painterly*: “the primary element of the impression is things seen as patches” (Wölfflin 1915/1950, p. 18)
- b Planimetric vs. Recessive:
 - Planimetric* “reduces the parts of a total form to a sequence of planes” (Wölfflin 1915/1950, p. 15)
 - Recessive* “emphasises depth” (Wölfflin 1915/1950, p. 15)
- c Tectonic vs. A-tectonic (or, closed vs. open form):
 - Tectonic*: “the picture is dominated in all its parts by the opposition of vertical and horizontal” (Wölfflin 1915/1950, p. 126) and “pictorial elements are grouped round a central axis or, if this does not exist, so as to produce a perfect balance of the two halves of the picture” (Wölfflin 1915/1950, p. 125)
 - A-tectonic*: “aversion from stabilisation about a middle axis” (Wölfflin 1915/1950, p. 125)
- d Multiplicity vs. Unity:
 - Multiplicity*: “the single parts, however firmly they may be rooted in the whole, maintain certain independence” (Wölfflin 1915/1950, p. 15)
 - Unity*: “abolishes the uniform independence of the parts in favour of a more unified total motive” (Wölfflin 1915/1950, p. 159)
- e Absolute vs. Relative clarity (or, clearness vs. unclarity):
 - Absolute clarity*: “exhaustive revelation of form” (Wölfflin 1915/1950, p. 196)
 - Relative clarity*: “pictorial appearance no longer coincides with the maximum of objective clearness, but evades it” (Wölfflin 1915/1950, p. 196)

The reason why I introduced these categories in great detail is to show that each of these pairs of “fundamental concepts” could be thought of as special forms or maybe case studies of the surface-first pictorial organization vs. scene-first pictorial organization distinction (see Nanay 2015 for a detailed argument for this claim). Surface-first pictorial organization, for example, tends to be linear, whereas scene-first organization tends to be painterly.

Here is a quick example. In the discussion of the last pair of concepts, of Absolute and Relative clarity, Wölfflin says that “life does not arrange its scenes in such a way that we can see everything and that the content of what is happening determines the grouping” (Wölfflin 1915/1950, p. 208). The implication is that pictures that are composed in a way that maximize absolute clarity do arrange their scenes in such a way that we can see everything. Wölfflin’s memorable example is the depiction of hands: in Leonardo’s *Last Supper*, 26 out of the 26 hands of the 13 depicted characters are visible. In the *Staalmeesters* by Rembrandt, in contrast only 5 out of the 12 hands of the 6 depicted characters are visible. But showing all the hands of all the depicted characters is something that only makes sense if we follow surface pictorial organization: to make sure that all 26 hands fit into the frame and are not occluded by something else. Absolute clarity is an aspect of surface-first pictorial organization, whereas relative clarity is an aspect of scene-first pictorial organization.

In other words, rather than focusing only on scene organization or only on surface organization, Wölfflin brings together the analysis of how the depicted three-dimensional elements are organized in space and how the two-dimensional pictorial elements are organized on the picture surface. Different painters (or image-makers in general, see David Bordwell’s way of extending Wölfflin’s analysis to the film image, Bordwell 2015) in different times (and in different parts of the world) used different ways of composing pictures. Some paid more attention to the surface. Others paid more attention to the scene.

Every picture, regardless of where and when it was made, falls somewhere on the spectrum between surface-first organization and scene-first organization. There is a trade-off between the two and most pictures are trying to combine them. But one – either scene-first or surface-first organization – tends to win out when the two organizational principles are in conflict.

But we don’t need to go along with Wölfflin’s category pairs to substantiate the claim that there is a trade-off between scene-first organization and surface-first organization. There are some much simpler features of pictures that are indicative of this (and ones that are easier to spot). I will give two simple examples.

First, in everyday perception, we get a lot of occlusion: we see some objects behind or in front of other objects. The question is whether occlusion shows up in pictures. Surface organization implies that the picture maker pays attention to whether there is occlusion or not: occlusion in a picture is a feature of how two-dimensional outline shapes of the depicted objects are related to each other on the two-dimensional surface. Some pictures go out of their way to avoid occlusion. Some others pile on occlusions. Both are good indications of surface organization. And we can place all pictures on a spectrum between extreme lack of occlusion and extreme seeking out of occlusion.

Pictures from some cultures will cluster around specific points of this occlusion spectrum. This means that the image-makers care a great deal about the presence or absence of occlusions in pictures. As a result, both of these types of pictures would count as having surface-first pictorial organization. Pictures of some other cultures, in contrast, are not particularly bothered by the presence or lack of occlusion – this is an indication of scene-first organization: if a picture is organized in terms of the three-dimensional scene it depicts, then neither occlusion nor the lack of occlusion will be particularly important.

Second, in everyday perception, some of our visual field is often empty in the sense that there are no perceptually interesting elements there – only the sky, the ground, and an empty wall. Some pictures deliberately try to avoid empty surface: they try to put pictorially interesting elements on every square inch of the surface. Others deliberately seek out empty surfaces.

Again, paying attention to whether some part of the surface is empty or not is very much an indicator of surface-first pictorial organization. Scene-first organization is neutral about whether some parts of the surface remain unfilled. As in the case of occlusion, pictures with surface-first organization will cluster around some specific points of the empty surface spectrum (pictures from

different cultures around different points). Pictures with scene-first organization, in contrast, are scattered around much of this spectrum.

This way of extending the broadly Wölfflinian way of thinking about pictorial organization would give us a coordinate system: occlusion and empty surface would be two of the axes. But we can add other features like whether the picture respects the frame or whether it pays attention to symmetry.

In this section, I talked about the trade-off between surface-first pictorial organization and scene-first pictorial organization and how in order to understand pictorial organization per se; we need to take both into consideration. A final reason for doing so comes from examples where surface-first pictorial organization and scene-first pictorial organization don't work against each other, but rather go hand in hand. I want to conclude with an analysis by Richard Wollheim, who has done more to draw attention to the importance of pictorial organization in recent philosophy than anyone else. In Raphael's *The Expulsion of Heliodorus*, the fall of Heliodorus on the right is counterbalanced by the boys climbing up a column on the left. And to make things even more complex, it is this interaction between the upward movement on the left and the downward movement on the right that draws our attention to the middle of the composition, to the praying High Priest in the background (Wollheim 2002, p. 10). This is a beautiful example of how some pictures are composed in a way that both surface-first pictorial organization and scene-first pictorial organization play a crucial role.⁴

Notes

- 1 In Nanay 2015, I called these two-dimensional and three-dimensional pictorial organization, respectively. I now think these labels may have been more confusing than helpful.
- 2 What I call scene-first pictorial organization should not be confused with Berenson's concept of 'space composition' either. Berenson defines space composition as the "sense of space not as a void, as something merely negative, such as we customarily have, but on the contrary, as something very positive and definitely able to confirm our consciousness of being, to heighten our feeling of vitality" (Berenson 1897/1968), p. 88) and goes on to argue that it is intimately tied to religious experience (*ibid.*, pp. 89–90) – a somewhat surprising claim... A closer approximation for pure (or close to pure) surface pictorial organization is the way Alois Riegel described – rightly or wrongly – the pictorial organization of ancient art, see Riegel 1901/1985, esp. p. 24.
- 3 Wölfflin applied these categories in the case of paintings, sculptures, and architecture. Given the present topic, I will only consider these categories as applied to pictures.
- 4 The work on this chapter was supported by the ERC Consolidator grant [726251], the FWF-FWO grant [G0E0218N], the FNS-FWO grant [G025222N] and the FWO research grant [G0C7416N].

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17

REALISM

Catharine Abell

1 Introduction

There is a range of possible answers to the question of what it is for a painting or a sculpture to be realistic, because there are different notions of realism. One notion holds that the realism of a painting or a sculpture is a measure of how entrenched the system of representation it employs is (Goodman 1976). Another holds that a painting or sculpture is realistic if it tends to provoke in its viewers the illusion of seeing the scene it represents (Gombrich 1977).

I have no objection to construing either as a form of realism or to the claim that paintings and sculptures can exhibit both. However, my concern here is with a different notion of realism in painting and sculpture, one that measures detail and accuracy in the depictive or sculptural representation of appearances. This notion is much closer to that which art critics and art historians employ when they praise the realism of Vermeer's and Caravaggio's paintings and of Bernini's sculptures. These artists achieved significant advances in realism by developing new ways of representing things, rather than employing entrenched methods of representation. Moreover, their works are not apt to produce the illusion of seeing the things they represent. What makes them exceptionally realistic seems instead to be that they capture their objects' appearances very accurately and in great detail.

Several philosophers have developed accounts that fit with such a notion of realism (Abell 2007, Hyman 2004, Kulwicki 2006, Lopes 1995, Newall 2011, Schier 1986). My aim here is not to adjudicate between these different accounts. Instead, I will begin by offering a broad, general characterisation of the notion of realism at issue, one that I hope advocates of different accounts will be able to endorse. Having done this, I will identify two problems for this broad characterisation that arise as a consequence of the fact that painted and sculptural representations of things that do not exist can be realistic in the sense at issue here. I will then determine how we need to modify our broad characterisation of this notion of realism in order to accommodate such representations.

2 Realism as Detail and Accuracy in the Perceptual Representation of Appearances

Paintings and sculptures can represent their objects more or less realistically. However, they can employ various forms of representation, not all of which are relevant to determining their realism. Bernini's unfinished sculpture *Truth Unveiled by Time* represents truth allegorically, as a naked woman. It perceptually represents a naked woman and, in virtue of doing so, allegorically

represents truth. The sculpture's realism is determined solely by the way in which it perceptually represents the naked woman. More generally, the realism of a painting or a sculpture is determined exclusively by the way in which it perceptually represents or depicts its object. Although it might employ further, symbolic or allegorical forms of representation, these are irrelevant to its realism.

Depiction is a determinate of the determinable *perceptual representation*. It is the specific form of perceptual representation exhibited by pictures, which involves the representation in two dimensions of three-dimensional things. By contrast, sculpture employs a form of perceptual representation in which three-dimensional space is represented three dimensionally. These different forms of representation are perceptual because they enable the representation only of perceptible features of their objects. Things like time cannot be perceptually represented because they are not perceptible. So long as we have a pre-theoretical grip on the notion of perceptual representation and on how it differs from symbolic or allegorical representation, we need not enquire further into its nature in order to characterise realism in terms of it.

At a first pass, the realism of a painting or a sculpture, or indeed of any perceptual representation, is a matter of how well it captures its object's perceptible appearance within the limitations that its medium imposes on what it can represent perceptually. Films and photographs can be realistic in the sense at issue. The fact that the medium of film enables the perceptual representation of auditory as well as visual appearances means that films can be realistic in virtue of capturing their objects' auditory as well as their visual appearances.

Because objects' perceptual appearances play a causal role in the production of films and photographs of them, film and photography may seem to be paradigmatically realistic media, with few limits on which aspects of an object's appearance they can represent perceptually. However, there are aspects of objects' visual appearances that paintings and sculptures can perceptually represent that films and photographs cannot, or cannot perceptually represent in the same way. For example, the media of film and photography impede the simultaneous representation of aspects of perceptual appearances that do not occur simultaneously. Film can represent non-simultaneous aspects of its objects' visual appearances, but it has difficulty doing so simultaneously. Although time-lapse photography can simultaneously perceptually represent non-simultaneous aspects of objects' visual appearances, it does so at the expense of the detail with which it represents those aspects of objects' visual appearances. By contrast, painting and sculpture can simultaneously perceptually represent, in detail, aspects of objects' visual appearances that they do not exhibit simultaneously. This affects their realism. For example, both a portrait painting and a sculpture can be strikingly realistic in virtue of simultaneously perceptually representing different facial and bodily expressions all of which are characteristic of its subject, although not simultaneously exhibited.

Painting and sculpture differ in which aspects of objects' visual appearances they can perceptually represent. Sculptures can perceptually represent objects' visual appearances independently of any particular perceptual point of view on those objects. By contrast, paintings can only capture the visual appearances their objects present from a particular perceptual point (or points) of view. Nevertheless, there are aspects of the appearances of their objects that paintings can capture but sculptures cannot. For example, paintings can depict the appearances their objects exhibit under specific conditions of illumination, while sculptures are generally unable to do so, because they typically lack the means of perceptually representing conditions of illumination.

There is a range of interesting further questions concerning which aspects of objects' visual appearances can be perceptually represented in painting and in sculpture and thus about the respects in which paintings and sculptures can be realistic. For example, are painting and sculpture, as static media, restricted to the perceptual representation of static appearances, or does the fact that they can simultaneously perceptually represent aspects of appearance that their objects exhibit non-simultaneously mean that they can perceptually represent the visual appearances of

objects in motion? Depending on how we answer this question, we may want to claim that Bernini's *Apollo and Daphne* realistically portrays Daphne fleeing from Apollo, or transmogrifying into a tree, rather than merely realistically portraying Daphne at a particular moment of flight or transmogrification.

How well a painting or sculpture captures its object's visual appearance depends on both the detail with which it perceptually represents that object's appearance and on the accuracy with which it does so. These two dimensions, detail and accuracy, do not operate independently of one another to determine realism. A painting or sculpture that is inaccurate is not realistic, no matter with how much detail it inaccurately perceptually represents its object. Similarly, a painting or sculpture that accurately perceptually represents its object will not be realistic if it does not perceptually represent that object in sufficient detail. For example, a child's stick figure finger painting of her mother may accurately represent her mother as possessing two legs and two arms but, because it perceptually represents few further features of her mother's appearance, it is not realistic.

Various questions remain about the respective roles of detail and accuracy in determining realism. One concern is how we are to cash out the notion of detail. Does the detail of a painting or sculpture depend on the number of features it perceptually represents its object as possessing (Schier 1986), or on its how informative it is about its object (Lopes 1995)? If the latter, how should we understand the notion of informativeness?

Another concern arises because detail and accuracy with respect to some features of an object seem more important to determining realism than detail and accuracy with respect to others. For example, portrait paintings often perceptually represent their subjects' hands and faces in much greater detail than they do their clothing, but this disparity in the detail with which the different aspects of subjects' appearances are perceptually represented does not seem to detract from the portraits' realism as it would do if subjects' clothing were represented in much greater detail than their faces and hands. Similarly, inaccuracies in the perceptual representation of a subject's dress would not usually detract from a portrait's realism to the same degree as inaccuracies in the perceptual representation of her face.

This raises the question of which features of an object a painting or sculpture must perceptually represent accurately and in detail in order to be realistic. Some accounts of realism take the variability of the contribution that detail and accuracy in the perceptual representation of different features of an object make to realism to be evidence of its interest-relativity. For example, Lopes argues that realism is relative to the purposes for which pictures are used in different contexts (Lopes 1995: 283). Elsewhere, I have defended a more restricted interest-relative construal and argued that how realistic a perceptual representation of an object is depends on how much it can teach one about the appearance of that object, where this depends on one's existing beliefs (Abell 2007).

An adequate account of realism should provide answers to questions such as these and, by doing so, should illuminate the role of both detail and accuracy in perceptual representation in determining realism. For present purposes, however, I will set these questions aside. In what follows, I want to focus instead on an important challenge to the claim that the notion of realism with which I am concerned can be characterised partly in terms of accuracy. My discussion so far has suggested that, although it is not sufficient, the accurate perceptual representation of visual appearances is necessary for realism. The fact that paintings and sculptures of both mythical and purely fictional objects can be realistic in the sense at issue here threatens to undermine this claim. Things that do not exist do not have visual appearances that can be perceptually represented accurately or inaccurately. How, then, can *Apollo and Daphne* be realistic given that neither Apollo nor Daphne ever existed to provide a standard against which the accuracy of Bernini's representation can be determined? Although several attempts have been made to resolve this problem, I will argue that no adequate solution to it has yet been provided. Examining how it ought to be solved will yield a better understanding of the role of accuracy in determining realism.

3 Realistic Representations of Non-Existent Particulars

Many paintings and sculptures perceptually represent fictional or mythical entities. A statue of the fictional character Sherlock Holmes by the sculptor John Doubleday stands at the site of 221B Baker Street in London where, according to Conan Doyle's novels, the detective lived. The statue is stylised rather than realistic, but a realistic statue of Sherlock Holmes could have been produced in its stead. However, there is no detective Sherlock Holmes. Even if someone did exist who had all the properties Conan Doyle attributed to Sherlock Holmes in his novels about that character, that person would not be Sherlock Holmes because Conan Doyle was not referring to that person when he wrote his novels (Kripke 2013: 26–27). Fictional people are necessarily non-existent.

To accommodate realism in the representation of fictional characters, we must distinguish between realism *qua representation of a particular* and realism *qua representation of an object of some type*. Paintings and sculptures can be realistic in the first of these ways only if they represent particular, existent people and things. Paintings and sculptures that perceptually represent particular fictional or mythical entities or that perceptually represent an object of some type but not a particular object of that type cannot be realistic *qua* representations of particulars. A sculpture of Sherlock Holmes can be realistic, although there is no such person as Sherlock Holmes, because it can perceptually represent the appearance of a man in an Inverness cape and a deerstalker smoking a pipe accurately and in detail and, according to Conan Doyle's novels, Sherlock Holmes is such a man.

Paintings and sculptures of actual people can be realistic *qua* representations of a person of a particular type even if they are not realistic *qua* representations of the particular people at issue. For example, many of Velasquez's portraits of Felipe IV of Spain depict him as being better looking than he in fact was. They are therefore not particularly realistic *qua* portraits of Felipe IV, although they are realistic *qua* paintings of a dashing blond young king.

4 Realistic Representations of Entities of Fantastical Types

The distinction between realism *qua* representation of a particular and realism *qua* representation of an object of some type provides only a partial solution to the problem of how it is possible realistically to represent non-existent entities. This is because it is possible realistically to represent fantastical entities of types of which there are no actual instantiations. It is impossible accurately perceptually to represent the visual appearances of objects of such types, because there are no objects of that type whose appearances can be captured more or less accurately. In such cases, therefore, distinguishing between the representation of particulars and the representation of objects that are merely of a certain type provides no purchase on the problem. Whereas the type *man in an Inverness cape and a deerstalker smoking a pipe* has, in all likelihood, been instantiated, the type *satyr* has not.

One might attempt to accommodate the fact that paintings and sculptures of satyrs can exhibit differing degrees of realism by construing realism as measuring how accurately perceptual representations capture our *conceptions* of the visual appearances of things (Kulwicki 2006). On such an approach, because we have a conception of how satyrs look, we can have realistic paintings and sculptures of them. This approach has the advantage of providing a uniform explanation of how paintings and sculptures of both Sherlock Holmes and satyrs can be realistic which obviates the need to distinguish realism *qua* representation of particulars from realism *qua* representations of objects of a type. It holds that, because we can have conceptions of the visual appearances of both non-existent particulars and objects of non-existent types, each can be represented realistically. However, as a general account of realism, it is implausible. This is because, when the things of whose visual appearances we have conceptions exist, our conceptions of their appearances can differ from the appearances they actually have. For example, many of us conceive of human heads as having eyes located above the ears, whereas in fact both are located at roughly the same height.

Even if one wrongly conceives of human heads as having such an appearance, a painting or sculpture in which the eyes are located above the ears will strike one as odd and unrealistic, whereas one in which they are located at the same height will strike one as comparatively realistic in virtue of this fact. The visual appearances things actually have, not those we conceive of them as having, determine the realism of perceptual representations of them.

Furthermore, paintings and sculptures of fantastical objects can exhibit varying degrees of realism even when we lack any independent conception of the fantastical objects at issue. Odilon Redon's painting *The Monster* depicts a monstrous creature of whose visual appearance Redon's painting provides the sole specification. Our only conception of the monster is provided by Redon's painting and therefore cannot serve as an independent standard against which we can measure the realism of Redon's depiction of it. Nevertheless, Redon's painting exhibits a certain degree of realism, and this degree is less than that of some other paintings. This is impossible to explain on a view according to which realism is a measure of the extent to which perceptual representations accurately reflect our conceptions of their objects' visual appearances since, by such a standard, all paintings and sculptures that are themselves the sole source of our conceptions of their objects' visual appearances should be maximally realistic.

One might attempt to accommodate the fact that paintings and sculptures of fantastical objects of which we have no independent conception can exhibit differing degrees of realism by construing realism as predominantly a property of styles or systems of perceptual representation, and only derivatively of individual such representations (Lopes 1995). On such an account, what makes a painting or sculpture realistic is that it belongs to a system that can be used to convey accurate information. Paintings and sculptures can be realistic even when they provide the only specifications of the nature of the fantastical things they represent, because they employ systems of perceptual representation that, when used to represent things that do exist, accurately capture the visual appearances of those things.

The problem with this suggestion is that it wrongly assumes that all paintings or sculptures that employ a given system of perceptual representation are equally realistic. This is not the case. Whether or not a painting or sculpture in a given system of representation is realistic depends on the nature of its object. For example, a system of depictive representation which involves painting the outlines of objects, as employed by Van Gogh in *The Bedroom*, can be used to produce moderately realistic paintings of solid objects, such as beds and chairs and tables, but cannot be used to produce realistic paintings of objects with indeterminate outlines, such as clouds or ghosts or gases. A painting or sculpture of a fantastical object cannot be realistic simply in virtue of the fact that it employs a system of representation that can be used to convey accurate information about the visual appearances of things, since there is no guarantee that the system at issue can be used to convey accurate information about the visual appearances of things of the type to which it belongs.

One cannot remedy this problem by construing the realism of a painting or sculpture of a fantastical object as a measure of the extent to which the system of representation it employs can be used to convey accurate information about the visual appearances of things of the type to which that object belongs, because how realistic the painting or sculpture is depends on precisely on how well it reflects the determinate type to which the fantastical object in question belongs. Consequently, absent an independent specification of its type, one cannot appeal to the type to which it belongs in specifying the determinants of the realism of representations of it, since this would presuppose an answer to the question of how realistic it is.

5 Realism in Narrative Representations

Let us leave the nature of realism in painting and sculpture aside temporarily, in order to reflect on the nature of realism in fiction films. They too can be realistic despite depicting objects of

fantastical types of which there are no actual instances. Seeing how the problem of realism in the perceptual representation of objects of fantastical types can be solved in the case of film will help us to see how it can be solved in the case of painting and sculpture.

Fiction films are perceptual representations, and also fiction narratives. It is often claimed that the content of a fiction narrative, its *fictive content*, is not wholly determined by what it represents explicitly. In the case of a film, this entails the claim that its fictive content is not wholly determined by what it represents perceptually. Kendall Walton argues that some fictive content is directly generated, while some is generated indirectly (Walton 1990: 142). Directly generated fictive content is determined directly by the features of a fiction narrative, independently of any other fictive content. Generally speaking, what a fiction film perceptually represents directly generates the fictive content that things are as it perceptually represents them as being. He argues that further fictive content is generated indirectly on the basis of this directly-generated fictive content by general principles of indirect generation. On one construal, such a principle holds that the fictive content of a fiction film is as much like reality as is compatible with its directly-generated fictive content. (Walton 1990). Consider a film that perceptually represents a man as wearing a gold band on the third finger of his left hand, and thereby directly generates the fictive content that the man wears a gold band on that finger. Such a film will indirectly generate the fictive content that the man is married, so long as, in reality, men of the type perceptually represented who wear gold bands on that finger do so because they are married.

What is important for present purposes is that, on such a construal, the fictive content of a fiction film is not wholly determined by what it represents perceptually. If Walton is correct that the fictive content of fiction films is determined partly by principles of indirect generation, one can appeal to the fictive content of a fiction film as a standard against which to assess the realism of what it represents perceptually. On this proposal, a fiction film is realistic to the extent that it perceptually represents its fictive content.

We can construe the realism of a fiction film in this way even when it perceptually represents objects of fantastical types of which there are no actual instances. For example, there are no extra terrestrials of the type perceptually represented by the film *ET*. Nevertheless, on the principle that the fictive content of *ET* is as much like reality as is compatible with what it perceptually represents, then *ET* will have certain kinds of features (for example, his skin will have some texture, and his eyes will be of some colour). The realism with which the film *ET* represents *ET* is determined by how many of these features the film *ET* perceptually represents *ET* as possessing.

This proposal is immune to the criticism I levelled against the proposal that the realism of a perceptual representation of some object is determined by the extent to which the system of representation it employs enables one to convey accurate information about objects of its type. The present proposal does not make illegitimate assumptions about the nature of the type of object a film perceptually represents, but takes this to be determined independently by the principles of indirect generation. Moreover, the proposal's plausibility does not depend on fictive content being indirectly generated in accordance with precisely the principle described above (for criticisms of the claim that fictive content is indirectly generated in accordance with such a principle, see Abell 2020). It requires only that: 1) there is *some* mechanism or set of mechanisms by which a film's fictive content is determined that is independent of what it represents perceptually; and 2) that the mechanism or mechanisms at issue determine the fictive content of perceptual representations of both existent objects and objects of fantastical types of which there are no actual instances.

If the proposal is correct, fiction films can exhibit two distinct forms of realism. A fiction film is *extra-narratively realistic* to the extent that the way it perceptually represents things as being reflects the way things are. *ET* is not extra-narratively realistic, because extra terrestrials of the type it represents do not exist. A fiction film is *intra-narratively realistic* to the extent that it perceptually represents the film's fictive content (See Abell forthcoming for more detailed discussion of each

form of realism). *ET* is reasonably intra-narratively realistic, because it perceptually represents *ET* as having many of the perceptible features that, according to the mechanisms governing the generation of fictive content, *ET* has.

6 Realism in Painting and Sculpture

Earlier, I characterised the realism of a painting or sculpture as a matter of how well it captures its object's perceptible appearance within the limitations that its medium imposes on what it can represent perceptually. We do not consider an unpainted marble portrait bust to be unrealistic because it is in grey marble, although the person it perceptually represents did not have marbled grey skin. The bust's medium prevents the sculptor from perceptually representing the colour of its subject's skin, so we ignore the difference between the colour of the bust and the colour of its subject's skin when assessing the realism with which the bust perceptually represents its subject. For the same reason, we do not consider a painting unrealistic because it is flat while its subject is three-dimensional.

The limitations imposed by their media mean that paintings and sculptures can never provide completely determinate perceptual representations of their objects. There are additional reasons why paintings and sculptures may fail to do so. For example, there are practical limitations, such as those imposed by the time available to painters and sculptors, to the determinacy with which they perceptually represent things. It is also limited by their skill. While we do not expect perceptual representations of things to capture their determinate visual appearances, we do expect them to capture the *distinctive* features of their visual appearances insofar as this is possible within the limitations imposed by their media. That is, we expect a painter or sculptor who perceptually represents an object to perceptually represent those of its features that distinguish it from other things. This constitutes a norm of perceptual representation, to which painters and sculptors attempt to conform insofar as they are able. Limits to their skill may preclude them from doing, but they will violate the norm as a result, leading us to evaluate their works negatively.

I propose that this norm of perceptual representation plays a role in determining the visual appearances of the things paintings and sculptures perceptually represent that is akin to the role mechanisms of fictive content determination play in determining the fictive content of films and other narrative representations. Because such a norm governs painters' and sculptors' acts of perceptual representation, we can legitimately make the defeasible assumption that the things they perceptually represent are as much like things are in reality as is compatible with the way they perceptually represent them as being. If painters and sculptors have perceptually represented the distinctive features of their objects' visual appearances, the remaining visual appearance features of those objects will be of the same type as those exhibited by the things that most resemble them with respect to the visual appearances they are perceptually represented as having. This assumption is defeasible because those objects might have distinctive features that cannot be perceptually represented due to limitations either of the painter's or sculptor's skill or of the medium in question. Nevertheless, absent evidence of such limitations, we are warranted in making it.

This assumption enables us to determine the realism of paintings and sculptures of existing things with whose particular visual appearances we are unfamiliar, so long as we are familiar with the visual appearances generally exhibited by things that look like them. It also enables us to determine the realism of paintings and sculptures of things of fantastical types that do not exist. Because there are no actual objects with visual appearances similar to theirs, the inferences this assumption licenses about such objects' visual appearances will be much less specific than those they licence about the visual appearances of existent entities. Consequently, we will be able to infer only that their visual appearances have features of a type common to the visual appearances of *many* things, none of which resembles them very closely: that they have three-dimensional shapes of some fairly abstract type, surface colours and textures of similarly abstract kinds, and so

on. Moreover, we will be able to infer that they have determinate three-dimensional shapes and colours, although we will not be able to say very much about the shapes and colours in question.

A painting or sculpture realistically perceptually represents an object of a fantastical type of which we have no independent conception to the extent that it perceptually represents that object as having the features that the norm licenses us to infer that it possesses. For example, the monster in Redon's painting *The Monster* has a humanoid face and ears like the fins of a fish. No actual creature exhibits this combination of features. Redon's painting provides the sole specification of the monster's appearance and the specification it provides is indeterminate. For example, it does not pronounce on whether or not the monster's face has wrinkles and furrows as those of ordinary people do, or on whether its ears share the more determinate features of fishes' fins. Nevertheless, the norm enables us to infer that the monster's face has determinate contours similar to those of real people and that its ears have determinate features similar to those of fishes' fins. The painting is not particularly realistic because we are able to infer that the monster has many visual appearance features that Redon's painting does not perceptually represent it as possessing.

Paintings and sculptures of things of fantastical types are not the sole determinants of the visual appearances of their objects. The norm governing painters' and sculptors' acts of perceptual representation also plays a role in determining the visual appearances of the things they perceptually represent, licensing the inference that those things have visual appearance features of the same type as the real things that most resemble them in visual appearance. Like fiction films, paintings and sculptures can exhibit two distinct forms of realism. A painting or sculpture is *extra-representationally realistic* to the extent that the way it perceptually represents things as being reflects the way things are. It is *intra-representationally realistic* to the extent that it perceptually represents the visual appearance of the thing it perceptually represents within the limitations imposed by its medium. To the extent that they conform to the norm, paintings and sculptures of existing things, whether particular things or merely things of a certain type, will be realistic in both these ways if they are realistic in one. Paintings and sculptures of non-existent entities cannot be realistic in the first of these ways, but can be realistic in the second.

7 Conclusion

Paintings and sculptures of non-existent things of fantastical types cannot be realistic in virtue of accurately perceptually representing the visual appearances of those things. Because there are no things of those types, they have no visual appearances that paintings or sculptures of them can perceptually represent either accurately or inaccurately. Nevertheless, paintings and sculptures of those things can be realistic. Their realism is a measure of the determinacy with which they capture the visual appearances of the fantastical things they perceptually represent. They can capture the appearances of those things more or less determinately because they alone do not determine the appearances of those things. The norm that governs the way in which painters and sculptors perceptually represent those things also plays a role in determining their appearances. It licences the inference that their appearances are as much like the appearances things have in reality as is compatible with the way they are perceptually represented as being, within the limitations that the media painters and sculptors employ impose on what they can represent perceptually. Accuracy is indirectly relevant to the realism of paintings and sculptures of things of fantastical types because the way things are plays a role in determining the appearances of those things.

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18

FUNCTIONAL ART

Glenn Parsons

That artifacts, generally speaking, are functional is a truism. Yet this plain truism has created many difficulties for theorists of art, at least in the Western tradition. The most glaring example of this is the long-standing precariousness of the artistic status of architecture, the most thoroughly functional of all artforms. However, issues concerning function arise, in some form or another, across the arts.

In this essay, I focus on the role played by talk about function in the critical evaluation of art. I begin by discussing two general issues: the relation between function and art evaluation and issue of how to determine the function of a given artwork. In considering these issues, I outline a possible framework for thinking about the role of art's function in critical evaluation. I then consider some specific issues raised by the application of this framework to the traditional 'plastic arts' of painting and sculpture. For, with the exception of architecture, these artforms bring out most vividly the issues concerning art's functionality that have vexed art criticism.

1 Function and Art Criticism

"Function" is a word with a wide range of uses. A fruitful way to approach the notion of function in art is in terms of its use in specifying legitimate or proper appraisal. In general, to say that something "has the function F" is to say that it is supposed to do F, and so to open it up to criticism if it fails to do so. If a particular piece of metal and rubber has the function of clearing rain from a car's windshield, but cannot do so, then it is a poor windshield wiper. In such contexts, function thus generally operates as normative notion.

This normative usage may, in many contexts, be extended to artworks. In many non-Western cultures, objects and activities that, pre-theoretically, we would identify as art (ceremonial masks, weapons, ceramics) clearly have functions and are evaluated and appreciated in light of them. A war mask that doesn't serve its function of inspiring fear in one's enemies, for example, is a poor war mask. Functional considerations have also been applied normatively to much traditional art in the West. Even setting aside architecture, religious painting and commemorative public sculpture offer examples of so-called Fine Arts where functional considerations have played an important role in criticism.

In the West, however, such acknowledgement of the functional aspect of art has long been in tension with ideas of artistic autonomy and the aesthetic, ideas often taken to specify competing norms of proper appraisal. Conceptions of aesthetic or artistic value have, for instance, often emphasized disinterestedness, restricted proper appreciation to an object's formal or expressive

qualities, or to its artistic meaning, and ruled out considerations relating to practical functionality. The influence of such ideas is apparent in 20th-century Modernist movements in sculpture and painting, which embraced these norms in a particularly pure form.

Given these conflicting norms for art evaluation, three philosophical options present themselves. The first option is to exclude functional considerations from a work's assessment *qua* art. So far as the assessment of a work as art goes, its function is irrelevant, or (what comes to the same thing) the only legitimate function of art is to serve as a source of aesthetic or artistic value. On this sort of view, which we can loosely describe as the 'art for art's sake' view, the non-Western art objects described above may be good art, but only insofar as they provide aesthetic or artistic value—by possessing pleasing shapes and colors, for example, or by expressing certain feelings or ideas. What an object's practical function is, or how well it serves it, has no bearing on its artistic value.

A second option is to reject independent norms of aesthetic or artistic value and accept only the norms associated with function as relevant to art. This is the line taken by Leo Tolstoy (1898), who dismissed beauty as an illegitimate norm for art, and endorsed the communication of religious feeling as art's function and the only legitimate standard for its evaluation. This approach is tantamount to equating artistic value with functional value.

Neither of these approaches is very satisfactory, however. A wholesale exclusion of functional considerations from criticism leaves us unable to handle explicitly functional art, of both Western and non-Western varieties. For in many cases, the practical function of a work *does* seem to affect its artistic or aesthetic value: seeing an object as a ceremonial spear, for example, may affect our assessment of the appropriateness of its design as well as of the ideas it expresses. If such considerations are ruled out, such works can only be accommodated to criticism through a distortion whereby they are taken as something other than they are (i.e., as functionless objects).

The second approach, reducing a work's artistic value to its functional value, fares no better. For on this approach, we lose our grasp of artistic value as an intrinsic value. A valuable artwork, or the experience of it, seems to be valuable not merely as a means to something else, but in and of itself. Thus, artistic evaluation cannot simply be determined by the extent to which the work accomplishes its function: indeed a work may have artistic value even if it fails to accomplish that function (Budd, 1995). Thus, we may draw a contrast between the value of Art and the merely functional value of a tool. Equating these also leaves us with no critical apparatus for handling Modernist art of the explicitly functionless variety. Although Tolstoy was willing to roundly condemn all such works, this hard critical line has found few sympathizers.

A third option, which aims to provide a critical framework for both functional and non-functional art, has been more popular. This involves accepting both norms as relevant for art evaluation, but seeing them as in some way integrated such that artistic value is not simply equated with functional value, but neither is artistic value independent of functionality. This approach can allow that some artworks have no practical function, aiming only to provide aesthetic or artistic value, but that others, such as the non-Western works mentioned above, do and that their function plays a role in their evaluation.

The task for this approach is to specify the precise connection between artistic or aesthetic value and function, and here a range of suggestions has been offered. One view, often associated with Kant's notion of dependent beauty, is that an object's function simply constrains the ways in which it can have aesthetic value. Interior decor that might seem bold and lively in a nightclub, for example, might look garish and oppressive in a church. Others have seen an object's function as contributing in a positive fashion to aesthetic value, producing as it were, a 'functional beauty'. A common view in the 18th century, for example, held that things could be beautiful in virtue of appearing capable of fulfilling a function (see Parsons and Carlson, 2008). A related idea, which later became a shibboleth in Modernist design and architecture, is the notion that beauty results

when ‘form follows function’, producing some kind of appealing economy or unity in the object. Recent discussions have produced still other variations of the concept of ‘functional beauty’ (Parsons and Carlson, 2008, Davies, 2006, Sauchelli, 2013, De Clercq, 2013; Shiner, 2011).

Explications of the idea of functional beauty, while they integrate functional considerations into aesthetic or artistic value, generally stop short of making an object or work’s actual functional success or failure a criterion of that value. Thus, the beauty of a functional object is determined by how its form and function are integrated, not by how well the object realizes that function. Accounts that do allow functional success to contribute to artistic value, typically restrict the function of art either to an aesthetic function (Iseminger, 2004), or to the intentions and goals of the work’s creator (Gilmore, 2010). This points to a second key theoretical issue: how is the function of a particular artwork even to be determined?

2 Determining Function

This second question is not only entwined with the first, but in fact, poses a thornier difficulty. Although philosophers frequently attribute this or that function to an artwork, the basis for these attributions is often unclear. Where philosophers do offer some theoretical basis for their particular attribution of function, these tend to be idiosyncratic, with various philosophers arriving at their attributions on wholly different grounds. In short, there exists no commonly endorsed framework for thinking about function attributions regarding artworks.

Moreover, critical and theoretical discussions of art often involve a wide range of competing claims about ‘the function’ of particular works of art. A particular civic sculpture might be said to have the function of honoring a historical figure, expressing the artist’s particular ideas or emotions, boosting the local economy by attracting tourists, providing a visual balance to a city square, objectifying women through its depiction, aiding the mayor’s chance of reelection, or simply providing onlookers with a valuable artistic or aesthetic experience. In many such cases, the relevance of these various suggestions to critical evaluation of the work is unclear, and some of them directly conflict with each other. To its critics, Rodin’s *Monument to Balzac* failed completely in its commemorative function, but its defenders emphasized its success in expressing Rodin’s particular artistic vision of its subject.

How should we respond to this array of ostensible functions of Art? Can we determine, in any principled way, which ones ought to play a role in art criticism? One might be tempted to skepticism on this question, seeing talk about function as so loose and indeterminate as to be useless in art criticism. However, we might hope to adjudicate between these conflicting function attributions by getting clear on the general idea of ascribing a function to an artifact, and this has been the subject of focused debate in several other areas of philosophy, notably the philosophy of biology and the philosophy of technology (for a review, see Preston, 2009). These philosophical discussions of function provide useful resources for constructing a framework for understanding the function of art.

One such resource is the distinction between *functions* and *proper functions*. If I use an iron as a doorstop, we can say that the iron now is functioning to keep the door open, or ‘functioning as’ a doorstop: in that sense, it has taken on a new function. But in another sense, of course, its function has not changed: the object is really still an iron, an object whose function it is to press clothes, not hold doors open. It does not seem possible to change *this* fact about its function by putting it to an *ad hoc* use, such as using it to keep a door open. Moreover, the function of pressing clothes seems to have a normative force that the other lacks. An iron that fails to press clothes well can be said to be malfunctioning, whereas the same can hardly be said for an iron that fails to keep a door open. We can distinguish the latter, less changeable sort of function from the former one by

calling it the object's *proper* function. Whereas some functions are merely, as it were, imposed on an object by accident or by *ad hoc* use, proper functions belong to the object.

In terms of this distinction, our question about identifying 'the function' of an artwork can be rephrased as the question "Which of the suggestions corresponds to the *proper* function of the artwork?" The issue then becomes how to distinguish the proper function of a given artifact from any other functions it may possess.

Traditionally, the most common approach to understanding artifact function in general has been to analyze it in terms of human intentions (for an example, see Neander, 1991). This seems very intuitive, since artifacts are, by definition, the products of human intention. If we ask "Why does an iron have the proper function of pressing clothes?", an obvious answer is: "Because the person who designed that type of artifact—the iron—intended it to press clothes". Other functions that an iron may have, such as holding a door open, might similarly be analyzed in terms of the intentions of users of the artifact. Applied to artworks, this approach would identify a work's proper function with the effect intended by the artist.

On the other hand, however, function talk is not restricted to artifacts: it is also pervasive in descriptions of the natural world, and in particular of biological parts and traits. The function of the heart, for example, is to pump blood throughout an organism's circulatory system. Setting aside certain creationist views, the functions of the parts and traits of animals cannot be ascribed to 'the intentions behind them', and so reference to them must be understood in naturalistic terms. Naturalistic analyses of function in biology have opened up alternatives to the traditional intentionalist approach to artifact function.

One such account is the notion of *systemic (or causal role) function*: an effect that an entity has that plays a role in explaining the operation of a larger system to which it belongs (Cummins, 1975). On this account, the heart has the function of pumping blood in the circulatory system because this is what the heart does that helps explain the circulatory system's capacity to distribute nutrients. A different account grounds the function of a trait in its causal history or etiology. On this account, camouflage coloration, for instance, has the function of making an animal difficult to see because, in the past, instances of such coloration enhanced survival by reducing predation, leading to the propagation of this trait type. In simpler terms, the function of a trait is the effect that explains why that sort of trait evolved (see e.g., Godfrey-Smith, 1994).

These naturalistic accounts may be applied to artifacts to produce an alternative to the traditional intentionalist approach. On such an account, while artifacts may have intentional or systemic capacity functions, they "get [their] proper functions by a process analogous in basic respects to the natural-selection process by which biological traits get theirs" (Preston, 1998, 243). A given sort of artifact may be created for an intended purpose, and be put to many different uses, but its proper function will be the use for which it has been manufactured and reproduced (Preston, 2003, Parsons and Carlson, 2008). Take, for example, the colorful sort of pipe cleaner sold in craft stores (Preston 1998). Though originally invented to clean smoking pipes and occasionally put to one-off uses, such as holding a ponytail in place or serving as a twist tie, these have the proper function of serving as craft materials, since this is the reason that they continue to be manufactured.

Together these ideas provide the outlines of a framework for dealing with the profusion of function attributions to artworks. Various function attributions can be classified according to the sort of function proposed: some such suggestions identify the artist's aims (intentional functions), while others specify effects of the work on some larger whole of which it is a part (systemic functions). Still others will pick out an etiological function of the work's type. In critical contexts where we wish to determine 'the function' of the object, it is the proper function—i.e., its etiological function—that we are seeking.

There are two motivations for this claim. The first is that, as noted, proper functions correspond most closely to the idea of ‘the function’ of the work, or the function that the work itself has. Second, excluding intentional or systemic functions in this context comes at no cost to criticism, since the factors involved—artist intentions and social impact—are already established elements of critical discourse. Nothing is gained by confusing these factors with the concept of artistic function. Narrowing our conception of art’s function not only provides a determinate meaning to the notion but also provides a way of resolving disputes concerning function, since the etiology of artifact types is an empirical issue (Parsons, 2011).

The proposed approach to functional criticism raises a worry, however. How do we know that artworks actually *possess* any proper functions? An etiological theory ascribes proper functions to reproduced artifact types, such as spoons, shovels, and screwdrivers. It is a well-canvassed feature of this theory that it does not attribute functions to novel objects. But contemporary artworks, it may be thought, are precisely such novel objects, being individual, singular entities rather than instances of any reproduced type. Furthermore, it may seem that this individuality and novelty is a part of the very concept of Art. Functional criticism, as we have defined it, may therefore seem irrelevant to contemporary art. In the final section, I explore the significance of this objection, with respect to contemporary painting and sculpture.

3 Painting and Sculpture as Functional Types

As noted earlier, in the history of Western Art, much so-called Fine Art was explicitly functional. This is especially true of painting and sculpture, as much painting was religious, and much sculpture was commemorative in nature, memorializing important leaders or events. The plastic arts were well-suited to such roles, producing durable physical works that could be situated in public spaces (Carter, 2010). In their physicality, painting and sculpture were thus akin to the most functional artform of all, architecture, with which they were often entwined.

The commemorative function of sculpture, in particular, was traditionally so prominent that the critic Rosalind Krauss could identify it as the very essence of the artform:

The logic of sculpture, it would seem, is inseparable from the logic of the monument. By virtue of this logic a sculpture is a commemorative representation. It sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolical tongue about the meaning or use of that place.

(1979, 33)

However, the commemorative ‘logic of sculpture’ was undone, according to Krauss, by the revolutionary work of sculptors such as Rodin, who moved the artform away from commemoration and site-specificity and toward Modernist norms of individual expression and abstraction. Although in the past, sculpture may have constituted a reproduced type, driven by the commemorative impulse, today it seems difficult to discern any such unifying motivation for the production of sculptural works, which are strikingly diverse in aim and appearance.

However, it would be hasty to conclude that the concept of function has no application to contemporary sculpture or painting. For, first of all, the demise of the commemorative impulse is often exaggerated. Hilde Hein, for example, says,

The monolithic cultural assumptions implicit in Roman forum statuary or an altar triptych or even the typical town square equestrian statue are no longer viable. The supposition that a visual form, an anthem, or a text might express its deepest values or unify a coherent social group has become a relic of romantic history.

(1996, 2)

Yet clearly there has been no extinction of public sculpture with the traditional commemorative function of old, for everywhere we see continued production of military, disaster, and civic memorials. These works may not always be successful in expressing a particular community's deepest values or in unifying the relevant social group, but nonetheless this is the reason that they are financed, produced, and displayed. To say that such works of sculpture are 'no longer viable' may be plausible as a blanket critical statement about the artistic significance of such commemorative, works from the perspective of gallery or 'fine Art' sculpture. From a broader perspective, however, commemorative works clearly are viable, insofar as they continue to be widely commissioned and produced. Art criticism ought to make space for the evaluation of such works, and to the extent that it does so, a functional analysis of this persisting type of art is essential.

The relevance of functional analysis to contemporary sculpture and painting goes beyond the persistence of the traditional commemorative type, however. Many contemporary works fall into the category of public art: works commissioned for a given space not to signify a specific event, person, or idea, but simply to 'be art' in that particular location. On the surface, these works appear to be of a piece with non-functional gallery-oriented art. Works such as Henry Moore's *Three-Way Piece No.2* (1966), a public sculpture commissioned for Toronto's City Hall, have no representational content. When public sculptures do have representational content (Antony Gormley's *Angel of the North*, for example), their meaning is not determined prior to commission but left open to artistic expression and choice. Seen in this way, public art might be thought to have no proper function, as it is not supposed to do anything in particular. It is simply large-scale art paid for by, and accessible to, the general public.

But there is clearly something missing in this account, for there do seem to be reasons why this generally expensive type of art is (increasingly) produced in various cities across the world. Pitches for public art support typically appeal to various benefits such works might deliver, including economic stimulation for local communities and cultural enrichment. As one philosopher opines "This may well be a proper function of a public artwork, to provoke critical reflection and dialogue on the space it occupies..." (Horowitz, 1996). If public artworks are selected, and financed, on the basis of their ability to fulfill this sort of role, then a case can be made that contemporary 'public art' sculpture and painting *does* have a proper function. Moreover, acknowledging this functional dimension is essential if we are to appropriately evaluate public artworks. Public artworks that have rich artistic meaning but fail to fulfill their function of engaging the relevant public in an effective manner cannot be said to be successful as works of public art (Carter, 2010).

It may be objected that, in applying only to traditional commemorative art and contemporary public art, the proposed framework for functional criticism applies only to marginal cases, and therefore offers little of substance to the resources of criticism. However, a concept of functional evaluation of art need not apply to all artworks to play a useful role: on the contrary, the main conceptual difficulty with the notion to date is that it is frequently asked to do too much and thus finds no clear application. A narrower understanding of artistic function, such as the one suggested here, offers not only conceptual clarity but also a critical approach to works that have been historically marginalized by the more standard approaches to the evaluation of art.

Further Reading

Preston (2009) provides a very useful and comprehensive survey of philosophical theories of artifact function. Differing analyses of the relation between aesthetic value and function can be found in Davies (2006) and Parsons and Carlson (2008). Parsons (2011) applies an etiological conception of function to a particular critical dispute. An intentionalist treatment of function in art evaluation is developed by Gilmore (2010).

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PART IV

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19

EVOLUTION AND THE FINE ARTS

Tobyn De Marco

Art is among the pinnacles of *Homo sapiens*. Yet, discussing connections between art and human nature tends to invoke either revulsion (those with humanist inclinations), or an unexcited and matter-of-fact assent (those with scientific inclinations). Daniel Dennett has noted, “The very idea that evolution by natural selection might have a foundational role to play in understanding human culture fills some people, even wise people, with loathing” (Dennett, 2017; 24–25). Historically, such connections are not uncommon; for example, both Plato and Aristotle appealed to human nature in discussing the arts. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle points out that humans have an innate predilection (instinct) for mimesis (1448b5–19). Nowadays, appealing to human nature means using the natural and social sciences, including evolutionary biology and related fields. Biologists, anthropologists, and psychologists consider human art behaviors important, perhaps as important as any other practice or technology (e.g., stone tools), for understanding the development of hominid and hominin species, especially the psychological development of *Homo sapiens*, as a new book’s title reveals: *Squeezing Minds from Stones* (Overmann and Coolidge, 2019). In fact, some scientists think that an adequate biological theory of the world and its organisms is incomplete without an understanding of beauty and art behaviors. In a recent book, Richard O. Prum states, “I will argue that we need an evolutionary theory that encompasses the subjective experiences of animals in order to develop an accurate scientific account of the natural world” (2017; 7). This essay is an overview, with a focus on painting and sculpture, of the problems facing us in attempting to explain art behaviors, of some of the main evolutionary explanations of art behaviors, and the relevance (or lack thereof) of such explanations to aesthetics and philosophy of art.

1 Methodological Issues

There are thorny philosophy of science and biological issues involved, many of which are not exclusive to explaining art behaviors. To demonstrate the depth and ubiquity of the methodological issues, consider the following questions and problems. Besides questions about the nature of explanation generally, and the nature of explanation of social phenomena, which also raises issues about the relationship between the social sciences and the physical sciences, there are deep questions about the correct method to use to generate accurate accounts of human behavior. Although acceptance of biological explanations for human behavior and culture has increased recently, the use and limits of biological explanations for human behaviors are still questioned, or their role in other types of explanations is unclear. Currently, within biology, anthropology, and archaeology, there are numerous controversies and questions about natural selection, adaptation, sexual

selection, cultural evolution, units of selection, etc. But, of course, these are beyond the scope of this essay. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to mention some of these general problems to glean an idea of what is at stake and to contextualize what is to follow.

In addition to the philosophical and scientific issues, there are problems within aesthetics that must be sidestepped here. If one is attempting to explain art behaviors, what is art behavior? Do we need an adequate definition of art to determine what art behaviors are? Changing the concept to “aesthetic” behaviors does not help because we will face the same definitional problems. Thus, to begin a discussion about explanations of art behaviors, one must make some reasonable assumptions. Consequently, I follow Stephen Davies in referring to “art behaviors” (Davies, 2012) and Henrik Høgh-Olesen’s “aesthetic impulses” (Høgh-Olesen, 2019). Davies defines art behaviors as “the creation, presentation, reception, and appreciation of art” (2012; 117), which includes domestic, decorative, folk, mass, and popular art (2012; 45), and the seeking and valuing beauty. Additionally, and perhaps slightly broader, Høgh-Olesen defines universal aesthetic impulses as “the human need to embellish itself and its surroundings” (2019; 7).

When discussing explanations, one should be clear about the explanandum. Thus, what is the proper object and subject of explanation? Since art behaviors are a subset of hominid behaviors, art behaviors should be treated like any other human behavior. But are we trying to explain art behaviors themselves, or the prerequisite and requisite traits necessary for art behaviors, such as motor, cognitive, and perceptual skills and habits? What are the requisite and prerequisite phenotypic traits necessary (or at least sufficient) for art behaviors? For example, some theorists think that art behaviors exploit cognitive and perceptual traits that are adaptations for non-art behavior functions. This is the neural reuse view (d’Errico and Colagè, 2018), which is a common approach in explaining other human behaviors and traits. Perhaps, we should seek to explain creativity generally, or the desire and motivated action for beauty and related aesthetic properties, counterfactual reasoning, imagination of alternative worlds, or pretense. Furthermore, art and aesthetic behaviors may be subsumed under what some psychologists and anthropologists call symbolic behavior. Thus, some theorists think that symbolic behavior and thinking is the proper object of explanation (see, for example, Cosmides and Tooby, 1992; Mithen, 1996; Chatterjee, 2014; Prum, 2017; Wilson, 2017). Although it is probable that *Homo sapiens*’ capacity for culture is itself adaptive, this does not entail that every behavior that results from that capacity is adaptive. In fact, some behaviors of that capacity may be neutral, non-beneficial, or even maladaptive because the behaviors are costly.

Even when one focuses on art behaviors, an important methodological question remains. Is there one evolutionary explanation for all art behaviors generally, or do individual art forms (or even genres) warrant different explanations? In other words, there may be separate evolutionary explanations for each art form (e.g., music, literary arts, painting and drawing, dance). Currently, the latter have been active approaches for especially music and the literary arts (Gottschall and Wilson, 2005; Mithen, 2005; Boyd, Carroll, and Gottschall, 2010; Davies, 2012; 158–182; Gottschall, 2012; Morley, 2013; Honing, 2018). Nonetheless, evolutionary accounts of general art behaviors tend to emphasize drawing, painting, and sculpture as paradigm examples for constructing such theories. The advantage of explaining painting and sculpture is that the archaeological record, particularly from the Upper Paleolithic period, is more directly available than for music, literary arts, and other art forms (more on this below).

Furthermore, there are questions about the proper subject of explanation. Explanations of art behaviors can be limited to consideration of just *Homo sapiens*’ behavior, or other hominid and hominin species, or, perhaps, all mammals. For example, are explanations for bowerbird-decorated nests and pufferfish making designs out of sand on the sea floor relevant for explaining hominid art behaviors? Nonetheless, for well-established phylogenetic and cladistic reasons, behaviors of other hominid and hominin species (e.g., Acheulian hand-axes, Neanderthal symbolic

behaviors) seem to be relevant for explanations of *Homo sapiens* behavior. Hence, consideration of prehistoric art behaviors, including the earliest art behaviors of *Homo sapiens*, is crucial to an evolutionary explanation of art behaviors.

Currently, no clear consensus views have emerged on many of these methodological issues. Consequently, one finds many theorists, working within many disciplines, approaching the evolutionary explanation of art behaviors from a diversity of perspectives and methods.

2 Prehistoric Art Behaviors

When did hominins, hominids, and *Homo sapiens* begin engaging in art or aesthetic behaviors? The oldest stone tools associated with hominins are circa (c.) 2.4 million years old, which were found in the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania (stone tools found in the Wonderwerk Cave in South Africa have similar dates). Stone tool use predates any artifacts that may be considered the result of material symbolic culture and art behaviors. Fossil evidence indicates that *Homo sapiens* comes into existence between 200,000 and 300,000 years ago (ya). Gregory Currie (2011) has argued that decorated hand axes of the Acheulian period, roughly 500,000–750,000 ya, should be considered art, or at least as aesthetic objects. If this view is correct, then our ancestors, such as *Homo heidelbergensis*, engaged in art behaviors. Such decoration may have functioned as status signaling, and Currie suggests sexual selection as an explanation for its persistence and diffusion. Furthermore, Acheulian hand axes demonstrate symmetry. Kohn and Mithen (1999) explain the emphasis on symmetry by sexual selection; whereas, Hodgson (2011) argues that this symmetry is the by-product of brain and perceptual development features.

There are objects whose dating is very early, presumably before the existence of *Homo sapiens*, but their status as art or being symbolic, or even being artifacts in some cases, is questionable. One example is the Venus of Tan-Tan, which was discovered in Morocco in 1999. It is between 300,000 and 500,000 years old. Some scholars believe the object was not carved (sculpted); instead, it is interpreted to be a manuport. Shells decorated with abstract geometric patterns were discovered at Trinil, Java. The early dating, 430,000–530,000 ya, suggests that *Homo erectus* modified the shells. If these marks are not considered art behaviors, then these markings are at least proto-aesthetic behaviors (Joordens et al., 2015).

The Berekhat Ram figurine was discovered in the Golan Heights, Israel, in 1981. It is a very small lump of lava that resembles a woman. The object is approximately 230,000 years old. Some scholars think that this is the earliest example of depictive art discovered thus far (e.g., d'Errico and Nowell, 2000), yet other scholars reject this hypothesis (Coolidge and Wynn, 2018; 173). Because of the early dating, this figurine also raises questions about the difference between depiction and symbolism. It is possible that this figurine is depictive but not symbolic because it is not clear that material symbolic culture was developed at that time.

Decorated ostrich shells have been found in Diepkloof Rock Shelter in South Africa, which are dated from c. 65,000 to 55,000 ya. They are decorated with deliberate, varied geometric patterns. In Klipdrift Shelter, also in South Africa, fragments of ostrich shells have engravings that may be described as proto crosshatching. Ochre crayons have been discovered in Australia's Arnhem Land region, which are 61,000–45,000 years old. In addition, limestone rock stained with red ochre was found in Carpenter's Gap in the Kimberley region of Australia (50,000–37,000 ya).

In Blombos Cave, South Africa, pieces of ochre and print-making toolkits were discovered. Probably, these artifacts are the earliest evidence of planned art-making (David, 2017; 124). These artifacts are c. 105,000–97,000 years old. Furthermore, this is the earliest evidence for shape being decoupled from tools, i.e., non-functional objects (Hodgson, 2011).

As of this writing, there is evidence that the earliest depictive rock art images arose in two distant areas of the globe: Spain and France in Europe and the Indonesian part of Borneo.

Archaeologists have found rock art images in the Sangkulirang–Mangkalihat Peninsula in East Kalimantan, Borneo. A large reddish-orange painting of an animal and purple hand stencils has been dated to a minimum of 40,000 ya to a maximum of 51,800 ya (Aubert et al., 2018). Some of the hand stencils are decorated with various shapes (lines and dots). The *Homo sapiens* occupation of these caves in Borneo have been dated to between 40,000 and 50,000 ya.

In three caves (El Castillo, Altamira, Tito Bustillo) in the Asturias and Cantabria regions of northwestern Spain, archaeologists discovered paintings, hand stencils, and engravings. The earliest date acquired was c. 40,800 ya for a red circle in the El Castillo cave. Currently, there is some controversy over whether this cave art was made by Neanderthals or *Homo sapiens* (Appenzeller, 2013; Hoffman, 2018a, Hoffmann, 2018b). If these dates for the art are correct, then these cave paintings would predate the arrival of *Homo sapiens* in Europe. In addition, Rodriguez-Vidal et al. (2014) analyzed rock engraving in Gorham’s Cave in Gibraltar, which is dated to no later than c. 39,000 ya. They conclude that the marks, requiring prolonged, deliberate action, in a habitation area of the cave (which suggests they were intended to be seen by others) are probably non-utilitarian, abstract pattern engravings by Neanderthals. There is no evidence that *Homo sapiens* had migrated to Gibraltar by this time. Although controversial, recently, the view of Neanderthals, who existed concurrently with *Homo sapiens* up to about 30,000 to 40,000 ya, is changing: Neanderthals may have been more cognitively similar to modern humans than previously thought.

Chauvet cave art was discovered in 1994 in the Massif Central region of south-central France. The art seems to have been made in two phases: one dated from 37,000 to 33,500 ya, and the other dated from 31,000 to 29,000 ya. The art is remarkable because of the sophistication of the techniques used: shading, foregrounding to give a sense of depth, and rock scraping to give the black, red, and yellow pigments a white background for better clarity and effect. There are depictions of mammoths, rhinoceroses, and bison. At the Peche Merle cave in France, paintings were made c. 28,700 ya, during the Gravettian period, and demonstrates that human painters used the natural shapes of the rock to enhance the outlines of their depictions, which seems like a type of textural relief.

The first therianthrope discovered thus far was in Hohlenstein-Stadel Cave in southwestern Germany. The depictive statue is a lion’s head with a human body sculpted from woolly mammoth ivory, and is c. 40,000 years old, probably made during the Aurignacian period of the Upper Paleolithic.

Currently, the oldest depiction of a human is the statuette “Venus of Hohle Fels,” which is dated to 40,000–35,000 ya. The representation of a woman was discovered in 2008 near Schelklingen, Germany. Discovered in the Czech Republic, the “Venus of Dolní Věstonice” female figure statuette is the earliest evidence of ceramic use dated to c. 31,000 to 27,000 ya.

Many scholars interpret the current archaeological evidence to reveal that, although there seems to be a creative explosion in the Upper Paleolithic period as evidenced by cave paintings and figurines, art behaviors developed gradually, and are based upon brain systems that *Homo sapiens* share with ancestor species and perhaps other hominin species existing simultaneously with *Homo sapiens*.

3 Evolutionary Explanations of Art Behaviors

The evolutionary study of behavior can involve sociobiology, evolutionary psychology, ethology, evolutionary cognitive neuroscience, cognitive archaeology, behavioral ecology, behavioral neuroendocrinology, epigenetics, multi-level selection theories, developmental systems theory, cultural evolution, and cultural evolutionary psychology. These disciplines can contribute to theories of explanation of art behaviors that invoke adaptations, sexual selection, by-products of

natural selection, exaptations, cultural evolution (co-evolution), genetic drift, or some combination thereof.

Below I briefly review some evolutionary explanations for art behaviors. It is important to note that some of these theories are compatible with each other, and some theorists have views that belong to more than one category (e.g., Dissanayake, 1995; Brian Boyd, 2009; Dutton, 2009).

Generally, adaptationist accounts of any trait (physical or behavioral) must demonstrate that the trait is heritable or encoded in genes, be functional, contribute to fitness or reproductive success, and not have been co-opted for some other function (which would make the trait an exaptation). These explanations attempt to show how and for what the trait was selected. Although there are adaptations without selection (phenotypic plasticity) and selection without adaptations (fecundity selection), we will bracket those possibilities for our discussion here. Adaptationist explanations for art behaviors differ by appealing to different ways in which art behaviors contribute to fitness or reproductive success.

Ellen Dissanayake (1995) has put forward a “make special” or elaboration theory, although her theory also shares elements with some of the other adaptationist theories. Art behaviors contribute to fitness by making our environments generally pleasant, which in turn contributes to the well-being of individuals and the community. Thus, Dissanayake’s theory implies both individual and group selective advantage.

Some adaptationist theories argue that the function of art behaviors is social cohesion. Art behaviors ease and promote social cooperation by providing cooperative group activities as practice (since the stakes are low) and/or help to regulate emotions, all of which contributes to fitness in social animals. Carroll (2004, 2014a, 2014b) argues that art behaviors unite people through emotional contagion. This theory assumes a view of inclusive fitness, which is the combination of direct fitness (reproduction) and indirect fitness, which is altruistic behavior toward conspecifics, or group selection. Boyd (2009) argues that behaviors enhance humans’ ability to direct and detect our conspecific’s attention, which may contribute to fitness in several ways.

Other theorists have argued that art behaviors contribute to fitness by helping humans to improve some of their cognitive and perceptual abilities, including imagining alternative realities (Allott, 1994; Boyd, 2009 and 2010). The problem here is that there are many other ways for humans to sharpen their cognitive and perceptual skills. So, it is difficult to see how art behaviors could contribute to fitness in this way. There are many adaptationist theories that claim that art behaviors contribute to fitness by functioning as a relief of tension and anxiety, including sexual and violent impulses (Koch, 1984; Ralevski, 2000; Barnett, 2019).

Geoffrey Miller (2000) is one of the main proponents of a sexual selection explanation for art behaviors. For Miller, art behaviors do not have any obvious, direct fitness advantage and are practiced and engaged with at great cost to humans. Yet, humans universally engage in art behaviors. Thus, Miller infers sexual selection is at work. Humans signal the capacity for reproductive success through the demonstration of intelligence and skill exemplified in art behaviors. Kohn and Mithen (1999) have argued that hand axes made by *Homo erectus* may have signaled increased probability of reproductive success. There are many criticisms of sexual selection. First, one problem is that the existence of sexual selection itself is being questioned (Roughgarden et al., 2015). Second, it is not clear that artists, or even those who spend much time as consumers of art, are in fact more reproductively successful. In addition, there is a methodological concern: some biologists and anthropologists believe that if a behavior is not the subject of natural selection, then it must be the result of sexual selection. Given new evolutionary approaches, this assumption is questionable, because with many new, increasingly plausible options available to theorists, the choice between natural selection and sexually selected adaptations is a false dilemma.

One of those other options is identifying by-products of adaptations. By-products of natural selection (or sexual selection), metaphorically called “spandrels” by Stephen Jay Gould and Richard

C. Lewontin (1979), are traits and behaviors of organisms that are the result (by-product) of the natural selection of a different trait or behavior. Thus, these by-product traits are not themselves adaptations, and not selected for, but arose as side effects of adaptations. Especially for depictive or representational drawing, painting, and sculpting, many prerequisite capacities are necessary. Painting, drawing, and sculpting may be by-products of skills developed from over a million years of stone tool development and use, incipient symbolic cultural practices like body ornamentation, and status and/or tribal membership indications by decorative clothes and tool decoration. Steven Pinker, for example, views art behaviors as by-products of the adaptive behaviors of status seeking, taking pleasure in the experience of adapted environments, and design abilities for functional tools (Pinker, 2003). By-product theory is very attractive for those who think that basic, survival behaviors and skills are adaptive and view art behaviors as scaffolding on those basic behaviors and traits but find it implausible that art behaviors themselves are adaptations. One potential problem with this view is that it quickly becomes too broad, thus risking vacuity: most of what humans do would be by-product behaviors, from automobile mechanics to writing letters. Another problem is the status of the by-product accounts. Many biologists and philosophers have offered skeptical critiques of by-product theory. Nonetheless, if it can be shown that art behaviors derive from specific cognitive and perceptual adaptations, then the evidence for art behaviors being by-products is enhanced.

Another possibility is that art behaviors may be exaptations. Traits that were adaptive for one function but then are co-opted for a different function are exaptations (e.g., birds' feathers are adaptive for temperature control but were co-opted for flight) (Gould and Vrba, 1982). There can be both biological (genetic) and cultural exaptations (d'Errico and Colagè, 2018). For example, Nadal and Chatterjee (2018) argue that art is not an adaptation. Art behaviors are the result of human sensory motor, affective, and cognitive mechanisms that are adaptations for other functions. They cite as support for this view the fact that there are no specific brain areas dedicated to aesthetic behaviors yet discovered. Most directly, Skov and Nadal (2018; 700) suggest that "The idea that art elicits a set of neural processes exclusive to art experiences must be laid to rest once and for all." Art behaviors take advantage of a wide range of neural systems. These systems have been shown to be very flexible. Nadal and Chatterjee even suggest that the relaxation of selective pressures (e.g., due to self-domestication) may have been responsible for the cultural evolution of art behaviors. Their account attempts to address both the universality of art by appealing to the reuse of adaptive neural systems, and its immense diversity among global cultures by appealing to cultural evolution. Similarly, Agnati et al. (2015) have argued that art behaviors are an exaptation of the drive to communicate by symbols.

Cultural evolutionary theory (or co-evolution) recognizes and emphasizes feedback loops between genetic and cultural evolution (sometimes called "dual inheritance"): genes constrain and influence culture, and culture influences genetic evolution. There are different schools of cultural evolution [the so-called California (e.g., Richerson and Boyd, 2005; Henrich, 2016) and "Paris" (e.g., Sperber, 1996; Morin, 2016) schools], and the most recent version is cultural evolutionary psychology (or cognitive gadget theory) (Heyes, 2018). Cognitive gadgets are cognitive mechanisms or ways of thinking that are cultural rather than instinctual, and thus are the result of cultural evolution not genetic evolution (Heyes, 2018; 2). Cognitive gadget theory is selectionist but allows for autonomous cultural evolution, i.e., cultural variants can evolve without having influence on genetic evolution. Whatever school of cultural evolution theory to which one subscribes, the general idea is that art behaviors are transmissible through various forms of social learning and perhaps individual learning. Art behaviors are part of the "library," or cumulative culture, that is transmitted through social and cultural learning. Furthermore, information in the "library" is subject to similar selective mechanisms that operate on genes (see Richerson and Boyd, 2005; Jablonska and Lamb, 2014; Hannon and Lewens, 2016; Boyd, 2018).

It is a mistake to think that only adaptationist theories can account for the significance, meaning, and value of art in human life; likewise, it is wrong to think that explaining art behaviors in terms of their contribution to fitness somehow diminishes the value of art and exhausts its cultural functions and meanings. In addition, the idea that art behaviors may be “only” a by-product of selected traits and behaviors does not imply anything negative about art’s status or value to us. Explaining a phenomenon neither justifies nor abjures the phenomenon; however, explanations may demystify the phenomenon by showing how it fits in with our best theories and tools for understanding the world. To wit, cognitive archaeologists (*inter alia*) deem the evolutionary explanations of art behaviors as crucially useful to understanding the modern human mind and its origins (Hodgson and Verpooten, 2015; Hodgson, 2011). Nonetheless, if these explanations are not straightforwardly applicable to issues about the value and meaning of art, then there are legitimate questions about their relevance to aesthetics and philosophy art.

4 Relevance to Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art

Besides their intrinsic intellectual interest, how (and if) evolutionary explanations of art behaviors are relevant to issues, problems, and questions in aesthetics and the philosophy of art is a subset of the meta-philosophical issue of the role of the empirical sciences in philosophy generally, both in the methods of philosophy and their role in philosophical theories. For example, could evolutionary explanations of art behaviors contribute to the philosophical issues of the definition of art, or the ontology of works of art? On the other hand, one should not discount the claim that the work art historians and aestheticians do may be helpful to the sciences that study human behaviors, especially art behaviors.

A helpful way of approaching these questions is to consider three possible positions (Currie et al., 2014; 10–15). First, there is the Replacement Thesis, which holds that the natural and social sciences should replace traditional philosophy and its methods. However, there still may be a minor role for philosophy in doing some conceptual clean-up work, which would serve the sciences in doing their job better—philosophy as handmaiden to the sciences. On this view, philosophical theories and problems would be replaced by scientific theories, including evolutionary explanations, and/or philosophical issues would be categorized as pseudo-problems. For example, it may be the case that the question of the function of drawing, painting, and sculpting ceases to be a philosophical issue because evolutionary explanations provide an adequate answer.

Second, there is the Supplement Thesis, which holds that scientific results and methods can supplement philosophy by (*inter alia*) providing evidence that either supports or refutes theories in aesthetics, give rise to new puzzles for philosophers to solve, and challenge us to see ways in which our theories need to be revised. Even for those who think that philosophy is primarily an analytic (*a priori*) enterprise, this does not rule out informed analysis, where this means being empirically informed where appropriate and helpful in conceptual analysis. In addition, analytic philosophy often relies upon intuitions as evidence, for example, as responses to thought experiments. Recently, experimental philosophy has demonstrated many useful (of course there are philosophers who deny this) things about intuitions: that intuitions are less stable than philosophers initially supposed, that they are more contextual and culture-based than previously thought, and many others. Consequently, evolutionary explanations can account for why our intuitions are what they are, or why they differ. This is useful when philosophers of art appeal to intuitions as evidence in their arguments and may permit us to strengthen our arguments by recognizing both the shortcomings and etiology of intuitions. In environmental aesthetics, there is a question of whether the human appreciation of the aesthetic features of nature and human faces and bodies gave rise to, or are necessary for, art behaviors, or vice versa. With respect to this issue, evolutionary explanations may be dispositive.

Finally, there is the Skeptical Thesis, which holds that empirical work should have no, or a very minimal, role to play in aesthetics. If many (most?) issues in aesthetics and philosophy of art are normative, then these cannot be settled by scientific results and methods. One infers that some version of the naturalistic fallacy is being used to support such a claim. One problem here is that many philosophers hold that not all issues, questions, and problems in aesthetics are normative. For example, ontological issues can be viewed as attempting to discover or construct facts about the nature of art and works of art. But even if aesthetics has non-normative issues, the Skeptical Thesis may still dismiss the relevance of scientific methods and facts on the ground that these issues are purely matters of conceptual analysis.

In contrast to the above positions, some philosophers have simply attempted to contribute to the biological theories, that is, provide possible hypotheses and evidence for evolutionary explanations for art behaviors. For example, Carroll (2014b) claims to be accounting for how art emerged, why it has persisted even under scarce circumstances, and its persistently important role in human history.

Often, strong views against scientific explanations for art behaviors (and other phenomena) derive from questionable large-scale assumptions, such as a simple-minded scientism, or a radical reductionism. Neither scientism nor some oversimplified metaphysical reductionism needs to be accepted. Once those have been rejected, it is easier to discern a role for evolutionary theory in aesthetics and vice versa.

Some philosophers, like Alva Noë, argue that art itself is a way of understanding ourselves, not different in motivation from our engaging in the scientific investigation of ourselves (Noë, 2015). To extend Noë's argument, it may be that work in aesthetics and philosophy art, as well as art criticism and art history, may help cultural evolution theorists because one of the main advantages of cultural evolution is a recognition that evolution is always occurring, that it did not cease for *Homo sapiens* in the Paleolithic period. Given that philosophy of art is a way understanding the artistic and aesthetic cultures humans have formed and built, such analyses may contribute to crucial components in cultural evolution theory, such as means of social learning, types of cultural variants, and means of selective processes.

One compelling way of considering the relationship between, and relevance of, evolution and art behaviors is the following. If the cultural evolution (or coevolution) account is even partly correct, then it is probable that our art behaviors and aesthetic sensibilities also gave rise to various capacities (Noë calls them "consciousnesses") that in turn assisted humans in developing other, functional behaviors and cognitive mechanisms (e.g., see Colagè and d'Errico, 2020). In other words, there are feedback loops not only between genes and culture (as in niche construction) but also among behaviors and cognitive mechanisms themselves. As Peter Kivy (1991) argued, the aesthetic appreciation of the natural world and universe provides a deep and significant motivation for investigating it scientifically, to seek understanding of its wonder and the source of our awe, and their underlying structure. Evolutionary biology and its related fields contribute to our understanding of our interest in the aesthetic features of the world and our artistic world-making, and our artistic world-making and its reception hones our cognitive and perceptual capacities to help us to become more astute at understanding those same capacities and behaviors. This suggests that biology and aesthetics are remarkably complementary to each other.

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20

COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

William P. Seeley

Ludwig Wittgenstein is said to have said that psychology was the wrong lens to use if you were looking to capture the defining elements of art.

35. People often say that aesthetics is a branch of psychology. The idea is that once we are more advanced, everything – all the mysteries of art – will be understood by psychological experiments. Exceedingly stupid as the idea is, this is it.

36. Aesthetic questions have nothing to do with psychological experiments, but are answered in an entirely different way.

(Wittgenstein, 1938/1966: 17)

A generation later, George Dickie (1962) recapitulated Wittgenstein's message. He wrote that asking psychologists about the nature of art was like asking toddlers about the rules governing good grammar. Alva Noë (2015) has argued more recently that research in neuroscience and related areas of cognitive science, despite the social cachet of this contemporary technophilia, has failed to reveal anything interesting about art ... and never will.

My goal in this chapter is to challenge these views. I will argue that cognitive psychology is a natural lens for understanding art. Artworks are communicative events. They afford a communicative exchange between artists and consumers. They are artifacts designed to communicate (sometimes we say express) a point, purpose, or meaning. The very possibility of art, therefore, depends upon the firm foundation of our human cognitive capacities. Of course none of this means that the mysteries of art can be explained away by the methods of psychology. Psychology isn't in the ontological business of reduction and replacement. That is a philosopher's hat. Psychologists want to know how things work. These data can be useful. They can help shape answers to complicated theoretical questions about familiar behaviors like those associated with artistic practice.

1 Skepticism about Psychology of Art

What is cognitive psychology? Well. Psychology is the scientific study of mind and behavior. Cognitive psychology is therefore the study of cognitive behavior. More concretely, it is the scientific study of the psychological underpinnings of cognition. So, what is cognition? It is the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses. The psychological underpinnings of cognition include attention, perception, language, memory,

reasoning, problem-solving, and creativity. Cognitive psychology is the scientific study of the role these processes play in the acquisition and development of knowledge and understanding.

I have argued elsewhere that cognitive science and art are natural bedfellows (Seeley, 2020). The same can be said for cognitive psychology. Cognitive psychology, like its more interdisciplinary cousin cognitive science, is the scientific study of the way organisms acquire information from their environment and use it in the service of behavior. It is a method for studying how intelligent organisms acquire, represent, manipulate, and use information in the service of knowledge, understanding, and the everyday behaviors that support their flourishing and survival. Artworks are communicative devices. They are, as mentioned above, artifacts intentionally designed to express (or communicate) their content. An understanding of art should start with an understanding of how this might work. It should include an explanation of how consumers acquire that subset of information from an artwork that will be sufficient to enable them to recover its point, purpose, or meaning. Why? We might argue everything turns on it. Explanations of how consumers recover information from the perceptible surface of a painting or sculpture (or any other kind of artwork for that matter) articulate strong constraints on exactly what can and can't be expressed in this kind of a communicative exchange and so on the adequacy of any theory of art.

Cognitive psychology is a science that is well-positioned to explain how all of this might work. Of course once we adopt this lens it should be obvious that one-size-fits-all explanations are ill-suited to the arts. Artworks come in a variety of media. The underlying story of our engagement with artworks, whatever it might be, will need to exhibit the flexibility necessary to accommodate this variance.

So why be skeptical about psychology of art? The easiest place to look is what might be called *the common perceptual mechanisms argument*. Research in psychology of art draws on everyday perceptual and cognitive processes. This is a significant strength. Empirical aesthetics eschews mystical just-so stories derived from assumptions about brute aesthetic capacities or ineffable aesthetic properties. But it is also the source of a significant problem.

Philosophical theories of art are often couched as definitions of art. Why? Theories of art ought to be able to disambiguate their subject, art, from other things. They ought to help us articulate our understanding of the category "art". They should point towards the categorially salient artistic features of works and use them to articulate a procedure for sorting artworks from other non-art artifacts. This project has been admittedly short on success stories. It has proven easier to recognize local evaluative criteria that underwrite art critical judgments about sub-classes of artworks than to uncover more global, general defining ontological constraints on what counts as artistic practice. It would seem that the broad variance observed among different types of artworks renders the category 'art' immune to definition. Nonetheless, consumers are quite adept at ontological and appreciative judgments about artworks. Theories of art should ideally sketch a set of heuristic criteria to explain these capacities (Carroll, 1992). They should provide a means to explain why we treat some preferential range of artifacts as artworks (see Danto, 2000).

The trouble for empirical aesthetics is that the cognitive processes appealed to in explanations of artistic practices are ordinary, everyday, garden-variety cognitive processes. We don't perceive an artwork any differently than we perceive a street sign or a busy barnyard afternoon. The same range of cognitive processes is involved in both cases. Cognitive psychology therefore fails to articulate what is unique about artworks. Seen through its lens, artworks are identical to other quotidian perceptible artifacts. Cognitive psychology doesn't provide any purchase in explaining art. The hard work of identifying the artworks and justifying associated category judgments has to be done in advance using the lens of art criticism, art history, or philosophy of art. Our understanding of art doesn't emerge from the work of cognitive psychologists. And herein lies the rub. The real hard explanatory work involved in understanding art is antecedently presupposed by psychology of art. Or so the argument goes.

It is important to note that researchers can simply bite the bullet and accept this objection. It is a well-worn strategy within empirical aesthetics to explain the cognitive processes that underwrite consumer interactions with canonical, art critically established artworks. The rationale behind this research strategy is most transparent in explanations of aesthetic and expressionist artworks. These are works intentionally designed to exhibit or betray aesthetic or emotionally expressive features. These are their artistically salient features. The thought is that if one were to uncover causal-psychological mechanisms that could explain how a work was designed to express its aesthetic or affective content, one would have explained that artwork. This may be a nice strategy for explaining how an artwork works, how consumers perceive recognize, and respond to some set of well-established artistically salient attributes of historically valued artworks. However, it is not clear that this is a sound strategy for understanding an artwork *qua* an artwork. What is missing is a psychological explanation of what is artistically unique about those features. Short that, all that has been established is how these works operate as perceptual stimuli.

Imagine that one thought that the dynamics of the wind-blown foliage in an impressionist painting by Monet were among its artistically important aesthetic features. One might undertake to explain how the manipulation of coarse brushstrokes contributed to the spatial frequency information in the painting. One might then undertake to explain how the perceptual dynamics of the painting emerged from the structure of this spatial frequency information, e.g., as the consequence of illusory feature conjunctions or a McKay effect (see Livingstone, 2002; Seeley, 2020). One might produce a fascinating perceptual explanation of the painting this way. But that explanation would not suffice to disambiguate the artwork from any other object or surface in the environment sufficiently structured to induce illusory feature conjunctions or a McKay illusion. It would therefore not suffice as an explanation of the artistic salience of the perceptual dynamics of the work (nor, for analogous reasons, would it necessarily be an explanation of the putative aesthetic quality of these perceptual dynamics). What is needed is a tie-in between these formal-compositional aspects of a work and its point, purpose, or meaning. What is needed is an explanation of why it would have been artistically salient for Monet to have rendered his subject matter in that particular way, perhaps as an attempt to capture the dynamics of a pedestrian moment in light.¹

Explanations of the latter sort are normative explanations. They refer to normative conventions as causes, as reasons for someone having behaved in one way or another. What it is to explain art, on this kind of account, is to explain why it is appropriate to appreciate a particular type of work made in a particular way given the normative conventions governing best practices within that category of art. Normative explanations of art refer to the fit between artworks and antecedently established normative conventions for artistic practice. The purpose of an explanation of art, on this account, is to render artworks intelligible, to explain why an artist rendered their subject matter in a particular way.

Skepticism about psychology of art is born of an assumption that the questions that matter for explanations of art are normative questions about the nature of artistic appreciation. Cognitive psychology can explain how we recognize the identities of artworks and how we categorize them as artworks produced by different artists who belonged to different schools, movements, or genre categories that are tagged to different historical epochs. It can explain the origins of our subjective preferences for different kinds of artworks and show how these preferences are expressed, e.g., as affectively nuanced aesthetic responses. It can even explain the underlying cognitive etiology of our appreciative judgments by explaining how we associate artworks with different sets of normative conventions. However, the psychological processes that underwrite these artistic practices are the same ones that underwrite all of our cognitive behaviors. They explain the etiology of both appreciative judgments that are art critically apt and those that are not appropriate. They apply equally in explanations of preferences for artworks that are fit to the normative conventions governing the production of artworks in a category and those that don't. And they explain our

capacity to recognize, understand, and appreciate non-art artifacts like editorial cartoons and journalistic photographs, and billboards. They even explain our appreciation of shop tools and kitchen appliances, e.g., perceived differences in the quality of Craftsmen and Milwaukee handheld power drills or Mr. Coffee coffee makers and the Nespresso machine next to the convection oven on my counter. Cognitive psychology, as a consequence, fails as a lens to explain what is artistically unique about our interactions with artworks. It fails to provide leverage in explanations of the art of those artifacts we categorize as artworks.

We can call this the *normative dimensions of appreciation argument*. It explains the underlying force of the common perceptual mechanisms argument. Together the two arguments articulate what we might call *the puzzle of locating art* (Noë, 2015; Seeley, 2020). The challenge for psychology of art, like any explanatory endeavor, is to identify the appropriate target explananda. Skeptics like Wittgenstein, Dickie, and Noë argue that psychology of art has missed the mark. It has failed to locate art. But this is no surprise. They weren't looking for it. They aren't really interested in explaining art. What they are after instead is an understanding of how consumers perceive, recognize, and exhibit preferences for the contents of a range of expressive and representational artifacts that include artworks.

Researchers in empirical aesthetics have a counterargument. The folk psychological intuition about artworks is that they are and have always been aesthetic objects. They are artifacts intentionally designed to induce aesthetic experiences, to trigger aesthetic responses in consumers that carry information about their artistically salient aesthetic content. Aesthetic responses are psychological responses, affectively nuanced perceptual and cognitive responses. If the folk psychological intuition is correct, an explanation of these psychological responses should also explain how we recognize, understand, and appreciate art.

This is not the place for a critical analysis of aesthetic intuitions about art. It is certainly the case that many artworks exhibit artistically salient aesthetic properties. It is also likely that there is a broad preference for these kinds of artworks, at least in western European communities. The goal of any critical analysis of the role of aesthetics in art, despite the deep anti-aesthetic vein in the last century of contemporary art, should be to accommodate this fact. This challenge can be met.

Artworks are, as discussed above, acts of communication. The end goal of acts of communication is understanding. We may exhibit subjective aesthetic preferences for some communicative strategies as opposed to others. But these preferences are more often than not beside the point. I may prefer a Downeast drawl or a Boston accent to its New York and midwestern cousins. But the auditory inflection of the range of phonemes used in these utterances doesn't ordinarily influence the information they carry and convey. Of course it might. Accents can be used, within the context a shared body of background information, to infuse dialect with rich sense of place that is replete with narratively salient semantic associations. This is the clue we need to understand the role of aesthetics in art. The aesthetic is a tool artists often deploy to render the content of a work. The aesthetic is a means to draw attention to artistically salient aspects of a work and to articulate the information that work carries and communicates. It is meaningful, against the backdrop of European history, to render an alpine mountain landscape as beautiful as opposed to terrifying (or to render a working farm landscape as cultivated and utilitarian as opposed to wild and natural). Artists choose how to render the subjects of their works. Artworks carry and communicate information associated with these choices. The aesthetic is just one among many tools available to artists to facilitate communication in these contexts.

Where does this leave us? The puzzle of locating art suggests that psychology of art has been looking in the wrong place. The place to look for art is in the communicative exchange between artists and consumers. Art is not located in our affective, perceptual, or cognitive responses to art per se. Our understanding of art might nonetheless be illuminated by an understanding of the role those processes play in that communicative exchange.

2 Art and Understanding

Artistic appreciation is a product of evaluative judgments about artworks. The range of target questions associated with appreciation should be familiar by now. Has the work executed well or poorly? Is its content, is the way its subject matter was rendered, apt to its point, purpose, or meaning? Does the work exhibit a good fit to the normative conventions governing artistic production in the appropriate categories of art? All of these questions are questions about what an artist did. They are questions about the choices an artist made when he or she set out to construct a work in a recognizable category of art with a recognizable point, purpose, or meaning (even if the purpose of a work was merely to render a realistic and aesthetically striking representation of its subject).

The goal of appreciative judgments is to articulate some set of normatively regulated preferences for different kinds of artworks. We value artworks. These values are reflected in the range of culturally organized (biased or constrained) preferences associated with different categories of art. Cognitive psychology is an odd place to look for this aspect of art. We don't ordinarily look to cognitive psychology for an understanding of the contents of our values. There is, however, another sense of appreciation. Appreciative judgments are judgments about how something has been done. Appreciation in this sense is tied to understanding (Carroll, 1999). What it is to appreciate a Milwaukee hand-held power drill is to understand why it is designed the way it is, what choices were made in the design and why, or how those choices are fit to the purpose of a hand-held power drill. We appreciate the drill when we understand why it was designed the way it was. We value it for the fit exhibited between its design and the point or purpose of the choices made by an engineer or industrial designer.

Noël Carroll's (1999) *functional account of artistic form* can be used to help articulate what this might mean for understanding art. Functional accounts of artistic form can be understood in contrast with descriptive accounts. A descriptive account of form is just that, a description of all of the formal elements and observable compositional relations exhibited by a work. These include, for instance, everything from the hue, tone, size, shape, and relative locations of all of the brushstrokes in a painting to the placement, relative scale, and relations among the elements of the recognizable parts of their represented subject. There is a lot, perhaps an intractably large amount, of information to sort through in a descriptive account of form. Luckily what we are interested in when we engage with an artwork isn't a descriptive account of form (although a conservator responsible for the collection at a major museum might be). What an ordinary consumer wants to know is how some subset of these formal and compositional elements were organized to communicate the point, purpose, or meaning of the work. We can call this a functional account of artistic form. The subset of formal and compositional relations constitutive of the functional form of a work reflects the range of communicative choices an artist made in deciding how to render its subject matter.

How does a consumer access the functional form of an artwork? The first step is to recognize any salient similarities between the target artwork and some range of others. These similarities facilitate categorizing a work appropriately, or perceptually recognizing its identity as a member of some range of salient categories of art. This is a volume about painting and sculpture. We can confine our discussion to the visual arts. But the point generalizes to all types of artworks from novels, poems, and novellas to conceptually driven performance art. When we recognize that an artwork belongs to one category or another we unlock a recipe of normative conventions that guide and constrain the way we attend to its perceptible surface. The concepts that encode our understanding of categories of art function as perceptual filters that direct attention and help us to recognize and understand the artistically salient features of a work. In short, we deploy our commonsense understanding of the communicative practices associated with different categories

of art to focus attention on the artistically salient attributes of the work, the attributes that carry information about its artistically salient point, purpose, or meaning.

Categories of art are encoded in our understanding of the productive and evaluative conventions governing artistic practices for a range of artworks within an artworld community. We might schematically explain the relationship between productive and evaluative conventions as follows. Artists develop their own unique productive strategies and stylistic vocabularies through trial and error with artistic styles and methods inherited from some chosen set of their precursors. Constraints on this process include the nature of the medium and the relative communicative success of these productive strategies in practice. Communicative success is, in turn, constrained by artistic preferences that have been shaped by the history of artistic practice within that community, by a shared background knowledge of the existing artistic styles and methods that underwrite artistic expression. The evaluative conventions that govern our appreciative practices reflect our understanding of those normative productive conventions artists have settled on as successful in the context of their communicative practices. The normative productive and evaluative conventions constitutive of categories of art, therefore, emerge and evolve together via a back-and-forth communicative exchange.

So, how does a consumer access the functional form of an artwork? They apply the resources available to them through their understanding of categories of art. They use their shared background knowledge of categories of art to recognize and evaluate productive stylistic choices reflected in the way the artist has rendered the subject of the work. This process, in turn, enables them to piece together the point, purpose, or meaning of the work. What it is to appreciate an artwork is, therefore, to render it intelligible by tying it into a narrative about the history of artistic communicative practices.

It is at precisely this point that the normative dimensions of appreciation argument rears its head again. What it is to appreciate an artwork is to render it intelligible. What it is to render an artwork intelligible is to locate it in a narrative about the history of artistic practice by associating it with some range of categories of art. Locating an artwork enables us to recognize and interpret the choices an artist made, what it meant to render the subject of a work in that particular way in that particular context. We cannot render a work intelligible by looking at it in isolation. The skeptic argues that this entails that psychology is the wrong lens to use to look to locate art. The causal-psychological lens of cognitive psychology is directed at those internal psychological processes that underwrite our individual, subjective interactions with particular, individual artworks at a particular, isolated moment in time. Artistic explanations lie in the way what has been perceived in a work is subsequently tied into the history of artist practice. The identity of an artwork lies in its relationship to the norms and values constitutive of different categories of art. The scope of cognitive psychology, so the argument goes, is too narrow to encompass this kind of normative explanation.

3 Why Shouldn't We Be Skeptical about Psychology of Art?

The puzzle of locating art is a genuine challenge for psychology of art. But it is a challenge that can be met. The solution is already suggested in the skeptical arguments rehearsed in the paragraphs above. Let's accept for now that cognitive psychology cannot help explain the productive and evaluative norms constitutive of categories of art (although I am skeptical about this claim). It can nonetheless contribute to explanations of role these normative conventions play in artistic practice, how they are used to shape our everyday interactions with artworks, how the artistically salient content of a work has been rendered and expressed. These sorts of explanations can, in turn, serve as strong constraints on our understanding of the nature of categories of art themselves.

The target of philosophical skepticism about psychology of art is a narrow, methodological divide that emerged between empirical and philosophical aesthetics in the mid-20th century. The roots of this divide can be traced back through David Berlyne (1971) to Gustav Fechner (1876/1978) and the origins of psychology as a discipline in the 19th century. The enduring fracas is largely a disagreement about evidence. Philosophical aesthetics looks to the judgments of expert artists, art historians, and critics for evidence about the nature of art. Researchers in empirical aesthetics have argued that there is a risk that small samples of individual expert judgments of taste like these might encode subjective biases that mask the real identity of art. Sometimes a charge of elitism is levied in these contexts. But the real trouble is the sample size. Empirical aesthetics proposes that researchers should look to the physiological responses and explicit preference judgments of large samples of ordinary folks instead. They suggest we replace subjective measures of the individual tastes of experts with objective measures of the behaviors of whole communities. This is a sensible request.

Philosophers have countered that the average behaviors of ordinary perceivers and cogniziers are not the right place to look for art. We might learn interesting things about the (aesthetic or artistic) preferences of average viewers this way. But these viewers need not necessarily have any understanding of the normative conventions that guide artistic production and appreciation in artworld contexts. They may well lack knowledge of the categories of art that guides artworld communities. If so their genuine judgments of taste will miss the mark. Dickie, as mentioned above, argued that studying art this way was analogous to a linguist looking for the nature of some natural language in the grammatical judgments of toddlers. Of course we often learn very surprising things about the shortcomings of our explicit conscious understanding of ourselves when we step into the realm of experimental psychology. We might, for instance, discover that the average perceiver prefers mass produced hotel room landscapes to critically acclaimed contemporary conceptual installation art.

The concerns raised on both sides of this methodological divide are valid and important. But I would suggest that the exchange is a red herring. I recall a recent conversation in which a graduate student in empirical aesthetics argued that it was perfectly valid to appreciate a painting (whether it was a Vermeer, a Kinkade, or a hotel room landscape) just because one was struck by its unique hue of blue. Of course they were correct. The folk view of art is that artworks are written in a perceptually universal, affectively inflected vocabulary of aesthetics. This folk view is underwritten by a generic aesthetic category of art. The right way to interact with artworks that fall within this category is to open your mind and attend to the way the work strikes you perceptually. The methods of empirical aesthetics are well suited to explore the nature of our cognitive interactions with these kinds of artworks. But there are many other categories of art. Worse, I'd bet that there are normative biases unique to particular aesthetic communities of ordinary viewers that define a broad range of categorial variance within folk-aesthetic views of art themselves.

The list of potential categories of art is long. There is contemporary art, minimalism and early conceptual art, feminist and Marxist conceptual art, the neo-expressionism and postmodernist neo-geo art of the 1980s, modernism, dada, surrealism, impressionism, expressionism, Hudson River landscape painting, mannerism, pastoralism, etc. Each of these categories of art is defined by its own normative productive and evaluative conventions. These normative conventions, in turn, define categorially unique sets of *artistically salient diagnostic features* or perceptible sets of defining features that allow a consumer to recognize that a work was intentionally produced as a member of one category or another (see Schyns, 1998).

The artistically salient diagnostic features exhibited in a work reveal the *categorial intentions* of the artist. They don't tell us how to interpret the point, purpose, or meaning of a work *per se*. Rather they show us that we are to understand the work as having been intended to be interpreted under a certain rubric, a recipe for recognizing, understanding, and appreciating the content of

the work particular to a particular category of art. We are supposed to notice the coarse brushstrokes of impressionist paintings, the skew scale of Hudson River school mountain landscapes, and the impossible muscular flexion of Rodin's sculpted figures. We are not supposed to be distracted by how far these categorically salient aspects of those artworks fall astray of realism. Rather we are supposed to recognize that they are canonical expressive devices designed to communicate something about the dynamics of a pedestrian snapshot of an ordinary landscape, the grandeur of the nature world, and the dynamic, animate, emotionally expressive qualities of human behaviors respectively.

Artworks are communicative devices. They are attentional engines. They are artifacts that instruct us how to attend to their perceptible surfaces in order to recover their artistic point, purpose, or meaning (Carroll & Seeley, 2013). Any comprehensive understanding of art should include an understanding of how artworks work in this regard. The methods of cognitive psychology, whether construed broadly to include psychophysiology and neuroscience or not, are ideally suited to the task. Evidence suggests, for instance, that memory and attention conspire to shape the content of perception. Phillippe Schyns (1998) has explored interconnections between research on categorization and perceptual recognition that can help illuminate how artists encode their categorial intentions in the perceptible surfaces of artworks. Biased competition theories of selective attention suggest that the categorization processes involved in perceptual recognition enhance the sensory encoding of diagnostic features at the expense of others (Desimone & Duncan, 1995; Kastner, 2004). This kind of research can help us understand how artists use artworks to direct attention and convey the particular content of their works. Studies of the differences between cognitive influences on spatial, feature, and category-based attention can help further articulate our understanding of these matters (Wolfe, 1994; Peelen & Kastner, 2014). Bence Nanay has argued, in a related vein, that differences between distributed and focused attention can help us articulate the nature of aesthetic expression, experience, and understanding (Nanay, 2016).

4 Cognitive Psychology and Art

Categorization is a psychological process that is central to this model for understanding the nature of art. The nature of art lies in the defining characteristics of different categories of art. Our understanding of art is revealed in the cognitive behaviors that underwrite a capacity to deploy categories of art in perceptual recognition, just as our understanding of other things is revealed in our capacity to deploy the appropriate categories in more pedestrian perceptual contexts. What are categories of art? Discussions of categories go hand in hand with discussions of the concepts we use to encode our understanding of them in memory (Murphy, 2002). Our understanding of the nature of categories is encoded in the nature (structure) of the concepts we use to represent them. The question, "What are categories of art?" might well be reframed as "What is the appropriate theory of concepts for categories of art?" (see Seeley, 2020).

Perceptual categories of art would seem to be well-matched to a prototype theory of concepts. Prototype theories define concepts relative to a notion of *typicality*. Objects, events, and actions are categorized relative to their resemblance to some set of canonical or prototypical features common to members of that category. A painting can be categorized an impressionist painting, on this account, if it exhibits the right prototypical features, e.g. coarse brushstrokes that exhibit the dynamics of an ordinary landscape. Kendall Walton's (1970) discussion of categories of art bears some resemblance to a prototype theory of concepts.

Morris Weitz (1956) argued that the only thread that runs through the history of art is a notion of revolutionary creativity. If we want to know if something is an artwork, he suggested, we should ask if it bears a resemblance to something else that we already recognize as an artwork. Weitz's view draws on Wittgenstein's philosophical notion of *family resemblance*. Wittgenstein

argued that there were likely no rigid sets of features shared by all members of a category. Rather, members of a category exhibit overlapping strands of similarity that transitively bind them all together. His canonical illustration was the notion games. Extreme skiing, ice hockey, hurley, rounders, boxing, backgammon, Monopoly, Parcheesi, Hungry Hungry Hippos, pick-up-sticks, and jacks are all games. But there doesn't seem to be any set of features they all share in common other than loose transitive relations of resemblance.

Weitz's view bears a similarity to *exemplar theories* of concepts. Exemplar theories are like prototype theories. Both are similarity-based theories of concepts. Exemplar theorists eschew reference to common prototypical features though. They appeal instead to measures of similarity and difference to sets of exemplars. What makes something an artwork is that it is recognizably similar to some set of artifacts we already categorize that way. For instance, artists often copy some aspects of their precursors. They make artworks that resemble some set of past artworks they find expressively interesting or historically important. Of course, in doing so they often amend those stylistic expressive devices that they have borrowed, intentionally correcting some perceived flaw in those prior expressive methods. Sometimes the corrections an artist makes are designed to repudiate some art critical position held by their precursors (see Noel Carroll, 1993). Sometimes these differences countenance creating a novel category of art to accommodate them.

Artists are engaged in a dialog with their precursors that is mediated by their works. It is more often than not the case that one must situate a work within this kind of a dialog in order to understand and appreciate it. Doing so reveals the underlying reasons for the choices an artist has made. It reveals the functional form of the work and so helps articulate its point, purpose, or meaning. Categorizing a work appropriately reveals the etiology of its content. Categorizing a work explains the artistic salience of its features by identifying the root causes of their appearances in the communicative intentions of the artist. Artworks can, in turn, be sorted together into categories relative to their roles in the history of a range of art critical dialogs (Carroll, 1993, 1999; Danto, 2000, 2001). This is a *cognitivist* view of categories of art. It bears a resemblance to *knowledge-based* or *theory-theory* accounts of concepts.

Why are appearances good indicators of the categories that something belongs to? Appearances reflect the structure and function of an object or organism. They are, as a result, good cues to its behaviors (Bloom, 2006). Evidence from developmental psychology suggests that young children start by categorizing things by their appearances. But these strategies soon yield to a *characteristics-to-defining-shift* in their category judgments (Kiel, 1989). Children shift the reasons for their category judgments to track the roles things play in the causal texture of their environment. These explanations shift their understanding of the underlying structure of categories of things from recognizable appearances to the reasons that explain why they have the appearances they have in the first place. Artworks are artifacts. They have the shape, structure, and appearances that they have because they were designed that way with a goal or purpose in mind. Category judgments about artworks, and artifacts in general, track this kind of intentional etiology (Barsalou, 1985; Bloom, 2006; Winner, 2018). The net result is a functional account of form.

5 Conclusions

Where does this leave us when we think about cognitive psychology and art? Our capacity to recognize something as an artwork requires that we categorize it appropriately. Categorizing an artifact as an artwork, in turn, unlocks a recipe of normative conventions that guide how we attend to its surface, perceive its artistically salient features, understand its content, and appreciate their artistic qualities. Cognitive psychology is well-positioned to contribute to our understanding of all of these aspects of our engagement with artworks. Explanations of this sort track the ways consumers acquire, represent, and use information carried in the perceptible surfaces of artworks

in order to recover their artistically salient aesthetic, expressive, perceptual, and semantic content. These kinds of explanations, as a result, serve as constraints on the acceptability of philosophical and art critical theories about the nature of art. More importantly they explain the artistic qualities of an artwork as artifacts of the categorial salience of its features. The artistically salient features of a work are the ones that carry information about its point, purpose, or meaning and which category of art it belongs to. In this regard, they can make a direct contribution to our understanding of the nature of art.

Does any of this help reveal and explain those normative conventions that define categories of art and related artistic practices in the first place? Maybe. Maybe not. I would be deeply surprised if an understanding of the information processing that underwrites our interactions with artworks had no bearing on our understanding of the sources of the normative conventions that govern them. At the very least, cognitive psychology should contribute to our understanding of how these normative conventions emerge out of the back-and-forth communicative exchange between artists and consumers. My intuition is that cognitive psychology, perhaps in conjunction with computational linguistics and anthropology, could explain the normative conventions constitutive of our categories of art as products of an implicit, ongoing, dynamic social exchange that serves as the grounds for communication in the first place. It might not thereby explain matters of taste. But it should be able to articulate what is going on cognitively when we look under the hood. And this should serve to explain the etiology and the normative conventions that define categories of art, as well as the roles they play in artistic judgment. And this would be a significant contribution to our understanding of the nature of art. But, of course, the validity of these intuitions is an empirical matter and the subject for another day.

Note

- 1 One might argue that the perceived dynamics of either painting are a product of the perceptual interaction between the work and the consumer. A painting is a static pattern of pigment suspended in a medium. It has no dynamic qualities. What dynamic features we perceive in a painting are cognitively projected onto it as a consequence of perceptual processing. If so one might argue that the dynamic qualities of a painting really are explained in our understanding of their etiology in perception. Still, this is true of many, if not far more, non-art cases. The projection of illusory motion onto the dusty venetian blind that shielded your undergraduate aesthetics classroom from direct sunlight (and any concomitant sense of vibrant energy) is equally explained this way. But it is not, as a consequence, (necessarily) understood as an artwork (although it could be if you had intended to use it in that context to express some art critical point about the history of philosophical aesthetics).

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PART V

Comparisons among the Arts



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21

FINE ARTS OF DISPLAY

Photography, Painting, Drawing

Patrick Maynard

The English terms for our three topics, “painting,” “photography,” and “drawing,” set us in a good direction for understanding each and their interrelations. That is the direction of distinct physical acts of production, rather than of their products, which indeed are named for those processes. Significantly, unlike the performance arts, these individual products persist beyond their formative events; still, they are experienced in terms of them, as kinds of *artifacts*, a term that, like “work of art,” signifies acts of purposive making.

It seems important to emphasize this broad common ground of our three arts before investigating the different perspectives that they might provide for one another, since, even before the recent advent of that great mixer, digitalization, the “postmodern” age has worked against such traditional distinctions, to an extent that it might appear to some futile, even reactionary, to consider these arts as distinctive. However, the idea of different arts, like that of art itself, has proved as robustly serviceable as other general empirical concepts, so long as, on Aristotle’s advice, we do not “expect the same levels of precision in all inquiries.”

Nevertheless, preserving these common genre conceptions must be done critically. It is a particular purpose of philosophy to identify, test and, where useful, suggest alternatives to the ideas, even terms, by which we conceive things. In a short discussion, that will entail beginning with some familiar matters put in rather unfamiliar ways. Fortunately, in this we can call on the ideas and terms of a number of original thinkers, from a variety of fields, to assist us.

- 1 *Artifacts.* Let us begin by asking, what in general, are artifacts? As child psychologist Michael Tomasello points out, a child wanting to know what an artifact or one of its parts or aspects is will often ask what it is *for*—for *us*—which is a special, purposive kind of “why” question. Artifacts are things of double purpose: made *on purpose for* purposes. Two important points to add are, first, that many artifacts have several functions, which may be main or secondary, interrelated or not; next, that it is typical of humans to *improvise* with them, including in make-shift ways, for purposes other than what they are normally for. Such, more generally, is an important basis for our creativity, without which we would have no fine arts.
- 2 *Marking and Display.* The physicality of these three formative methods helps advance us two more steps into our arts. When asked what any are for, we can reply that painting, drawing and photography are all for *marking surfaces* (sometimes transiently, on screens), in three physically distinct ways and that—notably regarding their arts—such marking is first for perceptual, here visual, *display* purposes. Yet it is important to keep in mind that throughout their histories all three processes have had a variety of major technological applications, with and

without display functions, and apart from connections with fine art, also that some continue to provide background sources of meaning for their arts.

As the printing press demonstrates, controlled surface-marking, like motive powers, building structures and so forth is one of the great families of human industry by which the world has been rapidly transformed in modern times. For brief example, to begin with the latest of our trio, photography, microchip manufacture is done by photo-etching, which was the earliest of photography's processes, and sound movies were made possible by marking photo-optical tracks on film, neither of which is display for visual perception. Most painting on surfaces of the world is primarily for protective covering. Drawing is essential to the industrialized world, in the way the surface-marking technologies of writing and moveable type were to the previous. By its means precise, complex and standardized specifications can be made, adjusted, stored, transmitted, thereby decisively "drawing the line" between the traditional and modern worlds with a draughtsman's marker, and while most of that operates through visual display, that is not for its own sake.

Taken more narrowly as arts, since *display* is the common function through which our surface-marking processes work there, we need to consider more closely what the act of display is. Making something perceptible is not necessarily to display it; display usually requires also a show of purpose for that very act. Just as showing off is more than showing, display artifacts will not only be perceivable (visible) but to be understood as having been made for that purpose—while, as artifacts, they are likely other purposes, as well. Should this seem complicated, the matter is the same as seeing that someone is waving to us—which entails making visible that we are meant not only to perceive the act but also to recognize it as being done for that very purpose, besides others.

Counting so-called "orders of intentionality," any artifact is already understood by at least three: of our perceiving that it has been produced on purpose, for our use. Among these, what may call "display artifacts"—and these include our works of visual art—add two more levels: that we are aware that they and some of their aspects were made and presented so that we should recognize this and be guided thereby: such is their particular use. Thereby we can protect our visual arts—particularly photography—from the idea that they are "imitations" of things or of natural effects. Of any relevant aspect of such works, it always makes sense to ask why it was put or left there, in terms of what its *purpose* is for our perception, as opposed to natural causes, and this strongly shapes our perception of it. "What's that doing there?" is always a relevant question with these arts, and that question, as art historian Michael Podro argued, is what "sustains perception" of them.

In summary, the products of drawing, painting and photography, when considered as artworks, are chiefly understood as display artifacts, whatever other functions they have, independently or in combination. This is confirmed by our standard use of captions for any artifacts, which tell us what they are in terms of what they are made from and how made, who made them (where and when) and what they are for. Failure to appreciate these familiar facts is a great source of confusion, notably regarding so-called "artists' intentions."

Another important critical observation here is that visual effects of our three display processes are at this point usually, awkwardly, considered in terms of things called "pictures," even "pictures of things," and—to compound the confusion—taken diversely as "visual likenesses," "iconic signs," "symbols," even "projections." That is to take all their display purposes as of one central kind. The modern arts, at least, having discredited some of these ideas, we are further discomfited to find such works regularly considered via alleged relationships to existents to which they "point" or that they "stand for". (What do comic drawings such as Mickey Mouse stand for or point to?) It is remarkable that such elementary confusion should be so entrenched, if only in "theoretical" contexts, as these are not terms of everyday

discourse. One way to disembarass ourselves of them is by staying on course, asking what the displays of these kinds of artifacts—including comics and fictions—are *for*, for us. We note that the ideas just listed are typically in terms of dyadic relationships, including the artifact and its “subject,” sometimes called “the (real) world” (thereby invoking gratuitous issues of “realism”), leaving perceivers out, whereas they should be in terms of our active *uses* of such artifacts. As the art historian E.H. Gombrich advised, we should always look to “the function of the image.” In order now to consider our three arts, let us ask what are the main functions of their displays, with their differing productive processes.

- 3 “*Mediators*” as *Cognitive Artifacts*. An interesting answer to the general question of purpose was proposed by the psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who used one of the standard terms cited, “signs,” in a distinctive way. Among artifacts, Vygotsky distinguished “signs” from “tools.” Tools he called “externally oriented” artifacts that we use to affect our environments, whereas signs, he held, are “internally oriented”: they are artifacts that we make and place in our environments to work back upon our minds, via our active perceptions of them. The latter artifacts he termed a type of “*mediators*,” a term adopted here to avoid the ambiguity of “signs.” Thus, for Vygotsky, such a mediator “has the reverse action” to a tool: it ‘operates on the individual, not the environment,’ so that by its use people become “both the subjects and objects of their own behavior.” Thereby we gain a measure of freedom from biological exigencies. For simple example, he wrote, ancient “use of notched sticks and knots” for reminders show that humans early “went beyond the limits of the functions given them by nature for a new culturally-elaborated organization of their behavior.”

Of particular interest in such procedures is that thereby (in a manner of speaking) we actively “use our brains.” We do so by singling out and exploiting some of their evolved capacities, for our own purposes—such as, in Vygotsky’s mnemonic example, off-loading short-term memory tasks to our visual systems—or, when counting on our fingers, other senses. This is possible due to the modularity of our sense and cognitive systems, and their adaptability to “detached” or borrowed uses, by means of our improvisatory powers, which are characteristic of our creativity, and thus of our measures of freedom. Thereby humans have invented what may be termed “cognitive artifacts” as ways of calling select mental systems to the assistance of others, via mediator through the environment. Important examples are provided by the visual display marking systems by our three methods. Let us apply this to one main function, *depiction*.

- 4 *Depictive Uses*. Let us begin with a common notion, that depiction is a method of “representation,” understanding that as a kind of display function that “presents” *content* to our minds, using, by mediation, our recruited great powers of visual processing. What kind of mental content? Following Kendall Walton, we may say that this content is what is to be *imagined*. It is characteristic of human mentality that we are active imaginers—indeed, dreamers—even absent artificial help. As Vygotsky remarked, “Unlike the ape, which [primatologist] Köhler tells us is ‘the slave of its own visual field,’ children acquire an independence with respect to their concrete surroundings; they cease to act in the immediately given and evident space.” Yet, by running mediating loops out into those surroundings, to be returned to our brains, thereby exploiting aspects of our visual systems, we not only greatly elaborate and vivify our imagining projects. We also sustain and share them publicly, by producing “internally oriented” physical artifacts that mobilize highly connected perceptual systems evolved for environmental perception, but for our controlled imaginative uses. As shared mediators these help establish cultural worlds. Again, fortunately, the *modularity* of our mental systems allows us to select certain ones in order to get effects, in ourselves and others: for us.

As Gombrich argued, in unique terms of both vision science and art history, finding which systems and how to recruit them has been a matter of trial and error. Not every effort is

effective; those that are stored and transmitted culturally. Finally to approach one of our three arts, a notable case, especially significant, even defining, for drawing, is our species' sensitivity to contour edges, thereby making drawn *lines* remarkably effective, despite the oft-stated observation that "there are no lines in nature." No need for that: contour lines are good examples of Vygotskian mediators: changes we can easily make on environmental surfaces that we have discovered to work back very effectively on certain modules of our visual as well as tactile systems, to assist us in projects of imagining perceiving. Photography however is well known for not working so well by this economical system but rather through comparative tonal differences across surfaces, which is very laborious for hand work, if also a method of drawing.

Working critically with the conceptions of artifacts, purposes, "mediators," orders of intentionality, marking, display, depiction and so forth, we have now positioned painting and our other practices within broad contexts of activities of great meaning to all peoples, liberating them from common, obscure and stultifying assumptions about reference, truth, resemblance, "the real world" and so forth. We have freed fiction from association with falsity, and thereby vivid depiction from illusion. Thus, no special cases need be made for nonfigurative uses of any of them at high levels, or for their important frequent mixes with each other as well as with other forms. Let us now consider more closely how painting compares with these other arts.

- 5 *Painting: "Location" and "Sustained Recognition."* Affinities and differences among our three modes vary with historical cultures and among individual schools and artists. For example, in some cultures, painting and drawing are closely linked, even mixed, with writing, as "arts of the brush." Still, kinds of painting usually come under the heading, "wet media," whose dominant connotation is of spreading colorants, usually in layers on prepared "grounds," over surfaces, so as to cover and somewhat obscure them, whereas drawing is usually said to "reserve" their surfaces. This, for example, is what constitutes ambiguities of classification for media such as watercolor. Accordingly, much painting is considered as "built up," especially with the development in the West of such thicker paints as oil and acrylic. Modern framed painting practices—more so photography—together with literary accounts, have tended to blur our understanding of the many interactions of paintings with such surfaces, for example in fresco, where surface and ground are physically consubstantial.

Such close associations with physical surfaces are important for our historical, empirically based, understanding of painting, which needs to be freed not only from close association with figurative depiction but also with "flat" and "canvas," which apply neither to the Sistine ceiling nor to many other canonic works. Greek painting was largely on walls and pots. Much of the greatest painting in cultures worldwide is closely related to architectural spaces, as wall and ceiling *decoration*. Indeed, it was to integrate painting, in a specific way, with architecture that one of its most famous and influential European techniques, *linear perspective*, was developed. That greatly affected not only painting practices but (not happily) the very conception of depiction. So important is the sense of addressing a surface to painting (and drawing), with strong appeal to our species' sensory/motor systems linkages, that photography could never be a substitute for that, as its images were "lossy" in this regard long before digitalization.

Another important characteristic difference is that, to use art historian Philip Rawson's term, much painting, depictive or not, may be said to have *location*, in the following sense. Its surface is and is experienced as that of a substance—typically itself an artifact—with a pre-existing presence giving it an independent nature, meaning and spatial location. Thus, "located" applies not only to broad, permanent, architectural surfaces but also to portable, e.g., devotional, ones, including boxes. Being taken as part of a larger whole has, potentially, a great effect on the perception and meaning of such works (often cropped by photo

reproduction). It sets located painting apart from typical products of the other two media, also to a degree from modern “unlocated” painting, whose grounds, like screens, are entirely in service of what is placed on them. Adding to its covering power, sometimes ranging over large scales, and its physical consistency, this power of “embodiment” connects painting historically with *sculpture*, as well, in several great cultures, where the two arts, as just noted, may also be combined with architecture.

Even less located modern paintings are typically seen differently from photographs owing to their being “*worked surfaces*.” That difference we might consider, avoiding misleading clichés about “brushstrokes,” with a pair of brief comments, characteristic of contemporary painters, by a nonfigurative one (Brice Marden): that every time he begins a painting he is “terrified,” and that he knows when one is finished “when the truck’s out front.” In contrast with photographers, painters begin with surfaces on which to produce displays, usually by building up through slow processes, with many deletions. Matisse had successive states photographed, in case he decided to scrape them back to where it seemed he had lost something too valuable. Because paintings largely consist not only in relationships—notably of colors (of which we should say more) and shapes—but also relationships of those relationships (also to other forms and colors), and so forth, they are commonly set aside by painters while there seem to be relationships needing further to be “resolved”. Such is a common modern condition, that finished paintings are ones not so much completed as abandoned. To be sure, however, traditional painting in most cultures is practiced differently. Typically, projects are prescribed in nature, material, space and time-frame, and accomplished through teachable stages of production, similar to those in most production activities, while still allowing for wider individual variation, “riffs” on standard themes.

From our artifactual beginning, we have been considering painting mainly in terms of artists, who make things on purpose. Yet such works are also for purposes, notably visual display to certain people of whom artists take themselves as representative: “for us.” With painting, such display is usually more permanent than that of photography or drawing, and also seen from more positions to which it should “carry.” Delacroix observed that pictures need to “give the impression of taking in the whole thing at once,” yet this must merge with what Michael Podro termed “sustained recognition.” All visual perception, as Gombrich stressed, is a process of hypothesis and revision, artworks more so. This is particularly true of paintings, which tend to provide much physical latitude of display. Paintings are far more common in museums than are the others, partly due to their scale, physicality and permanence, but also because of time taken with them by the hypothetical, investigative nature of their sustained recognition. That is perhaps easiest to explain in terms of figurative pictures, where we are prompted by the display to recruit our abilities at environmental object and event recognition, combined with many other factors, including information in captions. Podro’s idea is not only that we do not take in all of a scene in an instant, but also that, in the case of works of art, we are rewarded as we go back and forth between what is presented and how it was done, as we increase grasp of what we see and imagine seeing, gaining insight dialectically, in processes likely never completed, indeed renewed on many occasions over lifetimes.

6 *Views from Photography.*

Our understanding of photography has the advantage of a short, well documented, history, containing articulate records of its various kinds, revealing its relations with painting and drawing at every stage. A striking feature is that photography (which was named by scientist John Herschel) was from its beginnings understood as a family of technologies. Necessities often being daughters of inventions—as for sound recording on cylinder or, later, tape; thereafter transistor radios—in a modern age of patents, “science” often came first—search for as many different “applications,” as they were called, for various markets, later. Even as new

depictive technologies emerged from early photography, issues of fine art were not prominent; rather, those of labor-saving and cheaper industrial production were. That is not to say that aesthetic matters were neglected. Perceptual qualities of early processes were much commented on: notably fine detail and continuous tonal gradations. For depictive uses, other important features included the striking formative factors that all parts of the image were formed at once and, with the spirit of that age, free of hand work. Related to but distinct from these was the most important, then as now, combinations of the artifactual functions of depiction with *detection*.

The first formal presentations of photo methods made little appeal to them as “picturesque agents”, but rather as methods of what the writer Siegfried Kracauer termed “recording and revealing” for various sciences. Thereby photography, whether by camera or superposition, can be considered in terms of controlled information channels. In general, these may be understood in terms of an electromagnetic (or particle) “source,” an intervening “scrim,” and a uniform “screen.” The scrim modulates a fairly uniform flow from the source, and these modulations, as they differentially affect the screen, are recorded as information, made accessible by a series of optical filters along the channel to eliminate noise—to which photography is prone. This is a process of selective physical filtering all the way.

Just as with shadows, to which they were often likened, provided thereby are means for detecting states of any factor in this causal trio. Regarding sources, radioactivity, UV light, X-rays and the chemistry of stars were discovered this way. Regarding screens, the photo-chemistries of photography were thereby discovered. Most commonly, however, attention goes to the “scrims” where selected differences in these light modulators produce differences (thus information) on the screens. These are usually called “pictures,” many of which are “photographs of” things, events and conditions.

An ongoing source of confusion regarding photography is due to several factors: not distinguishing the different things photo-technologies are *for*, forgetting that artifacts, like organs in living nature, typically have multiple functions, also that these functions may interact in a variety of ways, thereby producing more complex functions. With photography, the main functions usually combined (aside from photo-reproduction etc.) are depiction, as a means of imagining, and detection. Most figurative photographs are looked at mainly for purposes of depiction, imagining seeing, with the detective functions appearing at various strengths more or less in support of the depictive. Again as with shadows, the sense of causal connection among source, scrim and “screens by filtered channels may add a sense of presence to the viewers’ experiences. To skeptics regarding the effectiveness of such “invisible” factors as causal relations, we may reply that live broadcasts of events have an impact different from indistinguishable recorded ones. Phenomenology does not reduce to epistemology. Thus to the material presence of painting largely lacking in photography, photography replies with a sense of indirect presence of source and scrim subjects, to some extent controlled by photographers.

Digitalization has provided a simple way to explain the complementary situation, where imagining seeing supports detection. Space exploration has made familiar vehicles carrying a variety of detectors, with filters for different kinds of sources beyond light. For example, from rockets: fields, particles, waves—including magnetism, plasma, radar, sonar, radio, microwaves, gravity—from surface probes: seismic activity, wind, temperature, chemistry and so forth. Distinct from these sensors are those for “optical remote sensing,” including cameras with filters for UV, infrared and “visible” light. All these reports are received, stored and sent as digital messages, in which, given the computer’s “fungibility”—ability to transform masses of different kinds of information into common forms—their reception may be shaped to taste.

The electromagnetic reports are usually of prime interest, since by their means spatial shapes and locations of individual sources, object surfaces with their spatial contours may easily be

placed in overall contexts, following optical laws regarding gradients. Next, these reports may be so processed and tuned as to produce on screens “user friendly” visual displays—that is, displays easily accessed by the human visual cortex, which, thanks to millions of years of evolution, comprises one of the largest information processing systems known. Nothing similar holds for the other data streams, which might be well suited to the environmental perception powers of other kinds of beings. Unlike reading oscilloscopes, our powerful everyday environmental visual processes are thereby recruited as mediators, albeit supplemented with special training. A major source of confusion about photography is that, given that our primate species is so dependent on that information channel, we tend, unscientifically, to identify the subject itself with our visual imagining of it, whereas depictive imagining should be understood here as an aid to detection via only certain, highly filtered, electromagnetic data sets, avoiding perennially puzzling confusions about “realism.”

Concerning art, early serious photographers first attempted to match some of drawing’s and painting’s attractions, but soon turned toward autonomous “photo-standards,” as they explored what seemed to be aesthetically distinctive features of their technologies as they developed. However, with the later modernist age’s tendencies away from such “purist” conceptions of distinct media, such views have lost currency. Speaking frankly about the art-world however, practical issues affecting photographers’ likening their works to painting returns us to the issue of artifacts, now as valued material objects persisting through time. This reintroduces the idea of “fungibility,” but now as exchange value: money. Augmenting paintings’ advantages as displayed artifacts, sometimes with “location,” is a physical robustness to which the other two kinds of images can only aspire. Besides their usual fragility of grounds, the two are extremely sensitive to electromagnetic phenomena, and so exhibited for limited times only. For that reason alone, artworld investment in them—thereby their market value—has been cautious. This was for long especially true of color photography, which nowadays is usually transferred to dyes. While painting’s analogue deteriorations are well-known from centuries of use, photo technologies are so recent as to require science to predict their permanence.

- 7 *Drawing and Design.* Regarding drawing and its deep relations with painting, we may be said so far to have barely scratched the surface. By contrast with photography, drawing’s history emerges from a prehistory of tens of thousands of years, and its first full manifestations—notably (along with carving) in caves of the Upper Paleolithic—show richness of content and high technical facility that would have been developed earlier on sunlit surfaces. It is no wonder that drawing and painting are dated to the appearance of modern *Homo sapiens*; indeed that “modern” version is itself dated by the beginning of these marked artifacts. Such species dating is usually explained in terms of this “material culture” evidence for possession of language, since it indicates “use of symbols”—of signs with *content*, beyond the expressive such as with body painting for decoration or to indicate status. However, drawing as having intentional content would no more be limited to depictive representation in its prehistory than it is now. Considered as Vygotskian mediators par excellence, such markings have a number of other intelligent uses—including marks as markers, for re-identifying, counting, placing locations, indicating directions—whereby mediator loops into the environment are made to bring internal systems into concert. Taken in broad meaning, drawing is by far the most important marking process, upon which much else depends. Writing is a form of drawing; as for printing, every font to be drawn.

For perhaps drawing’s most significant use, we may take our lead from languages besides English, where physical actions are not so much stressed—notably from the Italian “*diseño*,” which means both drawing and *design*, extending beyond depiction. We can suppose people planning complex things through drawings with no more interest in visual imagining than

when marking cutting patterns on stone, wood or cloth. Instead, the basic process of drawing might be first understood by drawing theorist John Willats' *dimensionality* approach, whereby (roughly) 0D points mark 1D lines on 2D surfaces, producing there 0, 1 and 2D artifacts, which may further be understood in terms of 0–3D entities, partly by tonal gradations, which from its start photography exploited. Of course, simply as perceptual variations of surfaces and understood as traces of intentional gestures, drawn marks and the units they form are replete with other phenomenological characteristics even before they designate or depict anything. So suggestive to the imagination are the slightest marks that special protocols are required to limit them when used for technical work. How does painting appear from this quickly sketched draughtsman's standpoint?

Drawing was taken, for millennia in different cultures, as a basis of painting, for surfaces covered by paints after being divided by lines. Beyond that, the adage, “if you can't draw it, you can't paint it,” signified drawing as the basic practice for studying and coming to understand the structures of things. By contrast, “modern painting” in the West is understood as rooted in a 19th-century liberation—notably through color—from academic principles based on contour and tonal drawing, which bound painting to sculpture. Yet the situation is never simple. For significant example, the early modern Delacroix wrote (somewhat unfairly) against “line of beauty” ideas, “I see the most beautiful landscape: the idea of line does not come into my mind. The lark sings, the river sparkles with a thousand diamonds, the foliage murmurs; where are any lines to produce these charming sensations?”, and more generally: “Contour should come last... Only the very experienced can use it accurately.” Yet he drew, never parted with his own drawings and insisted on close attention to half-tones in painting, while the next founding modern, Cézanne, referred to his colored structures as drawing.

Drawing remains integral to most painting, figurative or not, yet—even aside from questions of color—artistic temperaments continue to suggest natural differences between the two. If from the point of view of photography painting seems difficult, from that of drawing painting may at first seem easy, since effects that must be earned in drawing are easily produced by application of paint, which in addition produces a wealth of suggestive accidents and thereby a stronger sense of dialogue between artist and medium than does drawing. Yet this very richness of painting, with its bolder effects, can soon overwhelm with a confusion of relationships, from which the chastened painter returns to the drawing board. Drawing, at least as design through visual relationships, is often considered the main control for painting. Thus Delacroix's rival, Ingres: “*Le dessin est la probité de l'art.*”

- 8 *Art Issues.* To this point, we have considered our three image-making processes with intermittent reference to fine arts. For example, as mentioned, in its early decades, while photography was often compared with painting and drawing—and by now we must mention graphics—in certain ways, it was little considered in art contexts. The reason is not, as some later assumed, complacency, but far more thoughtful considerations, to understand which we need to consider “the fine arts” (“*beaux arts*”) like painting and photography, in our opening terms of powers of production rather than of individual objects that are “works” of them. Our “what is art?” question therefore is best put in the terms of historian P. O. Kristeller's: “what are the fine arts?”

What we have considered the “arts” generally, for thousands of years and in many societies, are reasoned capacities for producing artifacts. As such, they are thought of as kinds of skills—likely teachable, forms of knowledge—but, unsurprisingly, never just that. Such knowledge requires general principles, but, as the ancients insisted, special kinds of judgment are required to apply the general to concrete individuals. Such holds for all admired human powers: thus the common ideas of talent and inspiration. As Kristeller pointed out, the “modern system of the [fine] arts” emerged in specific circumstances of the mid-18th

century, in the plural form of a cluster, notably those for producing the fine. Fine or beautiful things are prized and preserved by all societies—as are skills for judging them—producing cultural aspects highly relevant for the maintenance of the wider cultures themselves, as fine things come to be taken as *expressive of*—as making perceptible, for group *display*—cultural values, often related to religions, that provide social identity. It is not surprising therefore that depiction, and like appeals to imagination (as in myths), should be closely related skills. In visual fine arts, depiction and fineness in artifact production are hardly ever found separate.

We may better understand more recent ideas of the arts, indeed of *modern arts*, by noting that the classical ideas of individual talent and inspiration were merged in the 19th century with the older of cultural display or expression, in the form of individual expression. Although that could conflict with the more traditional role of cultural expression—tragically so in authoritarian societies—it merged with it in modern cultures that increasingly characterized themselves as individualistic. Thereby, individual freedom came to be a cultural value that might be displayed preeminently by exercise of a fine art, as artists in different arts cooperated in producing a culture of modernism based on that.

A second simple consideration might also help dispel ongoing confusions. Given that, as we have seen, the fine arts idea was developed by grouping four individually valuable components, the idea has, like any viable structure, persisted, evolved, through flexibility—that is, by changing the components' importances and their relations. In different eras each component has been developed, shifted in position, value and attention. For notable example, self-expression has been positioned against the other formative factor, skill—even depiction and the aesthetic. More widely, photography has greatly affected attitudes toward depiction and its skills, whereas it has long produced ambivalence regarding its own two formative components, and thereby intentionality. This ambivalence increased as technological advances in equipment rapidly advanced and were widely marketed. Received art photographers such as Edward Weston and Robert Capa have responded by denying that they practiced fine art; some have held that modern photography has changed or even replaced the idea of visual fine art. That returns us for a last time to our initial artifact considerations.

Of particular interest to such photographers is photography's introduction into the formative component of "fine arts" a third factor besides art and self-expression. This is what provides its detective powers: the causal "scrim" (also source), and information channel, including optics and other filters, variations of which are registered by the image. Calling on the frequent impression of the presence of subjects detected by photographs, many photographers have sought to "*themmatize*"—that is, especially display and develop—rather than minimize it. Regarding causes generally, although we often speak of "the cause" of an event, we know well that there are always multiple factors, even multiple causal "agents" as opposed to "conditions," and also (though not well enough) that much that happens is owing to chance. Even in photography's earliest periods, it had become clearer that the presence of the two classic formative factors of skill and self-expression could not only survive new technologies but merge with their detective function.

Understandably, where several causal agents are prominent, perception requires more instances to distinguish them. Thus, art photographers' portfolios tend to be large. Yet the sense of style and other aspects of mentality that emerge may *include* how other causal factors have been displayed through mental agency. Thereby what is shown and what shows up need not be so distinct. Furthermore, across the much broader history of image-making occur many non-modern, also non-Western, traditions in which the maker's self-expression is not thematized, while actual or alleged manifestations of subjects—often religious ones—in images are. Modernist painters not infrequently attempted to provide experiences similar to that. Such images tend to be disassociated from time, even space, also to restrain naturalistic, even figurative, appeals to imagining seeing or even to visual experience.

As a modern species, we began painting and drawing; as infants each of us does, too, though very few continue. As a fine art, painting, like drawing, has dropped off steeply in practice, quality and expression of human cultures—their “ways of seeing.” That is partly owing to photography, whose own massive output, including its use in marketing, tends to overwhelm not only its arts but Podro’s visual practices of sustained recognition. The earlier productive and perceptual processes are slowly paced for fast times, so that the question how painting appears through photography invites another jest: “Poorly, because of all the cameras in the way.” Yet, whether taken literally or in terms of photo-reproduction, a positive side of the reply is that art—largely painting—museums worldwide are often the most visited gated venues in cities, where their lectures, prints and books do lively business.

Given its roots in our nature, the ever renewed stimulations of nature and perception, and our need to give form to our experiences through mediators, there is little doubt that painting as a serious practice will continue. It is hoped that the broader philosophical and historical approaches presented here, recommending replacing some familiar terms and conceptions with more useful ones, will improve understanding and thereby the practice and appreciation of painting, as well as the other pictorial arts, for individual and social expression, which, among all our activities, we look to as exemplary displays of human freedom.

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22

PHILOSOPHY OF PHOTOGRAPHY NATURALIZED

Scott Walden

Over the past several decades, two philosophical methodologies have emerged in the course of investigations into photography. The first, which I call the Platonistic approach, involves revealing necessary or sufficient conditions involved in concepts closely associated with photography, and then explores conceptual relations between these, seeking leverage for revision, and then offering such revisions as advancements in our knowledge of the medium.

The second, which I call the Aristotlean approach, instead canvasses high-level functions associated photographic technology and then examines ways in which photographers use those functions in contexts ranging from family snapshots to the production of contemporary art. This methodology also delves into how those high-level functions emerge from the interplay of lower-level functions manifested by the components out of which the technologies are assembled. As photographic technologies develop, the high-level functions change, and advancements in our knowledge take the form of cataloguing such changes and of exploring how the new functions are pressed into service by photographers who are addressing the needs of social environments in which they find themselves. Less often, but still importantly, such advancements take the form of discerning the interplay of lower-level functions with the aim of understanding the potentials or limitations of high-level functions in addressing the needs of the social environments as they are at a given point in time.

In what follows, I outline a recent application of the Platonistic approach and argue that the methodology it adopts to gain leverage for conceptual revision is flawed and that, more generally, the approach does little to advance our understanding of photography. I then sketch one application of the Aristotlean approach and ponder the larger question of how that approach might have application, not only to our understanding of photography, but to our investigations into the philosophy of art generally.

1 Roger Scruton and the New Theorists

The most influential application of the Platonistic approach is found in Roger Scruton's argument that viewers cannot take an aesthetic interest in ideal photographs and that, therefore, ideal photographs cannot be artworks (Scruton 1981). Suppose that a painter thinks of a man on a horse as possessing authority, arrogance even. In creating an image of him, she can use her control over details to arrange the eyes in a way that gives the sense of authority, or arrange the lie of the arm in a way that reveals the arrogant character (Scruton 1981, p. 581). In so doing she creates not only an image, but as well an image that is a representation, where a representation is defined as

an image that presents “not just the object portrayed, but [as well] the [artist] seeing that object” (Scruton 2009, p. 451). Viewers encountering such representations can recuperate those thoughts of the painter, and in so doing they, by definition, take an aesthetic interest in those paintings.

But now suppose that a photographer likewise thinks of the man on the horse as authoritative and arrogant and that he wants to use photographic technology to form a representation imbued with such thoughts. If we accept a traditional definition of an ideal photograph as having been formed automatically, by means of the camera mechanism, a mechanism that preserves independence from beliefs or other mental states of the photographer, he is expressively hamstrung, as such independence prevents him from arranging details in the eyes or in the lie of the arm in the ways available to the painter. On this traditional definition of ideal photographs, the photographer cannot produce a representation, and, therefore, viewers cannot take an aesthetic interest in his photograph. Absent such potential to generate aesthetic interest, ideal photographs, unlike paintings, cannot be artworks.

Likewise adopting the Platonistic approach, Diarmuid Costello and Dawn Wilson offer a response to Scruton’s controversial thesis. Taking as their starting point the transduction of light energy into chemical energy on a roll of film or electrical energy on a digital sensor, instances of which they refer to as “photographic event[s]” (Costello 2018, p. 78), they argue that many of the techniques photographers use to gain control over their images in ways that can render them representations in Scruton’s sense are in fact steps in the formation of ideal photographs or, in their own terminology, are involved in instances of “photography proper” (Costello 2018, p. 78).

If a photographic event is necessary, but not sufficient, for the creation of a photograph, then all those subsequent stages of image processing—without which there could be no visible image—should in principle count as strictly photographic. If one cannot generate a photograph without the use of such means, they can hardly be regarded as incidental to “photography proper.”

(Costello 2018, p. 80)

So understood, a “photograph” is a visual image, the causal history of which necessarily implicates a photographic event...

(Costello 2018, p. 78)

Darkroom techniques such as dodging and burning, double-exposure, or use of multiple enlargers are central to the history of the discipline; just as the manipulation of variables such as hue, contrast, saturation and other forms of post-production, such as gradient mapping, are already central to that of digital photography. So long as they implicate a photographic event they are photographic—irrespective of whether they preserve belief-independence.

(Costello 2018, p. 88)

Photographic events result in arrays of altered energy states on film or digital sensors, arrays that are not visible. Because photographs are, by definition, visible, such arrays are not photographs. They are better referred to as mere “registers” (Wilson 2021, p. 168). But, because a photographic event is, by definition, a necessary condition for a photograph, all the processing steps “necessarily implicated” in rendering those registers visible become part of the definition of “photography proper” (Costello 2018, p. 78). Thus, contra Scruton’s definition, ideal photographs need not have been formed by wholly automatic, mechanical means, means that preserve independence from beliefs or other thoughts of the photographer. And, because techniques such as double exposure or other forms of post-production can in this way be part of the formative process of ideal photographs, the possibility is opened for photographers to have the sort of control over their

images that permits those images to be imbued with thoughts about their subjects and, thus, to be representations. Viewers can therefore take an aesthetic interest in photographs—even ideal photographs—and so photographs can be artworks after all.

Costello and Wilson offer such reasoning as advances in our understanding of photography. They dub Scruton's assumption that automaticity is at the core of the definition of an ideal photograph the “Orthodox Theory,” and contrast this with a “New Theory” that dispenses with such orthodoxy and instead defines “photography proper” in terms of visible images that implicate photographic events along with any processing steps necessarily implicated in getting from the event to the image (Costello 2018, p. 74–78).

I do not share their conviction that such reasoning offers genuine advances, and for two reasons. My first concern questions the means by which they gain leverage for definitional revision. Because photographs are, by definition, visible, and because registers are not visible, Costello and Wilson argue that all the processing steps required to render a register visible are part of the definition of “photography proper.” These processing steps are “necessarily implicated” in the formation of the visible image, and it is thus this modality that constitutes the fulcrum point for their revision of the definition of “photography proper.” But how exactly are we to interpret this modality? Given that they seek to revise a definition of “photography proper,” one would expect a very strong interpretation, perhaps as a *logical* necessity. But it is not clear that they are entitled to a modality with such strength. Instead, the various processing steps that yielded a visible image on the basis of the register, if they are in any sense necessary, would be necessary only in a weaker *nomological* sense, one according to which, given the physical laws governing such processing steps, no visible image could have been produced without those steps.

But my more fundamental objection is with the Platonic methodology itself or, at least, with its application to investigations into technologies such as those associated with photography. Photographic technology is, after all, just another contemporary technology, one akin to automotive and telephonic technologies, and so we should expect that the sorts of investigations that yield understanding in relation to those latter technologies would be the same ones that would yield understanding in relation to photography. Looking to automotive technology takes us in the direction of the Aristotlean methodology outlined at the outset.

2 Functional Knowledge and Engineering Knowledge

Call the two types of knowledge associated with the Aristotlean approach “functional knowledge” and “engineering knowledge.” With respect to cars, much functional knowledge is quite simple. I know, for example, that when I turn the steering wheel clockwise, my car turns to the right, and when I turn it counterclockwise, it turns to the left. Matters become less simple, however, when we examine the high-level functions of cars in relation to their environments. Suppose that, at a very general level, cars are understood as technologies that function to transport a small number of people and a limited amount of cargo medium distances without physical exertion and under protection from the weather. The success of this technology at performing this function both inexpensively and reliably has had profound impacts on urban design and average physical fitness, and anyone professing knowledge of such technology must be aware of such impacts and the normative dimensions associated with them.

Engineering knowledge in relation to automotive technology is likewise sometimes simple, as when one learns how the high-level function of the steering wheel is realized in a rack-and-pinion assembly, or sometimes complex, as when one learns how kinetic energy for locomotion can be derived from chemical energies stored in gasoline, in hydrogen or in electrical batteries. Such engineering knowledge also has implications for high-level functions and thus for our understanding of the limitations of what high-level functions might be manifested. For example, limitations on

the storage of energy in electrical batteries has implications up at the functional level in terms of distances electric cars can travel without being recharged, with the result that those using such cars frequently experience “range anxiety.”

It is important to note that both functional knowledge and engineering knowledge are constantly in flux as technologies develop. With regard to automotive functional knowledge, in the early days, cars functioned as gadgets for the wealthy, as they were so unreliable that owners had to hire technicians on a full-time basis just to keep them operating. These days, however, cars can undergo many months of daily use without need for any maintenance beyond filling the gas tank, or charging the battery, and keeping an eye on the tire pressure. With regard to engineering knowledge, an understanding of carburetors or clutches has been replaced with an understanding of fuel injectors or torque converters. Such flux stands in sharp contrast with the sort of definitional knowledge sought by those who might adopt the Platonistic methodology in relation to cars. Aristoteleans who wish to understand cars and their roles in our society and impacts on our planet are not theorists who search for stable, essential qualities of cars, such as an automotive event (a transduction of chemical energy into kinetic energy) and all the steps necessarily implicated in making that kinetic energy available to ordinary drivers, with the aim of determining what counts as automotive technology proper. Instead, they explore the ever-changing functional capacities of cars, and how those capacities are materially realized, all in relation to urban planning, global warming, public health and other pressing issues of our times.

The structure of Aristotelean knowledge in relation to photography is strikingly similar. The list of functional capacities of photographic technology is familiar. Such technology enhances our epistemic capacities, both by expanding our perceptual sensitivities beyond what they are naturally capable of (via telephoto lenses, sensitivity to electromagnetic radiations beyond the visible spectrum, high shutter speeds capable of freezing action) and by offering warrant for perceptual beliefs thereby formed that would be absent had the images been manographic rather than photographic (imagine Steve Austin of 1970s television fame, taking up painting in his retirement, using his enhanced bionic eye to freeze the motion and on this basis create sketches of Muybridge’s famous galloping horse, and our lack of warrant for beliefs formed on the basis of those sketches relative to Muybridge’s actual photographs). Such high-level functions also intersect scientific, surveillance and photojournalistic practices and, as Arthur Danto (1998) noted, with ethical considerations, given that high-speed shutters can result in unflattering depictions of persons, and given that the special warrant offered by photographs can reveal truths about persons that are at odds with the appearances they autonomously decide to project. An additional—and coveted—high-level function is the capacity of photographs rather than manographs to furnish viewers with a special sense of contact with the subjects of those photographs, thereby explaining the frequent placement of photographs of departed loved ones on desks and nightstands. And, of course, there is the large and fascinating question of how these epistemic, ethical and phenomenological functions of photographic technology are used (or abused) by artists.

The development of engineering knowledge in relation to photographic technology is a nascent field or, at least, it is in terms of the development of knowledge about how high-level functions *that are of interest to philosophers* are realized by arrays of lower-level functional units. The distinction is both important and unimportant. It is important in the sense that knowledge of the operation of high-level functions, such as how the release of the shutter button leads to a timed exposure of light-gathering sensor, is obviously highly developed in the minds of the engineers who designed the camera, and yet is of little interest to philosophers. But it is unimportant in the sense that such knowledge is of a *kind* with that which philosophers seek. In the same way that the designers of a shutter mechanism know the functional parameters of that mechanism—they know, for example, the extent to which images created with it will be subject to distortions arising from the “rolling shutter” effect—philosophers seek engineering knowledge of the functions

enumerated in the previous paragraph in order both to understand how photographic technology can furnish those functions and to understand what the limitations of that technology in those regards will be.

Kendall Walton is perhaps the first philosopher to seek engineering knowledge in relation to photography in a careful way. In his celebrated “Transparent Pictures,” Walton (1984) takes as his starting point the contact-function or, as he calls it, the “immediacy” that photographs afford:

... In general, photographs and paintings (and comparable nonphotographic pictures) affect us very differently. Compare Francisco Goya's etchings *The Disasters of War* with the Civil War photographs by Mathew Brady and his associates...It is hard to resist describing the difference by saying that the photographs have a kind of immediacy or realism which the etchings lack.

(Walton 1984, p. 247)

He then traces this capacity to the transparency of photographs and opacity of manographs, the transparency enabling photographs to function as windows through which “we see, quite literally, our dead relatives themselves when we look at photographs of them” (Walton 1984, p. 252). Such transparency is, in turn, realized in the mechanistic character of the photographic technology insofar as “[i]n order to see through the picture to the scene depicted, the viewer must have visual experiences which do not depend on the picture maker's beliefs in the way that paintings do” (Walton 1984, p.264).

I have argued that Walton is wrong in this latter regard (Walden 2016), but it is the general methodological point that is central to this discussion, and with this I concur. Unlike Costello, Scruton and Wilson, Walton is not interested in presenting a web of definitions, devising a rationale for altering one of them, and then pointing to any resultant logical consonances or dissonances as constituting an advancement in our understanding of photography. Instead, he takes as his starting point an important high-level function and then postulates whatever lower-level functional units are required in order to explain how that high-level function can be manifested. His methodology is continuous with science, and in this sense, he naturalizes philosophy of photography.

Walton's term for this mode of investigation is “theory construction” (Walton 2008, p. 110), and he endorses it forcefully, devoting his American Society for Aesthetics Presidential Address to a discussion of it (Walton 2007). The language, however, can be misleading, as Costello refers to his Platonic investigations as a mode of inquiry that seeks a new “theory of photography” (Costello 2017). Indeed, Costello divides current researchers into those who endorse the “Orthodox Theory” (2018, p.5) and those who endorse the “New Theory” (2018, p.7) the former defining “photography proper” (2018, p.78) in terms of “automaticity” (2018, p.6) and the latter defining it so as to include “necessarily implicated” processing steps lying between the photographic event and the photograph (Costello 2017, 2018). It is not for me to legislate on the proper use of the term “theory,” but to my mind, Walton's usage lies much closer to historical usage of the term than does Costello's. Newton's resolution of phenomena such as apples falling from trees and orbiting satellites in terms of the mutual attraction of massive bodies governed by the inverse-square law is the textbook case of theorizing, and this mode of inquiry does seem closer in structural terms to what I am calling engineering knowledge than it does to Costello's investigations. Regardless, and in order to avoid confusion, I use “engineering knowledge” to refer to this aspect of the Aristotelean methodology and avoid the term “theorizing” as much as possible.

Perhaps even more challenging than Walton's investigation into the contact-function of photography are investigations into how photographs function in terms of furnishing warrant for perceptual beliefs formed on the basis of looking at them. Understanding this function and its limitations, unlike understanding the function of a steering wheel, is a complex matter, as instances of it supervene on a causal chain that includes, not only the photographic technology utilized

by the photographer, but also the perceptual systems of viewers of the resultant photograph and whatever assemblies of first- and higher-order mental states that result from the operation of those systems and that constitute warrant for the perceptual beliefs that form in their minds. The required engineering knowledge will thus straddle both the operations of photographic technology and the operations of the human psyche. No doubt the automaticity of the photographic process will figure in this, but explaining how it does so without making implausible belief attributions to ordinary viewers of photographs is a surprisingly difficult task.

At the most challenging level, however, is the question of how the Aristotlean methodology may be pressed into the service of fostering our understanding of issues in the philosophy of art generally. Walton is sanguine in this regard, arguing that, in the same way that Newton's theory of gravitation yielded an understanding that united categories which, on our folk understanding of the world, were quite disparate (falling apples and orbiting moons, for example), the Aristotlean approach will likely render cherished distinctions within artworld discussions obsolete but then lump together various artworld phenomena with phenomena traditionally thought to be entirely unrelated to art (Walton 2007, P.§4).

I am likewise sanguine, although I foresee developments in our general understanding of art more often taking the form of discerning the functions of artworks in the most general terms and then investigating how those functions are realized in more basic functional units. In his final publication, Arthur Danto, drawing inspiration from Kant's *Critique of Judgement*—although not the inspiration that is ordinarily associated with that text—concludes that “...the artist finds ways to *embody* [an] idea in a sensory medium,” illustrating this function with Kant's example of the artist who is tasked with conveying the god Jupiter's power, and who does so by painting an eagle with bolts of lightning in its claws. Given that the eagle is Jupiter's bird and that being able to hold bolts of lightning a superhuman feat, the image conveys the thought in a way that stating “Jupiter is mighty” does not (Danto 2013, p. 123).

The example, as Danto acknowledges, is “somewhat impoverished” (2013, p.123), but its bare-bones character serves to render apparent at least two important underlying functional units. On the side of the artist, she has to draw on her knowledge of mythology and of the capacities of her audience, and use such knowledge to guide the formation of the image. Elsewhere, I call this skill the “craft of the mind” (Walden 2022), both to distinguish it from the traditional material craft skills historically thought to be the essence of art, and to emphasize that it is at least as difficult a skill to develop as those traditional skills. On the side of the audience, they must not only possess the requisite knowledge of mythology, but as well must be prepared to recognize that the artist, by embodying meanings in a sensory medium, is enjoining them to have certain thoughts. This latter requirement is crucial, as it functions to maintain a distinction between art and advertising, and to thereby inject an ethical component into successful art.

This ethical component is highlighted in an underappreciated essay by Jerry Fodor (1993). What, Fodor asks, distinguishes art from advertising? While these practices have in common that one party intends to effect changes in the cognitive status of another, they are distinct at least insofar as, in instances of the former, success in effecting the desired changes is not sufficient for success in the practice overall. Instead, for such success the audience must *recognize* that they are being enjoined to accept the (real or virtual) communicative intentions of the artist. Such recognition, in turn, is a matter of the formation of, and adjudication between, hypotheses about those communicative intentions. An artwork is thus a sensory medium with a structure that is “compatible with its having been made with the primary intention that it produce a certain effect on its audience, and that it be recognized by its audience as intended to produce that effect” (1993, p. 51). Because recognition, understood in this way, is a highly cognitive process, it is one that exercises a human capacity that is at the heart of the Kantian ethical framework broadly understood. Whereas in successful advertising all parties may treat one another as means, in successful

art all parties must treat one another as ends, and it is in this respect that successful art is, if Fodor is correct, necessarily ethical.

In this way, the artist imagined in Kant's example will delve into their knowledge of mythology and structure the image they produce with the anticipation that a similarly knowledgeable audience will recognize that they are being enjoined to think about Jupiter in a certain way. This is in contrast to an imagined advertiser who, let us say, uses an indiscernible image to cause their audience to develop a certain desire, perhaps a desire to purchase a new model of electric car. In both cases, one party attempts to effect changes in the cognitive status of another party, but only in the former case do the success conditions require awareness of the character of the project. The advertiser has succeeded in their task even if their audience is none the wiser about what is going on; the artist has not.

Finally, it will be objected that the complex cognitive structures to which Fodor draws our attention are not the sorts of lower-level functional units that the Aristotelian has in mind when seeking engineering knowledge. Quasi-Gricean communicative reflexive conditions are a far cry from, say, the rack-and-pinion assemblies normally associated with the interests of an engineer. But while I grant this, we should not let it obscure essential similarities. In his understanding of art, Danto draws our attention to a very high-level *sociological* function, one that we should expect to be resolved into immediately lower-level *psychological* functional units, and Fodor's offered reflexive condition looks to be a good candidate in this latter regard. In principle, this reflexive condition could be resolved into more basic *neurological* functions, functions that might seem more of interest to an engineer, but the philosopher of art would likely be no more interested in these than a student tasked with learning a high-level software function would be interested in how it is realized, ultimately, in the logic gates and transistors of the computer on which the software is running. Philosophers of art are thus engineers, but given that in all domains of engineering there is a division of labor, with the operation of the most basic functions understood by one group and the higher-level functions by another, we should expect no less in a suitably naturalized philosophy of art.

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23

PAINTING AND SCULPTURE IN THEIR RELATION TO ARCHITECTURE

Carole Talon-Hugon

“Painting and sculpture are naturally attached to the building and [...] cannot be separated from it without danger”, wrote Alain (1920). The idea of a primitive union is historically indisputable and has been emphasized by many authors, but there are a thousand ways to “be tied”, and we will see the different forms that this bond can take. But this link can also be broken, and indeed it was during the period of architectural modernism. The whole question is to know if this disunity is, as Alain says, “a peril”. What do painting and sculpture on the one hand, and architecture on the other have to gain and lose from this emancipation? What is playing behind this debate?

1 Coincidence, Adhesion, Reunion

Looked at from a certain angle, painting and sculpture are intrinsically linked to architecture. I am not talking about those works “which hold the middle between architecture and sculpture” of which Hegel speaks in his *Esthétique*: Obelisk or alley of the sphinxes of Luxor, Colossi of Memnon in Thebes, to which we could add the extravagant *Ideal Palace* in Hauterives (France), produced by a postman named Cheval who, between 1879 and 1912, built it by assembling pebbles collected during his tours (Figure 23.1). All these buildings have in common that they “carry their meaning within themselves”, as Hegel says, in other words, not to pursue a positive goal. None are inhabitable, including Cheval’s *Ideal Palace* which, if hollow, has only narrow stairs and corridors. All these constructions are nevertheless architectural in their imposing proportions or their architectural layout. Their nature is so indistinct that talking about them about painting and sculpture related to architecture is inappropriate. There is no connection where there is indistinction.

To speak of the intrinsic connection of painting and sculpture to architecture makes full sense, however, if we consider these two elements which are part of architecture: polychromy and ornamentation.

With the exception of only two eras, the Classical Age and the 20th century, polychromy has been an important component of architecture throughout its history. It has been known since the 19th century that the whiteness of temples and Greek statuary, like that of medieval cathedrals, is not that of their initial state, but the product of the discoloration caused by time. Quatremère de Quincy was one of the first to reconstruct the original appearance of ancient works using ancient texts and, studying the colossal chryselephantine cult statues of Phidias, he established for the first time in his *Olympian Jupiter* (1815) the polychromy of Greek art. The so-called “natural” polychromy is based on the use of materials of different colors, such as gold and ivory in the statue of Phidias, but the so-called “artificial” polychromy is based on the use of paint. The tradition



Figure 23.1

continued without interruption until the classical age, and we still see in the 12th century in the interiors of Cluniac, Gothic or Cistercian churches, the beautiful cut stones constituting the walls, covered with colors and false joints. The space of these buildings is not only an organization of three-dimensional forms but “an illusionist construction to which colored effects lead” (Recht, 2016) which sometimes underline its structure, sometimes modify the perception of it.

The sculpture also touches the building intimately through the sculpted decoration. Vitruvius considered this to be an integral part of architecture. Its incorporation can be read on several levels. First in the structural elements of buildings: columns, architraves, cornices, entablatures or pediments; but also in what Vitruvius calls the “analogous” ornaments: in the triglyphs which punctuate the frieze, and in which the columns of the temple are repeated analogically, or in the Corinthian capitals whose carved foliage beckons toward the branches of the trunks of trees used in the primitive hut. The intimacy of sculpture and architecture can also be read in the so-called “variety” ornaments, that is to say in the ornamental treatment of certain structural elements of a building (modenature), which highlight its plastic. And finally, in the so-called “allegorical” ornaments: sculpted metopes, crossettes, lobes, volutes, figured ornaments, masks, foliage, branches, rafters, trophies, glory, etc.

The Classical Age reaffirms the intimate correlation of architecture and ornament—and consequently of its connection to all forms of painting and sculpture contained in buildings. Architecture is architecture only when its necessary elements, the floor, the wall, the roofing, are not left to their sole functionality. This can be seen in particular in the nomenclature used in the 16th century by Philibert de l’Orme, which ranks alongside small “accessory ornaments” (cartouches, cabling columns, rings which surround their barrels, etc.), “major ornaments” what are the columns (Philibert de l’Orme, 1567).

Painted or carved, the ornament is not a superfluous addition; it is a completion that completes the whole and gives it its full presence. The ornamentation of the architectural organism is the most intimate form of the presence of painting and sculpture in architecture.

The fact remains that it is not so much to the fluting of the columns, to their sculpted capitals, or to the brackets, lobes and volutes, that we first think of when we say the word *sculpture*. It is not first of all the blue vault studded with stars of the nave of the church of St Germain-des-near Paris, or the painted geometric decoration of its columns (Figure 23.2), that first evokes for us the word *painting*. It is, however, applied pigments, modeled marble. Moreover, in the Middle Ages, the one who chiseled stone was not a sculptor, but a *stonemason*; and the one who applied the colors was not a painter, but a *polychromator*. It should be added that during this same medieval period, there was no more architect in the modern sense (post-renaissance) of the word, that is to say in the sense of a person exercising a liberal profession, responsibility for a global mission ranging from the project management to the control of its realization on the site. Until the 12th century, the direction of



Figure 23.2

the construction work was entrusted to an experienced mason, appointed master builder, who was almost always anonymous as were stonemasons and polychromators. So here we have another form of intimate link between painting and sculpture and architecture, but which is not yet that of three singular and specific arts.

However, it is the latter that is referred to when the building houses frescoes, paintings, altarpieces, and sculptures in the round. Until the advent of abstraction, all of these objects shared their iconic dimension. In the Middle Ages, painters and sculptors were united in the corporations of “painters and image cutters”. The intimacy of these two arts with architecture then takes on another form.

A borderline case between adhesion and reunion is, for sculpture, that of column statues, a very fine example of which can be seen on the porch of Chartres cathedral (Figure 23.3). The human figure is integrated into it to the point of contributing to the structure; the bodies, in three dimensions, are taken from the volume of the column. The figuration of the figures and the architectural requirements are fused into each other, forming something that is neither quite a column nor quite a human body.

Another borderline case, but for painting this time, is that of the fresco, which is inseparable from the wall, but which, by the image represented, opens the latter, as we see beautifully in the painted Upper Basilica of Assisi by Giotto. All the scenes from the life of Saint Francis of Assisi are placed in the movement of a fictitious architecture made of projections, consoles, columns, even a coffered ceiling; in other words, the scene occurs in the dynamics of architectural lines in harmony with the building. This architectural illusion of Giotto was celebrated in the 15th century by Alberti, who describes the mural as an “open window” to the outside.

In the case of the fresco as in that of the column statue, the image adds to the architecture its own virtues, while remaining physically linked to it. It stands out when dealing with statues in the round which, unlike bas-reliefs and high-reliefs, is no longer attached to a background, and when the image becomes a painting. The statue of the Virgin on the central pedestal of the portal of Strasbourg Cathedral (12th–15th century), the Grünewald altarpiece intended for the high altar of the Issenheim preceptory church (c. 1515) are detached from the architecture. Even if they are sealed to their medium, works of this type can, without losing their integrity, be detached from it (and, indeed, very often they have been).



Figure 23.3

These are the different forms of integration. Noticing them and classifying them is one thing; considering their *raison d'être* is another. As we will see, these different forms of integration of painting and sculpture into architecture are not only topographical; they are above all functional.

2 Functional Integration

Two main types of purposes justify the integration of painting and sculpture in architecture: to embellish and to make meaningful.

2.1 Embellish

Because “beauty is a very noble thing”, it is very desirable and “must be sought first”, wrote Alberti. Conversely, “where the work hurts by its inelegance, having satisfied the need appears insignificant and negligible, and having ensured convenience, unpleasant”. In addition, he notes, beauty “alone provides the greatest support to the convenience and even to the longevity of buildings” (Alberti, 1485). But the value of the beautification does not lie only in the pleasure it produces in those who frequent the premises, or in the practical advantages that Alberti points out. From an ontological point of view and no longer a psychological one, embellishment is a completion and an accomplishment of the edifice. If, for Vitruvius, ornament is, along with proportion, one of the two hallmarks of architecture, it is because to embellish is to complete creation and give the world its *venustas*.

In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, Ruskin also justifies the embellishment of religious buildings from another point of view: by the honor that is due to the divine. This is the lamp of sacrifice: to offer beautiful buildings, made of precious materials, infinitely expensive in terms of labor and know-how, is to honor God or the gods. The magnificence of the decorated building is there to signify worship more than to arouse admiration. The Gothic Cathedral is a total work of art in which the creative works of thousands of anonymous people have collectively celebrated the

sacred (Ruskin, 1849). It is in a very close sense that Vitruvius affirmed that the temple has duties toward the God it shelters:

The temples of Minerva, Mars and Hercules will be of the Doric order, because virtue of these divinities has a gravity which is repugnant to the delicacy of other orders; whereas Venus, Flore, Proserpina and the Nymphs of the fountains must have a Corinthian order, especially as the kindness of the flowers, foliage and volutes with which this order is embellished, seems very suitable to the delicacy of these goddesses. This contributes a lot to decorum, such as making the temples of Juno, Diana, Bacchus and other gods of this species, of the Ionic order, because the mediocrity of this order lies between the severity of the Doric, and the delicacy of the Corinthian, fairly well represents the particular nature of these deities.

(Vitruve, 1st BC)

It is not only religious buildings, but also all edifices, civil or military, that ornamentation gives their highest value. Alberti thus affirmed:

The price that our ancestors, men of great wisdom, had thought it necessary to grant to him is measured by the incredible care which they spent so that all the institutions, and in particular legal, military and religious, as well as the whole of public affairs, were perfectly adorned: they seemed to have wanted to understand that deprived of the pageantry and pomp of adornments, these institutions without which the life of men could hardly exist would be reduced to insipid and insipid activities.

(Alberti, 1485)

Embellishment is quite another thing than a frills or blush. Far from being a deceptive make-up, the ornamentation is an increase in the potency of the adorned thing.

2.2 Make Meaningful

The second purpose of integrating painting and sculpture into architecture is to contribute to the meaning and function of the building. What the building signifies is its destination and the painted and sculpted images help to manifest it. In large classical buildings, they make the building speak, they fix its meaning.

The large painted and sculpted religious groups from the Middle Ages (we should add the stained-glass windows, mosaics, pavements, etc.) are veritable theological sums. Churches and cathedrals are stone *Bibles* that educate and edify the illiterate by showing them more or less symbolically scenes from the *Old and New Testaments* and from the history of Christianity (lives of saints, martyrs, etc.). Gregory the Great maintains that painting allows “to learn, through the history it relates, what to adore, to learn [...]”; in it the ignorant see what to do; in it, can read those who do not know the alphabet” (Gregory the Great, c. 600). The carvings on their porches often represent local saints who greet the faithful on the doorstep of the church and act as intercessors with members of the Holy Trinity. The representations of deadly sins move souls. Icons are supports for prayer and meditation.

The great classical civil buildings are just as telling. The effigies of illustrious men found there, writes Alberti, are there to “invite [to] imitate their virtues” (Alberti, 1485). The allegorical representations of virtues, as in the fresco in the Doge’s Palace in Venice, *Time and the virtues freed from evil and envy* (1550–1560) painted by Gian Battista Zelotti, are intended to remind men of their homework. The large fresco by Ambogio Lorenzetti, *The Effects of Good Government* (1337–1340), in the Communal Palace of Siena by, which represents the personified virtues, the honored

virtuous citizens and the vanquished vicious citizens, is intended to bring those who frequent the Palace around common values. In the Boston Public Library (1848), the head of Minerva, goddess of Wisdom, sculpted by Saint-Gaudens and Mora, the allegorical statues of Science and Art made by Bela Pratt, the eight panels by Puvis de Chavanne representing Philosophy, Astronomy, History, Chemistry, Physics, Pastoral Poetry, Dramatic Poetry and Epic Poetry, remind us that the place is a temple of knowledge. The large fresco on the facade of the Palace of Culture in Dresden in the former GDR is one of the many examples of the propaganda functions of socialist realism.

Sculpted or painted, images in architecture have had, and sometimes continue to have, meanings and functions, be they magical, religious, ethical or political. They are intended to arouse certain emotions, to direct the mind toward certain thoughts, to dispose those who frequent the place to certain behaviors. They are not only beautifying; they are mediators of meanings. They contribute to the impression that the monument is intended to produce and reinforce its affective, cognitive and behavioral effects.

Location and destination are linked: here we are dealing with works *in situ*, indissolubly situated and intended.

3 Modernist Isolationism

To all forms of more or less intimate collaboration, from painting and sculpture to architecture, there is a form of modernist isolationism. This consists in arguing that far from serving architecture, sculpture and painting harm it. In 1927, the architect and art critic Jean Baldovici said:

It is architecture that must be its own decoration. The play of lines and colors must be such, respond so exactly to the requirements of the interior atmosphere, that any detached painting, any painting, appears not only useless, but detrimental to the harmony of the whole.

(Baldovici, 1929)

Mondrian wanted the paintings to be turned over on the wall so as not to break the unity of the architecture (Mondrian, 1959). Moreover, in Mallet-Stevens' *Villa Noailles* in Hyères, the paintings are not hung on the walls but stored in cupboards.

As we will see, this isolationism is the result of the convergence of three distinct, albeit fundamentally linked, evolutions, the first concerning architecture, the second, painting and sculpture, and the third all the arts.

3.1 Architectural Functionalism

Already in the 18th century, Laugier wanted to reform architecture by putting it under the authority of reason. Not only against the decorative overloads of baroque and rococo buildings, but also against Vitruvius who gave ornamentation the founding place we have just recalled, Laugier advocated a return to the primitive hut and wanted to refocus architecture on its elementary components: pillar, beam, opening. According to him, architecture is above all the art of construction (*fabrica*). So much so that the shapes of the buildings as well as their ornaments must derive from the sole logic of the construction. It is in the name of this principle that Laugier criticizes the use of triangular pediments on the facades of buildings in Place de la Concorde (Paris) designed by Jacques Gabriel: these are only admitted if they correspond on the two sides of a roof, which in this case is not the case in these buildings where they have only a decorative purpose. By his declarations, Laugier announces the constructive rationalism of Viollet-le-Duc. However, the rationalism of these two architects does not make them strict functionalists: they are indeed functionalists, insofar as they consider that architecture must aim above all at utility; but their functionalism is

not strict insofar as they attach great importance to the decor of the building, provided that this comes after the structure, and that it is adapted to the functions of the building.

Much more radical are modern functionalisms, from the Bauhaus to Le Corbusier, which, for their part, want forms to flow from functions. In 1931, Adolf Loos launched a virulent critical charge against ornamentation in his manifestly titled *Ornament and Crime*. Le Corbusier's pamphlet *Decorative Art Today* follows the same logic: the decor is only a camouflage that conceals the mediocrity of the products; the "styles" are absurd parasitic ornamentations, and the decorative objects bulky, ridiculous and dishonest knickknacks, "moth-eaten defrocks" (Le Corbusier, 1925).

A closer look at these texts reveals that their criticism of ornamentation does not mean the sacrifice of beauty on the altar of functionality. Beauty has simply migrated to the side of useful, rational, hygienic and "true" forms; for Le Corbusier, on the side of simple geometric shapes adapted to the human scale by the *Modulor*, this universal measurement system which should make it possible to structure the architecture as well as the furniture and the human space of the city. Architectural beauty must be born from it:

The architect, writes Le Corbusier, by the arrangement of forms, achieves an order which is a pure creation of his mind; through forms, it intensely affects our senses, provoking plastic emotions; through the relationships it creates, it awakens deep emotions in us, it gives us the measure of an order that we feel is in accordance with that of the world, it determines various movements of our mind and our heart; that's when we feel the beauty.

(Le Corbusier, 1925)

What then does the great novelty consist of? In the refusal to make ornament, in all the pictorial and sculptural forms that we have seen, an integral part of architecture. These switch to decoration, understood as superfluous, superfluous and parasitic addition. Beauty value is retained, but functionality must follow.

However, modernist architectural functionalism refuses significance without recycling it elsewhere. The meanings which, as we have seen, are added to the ornamental function of painting and sculpture in architecture, vanish with the disappearance of this type of contribution. As Venturi writes, "modern architects have abandoned an iconological tradition in which painting, sculpture and graphics combined with architecture [and where] delicate hieroglyphics on a massive pylon, archetypal inscriptions on architecture. Roman, the mosaic processions, the portals, the frescoes all contain messages" (Venturi, 1979). We no longer want "talking" buildings.

3.2 *The Emancipation of Painting and Sculpture*

In fact, divorce is not the result of architecture alone. If painting and sculpture were originally attached to the building in all the aspects that we have just seen, from the end of the Middle Ages a slow movement of emancipation gradually detached them from it. During the 14th century, the belonging of a work to a building (religious or not) and its function in it is no longer its only regime of existence. Paintings and sculptures sometimes leave the places for which they were designed to be sold. A new type of market (on spec) for works appears, in which works are no longer made to order but produced upstream and offered in a market or fair. The client succeeds the former sponsor. By entering the market circuits for private, and later public, collections, the work emancipates itself from both its place and its function. The great historical movement of empowerment has started which, at the height of the Renaissance, will allow painting and sculpture

to access, in the words of art historian Theodor Hetzer, their “sovereignty”. This movement to empower the arts has obviously not prevented sublime collaborations, as the vivid testimony of Baroque architecture shows. But when the arts were thought of under the category of fine arts, the beautiful became their preeminent value (“the highest aim of art at the same time as its very center”, Winckelmann said (Winckelmann, 1765)), and soon their exclusive value, as we see it in particular in Lessing who wanted “that the name of a work of art should be applied only to those where the artist has been able to truly show himself as such, that is to say where the beauty was her one and only goal”(Lessing, 1766). Educating and edifying then become parasitic aims. The theories of art for the sake of the 19th century proclaim it vehemently: “art for us is not the means but the end”. Art should not concern itself with anything outside of its own sphere; the work must be its own goal. In short, it must be autotelic, therefore de-functionalized.

Such sovereignty of the arts in general, and of painting and sculpture in particular, comes into tension with the decorative and significant functions attributed to them. Because what is sovereign is not in view of anything other than itself. To embellish or to make meaningful a building, is not this to be reduced to an ancillary status?

3.3 *The Formalist Becoming of the Arts*

The formalistic development of the arts also plays a role in modernist isolationism. Konrad Fiedler, who was its most remarkable theorist, asserted that form is “the material of which the work is made”, so that in the work of art “it is the form itself which must constitute that in which the work of art exists”. When the form becomes “pure expression of itself”, it is necessary break with all the aesthetics of the content. Both with naturalism and with symbolism, because both share the mistaken belief that painting refers to something other than the pictoriality of the painting: to natural realities in one case, to spiritual realities in the other. An apologist of pure visibility, Fiedler, asserts that “seeing comes to itself, so to speak, when the relation to the object has disappeared” (Fiedler, 1887). He provided the theoretical framework for the formal criticism which triumphed at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th, with Roger Fry, Clive Bell or Clement Greenberg.

However, the concern for form is declined differently according to the arts. All share the rejection of any content and any heteronomous aim, but each has its specific form. Music, says Hanslick, must remain “unrelated to a sphere of foreign extra-musical ideas”, and be pure sound architecture: “it is made up of combinations and sound forms which have no other subject than themselves” (Hanslick, 1854). Roger Fry makes the value of painting reside, not by forms in the service of contents that painting shares with other representative arts, but by its pure elements: the rhythm and the line which delimits the forms, the mass, the space, color (Fry, 1909). More radically, Greenberg made flatness the ultimate culmination of the paint purification process (Greenberg, 1964). The growing concern for pictoriality in the circles of painting, that of musicality in the world of music as well as that of literarity in the literary field appear as the effective history of the progressive conquest of this purity of art.

The concern for the pure form thus means for each art the concern for its specific form. Each one must “develop the expressive possibilities of [his] medium”.

Formalism means the disappearance of significance, hence one of the two reasons for the presence of painting and sculpture in architecture, and reinforces the process of empowerment of the arts considered above. But he adds an essential point for our purpose: the autonomy is no longer only that of the artistic sphere in relation to what is not itself (politics, religion, power, ethics...), but those of the different arts in relation to each other. This is summed up very well by Venturi’s formula: “you don’t paint on a Mies” (Venturi, 1979).

4 Beyond Isolationism: Homology, Analogies, Confusions

And yet, at the same time that the formalist evolution of the arts toward their specific essences added to the reasons for the divorce of architecture from painting and sculpture, it paradoxically contributed, on another level, to their rapprochement.

Something in fact unites these three arts: their common belonging to the category of plastic arts, that is to say their common distance with regard to the language arts which, by nature, are less apt to renounce the meaning. Clive Bell argues that the quality common and particular to all members of this subgroup of the fine arts is what he calls “signifying form”. Signifying form, and not signifying content, which he defines as “[t]he relations of all these signifying forms which constitute the plastic arts. But we must go further. Inside all the significant forms that make up the plastic arts (“Saint Sophia and the stained glass windows of Chartres, Mexican sculpture, a Persian vase, Chinese carpets, frescoes by Giotto in Padua and masterpieces by Poussin, Piero de la Francesca or Cézanne”) (Bell, 1904), painting, sculpture and architecture are united by a more precise common denominator: space. The two-dimensional space which is not only of the wall but also of the canvas; the three-dimensional space worked by the architect as well as by the sculptor.

During the Renaissance, Alberti united painting, sculpture and architecture under the unifying category of drawing arts, the word *disegno* meaning both the outline and the project. The community formed by the three arts was symbolically marked by the three brother works that Alberti devoted to them: *De pictura* (1435–1437), *De statua* (c. 1445), *De re ædificatoria* (1452–1472), and it found its institutional translation in the creation, in Florence in 1563, of the first *Accademia delle Arti del Disegno* where these three arts were taught. At the start of the 20th century, architecture was rather becoming an art of space. Loos clearly marks his departure from tradition: architecture, he writes, is “the art of space and form (unlike design which seeks to refer architecture to the graphic arts)” (Loos, 1931).

For its part, the historical evolution of painting led it toward the plan. After Manet, the crisis of representation and the refusal of the illusionist rendering of perceptual vision mean that the painting is no longer a window. Its two-dimensionality is assumed and claimed. Flatness and the delineation of flatness are its essence. As we read in the first issue of the review *De Stijl*, “modern painting transforms corporeality into flatness and, by the destruction of the natural, reduced in terms of plane, by the understanding of space, it attains spatial relations” (1917). At the same time, the abandonment of corporeality in sculpture makes volume its principle. By the plan and the volume, the three arts converge toward the same geometrical place.

The conditions were in place for architecture no longer to include paintings and statues, but to make itself sculpture and painting.

In the *German Pavilion* designed by Mies van der Rohe for the Barcelona International Exhibition in 1929, the building becomes a sculpture. Architecture affirms the sculptural and plastic properties of its components. Richard Döcker’s *Lichthaus Luz* in Stuttgart (1928) piles up volumes projecting from its balconies as in Donald Judd’s *Stacks*. The row of houses created by J J P Oud in Stuttgart in 1927 uses the sculptural technique of serialization.

Architecture is also painted, in several senses. First, when she transposes the canvas to the size of the building, as seen with JJP Oud’s *café De Unie* in Rotterdam (1925) (Figure 23.4), the facade of which becomes an oversized painting. But also in the sense that it attaches unprecedented importance to the sensitive grain of its surfaces, to the properties of its materials, of its coverings that make up its walls. So, Loos, who advocates a stripped down and almost ascetic architecture, pays particular attention to materials. The architect Henrik Petrus Berlage requested that the wall be shown in its nakedness and in all “its smooth beauty”. The absence of decorative elements causes interest to shift to the optical quality of surfaces which can be smooth, irregular, satin, grainy, silky, etc. Nikolaus Pevsner is right to see in this new sensibility of architects at the beginning



Figure 23.4

of the 20th century and to walls and flat surfaces the paradoxical consequence of the rationalist rejection of ornament (Pevsner, 1949).

By renouncing sculptural and pictorial ornament, architecture, as Venturi puts it (Venturi, 1979), has become its own ornament.

For its part, painting affirms its proximity to architecture: “painting is architectural today, because in itself and with its own means, it serves the same concept: space and plan”, we read in the first of the review *De Stijl*. In Dr. Barnes’s private museum in Philadelphia, Matisse transposed the easel painting to the scale of the building. Fernand Léger saw in this widening the future of abstract art, which, he writes, “is in difficulty when he wants to make easel painting [but whose] possibilities are limitless for the mural” (Léger, 1996). Going even further, Mondrian wanted not only that the painting leaves the canvas for the wall, but that it merges and dissolves in the architecture: “the abstract-realistic painting can disappear as soon as we can transfer its plastic beauty around. from us by the color division of the room” (Mondrian, 1959). As for the minimalist sculpture of the 1960s, it tends toward architecture with its taste for the colossal. *L'X* by Ronald Bladen (1965), or *Playground* by Tony Smith (1966) explore massiveness and, in doing so, share with the architectural edifice the fact of not being able to be embraced with a single glance and of associating visual sensations and kinesthetics. At the end of the 1960s, Jesus-Rafael Soto's *Les Pénétrables*, with their vertically hanging nylons that have no other limits than those of the space that houses it, embraced the architecture: as in the latter, one was no longer in front of the work but moved within it. In the 1920s, El Lissitsky already presented his *Prouns* as “way stations” between architecture, painting and also sculpture. And indeed, these three-dimensional forms which float in space without bottom or top are stagings of space.

Such a fusion of painting, sculpture and architecture beckons toward the ideal of the total work of art. But *Gesamtkunstwerke*'s program of modernity is very different from that achieved by the cooperation of the arts in the medieval cathedral: painting, sculpture and architecture can come together not in the perspective of a common purpose, but instead of their common denominator: the space which, when it is plane, sometimes becomes a wall and a picture, and which, when it is three-dimensional, becomes a statue or a building.

5 For the Meeting

The relationships that painting and sculpture have with architecture are fundamentally driven by the evolution of the idea of art. As the needle of the seismograph translates invisible tectonic movements, the forms of their relations over the course of history visibly translate states of the idea of art and the debates that configure them: destined works *versus* sovereign works, functionalism *versus* autotelia, contenuism *versus* formalism, significance *versus* *aisthesis*.

The presence of painting and sculpture in architecture thwarts the modern idea of art in several ways, all of which stem from the fact that in building, painting or sculpture *is in a world that includes them*. A topographical and functional dependence which contradicts the modern idea that a work of art is to itself its own world, obeys only its own inner necessity, has no function, and is its own end. According to these principles, the work included in the architecture becomes accessory, functional and intended. It falls into the degrading category of the *applied arts*, an adjective which clearly indicates their additive character.

But being casual doesn't mean being superfluous and dispensable. To confer an additional being (of beauty, of significance) to the building is to confer on it a form of accomplishment and



Figure 23.5



Figure 23.6

increased power. The “peril” Alain referred to in the quote that opens this article, means first of all a loss for architecture; but undoubtedly also a loss for sculpture and painting. Without going like Ruskin, until seeing in what he calls portable art “a mark of degradation” (Ruskin, 1859), it can be said that *in situ* works derive part of their strength and power from their environment. A final example will show it. In the recently restored Hôtel Richer de Belleval in Montpellier (France), 17th-century plasterwork, painted decorations from the 18th century, and works newly created for the place by contemporary artists come together. Abdelkader Benchama’s India ink drawings on the sides of the ridge vaults of some rooms develop their power at the same time as they give the ceiling an airy beauty (Figure 23.5). The panels made of tens of thousands of scarab elytra assembled by Jan Fabre on the ceiling of another room (Figure 23.6) adorn the building at the same time as they make it significant, since objects and symbols are represented therein, make a sign toward the past of the building and that of the city (a symbol of union recalls that this room was a wedding hall, a caduceus echoes the fact that the Faculty of Medicine of Montpellier is the oldest in Europe). The remarkable plastic beauty of these panels does not suffer from their significance but rather is enhanced by them. The two works cited guarantee to be in this building a scale and a noticeable resonance. So the “peril” of separating painting and sculpture on the one hand, and architecture on the other, may well be that of the loss of reciprocal potentiation.

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PAINTING AND THEATER

Susan L. Feagin

This chapter addresses some relationships between painting as an art and theatrical performance as an art. In particular, I discuss roles of painting in theatrical set design, mainly as painted scenery and as a substitute for what the painting represents. Painting is generally construed as a two-dimensional image or design produced by the application of a fluid medium to a relatively extended flat surface, such as a wall, panel, or stretched canvas—though, as we shall see, construing painting as two-dimensional will prove to be problematic. Theater is often understood to include a broad range of types of events—such as parades, processions, puppet shows, opera, circus acts, carnivals, stand-up comedy, and sports. My concern here is with theatrical performance in a narrower sense, where people (or their surrogates, such as puppets) represent persons and events live, in virtue of their voice and movement, before a live audience.

From a global and historical perspective, painted scenery has figured only marginally in theatrical performance. The exception is from about 1500 to 1900 in Western Europe when, theater historians tell us, the conventions of painting dominated theater set design.¹ First, the proscenium arch functioned like a frame around the stage, so watching a performance was like looking at a picture. Second, “scenery was usually designed by the leading painters and architects of the day,” and, in courses of study, “scenic design was long an adjunct of architecture or painting.”² And third, set design employed popular forms and styles of painting—most importantly, geometrical perspective drawing techniques for creating the illusion of space. For example, various perspective techniques developed by Baldassarre Peruzzi were codified in Sebastiano Serlio’s *Second Book of Architecture* (1545), a practical manual partly devoted to theater design. Serlio designed one-point perspective backdrops to serve generically for each of three different kinds of plays: tragedy, comedy, and satire. One scholar goes so far as to claim that in the European tradition, set design “was born from the treatises on perspective.”³

One might initially think, as I did, that insofar as the conventions of painting as an art dominated the production of sets, the conception of theatrical performance as an art would be enhanced. But I was wrong. According to what I take to be the received view, the dominance of painting over set design actually worked in the opposite direction. In brief, the inherent two-dimensionality of the painted image or design was in basic tension with the real space of the stage. It thus failed to perform one of the fundamental functions of sets, which is to organize three-dimensional stage space, or acting space, for the performers. Instead, it actually undermined the artistic unity of the whole.

I don’t dispute the received view, though a couple of details give me pause. Painting is not just the creation of a two-dimensional image, and its role in theatrical performance may not be merely

as a painted backdrop as an object of visual attention. A painting is a material creation that is positioned in and occupies real space. As such, it can serve as what the art historian David Summers calls a “real metaphor,” that is, as a substitute for the object depicted, transforming the space into one where certain actions are made appropriate. My aim here is to show how, under this more robust conception of painting, it may better serve some of the functions of set design and mitigate the tensions between real and represented space.

In Section 1, I discuss the physicality of painting, the importance of positioning within and occupation of space, and Summers’s notion of real metaphor. In Section 2, I describe three functions of sets and how the more robust understanding of painting provides a fuller understanding of the ways they may be satisfied. In Section 3, I look at a fourth function of sets, the focus of the “received view,” which is to organize or structure the acting space. In Section 4, I consider some examples of pictures used as “real metaphors” in contrast with painted scenery, and how they can organize stage space and rationalize actor movement. They serve more like props and notably do not prompt tension between the two-dimensional image and three-dimensional stage space.

1 Painting as Two-Dimensional

Let us construe painting as the application of a fluid medium to a relatively extended flat surface, such as a wall, panel, or stretched canvas, to produce an image or design. Much philosophical work is concerned with just the two-dimensional image—the nature of pictures, or pictorial representation—such as what makes something a picture of a chair, or of a glass that has been filled with water, or of the Battle of Gettysburg. But in fact, a painting is much more than a two-dimensional image and not merely an object of visual attention. Paint and paintings are three-dimensional. Visible brush strokes and impasto can create sensuous, even tactile, effects. Paint is often applied in multiple, visible layers—e.g., by scumbling and glazing—occasionally unintentionally revealing pentimenti, images in lower layers that become visible due to the increasing transparency of oil paint in the upper layers over time. The surface onto which the paint is applied may be chosen for its texture that remains visible in the final product, such as the pattern of the weave of the canvas. Elevations and depressions in a surface may be important to the representational content or overall effect of the painted image, such as with many ceramics and cave paintings.⁴

Though paint is applied to a surface, it doesn’t always remain there. In Helen Frankenthaler’s stain paintings, the paint seeps into the canvas; fresco painting penetrates wet plaster. Watercolor and ink painters struggle with and exploit the graphic effects of absorption and diffusion of the liquid medium. Aesthetically, our appreciation of such works involves understanding both the fact of absorption into the surface or material support and the difference it makes to what was achieved. Such factors cannot be ignored when understanding the status of painting as an art. And although the physicality and three-dimensionality of painting do not have great impact in the theater, they reinforce a painting’s material presence, its positioning within and occupation of space, setting up spatial relations to actors, stage props, and audiences. Exclusive concentration on what a picture represents, the content of an image, neglects the physicality and three-dimensionality of painting.⁵

Paintings may have crucial relationships to their surrounding spaces and the human bodies that occupy them. Even if construed as two-dimensional, they are positioned in space: they have location. Careful positioning of many kinds of paintings—especially anamorphic images, and paintings to be hung along staircases, on ceilings, or toward the top of high walls—is necessary to experience some of their most important aesthetic and artistic effects. Maximal appreciation of a painting may be achieved only at a given distance, or within a certain range of distances.⁶

Further, paintings on curved or angled surfaces are not merely located or positioned in space but occupy space; they extend in three dimensions and relate physically to (other) three-dimensional

entities. Their relevant aesthetic and artistic effects are not dependent merely on color, form, and the representational content of a two-dimensional image, but on the space they create. Walking into a Byzantine church that contains its original painting covering the entire surface of the walls and ceilings is like walking into another world.

Because images are positioned in and occupy space, they can make up for what David Summers, following the 16th-century theorist Gabriele Paleotti, calls “the defect of distance.”⁷ Distance is a defect in that distant objects do not have the power they would have if they were present. A painting can make up for this defect of distance by serving as a substitute for what it depicts, making it “present” here and now, by occupying real space. This is what Summers calls a real metaphor. As a substitute, the painting transforms the space into a place where certain kinds of actions are appropriate—at least some actions that would have been directed toward or appropriate (or inappropriate) in the presence of the depicted object for which it substitutes. Importantly, the degree of visual resemblance between the image and what it substitutes for is irrelevant to its effectiveness in transforming the space. The goal is not to fool the viewer into thinking the represented object is actually present, but to create a representation that, in the appropriate context and subject to relevant conventions, functions in various respects as if the object depicted were present.⁸ As we shall see, painting functioning as a real metaphor expands the ways painted scenery and painting in general can fulfill some of the functions of set design.

2 Some Functions of Sets

Set design has many functions; I shall discuss four of them. A set establishes the place of the action; creates a mood or atmosphere; defines the acting space, both by identifying a space as a place for a performance and by delineating its boundaries; and organizes or structures the acting space.⁹

A set may establish the place of the action by showing what such a place would look like, whether generic or specific, real or fictional. A backdrop depicting a deep dark forest conveys that the action takes place in a deep dark forest. But a backdrop is not like an illustration in a book. It doesn’t just show you something so you conclude, “that’s what the place of the action is (or looks like).” It doesn’t function merely as an object of visual attention, but it transforms the space of the stage into the fictional place of the action (and it can create imaginary space off stage). The image substitutes for an actual forest, the place or scene it represents, making actions performed by the actors, insofar as they are portraying certain characters, appropriate. Images of gods, saints, or other religious figures are often used as real metaphors, and serve as the recipients of reverence, gifts, and obeisance that would be due the actual god or saint. The image transforms the stage into a place where characters representing the actions of bowing, praying, or offering gifts in relation to the image is made appropriate. And although a backdrop may appear to accomplish this just by being seen, its positioning is relevant. The conventions of theater require that actors be in front of and within a certain distance of the backdrop.

Another function of a set is to establish a given mood or atmosphere. It can do this both iconically—in virtue of the content of the image, as a picture of a graveyard might evoke a certain kind of mood—and aniconically—in virtue of other visual qualities, such as color, form, and expressive qualities.¹⁰ Establishing the fictional place of the action and providing a mood or atmosphere are two of the most important roles for painted scenery.

A set also may help to define the three-dimensional acting space. Defining the acting space includes both (1) identifying an area *as* a stage or acting space and (2) circumscribing or delineating the perimeter of the area within which a performance takes place.¹¹ I begin with the first. Often nothing special is needed to identify the acting space: theater architecture—the stage and the orientation of the seating—do that for the audience. Nevertheless, as I have indicated, painted scenery may provide an image of the place of the action, where the conventions of theater enable it to

transform a space into a place for actors, thus identifying the space as a stage. But it is not necessary for a painting to effect this transformation by representing the place of the action—it may do so, for example, by representing some other place. At the rear of the Noh stage there is traditionally a painting of a pine tree. The pine tree represents the abode of the gods, and the performance is carried out for the gods. The image substitutes for what it represents, transforming the space into a place for a Noh play to be performed for the gods—but it does not represent the place of the action, which may be elsewhere, such as in someone's home or on a battlefield.

The acting area may extend beyond the proscenium arch or into the aisles and the seats. Again, scenery is hardly necessary to signal the enlargement: audiences are likely to read wherever actors go as “a stage” (even though it does not follow that every actor visible to the audience will necessarily be “on stage”). Nevertheless, painted flats and other scenery beyond the stage can encourage the audience to anticipate that these areas will be used as performance spaces and to speculate (under the influence of the painted imagery) about what might happen there. This use of scenery beyond the stage is nicely accommodated by Susanne Langer’s view that the “forward-looking flow” of the action that takes place over time is the essence of the dramatic.¹² Anticipating future action can enhance the meaningfulness of current events because of their perceived relations to future and past events. Even the initial liminality of such places can heighten the sense of flow of the narrative.

The other aspect of defining the acting space is circumscribing or delineating its perimeter. Even if painting is two-dimensional it can do this, since two-dimensional images may be positioned in such a way as to establish boundaries of the acting space. The positioning of images (of alleyways or corridors) on flats or wings, not just the material support, establishes the exits; the positioning of an image (of a wall or chasm), just as much as the fabric on which the image appears, defines the rear limits of the stage or acting area.

Painting extends three-dimensionally into space when on a curved or angled surface. The physical positioning of the painting and its extension in space may combine with the character of the image to establish both the place of the action and the perimeter of the acting space. For example, a scene may take place within the boundaries of a curved stone wall, represented by a painting of a wall. The painted image serves to identify the place where the action occurs, and its positioning identifies the boundaries of the acting space. The image of a wall serves as a real metaphor: it substitutes for the presence of an actual wall. Indeed, our understanding of the ways in which painted scenery serves these three functions of set design—identifying the place of the action, establishing a mood or atmosphere, and defining the stage by identifying it as an acting place and circumscribing its perimeter—are enhanced by understanding how painting can serve as a real metaphor. The situation is a little more complicated for a fourth function of set design: organizing or structuring the acting space.

3 A Fourth Function of Sets: Structuring the Acting Space

A fourth function of sets is not handled well by painted scenery: organizing or structuring the acting space. A set structures the acting space when it makes it logical or reasonable for actors, representing their characters, to stand in a particular place, to move around in a particular way, and enter and exit where they do. Meaningless motion and random activity on stage tend to confuse and distract the audience; actor movements should make what is happening more, or at least not less, comprehensible. To transform a space into a stage or a place for acting does not necessarily organize or structure that space for the actors. And to define an acting space—identify it as an acting space and mark its perimeter—does not itself organize movement and positioning within the space.

Painted scenery, even when strategically positioned within or occupying space, has two major limitations when it comes to structuring the acting space: it is not as versatile as actual objects, and it is handicapped by the human visual perception system.

First, the most fruitful way to structure the real space of the stage is to use actual three-dimensional objects rather than representations of them as part of a painted scene. Objects' locations affect how we move—toward, away from, or around them, whether we touch them, pick them up and use them, resist touching them, or try but fail to pick them up or use them. Two actors can use a desk to represent their characters facing off against each other on either side of it, reaching out across it, walking around to meet in front of or behind it, getting on top of it, hiding beneath it, treating it as an obstacle, or using it to perform acrobatics. None of this is possible with a painted table on a backdrop. It is possible to exploit the whimsy of interacting with pictures of objects as if they were real objects, though the humor often stems from the way the image *stymies* movement in comparison with what one could do with an actual object. You can't walk up a picture of stairs; you can't grab an object from a picture of an object on a table. Painting just does not have the potential to organize acting space and control actor movement the way real objects do.

This is not to say painted scenes have no potential of this sort at all. There may be ways characters can interact with an object or situation depicted in a scene: they can point to it, look at it, or refer to it. I also above described how a painted image of a religious figure, even if part of a broader scene, could be the object of particular acts of reverence or prayer. There may be another type of possibility. Suppose that the left half of a backdrop depicts a scene inside a house and the right side a scene outside. The painted scenes may structure actor movement so that an actor moves from left to right to go outdoors and vice-versa to go indoors. Alternatively, however, one might say that the structuring of the space and related movement is due to the painted imagery establishing two contiguous places of action. As mentioned above, establishing the place of the action is something painted scenery does well.¹³

The second limitation, the way humans visually perceive distance and perspective, applies most clearly to the use of geometric perspective in painted scenery, such as in 1500–1900 Europe. One of the strengths of geometrical perspective is its capacity to represent in a precise way relative spatial locations among objects within a painted scene. Another is its potential for creating an impression of space extending behind the backdrop and, thanks to angled perspective, for extending the impression of space off to the side of the acting space.¹⁴ In addition, painted doorways and windows can imply other rooms or outdoor spaces.¹⁵

But, none of this serves to structure the acting space on the stage itself. Even though perspective painting can create an *imaginary* space behind and beside the flat image, it does not extend the perspective illusion forward to measure or organize the *real* space in front of the painted surface. An image can substitute for the real space it pictorially represents. That is, it can serve as a real metaphor for the represented scene and transform the space of the stage into the represented place. But the picture does not represent the space in front of the picture, so the measurement of the space in the picture does not thereby apply to the real space in front of it.

Various features of the human perceptual system actually prevent us from seeing the depicted space in a two-dimensional image as continuous with the real space in front of it. One-point perspective, for example, distorts audience perception of the size of actors, making downstage actors appear smaller and upstage actors larger in relation to the painted scene.¹⁶ But one-point perspective is not the only problem. Any relatively flat, two-dimensional rendering of an object or scene in depth, where some objects are supposed to be in front of or behind others, can create a problem. The perception of the relative motion of actors on stage in relation to such a scene involves parallax. Our angle of vision changes on the moving entity but not in sync with the depicted items in the backdrop, indicating a discontinuity between real and depicted spaces. Parallax is an important way of detecting distance, and it prevents us from perceiving moving actors as being in a unified space with painted objects in space on a backdrop.

The proscenium arch, adapted from the picture frame, highlights rather than resolves the spatial disunity. A picture frame creates a break between the fictional space of a relatively

two-dimensional image and the real space of the viewer. The break can be bridged, but it is surprising when it is—as in the *New Yorker* cartoon by F. B. Modell where the sun in a painting casts a shadow behind the viewer of the painting.¹⁷ A proscenium arch, however, frames much more than a static image: it frames a pictorial backdrop along with real space and moving parts.¹⁸ In accord with the received view, the arch frames the anomalies between painted image and real space, highlighting the tension between the two.

In 17th–18th-century Europe, the limitations of painted backdrops in relation to human perception made the training that embedded painting and set design in architectural structures especially useful. Painted backdrops were often combined with three-dimensional constructions in the form of painted side wings. Three-dimensional structures helped rationalize the acting space (and provided spectacle). Their positioning helped to articulate the fictional space and hence thereby to rationalize actor movement.

Another way designers compensated for the limitations of static, two-dimensional images was to make the painted scenery move, and there was a vogue for moving scenery from the 17th century on. Temporality is thus indicated by the set, not just by the words and actions of the actors. One technique was later adapted by the film industry: a painted panoramic background would scroll behind stationary actors who appeared to be moving through a landscape.¹⁹

Perspective painting and painted backdrops in general may do little to organize stage space, but there is at least one major reason why they persisted in the theater nonetheless. In court theaters, beginning in the 17th century, one-point perspective generated a privileged experience for certain selected viewers, such as dukes, princes, and aristocrats. The stage platform was aligned with the ruler's box and the vanishing point was centered at eye level, so that “the vantage point of the ruler was made the organizing principle of the stage as a whole.”²⁰ The effect is not of a performance in which the fictional space of the two-dimensional image structures the three-dimensional stage space, but where the viewpoint of the ruler controls what occurs on the stage.²¹ In contrast, multiple-point perspective in a painted scene has served as a political and social antidote, spreading out an optimal viewing experience to a larger portion of the audience.²²

It is of course not possible to attribute the eventual demise of painting in set design in Europe entirely to the disparity between two-dimensional depicted and actual three-dimensional space. Painting lost its dominance due to numerous changes in theater theory and practice during the 19th century (and eventually due to changes in painting itself). One central factor was theater's fixation on realism, as opposed to the pictorial illusion of reality, and the box set—a three-dimensional “box” for a domestic interior rather than a perspective backdrop—and attention to the historical accuracy of props, scenery, and costumes.

Also central was the emergence of the idea of a theatrical performance as a unified, complete work of art in itself. An emphasis on the three-dimensionality of the acting space played a role in this move. For example, Adolphe Appia, a late 19th-century Swiss architect and theorist of stage lighting and design, was the first since the 16th century to design a stage without a proscenium arch, thus undermining the idea that looking at the stage was like looking at a picture.²³ He also banished painting and painted scenery from the stage, exploiting real space rather than the mere illusion of space. Under the influence of Wagner, he championed the use of music and lighting (aided by developments in gas, arc, and incandescent lighting during the 19th century), not painted images, to integrate visual and spatial elements of a theatrical production. The goal was an integration of all aspects of the production into a visual and artistic unity, as in Wagner's notion of a *gesamtkunstwerk*. The English actor, director, designer, and theorist E. Gordon Craig also rejected two-dimensional illusion in favor of abstract, non-representational three-dimensional volumes, and promoted the director-designer as the primary artist of a theatrical production as an independent work of art.²⁴

Other factors also worked against scene painting. By the turn of the 20th century, a proliferation of stage types, such as thrust and arena stages made painted backdrops and flats impractical,

since they blocked sight lines. Site-specific productions take advantage of real rather than depicted places and spaces, “borrowing” scenery rather than pictorially representing it. The 20th-century French dramatist, essayist, and director Antonin Artaud, known for his “Theater of Cruelty,” defended the “total work of art” as a site where all the senses—including physical, bodily experiences—are to be combined to produce a unified experience, further marginalizing painted scenery as weak, illusionistic, and unduly committed to the primacy of *visual* communication. As is well known, the word “theater” is derived from the Greek for a place for viewing. The place for viewing became transmuted into a place for experiencing and feeling with the whole body.

4 Beyond Backdrops

Painted backdrops are well suited to setting the scene, creating an atmosphere, and identifying and defining the boundaries of an acting space. Though they may help to organize the acting space—such as when an image of a god or other religious figure serves as a focal point and hence organizer of actor movement—there are other possibilities where paintings representing single entities, rather than entire scenes, have an organizing potential that is more like that of props.²⁵

A picture representing a single entity is less subject to the two limitations of painted scenery described above. It can have more potential for organizing actor movement since, as a discrete entity, it can be positioned in and move around the stage space, and be the target of an action. A real cup provides more opportunities for some types of actor movement than a representation of a cup, but a bit of imagination reveals potential for the substitute that goes beyond the possibilities inherent in the original. For example, at one point in their theater piece *Wear and Tear*, members of the Austin-based company The Back Pack wear small pads of paper strapped on their arms. Every page of the pads contains a drawing of a leaf.²⁶ The performers are trees and their arms are branches, to which (pictures of) leaves are attached. The branches move wildly and the wind blows; the performers tear off pages of the sketchpads and the leaves fall. Someone arrives attempting with little success to “rake” the leaves with a broom (labeled as a rake by a picture of a rake—another function of the image), followed by someone with an instantly effective, super-powerful leaf blower. Ironically, the leaf blower is more effective at removing the drawings that represent leaves than the object whose actual function is to remove pieces of paper. The performance plays on the audience’s awareness that they are looking at pictures, pictures that are functioning substitutes for what they represent.²⁷

With regard to the second limitation, the way humans perceive depth, the contrast between images as substitutes and painted scenery is stark. There is no two-dimensional representation of moderate to deep space in the image of a leaf or other single entity, and hence no attempt to organize the stage space in virtue of it. Actor movement is instead rationalized and controlled by treating the images as substitutes for what they represent. The drawings function more like props, actual space-occupying objects. The drawings do not set the mood or scene but their manipulation drives the action. I do not claim that, in the role of real metaphor, painting is the future of theater, but instead that it has been both an under-recognized presence and is a viable future option, where its potential is secured by the power of its location and occupation of space—potential long obscured by the historical dominance of painted scenery.²⁸

For 400 years in Europe, painters recognized as some of the finest artists of their day were involved in creating painted scenery for theatrical performance, scenery that was heavily influenced by the use of illusionistic methods for representing space. But the control of artist-painters over set design did not help distinguish theatrical performances as works of art. Instead, two-dimensional illusion worked against the inherent three-dimensionality and actual presence of human performers. As theatrical performance developed as an independent art form in its own right, unified in the presentation of its components, painting lost its grip on set design in the West. I doubt that

painting in any form could ever maintain or reprise the dominance over theatrical set design that it held for 400 years. Yet, it is important to recognize the role as real metaphors that images have and continue to play in theatrical performance, a role that does not create a dissonance between the real, three-dimensional stage space and a two-dimensional representation of space, and that helps to perform some of the traditional functions of sets.

Notes

- 1 John Barnes, “Painting of Scenes,” in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*, vol. II, ed. Dennis Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 990; also Matthew Wilson Smith, “Scenography,” in Kennedy, vol. II, p. 1201.
- 2 Oscar G. Brockett, with Franklin J. Hildy, *History of the Theatre*, 8th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), pp. 129, 134.
- 3 Pierre Lavedan, *Histoire D’urbanisme*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1959), p. 27; quoted in Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 23.
- 4 For a more extended discussion of this idea see Susan Feagin, “Painting,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 516–535.
- 5 Jakob Stejskal drives home the point in his careful and sensitive study, “Substitution by Image: The Very Idea,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 77.1 (Winter 2019): 55–66, esp. pp. 55–56, 62.
- 6 I am not here including site specific works, which have an even more intimate relation to their surroundings. They are arguably partly constituted by their relation to a specific site, so that if removed (or if the site is altered in relevant ways), the work is at least partly lost.
- 7 David Summers, “Real Metaphor,” in *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), pp. 231–259. See also Susan L. Feagin, “Paintings and their Places,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1995): 260–268; repr. *Art and Its Messages*, ed. Stephen Davies (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), pp. 17–25. Stejskal, “Substitution by Image,” tracks the development of related ideas in Ernst Gombrich, Jean-Pierre Vernant, and Hans Beltung.
- 8 Many examples of real metaphor and related notions provided in the art historical literature are sculptural (often painted sculpture) rather than (relatively) two-dimensional pictures. This intriguing fact clearly deserves more attention than it is possible to provide here.
- 9 Oscar G. Brockett and Robert J. Ball, *The Essential Theatre*, 8th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2004), pp. 361–384. In discussing only the functions of sets as auxiliary to the action, I do not deny the possibility that scenographers can be co-creators of theatrical productions.
- 10 The distinction is not always easy to draw. The extent to which an image is iconic may depend on the extent to which the relevant affective qualities (such as brooding, restful, joyful, etc.) are features of the depicted scene (it is a brooding cemetery) and to what extent they are effects of the colors and forms of the painting.
- 11 I am assuming that these are done ultimately for the benefit of the audience. What an actor uses to know where to go or not to go may be different from what defines the space for the audience.
- 12 Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), pp. 307, 311.
- 13 I find the alternative explanation more plausible, since it seems necessary to have some on stage indicator that each of the backdrop scenes is to be extended forward in this way. However, the point is debatable.
- 14 Ferdinando Galli Bibiena, from a family of architects and scenic designers, introduced angled perspective in the 18th century. The technique employed one or more vanishing points to the side of the image so it recedes off the edge of the panel and invites viewers to complete the scene in their imagination. See Smith, “Scenography,” p. 1204.
- 15 See Carlson, *Places of Performance*, p. 131. Tim Fitzpatrick refers to these as “localized off” space, those that are adjacent to the onstage space, as opposed to “unlocalized off” space, which is not imagined as contiguous to the stage space and more remote. See Fitzpatrick, “The Dialectics of Space-Time: Dramaturgical and Directorial Strategies for Performance and Fictional World,” in *Performance: From Product to Process*, ed. Tim Fitzpatrick (Sydney: Frederick May Foundation, 1989), pp. 60–62.
- 16 See, for example, Freddie Rokem, “Scenographic Paradigms: Some Principles of Perception and Interpretation,” *Performance Research* 18.3 (Summer 2013): 75–83, at 76. Well-known optical illusions vividly demonstrate the problem. See, for example, <https://therealweeklyshow.wordpress.com/2014/01/15/5-more-mind-bending-optical-illusions/walking-men-size-illusion/> accessed 10/20/19.

- 17 Reproduced in Kendall L. Walton, *Marvelous Images: On Values and the Arts* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 70, to illustrate how a fictional world may extend beyond the picture to include the spectator.
- 18 The proscenium arch in movie theaters functions differently, since there is no real space in a film. In this paper, I do not attempt to address theater that intentionally blurs the boundaries between fictional space and the real space of the audience.
- 19 Moveable scenery was popular in the 18th century in the West and in Japanese Kabuki. See Smith, “Scenography,” in *History of the Theatre*, ed. Kennedy, p. 1201; and Brockett and Hildy, pp. 622–623. Moveable scenery, along with masks, painted faces, and painted puppets, might be thought of as painting that performs. See Michael Kirby, “The New Theatre,” *Tulane Drama Review*, 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965): 23–43, esp. p. 23. Other spectacular effects—such as explosions, fires, and flying things—also disrupted the possibilities for establishing a continuous, consistent relationship between two-dimensional pictorial space and actual stage space.
- 20 Smith, “Scenography,” p. 1201.
- 21 Carlson, *Places of Performance*, pp. 137–140.
- 22 On perspective in Greek scenic design, see, for example, David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 212.
- 23 The origins of the proscenium arch are disputed. Some place it about 1560 and others in Giovan Battista Aleotti’s Teatro Farnese of 1618.
- 24 For more detail on this aspect of theater history, see, for example, Brockett and Hildy, *History of the Theatre*, pp. 440–441; Smith, “Scenography,” p. 1206.
- 25 Kendall Walton employs the idea of depictive paintings as props, but for him they are props in *visual* games of make-believe, not as having roles dependent on their physical positioning. See Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 293–296. See Feagin, “Paintings and their Places,” 21–22, and Stejskal, “Substitution by Image,” 55, 66 ftn. 2, on this point.
- 26 The Back Pack performed at the Philadelphia Fringe Festival, September 7, 2019.
- 27 In their performance, drawings also function in a variety of other ways. I mentioned that they function as labels. They also provide context for the interpretation of behavior: an image of a wedge propped up behind a roller skate held by an actor indicates he is skating uphill; the wedge is reversed, and he skates downhill.
- 28 Digital technologies provide a whole range of options that challenge painting’s potential on other fronts, as they can be exploited for their ease of generation and removal, variety of surfaces on which they can be projected, movement, maneuverability, and origins in popular culture, documentary resources, or the imagination. I thank participants in the conference, “Aesthetics on the Prairie 2019: Scenography,” and especially comments by Stephen di Benedetto, for pressing this fact.

25

PAINTERLY ASPIRATIONS IN POETRY

John Gibson

1 Introduction

Poetry is, no doubt, a literary art, yet it has always encroached upon the territory of the other arts. Poetry aspires to the status of music, exploiting meter and the prosodic features of language to create verses with rhythmic, sonic, and melodic structures. It is for something like this reason that Friedrich Nietzsche declares poetry to depend “utterly on the spirit of music, music itself” (Nietzsche, 1999; 36), and Edgar Allan Poe defines it as the “rhythmical creation of beauty” (Poe, 2006; 576. See also Ribeiro, 2007). And poems are, of course, often animated by intense painterly ambitions, using poetic language to conjure up a kind of *picture*, and not merely a description, of its subject matter. Writing on poetry from antiquity through the Renaissance never tires of asserting this. Simonides of Ceos casts poetry as “painting that speaks” (Plutarch, 1992; 157), Horace famously insists that *ut pictura poesis* (Horace, 1989; 70), and Leonardo da Vinci pronounces poetry to be “painting that is felt rather than seen” (da Vinci, 2008; 201).

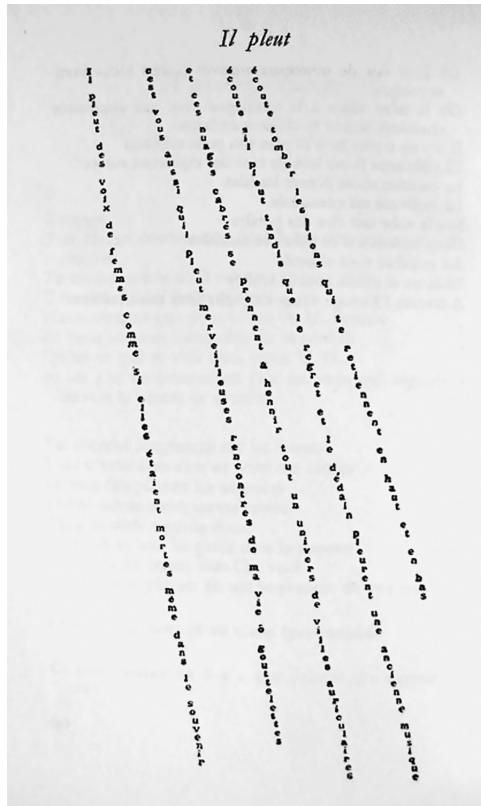
It is the apparent affinity between poetry and painting that will occupy me here. While in modernity scholars are on the whole much less willing to invoke the poetry-as-painting model literally or uncritically, a key feature of it is still with us. A hint as to what this key feature is taken to be comes in the name of one of modernism’s iconic poetic movements: Imagism. As Robert von Hallberg puts it, images “are constitutive, not ornamental, of thought, in modernist poetic doctrine” (Hallberg, 2008; 112). The kernel of presumed truth in the old model is that poetry and painting are aligned in respect to the essential role *images* play in each. Stronger still, the idea that remains is that the imagistic dimension of poetry is essential to how poems “think” and so *communicate*, and that matters are much the same in regard to how paintings “think” and produce meaning.

Yet just what are we asserting when we claim that poems yield images and make of them objects of aesthetic regard and critical scrutiny? Images in what sense, exactly? The point of this chapter is to outline a way of thinking about these questions and a strategy for answering them. We will see that we need a theory of the image that is fit for poetry and thus that contrasts in significant ways with the kinds of image that paintings produce. This should hardly come as a surprise. But in conclusion, I will suggest that what we stand to learn about how poems harness images for expressing thought and generating meaning promises to tell us something interesting about how paintings do, too. In the end, philosophers of poetry and painting alike need an account of how images become freighted with thought, feeling, and aboutness. This is because it is

by offering an image of a particular sort that poets and painters establish that all-important link between art and life, and this, we will see, is one of the chief ways each is able to endow their works with basic forms of critical, epistemic, and culture significance.

2 Verbal Images

Note immediately that we can find entirely literal respects in which poems produce images in such a manner that they effectively function as paintings in words. Guillaume Apollinaire's 1918 "Il Pleut" is one such example¹:



Here we have a poem that is itself a visual image. But while it is an image made of words, none of the aesthetic, semantic, symbolic, and prosodic dimensions of the poem's language are implicated in the creation of this image, though surely they contribute to the overall effect of the poem. The mere arrangement of words in whitespace suffices to craft this image, and all that is needed in order to understand how Apollinaire pulled this off is whatever the theory of depiction offers us for making sense of how any visual representation does.

This helps us to see what our question amounts to. In asking what a poetic image is, we are at least trying to understand a kind of *verbal* image, not a visual one, any rate not a literally visual one.² Whatever else a poetic image might be, we expect it to be constituted not just of words but through what these words say and the particular manner they say it. We thus need to understand the kinds of images that are in some manner present *in* a poem's language and manufactured by properly *poetic* machinery. We do not yet know what this machinery is, but it should be clear that we will not correct this ignorance by finding poems that one can frame and hang on a wall.

Better, but just slightly so, would be to look to ekphrastic poems for a model. In its most literal application, *ekphrasis* names a classical rhetorical exercise in which students were asked to write a poem that “calls out” or “proclaims” a work from a different artistic medium, say by composing a lyric that strives to capture the essence of particular statue. More broadly, it can designate any attempt to offer a poetic representation of an object of non-negligible aesthetic and artistic value, for instance, Homer’s description of Achilles’s shield in the *Iliad*. In modern poetics, we have an ekphrastic poem whenever we attempt, if you will, to put a painting to poetry, and the connection between a poem and an indicated painting becomes paramount. Contemporary examples would be Anne Sexton’s “The Starry Night” (1981) or Wislawa Szymborska’s “Two Monkeys by Brueghel” (1993), though the list is long indeed.

It is true that in ekphrastic poems we often find properly poetic *verbal* images, but the idea of ekphrasis, taken in its standard usage in poetics, is still too narrow to capture what we are after. The label demands nothing especially *imagistic* from the poem that wishes to be ekphrastic; it just requires that a poem be *about* an image found outside the poem. The practice, especially in its modern sense, also makes the connection between poems and particular paintings too intimate, for the obvious reason that we have poems which produce images, perhaps even painterly ones, but that do not strive to represent a given painting at all.

What is needed is an account of verbal imagery and the conditions under which it becomes recognizably poetic, not an account of how poems can successfully function as paintings or come to be *about* them. And to put matters this way is to make it clear that we are in the realm of another, much broader and more pervasive, dimension of language, a power perhaps most perfectly exercised in poetry but certainly found elsewhere. In his discussion of verbal icons, W. J. T. Mitchell puts the issues in these terms: “Figurative language [...] is what we ordinarily mean when we talk about verbal imagery. The phrase, ‘verbal imagery,’ in other words, seems to be a metaphor for metaphor itself!” (Mitchell 2013; 21). In short, what we need to explore is how the imagistic dimension of poetry relies on the figurative manipulation of words and exploits their metaphoric potential.

Caution is required here. We haven’t said anything informative or interesting if we simply describe this power of poetry to produce verbal images as “metaphoric.” “Metaphor” gestures in the general direction of many disparate non-literal uses of language, and a good number of those uses will have little to do with the production of poetic verbal imagery. For example, dead metaphors likely demand nothing of the imagination and so, as we will see, do not require the kind of *seeing-as* that calls on words to produce an image over and above a determinate semantic content. And there may be metaphors that are very much alive that nonetheless do not require us to consider anything picture-like in order to grasp their import (for these and related issues, see Camp, 2006; Stern, 2000; Wearing, 2006). The immensely tired but still living “Juliet is the Sun” might be one such example. Whatever “sun” means in this context, it has not yet settled into a conventional sense, as, say, “embattled” has when used to describe a certain philosopher’s status in the profession. It also isn’t clear that readers need to *picture* Juliet this way or that to get Romeo’s point, given the sheer familiarity of both the metaphor and the drama, as well as its appearance in virtually every philosophical discussion of metaphor since the 1940s. The kinds of metaphor that matter to my argument cannot count on established usage to lead the mind to meaning, and this is to be expected, since we are trying to understand the intensely creative language of poetry, which often takes great pride in producing meanings that are in utter excess of established linguistic usage.

One more word of caution. In work on figurative language, one finds frequent reference to the class of metaphors, similes, and analogies that are “poetic” and so are to be contrasted with the “low-energy” or prosaic metaphors of the unambitious everyday sort (Davies, 1982; 80). In these debates, the designation “poetic” describes a metaphor as something like *elaborate, aesthetically charged*, and *admirably creative* (see Reimer and Camp, 2008). Asking you to think of someone as “a

bulldozer” is not poetic in this sense. But when T.S. Eliot writes of an “evening spread out against the sky/Like a patient etherized upon a table,” we have a figurative deployment of language that aspires to the status of “poeticity,” as it once would have been put (“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” 1910). Yet Eliot’s lines achieve this status in part because of the extraordinary way they *picture* their object, creating an anxious image of evening as still much as one is when put under just before an invasive surgery. We won’t learn much about this imagistic power of poetry if we just consider the mellifluousness and tensed juxtapositions of really, really good metaphors. What in part gives the poetry to a poetic image is that it enables an aesthetically heightened form of *attention to an object*—an imaginative corollary to perceptual attention—wrought with words but that creates something in excess of what words do in their mundane conversational contexts. It is this verbally created “object” and its poetic power that we need to explore, quite in addition to the merely aesthetic features of the language through which it is created. It is this creative power of metaphor that helps us to see something important about poetry and its presumably painterly dimension.

3 Imagistic Meaning

We need to understand a particular power of metaphor that brings to clarity a particular power of poetry, namely, that in certain contexts poetry conveys thought and produces meaning by virtue of verbal imagery. In this section, I will attempt to make the idea seem intuitive, using two case studies that highlight different aspects of these powers. Both cases are admittedly fanciful but, I hope, instructive nonetheless.

In each case, assume, I approach a conversation with you with the goal of getting you to see some state of affairs more or less as I do, and I take you to begin the exchange with no firm grasp of the matter at all. That is, you are unfamiliar with the subject of discussion and I need to find a way to provide you with an object of understanding. My labor, assume, is one of devising an effective manner of forming an image—note how natural the term feels here—of what I wish you to see as I do.

Case 1

You are a guest at my university. My colleague Wes, I tell you, is a particular kind of jerk and you really must avoid him at the dinner tonight. You ask me, “what kind jerk, exactly?” and I begin to fumble around for words, producing, in the process, a mess of true descriptions. I tell you that despite being widely despised, he has a certain “*je ne sais quoi*” and is often the center of attention; that he regularly insinuates salacious things about faculty who challenge him; that he speaks in a soft, smoky voice, which gives a false impression of depth and intimacy; that he draws people to him only to reveal who he really is once trust has been established; that he has a motorcycle; that he takes great delight in the spontaneous creation of chaos, always finding ingenious ways to set colleagues against one another on the spot. I could keep going, but I sense that I’ve told you a lot without saying much at all, and at any rate I haven’t made my point. So in an attempt to bring it all home, I say, “imagine a kind of Miles Davis of malice. That’s Wes!” Finding that a tad purple, I try again: “Wes is the Iago of the Philosophy Department.” “Regardless,” I say, “I’m trying to tell you that when it comes to bad behavior, he’s an extraordinary improviser.”

Assume that both of my metaphors are apt, given who Wes is and who Miles Davis and Iago were. It is arguable that my two metaphors state no truths, provide no facts-of-the-matter, in addition to those given in the initial true descriptions. But they are hardly gratuitous linguistic embellishments. Each metaphor provides a radically different way of *organizing* those disjointed truths: the metaphors make them *cohere* in determinate ways. They open up new ways of seeing Wes, since each metaphor calls on us not just to describe him one way or another but enlists the

imagination in an act of seeing-as (see Wollheim, 1980; 147–150), namely, e.g., as Miles Davis, at least in respect to the performance of evil. The effect of this is that of *orientating* you in thought and feeling to Wes in a specific, and specifically imaginative, manner. Through this, a nuanced *purchase* on him, and not merely a set of properties he truly possesses, is articulated and shared. The metaphors make the descriptions hang together in a particular manner, and, in so doing, offer an image of how I take Wes to hang together as a person.

In a fantastically apt phrase, Troy Jollimore calls the kind of orientation a metaphor achieves a “cognitive grasp,” with the notion of a grasp “conceived holistically rather than as a set of discrete, atomistic propositions,” and this is a fine way of describing how my metaphors of Wes stand in relation to the true descriptions they structure and bring to a point (Jollimore, 2009; 142). Elizabeth Camp describes this as metaphor’s power to prompt an imaginative *perspective* on a subject, by “imposing a complex structure of relative prominence on them, so that some features stick out in our minds while others fade into the background, and by making some features especially central to explaining others,” which explains how the metaphors of Wes yield distinctive purchases on Wes (Camp, 2009). Regardless of whether we opt to call the organizational work these metaphors do “orientations,” “cognitive grasps,” “perspectives,” or “purchases,” one thing is very clear: they each offer a different way of *making sense* of Wes. They each provide a different way of *thinking* about him, of making him *meaningful* to you, and of presenting him as a precise *object of understanding*. And this gives us an intuitive and earthbound sense of what it means to say that an image “thinks” and “communicates” by virtue of its status as an image.

If the language in my example is shorn of imagery—if I say “Wes devises evil schemes with stunning quickness” and leave out the Miles Davisness or Iagoness of how he does so—I provide facts about a person but not a picture of the person to whom these facts apply. In this case, there is a hole at the very center of your conception of the subject of our discussion. We might even think that these two images, Wes-as-Miles-Davis or Wes-as-Iago, would be much more accurately captured with a literal picture than a literal statement, in part because the metaphors ascribe a certain look and feel to him, and an artistic gesture rather than a description is better suited for capturing such things. It is also because of the picture-like quality of the verbal image that we can explain the intrusion of the aesthetic in the metaphor: of language intended to color and stylize thought. It works upon the sound of words, plays upon suggestion, commonplaces, and sets of associations (of Miles Davis, Iago, jazz culture, *Othello*, false friends, etc.) and places the object, Wes, at a particular point in the space of value, though good luck stating exactly and literally what that point is. Verbal images do speak at that level of specificity (see Kulwicki, 2014; 155–172). This is one point at which the analogy with visual pictures ends, since verbal images lack entirely the kind of perceptual detail of a visual image. This is why it would not only be silly but a category error to ask whether Wes-as-Iago should be imagined as dressed in contemporary urban or Venetian clothing *circa* 1603.

One final thought. It is often thought that metaphors are a disruption of literal language. Perhaps, but as the above makes clear, metaphors often *coopt* the literal language that went before it—language that is not itself contained in the grammatical relationship a metaphor establishes between subject and predicate—and gives it a role to play in its imaginative enterprise. Some of the predicates in my clumsy descriptions of Wes rely on dead, or at least sleeping, metaphors, and the others are straightforwardly literal. But the metaphors awaken an imagistic force in them. The invocation of Miles Davis enlivens prior uses of “smoky,” “improviser,” “soft,” and perhaps even “*je ne sais quoi*,” given Davis’s genius at creating musical atmospheres that defy affective description. When I enlist the image of Iago, “spontaneous” is given a different force, since Iago, in his way, was an also immensely successful improviser of malice; and it gives an imaginative charge to terms like “set against,” “insinuate,” and “false impression,” certainly to those who know his story. In fact, even certain of the straightforwardly literal descriptions are given an essentially imagistic function. On

any charitable interpretation of my true descriptions, “has a motorcycle” functions not to convey a proposition about Wes so much as to *picture* him and his obnoxiousness in a particular way. If one does not assume this, the inclusion of “has a motorcycle” in the exchange is gratuitous, since the information it conveys would be entirely beside the point. In this respect, the whole of my communicative act is reshaped by the metaphor, precisely because it is all is implicated in the creation of a verbal image of Wes and so endows the entire exchange with a recognizably imagistic dimension.

Poetry makes great use of this power to endow language, metaphoric or otherwise, with an imagistic function. A painting, because visual, can furnish its images with extraordinary determinacy *internally*. It can simply depict what it wishes us to see. Metaphors and poetic verbal images, owing to the condensation of thought typical of each, usually cannot, so this coopting of surrounding swaths of literal language as a way of achieving determinacy becomes paramount (see John, 2013; Lamarque, 2009 & 2015). William Wordsworth was a great practitioner of this. Consider his sonnet “The World is Too Much with Us” (1802) and note how he passes seamlessly from philosophical registers to figurative ones that embody, in straightforwardly verbal images, the sense of his various claims about the poverty of experience in modernity:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.³

It is crucial to see that the entire poem functions as a verbal image, since its images of the sea flirting with the moon, the sleeping flowers, pagans, and Proteus subsume and make cohere the philosophical declarations about alienation, belatedness, and the atrophy of our distinctly human “powers.” What we might call the “total verbal image” of the poem refers not to the manner in which various lines of a poem metaphorically picture their grammatical subjects (“getting and spending” as a “sordid boon,” etc.) but to how the whole of poem itself pictures *its* subject: our world and our place in it. Thus as with my mundane examples of Wes, the various images in Wordsworth’s poem charge the entire poem with an imagistic function, and indeed the poem itself becomes an image of us, at any rate of the various ways of being “us” that it wishes to condemn. The poem in a sense thereby achieves the determinacy of a painting through its coopting of all of its language, literal included, in its elaboration of an image, verbal at its core, of an enchanted world that is now lost to us. Again, this is not a kind of *perceptual* determinacy, and it is to commit a category error to expect this. It is a kind of determinacy of content and aboutness: of the degree of thought and feeling that an image is able to convey about its subject.

Case 2

After some 25 years since university, you’ve found me on the internet. You send a few emails that reestablish a sense of connection, and then you begin to test boundaries. After successfully probing me for information about my job and the like, you ask me about my romantic life. Since we’re on

email, I opt to enlist an image to convey my response, but I am undecided as to exactly what I want to reveal. I first write, “At the moment it is a bit like this,” and insert the following image:



I then think twice and decide that I'd rather render the truth more optimistically. I replace the initial image with:



And then I decide that I want to change the sense of my response entirely so as to ensure no further intrusion:



In these examples, an actual image functions as a grammatical object: a proper picture is used as a predicate that completes the thought of a sentence and is therefore responsible for enriching it with meaning.⁴ But the images do so in a distinctive manner, not quite by telling you *what* but *how* to think about my romantic life. The first image asks you to view it as a catastrophe; the second as put on hold while I happily attend to other matters; and the third, very unlike the others, tells you how to think not about my life but your prying. Dull and wildly broad “truths” are conveyed, too: that I’m single, and that it is tragic, or fabulous, or none of your business. But it is *how* these images open up and structure ways of thinking about my life that is of primary importance here, and this, rather than any discrete truths these perspectives make available to you, is where the basic cognitive and communicative action takes place.

It would be a mistake to say that the second and third images communicate more about their subject (my life) simply because they provide more language. It is true that they have more words than the first sign, but the words play no more of a role in detailing thought here than the straightforwardly aesthetic—one could just as easily say formal—features of the images. The chains in the first image, the cheery garishness of the second, and the stern font of the third, all bear as much of the burden of meaning-production as the “for the season” of second and the vulgarity of the third do. The point is, in each of these cases, the aesthetic-visual elements are charged with giving an otherwise null conception of my romantic life a determinate shape and color, and they are charged with just as much, indeed likely much more, of the communicative labor than the linguistic elements are. They produce “thought” through the ways in which they color and shape a sense of the subject. In fact, we could remove all the language except for “closed” and virtually the same perspectives on my romantic life would be achieved.

The philosopher of language who wishes to make absolutely everything hang on the provision of propositional forms of understanding might rejoin that these images will ultimately be propositionally structured when made into a proper object of thought and understanding. We can grant this and even that understanding and meaning in these cases are not constitutionally opposed to propositional modes of articulation. The relevant question for our argument is whether it is a proposition *or something else* that conveys the insight and acts as the primary object of cognitive attention here. The answer is clearly that in these cases it is an image and its aesthetic and formal features that have this function. In their natural state, they are formally organized pictures, not propositionally structured statements. Meaning of this sort is a matter of import: of significance and not signification (see Gibson, 2011; 2016). It is what we hit upon when we elaborate, again, how an image organizes thought and leads it to fairly precise destinations such that we can say what the image is “about,” that is, what the *point* of an image like that, presented in this context, might reasonably be taken to be.

It is not a stretch to say that the role “Miles Davis” or “Iago” played in my verbal images in Case 1 have essentially the same function as these literal pictures in Case 2: that of completing a thought about an indicated subject. The visual images of my romantic life fill in the blanks in a different way from the verbal images in respect to Wes’ life. But I am still drawing upon the set of commonplaces associated with a notoriously difficult jazz icon, insipid holiday signage, a decrepit space chained off from public, an infamous villain, and so on. And this leads to an important point: I could have just as well provided an actual painting or an actual poem to the play the role these images did, plugging in, say, Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937) or T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) to articulate a purchase on my romantic life. One would have demanded a greater investment of time to get its point across, but that is neither here nor there for my argument.

Both of the cases explored in this section show that whether an image is verbal or visual should make precisely no difference as to whether it can “think,” establish relationships of aboutness, and so produce meaning, even understanding. A verbal image is, in effect, an assemblage of words that

are organized such that an act of imaginative seeing—as is made possible and, with it, a form of attention to a subject that amounts a manner of *figuring*—here ordinary language permits us to say *picturing*—it. A poem or metaphor can be painterly in this sense, then: they can “think” through an image and establish relationships of aboutness accordingly, as a painting would, though it of course uses verbal rather than visual means to achieve this effect. We can also see that verbal images are creatures of language that often strive, perhaps impossibly, to get beyond language, since they often seek to establish an essentially non-semantic and irreducibly imaginative form of attention to those worldly things that language is about: Miles Davis, a pleasant lea, even a motorcycle (See Guttenplan, 2008). Even Iago, Proteus, and the other fictions enlisted in the above examples are effectively given *real* status, insofar as the words that make them present to the mind render them as an actual frame through which we picture some real feature of human concern, for instance, Wes, my personal life, or the presumed disaster of experience in modernity.

4 Conclusion

Here is the general point I think we can take from all of this. It isn’t quite that a poem or a painting has a figurative content (or meaning) that gets the world right or wrong, no more than my metaphors and my odd images do. It is rather that they can structure and give form—essentially the form of the artwork itself—to how we think about some feature of the world such that a new sense is ascribed to it. Much as I can come to see a friend as Iago, I can also see the world through the lens, imagistic at root, of a poem or painting. And this is often precisely the point of a poem, as the example of Wordsworth makes clear: it yields an image of that messy thing called “life” in addition to the fictions and figurations that populate its lines and stanzas.

To make this move is to admit that the relationship between a poetic image of the world and the world itself is ultimately metaphorical. But this is no loss. As Arthur Danto says, in his typically vague but endearing fashion, “an artwork becomes a metaphor for life, and life is transfigured” (Danto, 1981, 172; see also Camp 2016). This capacity of a poem or painting to become an image of “life” and thus to offer a metaphorical transformation, if not of the thing itself, then of our cognitive grasp of it, is central to how poetry and painting intervene in our cognitive, ethical, and affective relationship to the world. Ultimately, it is this ability of the whole of a poem itself to come to function as an image of life that explains the point of commonality with painting. For unless a mere faithful portrait or landscape, a painting too pictures the world beyond it in an essentially figurative manner. Much of the critical potential of poetry and painting consists in this and thus so does much of its ethical, cognitive, and social significance (see Gibson, 2019). It is how they come to be *about* the world beyond the work and make of it an object not just of attention but scrutiny.⁵

Notes

- 1 <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2012/inventingabstraction/?work=17>, accessed November 20th, 2020.
- 2 Verbal images of course may be “visualized” through an effort of the sensory imagination and the production of mental imagery of a particular sort. Since my focus is on *verbal* images, in which the content of the image is presumably contained in a public use of language, I ignore the debate on the nature of mental imagery. I have no doubt that this debate has much to tell us about how we *entertain* verbal images in poetry and metaphor, though the matter is beyond the scope of this chapter. For discussion, see Arcangeli (2019), Gregory (2016), and Stokes (2019).
- 3 <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45564/the-world-is-too-much-with-us>, accessed November 20th, 2020.
- 4 For this idea and way of framing it, I am indebted to Guttenberg (2005 & 2008). These styles of example are his. I discuss this in much greater detail in Gibson (2011).

5 A version of this chapter was presented as part of the *ParoleImmagini* lecture series at the University of Turin. I thank Carola Barbero, Davide Dal Sasso, and members of the audience for comments and feedback. I also thank Andreas Elpidorou, Avery Kolers, Jonathan Gilmore, and Noël Carroll for comments on the version published here.

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26

PAINTING AND COMICS

Henry John Pratt

1 Introduction

Even if painting is not an immediate ancestor of comics, an early stage of the painting process might be. The word “cartoon,” often used (somewhat misleadingly, as I argue in Pratt 2011) as synonymous with “comic,” even derives from the practice of painting. As Robert Harvey recounts (2009; 26–27), the English word “cartoon” derives from the Italian *cartone*—the preliminary full-scale sketches painters used to make, often on cardboard, before applying brush to canvas.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the continuing relationship between painting and comics. I will begin by comparing several ontological properties of the two artforms. The next section will take up the possibility of paintings that are also comics, which will provide a challenge to that ontology. After considering a possible resolution to that challenge, I move on to a discussion of whether fully painted comics are (tautological though it might sound) also paintings.

2 Ontology

Rather than dealing with “real” definitions (i.e., using necessary and sufficient conditions) of the artforms of painting and comics—inquiries that others have attempted but well beyond what I can accomplish here—let us work through three distinctions that will shed light on the ontological features that paintings and comics do and do not have in common. The result will be what I shall call, for convenience, the “standard ontology” of paintings and comics.

1 In *Languages of Art*, Nelson Goodman divides artforms into *autographic* and *allographic*, in an attempt to provide an understanding of what it is for a given work to count as genuine (Goodman 1968; 113). For autographic artforms, of which painting is exemplary, even a perfectly exact molecule-by-molecule duplicate is not genuine—it would be a mere copy or a forgery. No matter how good our technique and technology gets, we cannot ever make another genuine *Mona Lisa*. For an allographic artform like the novel, by way of contrast, exact copies of works are genuine instances, not forgeries. A word-for-word duplicate of *Moby Dick* just *is* that novel.

Comics, like paintings, are autographic. As Aaron Meskin puts it, “An exact duplicate of a comic does not count as authentic unless it was mechanically copied from the original plate or art or some other genuine copy” (2012; 41). To take a real-world example: when the editors of *The Complete Peanuts 1953–1954* collected the relevant Charles Schultz comics, they found

that for one Sunday comic (May 3, 1953), the top tier could not be located. Artist Seth (as the book acknowledges) redrew the two missing panels in order to maintain consistent formatting. Even if those panels happen to be perceptually identical in all respects to the missing panels, the comic printed in the book would not be an authentic copy of the original.

- 2 The distinction between autographic and allographic artforms does not track another distinction that Goodman draws (1968; 113–114), between *one-stage* and *two-stage* artforms. This is about what it takes for an artwork to be made available for critical reception. Some artworks, like paintings (autographic) and novels (allographic), only require one stage for completion: simplifying a bit, the painter or writer decides that the work is done, and it is done, fully—no further execution is necessary, or even possible.

Other artworks, like a violin sonata (allographic), are two-stage. Once the score is completed, the work still requires more execution for audiences to experience it—it requires a performance. Comics, though autographic, fall into the two-stage camp. Again, Meskin writes, “A comic artist’s work (qua comics artist) is typically done when he or she has produced the original art even though that art is not the artistic end product” (2012; 39). In the same way that the block an artist makes for a woodcut looks rather different than the print it is used to generate, the original art for a comic often looks rather different than the printed copy that readers see. In what used to be the standard process for creating comics, the image the artist gives to the printer would typically include penciled lines in blue that would not show up in print, as well as instructions about layout (e.g., bleeding to margins) and coloring. Not to mention that most comics artists work at a scale bigger than the printed copy that their readers will receive.

- 3 Finally, painting is a *singular* artform: for a particular painting, there can be only one genuine copy. This is not the same as being autographic, since there are autographic artforms that are not singular, but, rather, *multiple*. Film, for example, is an autographic, multiple artform: there are multiple genuine copies of *Blade II* (2002), generated mechanically from the requisite template. Comics is another. There are multiple, genuine copies (currently fewer than 100) of *Action Comics #1*, and even comics that happen to have only one copy could be reproduced in such a way as to result in other genuine copies.

3 Comic Paintings

Consider painting qua artform. For my purposes, roughly, this would be the category containing the kinds of artworks made from paint applied to a relatively flat substrate, often in a frame, familiar from but not exclusive to high art contexts like museums and galleries. The ontological considerations raised in the foregoing will be interestingly problematized if there are works that fit into both the category of painting and the category of comics—what I will call “comic paintings.”

Among comics scholars, it is generally accepted that William Hogarth’s *Rake’s Progress* series, depicting the ruination of a prosperous young man, is at the least a proto-comic. The most popular versions of this series were engravings put into print in 1735. The originals, however, are eight paintings made from 1732 to 1734. Both versions have many features in common with comics, namely, they constitute a narrative told by means of discrete pictures meant to be viewed sequentially. The fact that the original version (to which I will be referring exclusively from henceforth unless otherwise noted) both uses paint as a medium and consists of works that are comfortably encompassed by the artform of painting does not undermine these similarities.

However, one might argue that *Rake’s Progress* does not provide much of a challenge to the standard ontology, since it is not actually a comic. Ahistoricist theories of comics (see, e.g., McCloud 1993, Blackbeard and Crain 1995, Hayman and Pratt 2005) tend to define the artform in terms of formal characteristics only. Scott McCloud, notoriously, counts not only *Rake’s Progress*, but

also ancient Egyptian paintings, pre-Columbian narrative art, the Bayeaux Tapestry, and many other works as comics that are not ordinarily thought to be such (1993; 10–16). If McCloud is right, the overlap between the categories of comics and painting is considerably greater than most believe—a controversial result. Meskin has argued forcefully that ahistoricist definitions are misplaced, on the grounds that comics, like everything else, could not possibly have existed much before they actually did, which was roughly the end of the 19th century (2007; 374). This echoes Arthur Danto: Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1964) could not have been art in 1914, Danto claims, just as “there could not have been, everything being equal, flight insurance in the Middle Ages, or Etruscan typewriter erasers” (1964; 581).

Perhaps a more apt and provocative set of examples can be located in the work of Roy Lichtenstein. While he was not the only artist to appropriate comics in his paintings (or even the first), Lichtenstein is probably the most famous for doing so. Take *Blam* (1962), modeled after a single panel of the comic *All-American Men of War* #89 (1962), which was drawn by Russ Heath. *Blam* uses a visual vocabulary recognizable as originating in comics, as well as a characteristically onomatopoetic sound effect, and unlike *Rake's Progress* clearly was created at a time when comics were commonplace. On my view, nonetheless, it is not a comic, for several reasons. The problem is not that it lacks word balloons (though other scholars would take that to be important—see Carrier 2000 and Harvey 2001). Rather, it fails to be a comic because it is a single image, not multiple images in a sequence. Multiple images, I argue elsewhere (Pratt 2011), is required of works belonging to the category of comics but not of works belonging to the category of cartoons—the kind of humorous drawings with captions one finds in *The New Yorker*.

A better case can be made for Lichtenstein's *As I Opened Fire* (1964). Again inspired by *All-American Men of War* (this time #90, from 1962, drawn by Jerry Grandenetti), this painting, unlike *Blam*, is a triptych that portrays a sequence of panels. While minimally so, the sequence is narrative, unified not only by the repeated images of an airplane firing guns, but also by the “voiceover” in narrative boxes (presumably by the airplane's pilot). In effect, *As I Opened Fire* has the features that are typically used to recognize that something is a comic: a combination of visual and verbal elements working together in concert to tell a story by means of spatially juxtaposed, serially arranged pictures.

Is *As I Opened Fire* a comic painting? This is a hard question to answer because, as the saying goes, one person's modus ponens is another person's modus tollens. If comics is an autographic, two-stage, multiple artform, as the standard ontology would have it, then *As I Opened Fire* is not a comic. For while it is autographic, it is, like other paintings, one-stage and singular. But, for the same exact reasons, if *As I Opened Fire* is a comic, then comics is *not* a two-stage, multiple artform (though it would still be autographic).

A reaction one might have to this situation is to abandon the standard ontology altogether. It might be that distinguishing between autographic and allographic, one-stage and two-stage, and single and multiple artforms does not provide useful ontological insight in the intended manner. However, the defender of the standard ontology has other options (but must be careful to avoid question begging—it will not do to rule out comic paintings merely by *using* the standard ontology).

One general strategy would be to deny the classification of *As I Opened Fire* and related works as comic paintings by pointing to properties of comics that they will inevitably lack—in effect, a generalized version of the considerations I advanced in the foregoing about *Rake's Progress* and *Blam*. Potential options include arguments to the effect that (a) the comparative scale of paintings is fundamentally different from that of comics (see Carrier 2000; 74); (b) paintings are art but comics are not (Schwartz 2004), so overlap is impossible; (c) while painting and comics are both artforms, the former is high art, whereas the latter is low art, and that boundary cannot be crossed; and (d) paintings of comics are not comics, but rather “copies of comics... done in a different medium” (Meskin 2012; 34).

I can only offer responses in brief. In order: (a) there are plenty of small paintings and big comics; (b) comics have penetrated the artworld to a degree that it is hard to rule them out as art (see Beaty 2012; Chapter 8); (c) the boundaries between high and low art are porous and cannot be used reliably to separate artforms; (d) a painting of *x* can be an *x*, and physical composition is largely irrelevant to whether a work is a comic, provided that it can be used (as paint can) to produce the requisite elements of comics. While it is notoriously difficult to prove a negative, I predict that comparable responses will be available in showing that no plausible definitions of comics and painting can be used to rule out the existence of comic paintings.

Another strategy, which I believe to be considerably better than the first, is to emphasize that the ontological classifications used in the previous section are not supposed to express exceptionless truths about necessary properties of the categories. Rather, they fall into what Kendall Walton famously termed “standard” conditions for the categories of comics and painting, which advert to properties shared by typical works within those categories and which tend to qualify works as members of those categories (1970; 339). As such, there will be works of both comics and painting that do not meet these conditions (in Walton’s language, their properties are contrastandard for the categories in which they fall), and comic paintings need not fall smoothly into exactly one ontological slot.

Indeed, the retreat (if it is a retreat) to standard conditions is ultimately the ending point of Meskin’s comics ontology (2007; 43). Meskin and I disagree about whether there can be comic paintings: he thinks the categories do not overlap. But perhaps it is an entailment of his own position that comics is only *standardly* autographic, two-stage, and multiple, together with the position that painting is only *standardly* autographic, one-stage, and singular, that *As I Opened Fire* is properly understood as both.

4 Painted Comics

No discussion of painting and comics would be complete without attention to, well, painted comics. While most comics are rendered in inks (or, increasingly, digital media), others are painted in their entirety. This prompts the two questions that I will attempt to answer in this section. First, why bother making painted comics? And second, what does the putative existence of painted comics imply for the ontological generalizations with which we began?

Inked comics—particularly those that employ a style of cartooning dependent on simplification and abstraction—are able to be produced quickly and efficiently, key for an industry that tends to have fast-moving and rigid publication schedules. They also tend to be legible at small print sizes. Paint, as a medium, can of course be used to produce a range of effects (one could paint quickly in a cartoon style). And it can be used in a limited way, as in Patrick McDonnell’s Sunday *Mutts* strips, which are often colored with a watercolor wash. But fully painted comics take a long time to make and are difficult to both print and read.

To explain why one might make comics entirely with paint, I would like to focus on the work of Alex Ross, the illustrator responsible for such classics as Marvel Comics’s *Marvels* (1994) and DC’s *Kingdom Come* (1996). Even though artists might not always have the best perspective on their own work, it is worth quoting Ross at length about why he uses paints:

[It] seems to cause the viewer to stop and linger over the images.... the advantage for me of painting in a realistic style has been a broad connection with an audience both inside and outside comics, who have found that my images depict a story more fully, closer to what a reader’s imagination can conceive. By that same token, though, a reader can more easily compare my work to reality, and my renderings don’t always measure up. Realism can [immerse us

deeply in the fiction, but it can] also take us out of the fiction that we're trying to be immersed in, so as a storytelling style it may have more chances to fail than to succeed.

(Abel and Madden 2012; 231)

According to Ross, the reasons for painting comics, in contrast to using “simpler outlines or high contrast lights and darks” (Abel and Madden 2012; 231)—i.e., inked cartoons—are ultimately that they demand and can reward greater scrutiny and attention, they offer an appearance closer to reality as the reader imagines it, and they thereby bring the reader more deeply into the story being told.

Why, exactly, would painted comics produce these effects better than inked cartoons? I believe that the answer lies in a notion that I will raise without much defense: a version of medium specificity. Briefly, the media out of which an artwork is made (roughly, the materials and technologies used to make it) afford and limit its specific capacities for representation and expression. To use an example congenial to—though considerably more moderate than—the pioneering theories of Gotthold Lessing (1910; 91–92), media used in visual arts like painting make it comparatively easy to represent bodies at a single moment in time and difficult to represent actions that unfold over time, whereas the media used in literature have exactly the opposite tendencies.

The media used in the creation of comics are no exception to this moderate claim about medium specificity. Ross paints in color; the real world is perceived in color, at least by normal human beings under standard conditions. The use of black-and-white media in comics will make it more difficult to match up to prevailing standards of realistic depiction than painted comics do. So will the use of grayscale, spot colors, zipatone, hand-tinting, four-color offset printing, and other traditional ways of incorporating different hues and saturations in comics. Paint gives artists the capacity to employ an unlimited range of colors in an attempt to match our experiences of the real world. With respect to this aspect of realism (at least relative to the standards of the symbol systems with which comics readers are most familiar), Ross’s claims about painted comics appear to have some merit.

Nowadays, most comics are colored digitally, allowing for a range of shade and tone that rivals traditional painting. On the face of it, this is effectively the digital equivalent of painting and carries with it many of the same medium-specific tendencies as its analog ancestor. Ross himself says that “It doesn’t matter how it got painted, watercolors or whatever, it just matters what the final effect is, which is a greater form of rendering the subject and delineating an experience for the readers” (Ross 2016). It is an open question why painted comics *still* exist if there is an easier digital alternative. Whatever the answer, it probably will not be medium-specific, but have to do with the personality and skills of artists—some just are not willing or able to work in digital media—coupled with the prestige that fully painted works still command.

Less plausible is Ross’s idea that painted comics attract and warrant comparatively more attention from the reader. It could be the case that Ross’s comics have this feature. But that would be due to his particular way of using paint, not to the medium itself. Paint can be used to make cartoons; inks can be used to make images as complex as anything Ross creates. Moreover, Ross himself notes that “some painted styles, including my own, may be ill-suited to the speed with which a reader might better absorb the story content” (Abel and Madden 2012; 231). This does not seem to be a matter of the greater degree to which readers compare his illustrations to reality (why would that be particularly salient for painted panels as opposed to panels rendered with other media?), but to other more typical mechanisms that readers seek out in narrative artforms: good storytelling, rich characterization, suspense, and so on.

To close out this discussion, let us consider the relationship between painted comics and comic paintings. As the terms I have chosen indicate, these are the reverse of each other. Comic paintings are uncontroversially paintings, but controversially comics. Provided that the case can be made

that comic paintings properly belong to both categories, perhaps a comparable case be made with respect to painted comics, which, by way of contrast, are uncontroversially comics and controversially paintings. Do we have any good reasons to think that painted comics are also paintings (where “paintings” here refers to the category of art)?

I argued in the foregoing that it is possible for paintings of comics also to be comics. To reiterate and develop that thought a bit further, that is because there are no physical media characteristic of the comics category: comics can be made out of anything that allows for the right kinds of formal and, possibly, historical features (leaving open here the question of what those are). There are physical media characteristic of painting: at a minimum, paint (emphasizing that this is a rough and provisional claim, no doubt problematized by other contributions to this volume). Since comics and paintings can both be made out of paint, comic paintings are possible. But that does not entail that painted comics are comic paintings.

Paintings are not *merely* objects that are painted. Obviously, there are plenty of painted objects—houses, furniture, bicycles, tchotchkes, and so forth—that are not paintings. But these are simply objects with paint applied to them: not quite akin to painted comics, which are something more than that. At root, painted comics like those of Ross start off with paint applied to a surface in order to satisfy depictive goals. While that is not necessary for being a painting (since not all paintings are pictures), it is plausibly sufficient, at least when conjoined with the possibility that comics can be art.

There is a final complication to confront, which returns us to the standard ontology. Even if, in light of the immediately foregoing, Ross’s painted comics are paintings, the medium in which they are almost certainly encountered by readers is not paint, but print (or digital images). Moreover, a reader with a print version of *Kingdom Come* has a genuine copy of that comic, since (a) comics is a multiple artform (allowing for multiple authentic copies to exist), (b) comics is an autographic artform, and (c) the print copy was mechanically generated from the original art. The copy is a painted comic in the sense that *Kingdom Come* was originally generated using paints, but not a painted comic in the sense that it (the print copy of *Kingdom Come*) is not made out of paint.

Kingdom Come, then, is not essentially made of paint, in the sense that its identity conditions do not depend on being constituted of paint. Arguably, anything not essentially made of paint is not a painting. It follows that *Kingdom Come* cannot be both a painting and a comic.

However, Ross’s original works muddle the issue. These are, of course, made of paint, essentially so. If they were not made of paint, then they would not be Ross’s originals. The key question is: do they also constitute a genuine instance of the *Kingdom Come* comic? If comics is *essentially* two-stage, they are not genuine, any more than the engraved plates used as the templates for the printed versions of *Rake’s Progress* are genuine instances of *Rake’s Progress*. If comics is only *standardly* two-stage, the position at which we arrived at the close of the previous section, then it is at least possible for the first stage—Ross’s original paintings—to be a genuine instance of the comic.

That this is no mere possibility is supported by a key difference between printmaking and comics. The goal in printmaking is to produce works that appear in a particular medium: print. Preliminary or intermediate physical objects generated in service of that goal are not themselves the final artworks. The goal in comics, by way of contrast, is *not* to produce works that appear in a particular medium. Rather, the goal is to make a comic. While it so happens that most comics do appear in the medium of print (or its digital equivalent), unlike prints, this is not a requirement. Physical media are irrelevant to status as a comic. Like *As I Opened Fire*, if Ross’s paintings meet whatever the required formal and historical criteria are for being a comic, then they are a comic. They require no further execution (e.g., printing) to be experienced by audiences. And if the originals were to have all of the same comic-relevant perceptual properties as the print version of *Kingdom Come*, it would be hard to conclude that they do not comprise a copy of *Kingdom Come*, albeit one made with comparatively unusual media.

Not only can the categories of painting and comics overlap, but so can the sub-categories of comic paintings and painted comics. While this does not provide us with reasons to abandon the standard ontology entirely, it does result in a modest interpretation on which that ontology only captures regularities that are subject to major exceptions. And it inspires further questions about categories of art. In Walton's framework, works can belong to multiple categories at once. However, it has been little noticed that works can belong to artkind categories of the same "grain," in this case, painting and comics, rather than merely categories that are nested (e.g., comics and superhero comics) or one artkind category and one stylistic category (e.g., painting and abstract expressionism). How this is possible and what entailments it has for the popular Waltonian framework of art categorization is a fascinating problem, but one that will have to be investigated elsewhere.

Further Reading

For more discussion of medium specificity and an argument against a strong version thereof, see Carroll, N. (1985) "The Specificity of Media in the Arts," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 19(4): 5–20. Many fine examples of painted comics can be found in Lawrence, C. (writer) and Ross, A. (Ed.) (2016) *The Art of Painted Comics*, Mt. Laurel, NJ: Dynamite Entertainment; and Ross, A. (2005) *Mythology: The DC Comics Art of Alex Ross*. New York: Pantheon.

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27

THE MEDIUM (RE)VIEWED

Returning to an Excursus on Painting, Film, and Photography

Kristin Boyce

Philosophical and theoretical (if not also practical) investigation into the power and possibilities of film as an art began with questions about the relationship of film to painting. To many, it seemed obvious that film could not be an art because of the ways it differed from painting. What made painting an art, so the story goes, was the *hand* of the artist: the combination of painstaking craft and inexplicable genius that were the condition for the possibility of its representations. By contrast, the representations constitutive of a film—the series of images in the motion picture—were the product of a machine, a camera. Given the mechanical, i.e., photographic basis of its medium, how could film be an art?

Theorists such as Noel Carroll and Victor Perkins have underscored the legacy of this defensive starting point for the development of philosophy and theory of film. Carroll in particular has argued that one costly implication has been a deeply ingrained habit of according to questions about *medium* a significance which they simply do not have. This has led him to go so far as to suggest that we in effect go cold turkey, eliminating from our philosophical and theoretical vocabulary a concept that no longer does any real work.

Recent work that returns to questions about the relationship between painting, film, and photography might seem to provide powerful reasons to follow Carroll's recommendation. In "Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before," Michael Fried, one of the staunchest defenders of the artistic, critical, and philosophical importance of *medium*, has seemed to more than one interpreter to have been forced (whether he is willing to fully acknowledge it or not) to give up on anything that could justly be called a commitment to *medium* specificity.

The question of whether there is any real work for the concept of *medium* to do?—is one that needs to be taken seriously. In my view, though, the best response to it is yes. The problems that Carroll so clearly identifies are important ones; they shed light on significant and persistent ways that the concept of an artistic *medium* has been misunderstood and misused. But the opportunity that his criticisms afford, especially when considered in combination with Fried's recent return to questions about the relation between painting, film and photography, is best construed, is the opportunity to get clearer about the axis around which our *real* need for this concept, in the present moment, turns.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into three parts. Part One introduces what I take to be the two primary reasons Carroll gives us to consider swearing off the concept of *medium*: first, that the habit of according so much importance to the concept of *medium* is part of a defensive legacy that continues too often to undermine the efficacy of film and media studies; second, that attention to individual films shows that *medium* just doesn't have the kind of artistic importance

it has consistently been accorded. Part Two argues that in the early writing on modernism that Fried develops together with Stanley Cavell, one can see the promise that it might be possible both to acknowledge—even to *agree* with—Carroll’s criticism while at the same time recognizing a genuine artistic and philosophical need for the concept of medium that persists. This promise depends, I argue, upon the particular way that Cavell and Fried criticize two interrelated aspects of Clement Greenberg work (even as they also build upon): (1) the character of the self-reflective turn that in Greenberg’s view characterizes modernist art, and (2) Greenberg’s understanding of what a “possibility of a medium” itself consists in.

With these two criticisms of Greenberg clearly in view, we are in a better position to turn in Part Three to the implications of Fried’s more recent writings for the concept of medium, which might at least initially appear to show the promise held out by the earlier work to have been illusory. What they point us to instead, I argue, is the need to turn attention to a third aspect of Greenberg’s framework, what I call the “map picture” of the relationship *between* the arts, that has, for the most part, gone unexamined. I show that it is this picture, not the concept of medium, that we have good reason to let go of, and that if we do, we will be in a better position to at least begin to see the *real* work there is for the concept of medium to do.

Part One: Reasons to Think Carefully about Giving Up the Concept of Medium

The questions that Carroll raises about the concept of medium are tied to his deep investment in what he proposes to call the art of motion pictures. As he understands it, the importance that theorists have been so eager to accord to medium is a function of, and also functions to maintain, the legacy of the defensive position from which it began, a legacy with which it continues to struggle. One powerful strategy for securing film’s status as an art was in effect to show how what might appear to be most problematic about film artistically is in fact its greatest strength: to show, in other words, the depth and power of the artistic potential that film has precisely in virtue of, not in spite of, the mechanical basis of its medium. A paradigmatic example of this kind of a strategy is found in the work of Andre Bazin. If the artistic power of all the other arts depends upon the “the presence of man,” Bazin argues, only that of photography [and therefore film] depends upon “his absence.” That absence, Bazin argues, allows film and photography to free “the object of habit and prejudice, of all the mental fog with which our perception blurs it, and present it afresh for our attention and thereby our affection” (Bazin, 1967; 18). So understood, the mechanical basis of film is not something that needs to be *overcome* if film is to be an art; it is the very heart of the unique power that the art form, at its best, has.

The idea here is simple and powerful. Yes, the camera is important and valuable as a tool for recording and preserving other art forms. (For example, some of the earliest films were recordings of dance and dancers.) But the artistic potential or value of the camera is not *limited* to its this capacity to record/preserve performances. That very same capacity of the camera to record what is in front of it can *also* be the basis of a powerful new form of art, a condition for the possibility of forms of artistic power or achievement. In other words, there are artistic possibilities that are unique to the camera, where the relevant contrast is to uses of the camera to create a record of an artistic achievement to which it does not contribute.

It is one thing to argue that the camera might contribute to artistic power or achievement (instead of just recording it). It is another to suggest that there are some forms of artistic power or achievement that only the camera makes possible. And it is yet a significant further step to insist that the artistic achievement of a film depends entirely upon whether and how fully it realizes those artistic possibilities that are unique to the camera. It is this significant further step that film

theory, as Carroll understands it, lost itself in. Overtime, the strategies born out of the exciting, polemical moment of early theorists like Bazin and Shaw harden into unexamined and widely shared assumptions that simply are not born out by careful attention to films themselves: (1) the assumption that there is a finite set of “possibilities” unique to the medium of film and (2) the assumption that the artistic value of a film derives from the way it exploits or mobilizes them.

These assumptions are reflected in a theoretical discourse in which the concept of medium is assigned a role to which it is not suited: that of an axiom in a deductive argument. “The history of film theorizing,” Carroll argues,

Has been dominated by a conception of what a film theory should be in terms of the model of a unified body of ideas with certain core propositions from which conclusions about concrete cases follow in various ways, once certain empirical possibilities are considered.

(Carroll, 1998; 359)

The idea that holds so many theorists in its thrawl. Carroll argues that these necessary core propositions are obtained by spelling out the “unique possibilities of the medium” of film. The blind faith is that from such propositions, combined with the right empirical minor premises about a particular film, unerring critical judgments can be derived. If, however, we can free our looking from what our theoretical prejudices dictate *must* be the case, Carroll argues, what we *see* is that some of the best sequences in some of the best movies depend on nothing more nor less than that most mundane capacity of the camera to record a performance. The “Oceana Roll” sequence from Chaplin’s *Gold Rush* is his favorite case in point:

The Tramp, in order to entertain some lady friends, takes two dinner rolls and attaches them to two forks, proceeding then to execute an exquisite mime of a dance—the rolls serving as feet and the forks as legs. It is pantomime pure and simple.... No special feature of the motion picture medium like editing or depth of field are in evidence.

(Carroll, 2019; 33)

If one compares this sequence to Mack Sennet’s Keystone Kop comedy, *Lizzies of the Field*, which is full of virtuosic camera work, it is clear that Chaplin’s use of the camera could not be more pedestrian or mundane. And yet, no critic in their right mind would argue that *Lizzies of the Field* is a greater work of film art than “The Oceana Roll.”

In diagnosing this problem, Carroll shifts from a theoretical to a practical register. The problem is that the possibilities of the medium simply cannot play the role that we have assigned them, that of the axioms in a deductive system. To assign them this role, Carroll argues, is in effect to treat them as “ends in themselves” where properly understood they are merely the *means* to the film maker’s ends. Medium specificity theories

Makes it sound as though being true to the medium or being pure is good for its own sake or intrinsically good. But that would appear to contradict or, at least, to misconstrue the very idea of what it is to be a medium—that is, a *means*. A medium, in other words, is instrumentally valuable, if it is valuable at all.

(Ibid.; 34)

And if in fact all we are talking about are means to the artistic ends of the film maker, what real work is there for the concept of medium to do? Therefore, if we simply drop the concept of medium, very little would be lost and a great deal might be gained in the service of avoiding confusion and breaking bad habits.

Part Two: Yes, but....

If we turn our attention to Clement Greenberg's influential theoretical essay about modernism, especially in painting, it can shed light on what might have eased or encouraged the transition from the defensive starting point with which film studies begins to the entrenched theoretical commitments that rightly trouble Carroll. For these theoretical writings of Greenberg's can help us to place the efforts of early theorists to *defend* the emerging art of film by working out its position with respect to established forms within the context of paintings own struggles with defensiveness. As Greenberg describes it, modernism in both the arts and philosophy takes shape in response to the devaluation of the arts in the enlightenment:

Having been denied by the enlightenment all tasks they could take seriously, they looked as though they were going to be assimilated to entertainment pure and simple... The arts could save themselves from this leveling down only by demonstrating that the kind of experience they provided was valuable in its own right and not to be obtained from any other kind of activity.

(Greenberg, 1993; 86)

In its first iterations that devaluation and response were not limited to the arts, Greenburg characterizes the strategies, which the arts found for "saving" themselves, by comparing them to the strategies that Kant finds for *saving* logic: "Kant used logic to establish the limits of logic and while he withdrew much from its old jurisdiction, logic was left all the more secure in what there remained of it..." (Ibid.; 86). In other words, Kant, as Greenberg understands him, uses the procedures of logic to do two things: first, to demonstrate that there are forms of knowledge which those procedures and only those procedures could make available, and second, to clarify the limits of those procedures by showing that they cannot provide certain kinds of knowledge that they had traditionally been taken to provide. The arts, as Greenberg understands them, follow this same basic strategy in saving themselves. Each art found itself tasked with demonstrating "through its own operations and works, the effects exclusive to itself." With respect to the arts, Greenberg argues, this took the form of demonstrating the effects unique to the *medium* of a given art:

It quickly emerged that the unique and proper idea of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art.

(Ibid.; 87)

One can see in the story that Greenberg tells the conditions for the possibility of the kind of fixation on *medium* that Carroll argues take hold in film theory. The need for defense may arise for film differently, and indeed in part because of painting's relative success in justifying itself and securing its position as an established art form, but when film moves to defend itself, it does so by taking over the strategy of its older sibling(s), that is, by demonstrating the "effects" that are unique to its medium. Bazin is exemplary here not only as a critic who "defends" film by highlighting the possibilities unique to its medium but also because in the process, he also turns his attention to the clarification of the *limits* of the individual arts. For one implication of the emergence of film and photography is to "free" painting from "its obsession with likeness" and to free it to focus instead on those effects that are possibilities unique to *its* medium, whatever those may be (Bazin, 1967; 12). George Bernard Shaw makes a similar point with respect to theater, arguing

that film will “kill that theaters which are doing what film does better” and help to focus efforts instead on “theater which does what film cannot do at all” (Shaw, 1997; 25).

In their early writings, Fried and Cavell develop their conception of modernism by building upon but also criticizing Greenberg’s work. In doing so, they pay special attention to what they take to be significant tensions between the understanding of modernism that guides and is implicit in Greenberg’s practice as a critic and the account of modernism that is explicit in his more widely cited theoretical essays. On the basis of careful attention to the former, they develop a conception of modernism by criticizing, or so I will argue, just those aspects of Greenberg’s “theory” that most strongly echo those parts of film theory that most trouble Carroll: (1) Greenberg’s conception of modernism as originating as a form of self-justification or defense and (2) a conception of the “possibilities of a medium” as irreducible essences or timeless conditions for the possibility of an art form. What is important about their conception of modernism for the present purpose is that they open the possibility that if we take the problems that Carroll identifies seriously, we might find ourselves not letting go of the concept of medium but instead clarifying the *real* artistic and philosophical work there is for that concept to do.

The first way that Cavell and Fried depart from Greenberg is by criticizing and revising his (theoretical) account of the modernist turn to medium in the first place. As we saw, Greenberg construes that turn as a function of a pressure that is exerted on the arts from the *outside*: that is, the arts find themselves under pressure to show, in the face of suspicion to the contrary, that they can stand comparison with science. Because science shows itself to be so much better at satisfying the search for knowledge than art could ever be, so the story goes, art finds itself under pressure to demonstrate there is something—someone of comparable value—that *it* can provide. As Cavell and Fried characterize it, by contrast, the modernist (re)turn to medium is instead a function of a pressure from the *inside* (which, if it cannot be separated from external pressure in practice, can surely be distinguished from it). As they understand it, the pressure that the modernist artist faces is not first and foremost a pressure to demonstrate to someone else—perhaps a grant-giving institution or government agency that holds the purse strings—that their art is just as valuable as something else. It is instead a pressure to demonstrate to *oneself* that the ones work can stand comparison with, as Fried puts it, work of the “modernist or pre-modernist past whose quality *seems to him* beyond question” (Fried, 1998; 99 emphasis mine). The modernist artist, as Cavell and Fried understand them, is not someone who makes art during “a certain time period or whose work bears certain properties—e.g., that of being ‘difficult’ or ‘self-reflexive’ or ‘formally experimental’” (Boyce 2016; 153). The modernist artist is instead someone who stands in a particular relationship to the past of their artform, someone who finds that she can no longer produce new work that matters by relying upon the conventions that, in the past, could be relied upon in order to produce such work.

What is important for the present purpose is to underscore how differently Cavell and Fried “go on” from a clear view of just those problems that Carroll also sees with what “theory” makes of medium. Their wager is that if we clear away such theoretical distortions, what we will find, right at the heart of what remains most alive within an artform, is a different kind of impetus to a renewed attention to questions about medium. One cannot, though, register that different impetus without returning to the basic question of what is *meant* by a “possibility of an artistic medium.” It is by returning to this question that Cavell and Fried depart from Greenberg in a second significant way. For Greenberg shares with those theorists who are Carroll’s direct targets a conception of such possibilities as “irreducible essences” or “timeless conditions for the possibility” of a given art form.

One place where Cavell directly invokes and criticizes such an “essentialist” conception of what is meant by “the possibilities of a medium” is in an early passage from *The World Viewed*. In an early section of *The World Viewed*, “Types; Cycles or Genres,” Cavell carefully distinguishes the

“possibilities of the medium” of film from what he calls its “mere actualities of film mechanics” (Cavell, 1971; 31). Procedures such as taking a photograph, cutting, editing, or taking shots from different angles do not in and of themselves constitute “possibilities of the medium” of the artform of film. Considered in isolation they are “mere actualities of film mechanics” that home movies and news reels make use of just as surely as do exemplary instances of the art of film (or, if you like, motion pictures). The point here is that it is only in their application—that is, only insofar as someone figures out how to use cutting, editing, etc. to make *art*, to make *film* (as Cavell puts it, to “make sense” or “get through to someone”) that these mere actualities become “aesthetic possibilities of the medium of film.” Insofar as the right way to describe someone is as *using* these mechanical actualities, which may be used in all other kinds of ways, to make film, the right way to describe them is as using the possibilities of the medium of film. To add “to make film” would be fine but redundant because it is only insofar as they are being used to make film that these mechanical actualities *are* possibilities of the medium of film.

One can start to see what matters about the distinctions Cavell makes by returning to the “Oceana Roll” sequence from *Gold Rush*. Notice that as Cavell has glossed “the possibilities of a medium,” there is certainly no basis for judging this sequence to be aesthetically lesser than one that requires some super-duper mastery of the most specialized uses of the camera. To the contrary, it offers one way to deepen our appreciation for what makes *Gold Rush* such a wonderful movie. Just look at what Chaplin has been able to *make out* of the capacities of the camera so ordinary and mundane (who couldn’t hold a camera up to record a dance performance) that one might have thought (assumed) they couldn’t *have* any artistic significance? One way to do justice to, even deepen, our appreciation for exactly what he has achieved is perhaps to say that he discovers how to make artistic sense out of this most mundane of the “mechanical actuality” of the camera; in *his* hands, those actualities *become*, are shown to *be*, possibilities of the medium of film.

In *The World Viewed*, Cavell’s discussion of “the possibilities of a medium” is meant to shed light on the *birth* of a new art form. In the writings on modernism that he develops with Fried, by contrast, the question is instead what role a turn to medium plays in the struggle of an art form to be *reborn*. Consider an example that matters a great deal to both Fried and Cavell, the example of the sculptor, Anthony Caro. Caro, as Cavell glosses him, finds himself unable to create sculpture, which convinces him that it can stand comparison with great sculpture of the past, by employing any of the methods that might have seemed *necessary* for something to *be* sculpture, that is by “working” his material in some way, whether carving, chipping, polishing, etc. What makes Caro so important, Cavell argues, is that he finds a new way of working—by “placing” his material—that is so different that it would not be recognizable as *a way of making sculpture* were it not for the fact that the work produced *has* the power that great sculpture has—that, as Cavell puts it, we are “stuck with the knowledge” that it *is* sculpture (Cavell, 2003; 216 & 218). Part of what makes such work so important is that it makes it possible for us to reconsider and appreciate anew even sculpture that is the most traditional.

On one hand, it is quite clear that the “possibilities of the medium,” as they are understood in the example of Caro do not and could not play the role of axioms in a deductive argument about the nature of sculpture. For part of what the new possibilities that Caro “discovers” make evident is that the very conventions might have been assumed to be “necessary conditions” for something’s being sculpture (as Cavell put is it, “I had—I take it everyone had—thought... that a piece of sculpture was something *worked*”) are *not* necessary. Equally important, there is no way to determine *in advance* those possibilities that Caro discovered by making the sculpture that he makes. On the other hand, Cavell and Fried give us, I think, good reason to at least hesitate to follow the deflationary moral that Carroll proposes, namely, that once we recognize that medium talk cannot be fit to a familiar model of deductive reasoning, our best bet (maybe our only remaining option) is to recognize it as having the familiar means/end form of practical reasoning instead.

One reason that Cavell and Fried give us to pause before taking this further step is that they create a vantage to at least consider what might prove to be important *differences* between ordinary practical cases of “getting the job done” and exemplary artistic achievements like Chaplin’s. In ordinary practical cases, it is often possible to take any number of means to a given end: if my job is to get you a message, I might get that done equally well by texting, emailing, speaking to you, or leaving a message on your cell phone. In order to properly appreciate what I have achieved, you do not necessarily need to know anything at all about how I did it. Unless some special circumstance obtains, who cares which of these interchangeable means I employed. The *point* is what I did: I got you the message. It is not at all clear that the same could be said about what Chaplin achieves. Does it make the same kind of sense to assume that there are (could anyone produce the same kind of list of) multiple interchangeably good means that Chaplin could have taken to the end that turned out to be *Gold Rush*? If not, how much (and in what way exactly) does that matter? And can we really (fully) appreciate what Chaplin *did* without appreciating that he created this most wonderful of films out of the most mundane and ordinary mechanical actualities of the camera? In this case, isn’t *how* he did what he did an integral part of *what* he did?

The possibility that opens here is this: perhaps our real need for the concept of medium, as Cavell and Fried elucidate it, lies in our need to have an adequate way to register and how deeply the distinction between how (means) and what (end), which is constitutive of practical reasoning, differs from the distinction between how (medium) and what (work) that is constitutive of the basic shape that talk about art takes. In other words, perhaps a medium can be equated to a means no more easily or successfully than it can be equated to an axiom.

Part Three: Medium and the Map Picture

I concluded Part Two by beginning to spell out one way to understand what our real artistic and philosophical need for that concept might be. It is important to acknowledge that the “real need” I started to sketch differs substantially from the pressing need that Cavell and Fried themselves identify. By their own early lights, the artistic and philosophical importance of the modernist turn to medium is a function of a pressing need to insist upon the “radical” distinction between the arts. As Cavell explains to critics of *The World Viewed*, the concept of modernism that he shares with Fried takes its point from the space it holds open between modernist art and the “avant garde”:

I have used the term modernist, not originally, to name the work of an artist whose discoveries and declarations of his medium are to be understood as embodying his effort to maintain the continuity of his art with the past of his art, and to invite and bear comparison with the achievements of his past. The term is not meant to cover everything that may be thought of as advanced or *avant-garde* in art. On the contrary, it suggests to me a wish to break into (certain uses of) the concept of the *avant-garde* at at least three points: into its implication that advanced art looks away from the past toward the future; into its tendency toward promiscuous attention to any and all claims to advancement, together with a tendency to cede the concept of art altogether, at any rate, to cede the idea of the arts as radically distinguished from one another, which is the sensible significance of the “pure” in art.

(Cavell, 1971; 216)

And as Fried sums things up in one of his most polemical professions of medium specificity, “Everything that lies between the arts is theater” (Fried, 1998; 164).

I turned to the early writings of Cavell and Fried in the first place because they promised to make it possible both to recognize those problems that Carroll identifies, and which lead him to raise the question of whether we better off “forgetting the medium” while at the same time

holding open a space for recognizing the continued philosophical and artistic importance of that concept. Especially if one concentrates upon the real need for medium that Cavell and Fried themselves most consistently foregrounded in their early writings, it might that some of Fried's more recent writings close that space down.

Consider, for example, Fried's discussion of the photography of Jeff Wall in *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*. What matters too much about Wall's work, Fried argues, is that his work returns to and inherits from painting

The entire problematic of beholding—in the terms defined in my previous writing, of theatricality and antitheatricality—that had been central, first to the evolution of painting France... and second, to the opposition between high modernism and minimalism in the 1960s.

(Fried, 2008; 2)

What is artistically most important, in other words, is the way that Wall's photographs stand comparison at one and the same time (although not, perhaps, in exactly the same way) with past works whose quality Fried takes to be beyond question. Similarly, he draws attention to exactly those aspects not just of Wall's work but also the work of Cindy Sherman and others, which raise questions about the deep relationship between photography and film. These artists, he argues, each respond “in different ways to the problematic status of movies in this regard by making photographs which, although mobilizing one or another convention of movies... also provide a certain essential photographic distance from filmic experience” (*Ibid.*, 13). The power of these works, in other words, lies precisely in the light they shed on the relationships between photographic and filmic experience. That power depends upon the capacity that these photographs have to “mobilize” possibilities of the medium of *movies*.

Fried admits that his commitment to medium specificity has changed and that he is no longer committed to the polemical claim that “everything that lies between the arts is theater” (in the pejorative sense). One place where he addresses this most directly is in the conclusion to *Four Honest Outlaws*¹:

Although this book singles out artists whose work seems to me to prove the current vitality of high modernist themes and issues, it also demonstrates that that vitality is not tied to a specific medium, or to put this more strongly, that the question of medium-specificity, while not exactly irrelevant to the artists I discuss...no longer plays the kind of role that it did at an earlier moment in the history of modernism.

(Fried, 2011; 204)

What are the implications of what Fried finds for the space, which his earlier work with Cavell seemed to hold open, for recognizing a real (present) need for the concept of medium?

At least one powerful critic of Fried's, Diarmuid Costello, gives us good reason to suspect that it has now become evident that this “space” was an illusion to begin with. “If it turns out,” Costello asks, “that a photograph *can* be made to stand comparison to past painting, or vice versa, in the relevant sense, what happens to the idea of medium specificity in Fried’s account?” (*Costello, 2008; 296*). His own answer is that the “very idea of an artistic medium” that can do any real work “threatens to dissolve” altogether (*Ibid., 296–297*).

In the remainder of this section, I argue that there is a better way to understand the implications of what Fried finds. What Fried's discovery both requires and makes possible is a reconsideration of a third aspect of Greenberg's account that has for the most part remained unexamined: what I will call the “map picture” of the arts. I show that if we isolate and criticize that picture, what we find is not that our apparent need for the concept of medium dissolves altogether but rather that

by disentangling that real need from the map picture, we put ourselves in a much better position to understand more fully what that need is.

Recall that Greenberg's theoretical story turns on a comparison between the condition of philosophy and that of the arts. Kant, he argues, uses logic to establish the limits of logic, where what that amounts to is using the procedures of logic to establish that there are some forms of knowledge which those methods and only those methods can make available.² The picture here is that of a totality of what we know which, without the methods of logic, would correspond only partially to the totality of what there *is* to know: a space of what there is to know with regions that would remain forever unexplored and unmapped *without* the methods of logic. And it is not difficult to see this picture transferring smoothly to the arts so that we have a picture of the totality of what Greenberg calls "effects," some subset of which we would never experience, or never experience fully, if we only had drama and sculpture but no painting. Or drama and painting but no film. And for the uninterrupted operating of this picture, it doesn't much matter whether one conceives the totality of "regions" as a totality of *effects* (as Greenberg does), or of "powers" (as I have done) or of "problematics" (as in the "problematic of the beholder" à la Fried) or "purposes" (à la Carroll). In other words, it has perhaps become both possible and pressing (maybe even necessary) to examine *this* part of the conception that Cavell and Fried, along with others, both inherit from Greenberg and transform.

One way to put this point is to say that the conventions of painting (or theater or dance or...) that a modernist finds she can no longer rely upon *include* conventions about the relationship between her artform and others, both how they hang together and how they are distinguished. Think for example about the allegory of the Cave from Plato's *Republic*, which as persistently shadowed film theory. On one hand, this allegory has struck more than one film theorists as a prescient anticipation of an art form that did not actually develop for several millennia that captures its specifics—i.e., the basic ways in which it differs from other arts—in an almost uncannily accurate way. On the other, one role of the allegory *within* the *Republic* is to capture something that is *shared by* the arts, with which Plato is especially concerned in *The Republic*, namely, the very different ways that painting and poetry (whether epic or tragic) reinforce a kind of deformation or disorganization to which we as humans are uniquely susceptible, given the specific kinds of creatures we are. So understood, what the allegory captures is the sense in which thinking about film will involve (be shaped by/make something of/being responsive in some way to) both questions about what distinguishes film as an art from others, and at the same time, what unites it to others insofar as they are all forms of *art*.

Consider, for example, a painter who finds herself still able to rely upon conventions for making painting (conventions that might have seemed so basic as to be necessary conditions for something's *being* a painting). Part of what it is for her *to* rely upon those conventions is for her to take for granted some understanding of what it is for her to make paintings as opposed to sculptures or photographs or... She may spend a great deal of time worrying about whether her paintings are *good* paintings or whether painting as an artform is valued the way it ought to be (as much as literature or music perhaps). But what she won't spend time worrying about is whether what she makes *is* painting or even *art* at all, or what could possibly count *now as* making painting (or art) that could matter to us the way painting (*art*) matters (has always mattered), could stand comparison with painting (*art*) of the past of the past whose quality seems to her beyond question. The very arising, the grip, of *that* kind of question is a manifestation of the failure of the conventions that have been relied upon—a manifestation, that is, of the condition of modernism. For it manifests the loss of what (at least in retrospect) might look like a conventional way to guarantee that something is a painting (sculpture, dance, musical composition, etc.). If the sculpture that Caro makes is *so* different from what came before that there is no way of telling in advance of his making sculpture *like that* that sculpture *could* look like that or be made *that* way, then the only candidate

for a replacement “guarantee” that it *is* sculpture will be the fact that we (whoever we are) cannot help but recognize it that way, perhaps as much to our own surprise as anyone else’s. And that will look quite tenuous, in fact may hardly look like a *guarantee* at all.

It is not difficult to see how, in response to this kind of loss, it might be compelling to insist upon the “radical distinctness” of sculpture from the other arts. Perhaps at some “nows” it might seem (or even be) the *only* compelling response. Perhaps, for instance, from the vantage of our present moment, that is the best way to understand Caro’s *now*. The important point, though, is this: insofar as there is no telling in advance of an achievement like Caro’s that sculpture could look like *that*, or that *that* could be a way of making sculpture, there is also no telling in advance what that work will make, what it will press *us* to make of the past and present relationship between sculpture and the other arts.

So understood, an important part of what the *work* done by artwork such as Wall’s is to draw to our attention—give us the opportunity to recognize/remember—something that could not be more obvious or matter of fact: where there is art, there are forms of art, even if what forms there are, and how they are related to each other—how unified *as* forms of art; how differentiated—is constantly changing. And part of the work of any work—part of the way it individuates itself as this work in the contexts of other works—is to *work out* what to *make* of this obvious fact. There is, though, no way to know in advance *what* a given work will make of this obvious fact.

Once one starts to get this possibility into view, it is striking how many important instances there are of artistic achievement that within one artform that comes by way of, and cannot be fully appreciated without, a willingness to reconsider the relationship of one artform to another. Henry James, for instance, famously works his way through deep artistic impasse by finding a way to transform his failure as a playwright into extraordinary novelistic virtuosity, that is, by finding a way to take what he found most powerful in theater and translating that into a new method of working *as a novelist*.

Part of what becomes easier to see, if we clear away the “map picture,” is how—and how deeply—the present and past of an artform (or perhaps better, the present and past of the arts) matter to each other. On an account like Greenberg’s, the present of an artform makes its past a *curiosity*. The interest that can be taken in it is like the interest many are now inclined to take in the stories that we once told ourselves about angry gods before we were in a position to provide a real (scientific) explanation for why it rains. For an account like the one that Fried continues to evolve, by contrast, the very condition for the possibility of *new* work that is artistically *alive* is work of the past that remains artistically alive for it. This, as I now understand it, is the force of the claim that for a photographer like Wall, or a sculptor like Caro, to succeed in making new work is for them to make work that convince *them* that it can stand comparison with work of the past whose quality seems to *them* beyond question.

If we disencumber ourselves of the “map picture,” we can no longer conceive any “real need” we might have for the concept of medium in terms of a need to police boundaries between the arts. Clearing away the map picture, though, does nothing but clear a space to think more fully about the potential *real* need for the concept of medium that I began to explore in Part One.

Consider again the example of James. What is important about them for the present purpose—if you are willing to grant me that the quality of their work is beyond questions—is this: they each highlight the possibility of ceding the map picture *without* ceding what I have called the special intimacy between how and what makes it possible to mark. Each seeks (and finds) new life for their art precisely by looking to another art form (whether theater, literature, or dance). At the same time, the very way in which they look to that other form underscores the centrality of their preoccupation with *how*. The power of the work is a function of discovering *how* to do *that* (what theater does) *as a novelist*. What cannot do justice to *what* they achieve only by focusing on the *that*. To get their achievement in view, one has to appreciate how they did *that* (what theater or literature or dance) *as a novelist*.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to do more than seek to convince you that there is good reason to pause before jumping too quickly to the conclusion that there is no longer an axis around me for a real need for the concept of medium turns. In conclusion, though, I want make two suggestions about how to start thinking more fully through what I have called the potential “real” need for a way to mark the depth of the difference between how (means) and what (end) in typical practical cases and between how (medium) and what (work) in exemplary artistic ones. The relation between means and ends is often spelled out as an “in order to...” relation. What I want to suggest in closing is that the relation marked by the medium/work distinction is better construed by contrast as a “make (out) of...” relation: look at what Chaplin was able to *make out* of the most mundane capacities of the camera. So understood, what we need medium to *mark* is the simple, fundamental fact that a work of art is made out of something (as opposed to ex nihilo) and that an essential part of appreciating the work is appreciating what the artist was *able* to make out of his or her medium, which in part means locating it with what others have made or may in the future prove able to make out of theirs.

One can, of course, speak of artistic achievement in means/ends terms: it does not, perhaps, sound less natural to speak of Chaplin’s achievement by talking about how he uses the camera in order to make *Gold Rush* than to speak of what he was able to make out of the most mundane capacities of the camera. But it is also worth noting that there are important cases where the means/ends formulation sounds quite forced. One especially salient case (I am surprised to find myself arguing) is to be found in Marx’s *The German Ideology*. In the early pages of this early work, Marx proposes that what distinguishes humans is first and foremost that *out of the environment* in which we are born and which we share with other animals, *we make a world*. This point simply can’t be translated, at least not without considerable loss, into means/end terminology: we use the environment in order to make a world? My wager is that if we were to stay a bit longer with this intriguing connection between the power of art and our capacities as world makers, we would find that our philosophical and artistic need for the concept of medium is real.

Notes

- 1 I am indebted Mullhall (2018; 98) for this passage.
- 2 It is beyond the scope of this chapter to address questions about the adequacy of Greenberg’s reading as a reading of Kant.

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28

THEATER DANCE AS A COMPLEX ARTFORM

Renee M. Conroy

1 Dance, Philosophy, and the Visual Arts

Questions of ontology (what kind of thing is a work of dance art?) and identity (what features are essential to a given dance artwork?) have played a central role in the Anglo-American tradition of thinking about theater dance for more than half a century (Van Camp, 2019). These issues continue to stimulate philosophical debate, as evidenced by recent publications in the field. Of interest in this chapter is that contemporary theorists explicitly leave room in their accounts for things *other than* movement structures, bodily designs, or dancing persons to play a constitutive role in dance art creations.

For example, Graham McFee's thesis of notationality articulates the identity conditions of danceworks in terms of an "adequate score" that provides a "recipe" for instantiating the work in performance (McFee, 2011 and 2018). The adequacy of the instructions consists in their capacity to articulate *all* of a work's non-contingent features, including music, costuming, lighting, props, and sets in cases where these are identity-relevant. Similarly, Julie Van Camp's pragmatic approach recommends we regard two numerically distinct performances as instances of the same work of dance art just in case they are "determined by members of the dance art community (including lay audience members, dance professionals and specially qualified experts) to exhibit 'substantial similarity' as understood within the context of dance practice" (Conroy, 2013; 115). Because her view is modelled on the American legal process for securing copyright protection for choreography, the basis of this communal "same as" judgment is the danceworld's appeal to some standard supplied by the choreographer, where this might be a notation, a film, or any other form of "tangible fixation" that articulates what the creator deems to be work-definitive (Van Camp, 2006 and 2019). Of concern in this context is that the dancemaker-supplied standard may include the specification of various "theatrical trappings," hence, an identity-conferring judgment by the dance community may involve considerations about aspects of a performance *other than* the dancers' bodily movements or the overall choreographic design of the piece.

More recently, Noël Carroll has suggested that questions of ontology – and, by extension, identity – in dance be approached by appeal to the "constitutive purpose of the choreography," defined as those dancemaker's aims "that govern the choreographic choices that make the dance what it is" (Carroll, 2019; 72). He notes, however, that "Very often . . . it is not only the choreographic element that contributes to the constitutive purpose of the dance," and highlights the fact that his account "does not preclude other factors from also making important contributions, including, most frequently, music" (Carroll, 2019; 73-74). Alternatively, Anna Pakes'

mutually supportive treatments of dancework ontology and identity focus on indicated-structures of action-types and emphasize communal norms (Pakes, 2020). Nonetheless, she also explicitly acknowledges the central role often played by non-dance elements, introducing her manuscript chapter entitled “Dance Identity” by offering the following description of her experiences with Maguy Marin’s *Umwelt* (2004):

What transpired on stage in London also closely resembled what I saw in Cork: the striking set of reflective panels, quivering in the blast of air tearing across the stage throughout the performance; the emergence from and disappearance behind these panels of variously dressed performers, carrying diverse objects; the grinding howl of the music as a cable unwound from a spool stage left and onto a second spool stage right, across strings placed at the front of the space. The presence of all of these elements seemed important to the performances being of *Umwelt*
(Pakes, 2020; 162)

In short, well-regarded 21st century philosophers recognize, in different ways, that dance as a theater artform is *complex* in the sense that it generally involves more than a perceptually “simple,” or artistically one-dimensional, presentation of choreography or persons dancing. Even so, there has been surprisingly little discussion in dance philosophy of the non-dance artforms that regularly coalesce with patiently designed choreography to create the artistic whole to which audiences are enjoined to attend and from which they are prescribed to make assessments about a dancework’s expressive content, narrative arc, revolutionary character, relationships to other artworks, and so forth. This chapter takes a first step toward expanding reflection on the importance of the *non-movement elements* of traditional concert danceworks by considering the formative roles often played by painting and sculpture in the creation and appreciation of works of theater dance art. Three preliminary remarks are in order.

First, I will use the words “painting” and “sculpture” in extended senses. The former refers to all two-dimensional images created by putting a tool to a swath of material, piece of paper, or blank space; it includes drawings, murals, and action-paintings, as well as oils, acrylics, or watercolors as applied to traditional canvases. By contrast, “sculpture” denotes any three-dimensional creation that is molded, cast, carved, or assembled; herein, I countenance as sculptures hand-crafted costume pieces, props, and stage sets alongside archetypical examples by Michelangelo, Constantin Brancusi, and Henry Moore. The phrase “visual arts” refers to both paintings and sculptures in the senses articulated, and I set aside complications introduced by lighting design.

Second, I describe the arts of theater dance as complex, rather than using more common descriptors such as “hybrid” or “multi-media,” because I am wary of overgeneralization. After all, painting and sculpture in my extended senses do not *always* matter in theater dance art, and *that fact* matters. This is part of what makes the artform artistically complex, rather than quintessentially hybrid (like opera) or ineluctably multi-media (like screendance). In some cases, there is no music, costumes are irrelevant, no props are used, and there is no set to speak of. That said, framing mechanisms supplied by the visual arts – often in concert with aural contributions from music, soundscores, or the dancers’ vocalizations – are frequently very important to the identity conditions of a particular work and are commonly crucial to audience members’ robust appreciation of its choreographed components, as evidenced when one considers the oft-startling contrast between viewing a studio rehearsal of a dancework’s “bare choreography” and the experience of seeing the final production on stage.

Third, I motivate this investigation by considering a potentially controversial example from which lessons about the interpenetrations of dance and the visual arts can be drawn: Nelson Goodman’s *Hockey Seen*. This case appears to be a “dance-art outlier” for several reasons. First,

the work was the artistic brainchild of a philosopher who was not a dancer and who did not create any of its choreographic elements. Second, it was billed as a piece of experimental theater rather than as a dancework. Third, it has not achieved standing in the pantheon of American avant-garde dance creations from the 1960s and 1970s. I submit that, despite its unusual history, nothing bars *Hockey Seen* from being regarded correctly as work of dance art. I also maintain it is an example that philosophers of dance should consider with care because it reminds us of the artform's entrenched relationship(s) to painting and sculpture.

1.1 *Hockey Seen*

In 1972, Nelson Goodman presented his first multimedia art project, *Hockey Seen: A Nightmare in Three Periods and Sudden Death*, to Harvard audiences. The piece was the product of creative work undertaken by director-producer and script-writer Goodman, choreographer Martha Armstrong Gray, composer John C. Adams, visual artist Katharine Sturgis, media artist Gerd Stern, and mask-maker Ernie Higgins of the Boston Bruins (later joined by sculptor Carole Sivin). In 1980, again under Goodman's direction, *Hockey Seen* was restaged and performed live in Belgium, while a modified version of the stage production was recorded and aired on Belgian National Television. The work was restaged once more for a performance at Harvard in 1984 that was filmed for archival purposes.

Program notes describe *Hockey Seen* as follows:

On three huge screens, projected calligraphic drawings of hockey skaters interact with dancers [in] hockey-like attire, who explore the gestures and rhythms of the sport with the vocabulary of modern dance. This curious drama is impelled by a contrapuntal musical score played on the electronic ARP synthesizer, and follows the basic structure of the hockey game which ends unexpectedly in 'Sudden Death'

(Howard quoted in Carter, 2009; 62)

Further details are provided in the guide for a 2006 exhibition at Marquette University celebrating the work, according to which *Hockey Seen* is an

... Innovative experiment... showing the interplay between the dancer's movements and large-scale media projections. These large multi-screen projections incorporate the drawings of hockey players in motion and crowd scenes at a hockey game to create the ambience of an actual hockey event

(Carter, 2006; 1)

Both synopses emphasize the multimodal character of the production, in which the dancers' movements were both visually framed by – and kinetically responsive to – imposing artistic renderings of hockey players and video footage of screaming fans. Thus, they highlight the aesthetic significance of the interactions *between* the dancing and several forms of visual art, suggesting that, in this case, designed movement was but one element of a larger artistic whole.

One salient fact about *Hockey Seen*'s history is that the projected calligraphic images were based on live-action sketches Goodman's wife, Katharine Sturgis, drew while watching hockey on their home TV in an attempt to "capture motion and energy rather than a representation of the game" (Carter, 2006; 1). These hasty doodles became the inspiration for the work because, as Curtis Carter reports, "the drawings suggested choreography to Goodman" (Carter, 2009; 61, emphasis mine) in virtue of their kinetic character. In response to the dance-like qualities possessed by Sturgis' outlines of players in action, Goodman penned a script for the piece and constructed an artistic

team, including his wife, a choreographer, a composer, and a mask-maker, who collectively transformed his sketch-based vision into theatrical reality.

Another revealing fact is that Goodman's overarching motive was to create a performative experience that could illustrate his influential theories about symbol-making and the cognitive potential of art as articulated in *Languages of Art* (1968) and *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978) by

... Demonstrat[ing] how our whole perception and conception of the game alters drastically by association with the distilled dynamism of the drawing, dance and music, while these take on new characteristics and intelligibility in relation to the familiar subject-matter as it is also being transformed

(Goodman unpublished manuscript quoted in Carter, 2006; 4)

Thus, the multi-faceted artistic character of *Hockey Seen* was central to Goodman's project since he intended to create a performable that could denote, exemplify, and express features of a hockey match while also bridging appreciative chasms between art and sports and between art-enthusiasts and those who "won't be seen dead looking at drawings or going to modern dance of all things" (Goodman quoted in Carter, 2006; 1).

One way these goals were achieved was by placing contemporary dance vocabulary within the optical milieu of Sturgis' magnified sketches and footage of actual hockey games, which generated a singularly dynamic visual environment within which the dancers' movements took place. Another mechanism employed was to hide the performers' faces in meticulously sculpted masks that transformed traditional modern dance choreography into the fictive representation of a particular kind of sports event. On Goodman's telling, the success of *Hockey Seen* depended crucially on the degree to which the tightly constructed interactions between the dancing, the sculpted costume pieces, and the projected paintings would sustain audience interest – and forge new connections between the seemingly remote worlds of high art and sports entertainment – by generating both direct and indirect referential relationships that could "toy... constantly with our expectations of what sport and art ought to be, embracing these disparate pieces of life into a richer synthesis" (Howard quoted in Carter, 2006; 2).

Hockey Seen is a valuable real-world "puzzle case" because it raises substantive questions about dance as an autonomous artform and the nature of authorship in dance-art contexts. In what follows, I argue that Goodman's experiment highlights two features of dance art that remain under-explored in philosophical treatments of the artform: dance's complex nature and its (characteristically) collaborative character.

2 Is *Hockey Seen* Dance Art? Three Worries

One might be skeptical about whether *Hockey Seen* could qualify as a work of dance art, though its appreciative focus is human bodies in motion and the choreography serves a variety of Goodmanian symbolic aims. Hesitation emerges initially from the fact that the work is self-consciously multimedia. But what, exactly, is the medium of dance art? Describing it minimally as movement is clearly insufficient: this approach cannot begin to distinguish dance from wildly divergent artistic kinds, such as kinetic sculpture. Even if dance's medium is characterized as *human* movement – or as "movings and posings," à la Monroe Beardsley – there are many disparate artistic traditions that exploit, systematically depend on, or direct appreciative attention to it, including Noh theater and silent film.

To ensure that the appropriate categorization of artistic works retains an essential connection to their associated media without oversimplifying the creative situation, Dominic McIver Lopes recommends the following schema: " x is a work of K , where K is an art = x is a work in medium profile M , where M is an appreciative kind, and x is a product of M -centered appreciative practice

P..." (Lopes, 2014; 158). The crucial question is whether *Hockey Seen* satisfies the final condition: is it a product of the distinctive human-movement-centered appreciative practices that constitute dance art? Or is it better understood as a different kind of work that just happens to utilize the medium central to dance? Lopes would likely regard *Hockey Seen* as a potential "free agent," that is, a work of art that either belongs to no particular artform or for which category membership is legitimately controversial. Three facts about *Hockey Seen* might generate skepticism about its potential to enjoy dance-art status.

First, *Hockey Seen* is not referenced in dance history or dance studies texts nor is it taught as part of the standard curriculum educating dance majors and MFA candidates about 20th-century American dance history. Its notable absence from the accepted academic canon of danceworks, and from presentations on danceworld stages, could suggest that *Hockey Seen* is not regarded by insiders as a dance-art creation. Hence, one might argue that because it has not been "taken up" by those with a serious stake in dance art, it is not part of the relevant community's appreciative practice. Call this the Canon Concern.

Second, *Hockey Seen* is referred to by Goodman and others who have a vested interest in it, including philosopher of dance Curtis Carter, as a "multimedia art work," a "multi-level work of art," a "multimedia performance project," or a "theatrical collaboration." Goodman employs other carefully qualified locutions, as when he describes *Hockey Seen* as "a particular theatre piece involving dance" (Goodman, 1983; 80, emphasis mine) and writes that "the work exemplifies, *as does* a purely abstract dance, certain movements and patterns of movement, changes of pace and direction, configurations and rhythms" (Goodman, 1983: 81, emphasis mine). In public records, he never calls the piece a dance(work), nor does he draw direct appreciative comparisons between *Hockey Seen* and other paradigm cases of dance art, though he does take credit for authoring the work. So, if one expands Kendall Walton's "Categories of Art" thesis and urges that authorial intentions carry substantive, though not definitive, weight in establishing art-category membership in virtue of their role in establishing correct category perception, then *Hockey Seen* has good *prima facie* claim to be some kind of non-dancework that utilizes dancing.¹ Call this the Classification Concern.

Third, if Goodman is its author in the sense of being the generative artist who bears creative responsibility for the finished work's beauties and blemishes, then it might seem that *Hockey Seen* could not be a work of dance art because it was authored by a person who was not embedded appropriately in the dance artworld. Furthermore, *Hockey Seen* could be argued to lack a relational property necessary for any creation made in the medium of human movement to qualify as a work of dance art, viz., that of being created by an agent who generates novel movement sequences for dancers to perform. Call this the Choreographic Concern.

3 Is *Hockey Seen* Dance Art? Three Worries Alleviated

The Canon Concern is the weakest of these skeptical challenges because canons are ever-evolving and are notoriously problematic indicators of value. First, the mere fact that an artwork featuring human movement does not appear in academic dance texts – or is not discussed regularly in dance history classes or anthologies of dance criticism – is not, by itself, evidence that the danceworld rejects it as a member of some recognized dance-art genre. Many works by famous choreographers that are accepted unequivocally as dance-art creations do not appear in the "historical canon" because they have been effectively lost due to the passage of time.

Second, for better or worse, canons are by nature selective. Thousands of pieces for performance regarded uncontroversially as works of dance art have been created in America in the last century, but only a handful are referenced regularly by those who pursue dance studies. Indeed, even for iconic choreographers such as George Balanchine, Trisha Brown, or Mark Morris, a relatively small percentage of their dance-art oeuvre is immortalized through repeated textual

analyses and on-going restagings. For every famous choreographer, there is a litany of lost works. And for every publicly revered dancemaker, there are hundreds more whose creations never receive widespread attention: it is a danceworld reality that most pieces of dance art are known by only a small set of audience members and a select group of performers. But this unfortunate fact never jeopardizes the average choreographic creation's *status* as a work of dance art provided other factors bind it to the relevant appreciative practice.

Finally, even the total absence of a movement-based work from dance texts, academic curricula, and the contemporary stage is not evidence that the danceworld *would* reject the creation as a paradigm case of dance art if confronted with the question. In fact, if today's dance insiders were asked to classify Goodman's *Hockey Seen*, it is probable that they would regard it as appropriately located in some category of dance art. Were it performed on a program alongside other canonical modern danceworks of the period, *Hockey Seen* would not seem at all out of place. After all, the 1960s and 1970s American dance scene was dominated by an array of theatrical experiments that explored minimalism, improvisation, multimedia presentations, and the relationships between art and everyday life. Thus, even the savvy dance aficionado who attended such a retrospective performance might be surprised to learn that *Hockey Seen* was the creative progeny of a famous analytic philosopher rather than a relatively unknown work by David Gordon, Ralph Lemon, or some forgotten Judsonite.

In addition, it is not difficult to construct a historical narrative of the kind recommended by Noël Carroll for identifying art, one that describes *Hockey Seen*'s genealogy as "an intelligible contribution to an evolving [dance] artworld project" (Carroll, 2008; 448). The most challenging part might be determining where the story should begin. Given that Goodman did have significant ties to the American danceworld – he served as the Director of the Dance Center at Harvard from 1971 to 1977 and was instrumental in the formation of the Harvard Summer School Dance Program – one could construct a narrative that highlights his non-philosophical preoccupations with the creative work of his dance-art contemporaries, including icons such as Merce Cunningham who was also exploring the intersection of dance and video technology at the time. Alternatively, one might reach back a bit further and emphasize an artistic link between Goodman's symbolic aims and those of earlier modern choreographers who sought to transform dancers' representational capacities through the use of sculptured masks and costumes (e.g., Mary Wigman's *Hexentanz* (1914/1926) or Alwin Nikolais' *Masks, Props, and Mobiles* (1953)) as well as projected images (e.g., Loïe Fuller's developments of the original *Serpentine Dance* (1892)). Which narrative is most accurate or illustrative is a matter for dance historians to decide; however, several plausible artistic stories could be told that bind *Hockey Seen* to both antecedent and contemporaneous dance-art projects. Thus, there is a theoretical basis for countenancing it as a work of dance art, as well as a practical reason to believe that members of the 21st-century dance community might do so if, as Lopes would advise, the "buck were passed" to them.

With respect to the Classification Concern, Walton's well-known theses in "Categories"—suitably expanded to include art-category membership – pave the way for a response. He argues that the generative artist's intentions about correct category perception might be informative but are not decisive, as they are one factor to consider against others: (1) whether the work has a preponderance of features standard with respect to a given category; (2) whether the work is "better, or more interesting or pleasing aesthetically, or more worth experiencing when perceived" in a given category; and (3) whether the relevant category "is well established in and recognized by the society in which W [the work] was produced" (Walton, 2008; 531). Goodman's intentions can, thus, be sidelined because *Hockey Seen* appears to satisfy the last three conditions with respect to dance-art categories.

First, *Hockey Seen* has an abundance of properties standard for the categories "work of dance art," "work of modern dance art," and "work of experimental dance art." These include things

like: being a presentation in which human movement is the obvious appreciative focus, being a presentation in which artistic content depends on the movements of people who are dancing, and being a presentation in which kinetic features are determined by how people dance. The fact that its symbolic content is enhanced by projected paintings and other images endows it with a property that dance practice confirms is *variable* for all the aforementioned categories, which is part of what I have suggested makes theater dance a *complex*, rather than straightforwardly hybrid, artform. Thus, the only contra-standard properties *Hockey Seen* might possess, which are historical rather than perceptible and do not seem to have much disqualifying weight, are that Goodman was not a recognized dance artist and he did not call the work “a dance.”

Second, although difficult to validate without mounting a reconstruction, it is credible that *Hockey Seen* is more interesting, aesthetically pleasing, or worth experiencing when perceived as being related to the array of dance-art creations cultivated by the first wave of postmodernism in American dance – or as artistically linked to earlier experiments by modern dance pioneers – than it would be if perceived in some nondescript categorical catch-all bucket designed for wrangling potential free agents, such as “multimedia performance” or “theatrical collaboration.” If experienced in a *dance-art category*, its associations are, to borrow from Borges, “almost infinitely richer.” For one thing, the set of relevant artistic projects with which to make perceptual connections is vastly *clearer*. For another, all the members of this set will draw attention to the uncontested appreciative foci of Goodman’s artwork: the *movements* of actual dancers, of fictive sports players, and of humans in action making meaningful connections between manufactured worlds.

Third, the three dance-related art categories noted above were all well-established in mid-20th-century America when *Hockey Seen* premiered, as were many others that might be more intriguing (e.g., the sub-category of sports dances). Whatever Goodman might have intended, a suitable appeal to Waltonian basics can defuse the Classification Concern. This leaves us with the Choreographic Concern and the following question: can non-dancers who are also not choreographers *author* works of dance art?

Complete treatment of this issue is beyond the scope of this essay, but several points deserve mention. First, although it might be tempting to regard it as contra-standard relative to dance-art categories for a dancework to have the historical property of being credited to someone who did not choreograph it, this feature is actually variable if one considers both classical ballet practices and the projects of some current dancemakers. In older ballet traditions, the choreographer was a menial worker-for-hire paid to design spectacles to showcase the idiosyncratic talents of star ballerinas; thus, choreography was expected to change from cast to cast. As a result, the person who typically receives creative credit for authoring works from 19th-century romantic and classical dance-art traditions is the original scenarist or librettist, which is precisely what Goodman was in the case of *Hockey Seen*.

Second, this historical practice has colored the danceworld’s perspective on Serge Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes* to some degree, so that while the infamous impresario never created a movement sequence and rarely authored scenarios, he is frequently credited *artistically* (not just causally) for the existence of the ground-breaking danceworks his company performed. It is worth noting that Goodman’s relationship to *Hockey Seen* was much more authorially robust than Diaghilev’s was to the works he produced. However, the cases are not dissimilar insofar as both men labored to convene the most talented group of available visual artists, musicians, and choreographers to bring their artistic visions to life on stage, and both oversaw their productions with a heavy directorial hand.

Finally, in contemporary dance the “rise of the choreographer-auteur” that took place in the early 20th century, and has become entrenched in dance-art practice, is both highlighted and problematized by works such as Jérôme Bel’s *Xavier Le Roy* (2000), whose official description on Bel’s website reads as follows:

He [Bel] asked his colleague Xavier Le Roy to develop a choreography in his vein and with his dancers, which he then signed, the way an artist signs a painting. The choreography is called Xavier Le Roy — the name of the artist who has been appropriated, and who has carried out another's concept. But it is Jérôme Bel who claims authorship.

(<http://www.xavierleroy.com/>, accessed 2/14/20)

If Bel's attempted appropriation is successful as an ironic commentary on dance-art history or current dance practices, this is only because it is not an isolated case of someone being granted authorial credit for a dancework (s)he did not choreograph. Hence, there is danceworld precedent for regarding dancework authors as numerically distinct from danceworld choreographers.

Philosophical defense of this practice awaits another occasion, but it must rely on drawing a principled distinction between danceworks (works created in the movement-centered appreciative practices that constitute dance *qua* artform) and choreographic works (designed movement structures). I defend this division elsewhere and describe it as follows: “the dancework is what the audiences are enjoined to appreciate, [while] the choreographic work is what the dances are instructed *to do* to generate an artwork for audiences to enjoy” (Conroy, 2019; 15). If this conceptual line is maintained, then the creation of a dancework is a different authorial achievement from the creation of a piece of choreography. As a result, it could be argued that Goodman authored *Hockey Seen* in the sense that he was *an author of the work*, even if he might not have been its sole author and Gray was its only choreographer. Thus, typical sources of skepticism about *Hockey Seen*'s potential to be a work of dance art can be allayed.

4 Painting, Sculpture, and Dance Art: Lessons from *Hockey Seen*

Even if its dance-art status remains controversial, *Hockey Seen* enjoins philosophers of dance to re-examine working assumptions about the nature of danceworks and implicit biases with respect to the examples discussed in defense of our views. It also reminds us that the arts of dance trade frequently in extensive collaboration between movement designers and visual artists. Stephen Davies gestures at this when he recommends that, like opera, ballet should be regarded ontologically as “essentially hybrid in nature” (Davies 2003; 177).

Davies' brief treatment, however, emphasizes the exceptionally close relationship that often exists between a ballet and its standard musical accompaniment, one in virtue of which the latter might be regarded an essential feature of the former. One might object that Davies' focus on ballet is too narrow to do justice to the wide range of dance artworks, some of which are performed without music, have no regimented costuming, and do not require any specialized props or stage settings and, therefore, do not seem good candidates for hybrid ontological status. I prefer to describe the arts of theater dance as *complex*, rather than essentially (or even characteristically) hybrid, to respect to the diversity of concert dance creations and the variety of ways works are regarded by those with an active role in shaping danceworld practices.

But there is also reason to be concerned about the precedent set by Davies' *way* of acknowledging dance art's potentially hybrid character. Although he focuses on ballet, which is a multimedia tradition, he does not pursue the possibility that painting and sculpture might have as substantive a metaphysical role to play in many balletic works as do musical scores. *Hockey Seen* cajoles us to be more metaphysically conscientious since it reminds us that, like Goodman, dancemakers often rely on exacting set designs and costuming to create the perceptual “work-worlds” within which movement inventions unfold. It also exposes the danceworld commonplace that, in many cases, the relationship between the choreographer and the visual artists (if these are different people) is *genuinely* artistically collaborative in the sense that commissioned sculptures and paintings do not serve as mere “perceptual frames” around antecedently designed movement. Instead, they often

render selected movement structures physically possible and/or actively limit the choreographer's range of options. Consistent with this recognition, Paisley Livingston offers the following characterization of co-authorship in artistic contexts:

... if two or more persons jointly author an utterance or *work*, they must intentionally generate or select the text, artefact, performance, or structure that is its *publicly observable component*; in so doing, they act on *meshing sub-plans* and exercise *shared control* and *decision-making authority* over the results

(Livingston, 2005; 83, emphasis mine)

Examples of creative collaboration between choreographers and visual artists satisfying Livingston's criteria abound, even though the choreographer is often given full artistic credit in public notices. Consider Martha Graham's long-time relationship with the sculptor, landscape architect, and furniture designer Osamu Noguchi, who crafted interactive set pieces and narratively indispensable props for her most revered works, including *Night Journey* (1947) and *Cave of the Heart* (1946); Merce Cunningham's use of backdrops and environmental props created by visual art contemporaries Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg, which literally set the stage for legendary creations such as *Summerspace* (1958) and *Rainforest* (1968); and Alonzo King's *Triangle of the Squinches* (2011), for which architect Christopher Haas designed two dramatic walls – one of shimmering elastic cords and another of hinged cardboard slats – on which the dancing unfolds in vertical and horizontal planes. There is no shortage of danceworks with respect to which central elements have been crafted meticulously by painters and sculptors to complement, enhance, inhibit, or otherwise affect our perception of movement on stage through processes that, when examined thoroughly, bear all the hallmarks of co-authorship as defined by Livingston.

In addition, for a striking number of traditional dance-art creations, the choreography simply cannot be performed correctly or in full without specialized visual art attendants. Mother Ginger is unable to totter downstage to reveal an army of polichinelles in the second act of *The Nutcracker* without assistance from an incredibly heavy stainless steel hoop skirt and hidden stilts, and Loïe Fuller enthusiasts cannot pay homage to her famous images of flames and butterflies without wearing her signature "cape and stick" apparel (an invention patented by Fuller in 1894). So, too, it is impossible to dance Kurt Jooss' classic *The Green Table* (1932), Tandy Beal's *Heisenberg's Principle* (1982), or Llory Wilson's *Davenport Memoirs* (1991) without the benefit of a special kind of ball or a specifically shaped piece of parlor furniture that determines, in part, what a dancer is able to do on stage. And many danceworks, including Alwin Nikolais' *Tensile Involvement* (1955) and Mats Ek's *Casi-Casa* (2009), depend on radically interactive set pieces that both constrain and amplify the performers' movements. Some well-known dance companies, such as Chicago's Hedwig Dances, even dedicate themselves to pushing dance-visual art interpenetrations to both practical and artistic limits. In cases like these, sculpture must be regarded as an essential feature of the dance artwork. Additional examples can be marshaled to make a similar point about the various roles painting plays in our perception of choreographed movement, especially with respect to famous ballets whose backdrops were meticulously hand-crafted by legends like Léon Bakst, Pablo Picasso, and Henri Matisse.

To conclude: in an array of paradigmatic danceworld cases, the visual arts seem to have as justifiable a claim to be work-constitutive as a musical score might. And independent of any philosopher's particular metaphysical commitments, it is uncontroversial that "theatrical trappings" make a substantive *appreciative* difference by contributing to – and effectively transforming – the representational, emotional, conceptual, and physical character of the movements executed in dance-art performances. *Hockey Seen* reminds aestheticians of this important danceworld reality.

It also invites us to reconsider the philosophical habit of regarding music as a putative essential component of many dance artworks while ignoring the roles played regularly by painting and sculpture.

Furthermore, reflection on Goodman's experiment draws attention to the fact that it is relatively common for a finished dancework to be the product of a genuinely collaborative creative process, wherein decisions made by non-dance artists, such as costumers and set designers, affect the formal and aesthetic qualities of the completed dance-art creation in ways that *might* render these artisans worthy of authorial co-credit in some cases. Such considerations suggest that, not only is theater dance a metaphysically complex artform in the sense highlighted herein, its complex relationships to painting and sculpture warrant further philosophical scrutiny.

Note

- 1 Theoretical expansion is required because Walton reminds readers in a recent symposium on “Categories of Art” that

What matters for Walton'70 is which categories works are correctly perceived in, not which ones they belong to. A work might be perceived correctly in categories to which it does not belong, or belong to categories it is not correctly perceived in.

(Walton, 2020: 80)

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PART VI

Questions of Value



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RELIGION

Gordon Graham

There is an ancient and enduring connection between religion and all the arts – in music, architecture and poetry no less than painting and sculpture. The expression ‘religious art’, however, is generally taken to refer to the visual and plastic arts and brings to mind such famous works as Leonardo’s *Last Supper*, Michelangelo’s *Pieta*, Caravaggio’s *Beheading of John the Baptist* and Holman Hunt’s *Light of the World*. All these works have Christian subjects and are at the same time manifestations of the best European visual art across several centuries. Furthermore, along with a great many others, they owe their existence to Church patronage.

Other world religions have also produced great art. Hinduism, for instance, has generated a profusion of illustration, ornament and statuary. In sharp contrast, Judaism and Islam are noted for a reservation about representational art that springs from the fear of idolatry. The second of the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai says ‘You must not make a carved image for yourself, nor the likeness of anything’ (*Exodus* 20:4), while Islam’s *hadith* (a record of properly authenticated stories about the life of the Prophet) recounts an episode clearly suggesting Muhammad’s firm belief that representative art is sacrilegious.

A tension between those who favour visual art and those who are suspicious of it can be found within the same religion. In the Protestant Reformation, many Christians rejected representative visual art for the same reasons as Judaism. Even Eastern Orthodoxy, a variety of Christianity notable for beautiful icons, generated intense theological debate between ‘iconoclasts’ and ‘iconodules’ in the 8th and 9th centuries, and one council held in 754 explicitly denounced ‘the evil art of painters’. One view of the relationship between religion and the visual arts, then, finds a deep affinity between them, while another sees an equally deep incompatibility. One aim of this chapter is to show why such a difference of opinion arises.

1 Representation and Resemblance

Painters and sculptors, it is natural to think, use a variety of media to depict objects, people and places by means of lifelike appearance. Yet a little reflection quickly reveals that representation need not rely on resemblance. A few convex and concave lines can successfully represent a smiling or a frowning face, without resembling a real human being, and while we have no difficulty identifying Mickey Mouse as a mouse, no one would mistake him for a real one.

Second, some visual depiction does seek to resemble the thing depicted as closely as possible, but when this is the case, the purpose need not be artistic. Identikit pictures based on the observations of witnesses are an example. Even in cases where skill at drawing and coloration is needed,

and the result is a beautiful picture, the aim may not be artistic. While guidebook illustrations of birds and plants are often beautiful in their own right, their purpose is a practical one, namely enabling us to identify the species to which real birds belong.

Third, the most striking example of representation by means of close resemblance is *trompe l'oeil* – two-dimensional depiction that is so close in appearance to the original, it deceives us into thinking the object depicted is actually present. Though *trompe l'oeil* requires an exceptional mastery of perspective, foreshortening and the use of colour, light and shade, it more often results in a curiosity than an artistic masterpiece. True masterpieces show the same exceptional command of artistic techniques, but to a different end. Vincent van Gogh's 'Irises', for example, is an outstanding figurative painting but is not going to be mistaken for a bed of flowers.

Fourth, the existence of *non-figurative* art is a further counter to the idea that representation requires resemblance. Abstract visual art can be representational, and some of the clearest examples are found in religious art. The mandalas characteristics of the religions of India, for example, are both abstract geometrical designs and symbolic representations of the cosmos. Similarly, ignorance of what the cross on which Jesus was crucified looked like has been no obstacle to its being visually represented. The Jerusalem cross, the Celtic cross and the Orthodox cross all serve this purpose, though none can claim to resemble the original.

A fifth important consideration is this. Visual art that neither resembles nor represents can play a prominent role in the decoration and ornamentation of churches and temples – as well as in synagogues and mosques where figurative art is forbidden. Despite, or perhaps because of this restriction, Islamic art especially has taken geometrical design to great heights. Astonishingly complex patterns in tiling, plasterwork and carving evidently serve effectively as artistic pointers to the Infinite in time and space, without resembling or representing anything.

We should conclude that while it is natural to suppose that the meaning and value of visual art lies in its ability to resemble and represent, this is a mistake. Representation by means of resemblance is a significant artistic accomplishment, but the representation of a thing need not resemble that thing, and neither representation nor resemblance can serve as a measure of artistic excellence. What matters is the purpose of representation. Lifelike pictures and photographs are useful for identification and record, but representative pictures can serve other purposes besides these. Once we acknowledge that visual art can serve different purposes, we can see that artistic purposes can be served by non-representational art as well. In short, resemblance and representation are just some of the *means* available to visual artists.

If resemblance and representation are means, what are the *ends* to which they can most powerfully be directed? Aestheticians have tended to insist on the creation of the visually beautiful for its own sake, but clearly the visual arts often have other ends – entertainment, advertising, education, campaigning, for example. We can add religious purposes to the list, and this gives us a helpful conceptual framework within which to explore the relationship between the visual arts and religion.

2 Visual Art and Religious Life

How are the purposes of the religious life best characterized? This is a difficult question. Answering it satisfactorily cannot ignore issues over which religious believers have frequently disagreed, sometimes passionately. Just as it is commonly supposed that resemblance is essential to visual art, so there is a common supposition that belief in the supernatural lies at the heart of religion. Religion, this assumption implies, is humanity's response to a reality beyond or behind the world we ordinarily perceive, the world that natural science investigates. The spiritual world, however, is *super-natural*; it has to be specially *revealed* to us. In confirmation of this supposition, Judaism, Christianity and Islam all regard their sacred writings – the Hebrew Scriptures, the Christian Bible

and the Quran – as ‘revelation’ of a divine reality. The religions of the East – Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism – also have their holy writings – the Upanishads, Buddhavacana and Adi Granth.

It is important to observe that in none of these cases was the religion in question *founded* on its holy book. The Christian Gospels were composed decades after the events they recount, and only became ‘canonical’ centuries later, while the Quran consists in God’s revelations to Muhammad over a 22-year period, collated and given unalterable authority only after Muhammad’s death, when Islam was already firmly established. So too the Sikh holy book assumed the status of revelation only when it took the place of the tenth guru of the Sikh religion.

The significance of all these holy books, consequently, is a function of the role they have come to play within a distinctive cultic *practice*. Their claims (and suppositions) about supernatural reality rely on a vocabulary and set of concepts whose meaning has arisen within this practice. Taken out of that context, they are merely ancient texts. This means that religious *practice* has to be regarded as more foundational than religious *belief*. So, contrary to the supposition with which we began, the heart of a religion is to be found in its rituals, ceremonies and ethical principles rather than its creeds and catechisms.

Of course, participation in religious practice can be purely conventional, and its ceremonies become *mere* rituals. So too, theological doctrines can become purely abstract formulae. Given these possibilities for a ‘dead’ religion, many thinkers stress the importance of a third element – religious *feeling* – experience of the supernatural or the divine, rather than subscription to doctrines or participation in practices. This three-fold classification (traditionally referred to in a different order as ‘intellect, emotion and will’) reflects the fact that all religions have their distinctive practices, virtually all have teachings about the supernatural, and every religion makes some appeal to validation through personal experience. It thus provides a useful way of thinking about the different ways in which visual art might serve religious ends.

Initially, visual art does not appear to relate very well to any of the three. Literary art seems the most promising medium for the articulation of religious belief and doctrine, music and drama (especially in combination with the art of architecture) lie at the heart of ritualistic practice, while music, dance and poetry are the obvious contenders for the expression of personal experience. So what role could paintings or statues play? Actually, visual art can play a role in all three. Visual narrative serves religious belief, visual identity serves ritualistic practice, and visual expression serves the life of the spirit.

3 Visual Narrative and Religious Belief

The most obvious and accessible religious beliefs take the form of stories – stories of divine visitations, miraculous happenings, conversion experiences, historical events. The Jewish religion is best summarized, in fact, as the story of God’s dealings with the Israelites, including, for instance, the journey through the Wilderness to the Promised Land, the Exile to Babylon and return to Jerusalem. For Christians, this same story culminates in the birth, ministry, miracles, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. The Quran is unusual in being a holy book without stories, but Muslims attribute great significance to episodes in the life of the Prophet recorded in the *hadith*. So too, the story of Buddha under the Bo tree is the pivotal event of Buddhism, while the Hindu scriptures are replete with stories of Hindu gods and goddesses. Beyond the pages of their sacred books, religions generate other important events and characters – the bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism, the martyrs and missionaries of Christianity, the Hejira of Islam and the Jewish ‘Mourning for Jerusalem’, for instance.

Stories can be told in pictures as well as words. That is how religious belief and visual art so easily form a relationship. Though the Bible is a literary text without any original illustrations, its stories and characters have proved a major stimulus to visual artists and their patrons. Indeed,

probably the single largest category of religious visual art is of this kind, and it is ancient. Early Christian paintings are to be found in the Catacombs of Rome, depicting figures and events from the Bible. The Ajanta Caves in the Indian state of Maharashtra are even older and are decorated with paintings of the Buddha, as well as episodes from his previous lives. South Indian classical painting in the Mysore tradition is mostly scenes from Hindu mythology.

These examples show visual art being used to teach and propagate religious beliefs, but some of the most strikingly beautiful religious art is to be found illustrating sacred texts. In these cases, visual art is not a non-literary alternative to text, but an *enhancement* of it. What lends visual art the power to enhance sacred text?

Importantly, painters (and sculptors) can determine just how the things they choose to depict are to be seen. At a strictly material level, a painting is nothing more than coloured pigments spread in patches on a flat surface. The ‘art’ of the painter, then, lies in getting the viewer to see beyond this material level, and perceive things *in* the painting. The most obvious way to do this is ‘representation’. We see, say, a face, a flower or a hillside in the picture, because the painter has chosen to put them there. What we see owes its perceptual existence to the use of composition, perspective, colour and so on. These are techniques by which the viewer is *obliged* to move from the observation of pigment on a flat surface to the apprehension of perceptual objects. And if, as with abstract and ‘action’ painting, there are only patches of colour and geometrical patterns to be seen, that too is the work of the artist.

Thus, religious painters and sculptors compel us to apprehend the actions, occurrences and characters central to a religion a certain way. Where there are no visual records (and often could be no such records), it is thanks to the visual artist that believers and potential believers can visualize the people and events of their faith. And by directing our attention, religious visual art becomes a means of spiritual orientation.

To see this, consider the development of Christian painting from the Renaissance to Baroque (roughly 1450–1650 CE). From early to late Renaissance, painters, especially in Italy, depicted biblical scenes and Christian saints in a ‘heavenly’ rather than an ‘earthly’ style. They present the faithful with idealized images in which, for instance, saints have halos (brightly coloured circles that surround the head), or an unnaturally calm, untroubled posture under conditions of great physical pain. These visual markers make the person on whose ‘holiness’ the artist invites us to focus stand out. Thus, in ‘The Stoning of Stephen’ by Paolo Uccello (c.1397–1475), St Stephen’s head is surrounded by a halo, and his eyes are cast heavenward as he kneels unperturbed in the midst of an angry mob hurling stones down on top of him. His faith-filled response contrasts dramatically with any ordinary victim, who would be cringing fearfully, fruitlessly guarding face and body against such painful blows.

The same ‘heavenly’ kind of image is to be found in a painting of the *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* by Carlo Crivelli (1430–1494). Though strapped to a tree, and shot through with no fewer than 24 arrows, the saint stands calmly looking up to heaven with a silver halo behind/on top of his head. The message is plain. Here is someone who has become truly indifferent to material misfortune, thanks to the infusion of heavenly grace. We need not suppose that Uccello nor Crivelli thought they were recording the actual attitude of Stephen or Sebastian in the face of martyrdom, any more than they thought that saintly people generally go about with halos. The point, rather, is to give striking visual representation to a contrast between the holiness of the saints and the brutality of unredeemed humanity.

‘Mannerist’ paintings of this kind contrast sharply with the new realism of the early Baroque, exemplified by the Italian painter Caravaggio (1571–1610), some of whose works can still be found in the sanctuaries for which they were originally commissioned. They are highly realistic in their depiction of saints and biblical scenes, showing the Apostles for example, with dirty feet and heavily wrinkled faces. Those who were accustomed to idealized portraits of the saints objected, but

the devotional relevance of these pictures is inspirational rather than aspirational. That is to say, the Mannerists portrayed an unearthly spirituality to which the believer is encouraged to aspire; Caravaggio shows saints to be possessed of humanity with which the worshipper is able to identify, enabling the worshipper to glimpse a spiritual dimension within, rather than beyond, the world of ordinary experience.

To summarize: All religions tell stories related to their sacred books and their history. In supplying visual narratives of these stories, the artist goes beyond illustration. By means of visual imagination, the mind of the worshipper is led to engage with religious narratives and characters, to understand them better and appreciate them more deeply.

4 Visual Expression and Religious Emotion

The idea that art has a role to play in religious ‘instruction’ was a commonplace in the 17th and 18th centuries. The 19th century, however, saw the rise of Romanticism with its emphasis on feeling. Accordingly, the most obvious connection between art and religion was thought to be emotional. On this way of thinking, visual art is an essentially expressive medium and the *ultimate* purpose of painting is the expression and communication of religious emotion.

In the history of art, ‘Expressionism’ names a distinctive school of painting that arose, partly, in reaction to the more widely celebrated school known as ‘Impressionism’. The Expressionist response to Impressionism rested on a preference for emotional impact over perceptual experience. The difference is strikingly embodied in the life and work of Paul Gauguin (1848–1903). Gauguin was a gifted amateur painter and completed some pictures in the Impressionist style. When none of them was chosen for an impressionist exhibition in 1886, he turned in other directions and adopted a much bolder use of colour. His first major painting in this new style had a religious theme – *Vision after the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (1888), the first of a series of religious paintings of which *The Yellow Christ* (1889) is the best known. Gauguin’s great contemporary, Vincent van Gogh, was even more explicit in his subscription to expressionism. ‘I have tried to express with red and green’ he wrote ‘the terrible passions of human nature’.

But can emotion be *visually* depicted? Emotion is not a visual phenomenon, but this does not constitute the restriction that it might seem to. There can be visual representations of the non-visual. Thanks to what philosophers sometimes call ‘natural signs’ a strictly visual medium can successfully be used to depict something non-visual. For instance, shapes and colours are perceptual phenomena; sadness and happiness are not. Yet, as simple drawings of a ‘happy face’ or a ‘sad face’ demonstrate, emotion can be visually depicted. The widespread use of ‘emojis’ to add emotional nuance to text messages shows just how easy this is. The meaning of a yellow smiley face or a stylized red heart can be grasped intuitively.

Great art can do the same. Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* (1895) uses black lines on a white background to create an easily identifiable picture of depression, while his paintings of *Despair* and *Anxiety* illustrate the natural emotional associations of certain colours. The word ‘blue’ can describe both a colour and a mood, ‘seeing red’ relates to anger, just as yellow does to cowardice. Van Gogh’s paintings are renowned for the surprising way in which the strong colours he uses seem to infuse flowers, landscapes and furnished rooms with emotional overtones. And there is reason to think that even when the figure is abstracted, the emotional resonance can remain. ‘Abstract Expressionism’ originally referred to a particular group of New York artists but came to mean a style of painting that abandons the figurative for reliance on the emotional content of colour alone. The paintings of Mark Rothko (1903–1970), identified by numbers rather than titles, aim to let colour to speak for itself.

Paintings inspired by abstract expressionism are not always successful, but there is nothing absurd about the attempt to depict emotion non-figuratively, and some painters have sought to

exploit this possibility for religious purposes. Wassily Kandinsky is one. In addition to his paintings, Kandinsky published a short book entitled *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. In a section headed ‘the language of form and colour’, he tells us that the starting point for a properly artistic spirit is ‘the study of colour and its effects on men’. There are feelings so fine grained, he says, that words can at best gesture towards them, and this observation grounds his belief in the spiritual power of painting.

Is this ‘spiritual’ in a religious sense? The emotions of joy, grief, exhilaration and anxiety all figure in religious life, but they figure in non-religious life also. So what emotions, if any, should we identify as *distinctively* religious? There are three plausible contenders. The first is awe generated by a sense of the vastness of time and space. The second is existential anxiety, prompted by an awareness of contingency and mortality. The third is guilt and sin as we compare our lives with ideals of beauty, integrity and moral excellence. For simplicity’s sake, we can label these emotions ‘wonder’, ‘fear’ and ‘sinfulness’. Can wonder, fear and sinfulness be given purely visual expression?

In a very wide range of cases, the proper identification of an emotion depends upon the object to which it is directed. For instance, a feeling of depression accompanies grief, loneliness and disappointment, while a feeling of elation accompanies pleasure, joy and excitement. So what turns the same feeling into a different emotion? The answer is the state of affairs that is both its originating cause and its intentional object. Grief is a feeling that is both *caused by* and *directed at* loss; excitement is a feeling *caused by* and *directed at* success.

Emotions, in other words, are constituted by apprehension as well as feeling. Without the element of apprehension, feeling is largely indeterminate. When feelings have *proper* objects, they become intelligible emotions. To be correctly described as jealousy, for example, a feeling of uneasiness must be caused by someone else’s success and directed at that person.

It follows that for experienced ‘feeling’ is to be identified as a specific religious emotion of wonder, fear or sinfulness, we have to be able to identify an object at which the feeling is properly directed. This enables us to restate the question. Visual art is undoubtedly able to stimulate feeling. But can it direct that feeling in a way that justifies our identifying the feeling as a religious emotion?

It was noted earlier that figurative painting (including symbolic representation) can direct the mind. If now we add that shapes and colours have the power to express and convey emotion, we can see how, in combination, visual art is able to serve the expression and communication of religious emotion. The use of form and colour, as the expressionists claimed, can stimulate feeling. Figuration directs this feeling to an identifiably religious object. It does not matter whether the figuration is realistic, surreal or symbolic. Any of these can enable the mind to identify and direct the accompanying feeling.

By way of illustration, compare Francisco de Zurbaran’s painting *Agnus Dei*, with Paul Klee’s *The Lamb*. The former, painted in several versions between 1635 and 1640, is a highly lifelike painting of a young sheep tied by the legs and (the picture invites us to assume) awaiting slaughter. The colours in de Zurbaran’s picture are muted – browns and blacks mostly – so a negative feeling of pity is prompted almost entirely by representational resemblance. This feeling is then directed to a properly religious object by entitling it *Angus Dei*, the name given to Jesus Christ in the Bible. In this way, the picture converts a feeling of pity into a devotional attitude. By contrast, Klee’s picture, painted in 1920, is not at all lifelike. Its lamb is almost a cartoon, with very vibrant colours. The heightened feeling the picture invokes, to which we cannot easily give a name, is directed to the same religious object as de Zurbaran’s, however, not in this case by a generic title ‘Lamb’, but by pictorial content, namely a cross, positioned like a spike through the head of the lamb with blood dripping from it. Both pictures evoke and direct feeling that is identifiable as religious emotion because the pictures, in different ways, direct it towards the sacrifice of Christ. That is what makes them *emotionally* powerful from a religious point of view. Without its identifying title, we

might well find de Zurbaran's picture disturbing, but the emotion would be pity for the sufferings of an animal. So too, relying only on the *title* of Klee's – *The Lamb* – we have no reason to think of the *Lamb of God*. Without these identifiers – the one linguistic, the other figurative, we have no reason to regard the pictures as *religious* art.

Some thinkers suppose that the religious or spiritual content of abstract expressionism can be experienced *without* any specifically religious identifiers. The theologian David Brown, for instance, says that the paintings of Kandinsky and Klee show a 'pre-occupation with form and colour as means of highlighting the underlying divine reality of the world', while in Rothko's 'implicitly religious canvases one senses a tragic longing for transcendence' (Brown 2004, 136–137). But can we make these connections with sufficient confidence? Klee's expressionist *Lamb* functions in the same way as Zurbaran's *Angus Dei* because for all its obvious differences, it is no less *explicitly* religious. The cross and the blood provide the elements needed for the feeling to be properly directed. Without such pointers, determining the mark of the *implicitly* religious feeling would be problematic, since we could not tell how it differs from *non-religious* feeling.

The Rothko Chapel in Houston Texas supplies an illustration of this point. Commissioned from Rothko, the Chapel was completed a year or so after his suicide in accordance with his conception of how it should be, and contains 14 of his paintings. They are all large colour field works in very dark hues, the kind of painting that became his trademark. It would be possible to visit the Rothko Chapel with complete indifference, but most visitors, it seems plausible to suppose, can be expected to feel something. The feelings they experience, however, could be of many different kinds – awe, admiration and pleasure, no doubt, but also, perhaps, contempt, irritation or puzzlement. By calling the building a 'chapel', it is implied that some of these 'feelings' are more appropriate than others – pleasure rather than contempt, for instance – and that in addition to simple pleasure, at least some people will experience feelings *properly* called 'religious'. Accordingly, the Rothko Chapel guide book describes the building as 'a holy place open to all religions', though it adds, 'and belonging to none', thereby immediately raising this question. If the 'chapel' belongs to *no* religion, what reason is there to think that the feelings the paintings in it arouse are *religious*? Rothko himself declared at one point that he was interested only 'in expressing basic human emotions—tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on'. These words sometimes have religious overtones, and we might grant that the emotions Rothko names are at least quasi-religious. Nevertheless, why are *these* terms the appropriate ones? Why say that a large patch of brilliant colour expresses emotional 'ecstasy', rather than describing it more simply as visually exciting? What makes a large patch of dark colour expressive of 'doom', rather than an undifferentiated depression? Colour alone does not compel us to connect it, as Brown does, with 'a tragic longing for transcendence'?

The idea of pure, thought-free feeling has had a special allure for visual artists in the modern period and many impressive paintings and sculptures have been the result. The cost of abstraction, however, is a loss of specificity and hence of meaning. Sorrow, guilt, depression, anxiety are all merged into uneasiness, while inspiration, surprise and joy are all merged into delight. The intelligible differentiation of psychic feeling requires identifying markers. Consequently, for works of visual art to be expressions of religious emotion, they must incorporate recognizable signs of properly religious objects. In other words, visual expression without visual identity remains religiously indeterminate.

5 Visual Art and Religious Identity

Painting does not always preserve or communicate identity. Indeed, one way of characterizing abstract painting is to see it as a deliberate, self-conscious determination to avoid all forms of identification. The American artist Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) became famous for his 'action'

paintings – pictures created by pouring and splashing colour on large canvases. His ‘method’ emphasized speed and spontaneity so that no preconceived idea, even on the part of the painter, would be allowed to influence the outcome. If we ‘see’ anything in Pollock’s action paintings, it is a consequence of the arbitrary imposition or association of images on the part of the viewer. As his paintings became more abstract, Pollock abandoned titles as well as figuration, and like Rothko’s, they are labelled ‘untitled’ or just given a number. This is a notable feature of other abstract expressionists. Mondrian, as he moved away from the figurative, produced ‘compositions’, and Kandinsky produced numbered ‘improvisations’.

Does abstraction of this kind make religious painting impossible? According to the great art historian E H Gombrich,

Kandinsky, Klee and Mondrian were mystics who wanted to break through the veil of appearances to a higher truth.... It is part of the doctrine of Zen... that no one who has not been shocked out of his rational habits of thought can become enlightened.

(Gombrich 1995 (16th edition) p. 604)

Perhaps Gombrich is right to see a desire for mystical experience in the aims of abstract expressionism. If the arguments of the previous section are correct, however, this ‘experience’ is of too indeterminate a kind to be properly religious. It could not in fact sustain the religious distinction between ‘veil of appearances’ and ‘higher truth’. On the contrary, regardless of what the artists themselves may have thought, such paintings are most plausibly regarded as the presentation of *nothing but* appearance. We may, of course, continue to admire them, but our admiration need only be grounded in their ability to reveal the astonishing beauty and wonder of the visual in itself. Abstract painting does not take us *beyond* the veil of appearance; it gives us occasion to delight in it.

The striking difference of style that sets off ‘modern’ art from its ‘realist’ precursors transcends the figurative/non-figurative division. ‘Modern’ art includes both. De Zurbaran’s *Agnus Dei* is ‘realist’; Paul Klee’s *The Lamb* is ‘modern’. Though painted in radically different styles, they are both figurative. In this case, ‘modernism’ is continuous with the art of earlier centuries. The same point can be made about paintings of the Crucifixion. There are hundreds, probably thousands of renderings of this scene by notable painters and sculptors. Antonello de Messina (c.1430–1479) painted several versions in the mid-15th century, and 500 years later, Marc Chagall (1887–1985) did just the same. No one could fail to see the radical visual differences between them, yet even without its title, Chagall’s *White Crucifixion* of 1938 clearly has the same subject as Messina’s *Crucifixion* of 1455.

In other cases, however, the question of continuity is problematic. ‘The Annunciation’ is the traditional name for the occasion recorded in Luke’s Gospel when a very youthful Mary is visited by an angel who tells her that she will become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. The scene of their encounter has been painted by acclaimed artists in every century from the 13th to the 19th. The list includes Giotto (1267–1337), Botticelli (1445–1510), Leonardo (1452–1519), Titian (1485–1576), El Greco (1541–1614), Caravaggio (1571–1610), Rubens (1577–1640), Murillo (1617–82), Goya (1746–1828), Rossetti (1828–1882) and Tissot (1856–1902). This impressively long list captures a history of both continuity and change – continuity of subject and change of style. Though painting styles have altered greatly, in every century from Giotto to Tissot, it is easy to identify the same scene.

But three more modernistic paintings, apparently with this same theme, raise a question: At what point does change of style about change of subject? *Annunciation* by the Cubist Fernand Léger (1881–1955) shows the face of a woman, to whom a dove seems to be murmuring. Is the dove intended to take the place of the angel? If so, how could we distinguish between substitution and

abandonment; a dove is not an angel. *Annunciation* by the surrealist Rene Magritte (1898–1967) is a figurative painting, but in the positions where we might expect to find Mary and the angel, we find three motifs that turn up repeatedly in Magritte's work – a curtain of iron with bell-like shapes, a piece of paper cut into patterns and two ‘bilboquets’ (to use Magritte's term), i.e. silvery white balusters. This picture displays Magritte's remarkable facility for representational art, the motifs mark it with his distinctive style, and his choice of title is deliberate. But what relationship does it have – could it have? – with the scene from Luke's Gospel? *Annunciation. Study I* by the abstract expressionist Brice Marden (b.1938) is an abstract – eight black and white lines of varying thickness on a white background. This seems even further removed from the Gospel narrative than Magritte's. In all three cases, the gap between the picture and Luke's story is too great to preserve any link at all.

Even if we say that what matters is the emotional response to the episode of the Annunciation that these painters have embodied in their paintings, this will not be sufficient to make them religious paintings. That is because the emotion to which the painter successfully gave expression need not be religious. Perhaps Leger, Magritte or Marden were voicing contempt or loathing for a story they regarded as a despicable idealization of submissiveness in women.

Even when images are more determinate, uncertainty can arise for a different reason. *Immersion (Piss Christ)* is a work by the American photographer and artist Andres Serrano (b. 1950). The work is a red-tinged photograph of a crucifix submerged in a glass container of what the artist claimed to be his own urine. The work won the 1987 Southeastern Center for Contemporary Arts ‘Awards in the Visual Arts’ competition, but precisely because the image is unmistakeably Christian, it provoked an adverse reaction in many quarters. Serrano's image, critics alleged, was a deliberate denigration of Christ's sacrificial death. Other commentators denied this and saw it in an elevation of the mundane. It seems that Serrano's rather beautiful photograph can be taken in quite different ways, with the consequence that none of the several interpretations which circulated at the time is any more defensible than any other.

Demands for the piece to be banned from public exhibitions, on the grounds of its offensiveness to Christians, met with protests from those who wanted to protect artistic freedom from religious censorship. This assertion of the importance of artistic freedom against deep-seated religious sensibilities reveals a tension between visual art and religion different to those of Islam or the Mosaic Law. To affirm the autonomy of art as a practice – expressed in the slogan ‘art for art's sake’ – requires artistic independence on the part of the painter. Religious identity must not be allowed to circumscribe art. On this view, if painting has any use for religious subjects it is only because through them painters and sculptors choose to express their artistic individuality (and spiritual insights, perhaps). In times past, visual art was expected to serve religion. With the liberation of art for art's sake, such subservience is no longer acceptable.

The high-value modernity places on artistic integrity, and the related importance of individuality, means that the visual markers of religious identity – stories, events and characters from the Bible and history of the Church – cannot be any more than materials. Like pigment, canvas, stone and bronze, they are available to painters and sculptors to do with as they wish. From this perspective, religious identity must give way to artistic creativity. The aim of visual art is not to educate the faithful, but to win an audience of its own, inviting them, sometimes, to find in a work some spiritual or other ‘meaning’.

This trajectory – from authoritative religious depiction intended to inform and inspire, to authentic artistic expression aiming to engender a ‘felt’ response on the part of the viewer – characterizes the development of religious visual art in the Christian West. The story of religion's relationship to visual art in Eastern Orthodoxy, in Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism is different. But globally, it is Western art that dominates the gallery and museum, and for the most part this has left any alliance with religion behind.

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30

“ART IS HOW WE LOVE OURSELVES NOW”

Race, Fine Art, and the Dignity of Criticism

Paul C. Taylor

1 Introduction: Distraction and Entanglement

In an address originally delivered to the NAACP in 1926, W.E.B. Du Bois provocatively identifies the governing principle of the field that would come to be called critical race aesthetics. He begins by imagining two groups of his listeners reacting inappropriately to his decision to take art as his subject. One group laments this distracting detour from the pursuit of racial justice; the other group welcomes the opportunity to “turn away,” however briefly, from life’s real struggles. Du Bois points out that both groups have the same guiding thought – that fine art and racial politics have nothing to do with each other – and that both groups are wrong. “The thing we are talking about tonight,” he explains, “is part of the great fight we are carrying on...” (Du Bois, 1926; paragraph 3).

Du Bois goes on to explore several ways in which the production, evaluation, and appreciation of art connect to the production, experience, and analysis of race – and, more importantly, to the prospects for navigating a racialized world intelligently and safely. He notes, among other things, that the experiences of racialized subjects can provide art with its most profound topics and themes, that racial codes and scripts often shape the distribution of opportunities for artistic training and aesthetic experience, and that art at its best can reset the problematic cognitive habits and expand the stunted imaginative capacities that enable white supremacy to persist and thrive.

As it happens, art and race are even more intimately related than this short sketch of Du Bois’ argument reveals. The most influential forms of both emerged at roughly the same time, in roughly the same contexts, under the pressure of many of the same forces. Each of these modern inventions helped shape the other, both at the level of concept and discourse and at the level of concrete practice. And this dialectical relationship continues in current approaches to race and art, in ways that make an appropriately critical approach to either require some sense of its impact and dependence on the other.

What follows will explore some of the many dimensions of what Monique Roelofs calls the “entwinements” or “entanglements” of art and race (Roelofs, 2018; 377). The next two sections will offer some philosophical ground rules for thinking about race productively and track some of the inroads that critical race theory has made into the study of art and the aesthetic. The next two sections will tease out the inner logic of some of these entanglements using art world case studies.

(The case studies will focus primarily on the challenges that white supremacy and anti-blackness raise for responsible inhabitants of various art worlds. This emphasis is in no way meant

to suggest that whiteness and blackness are the only racial positions worth scrutiny. As I've already noted, race is a profoundly contextual affair, despite having some generalizable features. My aim is to explore the racial dynamics I know best, the ones illuminated by black studies, black feminism, and Africana philosophy, on the way to articulating general principles that will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, in sites defined by alternative modes of racialization.)

2 Taking Race Seriously

Race is a notoriously slippery and controversial subject. There are different ways to think about it, and these differences spark debates in various registers. Nevertheless, the approaches currently regarded as most promising tend to share a handful of basic features.

As in any vibrant sub-field of philosophy, race theorists stake out opposed positions in a variety of domains. Some think the vernacular conception of race (if there is just one) is indefensible, while some think it's salvageable. Some are interested in race as a political tool that states use to contain unruly populations, while others regard it as a conceptual tool for capturing the way human social practices have created porous but identifiable breeding populations. Some attach a great deal of importance to the fact that race-thinking works differently in different places, while others are content to focus primarily on the color-coded US-style approach. Finally, some think race talk does more harm than good and should be abolished, while others think some refined, critical forms of it do useful anti-racist work.

These differences aside, contemporary race theories tend to share six basic commitments.

- 1 *Take race seriously*, which means accepting that it is important to examine the practices and populations that words like “race” denote. There are different ideas about how the practices work and what the populations are and how to use the words properly, but the shared starting point typically involves attending to the vernacular practices of race-thinking in places like the United States. In these places, it is common to sort humans into five or so color-coded populations (brown, black, red, white, and yellow), and to think of these populations as interestingly (if not always directly) descended from the premodern inhabitants of the world’s major land masses.

The remaining commitments explain how to take race seriously. The key is to approach it in the following ways:

- 2 As a subject of *criticism*, which means contesting the mechanisms of racial oppression and injustice and questioning the racial discourses that support, sustain, and emerge from them.
- 3 As an *artifact*, which means accepting that words like “race” pick out products of the meaning-laden, historically evolving exercise of human agency (even if those products still implicate human biology or psychology).
- 4 As *modern*, which means accepting that the most influential forms of race-thinking emerged during the modern period (even if those forms have important premodern roots, and even if other forms reward study).
- 5 As *political*, which means accepting that race matters in part because of its role in distributing social goods, formulating and applying ethico-political norms, and advancing – and contesting – schemes for human exploitation, oppression, and extermination.
- 6 As *social*, which means accepting that whatever else race is and does, it is not simply a matter of conscious, individual choices. It involves ascription and interpellation as well as voluntary identification, and it works in part by framing and informing the choices, habits, perceptions, and judgments that constitute individuality.

This consensus race theory has clear implications for the study of fine art. If race is an interestingly modern phenomenon and the modern world is defined in important ways by racial politics, then the worlds of fine art will exhibit the same forms of resource hoarding, maldistribution of goods, and distortion of experience and of valuation as the wider social world. Similarly, if race is about meaning-making and self-making, then art and the aesthetic will inevitably become resources in society's racial projects.

It is important to note in this regard that modernity's art worlds and its racialized life worlds have developed together, not just in parallel but to some degree in concert, in dialectical relationship. The idea of a smallish set of fine arts emerges in the 18th century, just as people like Kant are refining older, looser ideas of human variation into forms that now register easily as modes of race-thinking.¹ As concepts like "beauty" and "genius" and "taste" begin to take their modern forms, they provide resources that modern racism would use to distinguish civilization from barbarism, humans from savages and brutes. After all, humans can produce and recognize beauty; sub-humans cannot. This relationship between art and race provided an emotionally airtight (but logically porous) proof of white supremacy: we know those creatures are savages because they can't appreciate beauty, and we know they can't appreciate beauty – that their acts of aesthetic production and appreciation are inferior – because they're savages.

Tracking the impact of this art-race entanglement means tracking it across the different precincts of the art world. Words like "race" denote practices, habits, institutions, populations, and so on that exist in dialectical relationships with the elements of aesthetic theory, art criticism, art history, curatorial work, and, of course, the practices of artmaking. The sections that follow will explore some of these relationships, focusing on philosophical aesthetics and art history, using a failure of criticism as an exemplary case. (There is of course a great deal to say about the ways curators and artists have engaged race critically, but many more people have already said those things than have explored the meaning of race for philosophical aesthetics and art history. That fact shapes the focus of this essay.)

3 Critical Race Theory and the Art world

One way to take race seriously in fine art is to extend the insights of critical race theory, or CRT, to the art world. "CRT" originally named a late 20th-century school of legal scholarship but has since taken on a wider meaning. In this broader sense, it is just what happens when the insights and impulses of critical theory and of critical social theory are brought to bear on the workings of race in society. The philosophers and art historians currently setting the tone for the study of race in fine art explicitly position themselves in the CRT tradition.

In a 2016 article in *Art Journal*, Camara Dia Holloway uses words like these to announce the new field that she calls "critical race art history":

Drawing on the insights of social, feminist, and queer histories of art, CRAH aims to understand how race affects how we view the creation, content, and reception of visual objects. How does race matter when pursuing an artistic education? When patrons award commissions? When artists decide on their subjects and formal strategies? When artists seek venues for exhibiting their work? When audiences view the works chosen for display? When collectors acquire works? And when works are admitted to the canon?

(Holloway, 2016; 89)

Where Holloway brings the insights of CRT, and of the fields that align with it and inform it, to art history, Monique Roelofs brings them philosophical aesthetics. Drawing from contributions in feminist theory, postcolonial theory, African diaspora studies, and elsewhere, she develops a

“critical race feminist aesthetics” that complicates and deepens the philosopher’s engagement with the study of fine art (Roelofs, 2018; 366). One key to this enterprise is “the nexus of aesthetics and race” (Roelofs, 2014; 29), which Roelofs explains like this:

Racial formations are aesthetic phenomena and aesthetic practices are racialized structures. A theory of the nature of race and racism... must address the place of the aesthetic in processes of racialization. Correlatively, a theory of the aesthetic as a philosophical category... must account for the ways in which structures of aesthetic exchange channel racial passions and perceptions.

(*Roelofs, 2012; 291*)

The race-aesthetics nexus is a simple but powerful idea that tracks an important bi-directional dynamic. On the one hand, “racial conceptions historically permeate aesthetic theory” (Roelofs, 2018; 365). This “racialized aestheticization” is evident in the work of towering figures like Burke, Hegel, Hume, and Kant, all of whom famously distribute aesthetic values differentially across different racial populations.² On the other hand, aesthetic judgments frequently structure and inform racial formation processes. This “aestheticized racialization” is evident in the way great swaths of elite and popular culture train (invite, remind, license) their consumers simply to perceive, directly and with powerful affect, that some people matter more than others.

While ethically problematic racial practices provide the clearest occasions for aestheticizing race and racializing aesthetics, these activities can also advance arguably neutral or liberatory racialization processes. One might argue that any appeal to race for any purpose is ethically worrisome. But some appeals are surely more worrisome than others. For Roelofs, figures like Fanon, Angela Davis, and Kara Walker exemplify the less worrisome ways of implicating the race-aesthetics nexus.

Roelofs and Holloway exemplify a turn in the study of art that by its nature militates against overreliance on abstract theorizing. Race and art are profoundly complex and context-specific enterprises: engaging either one responsibly requires attending with care to the historical and cultural details of specific cases. These details matter all the more when we endeavor to think race and art together. In deference to the importance of context for the critical race turn, the next two sections will explore the implications of this turn in two specific cases.

4 The Dignity of Criticism

According to Henry Louis Gates, Thomas Jefferson’s “encounter with [Phillis] Wheatley’s Poems in 1779... proved germinal in the history of the criticism of African American writing” (Gates, 2009; 41). In order to see what he means by this, it’s important to say a little more about Jefferson’s place in the history of race-thinking and about the links that he forges between race, aesthetics, and art.

I’ve suggested elsewhere that Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787) is a serviceable signpost for the transition from older forms of race-thinking to more recognizably modern ones (Taylor, 2013). It marks this transition in part because its race-thinking aspires to the condition of science. Consider this passage:

[T]hough for a century and a half we have had under our eyes the races of black and of red men, they have never yet been viewed by us as subjects of natural history. I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.

(*Jefferson, 1996; 143*)

Jefferson seems here to hesitate in the face of thoughts about gradable racial differences. But he advances his “suspicion” about white superiority after he spends several pages documenting the differences between the races and the deficiencies of non-white peoples. What looks like diffidence is actually the open-endedness that attends the announcement of a research program. He advances his thought “as a suspicion” only because he recognizes the need for more systematically gathered data – because “to justify a general conclusion, requires many observations” (Jefferson, 1996; 153).

Interestingly, this prolegomenon to scientific racism is rooted in the aesthetics of racial difference.

The first difference which strikes us is that of colour.... And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immovable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race? Add to these, flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form.... The circumstance of superior beauty, is thought worthy attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of man?

(Jefferson, 1996; 138)

This appeal to the superior bodily beauty of white people is one of the foundational moments in an American tradition of white supremacist somatic aesthetics. It also provides a clear window onto Jefferson’s prejudices and onto the prejudices of his time. In addition, read against the backdrop of Jefferson’s infamous commitment to owning and using Sally Hemings’ body, it is a stark reminder that race is importantly shot through with desires, aversions, mystifications, and delusions that push race theory beyond social ontology and into domains like psychoanalysis and queer theory.

What matters for current purposes, though, is the way Jefferson’s discussion reveals the connections between the aesthetic and epistemic aspects of racialization. Jefferson simply asserts his prejudices, assigning greater and lesser “shares” of beauty with unwavering confidence. He then folds these prejudices into an account of bodily beauty that purports to have scientific and practical significance.

This commitment to turning aesthetic prejudice into truth claims and practical imperatives shapes the foray into literary criticism that captures Gates’ interest. One of Jefferson’s contemporaries was a poet named Phillis Wheatley, who is best known today as one of the founding figures of African American literature (‘Wheatley, Phillis: Introduction’, 2005; Winkler, 2020). During her early adulthood she became a *cause célèbre* for antislavery activists and for proponents of black humanity (these categories overlap but are not coterminous) because her poetry seemed to reject, both by its mere existence and sometimes with more or less explicit exhortation, assumptions of black inhumanity. This was a matter of such import that a group of cultural eminences gathered in Boston to interrogate Wheatley in person, “to verify the authorship of her poems and to answer a much larger question: was a Negro capable of producing literature?” (Gates, 2009; 10)

One of Jefferson’s correspondents extolled Wheatley’s virtues and provoked him to comment. Given the opportunity to exercise critical judgment, Jefferson chose instead to deny the appropriateness of such a judgment. “The compositions published under [Wheatley’s] name,” he explained, “are below the dignity of criticism” (Jefferson, 1996; 140).

The reasoning that leads Jefferson to this claim is worth reproducing in its entirety, such as its entirety is:

Never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never see even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture.... Misery is often the parent of

the most affecting touches in poetry.— Among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry. Love is the peculiar oestrum of the poet. Their love is ardent, but it kindles the senses only, not the imagination. Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Whately [sic]; but it could not produce a poet.

(Jefferson, 1996; 140)

He then goes on to discuss Ignatius Sancho and doesn't mention Wheatley again.

Jefferson's dismissiveness about Wheatley's work has not stood the test of time, but this says less about Jefferson's obtuseness as a critic – since he refused to engage as a critic – than about the decay of the theoretical grounds for his refusal. Those grounds are on full display in an earlier passage from the *Notes*, where he argues that black life “appears to participate more of sensation than reflection” (Jefferson, 1996; 139). If, as Gates points out on his behalf, “[t]rue art requires a sublime combination of feeling and reflection,” then humanoid creatures that are incapable of reflection are necessarily incapable of producing art (Gates, 2009; 44–45). Wheatley's poetry was not, could not have been, a proper subject of criticism, and hence did not require or deserve sustained critical scrutiny.

Needless to say, Jefferson's anti-black and white supremacist philosophical anthropology no longer tracks the weight of informed opinion. Jefferson's white supremacist – or, more or less for short, *whitely* – critical process remains relevant, though. It helpfully shows one way to operationalize the race-aesthetics nexus in aesthetic experience and in art world theory and practice.

To point to whitely ways of activating the nexus is to invoke a kind of race-theoretic shorthand. Race-talk is a way of denoting (among other things) certain complexes of epistemic and phenomenological conditions that shape judgment, perception, and cognition. These conditions constrained and shaped Jefferson's capacity to engage Wheatley's work, effectively rendering her aesthetic achievement invisible to him and encouraging him to render it invisible to others. The production of invisibility is a prominent outcome of mobilizing the race-aesthetics nexus to do the work of whiteness.

There are at least three dimensions to this racialized production of invisibility, each of which still has its place in the contemporary art world.³ First, Jefferson was unable (or unwilling, albeit at so deep a level that the distinction begins to lose its purchase) to register the quality of Wheatley's work, and might in fact be said not to have perceived it at all. Since the work was in effect invisible to him, its relevance to his status as a cultural authority – and its author's relevance to his status as a scientist and champion of something like human rights – was similarly invisible. Finally, his critical (non-)judgment effectively excluded Wheatley and her work from the institutional matrices that allow art to circulate and that allow artists to benefit from this circulation: Wheatley and her work became invisible in the art world, in much the way that led Michele Wallace to complain about the “restraint of trade” that excludes non-white culture work from hegemonic art institutions (Wallace, 2004).

5 Laure de Paris (1863)

Jefferson's refusal of critical judgment shows how racialized forms of epistemic numbness and phenomenological constriction are bound up with the concrete workings of the race-aesthetics nexus.⁴ Culture work in a racialized world, like race work in the cultural world, involves specific forms of perception, interpretation, and curation. These racialized forms of aesthetic responsiveness have important and specifiable impacts on culture workers even in times more racially enlightened than Jefferson's heyday.

Recent re-readings of Manet's *Olympia* (1863) highlight some post-Jeffersonian ways of operationalizing the race-aesthetics nexus. Manet's pathbreaking work both draws on and diverges

from representational traditions epitomized by Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, which, Denise Murrell reminds us, is the "Venetian Renaissance painting invariably cited as [Manet's] source...." (Murrell, 2018; 53). Many of these deviations are grist for the mill of standard art-historical analysis: "Manet flattens the spatial depth, refusing the Renaissance perspective of Titian's work," and he "transforms... Titian's invitingly diffident courtesan into a confrontational sex-for-pay worker" (Murrell, 2018; 53). But the formal deviations involving the black maids are of particular interest to a critical race analysis. Murrell explains:

While Titian's maid is proportionally much smaller than the courtesan, Manet's maid assumes a spatial dimension nearly equivalent to that of the prostitute. And though positioned behind and subordinate to the prostitute, Manet's maid faces us from the foreground of the picture, in contrast to her counterpart, who turns away far in the background depth.

(Murrell, 2018; 53–54)

Standard art-historical accounts notice Manet's deviations but read them not as attempts to draw attention to the black woman but as devices for defining the white woman. These readings tend to follow Sander Gilman in treating the maid as a figure for modern ideas about "the heightened, deviant sexuality of black women," ideas that in the symbolic economy of the painting express "intensified anxieties about the abnormal sexuality of the white prostitute" (Grigsby, 2015; 432).⁵ Read in this way, the maid becomes "a subservient foil, a woman that even the keen eyes of Manet scholars... could all but ignore" (Grigsby, 2015; 435). But the easiness of this reading enabled critics to set aside Manet's other revisionary interventions – as if these were beneath the dignity of criticism – and to set aside with them the harder and more interesting readings that might otherwise become available.

A more race-aware reading declines to return the black woman to the thematic background as swiftly as possible and looks instead for a more unified account of Manet's deviations. Grigsby begins in this spirit by noting that Manet's maid "brought the colonies to the metropole. She heightened viewers' awareness of racial difference and the colonial history of slavery...." (Grigsby, 2015; 435). Murrell deepens this thought by pointing out that the maid is dressed in a way that requires explanation:

The maid wears a bulky white dress of a vaguely European style, not the brightly patterned, seductively draped, and exotically styled garment typical of nineteenth-century depictions of black women within female spaces....

(Murrell, 2018; 55)

After building up some resources from the histories of art and of fashion in post-revolutionary France, Murrell offers an explanation. The maid's clothes reveal her to be a more or less normal member of the 19th-century Parisian proletariat. She is pointedly not another of the dark, exotic foreigners that routinely appear in European visual culture.

Murrell's reading – the fascinating nuances of which I've just barely touched on – has several important implications. First, it shows that one can read the painting in a way that deepens the viewer's pre-theoretic experience instead of repudiating that experience. For viewers not habituated to whitely perceptual codes or to art history's alignment with those codes, *Olympia* is a "painting that has two figures" – rather than one figure with a humanoid accessory – "who, with almost equal interest, engage [one's] attention" (Green, 2019). Murrell's reading saves that intuition.

Second, this harder reading saves the pre-theoretic intuition not by narrowing the scope of critical engagement but by deepening and expanding it. Murrell considers *more* of what's going on in the painting instead of letting racial ideologies artificially constrain the class of relevant

features. It matters that the maid is fully clothed, and wearing just those clothes, and that we see her face, and that her face is recognizable as the face of a specific woman. It matters, in particular, that the model, a woman Manet knew as Laure, posed several times for him and belonged to an “interracial network of friendships and professional connections among” artists and other residents of mid-19th-century Paris (Murrell, 2018; 10). All of this makes it harder to credit a view that sees the maid as a generalized racial symbol for deviant sexuality.

Recovering Manet’s model and restoring her, and the figure she posed for, to the fashion trends and the communities of 1860s Paris points toward a third conclusion: far from being the conduit for a generalized form of sexual racism, Manet turns out to be a chronicler of a richly interracial world. *Olympia* stands revealed as “among the early images in Salon painting in which... a black woman is de-Orientalized, and portrayed... in a modernist way, as part of the working class of Paris” (Murrell, 2018; 57). It also becomes apparent that Manet’s work here in some ways “has stronger affinities with abolitionist works by contemporaneous artists of color than with those of his Paris colleagues” (Murrell, 2018; 58).

Approaching *Olympia* from the perspective of critical race art history yields several benefits for students of the work and of the art world. By focusing attention on aspects of the piece that might otherwise escape notice, this approach allows for a more comprehensive engagement with the totality of the work. Similarly, it invites a more nuanced engagement with the artist and with the social worlds in which work and artist circulated. Finally, it models a more nuanced critical sensibility that does not limit itself to obvious moral errors – remember: one target of the Murrell-Grigsby re-reading of *Olympia* is Gilman’s flawed attempt at *anti-racist critique*.

6 Conclusion

It is tempting to think of the entanglements of race and art on the old “race relations” model, on which the main question is how large, stable human groups called races relate to each other in and through the arts. That is not the story I’ve tried to tell here. The entanglements in play here involve relations in the broader philosophical sense, which allows one to consider how all sorts of things – people and groups to be sure, but also institutions, cultural meanings, cognitive contents, affective experiences, material conditions, and much else besides – stand with respect to each other. (This thought is in the neighborhood of what Roelofs calls “aesthetic relationality,” but measuring this proximity any more precisely would require more space than I have available (Roelofs, 2014).)

Bringing a critical race aesthetics perspective to the cases discussed above reveals entanglements that often succeed in escaping notice, despite their concrete implications for art world activity. It is easy in hindsight to see how Jefferson’s cultivated ignorance about black humanity was entangled with his ambitions as a man of science and as a man of letters, and how all of this led him to shirk the burdens of criticism and exclude Wheatley from his literary art world. It is similarly easy to tease out the art world’s entanglements with certain constellations of race, class, and gender dynamics – the dynamics, to put it swiftly, that long excluded people like Denise Murrell from elite art-historical spaces and people like Laure from the ideas people in those spaces had about who counts as a modern European – and to imagine how these entanglements enabled art historians to erase Laure from Manet’s depiction of Parisian life.

The critical race perspective also helps explain *why* these entanglements escape notice and how to haul them back into awareness. It is hard for people to notice what they aren’t noticing, and to notice that they aren’t noticing it, because that’s how invidious race-thinking works. It cultivates forms of epistemic numbness and phenomenological constriction that limit the possibilities for aesthetic responsiveness *and* for self-criticism in the face of one’s lack of responsiveness.

In light of the elusiveness and persistence of these numbing and constraining forces, it is important to think about the critical race turn in aesthetics as an invitation to undertake a practice of self-criticism. Taking race seriously means, among other things, cultivating the capacity to interrogate the way broader social forces work in and on and through the self. It means being willing to subject oneself to criticism and to accept criticism from others, in relation not just to one's actions but to one's perceptual and affective habits. Perhaps most importantly, it means, as Medina makes clear, creating and inhabiting environments rife with opportunities for the “epistemic friction” that encourages agents to reconsider what they’re about.

Opportunities for epistemic friction often emerge at the intersections of aesthetic publics and art world communities. This is why diversity matters (in, for example, the leadership of museums and other cultural institutions), though diversity is surely not enough. And it is why the fact of art world pluralism matters. There are many art worlds, and one of the stories of art in recent decades has been the increasing frequency and openness with which the worlds organized around people like Manet and his most prominent commentators find themselves dealing with people who also circulate in artistic counterpublics. I think of these people as art world-travelers, in the sense of world-traveling that one learns from María Lugones (Lugones, 1987).

Art world travelers have been at the center of my argument here. Murrell undertook her studies in part to find a way to make art-historically visible the experience of someone who hadn’t yet accepted the hegemonic art world’s ways of (not) seeing. Roelofs and Holloway use insights from adjacent disciplines to make room in philosophical aesthetics and art history for ways of thinking and perceiving that are underrepresented in those spaces. Gates revisits the Wheatley affair in part to bring back into view the centuries-long tradition of criticizing African American literature that Jefferson unwittingly (and obtusely) helped launch – and to restore Wheatley to her rightful status as a resident of Jefferson’s cultural milieu (though her residency status was always in question).

It is important to note, though, that travel is not an end in itself. Travel to the hegemonic art world is certainly not its own reward. With more space, I would turn at this point to some of the many figures – like Theaster Gates, Sonya Clark, Mickalene Thomas, or Kerry James Marshall – who complicate the metaphor of world-traveling by being native both to the mainstream art world and to certain of its counterpublics, and who then use this flexible art world citizenship to challenge assumptions about art and about society. In deference to the limited space I have left, I will simply report the words that another of these figures uses to convey the thrill of building, aspiring to build, an alternative art world rooted in counter-hegemonic ideas about gender and race. Here is how writer Lisa Jones describes the experience of working with others to establish the 1980s performance art collective, Rodeo Caldonia High-Fidelity Performance Theater:

Twelve women, sometimes more, in our twenties and giddy with our own possibility. We were gonna do theater. Performance pieces we were calling them. We didn’t care much about genres and structures and things. Our need was to get out in public and act up; to toss off the expectations laid by our genitals, our melanin count, and our college degrees.... Art, says Nan Goldin, is about leaving a record no one can revise. We are not thinking of hereafters. Art is how we love ourselves now.

(Jones, 2017; 302–303)

Notes

1 See Kivy, P. (2012) ‘What Happened in the Eighteenth Century: The ‘Modern System’ Re-Examined (Again)’, *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 61–74; commenting on Kristeller, P.O. (1951) ‘The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics Part I’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 496–527.

- 2 In the Third Critique, for example, “[f]igures of American Indians and non-Europeans regularly denote observers whose perceptions fall short of the properly aesthetic, such as the ‘Iroquois sachem,’ who judges in accordance with interest, failing to evince an adequately disinterested form of aesthetic appraisal” (Roelofs, 2014; 37).
- 3 These are three of the four dimensions of invisibility that I discuss in Chapter 2 of (Taylor, 2016).
- 4 The idea of epistemic numbness, along with much of what I do with it in this essay, comes from (Medina, 2013). I explore the idea of phenomenological constriction in the discussion of Jefferson and Sally Hemings in Chapter 4 of (Taylor, 2016).
- 5 Grigsby is thinking here of (Gilman, 1985).

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31

PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS OF ART

Thomas E. Wartenberg

1 Introduction

The question of whether painting and sculpture can make contributions to philosophy has not received the sort of attention that has been accorded film and literature as sources of philosophical insight.¹ Perhaps because the former art forms have generally though not always excluded words from their images, their connection to philosophy—a discipline that seems to rely on explicit verbal statements and arguments—seems more remote and less easy to establish.²

Nonetheless, there is a body of both works of art and claims by philosophers and art critics that use art to support and develop philosophical ideas and theories. In this chapter, I discuss a range of works of art—engravings, paintings, and sculptures—that present philosophical claims. In the first two sections, I discuss works that were created to present philosophical ideas. The next section focuses on philosophers who have seen philosophical content in works of art that helps them explain their philosophical theories. I then turn to Modernist art, examining how works in this tradition raise philosophical questions and make philosophical claims about the nature of art itself. Finally, I look at works of art that were inspired by the writings of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, asking to what extent they actually help us understand his ideas.

2 Medieval Broadsides of Aristotelian Metaphysics

The first artwork I will discuss that attempts to convey philosophical insight was made in 1614 when a Franciscan professor of philosophy named Martin Meurisse, with the assistance of the engraver Leonard Gaultier, produced the first of four large engravings that present visual representations of Aristotelian philosophy. This work, referred to here as *Descriptio*, is entitled *Artificiosa totius logices descriptio* (*Artful description of logic in its entirety*). (The work can be accessed at <https://blogs.princeton.edu/notabilia/2013/12/17/martin-meurisses-garden-of-logic--1614/>.)

Broadsides like *Descriptio* were part of the culture of philosophical education in early modern Europe and functioned as useful tools in the preparation of students for their rigorous formal examinations known as disputations. They provided students with visual representations of the content of Aristotle's texts in an effort to help them memorize features of his theory for their examinations.

These broadsides are complex works that combine words and images in an attempt to render philosophical ideas visually. *Descriptio* presents all of Aristotelian logic in a single, albeit plural image. The engraving consists of a large garden divided into two walled spaces surrounded by a

variety of different figures and a large multi-trunked tree at the top being revealed by a bearded figure on the right carrying a book, viz. Aristotle. On the left top, the medieval philosopher Duns Scotus is portrayed sitting at a table writing. The idea is that Aristotle first developed logic but that Scotus elucidated his meaning.

The architectural features of the etching stand for the different operations of the mind that are presented sequentially in the different segments of the work. The etching's lowest portion contains a representation of the acquisition of concepts in the first stage; moves on, in the second, higher one, to a depiction of the formation of propositions employing the terms acquired in the first; finally in the third stage shows the combination of propositions into syllogisms, the ultimate content of logic.

One question that arises is whether these broadsides are illustrations of Aristotle's philosophy or something more. To see that the latter is true, consider how the *Descriptio* presents the creation of a proposition (see illustration 31.1).

Two palm trees are shown with their branches entwined. Palm trees are dioecious, i.e. their male and female flower grow on different plants. At the time, it was thought that the trees reproduced by intertwining the branches of different sexed trees. The engraving includes a great deal of text, labeling the trunks of the two trees "noun" and "verb," in addition to giving further descriptions of their logical function. The image of these entwined trees creates a visual and biological analogy to the formation of propositions.

To what extent can we say that this etching is really *doing* philosophy rather than just illustrating it? Susanna Berger (2017) claims that this visual representation of a proposition is an advance over the typical textbook of the time's definition of a proposition as the sum of its two parts—noun and verb—because it shows that a proposition is a new unity created out of the two distinct parts. As such, the etching suggests the need for a philosophical account of propositions that explains how such unity is created.

This is an example of how these broadsides provide innovative visual representations of the elements of logic through a combination of text and image. In it, an image combines words and pictures to give rise to an idea—in this case of the *unity* that a proposition is—that is expressed visually. As such, *Descriptio* actually makes a contribution to the philosophical understanding of propositions that would have to wait for an explicit theorization until Kant's theory of judgment.

3 Early Modern Frontispieces of Philosophical Texts

Books published in Europe during the early modern period (roughly 1600–1800) often contained etchings as frontispieces. Generally, as in the case of Margaret Cavendish's *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (1668), the image is essentially a portrait of the book's author. (The engraving can be seen at <https://www.amazon.com/Natural-Philosophy-Margaret-Cavendish-Scientific/dp/0801894433>.) But in some cases, the engraving presents the reader with a visual interpretation of the main claims made by a philosophical text.

This is the case with Abraham Bosse's famous frontispiece for Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651). (The frontispiece can be viewed at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leviathan_\(Hobbes_book\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leviathan_(Hobbes_book)).) Bosse's image is striking and has often been thought to be a clear representation of claims Hobbes makes about the sovereign. However, the image itself has a number of different elements that are often neglected in interpreting its significance. In part, this is because the work, like *Descriptio*, is a plural image, and interpreters have failed to see how important this fact is to understanding it.

The most obvious element of Bosse's engraving is the large regal figure shown from the waist up in the upper half of the engraving. The figure has a crown on his head and carries a sword in

his right hand along with a bishop's crozier. The body of the colossus is made up of the bodies of many small human beings. He is poised over a landscape with a town in the foreground and a hilly landscape towards the rear. This figure is clearly the sovereign who, made up of his subjects, unites them into a single being that joins pastoral and religious powers.

However, the lower half of the engraving is also important to understanding the engraving's significance. It is divided into thirds. In the middle, the title and author of the book are specified. Both the left and right sides are divided into five small vertical panels. The left-hand images are all secular, while the right-hand ones are religious, and there is a correlation between the images. At the bottom, there is a battle scene on the left and a religious disputation of the sort in which the thesis prints like *Descriptio* might have been deployed. Immediately above them are the tools used in the two disputes, weapons of war and those of logic, respectively. A canon on the left is matched with thunderbolts on the right. Then come a crown and a bishop's miter. Finally, a castle is paired with a church.

How were these disparate elements of the print to be understood? If we follow the logic of the composite image we have just considered, we will realize that such plural images were meant to be viewed in a specific order, here from the bottom to the top. So, Bosse's image might be interpreted, beginning at the bottom of the two columns of images, as representing the process of generating the state out of the warring and disputing individuals shown in the bottom panels. The frontispiece attempts to visually represent a substantial generation, that is, the formation of a new substance out of its parts.

Berger suggests that we should see the *Leviathan* frontispiece as a depiction of substantial generation, with the substance that is generated being the commonwealth. As she puts it: "the sovereign, the soul of the commonwealth, functions to unify and animate the individual members, its matter, into a single body politic, transforming many into one" [Berger, p. 206]. When interpreted in this manner, the engraving does more than simply illustrate some of the central claims made by Hobbes about the sovereign, for it also provides a visual analogue for the book's argument concerning the generation of the state. By including all of this in a single visual image, Bosse has provided an illustration of a number of different aspects of Hobbes' claims in *Leviathan*.

Slightly more than a century later, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* (1979) included a set of engravings. As a young boy, Rousseau was apprenticed to an engraver. Although he was mistreated and ran away, his experience gave him expertise in the process of creating engravings. So, it's no surprise to find that many of his works include them, with his novel *Julie or the New Heloise* being the most lavishly illustrated. But the five engravings of his philosophical work *Emile* are the works that most clearly link a philosophical claim with a visual representation albeit in an unexpected manner.

Each of the five engravings included in the volume illustrates one of the books that make up *Emile*. Designed by Charles Eisen, each presents a scene from Greek mythology in which some type of education is taking place, which is not surprising given the thematic content of *Emile*. The first two engravings show scenes from Achilles' life; the third, a mythic scene involving Hermes writing scientific knowledge on a pillar; the fourth, depicts Orpheus singing of the gods to his fellow Greeks; and the fifth, Circe offering herself to Ulysses as his shipmates, transformed into pigs, look on.

Rousseau provides a title for each of the engravings—Thetis, Charon, Hermes, Orpheus, and Circe—that emphasizes the mythic figure doing the teaching rather than the narrative of the event depicted. This initially suggests that the viewer of the engravings should focus on the teacher or preceptor rather than the person being educated. In addition, each illustration also includes a reference to a page number of *Emile* in its top right corner, so that the attentive viewer of the engravings will refer to the text in order to see what passage Rousseau had in mind in order

to determine what the relationship between the engraving and the textual passage might be. Rousseau also provides brief “explanations of the illustrations,” though these are little more than descriptions of the scenes presented in the engravings.

Given Rousseau’s educational agenda, one might suspect that the engravings would present models of education drawn from Greek mythology. It turns out that, contrary to our expectations, the engravings illustrate *bad* educational practices that are examples of ways of treating the young that should be avoided.

Consider the first illustration. (It can be accessed at <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-jean-jacques-rousseau-l-mile-ou-de-l-ducation-thetis-plunging-achilles-83364862.html>.) It occurs opposite the title page of the first book of *Emile* and depicts the sea nymph Thetis dipping her son Achilles in the River Styx. That the title does not include a reference to Achilles is surprising, especially since it occurs in a book about the education of a young boy, Emile. So, the emphasis in the engraving is on Achilles’ mother, a fact stressed by Rousseau’s explication of the illustration: “The illustration, which relates to the first book and serves as a frontispiece to the work, represents Thetis plunging her son in the Styx to make him invulnerable” [Rousseau, 1979, p. 36].

Should we take Thetis’ attempt to make Achilles invulnerable as a model for what the education of Emile should aim at? As I have suggested, the answer is, “No.” Rousseau believes that invulnerability should not be the goal of education, for knowledge of danger is required for the valor that should be the goal of education. A modern-day Thetis, he suggests, should be concerned with their charge’s soul, not just their body. As he says, the goal should not simply be to preserve the *child*, i.e. keep the young boy alive, but to create the *man*, i.e. to make him into a person who has as much autonomy as a person can. This interpretation is confirmed by another comment that Rousseau makes that critically invokes Thetis’ attempt to render Achilles invulnerable. Late in book V, Rousseau tells Emile, “it is in vain that I have dipped your soul in the Styx; I was not able to make it everywhere invulnerable” [Rousseau, 1979, p. 443]. What Emile is vulnerable to are his own passions, particularly his love of Sophie. But what is significant from our point of view is Rousseau’s reinvocation of Thetis’ action, only this time transferring it from the literal dipping of Achilles in the Styx to a metaphoric assessment of Jean-Jacques’ rearing of Emile.

To generalize, the *Emile* engravings are works that present inappropriate models for educating the young. A viewer will thus approach Rousseau’s text aware of a view of education that Rousseau rejects, bringing into relief the central claims of his theory while functioning as tests for attentive readers, who are left to discern the educational errors depicted in the engravings. This use of engravings is, I believe, unique in the history of visual renderings of philosophy.

4 Philosophers Use Paintings to Explain Their Theories

The visual images we have considered so far were all designed in relation to philosophical texts that they were intended to illustrate. I now turn to independently existing works of art that philosophers have turned to in order to illustrate their own philosophical ideas.

I begin with Friedrich Nietzsche. In his first mature work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche tells the story of the wisdom of Silenus. Asked to say what the best is for human beings, Silenus replies: “The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach not to have been born, not to be, to be *nothing*. However, the second best thing for you is: to die soon” [Nietzsche, 1999, p. 23]. The grounds for Silenus’ claim are the suffering that he sees as the truth of human existence.

If we took Silenus’ claim to heart, there would be no reason to go on living. In order to find a reason to live, human beings need to create an optimistic worldview, one that makes life bearable in the face of the inevitability of suffering and frustration Silenus highlights. As a result, human beings have created an idealized world, according to Nietzsche, one that he identifies with the Greek God Apollo, the Sun God. This is the world of reason and rationality, one that is also

embodied in Christianity and that Nietzsche contrasts with a Silenus-inspired view that he conceptualizes by means of Dionysus, the Greek God of wine and revelry.

To bolster his argument, Nietzsche turns to a painting. His idea is that his readers will see the painting as supporting the ideas he has just articulated. If there are grounds to see the painting as independently presenting the distinction between the truth of the inevitability of suffering and the illusory optimism of human rationality, it will serve to support Nietzsche's claims.

The painting that Nietzsche invokes is *Transfiguration* (1516–1520) by Raphael (1483–1520). (This painting can be viewed at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transfiguration_\(Raphael\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transfiguration_(Raphael)).) This remarkable painting is composed of two scenes from the Bible. At the top, Jesus' transfiguration is shown as he appears floating towards heaven dressed all in white, flanked by Moses and Elijah. In the lower half of the painting, we see the Apostles trying to free a boy from his possession by the devil. This portion of the painting is very dark, standing in marked contrast to the light upper portion with Jesus at its center.

Nietzsche claims that the lower half of the picture represents "a reflection of the eternal, primal pain, the only ground of the world." From this dark, somewhat chaotic world, there arises the vision of "a luminous hovering in purest bliss and in wide-eyed contemplation, free of all pain" [Nietzsche, p. 26]. That is, the bifurcation of the painting itself reflects the distinction Nietzsche has drawn between the truth about human life and the illusion people have created to make life bearable.

Nietzsche thus uses this painting as an illustration of the dichotomy he creates between the Dionysiac and the Apollonian even though this cannot have been what Raphael attempted to show in his painting. What Nietzsche realizes is that the painting's depiction of the difference between earthly and heavenly existence can help him explain his own views about the nature of suffering and the creation of illusions, providing him with a means of getting his audience to literally see what he is driving at.

The second example of a philosopher who turns to a work of art in order to support their metaphysical view is Martin Heidegger. In his long and deceptively titled essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger is interested in understanding how art functions to reveal truth. Because he sees the human world as determined historically, Heidegger uses a number of examples from different time periods. The one that is most relevant to our purposes is Vincent Van Gogh's painting, *Shoes* (1886).³ (Van Gogh's painting can be seen at <https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection/s0011V1962>.) Heidegger identifies the shoes not as Van Gogh's, but as belonging to a peasant woman who has taken them off at the end of a long day of work. It's worth quoting his description of the painting at some length.

From out of the dark opening of the well-worn insides of the shoes the toil of the worker's tread stares forth. In the crudely solid heaviness of the shoes accumulates the tenacity of the slow trudge through the far-stretching and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lies the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. The shoes vibrate with the silent call of the earth, its silent gift of the ripening grain, its unexplained self-refusal in the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining worry as to the certainty of bread, wordless joy at having once more withheld want, trembling before the impending birth, and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the earth and finds protection in the world of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself.

[Heidegger, 2002, p. 14]

Van Gogh's painting gives us a clear visual image of some of Heidegger's central ideas about humans inhabiting a *world*. While the painting's manifest content is simply the two shoes,

Heidegger suggests that there is a much richer latent content to the painting, for the two shoes reveal the existence of an entire network of objects and attitudes that make up the world of the peasant. So, the worn nature of the shoes reveals the effort the peasant woman has to make in going to and from the fields, where she labors all day wearing those shoes. The shoes also call to mind the concerns the peasant woman has about the weather and having enough to eat, among other things.

Heidegger's use of the painting provides support for his conception of "world." As with many philosophical terms, Heidegger thinks that our usual understanding obscures a more profound meaning. Rather than seeing the world as "the sum of all existing entities," he takes human beings to inhabit worlds that embody aspects of their experience. Since his account of "world" in *Being and Time* is quite abstract, his use of *Shoes* to illuminate the world of the peasant woman provides us with significant information about how he understands this very fundamental concept, showing how one's world reflects features of one's social situation.

The final philosopher I will consider in this section of the chapter is Michel Foucault. Although Foucault wrote about a number of different artists,⁴ I only have space to consider his use of Velasquez's *Las Meninas* in his book *The Order of Things* (1970). (The painting can be seen at <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/las-meninas/9fdc7800-9ade-48b0-ab8b-edee94ea877f>.)

The Order of Things attempts to lay out two major transformations in our fundamental metaphysical assumptions, what Foucault calls an *episteme*. During the Renaissance, Foucault claims, the *episteme* is based upon the resemblance that things have to one another; during the Classical Age—roughly from 1600–1800—representation becomes fundamental; while in Modernity, it is organic structure that is paramount. Foucault's agenda is to show that "man" and the disciplines based upon that concept—the human sciences of biology, economics, and philology [Foucault, p. 345]—are only possible within the Modern *episteme*, so that its breakdown heralds, in Foucault's famous phrase, "the disappearance of man" [Foucault, p. 386].

Given this agenda, it might be surprising that Foucault begins his study with a long description and analysis of *Las Meninas*. Let's examine his reasons for doing so.

Las Meninas is a remarkable painting for many reasons, but Foucault is drawn to it because it shows us an artist in the process of painting a picture whose subject or model is not included in the painting. This is because Velasquez' painting only includes a portion of the reverse side of the canvas, thereby blocking our access to who the represented painter is painting. We viewers are standing in the place that would have been occupied by the person(s) the painter in the painting is painting. This gives our viewing of the painting an uncanny feeling. The fact that all the people in the painting—from the painter to the young princess and all of the assembled servants—are looking directly at the non-represented, and perhaps non-representable, subject standing in the very place that we viewers occupy further enhances the uncanniness of the experience of viewing the painting.⁵

Foucault uses the painting and its elision of the subject of the represented painting to illustrate his claims about the Classical *episteme*. The painting is self-referential in so far as it is a painting about painting and the nature of representation. Its uniqueness is that very elision. Here is how Foucault describes the content of the painting:

Perhaps there exists, in this painting by Velàzquez, the representation as it were, of Classical representation, and the definition of the space it opens up to us. And, indeed, representation undertakes to represent itself here in all its elements.... This very subject... has been elided. And representation, freed finally from the relation that was impeding it, can offer itself as representation in its pure form.

[Foucault, 1970, pp. 17–18]

Despite its initial tentativeness, this passage lays out Foucault's claims for the Velasquez painting: that it displays the nature of representation in the Classical period including the problems that will lead to its downfall, its inability to represent the subject of representation.⁶

The three philosophers I have discussed—Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Foucault—each use a painting to explain a central idea in their philosophical theories. They clearly believe that works of art can function to clarify philosophical ideas for those unfamiliar with them. In so doing, they use these paintings in ways that might diverge from the intentions of the artists who painted them. But this only supports the idea that art provides an important resource for the presentation and elucidation of philosophical ideas and theories.

5 Modernist Art as Philosophy

The examples of artworks that have been discussed so far do not actually make an independent contribution to philosophy but generally function as illustrations of philosophical ideas and theories. I now turn to a group of works that can arguably be seen as advancing philosophical claims and ideas. The works belong to the genre of *Modernist art*.

The theorist who first argued that works in this genre were philosophically significant was Clement Greenberg. In “Modernist Painting,” Greenberg characterizes Modernism as follows:

The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.

[Greenberg, 1966, 8]

How can actual paintings realize this Modernist perspective? To support his argument, Greenberg relies on Gotthold Lessing's contention in *Laocoön* (1962) that each art form is different from every other one in virtue of their mediums. In order to realize the possibility of being a Modernist art form, each form would have to rely only on those features of the medium that are unique to it.

Each art, it turned out, had to perform this demonstration [of the value and uniqueness afforded by that art] on its own account. What had to be exhibited was not only that which was unique and irreducible in art in general, but also that which was unique and irreducible in each particular art... The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thus would each art be rendered ‘pure’..."

[Greenberg, 1966, p. 1]

On this account, painting differs from other art forms in virtue of its mediums: a flat surface that is usually rectangular though sometimes round and that is covered in colored pigments. Manet is, for Greenberg, the first Modernist painter precisely because he rejects the illusionistic space that had been essential to Western painting since the Renaissance. In works like *Olympia* (1863), while retaining a representational structure, Manet eschews the creation of a deep, receding space—which painting shares, for example, with theater—in favor of a shallow space that is nearly identical with the plane of the canvas. (*Olympia* can be viewed at https://m.musee-orsay.fr/en/works/commentaire_id/zoom/olympia-7087.html.) In this way, Manet created a painting that emphasized the unique features of painting as an art form. It makes a significant contribution to the philosophical understanding of painting by presenting the flatness of the canvas as the essential feature of that art form.

Manet was not, of course, unique in his attempt to create a painting that relied on features that were unique to this art form. Greenberg's praise for Abstract Expressionists like Jackson Pollock is derived from what he saw as their radicalization of Manet's project, creating works that emphasized the flatness of the painted surface and rejected any privileging of one area of the canvas over another.

The philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto applied Greenberg's claims about the self-reflective nature of Modernist art to pop art. Danto saw Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* (1964) as a work of art that raised an important question about the nature of art. (To view *Brillo Box*, go to <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/81384>.) That work consists of a reproduction by Warhol of the cardboard carton containing individual boxes of Brillo soap pads. Using plywood and silkscreen, Warhol created a box that was, according to Danto, visually indistinguishable from the ordinary cartons widely found in the storerooms of grocery stores of the time.

What impressed Danto was *Brillo Box*'s creative and insightful manner of posing the philosophical question, "What makes something a work of art?" Whereas previous philosophers had proposed a variety of answers to this question—suggesting such notions as the accurate representation of reality, the conveying of an emotion, the use of significant form—none of them had seen that there was a deeper question: Why can one of two visually indistinguishable objects be a work of art while the other one is not?

Brillo Box raised this very question. It did so because it appeared to be visually indistinguishable from the ordinary grocers' cartons of Brillo pads. And yet, it was clearly a work of art, something displayed in a gallery and destined for a museum, which any ordinary carton would not be. The work is Modernist precisely because it uses the traditional methods of sculpture—it is three-dimensional and has painted surfaces—in order to raise questions about art, the sort of self-critical stance that Greenberg identified with Modernism.

Danto is clear that he takes Warhol to have produced works of art that are actually doing philosophy. As he says in his study of Warhol, "Much of modern aesthetics is more or less a response to Warhol's challenges, so in an important sense he really was doing philosophy by doing the art that made him famous" [Danto, 2009, p.135].

There are many other works of art, both paintings and sculptures, that fit the Greenbergian model for philosophical works of art. For example, Frank Stella challenged assumptions about the shape that a canvas had to have for it to be a painting. But rather than exploring more examples of such Modernist works, I turn now to a different type of philosophical artwork.

6 Illustrating Wittgenstein

Ludwig Wittgenstein is a philosopher who exerted a strong influence upon artists. There are varying explanations for this. One factor is certainly the aphoristic nature of his writing. Instead of having to work your way through a complex argument, you can get a sense of Wittgenstein's ideas by reflecting on the meaning of such pithy, aphoristic statements as "The world is all that is the case" [Wittgenstein, 1961, §1]. And such statements can be used in an art work in a way that a lengthy philosophical argument cannot be. The question that we will be considering is whether the uses to which Wittgenstein's ideas have been put by artists actually amount to doing philosophy through the visual arts.

I begin with a series of 12 screen prints made by the artist Eduardo Paolozzi during 1964 and 1965 entitled *As Is When: A series of screen prints based on the life and writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein*. Each of the prints has a separate title, often referring to Wittgenstein, and there are quotations from his writings and from Norman Malcolm's memoir of Wittgenstein that are usually placed at the edges of the image. For example, to choose a work that refers to a famous idea of Wittgenstein's, one print is called *He Must, So To Speak, Throw Away the Ladder* (February 1965)

(<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/paolozzi-as-is-when-65450/6>). The title is taken from *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein's only published work. The quotation from that book is given in English on the left edge of the print and in German on the right. It reads as follows in translation, with the paragraph numbers eliminated in the print:

6.54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

7 What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.

[Wittgenstein, 1961, p. 151]

Paolozzi's silkscreen has no obvious relation to this passage. On a maroon background, there are seven multi-colored irregular shapes that are reminiscent of ones from a jigsaw puzzle. They are colored with bands of green, red, blue, purple, and orange. Perhaps the idea is that the various propositions of the *Tractatus* are elements in a jigsaw puzzle that the reader/viewer needs to assemble and that, when they do so, the original propositions/shapes will merge into a single cohesive whole.

On such an interpretation, we can see the relationship between Wittgenstein's text and Paolozzi's silkscreen. Yet, the silkscreen does not provide any rationale for or explanation of Wittgenstein's claim. This is not to say that Paolozzi was not deeply influenced by his reading of Wittgenstein, only that his silkscreen does not make an independent contribution to the issue Wittgenstein discusses. The same holds, I believe, for the 11 other silkscreens in this series, as beautiful and intriguing as they are.

Bruce Nauman also was interested in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. In 1966 Nauman took a sentence from that book and rendered it as an embossed bronze plaque that was intended to be attached to a tree that would eventually cover it up. The sentence, "A rose has no teeth," is used by Wittgenstein in contrast to sentences whose truth or falsity can be determined empirically, such as "A goose has no teeth" or "a new-born child has no teeth" [Wittgenstein, 1953, II xi, p. 221]. While these latter two statements are true, it's not at all clear what the statement "a rose has no teeth" means. After all, as Wittgenstein says, where would the teeth on a rose be located? The sentence appears to be making a claim, but it is not at all clear what exactly that claim is.

Nauman's *A Rose Has No Teeth* (1966) (http://tonymay.net/works/other_content/sharkthorns3.html) uses Wittgenstein's sentence in order to criticize traditional sculpture. Despite being made of lead—a material known for its density and malleability—the work is meant to be covered over by the natural growth of the tree to which it is attached. Clearly, then, the work suggests a contrast between natural things and works of art. But whether it does anything to clarify Wittgenstein's claim about the statement itself seems doubtful.

Jasper Johns made a number of lithographs that include the image made famous by Wittgenstein of a duck-rabbit. This image is one that Wittgenstein uses as part of his discussion of what he terms "aspect seeing" [1953, II, xi, p. 193]. Wittgenstein wants readers to see that certain visual images—of the duck-rabbit in this case—are ambiguous and can be seen now as *this* and now as *that*. The same visual image can be interpreted in different ways: "But we can also *see* the illustration now as one thing now as another. —So we interpret it, and *see* it as we *interpret* it" [1953, II, xi, p. 193]. This discussion of the relationship between image and interpretation is one that clearly has significance for a visual artist.

It's not exactly a surprise that Johns reproduces a version of the image Wittgenstein used [1953, II, xi, p. 194], though he places it in contexts that are more specific than Wittgenstein's line-drawing.

For example, in his *Rabbit/Duck* (1990) (<https://www.incollect.com/listings/photos-prints/prints/jasper-johns-rabbit-duck-168136>), Johns places the image of the duck-rabbit drawn on a pink piece of fabric that is depicted as tacked onto an abstract image of swirling blue-black and white that is similar to other works by Johns.

Placed in the context of this work, Johns seems to be suggesting that what Wittgenstein called “aspect seeing”—now it’s a duck, then it’s a rabbit—is part and parcel of how we view art. When we look at the cloth with the duck-rabbit on it, we try to see it as an object represented by Johns, but the attempt keeps collapsing as we see the background as a flat abstract work. So, Johns could be using an image taken from Wittgenstein to make a work that is about the nature of art itself, a frequent topic in Modernist art as we saw in the last section.

Joseph Kosuth created works that demonstrate a deep philosophical engagement with Wittgenstein’s ideas. Consider, for example, 276. *On Color Blue* (1990) (accessible at <https://www.skny.com/news-and-events/joseph-kosuth-in-infinite-blue>).⁷ The work consists of neon tubing that emits blue light and that is formed into a quotation from the *Philosophical Investigations*:

‘But don’t we at least *mean* something quite definite when we look at a color and name our color impression?’ It is as if we detached the color impression from the object like a membrane. (This ought to arouse our suspicions.)

[Wittgenstein, 1953, §276]⁸

In the previous paragraph, Wittgenstein had been criticizing the philosophical temptation to treat color words like “blue” as referring to our private “inner sensations.” His undermining of this suggestion is part of the so-called “private language argument” in which he is said to contest the idea that there could be such a thing as a language that was limited to one speaker, or that the primary referent of linguistic terms like “blue” is our private inner experience of the color. He states that, when you look at the blue of the sky, “the idea never crosses your mind that this impression of color belongs only to *you*” (Wittgenstein, 1953, §276). *On Color Blue* certainly presents us with a version of the experience that Wittgenstein alludes to in his thought experiment and thus can be seen as an attempt to support his position about color words not referring to private internal sensations.

The passage that forms Kosuth’s work begins with the interlocutor responding to Wittgenstein’s claim. He still maintains, albeit quite vaguely, that there must be something to the idea of color sensations. To which Wittgenstein responds by saying that would be like treating a color as if it were a skin that could be detached from the object and that doesn’t make sense.

But would it make sense to see Kosuth’s neon sculpture as presenting us with the color blue detached from any physical object? It’s true that the words from *Philosophical Investigations* that are present in the work are created by the blue neon tubes, but there are no “objects” to which the blue attaches. Hasn’t Kosuth created a work that problematizes the notion of colors in a manner analogous to what Wittgenstein does in the passage that forms the work? If so, then he has produced an independent means for assessing Wittgenstein’s claim.

The artist whose engagement with Wittgenstein yields the philosophically most substantial works is Mel Bochner. His aim is to use visual means to support some of the claims that Wittgenstein makes in his posthumously published work, *On Certainty* (1969). The works in which Bochner attempts this are not just the twelve *Wittgenstein Illustrations* (1971) but also the various *Range Drawings* (1973–1979). I will focus on *Fourth Range* (1973) (<http://www.melbochner.net/archive/1970s/>) to illustrate the unique nature of Bochner’s achievement.⁹

As the title *On Certainty* suggests, Wittgenstein is interested in the question of whether we can know anything with certainty. This issue has dogged modern Western philosophy since the time of Descartes. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes opens his investigation by arguing

that we cannot know with certainty that any of our occurrent beliefs are true, so that we should reject all of them as doubtful.

Wittgenstein's response to this skeptical argument relies on the idea that the notion of deception or doubt is being used improperly: "One gives oneself a false picture of doubt," he tells us [Wittgenstein, 1969, §249]. The move from doubting a specific perceptual report—"The person across the quad is Jaime", for example—to doubting the senses as a whole—"We have no reason to believe in the existence of an external world"—is simply illegitimate. "A doubt that doubted everything would not be a doubt." [Wittgenstein, 1969, §450]

Wittgenstein's claim, one that bears similarity to the ideas of the pragmatists, is that doubt only arises in specific situations. Universalizing the doubt that arises in a specific situation into a generalized doubt of everything, as Descartes does, is an error, Wittgenstein maintains. The reason that Wittgenstein gives to justify his claim that hyperbolic doubt is not possible is that something can be judged to be a mistake, an error, only in the context of a rule.

Bochner sets out to demonstrate the validity of Wittgenstein's argument by creating what we might call an original "number game" on analogy with the Wittgensteinian notion of a language game. A careful investigation of *Fourth Range* reveals that the image was created by applying a set of rules that specify how number should be arranged on the paper, its "syntax" in Wittgensteinian terms. The numerals from 0 to 9 are written in a vertical sequence with all the numerals written in red. At the end of the sequence, the sequence is repeated again, only this time the color is changed to black. This alternating sequence continues until the end of the column is reached. At this point, the sequence continues at the top of the page, but the color changes mid-sequence. This continues until a point is reached where the final numeral in a column is 9. A new "block" begins with a new sequence of numerals. (I'm simplifying a little here. For a more complete discussion see my [2023].)

So far so good. But a careful observation of *Fourth Range* reveals the presence of an "error." In the fifth column of the fourth block, the black sequence above the final red one ends with an 8 and not a 9 (see illustration 31.2).

This counts as a *mistake* because it violates the rules used to create the work—its "grammar." Only by becoming aware of the implicit grammatical rules for constructing *Fourth Range*, can a viewer recognize the 8 as the error it is.

The reason that Bochner's work moves beyond the others equally indebted to Wittgenstein's thought is that it provides an independent ground for accepting Wittgenstein's criticism of Cartesian skepticism. Wittgenstein argues that the skeptic misuses the notion of doubt and Bochner's piece shows us exactly why Wittgenstein is correct to assert that doubt only arises in specific contexts, so that the hyperbolic doubt necessary for skepticism involves a misunderstanding of the grammar of "doubt."

This examination of works of art indebted to Wittgenstein shows the range of significance such pieces have. Although some of them merely call attention to the ideas of the great philosopher, others provide insights into his views and even support his claims. A work of art can qualify as doing philosophy when it provides independent support for a view articulated by a philosopher such as Wittgenstein.

7 Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to explore a variety of ways in which visual art has been used—by artists, professors, and philosophers—to connect with philosophical claims and theories. We have seen a variety of different mediums—engravings, paintings, sculptures—employed in the attempt to illustrate philosophical ideas and theories. A few of the works I have discussed move

beyond illustrating a philosophical claim or theory to actually making a distinct and distinctive contribution to the field of philosophy.

I make no claims to this chapter being an exhaustive survey of philosophical paintings and sculptures. Rather, it is intended to mark out territory that calls out for further development by philosophers and art critics. More than that, it shows that philosophers, art critics, and artists themselves have seen visual art as a way of addressing the very philosophical concerns that animate the canonical texts of philosophers from Aristotle to Wittgenstein.¹⁰

Notes

- 1 See Wartenberg (2007) for a discussion of film as a source of philosophical insight and knowledge and Nussbaum (1992) for one about literature.
- 2 I want to thank Alexander George and Joe Moore for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.
- 3 Van Gogh painted a number of paintings of shoes. The one that Heidegger is referring to is presumably the one now in the collection of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, <https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection/s0011V1962?v=1>. Heidegger's interpretation was challenged by Meyer Schapiro in a series of articles. See Shapiro (1968).
- 4 Foucault's most extensive discussion of a visual artist is his book on the surrealist painter René Magritte, *This Is Not a Pipe*.
- 5 Foucault does not discuss an important element of the painting: the inclusion of a small mirror on the back wall showing the presence of the actual subjects of the painting, the king and queen.
- 6 For an interpretation of *Las Meninas* that contradicts Foucault's, see Svetlana Alpers, "Interpretation without Representation," *Representations*, 1, 30–42.
- 7 Different instances of the work have different dates. 1990 is the earliest and 1993 the latest I could find.
- 8 I have inserted the quotation marks that are in the German text but were omitted from the English translation.
- 9 Limitations of space prohibit me from discussing the actual *Wittgenstein Illustrations* themselves. But see Wartenberg (2015) for a discussion of them that highlights their philosophical implications.
- 10 For a more complete discussion of philosophical works of art, see Wartenberg (2023).

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32

PITTURA

A Gendered Template for Painting

Peg Brand Weiser

Why is painting unique among the visual arts? And why in the late 16th century did Cesare Ripa in his landmark *Iconologia* choose to create a distinctly female template for the act of painting? Moreover, why would a woman ever choose to paint herself as *La Pittura (The Allegory of Painting)*?¹

This essay will offer the thoughts of a painter-philosopher on the historic significance of the choice of topic, iconography, and gender of the most recognized allegory of painting, namely the original textual description of the Italian writer Cesare Ripa on Pittura (1593) which was later illustrated by various artists (1603 and following). Subsequent versions of Ripa's *Iconologia* were published by French, Dutch, and British translators. Artists and writers kept copies on hand for reference. It remained wildly popular and influential until the 19th century when art critic and historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann derided Ripa's allegories as "virtually useless" and published a rival work (Zimmermann 1995: 19). Through numerous editions, collaborative illustrators may have changed or embellished the template but they consistently depicted Pittura as a woman, pictured with symbolic attributes of an artist, faithful to Ripa's initial description.

The allegorizing of painting as a female artist plays an important role in legitimizing and valorizing actual self-portraits by women in ancient Greece and Rome, the Renaissance, and thereafter, leading to issues that involve identity and agency. I will argue that in a patriarchal art world that minimized women's accomplishments, (1) the valorizing of Pittura served to encourage women to paint and to portray themselves in art; (2) painting oneself as Pittura elevated an artist and her creative work to an iconic and allegorical level equal to male artists who were denied such self-representation; and (3) the valorizing of painting-as-allegory prioritized the physical action of painting and served to elevate a mode of creating that facilitated women's agency. The history of painting reveals ancient roots of gendered creativity as recorded by Pliny the Elder, Ripa's influential publication in 1593, and high levels of achievement by at least one notable Baroque artist in contrast to a diminishing of women's influence in favor of men's art: a norm that has internalized male privilege and power for centuries. Yet painting remains a medium that emphasizes women's talents, particularly as they are embodied in the depiction of the allegorical female figure, Pittura.

1 History of Women Painting/Portraiture

It is well-documented that artistically productive women were routinely dismissed as irrational, emotional, and incapable of serious creative output. Decades of feminist art history have chronicled their struggle (Borzello 1998; Chadwick 1990; Cheney, Faxon and Russo 2000). As far back

as 1971, the late art historian Linda Nochlin authored the pivotal essay entitled, “Why have there been no great women artists?” to unearth the elusive reasons for the paucity of female artists in standard art history texts, museum collections, and general art discourse (Nochlin and Grant 2021). In spite of centuries of challenge to their credibility, many women prevailed in producing images and artworks, including self-portraits (Higgle 2021; Reddeal, Chadwick and Borzello, 2002).

Although the first documented male self-portrait has been dated to 1300 BC in Egypt, “no examples from early antiquity have survived that can be identified with certitude as self-portraiture” of women until the Hellenistic era (400–315 BC) that include records of women artists and their self-portraits (Cheney, Faxon and Russo 2000: 1). A mural painting from a Roman villa at Herculaneum dating before the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 pictured “Marcia in Her Studio” seated in front of two female pupils, painting a male statue, complete with palette in her left hand and paintbrush in her right (Cheney, Faxon and Russo 2000: 11). In the 12th century, Claricia playfully drew herself hanging from the bottom of the letter Q in a German psalter from Augsburg (Borzello 1998: 21). Numerous miniatures from an early 15th century French translation of Boccaccio’s *Concerning Famous Women* (alternately titled, *Noble and Famous Women*) often posed a woman surrounded by painting implements, seated at a work desk, looking into a circular mirror positioned to the left of the panel on which she painted (Borzello 1998: 20). One example from a 1470 edition of Boccaccio’s *Noble and Famous Women* even provided an updated version of “Marcia Painting Her Self-Portrait in her Atelier” (Cheney, Faxon and Russo 2000: 11). What inspired these women to depict themselves as artists?

The writings of Pliny the Elder play an essential role in understanding their history. In his 1st-century AD work, *Naturalis Historiae* (*Natural History*), Book 35, on the history of art, Pliny recorded the names of women famous in both the visual arts and in poetry based on considerable evidence; most were allegedly married, trained by their fathers who were artists, maintained an academy-like following of students, and created self-portraits (Cheney, Faxon and Russo 2000: 7). They used a type of encaustic paint—powdered colored pigment mixed with hot wax applied with an iron knife or a type of spoon-palette—on linen, wooden panel, or ivory by means of several tedious and costly techniques. Not until the 5th century BC was color applied with a brush (*penicillo*) to a painting that rested on an easel, facilitating the process. An early S-curve of the painted human figure was attributed to Aristarete of Calypso, a well-known and famed Athenian painter during the end of the 3rd century BC. The subject matter of her work entitled, “A Mother Assisting Her Daughter’s Toilet,” helped popularize a theme derived from sculpted depictions of the goddess Venus at her toilet while allowing her the opportunity to include herself in the scene (Cheney, Faxon and Russo 2000: 7–8).

The female artists of Pliny’s text were said to successfully work under the royal patronage of Alexander the Great creating portraits, mythological scenes, and genre paintings for the court. Importantly, his account confined women’s artistic production in antiquity to painting, excluding sculpture: “probably because it was less heavy work than casting in bronze, carving in marble or modeling in clay” (Cheney, Faxon and Russo 2000: 9). One woman in particular, Athenagoras Kora of Sicyonia (or Callirhoë), was said to have played a pivotal role in the development of portraiture as a genre as far back as the 7th century BC. With a piece of coal, she sketched a profile of her lover’s face that cast a shadow upon the wall, as he prepared to leave for war. Her father, a potter named Dibutades, filled in the outline with clay, thus creating the first bas-relief (Cheney, Faxon and Russo 2000: 10). Pliny considered this to be the first portrait, indeed one *created by a woman*, as he outlined two types of artistic creativity: *intuitive* or *invention*, as with the original coal sketch created by Kora, and *reasoned* or *mimetic* which he considered imitation, as of that executed by her father (Cheney, Faxon and Russo 2000: 10–11). This distinction, particularly the role of imitation, is essential to Ripa’s characterization of *Pittura* 22 centuries later and recalls the early aesthetic nuances of imitation elaborated upon by Plato in his many writings as well. It is clear

that the writings of Pliny written six centuries after Plato's dialogues in *The Republic* established two clear trends: first, painting was the primary—perhaps the only—medium utilized by women in the ancient world of artistic production, and second, legend held that a woman created the first portrait in an intuitive and inventive, i.e., non-imitative act of creativity. The first accords high status to painting, whereas the second accords high status to a woman. Let us look at how painting—the act of painting and the painting of women's (self-) portraits by women became elevated to the allegorical figure of Pittura and enshrined through at least nine Italian editions, eight non-Italian (French, Dutch, and English), as well as an Austrian, Russian, and even a Slavonic edition (Zimmermann, 1995: 20).

2 Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1593; 1603; 1618)

Cesare Ripa was born c. 1555 in Perugia, knighted by Pope Clement VIII in 1598, and died January 22, 1622 in Rome. While working in his thirties as a cook and a butler, referred to more specifically as a *trincianti*—one who carved meat for important guests at meals—or a major-domo to the household of Cardinal Anton Maria Salviati (died 1602), he wrote *Iconologia* in his spare time and dedicated it to his employer (McGrath 2003/2010: 1; Venable 2008: 16). According to Hans-Joachim Zimmermann who has written extensively on Ripa's enormous impact on writers, poets, and artists, “Ripa wanted to offer not just a heap of somewhat broken images but a description and explanation of universal pictures which were accessible to any educated man” (Zimmermann 1995: 17). These “universal pictures”—or as they were later called “moral emblems” in the first English translation by Tempest Pierce in 1709—were derived from classical sources—Egyptian, Greek, Roman—as well as bestiaries and fairy tales or simply created from his imagination.

The original slim octavo (unillustrated) volume published in 1593 was titled, *Iconologia: ouero, Descrittione di diuise imagini cauate dall'antichità, & di propria inuentione* (*Iconology: Wherein are Express'd, Various Images of Virtues, Vices, Passions, Arts, Humours, Elements and Celestial Bodies*) (Ripa 1593). The title page noted the volume's usefulness for “Orators, Poets, Painters, Sculptors, and all Lovers of Ingenuity.” All entries—such as strength, eloquence, magnanimity, despair, friendship—were listed alphabetically. The illustrated 1603 version “became the standard handbook throughout Europe until the end of the 18th century” (Ripa 1603a; Zimmermann 1995: 17)). Ripa's Introduction, “Where in general is treated of diverse forms of figures with their ground Rules,” explains the conceptualizing of the terms, highlighting the number of human figures—male, female, child—that use the “Art of painting” to convey “essential” natures adapted from figures of both the gods and man (Ripa 1603b: British Library Ms. 3). From the beginning, the creative act of painting becomes codified, indeed allegorized as a woman in an uplifting and enduring way, affecting artists of both genders differently for centuries to come. Why is Pittura cast as female? According to one scholar, “Because abstract concepts were gendered feminine in Latin and Greek, humanists represented allegorical personifications such as ‘Painting’ as a woman” (Woodall 2005: 26–27). But some terms such as Soccorso (Rescue, Relief), Peccato (Pity, Sin, Shame), and Zelo (Zeal) are gendered masculine and represented as male figures beginning in 1603. The overwhelming number, however, is gendered feminine. Painting (pictured on the left of the 1603 frontispiece) is creatively contrasted to Poetry, also feminine, and conceptualized—as elaborated below—in terms of similarities and overlapping natures of Beauty, Art, and Perfection (Figure 32.1).

One interesting figure to study before proceeding to Pittura within the text is the concept and figure of Bellezza (Beauty) mentioned in the Introduction and found on page 41 of the 1603 text. Since many other feminine figures begin with the descriptor, “A beautiful woman,” it is important to know how Ripa characterized both the concept of beauty as well as a human figure representing beauty. His creative imagination does not disappoint as he writes, “Wherfore we have painted beauty, in her place, with her head in the clouds and with other

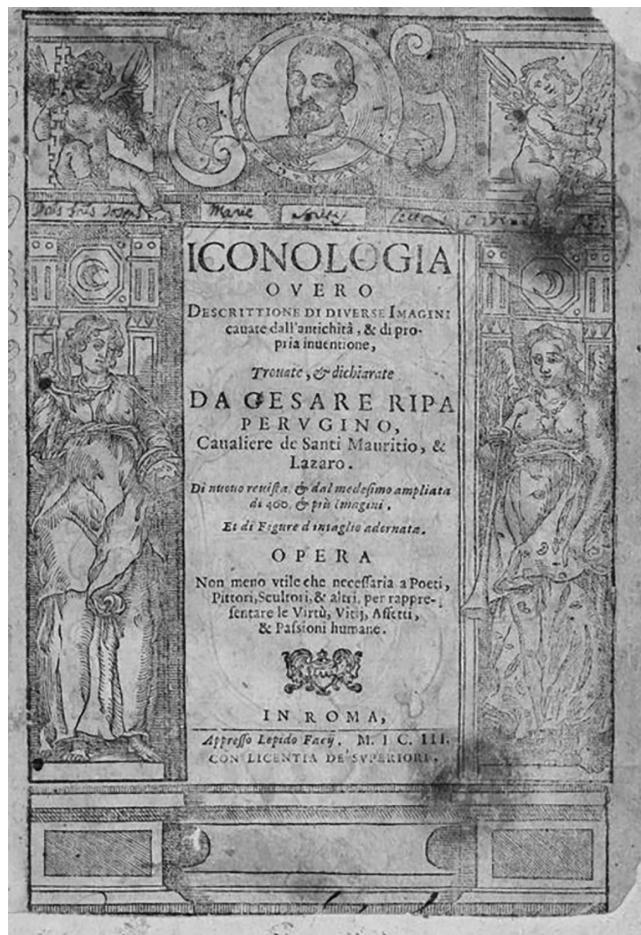


Figure 32.1 Cesare Ripa, frontispiece of *Iconologia*, 1603 edition

fitting circumstances” in order to capture her “essential qualifications” (Ripa 1603b: British Library Ms. 7) (Figure 32.2).

The visual challenge is palpable as Ripa continues in his attempt to qualify how she looks. He makes analogies to other terms, e.g., despair is depicted by one who hangs himself by the throat while delight, pleasure, and mirth “must be painted beautiful, wanton, fresh colored and laughing” (Ripa 1603b: British Library Ms. 7). The difficulty with painting Beauty is her unchangeableness, splendor, and perfection. Ripa’s figure attempts to “depict an unknown, by a less known thing: as if we would light a candle to behold the sun directly, so that the figure should have no likeness which is yet the soul of it” (Ripa 1603b: British Library Ms. 7). In the text itself, a nude Bellezza is gendered female, tilts with classical contrapposto stance, holds a lily that represents female charm with one hand and a ball and a compass in the other “to demonstrate that all beauty consists of measures and proportions, which are adjusted with time” (Ripa [1593]: 1764–1767). (One scholar claims that the first illustrator of the 1603 version failed to follow Ripa’s entry and incorrectly depicted her naked, in conformity with more typical Renaissance practice (McGrath [2003] 2010: 1.) The 16th-century Renaissance ideal of beauty was inherited from Plato, the Neo-platonists, Vasari, and others and involved a female figure

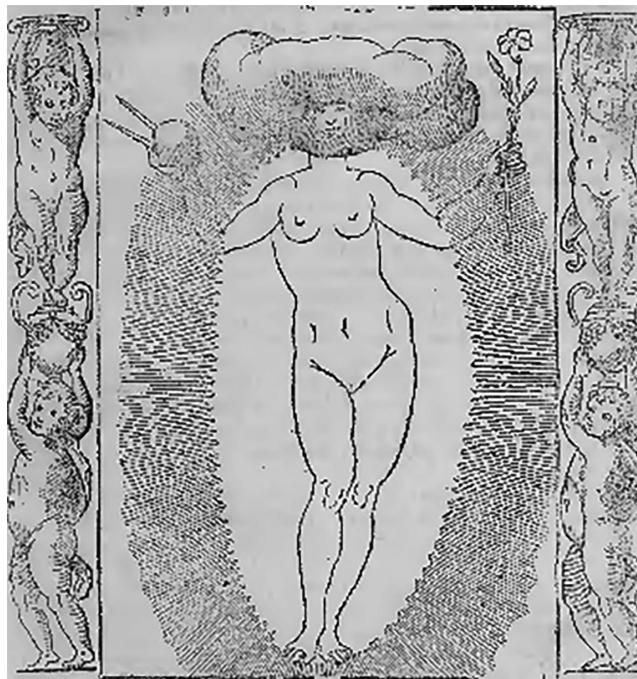


Figure 32.2 Cesare Ripa, "Bellezza," 1603 version

Characterized by a deportment that is erect and composed, with any curves or bends confined to the movement of the arms... a kind of movement that combined the gentlest appearance of animation and life with a simplicity indicative of inner virtue.

(Fermor: 128)

Beauty's head is in the clouds because beauty is difficult to define but clearly, artists did not follow this suggestion from Ripa, since beauty is not normally depicted as such. Her essence is an inner virtue composed of grace, modesty, nobility, and charm, according to Firenzuola's *Dialogue on the Beauties of Women* from 1541. Her beauty comes from a “‘mysterious’ order in Nature that the human intellect cannot begin to fathom” (Cole: 128). Ripa justifies how Bellezza is depicted and adds a comment about one's personal reward at the end of the contemplative process:

To make then, the likeness and action, what in every object is fittest and becoming, we shall take notice of what the Rhetorici or orators warn us: vis, that by known things we must seek the high things—by Laudible, the Illustrious; by despised, the foul or base; by commendable, the splendorous. From which things, every one will see such a multitude of imaginations increase in his understanding, if he be not too stupid.

(Ripa 1603b: British Library Ms. 7–8)

By making numerous virtues (such as beauty), vices, passions, arts, and so forth, available to the public in his published *Iconologia*, therefore, Ripa's “universal pictures” are accessible by everyone with active and intelligent imaginations. Moreover, one learns about the ineffability of beauty, increasing one's understanding of her power and potential, and why other female figures such as Pittura are often described first as “a beautiful woman” before Ripa continues with particular traits.

Ripa provided a vivid textual description of Pittura but in neither of his first two editions did he offer an internal illustration, not even in the second edition of 1603 which was published with 684 concepts and 150 woodcuts. Here is what Ripa deemed the “universal picture” of Pittura:

Woman, beautiful, with black hair, and thick, scattered, and twisted in various ways, with arched eyelashes, showing fantastic thoughts; cover the mouth with a band tied behind the ears, with a gold chain around the neck, from which a Mask hangs, and has Imitatio written on her forehead. She will hold the Brush in one hand, and in the other the panel, with the iridescent cloth covering her feet, and at the foot of it some instruments of Painting can be made, to show that Painting is a noble exercise, not being able to do without much application of the intellect.

(Ripa [1593] 1764–1767)

Ripa goes on to say that all of the professions, i.e., the arts, rely upon intellect but in different ways. For instance, poetry demands more of its practitioners in terms of intellect by which we “see” through reason and words whereas painting imitates nature through deception, making one see or “understand” through the senses. Painters need to imitate real things utilizing their imagination and if the imitations embody beauty, they become noble, aspire towards perfection, and provide pleasure. When attending to a “subtle investigation of minimal things in themselves,” the Painter “easily acquires wonder and melancholy;” wonder is indicated by the arched eyebrows and melancholy is defined as a vague, calm, and sometimes sweet sadness (Ripa [1593] 1764–1767). For Ripa, the “good Painter” is continuously thinking imaginatively about nature, as evidenced even by the artist’s hair described in detail as

hirsuti, and scattered overhead, and in different parts, with rings, which appear to be produced by neglect, because these arise externally from the head, as inside thoughts are born, and ghosts, which are means as to speculation, so again to material works.

(Ripa [1593]: 1764–1767)

Consider another translation offered by curators of the British Royal Collection, slightly different from above:

A beautiful woman, with full black hair, disheveled, and twisted in various ways, with arched eyebrows that show imaginative thought, the mouth covered with a cloth tied behind her ears, with a chain of gold at her throat from which hangs a mask, and has written in front ‘imitation.’ She holds in her hand a brush, and in the other the palette, with clothes of evanescently covered drapery.

(Whitaker, Clayton and Loconte 2007: 301)

In both versions, Ripa retains an essential element of “fantastic thoughts” or “imaginative thought” for Pittura—clearly an extension of Pliny’s notion of “intuitive” and “inventive,” i.e., a non-imitative, creative act—but then insists on a hanging mask with an inscription of the word “imitation.” It is not always clear, however, where the word “imitation” should appear. One suggestion is that “Ripa advised that mute Pittura should have the word IMITATIO inscribed on her forehead” while the hanging medallion represents the traditional pendant awarded by the royal patron (Woodall 2005: 27). The disheveled hair of the female artist invokes the non-reasoned mode of artistic creativity that separated daughter from (reasoned) father in the ancient Pliny myth; we are reminded of Plato’s insistence on divine inspiration in *The Ion* that strikes a similar note that was often repeated by the Neo-Platonists in 15th-century Florence.



Figure 32.3 Cesare Ripa, “Poesia,” 1603 version

In accordance with the ancient distinction between art and poetry, as Larry Shiner observes, we see “a gagged mouth symbolizing the ancient saying that painting is ‘mute poetry’” (Shiner 2001: 57). Painting is opposed to the oral act of reciting poetry since Poesia is another allegorical figure visually offered to us by Ripa. She is depicted in splendid raiments, covered with stars, accompanied by a long slender horn and a stringed instrument like a cello (Figure 32.3). She may be accompanied by three winged children who present the instruments to her and represent pastoral, lyric, and heroic poetry. She clearly appears, opposite Pittura on the frontispiece of the Dutch version of *Iconologia* (below), assuming main stage position in the 1644 translation.

It is worth noting that there is no entry for Sculpture in Ripa’s original or subsequent editions. However, the term appears in the 18th-century translation of Abbot Cesare Orlandi (1764–1767) and is gendered masculine: a young man, beautiful with a simple headdress, a pleasant but not ornate face, who is, like Painting, consumed with thoughts of nature and its imitation. Orlandi includes a sense of touch to describe sculpture, by way of arguing that sculpture is both the object of the “Eye” and tactile experience. The work of Michelangelo Buonarroti is cited and Orlandi adds that painting is the superior art form over sculpture “in that which belongs to the eye for the use of colors, lights, and shadows” (Ripa [1593] 1764–1767). Perhaps Ripa did not include a description of sculpture in his late 16th and early 17th-century versions of *Iconologia* in order to feature Painting as superior, particularly as he often cited the use of colors for effect and emphasized certain colors chosen for symbolic meaning even in his first unillustrated edition of 1593. Pittura wore “iridescent cloth” while Poesia was “dressed in celestial blue, over which there will be many stars” (Ripa [1593] 1764–1767).

3 1644 Dutch Translation by Dirck Pietersz

The 1644 Dutch version of *Iconologia* translated by Dirck Pietersz with 196 engravings by Christoph Jegher includes two that follow Ripa’s directions to the letter (Ripa [1593] 1644) (Figure 32.4).



Figure 32.4 Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia of Uytbeeldinghen des Verstants*, vertaald door Dirck Pietersz. Pers, Amsterdam 1644

This visual template of Pittura on the right of the frontispiece embodies the qualities Ripa laid down: a beautiful woman, mouth covered, painting tools in hand, ample flowing gown, wearing a human mask around her neck. We do not see disheveled hair, however, and we might question whether her arched eyebrows hint at or indeed “show imaginative thought.” Even her depiction as “a beautiful woman” is suspect, at least to our eyes in the 21st century, as her legs seem more appropriate to a Roman soldier or the sculpted “Michelangelesque” figure of Night adorning the 16th-century Medici tomb in the Church of San Lorenzo in Florence (Nelson 2002: 469). The influence of Michelangelo, who expanded both the range of body types and the ideals of physical female beauty, is clearly on display, once we appreciate the largesse of Jegher’s Pittura (Figure 32.5).

Michelangelo’s use of enhanced musculature in marble is but one way he depicted the ideal beauty of women; “Michelangelo aimed to go beyond nature, and in doing so, he helped create a



Figure 32.5 Christoph Jegher. Detail of 1644 frontispiece

new way to show female (and male) figures. This type of powerful woman reveals the artist's great imagination" (Nelson 2002: 468). We know from the artist's writings that the figure of Night—nude and reclining—was meant to embody not only the end of day but also the passing of time, aging, and death. Given that two Medici dukes are buried in the tomb, the artist sought to depict the cycle of life by completing the series of sculptures in addition to *Night* with the contrasting male figure of *Day* and the youthful, female *Dawn* and its contrasting male figure *Dusk*. One contemporary commented that artworks "made by Michelangelo compete with nature and reality; they seem to strive to be of equal or even superior beauty" (Nelson 2002: 468). His influence on succeeding artists was considerable; at least two 16th-century artists testified to his mastery of female norms of beauty. One sculptor, Giovan Francesco Susini created measured drawings—representing *Night* as standing—so that other artists could study and copy her proportions and another, Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, wrote down criteria for a range of female body types referred to as Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian (Nelson 2002: 469). Whereas the elongated, feminine, sexualized beauty of the Corinthian "type" was associated with the ancient goddess Venus, the "solid" Doric type "could be used for both men and women, expressing 'great severity and presence'... and thus should be used for representations of Mother Earth or of Sibyls" (Nelson 2002: 469). Lomazzo

specifically referred to *Night* as Doric, thus casting her as a paradigm of strength, skill, and knowledge: one of “those special women, like warriors and hunters, or matrons or other severe women” (Nelson 2002: 468). Similarly, Jegher’s Pittura as influenced by Michaelangelo’s Doric body type and strong character is definitely in control of her craft, caught in the act of painting, in her studio amidst canvases. We cannot see what is on her easel and in fact, she does not appear within the printed volume itself; rather her importance lands her opposite Poesia on the frontispiece to represent the visual, unwritten arts versus that of the written.

Once viewers understand the stylistic context of why Pittura looks so muscular, we might surmise that the masculine-looking beauty of Pittura is anti-feminine, butch, or perhaps more representative of an extreme Doric body type. If so, this expands the range of ideal beauty options even more than Michelangelo may have intended although to describe the Doric type of body for both men and women invites a comfortable gender fluidity in bodily depiction. Looking back to the way beauty was originally personified—pictured nude, radiant, with her head in the clouds—is helpful at this juncture. Since “beauty” was basically left undefined and open-ended, with Ripa explicitly endorsing imaginative speculation by encouraging multiple representations of beauty, those large, muscular female artists exhibiting inner strength and resolve of the 1644 woodcut version of Pittura can qualify as examples of Ripa’s original notion of “imaginative thought.” Pittura again stands next to Poesia; together they represent the major arts.

4 *Iconologia, or Moral Emblems* translated by Tempest Pierce. 1709

Consider three other depictions, not of Pittura herself who is missing from the 1709 (first) English translation by Tempest Pierce entitled, *Iconologia, or Moral Emblems*, that contains a total of 326 figures but rather of the related figures Art, Beauty, and Perfection (Ripa [1593] 1709). The figures in Pierce’s translation were attributable to several artists, each of which employed a motif of “etched oval medallions in the style of late 17th-century mannerism... highly original and well executed” but based loosely on woodcuts in an Italian Ripa edition (Zimmermann 1995: 22) (Figure 32.6).

Art (Emblem 28) is described by Pierce in much the way Pittura was originally cast: standing, fully clothed, holding the tools of her trade, with ample, flowing drapery.

An agreeable Woman, seems to be *ingenious* by her very Looks, in a green Gown; in her right Hand a Hammer, an engraving Tool, and a Pencil; holding in her left Hand, a Stake that supports a Vine.

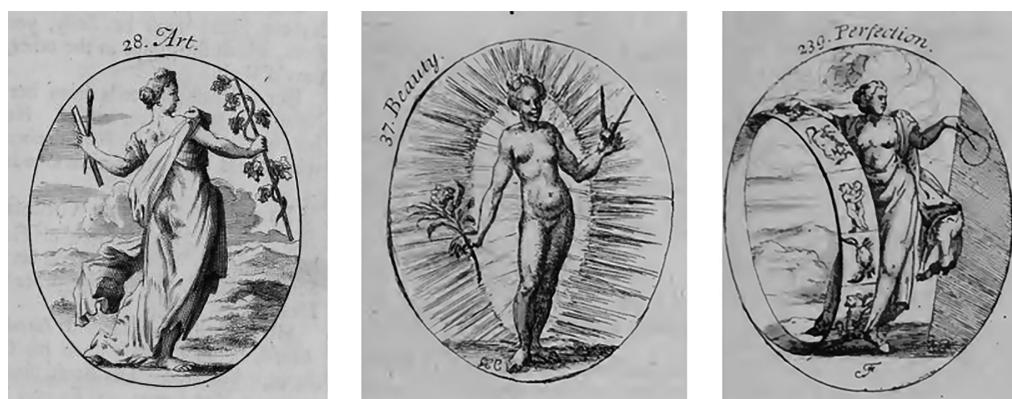


Figure 32.6 Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia, or Moral Emblems*. Tempest Pierce edition. London, 1709

The agreeable Countenance declares the *Charms of Art*, attracting all Eyes upon it, and causing the author to be *approv'd* and *commended*. The three instruments are for intimating *Nature*.

(*Ripa* [1593] 1709: 7)

She is not, however, called beautiful but rather only “an agreeable woman” who “seems to be *ingenious* by her very Looks” even though she is shown with her back to us. What is intimated by our translator, Tempest Pierce, is that what we see does not necessarily guarantee who she is since she only *seems* to be ingenious but possibly, is not. Moreover, she is merely “ingenious”—resourceful and cunning—not replete with fantastic or imaginative thoughts as she once was. Further suspicion is cast upon Art because her agreeable countenance—how she looks, not necessarily her true, essential nature—is tied to neither skill nor strength but rather to “the Charms of Art,” whatever those powers might be. Her stature has diminished considerably since 1644 when Jegher’s depiction of her followed Michelangelo’s dictates of both ample Doric proportions and inner strength of character, determination, and skill.

Also depicted is Beauty (37) who is once again depicted nude and radiant as in Ripa’s 1603 edition but in this translation, beauty serves no purpose for art or perfection since neither figure is described as beautiful:

A lady hiding her Head in the Clouds, and the rest of her Body is scarce visible, by reason of the Splendour that environs her. She stretches one Hand out of the Light, with a Lilly, and holds out a Ball and Compass with the other.

Her Head in the Clouds shows that nothing is more *impossible* to be *declar'd*, nor thing *less known*, being a Ray of Divinity. The Lilly denotes *Beauty*, the Ball and Compass denote that Beauty consists in *Measure* and *Proportion*. The Flower *moves* the Senses, and *recreates* the *Spirits*; so does Love *move* the Soul to Enjoyment.

(*Ripa* [1593] 1709: 10)

And finally, Perfection (Emblem 239) emphasizes the importance of measurements and the perfect form, the circle, but like Art, fails to exhibit beauty and in effect, becomes a servant to others, a nurturer:

A fair lady, in a Vest of Gold Gauze; her Bosom is unveil'd; her Body is in the Zodias; her Sleeves turn'd up to the Elbow, making a perfect Circle with the left Hand.

The Golden Robe denotes *Perfection*; the naked Breast, the chifest Part thereof to *nourish* others. The Circle, the most *perfect* Figure in the Mathematics.

(*Ripa* [1593] 1709: 60)

Studying the differences between the ways that the omission of Pittura influences the ways that art, beauty, and perfection are portrayed provides fascinating insights into a deeper analysis of the female personification of Painting in the year 1709 compared to earlier versions. In all three cases, these women remain standing and appear capable of acting. They are not posed erotically, nor do they invite the masculine gaze of desire and possession, but they are not really active and agentic. They pose, rather than do something. Art holds a paintbrush by which to paint while Beauty and Perfection hold instruments to measure their own bodies against an ideal of female physicality, but they pose, rather than act. They seem to lose the conviction to act; one can literally see the loss of self-confidence and strength. They have become frozen emblems—recall the title “Iconologia or Moral Emblems” adapted by Tempest Pierce—that reduce the creative and moral power of art, beauty, and perfection, and erases painting altogether.



Figure 32.7 Artemisia Gentileschi. *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting (La Pittura)*. c. 1638–1639. Oil on canvas. 98.6 × 75.2 cm. Royal Collection Trust

5 Artemisia Gentileschi's *La Pittura* (1638–1639)

Finally, let us consider a noted female artist posed as Ripa's allegory of painting while she herself paints (herself) (Figure 32.7). There is perhaps no artist who more aptly internalized the guidelines set down by Ripa for Pittura than the successful Baroque painter, Artemisia Gentileschi, who also produced highly creative portraits of historical women such as Susanna, Lucretia, and Judith. Art historian Mary D. Garrard devoted an entire chapter to Gentileschi's *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting (La Pittura)* in a book she published in 1989 on the artist's oeuvre, after introducing the topic in a journal article in 1980 at the height of the feminist movement of reclaiming forgotten female artists throughout the history of art (Garrard 1989, 1980; Parker and Pollock 1981). Gentileschi became well known as an oil painter who worked in rich colors applied to stretched canvases, adept at realistic depictions of men, women, and historical figures, as well as portraits of herself.

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1652) reportedly painted *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting (La Pittura)* in oil on canvas around 1638–1639 at the age of 46, although there is speculation that she created other self-portraits earlier that have been lost (Whitaker, Clayton and Loconte, 2007, 301). (Garrard, it should be noted, dates the work earlier in her 1989 book. This essay adopts the later date of the Royal Collection Trust.) She was invited to London in 1638 by King Charles I to join her father, Orazio Gentileschi, who had already arrived 12 years prior and in whose atelier she had been trained. Her work became popular among 17th-century collectors and the record shows that *La Pittura* was directly acquired by the king in 1649 at Hampton Court.

In her painting, she pictures herself in iridescent green, with billowy sleeves, wearing a gold chain dangling a mask, black hair out of place, and holding a brush in one hand and a palette in the other. She chose not to cover her mouth and she posed herself seated at an easel, working on a large

canvas to her left with her right hand holding a brush positioned above it. Even her *drappo cangiante*, garments with changing colors, testified to her abundant technical skills in applying paint to canvas as well as indicated her painterly preference for *colore* (color) over *disegno* (design) by which she cleverly took sides in a debate that raged at the time among aesthetes of the Academia di San Luca, including Lomazzo. The painting on which she works melts into the brownish background, as does the back of her own figure since she wears a brown apron over her dress. She appears to emerge from the painting itself and/or to disappear into its indistinct color field. Her left arm rests on a stone slab for mixing paints. She is agentic, self-identified as an artist, boldly portraying her own visage (difficult to capture in a painted likeness given her body positioning), as the personification of painting itself, Ripa's Pittura. In homage to *Iconologia*, she titled the painting, *La Pittura*.

Whereas in her individualized treatments of other iconographic themes she was concerned to offer uniquely female interpretations that were alternative to men's versions, in the *Allegory of Painting* she demonstrated not an alternative understanding of a subject, but a fusion of two themes that, under existing conventions, only a female artist could have combined.

(Garrard 1989: 337)

She was influenced, perhaps, by a portrait medal of the Bolognese painter Lavinia Fontana created in 1611 that showed the female artist—in a historically accurate depiction—in profile on the obverse, and on the reverse, an image of a female painter at work as Ripa's Allegory of Painting. Gentileschi "took the idea one step farther, fusing artist and allegory in a single image to create an aesthetically richer and philosophically more significant application of Ripa's iconography" (Garrard 1989: 339). Considered a "brilliant invention" by one critic (Woodall 2005: 27), Garrard explains the unique opportunity employed by the painter:

By joining the types of the artist portrait and the Allegory of Painting, she managed to unite in a single image two themes that male artists had been obliged to treat separately, since by tradition the art of painting was symbolized by an allegorical female figure, and thus only a woman could identify herself with the personification.

(Garrard 1989: 339)

Thus Gentileschi recalls the first self-portraits by women in ancient times and rescues the diminishing British and Dutch reputation of women artists in the Renaissance by fusing the female-artist self-portrait with Ripa's female-artist allegory of painting, Pittura. Garrard noted the challenge posed for male artists who were subsequently, from 1593 through the height of Ripa's popularity into the 18th century, denied the option creatively set as pictorial precedent by Gentileschi. The template had been gendered female; awkward attempts, e.g., *Allegory of Painting* (c. 1639) by Giovanni Domenico Cerrini (1609–1681) showed a bare-chested, young female artist with flowing drapery (shown only from the waist up), paintbrush and palette in hand, displaying *her* painting of *him* placed on an easel (Garrard 1989: 351, 353). Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo (1538–1600)—the art theorist/artist who commented upon Michelangelo's strong female bodies—presents himself in *Self-Portrait* (c. 1568) with an assumed name scripted across the bottom of the painting, a laurel wreath on his head, and a measuring instrument in his hand. Diagonally across the lower right of the painting is a branch, a vine with leaves (Woodall 2005: 25). The accoutrements are not those of Painting, but rather those of Art: another allegorical category denied to men.

The rest, we might surmise, is history: the continued depiction by male artists since the Renaissance of women nude, reclining, erotic, available for male pleasure through the masculine gaze, and stripped of agency—except for her "charms" to seduce. Two divergent paths, only one of which glorified women as painters, artists, talented, capable, beautiful inside and out, agentic,

and approaching perfection. The audacity of Gentileschi inspired many other female painters over the centuries while men were forced to forego the honor by which they could pose as Pittura or Art, or even Perfection. Not even “smart phone” applications that easily turn one’s own image into a “Renaissance painting” can compete with actual artworks covered with paint, executed by painters (Prior 2019; Larson 2018). With the recent work of painters like Jenny Seville and Joan Semmel who vividly portray their own nude bodies in defiance of male-defined conventions of beauty, as well as the culturally referential paintings by Mickalene Thomas who substitutes African American bodies for those of white women and expands the range of queer identity into gendered roles in art history, painters continue to explore an array of possibilities. The gendered template of Pittura invites artists—male, female, nonbinary, transgender, intersex, “women” of any identity and persuasion—to adopt the template and extend it yet again.

Note

- 1 Translations of the basic text of Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia* vary. Not all translate the original 1593 edition or his own subsequent versions (beginning in 1603) *ver batim*, nor do translations produced for three centuries necessarily translate the original or include all of the original. Later translations, or “editions” as they are called, also include new, additional material not in the original text.

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33

TRUTH AND TRUTHFULNESS IN PAINTING

John Hyman

1 Seeing Truthfully

In a memoir of his days as a gallerist in New York, Julien Levy reports the following exchange about one of Picasso's portraits of Dora Maar:

Is this woman with one eye, or three eyes, a development of cubism?" I asked Picasso. "Not at all," he answered. "This double-profile, as it is called, is only because I keep my eyes always open. Every painter should keep his eyes always open. And how does that arrive at seeing truthfully, one eye or two eyes, you may ask? It is simply the face of my sweetheart, Dora Maar, when I kiss her.

(Levy, 1977; 177)

We probably should not take Picasso at his word. The remarks artists make about their work are often teasing and evasive. And besides, while it is true that when you get close enough to kiss, the view from each of your eyes will be different, Dora is not portrayed from within kissing distance in any of these paintings. But the story is instructive. Ever since Plato, philosophers and psychologists have been fascinated by anamorphosis, trompe l'oeil, and other kinds of distortion and illusion in painting. Artists on the other hand more often say that they are interested in "seeing truthfully," even artists who play with forms as freely as Picasso does, and artists who are intensely painterly, thematizing the brushstroke and the substance and appearance of the paint. For instance, Gainsborough summarized his approach to painting with the remark, "I like the truth and daylight," while Van Gogh said that his aim in painting was to be simply honest before nature.

In this article, I shall explore the place of truth and truthfulness in figurative or representational painting and drawing. I do not mean to exclude the possibility that abstract art can be truthful, but I shall not consider it here. The concepts of truth and truthfulness are contentious, and I shall discuss both of them, and the relationship between them, both in general and in the specific case of painting. But my two starting points are these.

First, a pair of definitions. *Truth* can be defined as *agreement with reality*. This is William James's phrase (1907, Lecture 6), but it is not a summary of the pragmatist theory of truth, or of any other theory. James claims that it is what any dictionary will tell you, which is not quite right. But he is right in saying that the definition should not be controversial. The quarrel begins when philosophers interpret it. As for *truthfulness*, when it is attributed to a person, it can be defined as a

commitment to the truth—in other words, a resolute disposition to seek, accept, and communicate the truth. Truthfulness concerns especially a person’s commitment to communicate the truth to others, but not exclusively, because the desire to communicate the truth cannot be separated from the desire to discover it or learn it, and the willingness to accept it, once discovered or learned. A report or a description can also be described as truthful, in which case “truthful” commonly means the same as “true,” although a truthful statement can also be one that expresses the truthfulness of its author, which is not exactly the same thing. I shall sometimes attribute truthfulness to persons and sometimes to communicative vehicles or their contents. The context will make it obvious which sense of the word is in play. Notice that truthfulness comes in degrees, so that one description may be more truthful than another. I shall assume that the same is true of truth.

My second starting point is that truth is not the exclusive property of language or communicated exclusively with words. Ernst Gombrich insisted that “a picture [...] can no more be true or false than a statement can be red or green,” basing the claim on the authority of “logicians,” adding that these are “not people to be easily gainsaid” (Gombrich, 1962; 56). But artists, historians, and critics have always attributed truth and falsity to paintings, and a more cogent argument than Gombrich’s appeal to authority would be required to proscribe the practice now.

Consider the *paragone*, the Renaissance debate about the comparative value of the arts. One of the principal questions was whether painting or poetry is better able to represent its subject truthfully. Here is Leonardo, making the case for painting.

La pittura serve a più degno sensu, che la poesia, e fa con più verità le figure delle opere di natura ch’il poeta. (trat. 14) [Painting serves a nobler sense than poetry and represents the works of nature with more truth than the poet.]

Qual poeta con parole ti mettera in’ anzi, o amante, la vera effigie della tua iddea con tanta verità, qual farà il pittore? (trat. 18) [What poet can represent to you in words, oh lover, the true image of your ideal with as much truth as the painter will do?]

It is not plausible to dismiss this as an intellectual error, a metaphor, or a lazy or antiquated use of words. Perhaps painting does *not* represent the works of nature with more truth than a poet does. But if Leonardo’s boast is wrong, the reason is not that only language is capable of communicating truth at all.

Turning to the historians and critics, Gombrich does not seem to have taken his own stricture about truth in painting too seriously. For example, he writes admiringly of Constable that he “wanted nothing but the truth” (1951; 374).¹ Nor was he the first to describe Constable’s painting in this way. When Stendhal visited the French salon in 1824, he was thrilled by Constable’s paintings. Classical landscapes, he insists, have “a style and an elegance, but lack truth,” whereas, “the truth of [Constable’s] charming works instantly strikes and delights us” (Harrison, 1998; 35). When Stendhal tries to explain what he means, he reaches for an old cliché, “the mirror of nature,” which explains nothing at all. But this does not invalidate his original description, it only shows that it needs a better explanation.

Thus, my second starting point is that logocentric conceptions of truth are mistaken. A plausible theory of truth will have to encompass truth communicated by paintings, sculptures, maps, and photographs as well as by language, and will have to accommodate the fact that Rembrandt’s *Lucretia* portrays the victim of rape more truthfully than Cranach’s (Figures 33.1 and 33.2) and that Thomas Phillips’s portrait of the Duke of Wellington is less truthful than Goya’s (Figures 33.3 and 33.4). In both cases, we can assess the extent to which a painting agrees with reality no less than a description in words. For if a painting represents something as being a certain way, and it is that way, then to that extent or in that respect, it is true; and if it represents something as being a certain way, and it is *not* that way, then to that extent or in that respect, it is false. This remains



Figure 33.1 Rembrandt van Rijn, *Lucretia*, 1666. Asar Studios/Alamy Stock Photo

true whether we think of a painting as representing a particular person or place, such as the Duke of Wellington, a kind of object or scene, such as a soldier or a battle, or a subject or theme, such as war. For example, Goya's series of prints *The Disasters of War* represents its subject as truthfully as *All Quiet on the Western Front* or *Life and Fate*.

2 Scepticism

Anyone who investigates this topic will be struck by the scepticism or mistrust expressed by 20th-century critics, historians of art, and philosophers about the very idea that a painter can “see truthfully,” or communicate the truth. It is a kind of scepticism philosophers still direct against history, philosophy, and science, as well as painting, in other words, against every kind of work where truth is a value we aspire to and that measures our success.

Bernard Williams describes the attitude well in the first few lines of his book *Truth and Truthfulness*:

Two currents of ideas are very prominent in modern thought and culture. On the one hand, there is an intense commitment to truthfulness—or, at any rate, a pervasive suspiciousness, a readiness against being fooled, an eagerness to see through appearances to the real structures and motives that lie behind them. [...] Together with this demand for truthfulness, however [...] there is an equally pervasive suspicion about truth itself: whether there is such a thing; if there is, whether it can be more than relative or subjective or something of that kind.

(Williams, 2002; 1)

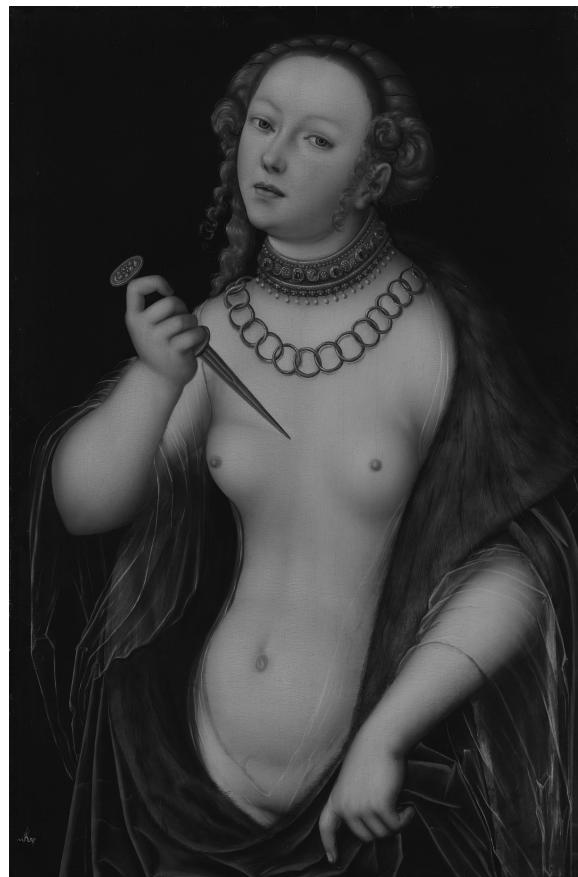


Figure 33.2 Lucas Cranach d. Ä., *Lucretia*, ca. 1530. Art Collection 4/Alamy Stock Photo

Williams defends the orthodox doctrine that truth *is* a valid goal of enquiry, however difficult it may be to attain; and he argues that truthfulness—when it is attributed to a person—is composed of two “basic” virtues, accuracy and sincerity, the first of which is needed when we seek the truth, and the second when we communicate the truth to others.

This approach seems to me partly right and partly wrong. Williams’s guiding thought that philosophers have focused on truth at the expense of truthfulness is astute. And he is right that truthfulness, when it is attributed to persons, includes both intellectual and moral dispositions.² But he makes two connected mistakes. First—as he seems to acknowledge (e.g. 2001; 124)—he draws a sharper distinction between the dispositions required for inquiry and communication than exists in reality; and second, as a result, the second basic virtue he postulates, “sincerity”—which he defines as “a disposition to make sure that one’s assertion expresses what one actually believes”—is too narrowly tailored to the communicative act. The more inclusive concept of honesty is more apt. Both inquiry and communication often call for clarity of thought, precision, and attention to detail; and both often call for honesty as well—the honesty to resist, as far as possible, the temptations that beset us to distort, or sanitize, or idealize, or simply falsify the truth, for the sake of some kind of satisfaction or advantage, or simply to avoid facing up to painful facts. So I prefer not to postulate distinct virtues for inquiry and communication, but to recognize instead

Truth and Truthfulness in Painting



Figure 33.3 Thomas Phillips, *The Duke of Wellington*, 1814. Lifestyle Pictures/Alamy Stock Photo



Figure 33.4 Francisco de Goya, *The Duke of Wellington*, 1812. Picture Kitchen/Alamy Stock Photo

that truthfulness includes the same complex set of dispositions in both cases, although the balance between them varies from case to case.

I shall return to the concepts of truth and truthfulness in due course; but I want to look now at the reasons art historians and philosophers have given to support their scepticism about the ability of art to record and communicate the truth.

Broadly, there are two kinds of reasons, both of which are comparable to the kinds of reasons that have been thought to support scepticism about truth in history, philosophy, and science. But they generally take a special form when they are applied to painting, because in *this* case, they rely on an assumption about what the truthfulness of a picture would have to consist in, if it existed, namely, in being a good copy or likeness or a faithful imitation of what it depicts. They make this assumption, and then they protest *either* that a painting is never a *faithful* imitation or likeness of what it depicts, *or* that it is not actually an imitation or likeness at all.

The first reason for scepticism is the belief that painting is inevitably shaped by the local perspectives and conventions, the prejudices and values that limit and control art, as they limit and control the whole of human life. All art is subjective—“la nature vue à travers un tempérament” (nature viewed through a temperament), as Zola put it—or worse, it is ideological and tendentious, and so it cannot be a true mirror or faithful representation of what it represents.

Thus, the great American art historian Meyer Schapiro insisted that there is no such thing as a “passive, ‘photographic’ representation in art.” “All renderings of objects,” he insists, “proceed from values, methods and viewpoints which somehow shape the image and often determine its contents” (Schapiro, 1978; 195–196). Gombrich, who transformed the study of the visual arts in the 1960s, by re-thinking their relationship with psychology and optics, declared that “The innocent eye is a myth” (Gombrich, 1962; 250). And by the 2000s, the suspiciousness Williams mentions, the “readiness against being fooled,” had become the norm so that even a study of ancient Greek vase painting—not exactly the most radical branch of art history—could include a trenchant statement of a similar idea.

It is commonplace to celebrate the objectivity of artists, their powers of observation, and their tireless curiosity. In this way, representational systems take on all the authority of science: dispassionate observation, not historical milieu, determines stylistic development.

(Neer, 2002; 28)

The second reason for scepticism is sometimes addressed to art in general, and sometimes to art in a so-called “realistic” style. Here the argument is that although we may imagine that a landscape by Courbet or Constable is a true likeness or imitation of reality, or a truer one than a landscape by Claude or Turner, works of art are actually composed of signs that are as arbitrary and conventional as words. Leo Steinberg—one of Tom Wolfe’s three “kings of Cultureberg”—makes this sceptical point directly:

“Technical capacity in the imitation of nature” simply does not exist. What does exist is the skill of reproducing handy graphic symbols for natural appearances, of rendering familiar facts by set professional conventions.

(Steinberg, 1972; 293)

But if paintings are composed of conventional signs or graphic symbols, then styles of painting—such as the Geometric style in archaic Greece, or the style familiar from Japanese Ukiyoe prints—are like languages, inasmuch as they are simply alternative systems of semantic and syntactic rules. Hence paintings in one style cannot be truer or closer to reality than paintings in another style, any more than descriptions could be truer or closer to reality, purely because they are in Japanese or Greek. Some styles of art are called “realistic,” but the label belongs to a false ideology. “The

literal or realistic or naturalistic system of representation,” Nelson Goodman concluded, “is simply the customary one” (Goodman, 1976; 38).

Taken together, these sceptical remarks represent a sea-change in attitudes towards art. For in the 20th century, the very idea of how art and reality are related was transformed. But how much truth is there in this new orthodoxy? My view is that both lines of argument are partly right and partly wrong and that only the part that is wrong supports the sceptical conclusions art historians and philosophers have drawn. I shall comment on them in turn under the headings *Art and Objectivity* and *Art and Language*.

3 Art and Objectivity

It is not difficult to assess the first three quoted remarks. The first two—by Schapiro and Gombrich—are true, or broadly true, while the third is lamentably confused. But nothing that is true in any of them supports a sceptical view about the ability of art to record and communicate the truth.

Beginning with Schapiro, it is true that the visual arts “proceed from values, methods and viewpoints which somehow shape the image and often determine its contents.” My only quarrel is with the preceding claim that there is no such thing as passive, “photographic” representation in art, which despite the scare quotes implies that photography is different. In fact, *no* medium of communication is inherently truthful or objective. For example, Philip Jones Griffith’s *Vietnam Inc.* proceeds from values, methods, and viewpoints just as much as Goya’s *The Disasters of War*. But of course, this does not undermine Schapiro’s main point, on the contrary, it reinforces it.

It is also true, as Gombrich says, that “the innocent eye” is a myth. This is Gombrich’s name for a popular idea about the artistic process that he did more than anyone else to debunk. It was based on the theory that our raw visual impressions of the world consist in patterns or arrays of colours, which we learn to interpret—unconsciously and automatically—by means of concepts. As a result, our mature visual experience presents us with visible objects of specific kinds disposed in three dimensions, and we find it extremely difficult to see once again, as it is thought we did when we were infants, the raw patterns of colour visible objects present to the innocent eye.

According to the myth Gombrich opposes, the painter’s task is to abstract from the framework of concepts, dissolve the boundaries between objects, recover the raw visual impressions the innocent eye perceives, and reproduce them on a surface. This theory of painting was widely accepted by psychologists, artists, and critics in the 19th century, including John Ruskin, who expounds it in the passage from *The Elements of Drawing* where the phrase “the innocence of the eye” occurs:

The whole technical power of painting depends on our recovery of what may be called the innocence of the eye; that is to say, of a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify.

(Gombrich, 1962; 250)³

Gombrich was right to reject this way of thinking about the artistic process, because the model of visual experience on which it depends is misconceived. Nineteenth-century psychologists inherited it from an older tradition in optics, enriched with Kantian philosophy, but it was a purely imaginary idea, not based on evidence, but rather, ironically, on a spurious analogy between the visual process and the task of seeing what a painting represents (Hyman, 2006; Chapter 10).

However, neither the fact that the artistic process does not involve eliminating the influence of concepts on our visual experience of the world nor the fact that art proceeds from values, methods, and viewpoints supports the sceptical conclusion that art cannot communicate the truth. This would follow only if values, methods, viewpoints, or concepts made truthful communication impossible, but the opposite is the case. Truthful communication would be impossible *without*

values, methods, viewpoints, and concepts, because without them we could not learn to distinguish between truth and falsehood or acquire the intellectual and moral dispositions—the clarity of thought, the attention to detail, and the honesty—on which truthfulness depends.

The third quotation is a different case. Here it is again.

It is commonplace to celebrate the objectivity of artists, their powers of observation, and their tireless curiosity. In this way, representational systems take on all the authority of science: dispassionate observation, not historical milieu, determines stylistic development.

This is a plainly sceptical remark. The claim here is that if we celebrate the objectivity of artists, their powers of observation, and their tireless curiosity, we assimilate art to science and ignore the influence of “historical milieu” on the development of artistic styles—such as in Greek vase-painting, in the sixth and fifth centuries BC, which is the author’s subject.

So are the objectivity of artists, and their powers of observation, and their tireless curiosity another myth? Observation is at the heart of painting and sculpture at all times and in every culture, even if it is mainly the observation of other works of art. But it is true that the curiosity of artists and their powers of observation have been exaggerated, sometimes by artists themselves. One sign of this is that writers have generally described optical effects long before painters learned to represent them. For example, the appearance of sunlight on a wall or pavement is mentioned by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux; but there is no record of it in 12th-century painting. Jan Van Eyck’s *The Virgin in the Church*, which dates from the late 1430s, may be the earliest example. Again, the French naturalist Georges Louis Leclerc described the varying colours of shadows in a lecture at the French Academy of Sciences in 1742, and similar observations were reported to the Royal Society in the 1790s. But they first appeared in English watercolours in the 19th century.

At the same time, artists *have* made discoveries, and not only about optical effects. For example, Greek vase painters began to depict the posture of a running man with his forward arm opposite his forward leg between 530 BC and 480 BC. It was not necessary to use a camera with a rapid shutter speed to discover this, as it was when Eadweard Muybridge discovered how a horse gallops. But both discoveries enabled artists to represent particular kinds of motion with greater accuracy than before.

The record of visual discovery in art can be exaggerated or underestimated. But it is confused to imagine that if we celebrate the objectivity, observation, and curiosity of artists—the traits that make discovery possible—we are assimilating art to science, or ignoring the influence of “historical milieu” on the evolution of style. The root of the confusion is the idea that observation and milieu are *competing* factors, one of which operates in science and the other in art. This is doubly wrong. On the one hand, while many artists have acute powers of observation, the particular phenomena they observe and the techniques they use to observe them are influenced both by forces within the artistic tradition itself and by facts beyond it—by their “historical milieu.”⁴ On the other hand, this is equally true of science. It applies to Newton and Darwin just as much as it does to Leonardo and Vermeer.

In sum, the opposition between “dispassionate observation” and “historical milieu” is false both in the case of art and in the case of science. So there are no plausible grounds here for scepticism about the ability of art to record and communicate the truth. Truth does not depend on transcending history—in either science or art.

4 Art and Language

I said that there are two main reasons for scepticism concerning the ability of art to communicate the truth. The first is that art is never a faithful imitation of what it represents, because it

is inescapably subjective or ideological, shaped by the artist's values, methods, viewpoint, and concepts, or those that were prevalent when it was made. The second is that art is not really an imitation at all: it consists in signs that are as arbitrary and conventional as words. Recall Steinberg:

“Technical capacity in the imitation of nature” simply does not exist. What does exist is the skill of reproducing handy graphic symbols for natural appearances, of rendering familiar facts by set professional conventions.

It is widely believed that some artistic styles are truer or closer to reality than others, but according to Steinberg artistic styles are just alternative systems of conventions, like languages or codes. The things we say are not truer or closer to reality if we say them in French, and we cannot expect them to be truer or closer to reality if we paint them in French either.

If this argument were sound, it would not follow that art is incapable of communicating truth, it would only follow that it does so in the way that language does, by means of signs that are as conventional as words. It is only if we add the premise that a truthful work of art would have to be a faithful imitation of its subject that we can draw the sceptical conclusion. But even without this premise, the argument still expresses the “pervasive suspicion” about truth Williams describes—“whether there is such a thing; if there is, whether it can be more than relative or subjective or something of that kind”—because it implies that the verisimilitude we attribute to Caravaggio’s or Velazquez’s art is an illusion, created perhaps by the ascendancy their style attained, and the consequent ease and familiarity with which we “read” their work:

Realism is relative, determined by the system of representation standard for a given culture or person at a given time. Newer or older or alien systems are accounted artificial or unskilled.

(Goodman, 1976; 37)

Again, I think there is something right about the analogy between artistic styles and languages. But it does not support this relativistic conclusion about realism, for the simple reason that languages—unlike codes—expand to express new ideas and new observations.⁵ “All you need is love” can probably be translated into every human language that is known, but the same is not true of “E=MC²” or “Energy is equivalent to mass.” The difference between Italian painting in the trecento and the seicento, for example, is not like the difference between two languages or dialects, it is like the difference between the English of Chaucer and the English of Milton, the English of *The Canterbury Tales* and the English of *Paradise Lost*. *The Canterbury Tales* is not inferior to *Paradise Lost*, and Giotto was not a lesser artist than Caravaggio. But the language at Milton’s disposal was far richer than the language available to Chaucer, and the same is true of the technical resources artists could draw on in the 1600s to depict drapery, anatomy, space, light, and shade, by comparison with three centuries earlier. The terms “realism” and “naturalism” are often used to describe the result of this kind of expansion in expressive power.⁶

Hence, we can agree with the claim that artistic styles are comparable to languages without accepting the implausible idea that “the [...] realistic system of representation is simply the customary one” (Goodman), or that “‘technical capacity in the imitation of nature’ simply does not exist” (Steinberg). The analogy between art and language is a helpful corrective to traditional ways of thinking about the “imitation of nature,” such as Ruskin’s (above), or Leonardo’s:

The painter, through himself alone, without the aid of anything appertaining to the various sciences, or by any other means, achieves directly the imitation of the things of nature.

But it is a mistake to assume that if *this* is rejected, then “the objectivity of artists, their powers of observation, and their tireless curiosity” must be rejected too; or to imagine if that if a painting cannot be a “passive, ‘photographic’ representation,” it can only be a “handy graphic symbol.”

The best way to prove that these are false choices is to look at actual examples. Take Leonardo’s anatomical drawings (Figure 33.5). They not only belie Leonardo’s own description of his achievement but also confront writers who dismiss the objectivity and curiosity of artists on theoretical grounds with hard facts. A. Hyatt Mayor’s comment about these drawings is particularly telling:

It does not matter that Leonardo lacked the academic system to do what Vesalius and Calcar were later to do as a team, for he had a rarer gift. He was the first man who, having found the plan in a limp confusion of tissues, and having unravelled the track of a wet thread of nerve, then could draw his exploration so unmistakeably that his drawings can forever guide any dissector in comprehending the structure in a tangle that opens under his knife.

(Hyatt Mayor, 1984; 67)

Leonardo, Hyatt Mayor suggests, devised “a classic compromise between a copy of appearances and an abstract diagram of connections understood by the intellect,” and he points out that this kind of “analytical picture-making” played an indispensable role in the development of modern science, which could not have been played by photography, because “the camera cannot think.”

This is an especially illuminating description of truthful communication in the visual arts, because it shows how complex the task is. It explodes the myth of the innocent eye more effectively than philosophy can alone; but it also reveals a kind of shallowness in the sceptical reaction against the myth by some of the writers (not all) quoted above.

In sum, none of the arguments I have considered justifies scepticism about the ability of art to communicate truth. However, they do draw attention to a variety of untenable conceptions of truth and truthfulness in art, which span several centuries and were promulgated by many of the greatest theorists of art, including Leonardo himself. I shall turn now to the task of explaining how we can correct these traditional conceptions of truth and truthfulness in painting, without embracing scepticism. In the next section, I shall focus narrowly on the problem of formulating an inclusive definition of truth. Then in the final section, I shall consider what truth and truthfulness in painting consist in, and why they are of value.

5 Truth in Painting (La Vérité en Peinture)

Philosophical ideas about truth in the 20th century were invariably about truth communicated in words: true sentences, true statements made by uttering sentences, or true beliefs expressed by uttering sentences.⁷ Philosophers were divided on the question of whether truth is a property of sentences themselves. Wittgenstein, Tarski, and Quine held that it is, whereas Frege, Ramsey, and Strawson held that it is not. But the assumption that language is the sole means by which truth is communicated was never a matter of dispute. But if we think about the history of art, and the history of discourse about art, this looks like a textbook case of tunnel vision—as if a theory of animal locomotion was confined to running and jumping and ignored swimming and flying, or a semantic theory was so fixated on nouns that it ignored verbs.

The exclusive focus on language as the vehicle of truth is one of two mutually reinforcing ideas which originated in the 20th century and remain predominant today. The other is the deflationary idea that *the statement that a certain proposition is true is equivalent to a statement of the proposition itself*. For example, the statement that Tolstoy’s famous dictum that all happy families are alike is true is equivalent to the statement that all happy families are alike. Frege expressed the idea as follows:

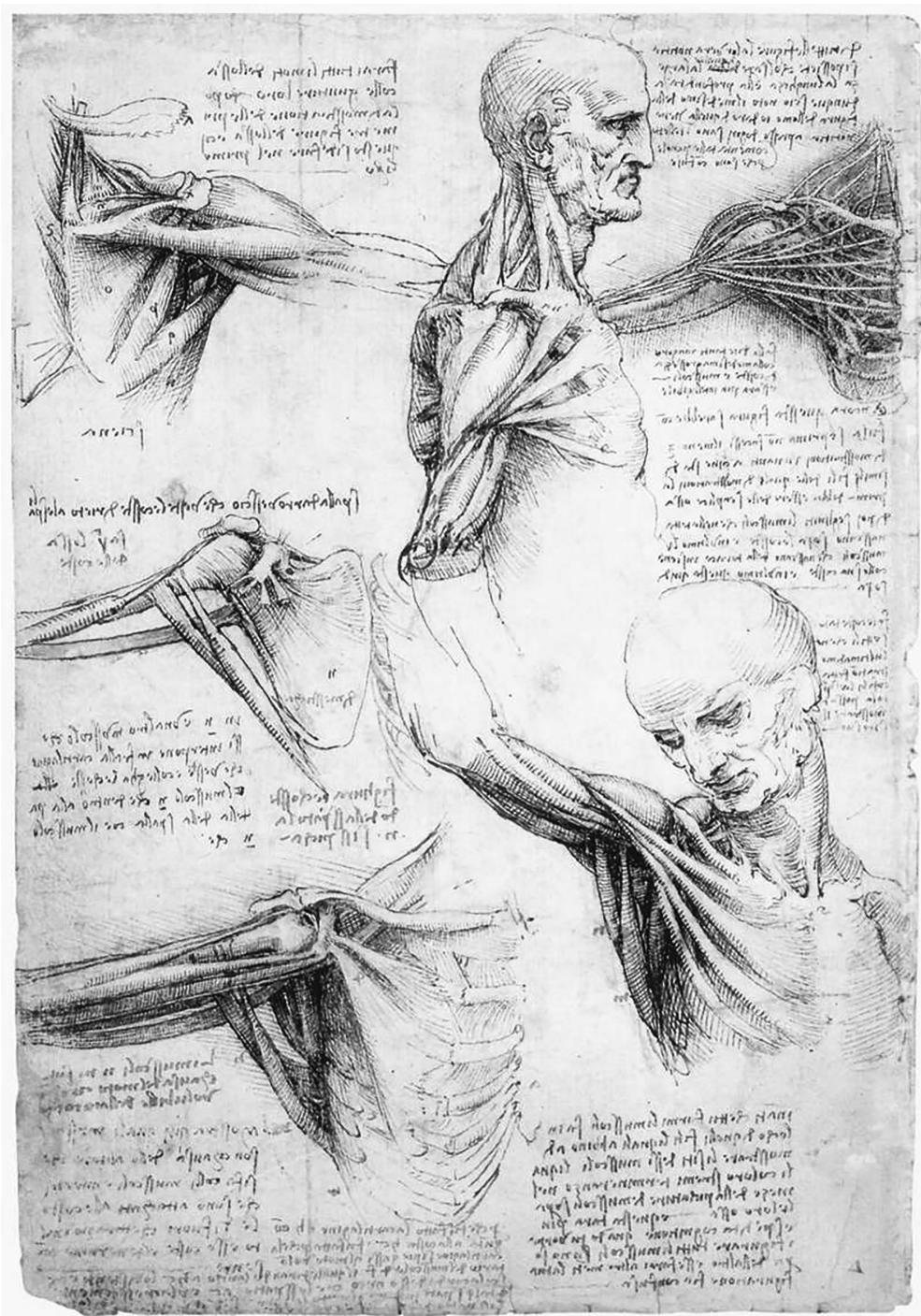


Figure 33.5 Leonardo da Vinci, *Myology of the shoulder region*, ca. 1510. incamerastock/Alamy Stock Photo

It is worthy of notice that the sentence ‘I smell the scent of violets’ has the same content as the sentence ‘it is true that I smell the scent of violets’. So it seems, then, that nothing is added to the thought by my ascribing to it the property of truth.

(1977)⁸

Frege’s insight was elaborated in many different ways, but its association with logocentrism was a constant. For example, consider Quine’s disquotational theory of truth. In *Word and Object*, Quine echoes Frege’s remark, claiming that “to say that the statement ‘Brutus killed Caesar’ is true [...] is in effect simply to say that Brutus killed Caesar” (1960; 24), and in *Philosophy of Logic*, he develops the idea as follows:

The truth predicate is a reminder that, despite a technical ascent to talk of sentences, our eye is on the world. This cancellatory force of the truth predicate is explicit in Tarski’s paradigm: ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white. Quotation marks make all the difference between talking about words and talking about snow. The quotation is a name of a sentence that contains a name, namely ‘snow’, of snow. By calling the sentence true, we call snow white. The truth predicate is a device of disquotation.

(1970; 12)⁹

Quine’s thought is this. A sentence placed in quotation marks, such as “Snow is white” is no longer a sentence, it is a singular term *referring* to the sentence. Hence, we can form a complete sentence by adding a predicate to it, for example, ““Snow is white” is an English sentence” or ““Snow is white” is true.” Quine’s proposal that the truth predicate is a device of disquotation means that adding the predicate “is true” to a singular term referring to a sentence has the same effect as removing the quotation marks, which would take us back to the original sentence. Hence the statement that the sentence “Snow is white” is true is equivalent to the statement that snow is white.¹⁰

Quine’s theory of truth was meant to be iconoclastic. Truth, he tells us, has no more depth or substance than a pair of quotation marks. But it is iconoclastic in more senses than one, since it rules out ascribing truth to paintings. Consider what Quine calls Tarski’s paradigm:

“Snow is white” is true if and only if snow is white.

This formula neatly illustrates the striking fact that a declarative sentence—*every* declarative sentence—says exactly what has to be the case in order for it to be true.¹¹ For instance, the sentence “snow is white” says that snow is white, which is exactly what has to be the case in order for the sentence to be true. No property apart from truth has this remarkable characteristic. Some sentences say what has to be the case in order for them to be in French: “This sentence is in French,” “This sentence is in the language spoken by De Gaulle,” and so on. But *every* declarative sentence says what has to be the case in order for it to be true, and it does so without even referring to itself. This must tell us something fundamental about truth itself, and Quine’s theory is designed to explain *what* it tells us.

Now the striking fact that every declarative sentence says what has to be the case in order for it to be true does not itself imply that truth is restricted to sentences. For equally, every picture *shows* exactly what has to be the case in order for it to be true. But Quine’s disquotational theory *cannot* encompass paintings, because it implies that the objects we describe as true (e.g. the English sentence “Snow is white”) invariably belong to a language that also includes quotation marks, logical connectives, and the word “true” itself—or can at least be exactly translated into such a language. But a painting *cannot* be translated into English, or any other language. Davidson makes this point nicely. He says, “A picture is not worth a thousand words, or any other number. Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture.” (Davidson, 2001; 263) We might say, for example, that Breughel’s *Icarus* depicts a boy falling out of the sky, the white legs disappearing into

the green water, an expensive delicate ship, and so on.¹² Or we might say simply that it depicts a landscape with the fall of Icarus. But every attempt to capture what a painting represents in words will be indeterminate and incomplete. So we cannot encompass pictures in a logocentric theory of truth with a translation manual.

Hence, Quine's theory of truth cannot be extended to include pictures. But the same holds for every other theory of truth developed on the basis of Tarski's formula or a variant of it. For example, it holds for Field's version of disquotationalism and Horwich's "minimal" theory of truth, although Field ascribes truth to utterances and Horwich to propositions, and it also applies to deflationary theories that owe less to Tarski, such as Grover's prosentential theory, Strawson's performative theory, and Künne's "modest" theory. All of these theories are about the way the truth predicate is used *when we are talking about sentences, utterances, or the propositions they express*, but a convincing theory of truth will apply *equally* to truth communicated by pictures and by words.

So, is it possible to express the deflationary idea in a way that avoids the persistent logocentric bias? Consider the following remark by Kotarbinski (Tarski's teacher), which begins by echoing William James's definition of truth:

In the classical interpretation, "truly" means the same as "in agreement with reality" [...] Let us ask what is understood by "agreement with reality". The point is not that a true thought should be a good copy or likeness of the thing of which we are thinking, as a painting or a photograph is. Brief reflection suffices to recognize the metaphorical nature of such comparison. A different interpretation of "agreement with reality" is required. We shall confine ourselves to the following:

*Jan thinks truly if and only if
Jan thinks that things are thus and so,
and things are indeed thus and so.*

For instance, the central idea of the Copernican theory is [...] that the earth revolves around the sun; now Copernicus thought truly, for he thought that the earth revolves around the sun, and the earth does revolve around the sun.

(Kotarbinski, 1966)¹³

Kotarbinski's position is this. Truth can be defined as agreement with reality. He does not reject this definition, he explains it. But he refuses to explain it in terms of copying or likeness—both of which are probably intended to evoke the then orthodox idea of correspondence to a fact. Instead, he explains it simply in terms of *conjunction*. Setting aside his preference for the adverbial construction (for thinking truly as opposed to true thought), a thought or theory or hypothesis is true, according to Kotarbinski, if and only if it is the thought or theory or hypothesis that things are thus and so, **and** things *are* thus and so.

Kotarbinski's position seems to me exactly right, except for two points. The first, of course, concerns painting and photography. For while the comparison between a thought and a painting or photograph may seem metaphorical after brief reflection, if the position I have defended is correct, less brief reflection shows that the comparison is not metaphorical at all. Truth is indeed in agreement with reality. And this can be explained by means of conjunction—or alternatively by means of identity: a thought is true if, and only if, it represents things as being a certain way **and** they are that way. Alternatively, a thought is true if, and only if, the way it represents things as being *is* the way they are. But this applies to *every* kind of representation. The Copernican theory is true if, and only if, the way it represents things as being *is* the way they are, and the same applies to a painting or a photograph.

The second point is that this deflationary conception of truth is not as far removed from the idea that truth consists in likeness as Kotarbinski implies it is. (Indeed, there is nothing wrong

with saying that truth is one kind of agreement and likeness is another.) For just as agreement in general—e.g. agreement in opinion—and truth, in particular, can be defined in terms of identity or conjunction, so can likeness. For example, you and I agree about the way to make an omelette if, and only if, your opinion about the way to make an omelette *is* my opinion (identity), in other words, your opinion is such-and-such, *and* so is mine (conjunction). Equally, your bike and my bike are alike in colour, if, and only if, the colour of your bike *is* the colour of my bike (identity), in other words, your bike is such-and-such a colour, *and* so is mine (conjunction). The difference is that agreement in opinion consists in the identity of a content, whereas likeness consists in the identity of a property, or a range of properties.

6 Truth and Truthfulness in Painting

So far, I have argued for two main conclusions. First, the arguments we considered, which were thought to support scepticism about the capacity of painting for truthful communication, are fallacious. Truth and truthfulness are indispensable concepts in art criticism, and our use of them has not been successfully impugned. So we should not accept a theory of truth that is restricted in its scope to truth communicated in words. Second, truth in general can be defined as agreement with reality. This applies *equally* to truth communicated by pictures and by words. But it is not to be understood as copying or likeness in either case. It is explained in terms of identity or conjunction. Thus, we can accept the deflationary conception of truth while rejecting a formulation of it that is restricted to truth communicated by words.

Deflationary theories of truth can seem puzzling or disappointing. How can truth be a value—traditionally, one of the supreme values—if “nothing is added to the thought by my ascribing to it the property of truth”? Why should we care about truth? Why in particular should we care about truth in painting? And what is the point of going to all this trouble to prove that art can communicate the truth, if truth has scarcely more substance than a purely logical notion such as conjunction?

There are three unsympathetic things to say in response. First, as we have just seen, likeness can also be explained in terms of conjunction. Second, the manner in which truth is defined does not cast doubt upon its value. Compare existence. We certainly care about the existence of individuals and species. For instance, many people care whether the orangutan will become extinct. If existence is merely a quantity—“at-least-oneness”—this does not make their concern puzzling or absurd. Finally, if a truthful painting *were* properly defined as “a good copy or likeness of the thing,” this would not explain its value. Virginia Woolf is reputed to have said, “Art is not a copy of the real world; one of the damn things is enough.” Certainly, there is no intrinsic value in a copy. We can admire the skill involved in making it. But lies can require as much skill as the truth.

However, the puzzlement or disappointment is not entirely misplaced. For it does remind us how little a mere definition of truth can achieve—in particular, that it cannot explain why we should care about truth and truthfulness. In conclusion, I should like to offer some tentative comments about this question, in three parts: the first concerns truth in general, the second concerns truth in painting, and the third concerns painting as an art. I can only indicate very briefly and with insufficient nuance how I believe we can approach each part of the answer. Let me reiterate that I am concerned here specifically with representational or figurative painting, as I have been throughout.

Concerning truth in general, describing truth as a value is a metonymy.¹⁴ The value of truth *is* the value of our awareness of truth, which is to say the value of knowledge. True propositions may be better than false ones for a certain kind of exercise in logic, but the proposition that snow is white is not superior to the proposition that snow is black as such. Considered simply as propositions they are on par. However, awareness of truth certainly is valuable, both as a means and as an

end. It is valuable as a means because it enables us to do the right things for the right reasons; and it is valuable as an end because it satisfies our curiosity, or at least has the capacity to do so (Hyman, 2015; Chapter 8). This applies to painting just as much as to language, but of course, there are differences, because when truth is communicated in painting, it is shown rather than said.

Concerning truth in painting in particular, since painting is a visual medium, whatever we perceive or understand or learn from a painting is ultimately due to the forms and colours it is composed of and the forms and (often) colours it represents.¹⁵ The relationship between these sets of forms and colours—traditionally described in the language of imitation¹⁶—means that paintings can communicate truth about appearances with an immediacy, intelligibility, and power that language cannot match, as Leonardo understood. But it also means that paintings depend on symbols to communicate abstractions, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, and it can illustrate but cannot state a fact. For example, as I noted earlier, Breughel's *Icarus* depicts a boy falling out of the sky, the white legs disappearing into the green water, and an expensive delicate ship. It may teach or remind us of the fact that suffering takes place “while someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along,” as Auden claimed. But we cannot discover that it does so without interpretation, i.e. without an explanation (in words) of the painting's meaning—which can always be contested and revised.

Finally, concerning painting as an art, painting is not necessarily an artistic activity, any more than writing is. But representational or figurative painting does have a communicative function, even when this is deliberately stymied, for example, when painting decorates the interior of a sealed tomb. So it is admired for possessing the values that pictures, texts, and other communicative vehicles can possess, or disparaged for failing to possess them, and truth is preeminent among these values.¹⁷

However, the arts in general, and painting in particular, also exemplify a process Quine famously discovered in moral training and in sport: the transmutation of means into ends.¹⁸ As Quine points out, “we come to relish the sport of fishing as much as we relish the fresh trout to which it was a means” (Quine, 1979; 472). Quine writes with a light touch, but we should not underestimate the effect this process has on our appreciation of painting as an art. For it leads us to value the skills and dispositions that make up truthfulness as much as truth itself: clarity of thought, precision, attention to detail, and in a culture with the “pervasive suspiciousness” Williams describes, honesty above all.

What do these qualities look like in painting?¹⁹ There is no general answer, any more than there is a way they sound, when they are expressed in speech. But there are plenty of examples. Returning to Constable, we might say that his aim in painting was to communicate his love for the rural scenery of England—especially in his native Suffolk—by representing it as truthfully as he could. But what can the truthfulness of a landscape painting consist in, if it is not an accurate record of a specific place, like a surveyor's drawing or a map? Perhaps in avoiding different kinds of untruthfulness. Constable refused to idealise the landscape by transforming it into an Arcadia inhabited by goddesses and shepherds, as Poussin and Claude Lorraine had done—though he revered Claude, and was inspired by his work. He shunned the picturesque. He described François Boucher's landscapes as “a bewildered dream of the picturesque,” and “the pastoral of the Opera House,” and he cordially loathed them. And he did not transform the landscape into an apparition or a dream, in the way that Turner—his contemporary and rival—did. “Golden visions,” Constable wrote of Turner, “but only visions.” When William Blake saw Constable's drawings, he said, “Why, this is not drawing but inspiration.” To which Constable replied, “I meant it for drawing.”

A portrait is a very different case, although here too the allure of untruthfulness needs to be resisted. Think again of Goya's portrait of the Duke of Wellington, especially the preparatory drawing, which was made in 1812, just after the defeat of the French at Salamanca, towards the end of the Peninsular War (Figure 33.6). However familiar we have become with photographs



Figure 33.6 Francisco de Goya, *Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington*, 1812. Red chalk over graphite. © The Trustees of the British Museum

of exhausted soldiers in Stalingrad and Vietnam, it remains a haunting image, and it shows that even Goya's finished painting is a compromise between honesty and decorum. Truthfulness looks quite different in a landscape and a portrait, and it looks different in a portrait by Goya and one by Picasso. Proust's description of Chardin's pastel *Self-Portrait with Spectacles* as the "faithful, highly inquisitive translation of three original elements: character, life and the mood of the moment" (1971; 377) does not apply to a Fayum mummy portrait. Perhaps the only valid generalization is that a truthful portrait is never a "passive, 'photographic' representation," and never depends on the "innocence of the eye." But it is evident that we can learn to recognize truthfulness in portraiture, and in other genres of painting, since we know where to look—and where not to look—for examples. For example, it would be surprising if a critic said that truthfulness was a quality she prized in Arcimboldo or Roy Lichtenstein.

There is no single source of value or overarching motive in art, any more than in human life generally. But the experience of encountering truthfulness face to face is one of the great gifts painting has to offer, and so a philosophical theory that rules this out should be rejected, whether it comes from logic or the philosophy of art.²⁰

Notes

- 1 Admittedly, the remark about Constable was written several years earlier than the one about "logicians"; but it was left untouched in all 15 subsequent editions of *The Story of Art*, at least three of which include revisions.
- 2 Williams appears to deny that virtues are dispositions (2001, 125), but the text is not perfectly clear at this point, and in any case I prefer to use the term "disposition" in a sufficiently broad sense to include virtues.

- 3 Monet was also an adherent of the myth (see Gage, 1993; 2009), and it persisted in the 20th century, especially in relation to impressionist painting. For example, see Merleau-Ponty 1993; 59–75 and Schapiro 1997; 56.
- 4 Baxandall 1972 is a classic study.
- 5 Art historians who seek to emphasize the importance of conventions in painting tend to refer indifferently to languages and codes (e.g. Gombrich, 1982; 278ff). But a code is a function that maps one alphabet onto another. Hence Morse and Semaphore, for example, have precisely the same expressive power: any sentence that can be communicated in one can be communicated in the other.
- 6 The term “realism” also has other uses. See Hyman 2009.
- 7 Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* is a notable exception (Wittgenstein, 1961; 2.21–2.222). But when Wittgenstein abandoned the picture theory of meaning, he seems to have abandoned the more inclusive conception of truth that he presented alongside it as well.
- 8 By a “thought” (“Gedanke”), Frege means what I call a proposition, that is, the possible content of a belief or statement, such as that all happy families are alike. Propositions are also sometimes held to be sets of possible worlds—that is, the worlds at which the sentences that express them are true. But (despite some ingenious arguments to the contrary) the content of a belief or statement cannot be a proposition in *this* sense. For if it were, then one could not believe or state one necessary truth or falsehood without believing or stating every other necessary truth or falsehood, since every necessary truth and every necessary falsehood is true at exactly the same possible worlds, respectively, all and none.
- 9 What Quine calls “Tarski’s paradigm” belongs to the test Tarski proposed for the extensional adequacy of a definition of the predicate “*s* is a true sentence of *L*”, where *L* is a formal language, such as the one Russell and Whitehead introduced in *Principia Mathematica*. Tarski argued that an extensionally adequate definition will entail an instance of the schema

“*s*” is a true sentence of *L* if, and only if, *p*.

for every sentence of *L*, where *p* is a translation of *s* into the language of the formula as a whole (in this case, English). See Tarski 1956.

- 10 Notice that unlike Frege, Quine ascribes truth directly to sentences, as opposed to the thoughts or propositions that sentences express. For the sake of simplicity, I shall do the same in my discussion of Quine.
- 11 If truth is properly applied to statements, thoughts or propositions, and not to sentences, we ought really to say that every declarative sentence says (or records) what has to be the case in order for *the statement made or the thought or proposition expressed by uttering it* to be true. See above, note 9.
- 12 These are all phrases from W.H. Auden’s description of the painting in the poem “Musée des Beaux Arts” (Auden 1966).
- 13 The translation is by Künne (2003; 333).
- 14 “Value” in the Fregean term “truth value” (*Wahrheitswert*) has the mathematical sense of the output of a function, it does not mean value in the sense of worth.
- 15 This may look like a restatement of the myth of the innocent eye, but in fact it has no implications regarding the nature or development of the visual system.
- 16 I examine this relationship in detail in Hyman 2013.
- 17 My use of the term communication is not intended to invoke any particular theory of communication or communicative intention.
- 18 Quine borrowed the phrase from Stephen 1843; 324.
- 19 Lamarque and Olsen (2014) associate truthfulness specifically with “Romantic or expressive” conceptions of art, apparently because they equate truthfulness with sincerity. As I have explained above, I regard this as an excessively narrow understanding of truthfulness. Williams claims that the Romantic innovation was to associate sincerity with “personal authenticity” (2002; 172).
- 20 I am most grateful to audiences in Uppsala and London and to a number of friends and colleagues for their comments on an earlier draft, especially Stacie Friend, Hans-Johann Glock, Andrew Huddleston, Paul Horwich, Jennifer Judge, Peter Lamarque, and Elisabeth Schellekens.

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PART VII

Philosophers of Art



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DIDEROT

Jacques Morizot

Everyone knows that until the 18th century at least, most authors were not strictly specialized. Rather they were used to writing on very different topics and in various manners. Among many others, Voltaire, Hume, and Montesquieu were active in the field of history, besides their main areas of writing, and there was not either a clear-cut dividing line between those who gave themselves up to fiction and those dedicated to the scrutiny of technical analysis. It is all the more so in the case of Diderot who spent 20 years of his life burdened by the direction of the *Encyclopédie*, compiling more than 5,000 entries as principal author (his signature was a simple asterisk) but also revising or expanding others, dealing with an army of collaborators, the publishers, printers, the whole under the constant threat of censorship. The same diversity and circumstances govern also the course of his personal publications and still more in the papers given to the *Correspondance littéraire*. In fact, no subject was discarded beforehand as insignificant, so that it is easy to disparage him as a jack of all trades. It would nevertheless be unfair to endorse crudely such a judgement; there's every chance that just the opposite is true and that he deserves his common name of "The Philosopher", even though he had never claimed the statute of a professional philosopher, because whatever topic he was taking into consideration was always examined with an epistemological concern and from a critical point of view.

It is likely that Diderot had no real interest in the unity of his oeuvre. It was not indeed a system, though it rests on strong and lasting principles. Some knots are readily apparent: physiology, materialism, the struggle against superstition, but also scientific as well as moral and aesthetic preoccupations. Each of them gives a valuable approach to the whole corpus and affords insights that exceed any component. But if there is no privileged and still less mandatory viewpoint, it does not mean that all of them are equivalent or interchangeable. The hypothesis implied and supported here is that the questions raised by art provide one of the most sensitive and powerful access to its complex identity, provided that it is interpreted as a range of activities rather than as a special category of products. To this extent, it would indeed make sense – although it does seem at first sight rather surprising – to relate Diderot and Goodman, both of them being outstanding instances of radical, artful, and somewhat maverick philosophers. For them, art is not a matter of leisure or wonder but the best suitable place for studying human possibilities and experimenting on them. Besides, both of them have felt an increasing appeal toward the specificity of any form of expression.

At the centre of Diderot's strategy on knowledge lies an active and continuous dialogue between arts and sciences, whose implement and symbol is the machine, either as a material or as an intellectual device. It is highly significant that the entry "Art" in the *Encyclopédie* deals only with

mechanical arts, not because he is not interested in the fine arts (they are treated in specialized entries like “Composition” or “Beautiful”) but because the reality of art refers primarily to its power of invention. Nowhere Diderot is more explicit than at the beginning of the entry “Bas” [*Stocking*] when he states that the machine designed for its fabrication is functioning like “one and unique piece of reasoning” whose product is the conclusion. This kind of analogy between art, mind, and technology has a pervasive force everywhere in his works; thus, one has to interpret him literally, when he speaks of Leibniz as a “machine aimed at reflection” or of Raphael as “a painting machine”, in the way that a loom is a warping machine. Every artwork is also a machine in itself, by its very organization and befitting interaction with organism and environment. Nothing is derived from any strict division imposed by nature or tradition but it activates a continuum of practices issued from a deep source and tightly interconnected. Diderot took it that “the history of nature is incomplete without that of the arts” and in return that understanding art in its multifarious mechanisms and spontaneity affords the best ground for a well-balanced sense of humanity. If one takes seriously the impact of taste, the experience of drawing or similar skills is no less essential than the development of writing.

1 A Renewed Approach to the Most Basic Artistic Notions

In his first contact with any aesthetic work written by Diderot, it would be likely for a modern reader to gain the impression that his thought is on a par with most of his contemporaries, because one does find in it the same sort of terminology they make use of. This would, nevertheless, be a superficial and misleading conclusion, insomuch as behind the presence of the very same word different representations are, in fact, brought into play. It is *par excellence* the case in the entry “Beau” [*Beautiful*] that should later be published as a little treatise, even if Diderot’s remarks are not yet fully developed.

Whereas his predecessors are selecting a principle purporting to explain the ascendancy of the beautiful on human beings (Dubos favours thus pleasure, Shaftesbury moral utility, André the degrees of perfection, etc.), Diderot tries to describe the process by which the real (or general) beautiful is engendered, independently of the various conditions that particularize it. His answer can be shortly summarized by the phrase “perception of relationships”. Unlike many authors of any time, Diderot does not say that the beautiful consists in relationships such as balance or proportions (as a formalist would say) but that beauty’s reality in our experience is an integral part of the perceptual act that actualizes it. Given that the ability of organizing the data is inherent to our powers of sensitivity, it is not only a spontaneous task but also an endless process that puts into action the whole intellect. Diderot is fully aware of the distinction to be made between what he calls real relationships that are immanent and adequate to the thing considered and perceived relationships that exploit a casual relation with something exterior to it, and even fictive relationships that are the mere product of imagination. But he never puts these categories on one and the same level. Conversely, he maintains that truth is the only touchstone for art as well for science, that “the beautiful is only the truth, but dressed with possible circumstances, though uncommon and marvellous ones”. Indeed, the line of thought that leads to such a result is full of pitfalls.

One of the most sensitive loci is imitation, a notion taken for granted by almost everybody in these times, Diderot included. Batteux goes even as far as trying to reduce all artistic phenomena to a single principle, namely imitating “la belle nature”. But where is such a thing to be searched and discovered?

Anticipating on Diderot’s stance, Batteux claims that imitation must not refer to nature as it happens to be seen but as it should be, when conceived by mind’s activity. But Diderot is the first to provide a full elaboration of this insight: the model needed is interior, not exterior, so that the prospect of “beautifying nature” is null and void (he can even write that “the flesh displayed in

art fights against the flesh in Nature"). Above all, it is an ideal model that cannot be derived from any individual image present in front of the artist or remembered by him. Diderot uses the word 'portrait' in the most derogatory sense, for denoting the act of stubbornly reproducing fortuitous appearances (as genre painters do), without considering what is universal in scope and capable of arousing the finest aesthetic effects (the same line of argument remains active in the Paradox of the Actor). This does not mean for all that the model functions in the way of an archetype in the Platonic filiation. Deeply imbued by an empiricist epistemology, Diderot sees on the contrary this situation as an experimental and filtering process that ends up to what could be identified as "true line", the one so much admired in the great masters and always in danger of degenerating in their epigones. So even if it happens that Diderot is a true admirer of Greek sculptors, he is reluctant to give artists the advice to "reform nature after the antique" and likes better to encourage them to study antiques in order to learn seeing nature.

Generally speaking, two symmetrical flaws are always threatening: at one side, "rigorous imitation of nature makes art paltry, mean and shabby" and at the opposite exaggeration or affectation produces mannerism, a "vice common to all the fine arts" that undermines the grand style. There is an immediate counterpart on the side of the receiver. Diderot does not conceive of taste as the effect of an internal sense setting a rule or standard, even though the pursuit of the beautiful is neither arbitrary nor capricious (he likes to recall that, having plotted the arc of the dome of Saint Peter's in Rome by Michelangelo, La Hyre found that this wonderful curve was the one that offered the greatest resistance). Taste appears to be a kind of facilitation acquired through repeated experience, a form of perspicuity that is suited to find its way into what is intricate and uncertain. It involves a delicate blending of reason and enthusiasm, of judgement and impulse, each one being corrected by the other, dismissing both extravagance and commonplace.

In the entry 'Composition', Diderot provides a first synthesis relative to ideas that must inspire the art of painting and reiterates them in the prologue of the Salon of 1767. A primary rule claims that "the important point is to find a great idea", that is an idea integrating enough richness as suitable for a given subject (according to the context, it can mean a strong, or clever, or delicate, or surprising, idea) and so organized that it would be difficult for someone to imagine that things could have been otherwise. Two conditions are prevalent to ascertain such an organic display: first, the picture should show "a whole regarded as a single point of view". If so, "each part should contribute its share to the principle effect", with a complete subordination of the figures. But this does not impose any constraint on the content itself, for a composition may be poor with too many characters, whereas another one is rich with only a few of them. The second condition is the selection of the most interesting moment, the one able to convey the unity of action. Anticipating on G. H. Lessing, he insists that "the painter has but one moment and he is no more allowed to comprise two distinct instants than two actions", by contrast with the innumerable resources of the poet and platitudes of poor copyists. When describing a painting, Diderot likes to note some source of confusion or inconsistency and even proposes a tentative means to avoid it. In "My bizarre thoughts about drawing", he remarks that unity is already manifest in a single figure, since it bears in each of its features her whole physiognomy; for instance, "if a woman allows her head to droop forward, all her bodily members acknowledge its weighty pull; if she lifts and holds it erect, there's a similar acknowledgement from the rest of the machine". It is also the reason why

A crooked nose in nature does not offend because everything is of a piece ... [but] twist the nose of the *Antinous*, leaving the rest as it is, and this nose will be unfortunate. Why? Because the *Antinous'* nose wouldn't be twisted at all, but rather broken.

In this context, the utmost challenge for an artist lies in the invention of the adequate expression of a passion which has yet no usual model in nature.

The symbol of coherence and efficiency indispensable in any good composition, Diderot labels it the “liaison line”: “it snakes and chains the different parts of the composition” by a virtual and potent thread that guides the viewer as well as the critic who is trying to describe the picture. Hogarth was celebrating the waving line as a line of beauty and the serpentine line as a line of grace; by contrast, Diderot focuses his attention on the cognitive and functioning import, already active in a simple sketch drawn with a pencil but confirmed through the harmony provided by colour (which is more than tincture). The most brilliant lesson given by Diderot is unquestionably his commentaries concerning two major paintings by Vien and Doyen, commissioned for the same church and exhibited in the Salon of 1767. He sincerely admires the neo-classicist virtues of Vien’s *Predication of St Denis* which shows the clearest liaison line, well-positioned planes, and a superior mastery in drawing, but he must recognize at the same time that it lacks any evidence of imagination, ideal, and poetry, ending up in a dull picture. By contrast, Doyen’s *Miracle des Ardens* seems somewhat confused and even discordant, with a messy or unstable construction; yet the painting appeals irresistibly to the beholder, activating his sense of enthusiasm and sublimity. Diderot takes as much liking to it as other visitors do but he is still insisting on its defects whereas he can but praise the qualities of Vien qua artist. As it is definitely difficult to conflate reason and feeling, and any hope to beget an exceptional artist just by conjoining these complementary talents that are missing in either of them is probably doomed to remain inconclusive. This passage could be read both as a last echo of the ongoing quarrels inside the Academy a century before, and the first glow of a new sensibility that becomes aware that “imitation arts need something wild, untreated, striking and enormous”, a feature that points to the emergence of romanticism.

2 Materialism and the Senses

It is impossible to play down Diderot’s commitment to materialism, inasmuch as it has important implications everywhere in his whole work, including the fine arts. At first glance, it might seem that its influence is not so outstanding than expected, because the brand of materialism concerned has little in common with the simplistic and dogmatic thought of the thinkers generally listed under that label. Diderot’s background is not metaphysical nor atomistic but physiological. Its main tenet lies in the strong conviction that sensibility is a universal propensity inherent to the world, so that there is no real discontinuity between matter, life, and thinking. Basically, these are diverse manifestations of a single and still largely unknown phenomenon. The whole reality is in a perpetual flux, a metamorphosis of forms, without stability or normality – monsters themselves are part of the nature – according to *D’Alembert’s Dream*. In this context, the best image of the human organism is not given by a description of its visible anatomy, it is better conceived of as a beam of threads relating every component of the body to a brain centre, or some intricate kind of web that resonates with incessant impulses.

If one considers arts generally, the first index of a materialist stance is a strong emphasis upon the senses. What motivates most Diderot is not the empiricist thesis regarding the origin of ideas and knowledge but the scope and modalities of an experimental access to sensitivity. Luckily for him, that period afforded a fruitful opportunity, in the so-called Molyneux problem that draws attention to the epistemological consequences of sensory deprivation: would a man fully developed but born blind be able to tell apart two solids already known through touch, like a cube and a sphere, using only his visual capacities recovered after a cataract operation? Unlike most of his contemporaries, Diderot is rather indifferent to give a simple answer (roughly a yes for the rationalists and a no for the empiricists) but he finds in its subject matter a springboard for a reconfiguration of the case of vision. He realizes that the situation of “eyes wide shut” (in the words of K. Tunstall) offers paradoxically the best viewpoint to understand how to be better acquainted with vision. He goes as far as imagining a kind of metaphysical anatomy whose object “would be to

analyse, as it were, a man, and to examine what he derives from each of his senses". In the fiction of a society of five people, each of them reduced to one sense different from the others, "there is no doubt that these persons would look on one another as out of his wits" but they would still be able to activate their faculty of abstraction and understand one another on the subject of geometry and that alone (*Letter on the deaf and Dumb*).

The additional element of these provocative statements lies in the necessity for every man to be exercised to get a full mastery of the organs he possesses. At the beginning, like any infant, he is unable to see or feel anything but he improves gradually its abilities through experimenting alone, independently of any link with others though gaining momentum through their interplay. Here as elsewhere, Diderot prefers to focus on potentialities rather than deficiencies. He is aware that a blind man understands perfectly well what a mirror might be, namely "an instrument which sets things in relief at a distance from themselves, when properly placed with regard to it". As he is compelled to see by means of his skin, the integument has become so keenly sensitive that he could recognize the features of something traced on his hand. So concludes Diderot, "the blind have likewise a painting, in which their own skin serves as a canvas". As crude as it might seem at first sight, such an observation points to current researches developed today by neuroscientists on brain plasticity, haptics and cross-modality. One of the most telling examples is the TVSS (tactile-visual sensory substitution), a device that uses as interface some spot on the skin or even the tongue to transform tactile stimuli into a visual signal simulating the experience of normal perception. Diderot would also be impassioned by the experiments of J. M. Kennedy and others on raised pictures, that is pictures with their contour lines in slight relief in order to be scanned by the fingertips. They are not only visual aids, they allow to go into cognitive issues concerning the capacity of blind people to draw or interpret such images. In particular, they afford a means to broach space representation and perspective, a topic mentioned by Diderot when using convergent lines to render parallels.

Moreover, Diderot remarks that "a blind people might have sculptors and put statues to the same use as among us" since, contrary to painting that appeals only to the eyes, sculpture is for the blind as well as for those who can see, whether or not the same experience and mechanisms are involved. In the Salon of 1765, he says of sculpture that "its muse is violent, but secretive and silent", it "requires an enthusiasm that's more obstinate and deep-seated", a hidden fire that burns within, because "the pencil is more licentious than the brush, and the brush more licentious than the chisel". As a consequence, he can assert that "few people other than practitioners of the art can distinguish a very beautiful work of sculpture from an ordinary one" so that "I'd take the chance of buying a picture on the basis of my own taste, my own judgment; if it were a statue, I'd ask an artist's advice". Probably this explains the fact that, in spite of his admiration for Pigalle et above all Falconet, Diderot is so short on the subject of statues. One example is nonetheless remarkable, the little group of *Pygmalion and Galatée* (Salon of 1763) which he confesses he would be so fond to have in his office. He observes that Falconet has treated his subject from a visual point of view (Pygmalion looks at the statue that slowly becomes animated) and he proposes instead a different version inspired by Ovid that inverts the reading of the composition without changing its layout: Pygmalion is about to touch the statue in order to convert marble into flesh, in the same sense that Chardin "makes flesh whenever he likes". But although touch is recognized to be "the profoundest and most philosophical sense", sculpture has still to wait for Herder and Hildebrand to gain a most prominent status in aesthetics.

3 Theatre, Painting, Semiotics

It is usually admitted that Diderot has not been successful in his own theatre attempts. This fact did not prevent him to have produced interesting writings about dramatic art and to have

nourished a continuous interplay between the worlds of the scene and painting. In fact, these relations are not absolutely new since there is a long-standing tradition of exchanges in their respective vocabularies. A unit part in an opera or ballet or even play is sometimes called a tableau (French word for a painting); conversely, it is common that Diderot speaks of a picture as being a scene and moreover, in front of it, a beholder may stand as much riveted as when he is looking at a show on the stage.

Michael Fried has called a careful attention to this aspect of Diderot's thoughts on these themes. He remarks that the painters favoured by him (in the first place, Greuze and Chardin) often represent figures totally engaged or absorbed in their activity, be it serious or minor, without noticing what is going on around them or the putative presence of the spectator as witness. But in fact, Diderot wavers between two stances that have in common to oppose the falsity of representation and theatricality but diverge on the means to achieve it. The dramatic conception inherits from history painting through the construction of an enclosed space, the figuration of bodily action as the best portrayal of the human soul and the emotional and ethical efficiency of the subject depicted. In such a case, there is "nobody beyond", neither spectator nor artist, to surprise (say) an intimate scene or he would be a voyeur. This conduct would exhibit the same kind of unseemliness than an actor who is shouting at the audience. The alternative and/or complement is the pastoral view when the painting becomes a field of experimenting visual layouts and artistic potentialities. Diderot's literary imagination aims at the unfolding (so to speak) of what he is looking at; it narratively dissolves the boundaries of the frame, so that the beholder can fictionally enter the work. In front of the much-admired works of Loutherbourg, Le Prince, or Vernet (the famous Promenade Vernet that develops along 40 pages!), he gives instructions to the reader, describes wonderful vistas in each site, and devises encounters and snatches of stories. As a critic, he asserts: "I substitute art for nature, in order to gain a better judgment of it", mixing in his narrative sentences past and present tenses. At some points, he has to confess that he was forgetting he was still speaking of a painted scene, but must also avow that the contemplation of the best paintings falls short of the kind of emotion afforded by a sublime landscape.

At first sight, theatre offers the reverse situation. In his *Discourse on Dramatic Poetry*, Diderot gives this surprising advice: play as if the curtain never rises. It is significant that he makes use of the word "toile" (canvas), suggesting that the plane of separation must have a physical reality for actors although it remains translucent for the spectator. For him, theatre is most successful when achieving the best tableau, that is a logical and clever display of the characters involved in the plot, in so compelling a way that a painter would be tempted to imitate it. In compensation, Diderot despises the use of "coups de théâtre", these unexpected incidents that shatter the course of the action and whose effect is only superficial and momentary.

This continuous relationship between painting and theatre explains also the importance recognized by Diderot to the neglected art of pantomime. From a technical point of view, it refers to a language of gestural expressiveness capable of conveying the significance of an action or a situation without any help of words. It therefore opens an appropriate room for manoeuvre to the actor who has to decide which physical embodiment is fittest to represent some features in a play, though it is no more written down than the musical continuo. The fruitful reference here is the experience of deaf-and-dumb people who show a superior penetration in being skilful to project non-linguistic signs as a means for communicating, for instance Father Castel's harpsichord that made use of coloured fans. They reach perfect discrimination between various musical instruments and tones, a talent that might compete with the ability of Rameau's nephew in miming each of them. In fact, Diderot goes as far as retaining something of their condition when listening at performances. He confesses that he was used, much to the astonishment of his neighbours, to put his fingers in his ears while watching, in order to remain the most concentrated on the bodily attitudes, as a painter would do in search of a suitable composition. So, it is no wonder that his

liking and taste to pictures was so colloquial, and that he was convinced that a master painter should be the ideal director.

All these considerations point to one of the most elusive and creative notions begotten by Diderot's pen, that is the "hieroglyph". It was first introduced in relation to poetry, through the order of words and the use of figurative language. A poem may be described as a chain of overlapping hieroglyphs – at the phonemic, syntactic, and semantic levels – woven into a single semiotic fabric. To say that poetry is emblematic means that it stimulates the creation of a mental image of the objects evoked in order to make them be seen. Cognition and desire cooperate in an act of critical mimesis. In this context, it is no surprise that Diderot lays stress on the limitations imposed on translation, from one language to another, and more radically from one sensory experience to another. But in the same time, he is quite aware of the range of possibilities involved in a two-way procedure when the reflected light of the metaphor is added to the direct light of the natural expression. Before Lessing, he has understood that it is never legitimate to transfer literally from one given art to another: Neptune raising his head above the waves may be impressive in Virgil's lines, but he would only look like a beheaded man in a picture. What is at stake is the upcoming program of a comparative aesthetics: "as every imitative art has its own special hieroglyphs, I much wish some man of taste and intelligence would make a systematic study of them" and of their unequal correspondences. He imagines three versions of the same subject, a dying woman, rended by a poet, an etcher, and a musician. None of these could abolish the others, because each makes use of its proper method of expression and is liable to various kinds of constraints. The painter's strength lies in his capacity to show the very thing whereas poet and musician can only look for equivalents; nonetheless, it is a fact that "the brush takes time to represent what the artist's eye sees in an instant" and the writer achieves in a single sentence what the painter sketches hardly in a week. This easiness is itself partly delusive since it opens on to a new challenge, the exciting and painful task of "painting with words" as Wollheim dubs Diderot's approach to criticism.

4 The Magical Experience

One of the strongest tenets supported by Diderot is that "painting is the art of reaching the soul through the intermediacy of the eye; if the effect is concerned only with eyes, the painter has gained the lesser part of the way". The scope of such a statement is twofold: first, it recalls that the ultimate *raison d'être* of art has to do with emulating "the moving picture of the soul", making the most of the philosophical echoes of the subject as well as ethical purposes like celebrating virtue or chastising vice or failings; second, it stresses the major fact that visual experience has something peculiar which Diderot speaks of in terms of magic. The terminology is generally associated with his favourite painters, Chardin and Vernet, Loutherbourg, and a few others. It is also ironically mentioned to belittle second rate artists that may show ability and even fieriness but misuse their talent for want of genuine ideas – like Boucher who has no art thoughts, only deceptive *concetti*.

At this point, it is important to notice that the core of the phenomenon has little to do with ordinary *trompe-l'oeil* or a vulgar form of illusion. Some statements may indeed favour such an opinion, for example when Diderot remarks about Chardin: "in order to look at paintings by others, it seems that I need to shape suited eyes; to see Chardin's ones, I have just to keep the eyes nature gave to me and make the best use of them". Or when he characterizes 'magic' as a situation in which a beholder feels the plain effect without being able to guess the cause responsible for it. This definition is also provided by Watelet who distinguishes the common magic born out of ignorance and the delicate and powerful achievements related to the arts.

In fact, in his *Essays on Painting*, Diderot is fully aware of a distinction between two sorts of paintings. According to the first one, whenever the eye is close enough to it, it is in a position to focus on all the minute details it contains; if conversely the viewer walks back, the image fades

itself. It is up to him to discover the right distance ensuring natural appearances, a clear premonition of what Gombrich calls the eye-witness principle. The other sort rests on an intentional selection of aspects that make sense only in the vision of the artist. Such was Rembrandt's method and its incomparable success. In that case, important parts of the painting resist interpretation if they are considered separately. Incidentally, Diderot lays stress on the decision to neglect secondary or non-pertinent features, and not on the effort to create artificial effects such as *papillotage* (flickering) which the *rococo* painters were so fond of. Instead of a distinctive threat on the stabilization of appearances, what is first in question is often the difference prevailing between long-sighted and short-sighted persons; besides, he thinks the poet is spontaneously tempted to see an elephant in every fly, whereas the philosopher tends to reduce elephants to the size of flies.

It is worth noting that Diderot never tries to apply a rigid grid that locks up every artist in a pre-determined box. It is obvious for Chardin, Diderot's most favoured painter. He does not belong to the first category since the description offered for *The Rayfish* (1728) is at the exact opposite: "close up, everything blurs, goes flat and disappears. From a distance, everything comes back to life and reappears". And the second category is no more appropriate, given that he is renowned for his sense of precision and reality. To a large extent, he is beyond this kind of duality, retaining something on each side while exceeding both of them. Apropos *A Basket of Plums* (1765), Diderot writes

Chardin's handling is unusual. It resembles the summary style [*la manière heurtée*] in the way one can't make things out from close up, while as one moves away the object coalesces and finally resembles nature; and sometimes it affords as much pleasure from close up as from a distance. This man is as superior to Greuze as the sky is high, but in this respect alone; he has no style; no, I'm mistaken, he does have one that's his alone; but because it's his own style, it should ring false in certain circumstances, and it never does.

The sophistication of Diderot's analysis mirrors the genius of the painter but it falls short of an explanation: "At times, it looks as though the canvas has misted over from someone breathing on it; at others, as though a thin film of water has landed on it". Still he does not abandon his questioning about the procedure, asserting occasionally that, whereas the musician works with the sounds themselves as we can hear them, the painter does not use as materials flesh, blood, wool, or light but various pigments, juices, charred bones and the like which act in a kind of translation. A few pages below, the tonality is noticeably different

O Chardin, it's not white, red or black pigment that you grind on your palette, but rather the very substance of objects; it's real air and light that you take onto the tip of your brush and transfer onto the canvas.

Should these two statements be taken as contradictory? Rather they point to the double nature embedded in any work of painting that can generate a transparent and truthful image only through the thickness of its stuff.

Reading these texts in hindsight, one may be tempted to search in them a first draft of the modern theory of twofoldness. It would not be absurd though not a promising project, due to the heterogeneity of the contexts. At the very least, it should be clear that the observations provided by Diderot do not take place at the same level. They do not refer to a conflict between two interpretative hypotheses, such as in Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit figure, any more than the fusion between a configurational aspect and a recognitional aspect in the classical approach defended by Wollheim. They would be in better agreement with Gombrich when he insists on the impossibility to focus at the same time on the marked surface and the subject, but Diderot is more sensitive to the changes caused by moving closer and farther (a sign fading into a stain, a blot becoming a

familiar form). In fact, the most fruitful insight points to Walton's notion of make believe, because it involves a native range of interaction between perception and imagination, visual abilities, and the whole mind. At the same time, one must never forget that a significant part of Diderot's writings still remains dependent on a rhetorical background.

5 The Dawn of Criticism?

Although Diderot has written a lot on the arts, with a special care for painting, and though he was quite conscious that this was a privileged part of his oeuvre (see his letter to Sophie Volland, 10 November 1765), it is not uncalled-for wondering if he deserves a true status of an art critic and all the more if he played a leading role in the development or even emergence of criticism as a genre. Anyone who reads Diderot today is inclined to give a positive answer, so much his personality supersedes that of the vast majority of his contemporaries. However, it must be recalled that the *Salons* had no public appearance at the time. They were edited in French in the *Correspondance littéraire*, a private newspaper run by Grimm that was not printed but handwritten and limited to 15 copies distributed through diplomatic channels to liberal sovereigns and the elite of European nobility. None of them was published during Diderot's life and the complete series was not published until 1876.

At the beginning, the impulse seems to have been a desire to do Grimm a favour but rather quickly Diderot became quite taken with it. If the first reviews (1759 and 1761) are still a casual collection of notes, the following ones are far more elaborate and creative, at least till 1769 when he appears to be fed up with what did amount now to a burden. In fact, Diderot has never got a good opinion on criticism as a professional activity. He scorns it as a silly occupation that spoils immediate pleasure; critics are dubbed narrow brains, men of little sense, always ready to throw poisoned needles against their opponents. By contrast, Diderot introduces himself as a plain man of letters who says what he sees and needs to address his remarks to somebody he knows, like anyone writing a letter. He can easily detect mediocrity and often complains about the plethora of poor paintings, with no capacity for all that to produce something worthwhile. It is the reason why he confesses that "he praises or blames after his personal sensation that does not establish a rule" and claims the right not to keep to agreement with himself. This does not mean that Diderot's judgements are impulsive or thoughtless, but rather that he gives prominence to sincerity in his appreciation, so that his choices tend to delineate a kind of personal imaginary museum.

It is patent that Diderot makes use of a careful method of description. He begins with the subject (often mentioned in the title), then goes through the main figure and those related to it, the other groups, to meaningful features such as light, physiognomies, draperies, etc., and the resulting expression. These passages may seem rather tedious today but one has to be conscious that Diderot has no photograph or engraving at his disposal. He regrets this situation and confesses that a simple sketch indicating the general layout, the liaison line, and distribution of light and shadows would afford a true benefit. For want of such drawings, the reader is compelled to imagine through Diderot's seductive words. Moreover, in front of some paintings, he dares to suggest improvements to the composition, and he is proud to avow that painters ask him for subjects and recognize in the insights given something really usable, so much pictorially grounded his unrestrained imagination was.

Most commentators agree that Diderot has showed a correct grasp of the major trends in the evolution of art at his times. He has been harsh with rococo or official history painters as well as he has sensed the importance of Robert, the troubadour style or neo-classicism. For the most part, the artists he has praised remain nowadays on the upper rank while those he has despised have not known any revival. It cannot be denied however that his open-mindedness is sometimes flawed by lingering prejudices, moralizing and that he was too confidently reliant on his intuitive

taste. But none among his contemporaries would be exempt from the same reservations, personal genius apart.

Anyway, it does seem difficult to follow Brunetière in his unsubtle verdict concerning Diderot's supposed dogmatism and lack of information on the technical part of the art of painting. These strictures are disputable and, as Gita May remarks, "to evaluate the *Salons* as though they were ordinary critical reviews is to commit a basic error in methodology". They do not belong to "art criticism in the usual sense of the term" and still less to any science of pictures. Their challenge is an attempt to "make an art of art criticism". In this sense, Diderot's natural heirs are not critics or art historians but the persistent tradition of French writers like Baudelaire, Gautier, Huysmans, or Apollinaire (among many others) that serve the defence of art through an opinionated and creative practice of writing. It does not replace academic disciplines but affords additional reasons to be interested in art. This insistent lesson must always complement the achievement of Diderot as a philosopher.

Further Reading

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35

HEGEL ON SCULPTURE AND PAINTING

Richard Eldridge

Hegel's accounts of sculpture and painting are both enriched and complicated by their relation to his metaphysics. He undertakes to describe what is peculiar or proper [*eigentümlich*] to sculpture and painting at various historical moments: the materials, subject matters, and modes of organization that make for the most significant and effective works in these media of art (and others) at specific historical times. He takes artistic value to be essentially partially realized historically so that his accounts are simultaneously descriptive and normative. Hence his accounts take note of what has been done within these media, but the approach is not that of simple observation and generalization alone. Instead, the approach is also evaluative in focusing on what has been most significant when.¹

Second, both which medium of art counts as most important and which forms, materials, and subject matters are most successful within any given medium of art vary historically, in tandem with changes in cultural, economic, and political modes of joint social life and with the changes in human self-understanding that both imply and are implied by those changes. As Robert B. Pippin aptly puts it, Hegel "links the meaningfulness and significance of art-historical developments to both social history and philosophical history ... without any reduction of aesthetic norms to merely thematic issues" or of artworks to mere illustrations of ideas fully established elsewhere.² Or, in Benjamin Rutter's formulation, "the sort of world to which [the artist] belongs" matters for artistic significance and success.³ Art is a mode of human self-understanding, and major artistic achievements develop and change historically in reciprocal interaction with both explicit philosophical self-understandings and implicit self-understandings that are lived out in social life.

Third, Hegel's large-scale account of how the history of significant art develops in reciprocal interaction with sociocultural and philosophical history sees each of these histories as driven by a fundamental need of human beings, initially alienated from their lives by the facts of mutual opposition and conscious reflection on it, to find themselves freely at home within their worlds, within relations of achieved mutual recognition and endorsement. The significance of art is determined by how it contributes to this fundamental project. Hegel coins the term Spirit in order to describe, roughly, the ongoing interaction between reflection on the project of free life *qua* mutual recognition and its proper object, namely, the existing and developing forms of individual and social life that reflection is essentially devoted to understanding, reforming, and (ultimately) justifying. As Hegel puts in the *Lectures on Fine Art*, Spirit

Generates out of itself works of fine art as the first reconciling middle term between pure [but initially undeveloped, abstract, and empty] thought [about what is worth doing, about

how to live, about freedom as achieved recognition], and what is merely external, sensuous, and transient, between ... the infinite freedom of conceptual thinking [on the one hand] and nature and finite reality and [on the other].⁴

Or, in more anthropological terms, Hegel compares the development of art and the fundamental human interests that it serves to a child's seeking a reflection of itself in nature.

A boy throws stones into the river and now marvels at the circles drawn in the water as an effect in which he gains an intuition of something that is his own doing. This need runs through the most diversiform phenomena up to that mode of self-production in external things which is present in the work of art.⁵

One result of these three commitments on Hegel's parts—blending the descriptive with the normative; seeing the histories of art, sociopolitical life, and philosophy in reciprocal interaction with each other; and seeing those histories as unified under a large metaphysical story about the achievement of freedom as achieved recognition—is that Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art* might offer us nothing more than a highly speculative, ungrounded story about developments in the histories of art and social life. Since Hegel develops his philosophy of history partly via attention to works of art⁶ and, conversely, his philosophy of art via attention to sociocultural history, there is at least some risk of circularity in his approach.⁷ The only answer to this worry is to scrutinize the mass of detail about media, subject matters, materials, and modes of organization that Hegel offers throughout his lectures in order to characterize which works have been important to whom, when, and how.⁸

A yet further complication is that after an Introduction and a general discussion of “The Idea of Artistic Beauty, or the Ideal,” Hegel divides his treatment of specific media into Part II, “The Development of the Ideal into the Particular Forms of Art” and “Part III, The System of the Individual Arts.”⁹ Both the titles and the division itself are somewhat misleading. In Part II, Hegel focuses primarily on the differences between the major epochs of art history as he understands them (Symbolic, Classical, and Romantic, or, roughly, Egyptian, Ancient Greek, and Roman up to the present) and the media of art that are most significant during these epochs (architecture for the Symbolic epoch, sculpture for the Classical, and, in order, painting, music, and poetry for the Romantic). Yet, as Hegel is well aware, works in each medium exist during all epochs, and important ranges of achievement are possible within each of them at all times, even when the medium in question is not the most significant medium of art for the life of the culture. The differing and historically changing conditions of artistic success within individual media at any historical moment is the primary topic of Part III, where the focus is more on medium-specific choices of materials, subject matters, and modes of organization than it is on the salience for joint social life of a medium of art as a whole. Hence it is generally wise to read Part II and Part III in relation to each other, bearing in mind that Hegel thinks both that particular media of art are culturally most salient during distinctive historical epochs and that artistic achievement is also possible in any medium at any time, in changing, historically and medially specific ways.

Hegel begins his account of the history of art by focusing on uses of artifacts—towers in Persia such as the Tower of Babel and Indian phallic lingams—in more or less religious rituals. In constructing these objects and developing rites centered around them, human beings are reflecting on what is divine and most deserves human allegiance, but in a relatively abstract, contentless, and hence inadequate way. Such religious, ritual practices are part of a kind of pre-history of art that makes manifest the seriousness of the more explicitly artistic practices that will subsequently develop out of them.

Human beings then turn their ritualistic intentions to the construction of massive stone objects—the Egyptian pyramids—as foci for worship and reverence. This turn is altogether

compatible with, and in fact explicitly rests on, the fact that not all are free and that masters command slaves to undertake the required massive building projects, for human beings have not yet understood freedom as an ultimate value. Their conception of the divine remains still relatively contentless or what Hegel terms Symbolic. “The pyramids put before our eyes the simple prototype of symbolical art itself; they are the prodigious crystals which conceal in themselves an inner meaning ...; the shape *for* an inner meaning remains just an external form and veil.”¹⁰ When human beings are represented, for example, in bas-reliefs, on sarcophagi, or as guardian figures at entrances, the human figure is

So represented that it still has the inner element of subjectivity outside itself, and cannot unfold itself into free beauty. Especially remarkable are those colossal statues of Memnon which, resting in themselves, motionless, the arms glued to the body, the feet firmly fixed together, numb, stiff, and lifeless, are set up facing the sun in order to await its ray to touch them and given them soul and sound. ... [Here] the inner life of the human form is still dumb.¹¹

Egyptian sculpture “has not yet overcome the breach between meaning and object;” there is a “lack of inner, creative freedom ... [and of] the grace and vivacity that result from the properly organic sweep of the lines.”¹²

In contrast, in roughly 5th-century BCE Greece, the conditions of life are very different, so that the free unfolding of beauty in sculpture is both possible and apt to those new conditions. “The Greeks,” as Hegel would have it, “in their immediate real existence lived in the happy milieu of both self-conscious subjective freedom and the ethical substance.”¹³ According to this understanding, at least (and only) Greek male property owners above a certain level immediately felt mutual recognition and identification with their social status and roles. For at least these happy few, Spirit was at home in the world; the human need for recognition and continuing identification with one’s way of life was significantly satisfied. Hence the art that is appropriate to this new situation is no longer abstract, symbolic, and lifeless, but instead presented what Michael Podro calls an “image of man’s sense of his own situation [that] brought forth a response of recognition from the depth of consciousness.”¹⁴

According to Hegel, it is in sculpture in particular that

Spiritual inwardness ... makes itself at home in the sensuous shape and its external material... [Here] insofar as ... both sides [—formed material and represented content—] are so mutually formed that neither preponderates, sculpture acquires the *classical art-form* as its fundamental type

and “forms the center of classical art.”¹⁵ “Nothing,” Hegel tells us, “can be or become more beautiful.”¹⁶ In sculpture, “spirit so forms this externality that it is present to itself in it and recognizes in it the appropriate shape of its own inner life.”¹⁷

Sculpture does this—presents reflection on life as satisfied by existing modes of life—by presenting the divine, or what is worth reverence, in human form, where the human form is itself calm and undisturbed in a way that figuratively presents achieved and stable satisfaction. In statues of the Greek gods, we see “the Divine as such in its infinite peace and sublimity, timeless, immobile, without purely subjective personality and the discord of actions and situations.”¹⁸ Here in the human body in marble,

Spirit makes itself living likewise in this reality appropriate to itself, it glints in it, pervades it and through it becomes manifest to others. ... In its shape and structure [the human body] declare[s] itself as likewise the sensuous and natural existence of the spirit. ... The external human form is alone capable of revealing the spiritual in a sensuous way.¹⁹

Rutter describes the particular appropriateness of a human god for Greek sculpture and its significance in relation to Greek life in observing that

A content that is pure universality—God, light—is nearly impossible to sculpt. One that is pure particularity—a bust of an ordinary Athenian—is not worth sculpting. ... But Apollo's divinity outstrips neither the corporeal form of sculpture (his godliness just is his physical perfection) nor its stillness (Apollo's identity is not bound up with any particular story about his life).²⁰

In Apollo's sculpted human form, divinity is at rest and at home in the world, thus discharging “the chief task of sculpture, [which] is to present the peaceful divine image in its blessed perfection without any inner struggle, ... in beautiful, simple, inactive repose in no specific situation.”²¹

Hegel describes several statues by Phidias (c. 480–430 BCE), Polyclitus (5th century BCE), Myron (480–440 BCE), Praxiteles (c. early 4th century BCE), and Scopas (c. 395–350 BCE). He saw some of these works in the collections in the Louvre and in Dresden (sometimes as plaster copies), and he knew others from descriptions given by Winckelmann and Pliny. He describes the Phidias Dresden Zeus as “benign in his majesty,” and he notes that while “Bacchus has more youthful beauty and delicacy of form; Apollo is more manly but has no beard.”²² Juno has “the greatest majesty in form and expression. Her large rounded eyes are proud and commanding; her mouth is similar and it at once makes her recognizable, especially when seen in profile.”²³ “Venus arises[es] from her bath, conscious of her powers, quietly looking into the distance.”²⁴ “Praise,” he writes, “comes back ever anew to the figure of the recumbent river-god [Ilissos, in the Elgin Marbles, from the west pediment of the Parthenon, ascribed to Phidias] which is amongst the most beautiful things preserved to us from antiquity.”²⁵

Not only is the subject matter—the divine at rest in human form—determined by the needs and character of Greek life (for the male aristocratic few), so are the materials and the manner of presentation. “Marble in its soft purity, whiteness, absence of colour, and the delicacy of its sheen harmonizes in the most direct way with the aim of sculpture.” In contrast, “the darker vaguer colour, the sheen, the smoothness of bronze, ... the most widespread and favourite material [among the Greeks], ... lacks in general the abstractness of white marble, but it is, as it were, warmer” and possesses “infinite malleability and, as it were, fluidity.” Nonetheless, it is marble that “through its granular character and the gentle infusion of light” best permits a kind of shining forth of embodied divine subjectivity through the material.²⁶ Here Hegel’s preference for marble over bronze (following Winckelmann) makes clear that he is not simply describing what was mostly done in making sculptures in Greece, but instead evaluating which works best fulfill the fundamental aims of Greek art.

This selective, descriptive-normative treatment on Hegel’s part extends to the topics of sculptural form, color, and decoration. In the most successful sculptures of children and youths,

The straight line that goes on and on, abstract even surfaces, and rigidly geometrical curves are avoided everywhere, and instead there is elaborated in the most beautiful way the living variety of lines and forms in the nuances linking their transitions together. ... The boundaries of the forms flow into one another rather unnoticeably and they fade into one another so delicately that, as Winckelmann says ... one might compare them with the surface of a sea unruffled by the winds, of which one could say that although it is in constant motion it is nevertheless calm.²⁷

In contrast, “statues of grown men” will present “distinctions more markedly” in order to indicate an achieved typical moral character, such as “developed bodily strength and courage.”²⁸ Yet in

all successful Greek sculptures of both young and old, “the serenity of delight remains common to them all, a joy and a blissful indifference in soaring away above everything particular.”²⁹ Unlike the Egyptians, “in their sculptures … the Greeks release the arms and legs from the body,” whether in motion or in repose, while nonetheless presenting a figure that “remains self-enclosed and has its warrant in itself.”³⁰ The need for self-enclosure and repose on the part of figure explains why successful Greek sculpture must lack “the iris and glance expressive of [the] spirit” of a distinctively individualized personality. Instead, “spiritual life is effused over the entirety of the sculptural form.”³¹

Though the Greeks frequently painted their statues and decorated them with gold, jewels, or ivory, these adornments are not necessary for a fully sculptural effect and may even be inimical to it. In an unpainted marble sculpture, “the mildness of the color corresponds to the purpose of sculpture, namely to express that which is calm, naïve, ideal.”³² “The purer artistic taste became, the more did it ‘give up that display of colour which was inappropriate to it.’”³³ Here it is clear, again, that Hegel’s point is not simply descriptive-historical. As Stephen Houlgate aptly puts it, “Hegel’s assertion that ideal sculpture lacks both color and seeing eyes is not an ill-founded historical claim. It is a claim about what is proper to and so specifically *sculptural* about sculpture.”³⁴

The ideal sculpture—ideal both in relation to Greek life and as exemplifying the highest achievements of sculpture as such—for Hegel is thus an unpainted and undecorated marble statue of a Greek god in human form, presenting the god at rest, but in a fluidly free stance, with smoothly modulated contours, without delineated eye sockets, and with a calmly abstract and somewhat distantly directed gaze. Phidias in particular excels in making such statues and so in reflecting back to mid-5th-century B.C.E. Greeks what they took to be the highest and most meaningful mode of human life.

For reasons that are both internal to the artistic practice and experience of sculpture and socio-historically external, however, sculpture inevitably declines from this high point of achievement. Within the practice of sculpture, artists find themselves increasingly moved by what Hegel calls “a craving to please”³⁵ an audience that demands increasingly particularized detail and subject matter. Instead of statues of gods in moments of calm, sculptors begin to depict “delightful situations” and “fleeting moments,” such as “the sports of Eros,” dice-playing, or “the boy plucking a thorn from his foot.”³⁶ As the subject matters taken up become more pluralized and particularized, sculptors begin to turn their attentions to bravura treatments of incidental details such as “little independent miniatures, decoration, ornaments, dimples on the cheeks, graceful coiffures, smiles, robes variously draped, … [and] poses that are striking and difficult,” so that the sculptures become merely pleasing and agreeable, with “their essential purpose solely in relation to the spectator or reader,” where they “flatter the person for whom they have been devised.”³⁷ Hence “the ideal passes over from loftiness to what is pleasing and delicate, to cheerfulness and a coaxing gracefulness.”³⁸

As both cause and effect of this development—the spiritual and the sociohistorical are always in reciprocal interaction, according to Hegel—ethical solidarity in common attachment to Periclean ideals wanes, and individualism, setting individual judgment against the state, waxes. Socrates exemplifies this development on the political side, according to Hegel, insofar as he “claims to be free not only in the state as the substantial whole, … but in his own heart,” against a background of a state already degenerating into “vanity, self-interest, and the licentiousness of democracy and demagogery.”³⁹ Similarly, Hegel reads the opposed one-sided insistence of Antigone (familial duty) and Creon (civic order) in Sophocles’ *Antigone* as symptoms of an irresistibly emerging individualism.

More forcefully, the ethical solidarity of the Periclean Golden Age of Athens had to disappear—in principle, it could not hold the allegiance of all—insofar as its benefits and entitlements were restricted to male property owners and insofar as it failed to give scope to more diverse and articulated forms of individual meaning-making within supportive and stable social settings.

Freedom as being meaningfully “with oneself in another”⁴⁰—the dominant value for Hegel and a value that is progressively instantiated and modified dialectically in history—itself requires the fragmentation and replacement of Periclean solidarity and the introduction of some degrees of inwardness and individualism. Hence, the classical sculpture of Phidias that was so well suited to expressing and reinforcing Periclean ideals is also defective when measured against the actual, true, emerging interests of Spirit.

The classical form of art has attained [especially in sculpture] the pinnacle of what illustration [of the interests of spirit] by *art* could achieve, and if there is something defective in it, the defect is just art itself and the restrictedness of the sphere of art. This restrictedness lies in the fact that art in general takes as its subject-matter the spirit ... in a *sensuously* concrete form, and classical art presents the complete unification of spiritual and sensuous existence as the *correspondence* of the two. But in this blending of the two, spirit is not in fact represented in its *true nature*. For spirit is the infinite subjectivity of the Idea [of freedom], which as absolute inwardness cannot freely and truly shape itself outwardly on condition of remaining moulded into a bodily existence as the one appropriate to it.⁴¹

Hence “art, considered in its highest vocation [of expressing most adequately the interests of spirit, as that vocation is achieved in Greek sculpture] is and remains for us a thing of the past.”⁴² There of course can be and are sculptures made in post-Periclean Greek life and on throughout history into the present. Hegel is particularly impressed with the sculptures of Dürer and Michelangelo. Post-Greek sculptures remain, however, primarily either “an adornment of architecture”⁴³ or treatments of themes (the love of the Madonna for the Child, the Crucifixion) that are better treated in painting. Hegel of course did not know modern, abstract sculpture. But here, too, while there can be striking and imaginative works that provoke thought, none of them will match the achievement of Classical Greek sculpture in sensuously expressing the interests of spirit and the idea of freedom. As Houlgate aptly puts it, contemporary abstract sculptures “do not directly embody concrete human freedom or organic life, but are invented, constructed shapes that simply ‘stimulate thought... and arouse general ideas’ [with an ultimately mute opacity] not unlike the symbolic constructions of the ancient world.”⁴⁴ It is, perhaps, an open question whether any such abstract works can achieve or have achieved anything like the depth of address to socially lived possibilities of meaningful life that is distinctively manifest in Greek sculpture.

In contrast with sculpture that is, according to Hegel, “predominantly independent on its own account, unconcerned about the spectator who can place himself wherever he likes” in viewing it and with a content that is “self-reposing, self-complete, and objective,” painting

Reveals its purpose as existing not independently on its own account but for subjective apprehension, for the spectator. The spectator is as it were in it from the beginning, is counted in with it, and the work exists only for this fixed point, i.e. for the individual apprehending it.⁴⁵

That is to say that a painting, or at least a representational painting using fixed-point perspective, assumes a single spectator’s viewpoint directly opposite the painting’s vanishing point. In so doing, as Michael Podro observes, a painting gives us “something seen from a particular viewpoint, and being seen from a specific viewpoint ... becomes a theme within the painting. The fact that it is being seen from a given viewpoint is part of its content.”⁴⁶ In general, according to Hegel,

The truth of art cannot be mere correctness, to which the so-called imitation of nature is restricted; on the contrary, the outer must harmonize with an inner which is harmonious in itself, and, just on that account, can reveal itself as itself in the outer.⁴⁷

In landscape painting in particular, for example, success is not simply a matter of the depiction of the relative spatial positions of the objects composing a natural scene, but instead a matter of producing “moods in our heart which correspond to the moods of nature” so that the “life of nature re-echoes in our soul and heart.”⁴⁸

Second, the number of objects the appearance of which a painting can present for apprehension by the spectator is vastly multiplied in comparison with the single object or a small number of objects that a sculpture presents. From a still life that may depict myriad goblets, serving trays, trussed fowls, grapes, cream pitchers, lemon slices, and so on to a wider angle landscape painting that may present multiple human figures, mountainous backgrounds, groups of buildings, whole cities as seen from afar, and so on, “it is possible for the painter to bring within the sphere of his presentations a wealth of objects that remain inaccessible to sculpture.”⁴⁹

As a result of the compositional grouping of multiple objects seen from a point of view, the viewer of a painting is forced to consider why the objects are thus grouped or what they have to do with each other. For the depiction of human beings, in particular, this will mean that “the grouping of [the] figures indicates their *activity* in a specific situation” so that they are presented in relation to their “variegated external surrounding” and in “dramatic liveliness” (even if their mode of action is quiet reflection on their situation).⁵⁰ “What,” the viewer must ask, are these objects doing here?” and for human figures in particular, “what are the beliefs, desires, commitments, experiences, and so forth that have put them in this situation?” Representational paintings hence essentially imply a narrative that must be imagined by the spectator, though they typically do not (unless they are diptychs, triptychs, or otherwise multi-panel) present the unfolding of multiple events over time.

Not only is an implied narrative presented as to be imagined by the viewer, who must reconstruct from the visual appearances of the figures (or other objects) and from the title or other contextual information the motivating reasons (for human figures: the passions, desires, beliefs, etc.) that explain the grouping, painting also, as Hegel puts it, “restricts” or “dissolve[s] … the independence of the actual spatially present existent” by presenting only a two-dimensional appearance of an object, or something to be seen *in* the paint on canvas, rather than something existing on its own. In this way, there is a kind of natural use of the medium of paint on canvas (or other support), presenting two-dimensional appearances, to solicit imaginative activity on the parts of viewers who reconstruct what is going on from what they see.

Strikingly, Hegel then argues, this makes painting, unlike sculpture, distinctively appropriate to subjectivity’s reflection on its possibilities of meaningful life in the new Roman-Christian world. In contrast with Greek socioethical life, this new world is characterized by a more strongly felt sense of inwardness [*Innerlichkeit*]. This sense is both nurtured and expressed by Roman commercial law, where individuals participating in legally enforceable commercial transactions may typically hide motives, commitments, and pieces of knowledge from others with whom they are making contracts, and by Christianity, with its sense of inner resources for radical conversion to new religious commitments. In the life of Spirit or of the forming and testing of normative commitments for the sake of meaningful life, there is, as Hegel puts it, “something higher than the appearance of spirit in its immediate sensible form”⁵¹: namely that individuals should freely create and participate in distinctively divergent but also mutually intelligible and endorsable social roles. This will require the continuing activity, driven by inwardness or subjectivity, of the creation and revision of social roles under conditions of conflict, where the result, as Hegel will ultimately have it, is a kind of fortunate fall from the more immediate and naïve meaningful way of life of (some) Greeks. Unlike sculpture, painting in its ability to present subjects-in-interaction within richly significant settings and from a point of view that surveys them, is best suited to express and embody what human beings now hold to be most important to them.

Painting ... opens the way for the first time to the principle of finite and inherently [*in sich*: implicit, not yet developed] infinite subjectivity, the principle of our own life and existence, and in paintings we see what is effective and active in ourselves.⁵²

According to Hegel, there are then two paradigm cases of painting that distinctively succeeds in presenting living, active human subjects engaged in what they take to be meaningful life: Italian Renaissance religious painting of roughly the 15th and 16th centuries, and Dutch-Flemish painting of the 17th century. In both cases, the subject matter is not simply human subjects at home within meaningful ethico-social life in the world. Instead, in religious paintings, in particular, we see human beings in situations in which

The soul has worked its way through its feelings and powers and the whole of its inner life, i.e. that it has overcome much, suffered grief, endured anguish and pain of soul, and yet in this disunion has preserved its integrity and withdrawn out of itself into itself.⁵³

Paradigmatically, this inward acceptance of a difficult situation and achievement of integrity are exemplified by Mary in her love for Jesus, whether in her acceptance of the Annunciation, in her gaze at the infant on her lap, or her resolute, composed sorrow at the removal of the body from the cross. Her “ardor [*Inmigkeit*]” in playing her part in loving Jesus shows itself in her face and bearing.⁵⁴

What depth of feeling, what spiritual life, what inner wealth of profound emotion, what sublimity and charm, what a human heart, though one wholly penetrated by the divine Spirit, does not speak to us out of every line of these pictures [of the great Italian masters]. ... It is the inner life of the spirit which undertakes to express itself as *inner* in the mirror of externality.⁵⁵

Or in scenes of the Passion, in “the mockery, the crowns of thorns, the Ecce Homo, the carrying of the cross, the Crucifixion, the Descent from the Cross, the Entombment, etc.,”⁵⁶ we see Jesus in pain and sorrow, but also in what Hegel calls his bliss in the fulfillment of his vocation, in his “unity with self in spite of all the self-surrender.”⁵⁷

Technically, Hegel for both Italian Renaissance and Dutch painting stresses the importance of coloring, and in particular coloring using oils, over design in establishing a convincing pictorial space into which viewers can see imaginatively. In contrast with egg-based tempera, which dries quickly and relatively monochromatically, oil painting “not only permits the most delicate and soft fusion and shading of colors, ... but it also acquires ... by means of the glazes it can produce ... a translucency of different layers of colour.”⁵⁸ The use of color in oils to set up an illuminated, modulated, translucent depth space gives an oil painting an effect of shining from within that, especially when the painting is large enough, seems to surround viewers and invite them to explore its pictorial depth. Hence, the absorption of the viewer in the pictorial space presented in oil mirrors the absorption of the paintings’ subjects in their activities and relationships.⁵⁹ At the limit of the self-sustaining use of colour, in *sfumato*, in particular, the play of colors seems to set up a self-sustaining world of its own.

In general, it may be said that the magic consists in so handling all the colours that what emerges is an inherently objectless play of pure appearance which forms the extreme soaring pinnacle of colouring, a fusion of colours, a shining of reflections upon one another become so fine, so fleeting, so expressive of the soul that they begin to pass over into the sphere of music.⁶⁰

In addition to *sfumato*, the smooth modulation of shining colors in oil with glazes is able to present “atmospheric perspective” or effects of relative distance in addition to those of linear perspective,

especially in landscape painting, by having stronger color contrasts and sharper contours in the foreground and weaker contrasts and more diffuse contours for figures in the background.⁶¹ Finally, citing Diderot's remark in his posthumously published 1796 *Essay on Painting* that "The man who has got the feel of flesh has already gone far. Everything else is nothing in comparison," Hegel adds that

The summit of colouring, ... as it were, ... is 'carnation', the colour tone of human flesh which unites all other colours marvelously without giving independent emphasis to either one or another. The youthful and healthy red of the cheeks is pure carmine without any dash of blue, violet, or yellow; but this red is itself only a gloss, or rather a shimmer, which seems to press outwards from within and then shades off unnoticeably into the rest of the flesh-colour, although this latter is an ideal inter-association of all the fundamental colours.⁶²

Given the importance for successful painting of depicting human subjects in full absorption in activity or at least in fully manifested distinctive subjectivity, the portrait is an especially central form for painting. "Since among the visual arts painting is the one which most of all allows to the particular figure and its special character the right to emerge independently, the transition to portraiture proper lies especially near its nature."⁶³ But here too, as in landscape painting, the aim is not simply exact imitation. Rather "the spiritual character of the subject must be emphasized and made predominant ... by treating and emphasizing precisely those traits and parts in which this spiritual special character is expressed most clearly, pregnantly, and vividly."⁶⁴ Titian was, according to Hegel, "the greatest master in this art,"⁶⁵ in particular "in the wealth of natural life, and the illuminating shading, glow, warmth, and power of colouring" in his portraits.⁶⁶ In general, "the perfection of painting in these great masters"—Giotto, Titian, Correggio, Raphael, Leonardo, and Michelangelo—"is a peak of art which can be ascended only once by one people in the course of history's development."⁶⁷

In contrast with Italian Renaissance painting with its predominantly religious subject matter, Flemish-Dutch painting of the 17th century (Van Dyck, Ostade, Rembrandt, Steen, Ter Borch, Teniers), the second high-point of modern painting, focuses on scenes of daily life. According to Hegel, these painters find

Joy in the world as such, [in] natural objects and their detailed appearance, [in] domestic life in its decency, cheerfulness, and quiet seclusion as well as [in] national celebrations, festivals, and processions, [in] country dances, and the enjoyment and the jollities and boisterousness of wakes-weeks.⁶⁸

They depict "utterly living absorption in the world and its daily life."⁶⁹ As with landscape painting and with portraiture, however, the artistic interest and truth of these paintings are not simply a matter of imitation or exact copying. Instead, Flemish-Dutch painters undertake to "grasp this most transitory and fugitive material, and to give it permanence for our contemplation in the fullness of its life."⁷⁰ Dutch painters in particular are masters at rendering in paint human figures who display "joy and exuberance in their own sense that for all this"—the routines of daily life and of the round of the year—"they have their own activity to thank," specifically the activities of reclaiming land from the sea by building dikes and of expelling the Spanish from their country through the Eighty Years War (1568–1648).⁷¹ Despite "what otherwise is the poverty and accidental character" of the scenes depicted—the pulling of teeth, the fetching of water, quiet reading, or dancing at weddings—we see in these pictures that the Dutch live with an achieved and expressed sense that

The right thing is simply to fulfil every task, no matter how trivial, with heart and soul. ... Consequently, the interest we may take in [such] pictures ... does not lie in the objects

themselves, but in this soul of life which in itself, apart altogether from the thing in which it proves to be living, speaks to every uncorrupt mind and free heart.⁷²

In addition to or beyond the activities and attitudes that are depicted, however, there are also places in Dutch painting, particularly in the treatment of “external details,” where our interest fastens on “the extreme of pure appearance” that the painter has achieved, on “the point where the content does not matter and where the chief interest is in the artistic creation of that appearance.”⁷³

In supreme art we see the fixed the most fleeting appearance of the sky, the time of day, the lighting of the trees; the appearances and reflections of clouds, waves, lochs, streams; the shimmering and glittering of wine in a glass, a flash of the eye, a momentary look or smile, etc. ... With what skill have the Dutch painted the lustre of satin gowns with all the manifold reflections and degrees of shadow in the folds, etc., and the sheen of silver, gold, copper, glass vessels, velvet, etc.⁷⁴

Yet even here the achievement is not simply that of sheer exactness of depiction, but rather a matter of “a spiritually rich industry which perfects each detail independently and yet retains the whole connected and flowing together.”⁷⁵ A scene—whether a still life, portrait, figure grouping, or landscape painting—is presented in such a way that the viewer’s attention is held all at once by the manifold details of the painting, their integrated unity, the handling of the paint, and the expression (by either human figures or the implied attention of the painter) of emotions and attitudes. As Rutter usefully notes, in the modern painting of daily life, the fit between the subject matter and form is “looser” and “more dynamic” than it is in Classical sculpture, and the active attention of the viewing audience is divided between the subjects depicted and the painter’s absorption in handling the paint, the subject matter, and the composition in just this way.⁷⁶ Fred Rush interestingly remarks that Dutch painting “is superior to all other forms of art in terms of its reflexivity. It is, simply put, painting about painting.”⁷⁷ This somewhat overstates the point, but the insight that our attention is held by the composition, the handling of the paint, and the painter’s attitudes and intelligence—which Rutter calls, picking up on Hegel’s terminology, the painting’s subjective liveliness [*subjective Lebendigkeit*]—is surely right. Or, as Hegel puts it, we are captivated by “the love, the mind and spirit, the soul, with which the artist seizes on [common-place subjects], makes them his own, and so breathes his own inspiration of production as a new life into what he creates.”⁷⁸

As with the decline of the significance of Greek sculpture into a variety of subject matters under the pressures of the increasing urbanization and commercialization of Hellenic life, painting, too, declines from its high points of Italian Renaissance religious painting and the Dutch painting of daily life. As modern life develops, the subjects of painting become increasingly pluralized:

The realm of nature outside us, human life down to the most fleeting aspects of situations and characters—each and everything of this can win a place in painting. For to subjectivity there [now] also belongs what is particular, arbitrary, and contingent in human interests and needs, and these therefore equally press for treatment in art.⁷⁹

As a result, as with the supplantation of sculpture by painting as the central form of art, painting, too, along with the other modern forms of art of music and poetry, is now supplanted by first religion and then philosophy as the central cultural forms for articulating and representing what human beings hold highest. “The culmination of the romantic in general [—Hegel’s term for modern or post-medieval life]—... brings home to our minds that we must acquire higher forms for the apprehension of truth than those which art is in a position to supply.”⁸⁰ The adequate

representation of human life as free and meaningful under complex modern social, economic, and institutional forms requires more abstraction than concretely sensuous works of art are able to supply.

Yet just as sculptures, including important and successful ones, continued to be produced after sculpture's high point in 5th-century BCE Greece, so too important and successful paintings continue to be produced as well. Even if it is unable to portray what is highest,

Individual talent ... can remain faithful both to the manifestations of spirit and also to the inherently substantial life of nature, even in the extreme limits of the contingency which that life reaches, and can make significant even what is in itself without significance, and this it does through ... fidelity, ... the marvelous skill of the portrayal, ... [and] the subjective vivacity with which the artist with his spirit and heart breathes life entirely into the existence of such topics.⁸¹

Beyond the Dutch painting of everyday life, one might think of Cezanne's apples or the scrupulously but self-consciously drawn still lifes of Giorgio Morandi or the stylized paintings of antelope skulls by Georgia O'Keefe.⁸²

One might well wonder about Hegel's accounts of sculpture and painting, as John Sallis does, whether "the differentiation of the forms of art [Symbolic, Classical, and Romantic] also provide[s], as Hegel insists, 'the fundamental principle for the articulation and determination of the individual arts'"⁸³ and of the necessary and sufficient *historical* conditions for success within them. What is Hegel to say about abstract sculpture (Brancusi, Caro, Smith, and all the rest), abstract painting (Pollock, Hofmann, Rothko, Louis, and all the rest), and environmental art (Smithson, Christo), not to mention video art, installation art, and conceptual art? Can it really be true that media of art and the conditions of success within them rise and fall in tandem with changes in forms of sociohistorical life that themselves conform to some more or less scrutable 'logic of freedom'?

Whatever the answers to these questions may be, it is nonetheless the case that the high points of artistic achievement in sculpture and painting that Hegel identifies *are* high points that remain in their combinations of subject matters, forms, and materials central axes of orientation for both artistic practices and thinking about the arts. In this respect, Hegel has done as much as anyone to shape a widely shared sense of the history of art. Second, sculpture and painting can be and are ways of achieving and embodying, in sensuous form and for absorbed engagement, serious thoughts about significant experiences and modes of life that may be widely shared. Or as Pippin puts it in commenting on Hegel's use of the term "theoretical" [*theoretisch*] to describe art in general, by *theoretisch* Hegel "means *a still sensible and affective recognition of lived dimensions of human subjectivity in their 'liveliness'*."⁸⁴ If this is right and sculpture and painting can continue to afford such recognitions, then they retain considerable importance as serious modes of thought about life, and Hegel's accounts of the high points of achievement of sensuously embodied thought within these modes will continue to have orienting force for the practices of art—perhaps especially so when, as Hegel surprisingly remarks, both philosophy and modern life remain "burdened with abstraction."⁸⁵

Notes

1 Robert B. Pippin notes that according to Hegel forcing a choice between a descriptive "logic of discovery" and an evaluative "logic of justification" is "a choice between false alternatives" in that ideals relevant to practices, artistic and otherwise, are essentially partially realized within the relevant practices. (Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014, p. 18].)

2 *Ibid.*, p. 133.

- 3 Benjamin Rutter, *Hegel on the Modern Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 31.
- 4 Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), Vol. I, p. 8.
- 5 *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 31.
- 6 “In works of art the nations have deposited their richest inner intuitions and ideas [about meaning and value that organize their lives], and art is often the key, and in many nations the only key, for understanding their philosophy and religion” (Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Arts*), Vol. I, p. 7.
- 7 In *Hegel's Aesthetics: The Art of Idealism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), Lydia L. Moland raises this worry before turning to the manifold elucidatory details about artistic achievement that Hegel puts forward.
- 8 One symptom of Hegel’s approach to the history and philosophy of art—arguably a virtue—is that he resolutely offers no theory of taste or theory of the justification of judgments about the artistic value of individual works, taken one by one. The need for such a theory of taste is absorbed and supplanted by Hegel’s broad story about how major works have served essentially collective, historical human interests. On this point, see Pippin, “The Absence of Aesthetics in Hegel’s Aesthetics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and 19th Century Philosophy*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 394–418, at pp. 394–395.
- 9 The titles and the general organization of the posthumously published 1830 *Lectures on Fine Art* are due as much or more to the editor of those Lectures, H. G. Hotho, as to Hegel himself.
- 10 Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. I, p. 356.
- 11 *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 358.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. Vol. II, pp. 784, 781, 782. Here Hegel follows J. J. Winckelmann’s 1764 *History of the Art of Antiquity*.
- 13 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 436.
- 14 Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 21–22.
- 15 Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. I, pp. 85, 517.
- 16 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 718.
- 17 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 710.
- 18 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 712.
- 19 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 715, Vol. I, p. 433.
- 20 Rutter, *Hegel on the Modern Arts*, p. 88.
- 21 Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. II, p. 740, Vol. II, p. 766.
- 22 *Ibid.*, Vol. II p. 762.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 202.
- 25 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 724.
- 26 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 776, 774, 776.
- 27 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 756.
- 28 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 756, 757.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 757.
- 30 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 201.
- 31 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 732.
- 32 Hegel, *Vorlesung über Ästhetik: Berlin 1820/21*, ed. Helmut Schneider (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995), p. 235; cited in Stephen Houlgate, “Hegel on the Beauty of Sculpture,” in *Hegel and the Arts*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), pp. 56–89, at p. 62; Houlgate’s translation.
- 33 Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. II, p. 707, citing J. H. Meyer’s *History of the Visual Arts in Greece* (1824–1836).
- 34 Houlgate, “Hegel on the Beauty of Sculpture,” p. 64.
- 35 Hegel, *Vorlesung über Ästhetik: Berlin 1820/21*, p. 190; cited in *ibid.*, p. 76; Houlgate’s translation.
- 36 Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. II, p. 767.
- 37 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 619, 618.
- 38 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 788.
- 39 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 510.
- 40 Hegel defines freedom using this formula in Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood., trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §§ 7, 7A, p. 42.
- 41 Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. I, p. 79; first emphasis added.
- 42 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 11.
- 43 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 789.

- 44 Houlgate, “Hegel on the Beauty of Sculpture,” p. 81.
- 45 Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. II, p. 806. Hegel may overstate the point somewhat in claiming that the spectators of a sculpture may position themselves wherever they like in relation to it; some vantage points may be better than others for apprehending a sculpture’s meaning. Yet it seems correct to hold that sculptures typically do not presuppose or assume a single, privileged point from which to view them. One is more or less expected to view them from multiple angles.
- 46 Podro, The Critical Historians of Art, p. 24.
- 47 Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. I, p. 155.
- 48 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 831.
- 49 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 803.
- 50 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 853; first emphasis added.
- 51 *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 157
- 52 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 797.
- 53 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 815–816.
- 54 See Rutter, *Hegel on the Modern Arts*, pp. 74–75 for an account of Hegel’s distinctive use of *Innigkeit*.
- 55 Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. II, pp. 800, 801–802.
- 56 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 823.
- 57 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 818.
- 58 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 848.
- 59 The mirroring of absorption by a painting’s subjects in their actions by absorption of the viewer in the painting’s depth space is a major theme of Michael Fried’s *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), but it is also already here present in Hegel.
- 60 Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. II, p. 848.
- 61 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 845–846.
- 62 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 847, 846.
- 63 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 865.
- 64 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 866
- 65 Hegel, *Philosophie der Kunst: Vorlesung von 1826*, ed. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert, Jeong-Im Kwan, and Karsten Berr (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2005), p. 215; my translation.
- 66 Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. II, pp. 881–882.
- 67 *Ibid.*, p. 882.
- 68 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 885.
- 69 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 884.
- 70 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 599.
- 71 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 169.
- 72 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 833.
- 73 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 812.
- 74 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 812, 843.
- 75 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 813.
- 76 Rutter, *Hegel on the Modern Arts*, pp. 86–86, 95, 97
- 77 Fred Rush, “Still Life and the End of Painting,” in *The Art of Hegel’s Aesthetics: Hegelian Philosophy and the Perspectives of Art History*, ed. Paul A. Kottman and Michael Squire (Leiden: Wilhelm Fink, 2018), pp. 159–187, at pp. 177–178.
- 78 Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. II, p. 837.
- 79 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 803.
- 80 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 529.
- 81 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 596.
- 82 In *After the Beautiful*, Robert Pippin makes a powerful case for the major figure paintings of Manet and Cezanne as paintings that, contra Hegel, display alienation within modern life, but do so à la Hegel in sensuous forms that embody cognitive content or a sense of life that is widely shared socially.
- 83 John Sallis, “Carnation and the Eccentricity of Painting,” in Houlgate, ed. *Hegel and the Arts*, pp. 90–118, at p. 103, citing Hegel, *Lectures on Art*, Vol. 1, p. 82.
- 84 “Hegel on Painting,” in *The Art of Hegel’s Aesthetics: Hegelian Philosophy and the Perspectives of Art History*, ed. Paul A. Kottman and Michael Squire (Leiden: Wilhelm Fink, 2018), pp. 211–237, at p. 219.
- 85 Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. II, p. 1128.

36

JOHN RUSKIN ON PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

Paul Guyer

John Ruskin (1819–1900) was the dominant writer on painting and architecture of Victorian Britain (he was born just three months before Queen Victoria and predeceased her by just one year) and was also deeply influential in the United States. His views on painting were expressed in the five volumes of *Modern Painters* published between 1843 and 1860 and in many other works, and his views on architecture were chiefly stated in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and the three volumes of *The Stones of Venice* (1851–1853). He never addressed a full-length work to the topic of sculpture, but sculpture is at the heart of “The Nature of Gothic” in *The Stones of Venice*, a chapter that is the centerpiece of the work and also the turning point in Ruskin’s career from art criticism to the social criticism that occupied the last three decades of his productive life. Ruskin did not explicitly connect his work to the great British tradition in aesthetics begun by the third Earl of Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson and carried into the beginning of the 19th century by such writers as David Hume, Edmund Burke, Henry Home Lord Kames, Alexander Gerard, Thomas Reid, Archibald Alison, Dugald Stewart, and many others, as well as by the writers on the “picturesque” such as William Gilpin, Uvedale Price, and Richard Payne Knight, but his work was nevertheless deeply influenced by this tradition. The leading concept of Ruskin’s criticism was “truth,” but this must be understood with two qualifications. First, following the Neo-Platonist strand within British aesthetics represented above all by Shaftesbury and Reid, Ruskin did not draw rigid distinctions among truth, beauty, and goodness, or the cognitive, perceptual, and moral aspects of our response to art. And second, Ruskin’s conception of truth also included what we might now distinguish as *truthfulness*, that is, the sincerity of the artist, as well as the content of art and its cognitive significance. In what follows, these themes will be illustrated from Ruskin’s work on painting, with a concluding comment on his views about sculpture as hinted at in “The Nature of Gothic.”

Ruskin was the only child of Scottish-born John James Ruskin, an increasingly wealthy wine importer and merchant, and his devout wife (and cousin) Margaret, an adherent of the Evangelical branch of the Church of England. His parentage was both a blessing and a curse for their son. On the one hand, their wealth afforded him education at home until he went up to Oxford; frequent travel to both the great houses of England, his father’s customers, with their art collections, and to continental Europe, including his first trip to Italy at 14; his father’s burgeoning art collection, especially of works by the greatest British painter of the century, Joseph Mallord William Turner; and a lifelong allowance and then inheritance that freed him from ever having to work for a living. Ruskin’s education included extensive training in drawing and, at Oxford, studies in geology, and he would become a truly gifted drawer and watercolorist of both nature and architecture in

his own right. On the other hand, his parents had great expectations for him and put tremendous pressure on him, for example his mother accompanying him to university and his father telling him how to style his works even as late as *The Stones of Venice*, when the son was already in his thirties. Unsurprisingly, Ruskin suffered bouts of depression as a young man, followed by long spells of mental illness in his final decade of life. The Christianity of Ruskin's parents remained a deep influence on him until the age of 40, when his religious fervor began to be converted into the social passion of many of his late works and activities. Ruskin's only formal position was as the first Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford from 1870 until 1884, and the Ruskin School of Fine Art continues at Oxford until this day. As an executor of the estate of Turner, Ruskin also organized the painter's vast bequest of materials to the British nation, and lectured on art and society in many venues, including a Working Man's College, from the 1860s through the 1880s.

Ruskin's major work on painting was done before his loss of religious faith. *Modern Painters* concerns above all landscape painting, and its central tenet has been summed up thus:

Ruskin wished to show... that the works of nature expressed the same universal laws as those contained in the Bible. He therefore set out to persuade an Evangelical audience that their suspicion of visual pleasure was ill-founded, and that beauty and the enjoyment of beauty was a gift from God.... being a gift from God, beauty exists outside ourselves, and therefore [is] not the result of the [mere] association of ideas.

(Hewison, 2009; 106–107)

In Ruskin's own terms,

The power of every picture depends upon the penetration of the imagination into the TRUE nature of the thing represented, and the utter scorn of the imagination for all shackles and fetters of more external fact that stand in the way of its suggestiveness,

(Ruskin, 1903–1912; 4:278)

where the “true nature” of things represented in turn reflects God's benevolent will and the gift of natural beauty to mankind. Ruskin's view of art as expressing the true essence rather than superficial appearance of nature certainly has historical antecedents—one thinks immediately of the view of Charles Batteux a century earlier that beauty lies in the imitation of nature, but of *la belle nature*, nature as we think it *ought* to be (Batteux, 1746 [2015], Part I, Chapter 3, 13)—and it can be separated from the view that the beauty of the essence of nature must be appreciated as the gift of God, but at least for the younger Ruskin, these two premises were not separated.

Yet Ruskin's approach to art is never reductionist, that is, he does not reduce all the sources of our satisfaction in art to truth or any other single factor. As already suggested, his conception of truth itself is bifold, including both some sort of cognitive or epistemic value under the rubric of truth and the value of truthfulness or sincerity on the part of the artist, and while the general category of truth in art can be conceptually distinguished from other values such as beauty and goodness, these values are not separated in our actual experience of art. In the Synopsis to Volume I of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin distinguished five sources of “greatness in art”: “ideas of power”; “ideas of imitation”; “ideas of truth”; “ideas of beauty”; and “ideas of relation” (Ruskin, 1903–1912; 3:56). This list may be compared to Ruskin's list of the seven “lamps” of architecture, namely those of “sacrifice,” “truth,” “power,” “beauty,” “life,” “memory,” and “obedience” (Ruskin, 1903–1912; 8:ix): while there are some differences between this list and the list of the sources of greatness in art (sacrifice, for example, concerns the great cost in both money and labor of works of architecture such as cathedrals, which Ruskin thinks befitting, but is not a topic in his account of painting), some of the categories, such as “truth,” “power,” and “beauty” are the same, as befits the fact

that architecture, like painting, is a visual art, although it also involves further considerations, obviously, such as utility. The categories of truth and beauty are especially important in Ruskin's account of painting, along with "relation." This is because by "power" he means something like artistry, the "excellence" by means of which "difficulty" in realizing artistic aims is overcome (Ruskin, 1903–1912; 3:96–97), and this category is parasitic on the other categories of artistic value. Ruskin also plays down the value of imitation insofar as it is a mere trick, *trompe l'oeil*, or "requires nothing more for its attainment than a true eye, a steady hand, and moderate industry" (3:103) as opposed to genuine insight. In other words, imitation concerns itself with the superficial appearance, in particular the accumulation of the appearance of all the features of things without any principled discrimination among them, rather than the essence of things. Insight into the real essence of things through their depiction is the first independent value of art. This is what Ruskin first captures under the rubric of truth. "The word truth, as applied to art, signifies the faithful statement, either to the mind or senses, of any fact of nature" (3:93). However, Ruskin's use of the word "statement" has to be handled with care. He is not maintaining the truth of a work of art consists in its communication of a *proposition* that corresponds to some fact, or more generally that truth in painting consists in some isomorphic relation between sign and signified. Rather, what Ruskin has in mind is that a "true" painting vividly conveys the *experience* of what is essential to its object. In a passage on "Turnerian Topography" in the fourth volume of *Modern Painters*, he states that the "artist who has real invention"—that is, Turner—first

Receives a true impression from the place itself, and takes care to keep hold of that as his chief good... and then sets himself as far as possible to reproduce that impression on the mind of the spectator of his picture.

He continues that

The aim of the great inventive landscape painter must be to give the... higher and deeper truth of mental vision, rather than that of the physical facts, and to reach a representation which, though it may be totally useless to engineers or geographers, shall yet be capable of producing on the far-away beholder's mind precisely the impression which the reality would have produced, and putting his heart into the same state in which it would have been, had he verily descended into the valley

that the painter had painted (Ruskin, 1903–1912; 6:32–39). Ruskin's reference to the "heart" as well as the "mind" of the audience for the work of art is important: he draws no rigid distinction between the intellectual and emotional response to a work of art, but sees them as fully integrated. Citing the same passage, I have elsewhere referred to Ruskin's conception of truth in painting as phenomenological rather than, say, semantic (Guyer, 2014; 2:198), but that could be misleading if it is taken in a purely perceptual sense—Ruskin's point is that a "true" work of art conveys the emotional as well as perceptual experience of seeing real nature, but it does not do this through any kind of point-by-point imitation of the natural scene or object. That is why Turner's later paintings, with their great swirls of light rather than detailed objects or figures, or, to take an example that came too late for Ruskin to notice, the full-blown Impressionism of mid-career Monet or Pissarro, can count as "true" in Ruskin's sense.

Indeed, although he never discussed French Impressionism, Ruskin does use the word "impression," his point being that a great painting gives a faithful "impression" or experience of its object rather than an accurate rendition of it. He further explicates the means of such impression as tone, color, chiaroscuro, and space and then illustrates these in application to the main classes of objects depicted in landscape, namely the truth of skies, the truth of earth (geology and

topography), the truth of water, and the truth of vegetation. In all of these cases, his aim is to show how veridical *experiences* of nature can be created through the means of painting. This passage sums up his approach to “truth”:

Go to the top of Highgate Hill on a clear summer morning at five o’clock, and look at Westminster Abbey. You will receive an impression of a building enriched with multitudinous vertical lines. Try to distinguish one of those lines all the way down from the one next to it: You cannot.... Look at it generally, and it is all symmetry and arrangement. Look at it in all its parts, and it is all inextricable confusion. Am I not, at this moment, describing a piece of Turner’s drawing, with the same words by which I describe nature[?]

(Ruskin, 1903–1912; 3:336)

What Turner does, as Ruskin conceives of the truth of his painting, is to convey the experience of seeing the object he painted, in its perceptual and emotional fullness and depth, without providing an accurate rendition of his object the way a botanical illustration or architectural elevation might.

The remaining two sources of value in painting and other fine art for Ruskin are beauty and what he calls “relation.” He initially defines beauty in purely perceptual terms, and in a way reminiscent of Francis Hutcheson’s definition of “absolute” beauty from 1725 (Hutcheson, 1725 [2008]; Treatise I, Section 1, paragraph XIV, 25):

Any material object which can give us pleasure in the simple contemplation of its outward qualities without any direct and definite exertion of the intellect, I call in some way, or in some degree, beautiful. Why we receive pleasure from some forms and colors, and not from others, is no more to be asked or answered than why we like sugar and dislike wormwood.

(Ruskin, 1903–1912; 3:109)

This would seem to draw a rigid boundary between beauty and truth in painting or any other art. However, Ruskin quickly qualifies this statement by stating that he does not “mean by excluding direct exertion of the intellect from ideas of beauty, to assert that beauty has no effect upon nor connection with the intellect.” He continues

All our moral feelings are so interwoven with our intellectual powers, that we cannot affect the one without in some degree addressing all the others; and in all high ideas of beauty, it is more than probable that much of the pleasure depends on delicate and untraceable perceptions of fitness, propriety, and relation, which are purely intellectual, and through which we arrive at our noblest ideas of what is commonly and rightly called “intellectual beauty.”

This in turn leads to a statement of the theological orientation that grounded Ruskin’s aesthetics in 1843:

Ideas of beauty are among the noblest which can be presented to the human mind, invariably exalting and purifying it according to their degree; and it would appear that we are intended by the Deity to be constantly under their influence, because there is not one single object in nature,

or the artistic representation thereof, “which is not capable of conveying them” (Ruskin, 1903–1912; 110–111). Here Ruskin treats the human mind as a unity in which the perceptual aspects of experience are inseparable from the intellectual ones, even if they may be distinguished for the sake of conceptual analysis. In any experience of nature or of the painting of nature pleasure in

colors and forms is inseparable from pleasure in thought, ultimately thought leading up to the idea of the goodness of God from whom nature is a gift to us.

The theological orientation of Ruskin's thought is still evident in a further distinction that he introduces in *Modern Painters* II, that between "typical" and "vital" beauty. This is reminiscent of David Hume's distinction between the beauty of "*species*" or visible form and the beauty of the appearance of functionality (Hume 1739–1740 [2007]; Book III, Part III, Section 5, 393). For Ruskin, typical beauty is "that external quality of bodies... which, whether it occur in a stone, flower, beast, or in man, is absolutely identical," and which is called "typical" because it "may be shown to be in some sort typical of the Divine attributes," while vital beauty is "the appearance of felicitous fulfillment of function in living things, more especially of the joyful and right exertion of the perfect life in man" (Ruskin, 1903–1912; 4:64). Thus, all forms of perceptible beauty in nature and their depiction in art can be considered images of divine perfections, so perception and intellection are in their case clearly intertwined, and for a religious mind, the pleasing appearance of functionality throughout nature including human nature is also obviously a gift of God.

In *Modern Painters* II Ruskin draws a further distinction among forms of imagination, which may be considered his refinement of the 18th-century conception of genius as the condition of the possibility of art. He divides imagination into "associative," "penetrative," and "contemplative." "Imagination associative" is the source of what earlier philosophers such as Locke and Burke called the association of ideas, to which everyone is prone, and which can be quite superficial connections. "Imagination penetrative" is the artist's power to grasp parts and form them into a whole that is more illustrative of the real experience of nature than is any mere delineation; "whatever material" this form of imagination "receives, it instantly so arranges that it comes right; all things falls into their place and appear in that place perfect, useful, and evidently not to be spared" (Ruskin, 1903–1912; 4:241). "Imagination penetrative" gets beneath the surface of nature to its essence

It never stops at crusts or ashes, or outward images of any kind, it ploughs them all aside and plunges into the very central fiery heart, whatever semblances and various outward shows the subject may possess... all that it affirms, judges, or describes, it affirms from within.

(Ruskin, 1903–1912; 4:250–251)

The opening of this passage suggests that the imagination penetrative penetrates the outward appearance of nature to reveal some essence within nature, while the conclusion suggests that the imagination penetrative reveals the core of the human *response* to nature. Here Ruskin seems to be talking about truth as much as beauty: this form of imagination reveals deep truths about the laws and energies of nature and deep truths about the passions and motivations of human nature and of course deep truths about the divine that grounds both of the foregoing. Finally, "imagination contemplative" is the function of imagination by which the truths grasped by the prior two forms of imagination are fixed in memorable form: this is the special gift of the artist, which Ruskin illustrates with examples from poetry, Milton's renditions of Death and Satan (4:249), before going on to painting, about which he says that the greatest painters "all paint the lion more than his mane, and the horse rather than his hide" (4:303). Again, imagination gets at the truth rather than mere appearance of things, but beauty also has as much to do with the essence as with the mere appearance of things.

To return to *Modern Painters* I, we can finally describe Ruskin's category of "relation." He says that he uses this term as "one of convenience [rather] than as adequately expressive of the vast class of ideas" that he intends "to be comprehended under it, namely, all those conveyable by art, which are the subjects of distinct intellectual perception and action, and which are therefore worthy of the name of thoughts." Under this head, he says, "must be arranged everything productive

of expression, sentiment, and character, whether in figures or landscapes” (Ruskin, 1903–1912; 3:112). This category includes the historical associations of objects of art, what Ruskin discusses in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* under the rubric of “The Lamp of Memory.” Putting “relation” together with Ruskin’s other categories, we can see that in his view our experience of painting comprises the beauty of the outward appearance of nature (including humankind), the intimation of the inner essence and ultimately the divine ground of nature, and the whole range of human “expression, sentiment, and character,” as both part of nature and response to nature. In other words, Ruskin’s painting can capture the whole range of human experience and thought of both nature and ourselves, and is not to be limited to depicting one aspect of nature—such as pure form—or depicting by one means, for example, as Kant notoriously asserted, by “drawing” rather than “color” (Kant 1790 [2000], §14, 5:225, following Alberti 1435–1446 [2011]; Book II.31, 50–52).

We can turn now to Ruskin’s conception of truth as truthfulness, a quality of the artist rather than of the artwork. What Ruskin means is that artwork cannot be true except as a product of the artist’s desire for truth: “no artist can be graceful, imaginative, or original, unless he is truthful; and... the pursuit of beauty, instead of leading us away from the truth, increases the desire for it and the necessity of it tenfold” (Ruskin, 1903–1912; 3:138). In *Modern Painters* III, Ruskin includes a chapter on “The Real Nature of the Greatness of Style,” and here his argument is that while “great” or “high” art requires “Choice of Noble Subject,” for example “sacred subjects, such as the Nativity, Transfiguration, Crucifixion,” even the right choice of subject can produce great art only “if the choice be sincere,” that is, the artist himself must believe in the importance and truth of what she chooses to depict (Ruskin, 1903–1912; 5:48–49). “Sincerity” as well as “Invention” are necessary elements of the imagination of the successful artist. Part of what this involves is subordinating the display of one’s technical gifts to the overarching purpose of the work of art. For example, although Rembrandt can dazzle us with his talent, for example, representing “the exact force with which the light on the most illuminated part of an object is opposed to its obscurer portions,” a greater artist, for instance, Paolo Veronese, uses his technical prowess

To represent the great relations of visible things to each other, to the heaven above, and to the earth beneath them... restraining, for truth’s sake, exhaustless energy, reining back, for truth’s sake, his fiery strength; veiling before truth, the vanity of brightness; penetrating, for truth, the discouragement of gloom... subduing all his powers, impulses, and imagination, to the... obedience of an incorruptible verity.

(5:59)

We might not agree with Ruskin’s preference for Veronese over Rembrandt, but what is clear is his view that truthfulness is commitment to truth in art, as broadly construed as that concept of truth may have to be, as more important than technical facility. But while truthfulness is a quality of the artist’s character, Ruskin is not suggesting that we value it in our assessment of art for its own sake, purely as a virtue of the artist, but as a causal condition of the production of great art. As a causal claim, of course, Ruskin’s assertion should be empirically testable, and whether it would pass the test of experience is a separate question.

Ruskin’s conception of truthfulness in painting may be compared to his treatment of the “Lamp of Truth” in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. There Ruskin inveighs against the deceptive use of materials in architecture: for example, although there is no deception involved in plastering brick walls in order to cover them with frescoes, “to cover brick with cement, and to divide this cement with joints that it may look like stone, is to tell a falsehood,” and is “contemptible” for this reason (Ruskin, 1903–1912; 8:73), and likewise to use “cast-iron ornaments” to reproduce the carved stone of genuine medieval buildings is “vulgar and cheap,” for while “The common

ironwork of the middle ages was as simple as it was effective, composed of leafage cut flat out of sheet iron, and twisted at the workman's will," no "ornaments, on the contrary, are so cold, clumsy, and vulgar, so essentially incapable of a fine line or shadow, as those of cast-iron" (8:85–86). Here his objection is, first, to the incapacity of the ersatz material to genuinely produce the aesthetic effect of the original, and thus Ruskin's objection to "falsehood" in the use of materials in architecture would seem, like his insistence on truthfulness as a necessary condition of truth in painting: to depend upon a causal claim: ersatz materials are rejected as causally incompatible with the desired aesthetic effect in architecture. But Ruskin's insistence upon architectural truth also seems to reflect a moral judgment, namely that deception as such is a morally bad thing no matter what its aesthetic effect might be. Ruskin says of "surface deceits" in architecture, such as "the painting of wood to represent marble, or... the painting of ornaments in deceptive relief... that the evil of them consists always in definitely attempted *deception*" (8:72), and here his assumption seems to be that deception is a moral evil rather than an aesthetic ill and that as a moral evil it is the intention and attempt to deceive, whether or not the deception succeeds, which is the real evil. Ruskin does not provide a philosophical analysis of deception according to which deception involves one person trying to get another to believe something that the first person does not actually believe and which the second person would not believe either but for the first person presenting his statement as if he did believe it. But Ruskin does understand the implication of such an analysis, namely, that what counts as attempted deception depends upon the antecedent beliefs of the audience, that is, on what the audience would believe in the absence of the would-be deceiver's efforts. Thus, he argues that the painted fan vaulting of the Milan cathedral is a "gross degradation," because it plays upon the natural tendency of the observer to assume that there are stone ribs in the ceiling of such a cathedral (8:72), but that to fasten a "veneering of marble" on "the rough brick wall" of a church, "built with certain projections to receive it," is not deception, "even though what appear to be massy stones, are nothing more than external slabs" (8: 78–9), because it is "well known" that this is how churches are built, readily observed, for example, in the unfinished facade of a church such as San Petronio in Bologna.

Of course, that the possibility of deception by art (or anything else) depends upon the beliefs or mental attitudes of the audience means that such possibility is historically relative and changeable. Ruskin recognizes this in a slightly different context when he admits that an aversion to the structural use of iron and glass in architecture, as in the Crystal Palace of 1851, will change simply as we become more accustomed to the use of such materials. In this case, his objection is not that the use of these materials is deceptive, but simply that it is new and jarring; but of course, what is new and jarring can come to seem old and familiar, and indeed Ruskin concedes "that the time is probably near when a new system of architectural laws will be developed, adapted entirely to metallic construction" (Ruskin, 1903–1912; 8:66). The more general implication, thus for the case of painting as well, is that what can often seem to be Ruskin's conservatism is not absolute; while the acceptance of innovations in style may not be immediate, new styles can gradually be accepted. Thus "Greatness of Style" in painting or any other artistic medium cannot be identified with any superficial features of style, just as truth in painting cannot be identified with the accurate reproduction of the superficial appearance of objects but has much more to do with the depth of thought and emotion expressed in art as a product of the artist's truthfulness or desire for truth.

Now for a concluding comment on sculpture. As noted, Ruskin never devoted a whole book to sculpture, but it does figure in the central chapter "On the Nature of Gothic" in *The Stones of Venice*. Ruskin famously defends Gothic architecture on the ground that unlike the monuments of Greek architecture, which he supposes to have been built to rigid specifications by slaves, or contemporary buildings with machine-made or at least machine-like ornament, Gothic architecture allows for the free expression of the imagination of the workmen involved. What he has in mind is above all the sculptural elements of Gothic cathedrals, including both sculptured figures but

also the capitals of columns, which often vary from one to the next, and often include sculptured human and animal faces as well as foliage. Ruskin praises the variety in such capitals under the rubric of “changefulness,” but his explanation makes it clear that what he values in the Gothic is not just the experience of variety by the observer but also the freedom allowed to the workmen who created these sculptures:

Wherever the workman is utterly enslaved, the parts of the building must of course be absolutely like each other; for the perfection of his execution can only be reached by exercising him in doing one thing, and giving him nothing else to do. The degree in which the workman is degraded may thus be known at a glance, by observing whether the several parts of the building are similar or not; and if, as in Greek work, all the capitals are alike, and all the mouldings unvaried, the degradation is complete;... if, as in Gothic work, there is perpetual change both in design and execution, the workman must have been altogether set free.

(Ruskin, 1903–1912; 10:204–205)

We would have to know about the labor conditions at buildings that often took centuries to complete in order to know how true Ruskin’s claim really is, but in line with his general approach, he could argue that we *experience* the variety in Gothic edifices as the expression of the freedom of workmen, and take pleasure in that because we take pleasure in freedom itself. This would become a central theme in Ruskin’s criticism of the social effects of capitalist industry beginning in the 1860s. We might also argue that Ruskin’s valuation of expressions of freedom must underlie his approach to painting as well as sculpture, and that he must have valued the work of Turner because of the unusual degree of freedom from ordinary conventions of depiction evident in the work of that painter as well as for the other reasons that he gives. In that case, the pleasure that we take in what we experience as the expression of the freedom of imagination on the part of painters as well as sculptures would be the common thread in Ruskin’s approach to both painting and sculpture.

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Further Reading

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NELSON GOODMAN'S THEORY OF EXPRESSION AND EXEMPLIFICATION

Problems and Halting Solutions

John Bender

Two of the traditional pillars of aesthetics are Representation and Expression, and what I mean by this is that these are among the fundamental ways in which art, and especially visual art like painting, is conceived as relating to human concerns and to the world at large. Moreover, questions like “What is it for an artwork such as a painting to depict Mont Sainte-Victoire, to represent evening light, to be sad or humorous, balanced or unrestrained?” seem to be of inexhaustible interest to philosophers of art.

It is well-known that Nelson Goodman, in his book *Languages of Art* (LA; 1968) and in later writings, developed a theory that views art symbolically: making art is symbol-making for Goodman. And central to this view is a theory of representation and expression as symbolic relations: in Goodman's hands, these turn out to be various relations of reference. Linguistic denotation, the clearest example of reference, is reference by a symbol to an object by naming or being a definite description of the object. So, “Napoleon” denotes the French general and emperor, Bonaparte.

There is a type of complex reference, that Goodman calls “exemplification,” which is at the heart of his theory of both how paintings express emotions or various other properties, as well as how paintings represent objects in certain ways—what Goodman calls, “representation as.” In this chapter, I shall present two rather deep problems for Goodman’s theory of exemplification and expression. These problems will be diagnosed and tentative solutions will be proffered. Unfortunately, the solutions themselves run into shortcomings and difficulties. I will make these defects clear, but at present, I have no better prospects for success to suggest. This leaves us without a unified theory of expression, but it is my hope that we will have gained a clearer appreciation of the complexities of the concept of artistic expression.

1 A Dilemma for Exemplification: The First Problem

Although representation will not be the focus of this chapter, I begin my discussion of exemplification with a brief treatment of Goodman’s theory of representation, in order to distinguish representation from expression, and in order to fully understand the pivotal role that exemplification plays for Goodman. Any problem affecting the concept of exemplification will leave unresolved questions not only about expression but also about representation.

A portrait of Napoleon *denotes* Napoleon, Goodman says. But pictorial representation involves more. Objects must be *represented as* something: Napoleon is represented as a soldier or general. So the portrait not only denotes Napoleon but is a certain kind of picture, a “so-and-so picture,” Goodman says; in this case, an “army-general-picture.”

In general, then, an object k is represented as a so-and-so by a picture p if and only if p is or contains a picture that as a whole both denotes k and is a so-and-so picture.

(*LA*, 28f)

Representation-as, or being a so-and-so picture, obviously requires the picture to *have* certain properties. A canvas painted homogeneously red is not an army-general picture because it does not have the right properties.

Of course, many properties possessed by a painting are not relevant or important to the painting's symbolic function, e.g., "being 347 sq. in. in area," or "being painted with acrylic paints." A painting not only has certain of its properties but, in addition, exhibits, shows off, highlights, or "refers to" them, according to Goodman. Properties which are both possessed by *and* highlighted or referred to by the painting are *exemplified* by the picture, for Goodman.

Which properties a piece exemplifies depends on how the painting is being used as a symbol, or in what sort of symbol system it is functioning. Goodman asks us to think of a tailor's swatch.

Exemplification [of a property by an artwork] is possession plus reference"..." "The [tailor's] swatch exemplifies only those properties that it both has and refers to." (*LA*, 53). "An object that is literally or metaphorically denoted by a predicate, and refers to that predicate or the corresponding property, may be said to exemplify that predicate or property.

(*LA*, 52)

Color, texture, pattern, and weight of material are exemplified by the swatch, but not its size or pinked edges, because of the way the swatch is normally used—because of what it is taken to be a sample of. Similarly, paintings exemplify some but not all of their properties.

We see, then, that what kind of picture a painting is, as well as which properties a painting is thought to highlight or call to the viewer's attention, is understood as a matter of *exemplification* on this theory.

Therefore, when we call something a pictorial representation of Napoleon-as-a-general, there are two distinct relations involved according to Goodman: *denotation* of an object, and *exemplification* of certain properties.

Exemplification is, therefore, not itself denotation. Why? When a painting denotes, it relates itself to an object. Exemplification is possession of, and highlighting of, or reference back to, a property by the painting. Why not say that pictures can denote properties as well as objects? Here, Goodman's nominalism prohibits him from countenancing properties, being altogether more comfortable using a different "p-word:" "predicates." Goodman prefers to talk of predicates because predicates are themselves symbols or labels, i.e., elements in our language.

An object is gray, or is an instance of or possesses grayness, if and only if "gray" applies to the object." "...what properties the picture ... possesses depends upon what predicates denote it.

(*LA*, 51)

Exemplification of a property by a painting is, then, denotation of the painting by a predicate and reference back to the predicate. Now it is clear why representation or denotation of an object is not to be confused with exemplification in Goodman's theory, even though they are both matters of denotation. In one case, the artwork denotes an object; in the other, a predicate denotes an artwork. It is a "difference of direction," as Goodman puts it. (*LA*, 50).

Exemplification does a lot of theoretical work for Goodman. Not only is a Napoleon portrait an "army-general-picture" because of the properties it exemplifies, but also a painting exemplifies many of its *pictorial* properties such as "being predominantly green," "having spiraling shapes,"

“being iridescently bright in color,” and also exemplifies its so-called “aesthetic” properties: a work can exemplify power, balance, delicacy, motion, anxiety, or sadness.

Some of these properties, like being predominantly green, are literally true of the painting. Others are *metaphors*, e.g., “sad,” “delicate.” When an exemplified property is metaphorically possessed, the property is *expressed* by the artwork.

“Not all exemplification is expression, but all expression is exemplification.” (LA, 52). “What is expressed is metaphorically exemplified. What expresses sadness is metaphorically sad. And what is metaphorically sad is actually but not literally sad.” ... “Thus what is expressed is possessed.” (LA, 85). “A symbol must have every property it expresses.”

(LA, 88)

We now have the complete view, which analyzes both “representation as” and expression in semantic terms—predominantly exemplification—but which nonetheless categorically distinguishes the one from the other.

This theory is complex enough to be challenged in numerous ways, e.g., one might even have reservations about the basic contention that art is symbolic. But I want to ease us into a problem “internal” to the theory. I start with some examples which make Goodman’s view appear to be correct, but then offer some trouble-makers. Ultimately, I will argue that Goodman’s theory faces a logical dilemma, and either way, it moves to try to extricate itself will imply that the theory is, in part, incorrect.

In many cases, the properties we wish to say are exemplified or expressed are, as Goodman requires, truly possessed by the work; the predicate is correctly applicable to the painting itself. Otto Dix’s *Card Playing War Cripples* is *grotesque*, for example. Not only are the card players depicted as grotesque, the work itself exemplifies grotesqueness. In Monet’s *Rouen Cathedral* not only does the cathedral appear to be *dissolving* in the light, but this predicate also seems true of the painting. Leger’s *Three Women* exemplifies “looks machine-made,” “stamped out,” and not accidentally, the women depicted also may be said to look machine-made.

But these examples should make us suspicious. There is a subtle difference between Leger’s painting looking machine-made, and the depicted women looking machine-made.

Let us call properties that a painting literally or metaphorically ascribes to something depicted in the work, *depictional* predicates. Call properties true of the work because of the painting’s compositional, painterly, or stylistic characteristics, *compositional* predicates, for want of a better word. It appears that, in many cases, paintings possess compositional properties as a partial result of the way they depict things in the paintings: the Monet looks to be dissolving because of the way the cathedral is pictured. There is a kind of transfer of properties *up* to the painting.

But this is not always the case. What does Leger’s *The Cardplayers* express? We want to say, “how modern mechanized warfare not only mutilates soldiers but turns them partially into machines: the *machine-like nature of soldiers* is expressed.” But is the painting actually machine-like; does it possess the property, “being machine-like?” No. Compare the earlier Leger, where we *do* want to say this.

An even clearer example is Max Ernst’s *The Elephant Celebes*. The depicted corn bin is elephantine, and it seems correct to say that the work expresses or exemplifies that property, but it is surely incorrect to describe the *work* as elephantine. That predicate is not actually (not even in a metaphorical way) possessed by the painting. Velasquez’s famous portrait of Pope Innocent X expresses weakness, corruption, and even lasciviousness, but the painting is anything but weak or corrupt, let alone “lascivious.”

Goodman himself uses “express” and “exemplify” in this broad way: he would not object, I think, to the claim that the Velasquez expressed corruption. In *Ways of Worldmaking* (WW, 1978), e.g., Goodman compares two works, a drawing and a print and says:

Although the Sturgis drawing (*Hockey Players*) and the Pollaiuolo engraving (*Battle of Ten Naked Warriors*) both represent men in physical conflict, the Sturgis expresses flashing action while the Pollaiuolo expresses poised power ... and Joyce's *Ulysses* expresses an infinite cycling of time.

(*WW*, 28f.)

In general, a symbol of a given kind—pictorial, musical, verbal, etc.—expresses only properties that it metaphorically exemplifies as a symbol of that kind.

(*LA*, 87)

Is the Pollaiuolo *actually* poisedly powerful? No. In the art historical scheme of things, it is relatively static—as if a single moment of a powerful event has been captured. Compare Rembrandt's *Blinding of Sampson* which is, I think, poisedly powerful.

Once the distinction between depictional and compositional predicates is seen, it becomes clear, I believe, that *paintings can express or exemplify properties that they do not actually possess*. Paintings sometimes *exemplify or express* properties by depicting objects as possessing them.

There is an element of Goodman's theory that might be used to attempt to address this problem. For every problem-causing predicate, one can develop a related one which *is* true of the painting. For example, Velasquez's painting is not itself lascivious, but it is a lascivious-pope-painting. The Pollaiuolo might not be poisedly powerful, but it is a poised-power-picture. These predicates might seem odd, but they are true of the works, and they are used by Goodman as a way of marking off how we classify pictures.

When confronted with examples of expressed properties that are not actually possessed by a work, can the theory resolve the problem by claiming that, e.g., the Pollaiuolo *does* exemplify “being a poised power etching?” The work does possess this property, but the other necessary condition for exemplification is that it highlights or refers back to this “Goodman predicate.” But does the theory support such a highlighting or reference back to such constructed predicates?

Highlighting or referring back is the rather vague idea introduced by the example of the tailor's swatch. If a certain seascape is said to exemplify “being an unfathomable-unforgiving-sea-picture,” then, a tailor's swatch must be said to exemplify “being a (standard-size, standard-cut) tailor's swatch.” Remember, though, that Goodman says that the swatch exemplifies only properties like weight, pattern, texture of cloth, and not its size and pinked edges. In fact, he explicitly denies that the swatch typically exemplifies “being a tailor's swatch.”

The tailor's sample does not normally function as a sample of a tailor's sample; it normally exemplifies certain properties of a material but not the property of exemplifying such properties.

(*LA*, 54)

Another argument that Goodman predicates like “being a poised-power-picture” are not highlighted by an artwork is this: if they were highlighted or referred back to by the work, it would be what Goodman calls a self-referential symbol, yet he says that artworks which are self-referential are “in the minority” (*LA*, 64).

So, even if a Goodman-predicate is possessed by an artwork, it is wholly unclear that it is exemplified by the work in the typical case.

Goodman is in a dilemma: either he must admit that some cases of exemplification and expression do not involve possession of the property (in other words, do not involve denotation of the work by a predicate) in which case his theory is in error or he must rely on Goodman-predicates which do denote the work, but which are not “referred back” to by the picture, in which case

his theory is in error. The error is in defining exemplification and expression as possession plus highlighting, (or alternately, denotation plus reference back to the predicate). Since both horns of the dilemma lead to the result that Goodman's theory is in part incorrect, we must conclude that the theory of exemplification is left twisting on the dilemma's horns.

I should say that I think Goodman just caught a glimmer of this problem. Late in *Languages of Art* (92), he says, "Not every sad-person-picture is itself sad," which is, of course, part of my basic point. The rest of my point is that such a picture may nonetheless express sadness. However, only two sentences later, he returns to his original position. He says: "Exemplification relates a symbol (a picture) to a label (predicate) which denotes it." And we have seen that this is equivalent, in property talk, to saying that exemplification relates a picture to a property it *possesses*.

It seems to me that the phenomenon I have referred to as "ascent" is an interesting one that any theory of expression should recognize. We might state it as follows:

Property Ascent: sometimes painting A is expressive of property P as a (partial) result of A's depicting something x as being expressive of P.

However, this brings along with it the consequence of acknowledging that there can be instances of property expression that do not require literal or metaphorical property *possession* by A.

What I cannot provide at this time is a theory of either when or why property ascent occurs. Hence, at present, we seem only to be capturing our rather weak intuitions of when it is correct to say that A is expressive of P as a result of ascent. But we can see, I think, that expressiveness in art is a more complicated phenomenon than Goodman's theory acknowledges.

2 Goodman's Theory Seems "Backwards" for Certain Cases: The Second Problem

Exemplification, whatever its problems, shows that painting and the related visual arts are involved in a variety of types of reference. A singularly important form of exemplification is expression. It is particularly interesting (especially to an abstract painter like myself) that abstract paintings frequently establish reference to things expressive, most obviously, to human emotions, moods, and feelings. This is what gives us *Abstract Expressionism*. I will be offering a view of abstract expressionism that is, in a sense, diametrically opposed to Goodman's theory of expression.

Nevertheless, my position has pro-Goodman, as well as contra-Goodman aspects. Like Goodman, I think that expressiveness is more a matter of reference, metaphor, inference, and cognition, than it is, e.g., some kind of emotional reflex response to a visual stimulus.

When a painting strikes us as expressive of some emotion, it has succeeded in referring—perhaps vaguely, perhaps ambiguously, but still successfully—to something in our emotional topology. But how this works, in at least some cases, does not seem to conform to Goodman's theory of expression.

As already mentioned, expression, for Goodman, is metaphorical exemplification, which means that the expressive painting is in the metaphorical extension of a certain predicate, e.g., "is sad" or "is lively"—"sad" or "lively" being metaphorically true of the painting; plus there is a reference back to those predicates by the painting, since it highlights its sad or lively character. I wish to suggest that the painting's literal (or nearly literal) pictorial properties set up a metaphorical association to an emotional state, making the painting expressive of that state because its pictorial properties are *metaphorically true of that emotional state*. There is no reference by the painting back to predicates—Goodman is surely wrong about this—but more importantly, at least in some cases, it seems that expressiveness is not a matter of the painting being in the metaphorical denotation of a predicate that names an expressive property; rather, it is that the painting exemplifies visual relations which we accept as metaphorically true of our emotional experiences. The metaphor runs from the painting to the emotion, not from the emotion's name to the painting.

Let me refer to two of my paintings that I believe may help to make this point. The first work is entitled *Broken Order*. I intended this piece to be, and hope it is, expressive. There is a palpable sense of mood in the work. Once you read the word “disturbance” in the lower portion of *Broken Order*, you sense that the starkness of the painting indicates its emotional reference will be to a “dark” emotion, not to joy or innocent frivolity. Notice already that we have used a description, “dark,” that is literally true of the painting and only metaphorically true of certain emotions. Goodman’s theory goes in the other direction: “sad,” e.g., is literally true of an emotion and metaphorically true of the sad painting.

We say that pangs of despair, or regret, or panic, unease, or dread can cut razor-like into one’s calm, can alter the texture of one’s experience, can come in like a wave and blanket your current state, and so forth. Although I would not try to defend the idea that all of these descriptions are *literally* true of a painting, I do think that they are more immediately and pictorially true of a painting than they are of an emotion. The relevant emotions are metaphorically described in these ways, and therefore, paintings exemplifying such properties can be seen as referring to those emotions.

Hence, my claim is that a painting P is abstractly expressive of Φ when P literally exemplifies properties and relations that can be thought of as *metaphorically* applying to the emotion Φ , because of some similarity that obtains between the properties P exemplifies and the properties that are characteristic of emotion Φ , or being in Φ , or being a Φ person. The painting, then, is a metaphor for the emotion. This is how reference gets established. The painting is said to be metaphorically Φ when it literally possesses properties that metaphorically apply to the emotion. The painting is not metaphorically “sad” as much as sadness is metaphorically drab, gray, and static. So, we have Goodman, but from 180° .

An additional and final example makes no new point, but reinforces the claim that expression is a form of exemplification; that expression is artistic reference to abstract properties and relations, pictorially represented, that can be thought of as similar to the properties of emotion, or metaphorically true of given emotions.

Another painting of mine, entitled *Emotional Embers*, exemplifies a dormant glow that might be a cooling down or an imminent sparking up. It has a brighter outside frame that makes the middle areas seem further back in the painting’s depth, as if presenting the residue of some event that once covered or encompassed the middle area. This reinforces the idea that what is expressed is the effect of some past incendiary event. Something transpired here and something is still going on. I would say that incendiary processes and properties are represented or alluded to rather literally here—at least more literally than these properties are true of emotional events we have all experienced. Yet we metaphorically describe such events in incendiary terms, and hence, can make the association between the exemplified properties of the painting and those emotional events. As a consequence, it strikes us as true that the painting expresses or refers to such emotions. Again, the painting has pictorial properties that are metaphorically true of the emotion. Metaphor runs from the symbol, the painting, to the natural object, the emotion, and the association is secured. This involves definite reference by the painting to certain properties that are metaphorically true of the emotion rather than to predicates metaphorically denoting the painting.

It should be noted that the explanation given for the expressive quality of the artwork will not also be the explanation for the metaphorical attribution of that property to the emotion. This latter attribution is a metaphor already established, not by any connection to art, but by the natural associations widely experienced in daily life. For example, an artwork may be expressive of a burning desire of one sort or another but, obviously, the desire itself is not metaphorically “burning” because of its relationship to an artwork. Rather, a burning desire is one that we want to “put out,” i.e., satisfy, and is also one that “hurts” prior to its satisfaction. An association is made between a physical state (being burnt by fire) and a mental state (the desire) which is in no way dependent on the relation the desire has to an artwork expressing that emotion.

The fact that Goodman's view can be applied to non-artistic cases of metaphor, at least to the extent that we acknowledge that a burning desire is in the metaphorical denotation of "burning," does nothing to support his position on aesthetic expression over against the one offered here. Our argument is that an artwork expressing burning desire is, at least in some cases, quite a different thing from a natural desire being understandably described as "burning."

At least one source of Goodman's difficulties is that he conflates the two predicates, "___ is a metaphor for ___" and "___ is in the metaphorical denotation of ___." But these predicates are not synonymous. Is every cheerful painting a metaphor for cheerfulness? No. Is a seemingly dripping painting (Monet) a metaphor for "drippiness"? Hardly. The Sturgis painting is in the metaphorical denotation of "flashing action" but is not a metaphor for flashing action. It represents hockey players as involved in flashing action but to be a metaphor for flashing action it must make some referential connection to flashing action in general, much as the whale in *Moby Dick* is a metaphor for evils which must be fought. Paintings can have expressive properties without being metaphors for those properties. They may simply not be involved in the metaphor function. Hence, not everything important about metaphor is going to be captured by Goodman's concentration on metaphorical denotation.

3 But Our Suggestion Cannot Be a Wholesale Replacement for Goodman's Theory

How philosophically easy it would be to simply substitute the new theory of expression for Goodman's. No such substitution will work, however. One example that has already been discussed will be sufficient to uncover the problem. Return, then, to Velasquez's *Pope Innocent X*. The painting expresses lasciviousness, I have suggested, and have argued that Goodman would agree. According to the expressive theory put forward above, there must be features literally true of the painting that can be metaphorically predicated to the Pope himself in virtue of his lasciviousness. But what might such features be? The painting expresses lasciviousness (this is an instance of "ascent") presumably as a result of the Pope being depicted with a leer that is such that we identify it as evil in a number of ways, lasciviousness being among them. But "being depicted with such a leer" is not a feature metaphorically true of the Pope, and, indeed, since the Pope is the original owner of the leer, we do not seem to be in the area of metaphor at all. Unlike the abstract *Broken Order* there seems to be no pictorial properties in the portrait which we could say are literally true of the painting but metaphorically true of poor Pope Innocent. Our suggested theory of expression fails in this case.

One might attempt to solve this problem by denying that depictional properties that are true of the work as a whole by way of ascent are not *expressive* but rather representational properties true of the work in virtue of the work's representing some object as possessing that property. But if this is seen as a pro-Goodmanian move, it pays a substantial price. It would significantly contract the range of expressive properties that Goodman's theory could countenance. Properties such as "flashing action" and "poised power" would no longer be subsumed under Goodman's theory.

Perhaps another unified solution will be forthcoming, but I, for one, do not see it at present. The conclusion does not, however, have to be negative. It may be that we have gotten onto a couple of ways in which artistic expression is a more complex feature of art than we may have earlier supposed. It is in no way absurd to conjecture that artistic expression can be accomplished in more than one way and that art is that much richer for it. This, at any rate, seems to be where the matters stand.

4 Conclusion

I have offered two major challenges to Goodman's theory of the semantic functions of art. I have argued that property exemplification by an artwork does not require the actual *possession* of the

property by the work. Depictional properties can be exemplified, even though not actually true of the work. Consequently, exemplification and expression do not entail property possession.

I have also claimed that an artwork's being expressive of a certain property is, at least in some cases, not a matter of that work's being metaphorically denoted by a predicate naming the property expressed.

If these conclusions initially seem to be only fussy analytic details, they are not, for they ultimately show that fundamental tenets of Goodman's theory must be rethought. The re-thinking led us to the idea of property ascent as well as to a new analysis of artistic expression that seemed to work well for abstract expressionist painting in particular. Limitations were encountered, though. We lack anything like a *theory* of property ascent, and the new suggestions about expression were not without counterexample. But a more complete understanding of artistic expression can nonetheless be gleaned from these halting solutions. And, irrefutably, Nelson Goodman is the original inspiration.

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38

E. H. GOMBRICH

William P. Seeley

What Constable ‘really’ saw in Wivenhoe park was surely a house across a lake. What he had learned to paint was a flat patch that allowed any number of readings, including the correct one.

E. H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion, p. 278

Sir Ernst Hans Josef Gombrich was an art historian with a keen interest in both cultural history and perceptual psychology. Gombrich was born in Austria in 1909. He emigrated to the United Kingdom in 1936 and became a naturalized British citizen in 1947. All but one of his books, *Eine Kurze Weltgeschichte Für Junge Leser* (1936), were published in English. *The Story of Art* (1950) is perhaps his most widely read book. It outlines a broadly accessible history of Western visual art (albeit from a uniquely mid-20th-century perspective). His influence in philosophy is, however, most closely tied to his writing and lectures on art and the psychology of perception. These materials are collected in *Art and Illusion* (1960), *Meditations on a Hobby Horse* (1963), and *The Image and the Eye* (1981).

Gombrich argued that artworks are communicative devices. Understanding an artwork requires some form of cooperative collaboration between an artist and a consumer. Artworks are structured to carry hints or suggestions for how they are to be recognized, perceived, and understood. Some of these hints are biologically salient cues that suffice to trigger automatic perceptual processes. Others are stylistically unique cues that indicate how an artwork should be used as a communicative proxy, how consumers should recognize and understand its content.

Gombrich’s interests in this context were focused on paintings, pictures, and other kinds of two-dimensional representational media. He argued that artists and consumers come to learn the conventional structure of artistic communication via their active engagement with these types of artifacts. The general class of artworks can, in turn, be subdivided by media, genre, epoch, school, movement, artist, and other stylistic categories. Consumers (and artists) learn to see art through the lens of these different stylistic categories. They learn to see a sub-class of representational artifacts as artworks, paintings, sculptures, and other types of semantically inflected depictions that can be differentiated by era, school, movement, and individual style. The conventions that constrain and define depictive practices within these different categories of art, in turn, shape the way consumers perceive the world that artworks have been constructed to represent. Consumers learn to recognize the world as an artwork. Said another way, the normative conventions governing productive practices in the representational arts reflect what is salient to the identity of a landscape, object, or event for a community at a time.

There are *constructivist* undertones to Gombrich's writings on representational art (Winner, 1982, p. 90). Cognition is an adaptation that enables us to organize the perceptual world around those everyday activities that constitute our environment. In engaging in those activities we learn to recognize, and selectively direct attention to, just what is salient in the world for those behaviors (Gombrich, 1951, 1960). Artists exploit these cognitive aspects of perception. They produce what Gombrich identified as *minimum images* that function as perceptible substitutes for what they represent. In the case of naturalistic painting, for instance, artists produce inflected formal patterns that suffice to enable viewers to perceptually recognize what a work represents and what it meant to represent that subject that particular way. Gombrich did not think that artworks resemble what they represent (Gombrich, 1951). What matters in matters of depiction is rather what we do with them, how we use them. Representational artworks are artifacts that function as semantically inflected, perceptual *substitutes*, or schematically stylized stand-ins for the subject they represent in a specialized communicative game of sorts.

The constructivist undertones of Gombrich's theory have been associated with an illusion theory of depiction. We readily recognize that pictures are composed of abstract two-dimensional patterns of marks within a medium, e.g. charcoal on paper or pigment suspended in linseed oil spread on canvas. Yet somehow we perceive the sum total of these marks to resemble, and so depict, some subject. A loose notion of resemblance is critical to our folk concept of depiction. It is often thought to be one of the key factors that distinguish pictures from verbal descriptions. Gombrich's suggestion was that formal patterns embodied in the design of an image encode perceptual cues sufficient to enable ordinary perceivers, at least within the context of current conventions for depiction, to recognize what the artist intended to depict. A depiction does not, strictly speaking, resemble its subject. Rather these cues suffice to enable a consumer to perceptually recognize what is depicted in the picture plane, and so induce an *illusion of seeing* that subject. Gombrich, therefore, provided a psychological mechanism to explain how resemblance might work in pictorial representation, e.g. how viewers recognize a naturalistic landscape in depth in what they easily see to be an abstract two-dimensional pattern of paint.

The trick in Gombrich's constructivist story about representational art is the observation that we perceive what we recognize, not what we see per se. The constructivist account holds that we perceive the world in terms of those learned concepts that encode the defining features of conventionally and biologically salient categories. Perceptual recognition involves a matching process. We match what we see to concepts that encode what we know about the world. What this entails is that, when we recognize what we see, we see it as a particular instance of a member of a category, a scene, object, or event replete with a projected range of expected attributes and behaviors. A stick can represent a horse because it can substitute for one in a game of make-believe – its physical attributes are fit to some minimal criteria of rideability. Artists working in naturalistic styles analogously learn to construct minimal images or images that encode some range of *diagnostic* perceptual cues sufficient to enable us to visually recognize their depictive subject.

Gombrich's theory provides a nice explanation of the perceived resemblance between a canvas or model and what it was designed to depict. It also explains why the development of systems for realistic depiction should have been so hard. A constructivist account of perception suggests that the translation from what we perceptually recognize to what we actually see is difficult. If we only perceive what we recognize, and we only recognize what we can match to concepts that encode the structure and function of familiar categories of things, then we need to be able to recognize a scene object, event, or action as a painting, etching, drawing or other types of picture in order to see what is necessary to manually depict it in a medium. The complexity of this task is compounded by the fact that any of an uncountably large range of combinations of perceptual cues might suffice in a given context to enable a perceiver to recognize what has been depicted. Artists working in naturalistic styles don't copy what they perceive per se. They must choose both how

to render the diagnostic cues sufficient to recognize their subjects and how much (or how little) to include in their compositions.

The net result, Gombrich argued, is that representational art has a recognizable history that tracks relationships among different depictive systems or styles that have been developed over time. Representational art is defined by a history of the languages of depiction that have been deployed over time. Languages of art are, in this context, defined by conventional schema for depicting types of things. These schema initially emerge as loosely described attentional strategies, perceptual devices designed to direct attention to those aspects of the visual environment that suffice to enable ordinary perceivers to recognize quotidian scenes, objects, and events in the day-to-dayness of their everyday activities. Representational artworks encode subsets of the same range of perceptual cues. They thereby suffice to induce an illusion of seeing in sufficiently educated viewers.

It is important to note that there is some slip between this illusionistic account of depiction, what Gombrich meant by the illusion of seeing, and the nature of everyday perceptual illusions. Gombrich thought that the compositional structures of representational artifacts were constrained by, and so carried information about, the everyday activities of ordinary consumers. These sorts of activities reflect the goals, values, and associated normative attitudes of members of particular communities at particular times. Gombrich identified related differences among the formal-compositional strategies and semantic contents of different styles of art as critical to the practice of depiction. When we recognize a landscape in a painting we recognize it as a landscape depicted in a style with a particular communicative intent unique to a culture at a time, e.g. similarities and differences between 18th-century Dutch and 19th-century Hudson River School canvases. Ordinary consumers easily recognize these differences among works of familiar styles. They recognize a particular work of art, say an 18th-century Dutch landscape, as a rendering of some subject in a particular artistic style that carries information about the history of painting and the cultures that support an associated range of artistic practices. Therefore, although consumers perceptually recognize landscapes replete with a projected range of expected attributes and behaviors in these images, they do not believe that they see those landscapes there. They believe, rather, that they see representations, or intentionally inflected renderings, of those landscapes.

Everyday perceptual illusions are cognitive illusions. They are illusions that fool us. We often believe, however briefly, that the world is as we mistakenly see it.¹ The fact that viewers aren't fooled by what they see is often raised as an objection against Gombrich's illusion theory of depiction. However, a close reading of his theory shows that this objection won't quite do. Gombrich quite clearly thought that consumers recognize that art has a history. This fact is part and parcel of (a metaphysician might say constitutive of) their understanding of the communicative dimension of depictive practices. Consumers both recognize and understand what it means for a landscape to have been rendered in a particular style at a particular time. What this means is that they recognize that art is an illusion. They aren't fooled by it. They recognize that what they are looking at is a highly stylized, conventionally constructed representation of a landscape. An understanding of the historically constrained conventional nature of the activity of artistic representation, in turn, directs attention and articulates their understanding of how the depicted subject has been rendered. The trick is that all of this is a constitutive part of Gombrich's theory of depiction. This raises a question. What does it mean to say that Gombrich's theory of depiction is an illusion theory?

1 The Gombrich-Gibson Debate

Once upon a time it was philosophically sound to imagine that the input to perception was a topologically defined sensuous manifold, a systematically organized veridical map of colored patches projected from the environment onto the picture plane of a visual field (Kant, 1790). Light

reflected onto the retina was collected, passed on, and represented as a global concatenation of visual sense data defined by what mid-20th-century art critics might have called a Greenbergian sense of all-overness! Perceptual recognition, borrowing from Kant, was thought to involve the intuition of some set of organizing principles embedded within the currently encoded sensuous manifold – organizing principles that provided compositional (representational) structure to an otherwise undifferentiated two-dimensional mosaic of color. Vision, in other words, operated a lot like oil painting. An oil painting (or any other two-dimensional pictorial representation for that matter) could be conceptualized as a retinal prosthesis, a substitute retinal image designed to artificially trigger the process of visual recognition in the gallery (or more generally on the wall). The process of painting, constructing a picture, could, further, be reconstructed as a problem of optics, a puzzle about the geometric projection of wholistic mosaics of light projected onto a two-dimensional plane (perhaps naively resolvable by something like Alberti's Window). Oil painting could, therefore, be used to model vision itself.

Vision does of course begin with a procedure that is something like this. Pictures can, as a result, be conceptualized as retinal prostheses of a sort. Many years ago, when I was a young artist, I learned from a friend's dad that when lithographers were enjoined to reproduce editions of a target image they would project a grid onto a copy of the original and painstakingly copy the color gradients, or texture information, contained within each cell. At least that is what they did in a more analog time. The strategy is remarkably successful for producing of reproductions. Gombrich points out, however, that it is an impossible strategy for painting and other manual forms of picture making. What's the trouble? No one has ever seen a raw retinal image. Nor could they. We see and perceive what we recognize, not what we see.

Consider the figure reproduced on page 237 of *Art and Illusion*. It is an image of three identical figures projected onto the wireframe grid of an imaginary hallway. The aperture of the depicted hallway narrows with its perspectival projection into space. The apparent sizes of the three figures increase in inverse proportion to the apparent narrowing of the hallway. The furthest of the three figures appears to tower over its cousin in the foreground. They are however identical figures. They are the same size. They take up the same amount of space in the picture plane. Their retinal projections are therefore identically sized. But we don't perceive them that way. Why not? The relationship of each figure to the metric of their local space is different. The perspectival projection of the drawing compresses the metric of the local hall space as it fades into the distance. The furthest figure therefore appears to take up more space. Psychological mechanisms associated with the perception of *size constancy* cause it to appear bigger to us than its pictorially closer cousins. Similar mechanisms contribute to *brightness* and *color constancy* in perception. What we perceive is what we would expect to see in the natural scene that we recognize depicted in the picture given the compositional relationships rendered on the canvas. What we don't see is the projected retinal image produced by the picture, the veridical relationships among the particular elements of the undifferentiated sensuous manifold that produced those cognitive-perceptual expectations!

Gombrich makes several references to J. J. Gibson's ecological theory of perception in *Art and Illusion*. Gibson identified the input to perception with an *ambient optic array*, or a pattern of orthogonally juxtaposed texture gradients that reflect the relative orientations of different surfaces in the environment. Perception should require no interpretation, no categorization, on this account. The *direct registration* of information already present in the optic array should suffice to orient ourselves to those surfaces and objects we need to interact with to succeed in our behaviors. Drawings and other kinds of realistic representations, Gibson thought, need only reproduce these aspects of the optic array to succeed in accurately depicting their subjects. There is an improvement over the Kantian model for perception here. An optic array is not a retinal image. It is a representation of information objectively present in the environment. Drawings and other sorts of naturalistic depictions, Gibson thought, reproduce those higher order relations that are constitutive of the

internal structure of an ambient optic array that would have been produced by their subjects in ordinary perceptual contexts (Gibson, 1971, 1978).

Gibson's theory of depiction is quite elegant in its simplicity. Gombrich thought that it was spot on in its assessment of the importance of texture to depiction. But he argued that there was an *ambiguity of illusion* which demonstrated that it could not be the whole story. Consider the three figures projected in depth in the hallway illusion again. There are two sets of formal relations salient to the size illusion illustrated in the drawing: the relations among the three figures themselves and the relation of each figure to the spatial metric of the depicted hallway. The overall composition of the picture plane is neutral between these two sets of formal relations. The overallness of the formal pattern of marks rendered on the page doesn't favor either of the two. The size illusion occurs because vision naturally fixes on the wrong set for an accurate judgment about the actual relative size of the three figures. Why does this happen? We recognize that it is a picture. We know that mathematical perspective is a formal convention regularly used to depict space in a picture (and has been for at least 500 years). We are in fact members of a common visual community that has generally learned to interpret perceived space in terms of this convention for perspectival projection. So we categorize the picture as an image in perspectival projection. Once we do we visually fixate on the relationship between each individual figure and the metric of its locally depicted space. Once we cognitively latch onto the image in this way it is hard to see it otherwise. The upshot is that our perception of the image isn't direct as Gibson describes it. It is cognitively mediated by a shared cultural understanding of perspectival projection that has been derived from the history of art.

Gombrich's discussion of art succinctly captures the cognitive dimension of perception. But there is a wrinkle in his use of the size constancy example. The mechanisms of perceptual constancy are automatic psychological mechanisms (Palmer, 1999). They do encode knowledge of the environment, e.g. that surfaces remain the same color across changes in the brightness and hue of light or that objects remain the same size despite differences in the apparent metric of local space. But these mechanisms encode information about the world as reflexive cognitive adaptations that are keyed to the phylogenetic scale of the evolved structure of perceptual systems. The story Gombrich tells, in contrast, depends on explicit knowledge of art historical conventions developed within the ontogenetic timeframe of an individual's art historical experience. What Gombrich really needs is an example of the explicit influence of learned concepts and categories and their explicit influence on perception.

Bi-stable ambiguous figures like the duck-rabbit figure Gombrich discusses in the introduction to *Art and Illusion* can be used to track the influence of explicit categorization processing in perception (Bonnar, Gosselin, & Schyns, 2002; Gombrich, 1960, p. 5). The optic array that is depicted in the image is ambiguous between two interpretations (or three if we add the alloverness of the optic array itself). It seems uncontroversial to think that sensory processes directly pick up all the information encoded in the optic array whenever one looks at the duck rabbit figure. Nonetheless, one ordinarily perceives either a duck or a rabbit. Not both. Of course, we can learn to switch back and forth by fixing our attention on different aspects of the drawing ... different formal relations diagnostic for the two different interpretations (categorizations) of the identity of the figure (Bonnar et al., 2002). But we cannot see both simultaneously. Why not? The texture gradients present in the image provide hints, clues, or cues to two possible interpretations of the image. Which one is perceived depends on how one categorizes the image, which of two concepts one chooses to use to interpret its content. Bi-stable ambiguous figures, therefore, directly illustrate the influence of cognition in perception.

Gombrich argued that the trick is that all perception is like this. Constructivists appeal to the *inverse projection problem* for visual perception to explain why. A well-defined function can be constructed to describe the projection of any three-dimensional scene onto a two-dimensional

surface like a photograph. However, the converse is not the case. The two-dimensional pattern produced by that projection is consistent with an infinite set of possible three-dimensional configurations (Palmer, 1999). What this entails is that the retinal inputs to visual perception are always ambiguous between any of a large (theoretically infinite) set of possible three-dimensional interpretations. Constructivists argue that vision is thereby an inferential process. The visual system identifies the retinal input with the most likely interpretation of its source given the context. A range of variables contribute to this inference in ordinary cases, variables that include general world knowledge and local movements of the agent itself used to disambiguating the relative orientations of local spatial cues.

Gombrich, following this general constructivist recipe for perception, argued that cognition is a general influence in all perceptions. Painters and other manual picture makers learn conventional systems designed to harness these cognitive influences in perception. Paintings are therefore illusions of a sort. They are bistable ambiguous images, two-dimensional mosaics of color that lend themselves to abstract formal, and more or less naturalistic, interpretations. We can switch back and forth between these interpretations, but once a consumer has latched onto a naturalistic interpretation of the image it takes effort to switch back to a two-dimensional design view. What underwrites this effort? An understanding of depiction, a capacity to categorize a canvas or image as a two-dimensional pattern of medium-specific abstract marks unique to a particular category and style of art.

Contemporary research in the neurophysiology of attention lends support to Gombrich's account (see Seeley, 2020). Perception is selective both by nature and necessity. Perceptual systems are limited resource cognitive systems. The world is replete with currently irrelevant information that sensory systems, left to their own devices, would record relatively indiscriminately. Perceptual systems therefore need a strategy to sort signal from the noise in everyday situations that require milliseconds-fast reactions on the fly. Biased competition theories of selective attention suggest that reciprocal attentional networks provide a mechanism to support just such a strategy (Desimone & Duncan, 1995; Peelen & Kastner, 2014; Pessoa & Adolphs, 2010). Initial sensory information is fed forward to prefrontal brain regions associated with affective processing and perceptual recognition. These processes are used to generate an initial perceptual hypothesis about the identities of perceived objects, actions, and events. Feedback from prefrontal areas to brain regions associated with sensory processing, in turn, directs attention, biases populations of sensory neurons to the perceptual expectation of features and objects consistent with this initial hypothesis, and inhibits the sensory encoding of potentially distracting information. Subsequent waves of perceptual processing produce error signals that help attentional processes hone in on what is salient to our current behaviors. Perception is the product of multiple waves of this type of hypothesis testing on a time scale measured in the hundreds of milliseconds.

Biased-competition theories of attention suggest that categorizing the duck-rabbit figure one way or another biases sensory processing to just those perceptible features sufficient to recognize either the duck or the rabbit in the image while at the same time suppressing the encoding of those perceptible features necessary to perceive the other. Artists, on this more contemporary account, learn conventional systems designed to harness the influence of analogous attentional processes in perception.

2 Making, Matching, and the History of Pictures

Gombrich looked for the nature of depiction in the practices of picture makers. His interest in the topic was not a philosopher's interest in depiction per se. His starting point was rather a question about artistic style: why should representation have a history? If the representational arts were identified with *mimesis*, or imitation, why should success be such a hard fought achievement and why do we find so many different artistic styles? Why shouldn't it suffice to simply copy what we

see? His answer to this question emerges in the role he attributed to categorization processing in perceptual recognition.

Recall that Gombrich objected to the idea that the marked surface of an image might stand in as a retinal prosthesis of sorts. Constable, he remarked, could not have looked out on the grounds of Wivenhoe Park and seen an undifferentiated sensuous manifold. What he saw was a house situated on the grounds of a well-heeled estate across the lake from where he sat with his, pencils, pens, brushes, ink, pigment, medium, canvas, and paper. What Constable needed was a set of attentional strategies to discern those formal relations within the visual environment sufficient for depiction and a system of medium-specific productive strategies to render them in a recognizable way.

But in the opposite order.

Students in undergraduate courses in aesthetics learn hackneyed platitudes about art embedded in traditional theories of aesthetic experience. We naturally learn, so the story goes, to see the world in terms dictated by our values and interests. When we do so we learn to see past the underlying essence of objects and events, their true appearances, to their utility to us, their users. Why? Well. Perception, like the rest of cognition, is an adaptation. It enables us to see the world in a way that facilitates behaviors that foster flourishing and survival. Perception is a cognitive shortcut of sorts. What we know of the world we know precisely because it facilitates these kinds of behaviors. We see the world as we know it. We see past the genuine appearances of things. We perceive them rather as they have been represented by the visual system for action. We perceive them in terms of our own biological and culturally unique values and interests. Viewers, for instance, overestimate the relative size of plates depicted in perspectival projection in depictions of well-set dinner tables (Winner, 1982, p. 92). They know the plate has been rendered as an ellipse. But they see it as a circular object. As a result, they overestimate the height of its rendered form relative to its width. We might call this a case of constructive misperception. It is a putative misperception that is useful in real contexts. It facilitates reaching, grabbing, and the concomitant ingestion of metabolic fodder. Nonetheless, it is a bit of an oddity in the recognizable two-dimensional context of the picture plane. Drawn dinner plates have no biological salience, no natural utility in the everyday activities associated with survival and flourishing.

Theories of aesthetics traffic in what is often called *the myth of the innocent eye*. The central tenet of this myth is the idea that artists must learn to see past cognitive influences in perception to the true underlying visual form, the natural appearances, of the perceived environment (Fry, 1920; Gombrich, 1960; Ruskin, 1857). Aesthetically sensitive viewers, so the story goes, also learn to see through the veil of cognition and gather glimpses of the true visual world. Artists (and consumers) are experts at aesthetic vision. They use the tools of their trade to train their eyes to what the world really looks like. This capacity for accurate visual analysis is what underwrites depiction.

There's something to this view of artists' perceptual abilities. Evidence suggests that expert training in drawing, for instance, confers an advantage in form recognition, visual analysis, and perceptual identification tasks (Kozbelt, 2001; Kozbelt & Seeley, 2007). The metaphysics of the story is, however, skewed. If categorization processing plays a constitutive role in perception then viewers can't see past the conceptual biases of what they know. Seeing is always a form of *seeing-with* (concepts) that manifests itself as a *seeing-as* (perceptual categorization). The artist's eye is not an innocent eye. It is a well-trained eye whose behavior is shaped by expert knowledge of the nature of artistic production in a preferred medium. Artists simply learn to see the world in terms dictated by the values and interests of their profession.

Gombrich contrasts Constable's original painting with a child's copy of the canvas. The child's copy of *Wivenhoe Park* is a rendering of what she knows. Like-sized things have been rendered literally like-sized. The artist's perspective on the rowboat on the lake has been elevated so that it better captures the craft's defining features. The house is proportionally scaled to the surrounding trees on the waterfront. It is a conceptual picture. It renders the information present in the scene

as it is perceived. The picture appears quite flat. Everything has been pushed forward to the imagined scrim of the picture plane. Gombrich argues that the child's copy of the painting represents a first step in a putative history of representation. The next step would be for the artist to look again, note the compositional errors present in the copy, and remake the picture, adjusting the composition to compensate for recognizable errors in the appearance of the original.

Making, Gombrich argues, precedes matching. The artist doesn't make a picture by copying what they perceive. They start by making a picture, seeing where they have gone wrong, and then starting again. The net result is the development of sets of medium-specific conventional schema for representation that an artist can subsequently use to direct attention and shape seeing for drawing, painting, photography, etc. Artists do not see past the conceptual apparatus of life to a true underlying visual form. They develop conceptual apparatus that enables them to see the world in a way that facilitates their artistic practices and their behaviors. They learn to see the world as the artwork they are trained to make.

Consumers learn to do this too. They learn to decode the spatial information carried in the picture plane and read the image as a depiction of a scene, object, action, or event rendered in a particular style. They learn to recognize what has been included, what has been omitted, shortcuts, abstractions, and more generally what it means to have rendered the subject of the image in one particular style or another. The exaggeration of scale in a mountain landscape, for instance, is not a distortion per se. It is a perceptual clue, a means to render the apparent grandeur of the depicted landscape for the purpose of conveying a particular attitude toward the natural world. Artistic styles thereby emerge as negotiated communicative strategies in the back-and-forth conversation between artists and consumers (Gombrich, 1960, p. 196). The history of representation is the history of this negotiation. It is a history of making and matching, of schema and correction, of the development of shared perceptual strategies in the name of artistic communication.

3 An Illusion Theory of Depiction

We are now in position to return to the question we closed the first section with: in what sense is Gombrich's theory an *illusion theory* of depiction. Gombrich doesn't really offer a theory of depiction. But we can extrapolate one from his writings. Artworks are *substitutes* (Gombrich, 1951). They are artifacts that we use as stand-ins for what they represent in particular, narrow, culturally unique types of behaviors. Their status as representations is a matter of how we use them and what we do with them. Gombrich's stock illustration is a child's hobby horse. What makes a stick, broom, or store bought toy a hobby horse is just that it has a compositional structure that allows us to use it as one. It is easy to grab a crooked branch from the backyard and ride it. The branch functions in this context as a complex sensorimotor cue that facilitates a range of imaginary behaviors. We might add more or less to it as the occasion required. We might look for a branch that still held some of its leaves to serve as a mane. We might look for one with a big knot to stand-in as an eye. Ultimately what matters is that the relative scale of the parts and their scale relative to the rider make it a fit substitute for a horse in the game they are playing. We let imagination fill out the rest.

Pictures, Gombrich thought, are like this. They encode a range of perceptual cues that allow them to stand-in for a perceived landscape, person, etc. We recognize that pictures are composed of patterns of charcoal, graphite, ink, pigment suspended in a medium, etc. We can perceive them that way. But we can also perceive them as the scene, object, action, or event they were designed to represent. Which we choose (or better, how much of each we choose to attend to) is a matter of how we intend to use them. We might look past stylistic formal-compositional features when we use an image as a record of a person, place, thing, event, or action. We might, in contrast, keep recognizable stylistic features in the forefront of our mind when we look at a depiction as an artwork, when the focus of our attention is what it might have meant to render the depicted

subject in one way or another. But, notice, we remain aware of key stylistic attributes of the image even when we treat it as a record of its subject. We do so even if we don't explicitly perceive them. Why? These are the cues that direct us to use the image that way.

The illusion theory of depiction Gombrich seems to have held is a bit more complicated than the naïve illusion theory philosophers have often attributed to him (Bantinaki & Hyman, 2017). Philosophers distinguish between *perceptual* and *cognitive* illusions. Perceptual illusions are *cognitively impenetrable* (Currie, 1995). They are not affected by what we believe. A stick in the water appears bent even though we recognize it is straight. We aren't fooled by the illusion – at least not once we have been informed of it. But we can't see it any other way. *Cognitive illusions* are cases in which we believe what we see. We are fooled by them. The standard objection to an illusion theory of depiction is that a) it entails that viewers believe they see the depicted subject in the picture plane so that b) they are unaware of the features constitutive of its identity as an articulated two-dimensional design. No one thinks viewers are in the throes of a cognitive illusion when they recognize the depictive content of an image. Therefore illusion theory is flawed. But, of course, Gombrich would agree (see above). He didn't think consumers were in the throes of a perceptual illusion in the strong sense of a cognitively impenetrable perceptual experience. Further, he thought that an awareness of the non-representational stylistic features of the image, the features constitutive of its identity as an articulated two-dimensional design, underwrite the experience of the work as an instance of work in a particular, semantically inflected, culturally distinct style. He, therefore, didn't think pictures were, strictly speaking, perceptual illusions either.

Objections to Gombrich's illusion theory reflect intuitions derived from Richard Wollheim's notion of *two-foldness*. Wollheim offered a counter-theory he saw as an alternative to Gombrich. He argued that viewers were *simultaneously perceptually aware* of images as both depictions of scenes objects actions or events in depth and two-dimensional patterns of marks. If sound this would mean that the perceivers would be simultaneously perceptually aware of both the subject of a depiction and the information in the abstract design of the composition constitutive of its artistic style. The constructivist undertones of Gombrich's theory certainly run counter to this account. On the latter theory of perception, one can either see the image as an abstract pattern or a depiction, one can switch back between the two, but one cannot see both simultaneously. Once one latches onto a particular categorization what one perceives is (at least for the moment) fixed. However, as we have seen, Gombrich did not exclude an explicit, concurrent awareness of the design features of a composition from his theory.

The disagreement between Gombrich and Wollheim would seem to turn on an empirical question about the nature of attention and perception. The perceptual recognition literature would seem to support Gombrich (see Palmer, 1999). Whereas we may be simultaneously aware of both the design features and the depictive content of a work we can only attend to one of these two aspects of the work at a time. However, the contrast between the two views is not as stark as it is often made out to be. We recognize images, on Gombrich's account, as depictions of a subject rendered in a particular style. This may well be resource enough to fold the critical design elements of twofold experience into the explicit perceptual recognition of the image. Whatever the case, the perceptual illusion that underwrites Gombrich's tacit theory of depiction is replete with formal and semantic information constitutive of different stylistic categories of art. This seems sufficient to challenge standard objections to the illusionistic tenor of his account of depiction.

Note

1 It is a bit of a misnomer to equate perceptual illusions with perceptual mistakes. A perceptual illusion is more often than not the result of perceptual systems operating to code in ecologically invalid contexts, or contexts for which they were not adapted.

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RICHARD WOLLHEIM

Derek Matravers

1 Introduction

Richard Wollheim was born in 1923 in London to a German-Jewish father and an English mother. He served in the war, after which he returned to Oxford to study History and PPE. There he met A.J. Ayer, who, in 1949, on the slender evidence of only four terms of study of philosophy, gave him a job at University College London. Wollheim spent the bulk of his career at UCL, becoming Grote Professor in 1963 and remaining in the department until 1982 when he moved to America. In 2003 he returned to London, where he died later that year. Wollheim has been described as ‘one of the most original, creative and courageous philosophers of his time’ (Budd 2005: 245). He generally worked outside of the intellectual mainstream of philosophy, which did not prevent his work from receiving acclaim. He was formidable in many respects; he was culturally extremely sophisticated, socially well-connected, possessed a vast knowledge of both past and contemporary art, and had well-placed confidence in his own judgement. He wore these assets lightly, and, to his many friends, was charming and excellent company.

Wollheim published widely in philosophy, with work in political philosophy, the philosophy of mind, psychoanalysis, and ethics. However, his principal interest was in the philosophy of art, particularly as concerned painting, and it is that on which I will focus in this entry. There is a remarkable consistency in his ideas; many of the themes which surface in this first book, *Art and Its Objects*, are returned to in later writings. I shall consider his contribution under five headings: the ontology of art; painting as an art; representation, expression, and visual delight; interpretation; and his contribution to modernist art theory.

2 Ontology

The structure of *Art and Its Objects* is provided by Wollheim’s attempt to answer the core question – what is art? He begins with ‘a natural starting point’: the ‘physical object hypothesis’: the view that works of art are physical objects. Wollheim considers two criticisms that can be made of this view. The first is that, for some works of art, there is no physical object which is a plausible candidate to be that work of art and the second is that art generally has properties (that is ‘moves with life’ for example) which could not be properties of a physical object. I shall take each in turn.

Wollheim agrees that, in one sense, there is no physical object which is a plausible candidate to be a novel or to be a piece of music. These works of art are repeatable: different instances each of which are Jane Austen’s *Emma* can be found in any decent library. Different instances each of

which are Mozart's *Gran Partita* can be heard in living rooms and concert halls throughout the world. Wollheim borrows a distinction from Pierce and identifies the work of art with a *type*, of which its instances are *tokens*. The distinction can be roughly grasped if one understands that the word 'book' has four tokens of letter but only three types of letter. Wollheim gives a careful discussion of types and tokens, differentiating them from other pairs such as a class and its members or a universal and its instances (Wollheim 1980: 74–84). Nonetheless, the metaphysics of the position has proved challenging and subject to ongoing debate. There are a number of problems. In apparent contrast to works of art, types are eternal, and hence cannot be created. Furthermore, we cannot experience types (at least not qua types) and yet we can experience works of art. With proponents on either side of the divide, the debate does not look as if it will be resolved any time soon.

Wollheim's reply to the second criticism has spawned not one debate but several. The general form of the reply – which, not for the only time in his writing, reveals Wollheim's broadly Humean outlook – is to show that the claims we make about works of art *are* compatible with the works of art being physical objects. The general strategy is to give accounts in terms of the physical world and human interactions with the physical world which both explain and justify such claims. The mere existence of such accounts does not entail the physical object hypothesis. However, they are enough to deal with the argument that claims we make about works of art commit us to the existence of properties that cannot, by their nature, be properties of physical objects. Wollheim's accounts – particularly of representation and of expression – emerge as fully-fledged theories in their own right (of which more below).

The claim that some works of art are types and some are tokens, and that the tokens are physical objects, does not really illuminate the issue of what is distinctive about art. This emerges piece-meal throughout Wollheim's work. However, it is worth alluding to a discussion in *Art and Its Objects* of art as a 'form of life'; a claim that gets further exploration in his later book, *The Thread of Life* (in particular Chapter 7) (Wollheim 1986). The peg upon which this discussion hangs is whether what unifies the practice of art is it being the result of some 'artistic urge', akin to the sexual urge. Wollheim's reply is that human beings indeed have urges that are relevant; in particular, the urge to repair early psychic fracture. However, this does not directly manifest itself in artistic activity. Rather, there needs to be in place a complex network of social activities and, in particular, some vehicles through which such urges can manifest themselves as art. Accounting for quite how we ended up with the vehicles that we did, such as stretched canvas or carved stone, Wollheim names 'the bricolage problem'. There is an element of arbitrariness as to which vehicles we have, although any such will require properties such as being at least somewhat durable and not consumed in appreciation (Wollheim 1980: 110). Hence, a picture emerges of complex human needs for externalisation, with complex social structures through which such externalisations result in what we know as works of art.

3 Painting as an Art

It seems, from the immediate forgoing, that the sphere of art will be drawn narrowly. The Sunday painter, or the person producing views of Montparnasse for tourists, does not seem to be working through some complex human trauma. Wollheim accepts this consequence. He holds that the 'folk' category of art is unreasonably broad. For Wollheim, 'work of art' is an evaluative category; furthermore, it is a highly evaluative category. He opens his 1987 book, *Painting as an Art*, by enumerating those people who paint but do not produce art: Sunday painters; people who paint for relaxation or distraction; forgers; non-human animals; people who paint as a result of art therapy; children – even if they produce work of 'explosive beauty'; painters of street scenes, of Mediterranean ports, of still-life, of 'mammoth abstractions, whose works hang in old-fashioned restaurants

or modern banks, in the foyer of international hotels and the offices of exorbitant lawyers'. This final category 'once, probably, were artists but... now paint exclusively for money and the pleasure of others' (Wollheim 1987: 13).

To produce a work of art, an artist needs to produce it intentionally – under some description; in particular, under the description 'work of art' (the artist has grasped this concept by participating in the form of life described above) (Wollheim 1970: 113). The intention is reflexive; that is, the painter intends viewers of the painting to have an experience which discloses the painter's intention. The content of the intention is complex; it will include 'desires, beliefs, emotions, commitments, wishes ... some of these psychological factors arise deep from the artist's psyche [and] some are unthinkable outside the history and traditions of painting' (Wollheim 1987: 8). This does not explain why the benchmark for producing a painting that is art has been set so high; could not a Sunday painter produce a painting with the intentions described above? A full answer to that question needs to wait for the discussion on intention and interpretation; a shorter answer can be provided here.

The Sunday painter is excluded by the fact that, in producing art, the painter externalises a highly complex constellation of mental states onto the artistic medium in a controlled and scaffolded manner. The task of the viewer is to retrieve the intentions behind this externalisation from the work in front of them. In contrast with interpreting language, there is no structure to provide a scaffold for the retrieval of these intentions. How does the viewer know that the configuration of a particular line is accident, luck, or intended? The answer is that the viewer needs to interpret that work within the constraint of assuming the work was produced by someone with a style; it was produced by a 'style process'.

A style process can be divided into three different items or aspects. First, there is the *schema* or *universal*, under with the painter brings some part of the pictorial resources available to him. Secondly, there is a *rule* or *instruction* for placing, or otherwise operating on, those pictorial resources which the schema picks out. Third, there is the *acquired disposition* to act on the rule, where this disposition is, generally, not just psychological but psychomotor.

(Wollheim 1993c: 176)

Thus Wollheim was unimpressed by those philosophical thought experiments that relied on comparing an object which is a work of art, with an indiscernible counterpart that is a 'mere real thing'.¹ The work of art is interpretable, and the mere real thing is uninterpretable. Of the latter, he says 'we are likely to feel that we don't know what to make of, or what weight to attach to, whatever shows up on the painted support' (Wollheim 1993c: 174).

4 Representation, Expression, and Visual Delight

As stated above, Wollheim was committed to showing how claims made within criticism about art such as painting and sculpture could be true of a physical object. However, the interest of his accounts transcends such motivation – what he gives us are accounts of visual representation (also known as 'depiction') and expression. Wollheim also deals, rather too briefly, on a third capacity of the spectator on which the artist relies; the capacity for 'visual delight'.

In *Art and Its Objects*, Wollheim's analysis of depiction was in terms of an interpretation of Wittgensteinian 'seeing-as'. This shifted to an analysis in terms of 'seeing-in' – and I shall deal only with the later version. Let us take as our example a painting Wollheim much admired: Ingres's *Madame Moitessier*. What is it for the worldly object, the painted canvas, to be a picture of a Madame Moitessier? Wollheim's approach is to define depiction in terms of the experience to which it gives rise (seeing-in) and to provide a 'standard of correctness'.

Let us consider the experience first. There are two key facts about it that provide the substance of Wollheim's account. The first is that it is distinctively visual. The second is that it has a distinctive phenomenological feature: that of 'twofoldness'. When we look at the picture have a single experience with two aspects. First, I am visually aware of a rather well-dressed woman – which Wollheim calls 'the recognitional aspect'. Second, I am visually aware of the surface of the painting – what Wollheim calls 'the configurational aspect'. Although the account is perceptual, and Wollheim is content to describe the two aspects in terms of 'visual awareness', my awareness of the woman (the recognitional aspect) cannot be equated with an experience of seeing a woman face-to-face.² The first, quite simply, is that it is not true to phenomenology. Seeing a picture of a woman and seeing a woman face-to-face are (discounting marginal cases) very different experiences. The second is that if either aspect were akin to a simple face-to-face experience, we would not be able to account for the relation of the two aspects within a single experience. It is not possible for me to have a visual face-to-face experience in which I represent what is in front of me both as a woman and as a painted surface. The two aspects of seeing-in borrow some, but not all, of the properties of the respective face-to-face experiences. One difference is that it is possible to have both aspects of the visual experience simultaneously.

According to Wollheim, seeing-in is a natural capacity we have which we exercise when we see horsemen in stained walls, dancers in frosty panes of glass, or great Wagnerian conductors in clouds. Hence, seeing-in is both logically and historically prior to representation but is not yet representation. To become representation it needs something else; a standard of correctness. That is, we are correct to see a woman in Ingres's painting, in a way in which it does not make sense to say we are correct to see dancers in the frosty pane of glass or a conductor in the clouds. The standard is set 'by the intentions of the artist in so far as they are fulfilled' (Wollheim 1987: 48). The condition is important. The intentions set the standard of correctness only to the extent that what the artists intend to be seen in the painting can actually be seen in the painting. Hence, to answer our question: Ingres's canvas is a picture of a woman because (a) a viewer can see a woman in the painting and (b) Ingres intended that a viewer could see a woman in the painting.

Granting the standard of correctness for the moment, we can summarise the position as holding that a painted surface is a representation if depth can be seen in it. That is, the viewer is simultaneously aware of the two-dimensional painted surface but also the three-dimensional pictorial space it supports. By contrast, the surface of an ordinary painted wall is seen only as a two-dimensional painted surface. This has consequences that some might find counterintuitive. First, all paintings are representational. This is not to deny (as it would be absurd to deny) that the pictorial space of some paintings features such things as 'a man, a horse, a bowl of fruit, the sky, the death of an animal' and the pictorial space of other paintings features coloured solids that do not represent such things (Wollheim 1987: 21). However, this is a distinction *within* representation between figurative paintings and abstract paintings. Second, instances of *tromp l'oeil* are not paintings, as there is no configurational aspect to the experience. Third, canvases in which depth cannot be seen (perhaps the black canvases by Ad Reinhardt) are not paintings as there is no recognitional aspect to the experience. Wollheim embraced each of these three consequences.

Wollheim's account has been subject to a great deal of criticism.³ The principal complaint is that the nature of the recognitional aspect of the experience is wholly unspecified. The issue is that the only grasp we have of the recognitional aspect, the only experience which can provide us with the description we have of it, is a (counterfactual) face-to-face experience of a woman. However, Wollheim is adamant that there is no relation between seeing a woman in the picture and seeing a woman face-to-face (although he does allow, wisely, that there can be causal traffic between the aspect of the experience and the experience). For him, 'the particular complexity that one kind of experience has and the other lacks makes their phenomenology incommensurate' (Wollheim

1987: 47). However, if nothing can be said about the nature of the experience then, despite the fact that Wollheim could (and did) claim that we were nonetheless familiar with it, the theory has a lacuna at its heart – familiarity is not understanding.

The other important category of properties possessed by paintings is expressive properties. As with representational properties these are, according to Wollheim, visual. What it is to see a painting as melancholy is for us to see it as ‘corresponding to’ melancholy. So far, this appears to be a constitutive account of expression; what is meant by saying that a painting is melancholy is that it has a melancholy look about it (compare (Lopes 2005)). Wollheim fills out his claim by providing an account of how such a ‘correspondence’ comes about. This draws on his background in psychoanalytic theory. He borrows from this the notion of projection, which, he claims, comes in two sorts: simple projection and complex projection. Simple projection occurs when an individual (A) has an emotion that he or she cannot tolerate – let us stay with the example of melancholy – which A projects onto some other individual in A’s environment (B). This results in an unjustified belief (that B is themselves melancholy) and some remission in A’s own condition. Complex projection occurs when A projects a feeling or emotion onto the external world. This complex projection generates new properties, projective properties, which the viewer perceives as properties of the world. This experience, which has both a cognitive and affective component, is the experience of the world as corresponding to the emotion.

Unlike simple projection the ‘target’ of complex projection is not random; the part of the external world on which the feeling or emotion is projected must have features that encourage and sustain the projection. However, if so, what does projection add? Why not simply rest with the claim that it is that parts of the world that show an affinity with our feeling or emotions that are expressive? Wollheim claims that the experience of projective properties ‘intimates its own history’ – it intimates that it derives from an experience of projection – which will ‘organise and structure the perception’. However, this only makes prominent a difficulty for the account. It is implausible to hold that all experiences of expression are preceded by the projection of an occurrent felt feeling or emotion. To overcome this problem, Wollheim claims that the experience of projective properties does not intimate a particular instance of expression, but ‘intimate how experiences of this sort originate’ (Wollheim 1991: 153).

The account has been subject to a number of criticisms.⁴ First, even if we grant a notion of simple projection, the notion of complex projection is simply assumed and not explained; it has no precedent in the psychoanalytic literature. Second, Wollheim never satisfactorily explains what it is for the experience of expression to intimate that it derives from an experience of projection. Finally, the exact nature of the account remains elusive. Is it a constitutive account (saying what is meant by ‘the picture is melancholy’) or a causal account (saying how we come to be in the right condition to truly make such a claim)? If both, what is the relation between them?

The last of the three ‘fundamental perceptual capacities that the artist relies upon the spectator to have and to use’ is ‘visual delight’: ‘the power to induce a special form of *pleasure*’. Unlike depiction and expression, to which Wollheim returned on many occasions in many different contexts, he seems only to have dealt with visual delight once – in *Painting as an Art*. Its importance for him is that ‘a large part of the cultural... value of painting practiced as an art, as of any other art, is that it transforms our capacity to experience pleasure’ (Wollheim 1987: 45). Rather than telling us the nature of this pleasure, or its transformation, he instead discusses three sources of visual delight. The first is the interplay between the contents of our experiences of a representation and of what, in the real world, is represented. We start with the real world which raises interest in what is represented but then move from the nature of the representation to experience the real world differently. The second is the interplay between ‘how what at one moment seems an image at the next moment dissolves into a paint surface without meaning’; that is, the interplay ‘detail’ and ‘a more comprehensive, a more distanced, view of the marked surface’. Finally, there is the fact

that ‘paintings draw upon synesthetic associations with what we see... Much of Venetian painting depends on remembered sound, much of Courbet depends on remembered silence’ (Wollheim 1987: 100).

For Wollheim, representation and expressive properties are the fundamental perceptual properties that constitute our experience of pictures – along, of course, with the experience of visual delight. However, he has more to say about the means by which paintings achieve the status of bearers of meaning. I shall merely sketch these here, rather than go into them in depth.

For some pictures, it is appropriate for our experience to include a ‘spectator in the picture’, that is, a spectator located in the virtual space a painting represents. The function of such a spectator is ‘to allow the spectator of the picture distinctive access to the content of the picture’ (Wollheim 1987: 129).

There are ways in which a ‘new kind of content’ can enter a painting. The first, which Wollheim calls ‘the way of textuality’, occurs when some text, some propositional content, such as ‘a religious doctrine, a proverb, a cosmological theory, a moral principle, a metaphor, a world view’ (Wollheim 1987: 187). The second, which he calls ‘the way of borrowing’, means that ‘a certain motif or image has been borrowed from earlier art’. However, this is not a matter of simply ‘cutting and pasting’ some content so as to add meaning. Wollheim proposes the following conditions:

First, that a text enters the content of a painting only if, in representing some event that is connected with that text, the painting also reveals what the text means to the artist. Secondly, that a borrowing enters the content of a painting only if, in putting to new use some motif or image from earlier art, the painting reveals what this borrowing means to the artist’.

(Wollheim 1987: 188)

In addition to the kinds of meaning already considered (representational, expressive, textual, and historical), Wollheim also considers paintings to have ‘secondary meaning’ which is to do with the way the artist makes the painting. This discussion draws heavily on Wollheim’s psychoanalytic background – although that is not too far away in any of his work. The secondary meaning ‘comes about because of what the act by means of which the artist gives the picture meaning means to him’ (Wollheim 1987: 304). The case study Wollheim gives is of Ingres, and the secondary meaning follows from the painter endowing his activity with ‘instrumentality’: what it means to him, unconsciously, is a way of altering the world in a way that stems from the ‘great psychic drama’ of psychosexual development.

The final way in which a painting can gain content or meaning is ‘the way of metaphor’: the painting is a metaphor for, as opposed to a representation of, some part of the world. Wollheim’s claim is not that the content of a painting (a river, for example) is the content of a metaphor (life, for example). That would be a special case of ‘the way of textuality’ (Wollheim 1987: 308). Rather, properties of the picture themselves serve as a metaphor for, say, corporeality. The general point is rather elusive. Wollheim supplies some examples. A painting, and the elements therein, can be thought of – metaphorically – as a container and thing contained in a container. That bodies can be thought of this way will ‘contribute... to the overall effect of corporeality’ (Wollheim 1987: 314).

5 Interpretation

Wollheim did not have a general theory of interpretation, by which I mean a theory that applied to all the arts. He did, however, provide an account of ‘criticism’: the word he used to refer to the process of coming to understand a particular work: ‘The task of criticism is the reconstruction

of the creative process, where the creative process must in turn be thought of as something not stopping short of, but terminating on, the work of art itself' (Wollheim 1980: 185). This is the flip side of Wollheim's view as to what constitutes 'painting as an art'. Above, I claimed that a necessary condition for being such was that the work was the result of an extremely complex intention. Hence, coming to understand the work is at least coming to a position of being able to say what that intention was; of being able to 'reconstruct' it as part of 'reconstructing the creative process'. The qualifier (at least) is because recreating the creative process is broader than simply recreating the artist's intentions. The critic needs to understand both 'the various vicissitudes to which the artist's intentions are subject' and also 'the many background beliefs, conventions, and modes of artistic production against which the artist forms his intention'. It follows from this that the critic's reconstruction may not even concur with the artist's intention, even if that intention will always be central to the task of reconstruction (Wollheim 1980: 200–201).

Wollheim's view can be explicated by comparing it to a rival, the 'scrutiny view'. The scrutiny view holds that all that is needed for criticism is scrutiny of the manifest properties of the work itself. The argument for this can be put in the form of a dilemma. Any property that is put forward as relevant for understanding a work is either manifest in the work or it is not. If it is, then it will be captured by scrutiny. If it is not, it is not part of the work and hence irrelevant.

The arguments Wollheim provides to show the superiority of his view over the scrutiny view are revealing of his overall approach to the philosophy of art. He takes the scrutiny view to be fundamentally misguided in simply starting with the work as it is and being interested in the creative process, if at all, only to the extent that it explains how the work ended up like that. Wollheim, by contrast, argues that we should *understand* the work. In doing so, we need to bring together two different aims which might be thought to be in tension: understanding the creative process in all its complexity and deepening our perceptual understanding of the work, of what we see before us. Wollheim claims that understanding the creative process will include

Such issues as how much of the character of the work is to be design, how much has come about through changes of intention, and what were the ambitions that went into its making but were not realised in the final product.

(Wollheim 1980: 192)

The apparent tension arises because (for example) it appears as if our understanding of why a property is absent (not realised) cannot possibly deepen our perceptual understanding (as we cannot perceive an absence).

The tension is resolved by denying that, in the relevant sense, we cannot perceive an absence. In coming to understand the creative process we come to perceive the work correctly. So, to take one of Wollheim's examples, understanding that Rodin's *Monument to Balzac* started off as a nude sculpture changes our perception of it – putting the matter very crudely, we see it (amongst many other things) as a-sculpture-that-could-have-been-a-nude (Wollheim 1980: 191). Limning the differences between this view and the scrutiny view enables Wollheim to raise several issues that are key to the practice of criticism, such as the nature of the critic, the limits of what critical information is relevant, and the content of perception.

In a lecture written at about the same time as the paper we have been considering, Wollheim links his view of criticism with his view of evaluation of works of art. In a claim that is breathtaking in its audacity, he says 'while there are several ways in which the activity of making the work can detract from its significance, there is only one way in which it can add to it'. The creative process adds to the significance of the work when it involves those difficult but positive processes such as 'self-knowledge, self-change, and self-reparation'. This occurs when 'the work of art reflects with sufficient precision some complex constellation of mental inner states which

the artist seeks to externalise' (Wollheim 1979: 11). A complex, interesting, and (for want of a better word) healthy creative process contributes to the significance of the work. Correlatively, there are many ways in which this process can go wrong; if so, understanding the creative process is understanding something which has failed. First, this can be because 'the work of art may insufficiently, too imprecisely, fit that internal states it comes to reflect... something felt to be shameful, or degrading, or frightening, something... whose outward manifestation could not be steadily contemplated, fails to get externalised'. Second, it can be because the fit between inner and outer leaves nothing to be desired. The problem in this case is that 'the artist has externalised some mental constellation so as to rid himself of it'. By doing this, rather than working through it, there is no gain in self-knowledge (Wollheim 1979: 11–12).

Even on this small sketch of the various views Wollheim took, one can see how it fits together into a single overall view. To paint as an art is to work through a creative process, rather than simply produce a piece of carved stone or painted canvas. This can only be done once a style has developed, otherwise, it will be uninterpretable. Criticism is a matter of understanding this process, and evaluation is, at least in part, grounded in the quality of that process of externalisation.

6 Contributions to Modernist Art Theory

In 1961, the hugely influential American critic, Clement Greenberg, published 'Modernist Painting' in which he provided what could be read as a theory of modernist visual art; a systematic account of what it was attempting to achieve (Greenberg 1961). The exact line of argument is unclear, and Greenberg frequently asserted that he had been misunderstood. Whatever the truth of that matter, the paper had a great deal of influence. The overriding thought was the role of each artistic medium was to distinguish itself from every other artistic medium. Past figurative art, by virtue of being figurative, dealt in illusions and, in doing so, concealed its identity as an object: 'Realistic, naturalistic art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art; Modernism used art to call attention to art'. Modernists gave up dealing with illusory space so as to draw attention to those properties unique to it; the nature of the support: frame, canvas and so on: 'Because flatness was the only condition painting shared with no other art, Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else' (Greenberg 1961: 309). To some extent, this theory still carries influence – I have often heard versions of it from those introducing avant-garde art to a generally uncomprehending public.

In 'The Work of Art as Object', published nine years later, Wollheim confronted this view. Although he does not name Greenberg, instead directing his attention to 'a theory [which] underlies or regulates much of the art activity of our age', it is clear who Wollheim has in mind. He brings forward three objections which are not only devastating to Greenberg's view but also (as before) reveal something of Wollheim's own attitude to painting. First, he rejects Greenberg's claim that painters before 1905 were concerned with producing illusions and paid attention to the surface only for the purposes of concealing it. Empirical and theoretical considerations show that painters 'have [always] shown had a clear predilection for the values of surface, and they have employed selected means to bring out the physical qualities of what they were working on or with' (Wollheim 1970: 120). The second objection is that the instruction to painters that follows from Greenberg's view, 'Make us aware or conscious of the surface', is underspecified. We need to be told what kind of surface is in question. The answer, obviously, is that 'the theory is irreducibly or ineliminably referring to the *surface of a painting*' (Wollheim 1970: 121). This leads directly to the third objection: given that what painters are dealing with (and, recalling the first objection, what they have always been dealing with) is the fact that the surface is *the surface of a painting*, we are in the familiar, if highly complex and fraught, world of how to make a painting.

To talk of the use of the surface and to contrast this with the fact of the surface, and to identify the former rather than the latter as the characteristic preoccupation of modern art, attributes to modern art a complexity of concern that it cannot renounce. For it is only if we assume such a complexity that there is any sense in which we can think of the surface as being used.

(Wollheim 1970: 125)

For Wollheim (and also for thinkers such as Leo Steinberg (Steinberg 1968)) the nature of the activity of painting does not suffer any great fracture with the advent of Modernism.

7 Conclusion

As I said at the beginning of this paper, Wollheim was a man of great sophistication and great personal charm. He is probably unique in philosophy in thinking that the value of art was more secure and less questionable than moral value ('I am surprised that philosophers make little of the fact that, although good art is more likeable than bad art, virtuous people do not enjoy this same advantage' (Wollheim 1993b: x)). For him, art was an immensely serious business and his engagement with it was profound. This is reflected in his philosophical writing on art, which has a depth to it that makes engaging with it difficult, but inevitably rewarding.

Notes

- 1 A view propounded by Arthur Danto (Danto 1981). For Wollheim's view on Danto, see (Wollheim 1993a).
- 2 Wollheim seems to allow that the configurational aspect is a face-to-face experience: 'our awareness of the marked surface itself' (Wollheim 1987: 73). It is difficult to see how this is compatible with his claims about the complexity of 'seeing in'. See (Budd 1992: 270).
- 3 A small selection would include (Budd 1992; Hopkins 1998; Lopes 2004).
- 4 See (Budd 2001; Freeman 2012).

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ARTHUR DANTO

Noël Carroll

Arthur Danto (1924–2013) was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan and was raised in Detroit. He served in the United States Army for two years during World War II. He went to Wayne State University on the GI Bill, majoring in art and art history. He was planning to become an artist, specifically a printmaker working in the expressionist vein. After college, however, he enrolled in the philosophy department of Columbia University, writing his Ph.D. under the direction of Ernest Nagel, an eminent philosopher of science in the tradition of logical positivism. Ultimately, Danto decided for a career in philosophy rather than art.

Despite his artistic background, most of Danto's early publications did not focus on art. Several of his initial books tackled central topics in philosophy, including his *Analytical Philosophy of Knowledge* (1968), *Analytical Philosophy of Action* (1973), *Analytical Philosophy of History* (1965), and *What Philosophy Is* (1968). With Sidney Morgenbesser, Danto also co-edited *Philosophy of Science: Readings* (1960).

Danto's first published work in the philosophy of art was the much-anthologized essay “The Artworld;” his first book in the philosophy of art was *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981). After that, the bulk of his writing concentrated on art.

That Danto's earlier writings were not primarily about art was important for the historical development of philosophical aesthetics in the Anglophone world. That Danto – along with figures like Nelson Goodman and Richard Wollheim – were already recognized as accomplished practitioners in more “central” branches of philosophy – raised the prestige of aesthetics in general when they turned their attention to art. That each became professionally, deeply engaged with the fine arts was especially significant for the anthology you are now reading.

Danto's contributions to the study of art come primarily in three interrelated areas: the definition of art, the philosophy of art history, and his approach to art criticism.

The definition of art. Although Danto did not propose a definition of art in his essay “The Artworld,” it was nevertheless a crucial contribution to the discussion of the definition of art in several respects, and not only in terms of its introduction of the philosophical concept of the very useful idea of an “artworld.”

A key notion in “The Artworld” is that of indiscernibility – specifically the insight that artworks can be indiscernible from real things. For example, Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box*, an artwork, is indiscernible from Proctor and Gamble's, a mere packing carton. That is, one putatively could not tell by looking at them which one was the artwork. But Warhol's is; it possesses properties that Proctor and Gamble's doesn't. For example, Warhol's *Brillo Box* is about art; Proctor and Gamble's is merely about Brillo.

That what made something art might be imperceptible unhorsed two major tendencies of thinking in the prevailing discussion of the definition of art. Previously, traditional definitions of art had been stated in terms of properties detectable by the senses: representation, expression, and form (or significant form). But that approach was no longer available once Danto showed that an essential feature of art could not be identified by the senses.

Yet the relevance of indiscernibility to the determination of art status also scotched what is called the Neo-Wittgenstein tendency in the philosophy of art. That view claimed that art cannot be defined, in opposition to the traditional view alluded to in the preceding paragraph, and, in contrast, asserted that artworks were actually to be identified by recognizing family resemblances between works already previously categorized as artworks and prospective candidates. Inspect the novel artworks for their resemblances to previously acknowledged works of art; just “look and see,” the Neo-Wittgenstein recommended. But if artworks are indiscernible from real things, as Danto showed, looking would be ultimately irrelevant to establishing art status.

The indiscernibility thesis revealed something deeply significant about the project of defining art; whatever properties defined art would be nonmanifest properties. In “The Artworld,” Danto proposed one such property – an atmosphere of theory and art history.

This suggestion profoundly shifted the direction of art theorizing insofar as subsequently much of it looked to contextual features, such as institutional factors, as key to defining art. One very influential development was George Dickie’s Institutional Theory of Art (1974). Although Danto’s view of the art world was distinct from Dickie’s, the two were often conflated. This, however, was a mistake inasmuch as Dickie’s notion of the art world was sociological whereas Danto’s was historical.

In the decade or so that followed the publication of “The Artworld,” Danto wrote some articles on aesthetics, but he did not present a thorough-going theory of art, replete with an implicit definition, until the publication of his *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981). The essentialist stance of this book surprised many readers. Perhaps because Danto had written about philosophers like Nietzsche and Sartre as well as Hindu mysticism, many had assumed that Danto did not subscribe to the analytical approach to philosophy.

The definition of art detailed in *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* was very complex but implicit. However, in his *After the End of Art* (1997), Danto propounded an explicit theory of art, one highly reminiscent of Hegel’s. Stated formulaically, Danto maintains that something is a work of art only if it is made with the intention that (1) that it is about something or has content and (2) that content is presented or articulated in a form that is appropriate to it.¹

By aboutness or content, Danto has in mind the possession of a meaning – a theme, a thesis, or expressive properties. So, Danto maintains that an artwork has a form appropriate to its meaning. By form, Danto is thinking of something like the human form. Thus, Danto maintains that an artwork “fleshes out” or gives substance to or presents or *embodies* its meaning or content in a form that is appropriate or suitable or fitting. For example, a temple dedicated to Minerva, Mars, or Hercules should employ Doric columns in recognition of their martial status.

Danto himself, for obvious reasons, abbreviates his view by proposing that artworks are *embodies meanings*. He emphasizes that it is not a complete theory of art, since it provides only two necessary conditions for art status which do not conjointly amount to sufficiency. For example, these two conditions are not sufficient to differentiate artworks from real things; for instance, they fail to distinguish between Warhol’s *Brillo Box* and Proctor and Gamble’s inasmuch as both have a form appropriate to their meaning: the former being a reflexive comment upon the nature of art status and the latter a celebration of the Brillo pad (Carroll, 2021).

Danto freely admits that his definition of art is incomplete. Although a work in progress, it is arguably a fruitful starting point.

The philosophy of art history. In addition to advancing a theory of art, Danto also has a philosophy of art history which is interestingly related to his concept of art. First proposed in his book, *The*

Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art (1986, 2004), Danto pronounces that art history has come to an end, an unlikely sounding hypothesis since it would appear that nowadays more art is being produced than ever before. However, what Danto means by “the end of art” is not that artworks will no longer be produced, but rather that certain kinds of art-historical narratives are no longer possible – specifically, developmentally progressive or teleological narratives.

These are art historical narratives that chart the linear progress of art toward some preselected goal. One such narrative, told by Vasari and Gombrich, among others, can be called “the saga of the conquest of visual appearances.” That is, starting in ancient Greece and then restarting again in the Renaissance, artists putatively pursued an overarching goal, namely that of achieving verisimilitude to the visual world. Moreover, such goal-oriented projects can come to a conclusion. Supposedly the aspiration to conquer visual appearances came to an end with the invention of photography and then, definitively, with cinematography which captured the very appearance of movement.

Are other developmental, goal-driven narratives of art history possible? At least one other such epic has been attempted. It was called Modernism which was theorized most authoritatively by the art critic Clement Greenberg (1961).

According to Greenbergians, after the successful resolution of the story of the conquest of visual appearances, artists sought another vocation. “Modernism” was the name of that quest – its goal: the reflexive critique of the conditions of possibility of its own media – painting and sculpture – by means of those very media themselves. That is, the Modernist painter would strive to reveal and exhibit the essence of painting by means of painting.

For example, one of the conditions of painting was allegedly two-dimensionality. Thus, painters enlisted in the project of acknowledging the flat surfaces of their works by strategies such as eschewing perspective (Manet), embracing abstraction (Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian, etc.) and even soaking the canvas in paint so that the paint became as one with the canvas (Morris Lewis). Other projects included acknowledging the shape of the support and its aesthetic relevance, as in the work of Stella. Presumably, as time went on, artists would be able to inventory all the essential conditions of painting, thereby delivering – by means of painting – a complete disclosure of the nature of painting. That, at least, was the Modernist brief.

But Danto argued that narrative was no longer possible after work like Warhol’s *Brill Box*. Why? Because Modernism presupposed that the nature of the art of painting could be exhibited by means of painting. But Warhol’s work established that the nature of art was indiscernible and *thus* could not possibly be revealed by painting, since painting dealt with appearances – appearances discernible to the senses. As Danto put it, after Warhol’s works, among others from Duchamp to Lichtenstein, painters would have to give up the aim of defining art and turn the job over to the philosophers.

Why? Again, because painters doing what painters do – creating appearances (a.k.a. discernibilia) – cannot hope, for reasons of logic, to display something indiscernible, such as the essence of art. Consequently, the Modernist narrative has necessarily come to an end, with no other comparable evolutionary narratives in sight, thereby convincing Danto that art has come to an end. That is, it is not possible for art to be chronicled in terms of a progressive linear narrative.

Notably the end of the Modernist narrative is not the same as the end of the narrative of the conquest of visual appearances. The latter narrative had a “happy ending.” Verisimilitude was secured; mission accomplished. On the other hand, the Modernist narrative did not achieve its goal. It was stopped in its tracks. It just ended rather than being resolved.

Moreover, the abrupt termination of the Modernist narrative had significant repercussions for our understanding of the art world of the closing decades of the 20th century and the opening decades of the 21st century.

For the Modernist narrative was not merely an attempt at a descriptive account of the trajectory of modern art. It also had a prescriptive or critical dimension. That is, it was not only supposed to

be a history of the way that, in fact, the trajectory of modern art tacked; it was also a map of the course that trajectory *should* take. Thus, Modernist critics could evaluate artists and their creations by virtue of whether or not they followed the Modernist agenda or failed to do so. Color field painters played by the Modernist rules and were appraised positively. But Surrealism – think of the deep perspectival space in Dali’s work – was beyond the pale from the Modernist viewpoint.

Consequently, when the Modernist narrative came to its untimely demise, so too did the authority of Modernist criticism. Artists no longer had to adhere to the Modernist critics’ marching orders since the march of (art) history has been demobilized. Whereas under the Modernist dispensation all art was supposed to aim at critique, with the dissolution of the Modernist program, artists were free to explore their own agendas. Artists were not obliged to contribute to the definition of art. They could pursue all sorts of self-elected aims including social criticism, museum critique, visual pleasure, you-name-it.

The defeat of the Modernist dream has critically enfranchised our present critical moment which Danto has christened as “post-historical.” The post-historical moment in art history probably began to take hold somewhere in the 1970s and has continued into our own time.

And despite its seventies vintage, the concept of post-historical art should not be equated with that of post-modernist art. Danto’s characterization of the post-historical art world is pluralistic; post-modernist art is, on some very influential views, still governed by a program. For example, according to commentators like Hal Foster (Foster, 1985), politicized post-modernism is good, but merely nostalgic post-modernism, like the architecture of Michael Graves, is reactionary. Whereas in contrast to Foster, for Danto, Graves, on the one hand, and Barbara Kruger and Cindy Sherman, on the other hand, are all post-historical as someone like Kara Walker would also be.

Danto’s notion of the end of art is very hospitable to the contemporary art scene and has been for quite some time. (Gilmore, 2005). Nevertheless, it is not clear how philosophically, as opposed to art historically, decisive it is. For Danto claims that no more progressive developmental art histories are possible. However, showing that the Modernist narrative is inconclusive does not show that no other progressive story of art can be told. (Carroll, 2021).

Art Criticism. Danto was not only a leading philosopher of art and its history. He was also a distinguished art critic, earning, among other accolades, the National Book Award for his writing (1990). In 1984, Danto became the art critic for *The Nation* and he continued in that capacity until 2009. During that time, he perfected a form of criticism perfectly suited for the Epoch of Post-Historical Art, if not for all times.

Danto’s approach to criticism is intimately related to his philosophy of art and his philosophy of art history. Recall: Danto’s philosophy of art maintains that something is an artwork only if it is intended to be (1) about something which is (2) presented or articulated in a form appropriate to whatever it is about. Although this is not sufficient as a characterization of the essential nature of art, it is eminently serviceable as a patent for art criticism. That is, in order to adequately criticize a work of art, identify whatever it is about (its content), and show how its form (the artist’s choices) function or serve appropriately to present, realize, or articulate whatever the work is about – i.e., its content.²

For example, the critic responding to Warhol’s *Brillo Box* identifies, as part of what the work is about, the thesis that art is a commodity and then notes that material to the way in which Warhol gets this message across, appropriately enough, is to present an artwork that is the indiscernible simulacrum of a commodity.

Or, considering a *memento mori* such as the statue of *Prince of the World* in the church of St. Sebald in Nürnberg, the critic proceeds by identifying its message by means of an interpretation – that earthly glory is transitory – and by taking note of the way this is suitably illustrated by presenting a frontal view of the prince in his majesty and a rear view of his cankered, decaying back.

Similarly, the non-imposing form of Maya Lin’s monument – Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial – reinforces its meaning, the disavowal of triumphalism (Gilmore, 2005).

Danto's approach to criticism is also connected to his philosophy of art history. Danto's tenure as an art critic transpired in the period that he labeled as post-historical, a period in which, given the downfall of Modernism, each artist was free to pursue his or her or their own vision. Thus, the range of things that artworks were about was thenceforth plural, ranging from reflexive interrogations of the audience's phenomenological engagement with the artwork to commemorations of Black communal life to cultural criticism of consumerism.

Furthermore, pluralism in the content of artworks, on Danto's theory of art, mandated a plurality for the related appropriateness of its forms of embodiment which in turn entailed, for Danto, an accompanying pluralistic version of criticism – one in which the critic isolated what each artwork, as a singularity, was about and, in light of that, explicated the specific choices the artist had elected in order to present that particular content appropriately. In place of the monistic evaluative grid of Modernism, criticism à la Danto was necessarily pluralistic.

However, although Danto's approach to criticism is especially apt in our particular post-historical moment, it may be argued that insofar no progressive, art historical narrative ever truly canvasses all of the artistic ambitions of any particular time and place, something like Danto's approach to criticism may not only be advisable today, but can be recommended more generally across the board, for all seasons and climates.

Summary. Arthur Danto's philosophy of art is remarkably unified. Its theory of art connects with his philosophy of art history. Once the Modernist interlude collapses art could be about anything as well as look like anything. This, in consequence, called for a pluralistic approach criticism, one that, in accordance, with Danto's theory of art involved locating the intended content or meaning of the work (a.k.a. interpreting it) as typically singular and simultaneously, in that process, showing the ways in which the artist's specific choices in presenting the work was/is fitting given the aims of the work (i.e., what it is about).

Notes

- 1 In this formulation, I have added the notion of intention. I have done so in order to accommodate the fact that some (much) art, namely, bad art, fails to embody its content in an appropriate form. Danto often omits mention of the role of intention in his formulations of his view, but I think that a fair reading of Danto would concede that the intention requirement corresponds to his intention.
- 2 For Danto, since what the work of art is about – its content – is a meaning, the critic's isolation of the content of the work involves an interpretation.

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PART VIII

Institutional Questions



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FORGERY AND AUTHENTICITY

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Stories of art forgery are dependably sensational and lurid, never failing to capture news headlines. These are the crimes of the art world underworld. They are the stories of rich elites getting duped by blue-collar rascallions and of snooty connoisseurs revealed as the charlatans we always believed they were. Occasionally, there are Nazis involved.

There isn't a lot of overlap in the Venn diagram of true-crime sensationalism and art ontology. So it isn't altogether surprising that philosophers of art have made regular forays into questions of art forgery. At least in the case of art forgery, the weed of crime bears ample philosophical fruit.

1 What Is a Forgery?

There are two main classes of art forgery. Let's deal with these in turn, starting with what Jerrold Levinson (1980) calls the *referential forgery*—an outright copy of an existing work, presented *as* the original. The standout contemporary example of referential forgery is found in the case of Ely Sakhai, who in 2005 was sentenced to 41 months in prison after pleading guilty to eight counts of wire fraud. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigations, Sakhai had for several years been operating a sort of forgery mill: Sakhai would purchase minor works by familiar Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and Modernist painters—including Chagall, Klee, and Renoir—arrange to have near-perfect copies made of the originals by a small team of Chinese immigrants working above his gallery and then sell the copies *as* the originals, along with forged certificates of authenticity (Tarmy 2015). Later, Sakhai would sell the originals, too. Indeed, it was this double-dipping that ultimately illuminated the trail back to Sakhai. In May 2000, both Sotheby's and Christie's auction houses featured Paul Gauguin's *Vase de Fleurs* in their respective catalogues, one the original (being sold by Sakhai himself) and the other a forgery (presumably unbeknown to the seller, who was just the latest buyer in a chain of transactions leading to Sakhai) (US Attorney, SDNY 2004).

The forgery case that has garnered the most philosophical attention, however, is that of 20th-century Dutch painter Han van Meegeren and his forgeries of Johannes Vermeer's works. Using authentic 17th-century canvases, and paints and brushes crafted using period-authentic techniques, van Meegeren produced *The Supper at Emmaus*, mimicking the natural aging process by baking, distressing, and adding artificial patina to the finished work. The painting was not a reproduction of any true Vermeer, but captured the artist's style well enough that it was authenticated as genuine by Dutch art expert Abraham Bredius and subsequently purchased by the Rembrandt Society, an esteemed group dedicated to preserving unique paintings for the Netherlands. Van Meegeren

followed up *The Supper at Emmaus* with a series of forgeries, each, in turn, authenticated and sold as Vermeers. His downfall came when he was arrested in 1945 and charged with aiding and abetting the enemy. He had sold one of his forgeries to a German art dealer, who subsequently sold it to Nazi Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring. Facing the death penalty for the charge, van Meegeren revealed that he was not plundering the Netherlands of its cultural heritage, since Göring—like all of van Meegeren's victims—had purchased a forgery. Since van Meegeren was not laboring to reproduce any existing Vermeer, *The Supper at Emmaus* (and the others to follow it) would fall into Levinson's second class of forgeries: the *inventive forgery*.

Philosophical discussion of forgery has focused primarily on works of sculpture and painting because—in ordinary cases, at least—a perfect copy of a literary or musical work just *is* a genuine instance of that work. If I copy a Wordsworth poem word for word and then present this as a Wordsworth poem, I am telling the truth: it just *is* Wordsworth's poem. Likewise, if I perform a prelude following a score from Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* and declare what I have performed to be the very work that Bach created. In the case of painting and carved sculpture, however, a perfect copy of an existing work may be a replica, or it may be a distinct work of art in its own right, but if I present it *as* the authentic original, it seems it is now a forgery. So, while all art forms may be equally subject to inventive forgery, the plastic arts seem uniquely (or, at least, specially) susceptible to problems of referential forgery.

In his *Languages of Art*, Nelson Goodman offers what has become the standard definition: “A forgery of a work of art is an object falsely purporting to have the history of production requisite for the (or an) original of the work” (1976: 122). And here, it helps to understand another of Goodman's distinctions. Paradigm literary and musical works are what Goodman calls *allographic* works: on Goodman's view, *no* particular history of production is required for something to be a genuine instance of Wordsworth's “She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways” or of the first prelude from Book I of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. If it has the right symbols, or the right sounds, in the right order, it just *is* what it is purported to be. This, Goodman suggests, is because a notational system (like words or notes) is all that determines the genuineness of allographic works. But *autographic* works require more than notational adherence. In the case of a painting like Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* or a sculpture like Kapoor's *Cloud Gate*, genuineness is wrapped up in the work's history of production: simply looking exactly like the original does not make it an instance of the original.

For something to be (or to be an instance of) *Impression, Sunrise*, it isn't enough that it *look* like *Impression, Sunrise*. At the very least, Goodman might suggest, it must have issued—like an autograph—from Monet's own hand. Art practices complicate this somewhat; it isn't unusual for artists to employ assistants and fabricators in making their works. Anish Kapoor did not personally fabricate the mirrored steel sculpture that dominates Chicago's Millennium Park. Kapoor created the original design for what would become *Cloud Gate*, but a team of engineers was brought in to modify the design after technical concerns were raised with Kapoor's original conception. The massive object was actually built by Performance Structures, Inc, a fabrication company specializing in stainless steel builds. On-site fabrication lasted more than a year. *Cloud Gate* did not issue from Kapoor's own hand, but what makes the thing in Millennium Park the genuine article is that it has *this* rather complicated history of production. According to Goodman's theory, to be *Cloud Gate*, an object must have this history—and, as it happens, only one object qualifies: the object presently sitting in Millennium Park and referred to by locals as “the Bean”. A perfect copy produced some other way would be a *mere* copy, and presenting that mere copy *as* the original would be forgery.

Whether an item is of the allographic or autographic kind—and, if the latter, what is relevant to authenticity in the item's history of production—is not the sort of thing that can simply be established by examining the object itself. What makes something *genuine*—a genuine instance of “She

Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways,” a genuine instance of *Cloud Gate*—according to Goodman, is culturally determined, arising from evolving artistic practices and technology (Goodman 1976: 121–122). Joseph Margolis similarly notes: “[A]uthenticity is a distinction of an intentional and normative sort that is bound to reflect the shifting practices and technological possibilities of different societies” (Margolis 1983: 165). This is to say, things could have been different. At a first pass, we might imagine a culture in which every copy of a poem counts as a distinct literary work (say, if the printing press had never been invented, and so handwriting or type came to be more aesthetically or interpretively relevant in that culture than it is in ours), or where any reproduction of a given painting qualifies as a genuine edition of that work, despite any inaccuracies in copying (just as we forgive occasional typos in printed novels).

Even in the real world, however, artistic practices are notoriously fluid and undefined, and technology constantly evolving, so nailing down the authenticity conditions arising from these is at best a complicated and uncertain process. When sculptor Auguste Rodin died in 1917, he transferred ownership of his works, some 7,000 plaster casts, and his copyrights to the government of France. Two years later, France opened the Musée Rodin in Paris to administer, exhibit, and produce authentic castings of Rodin’s body of works. The French government has since decreed that only 12 authentic “originals” could be produced from any of Rodin’s casts. At the time of the decrees, some of Rodin’s bronzes had not yet capped out at 12, and so the museum continued to produce “originals”. It produced the final, large-form *Thinker* in 1974. Others, like Rodin’s *Eternal Idol*, were never cast during the artist’s lifetime, and the Musée Rodin authorized 12 bronzes produced between 1927 and 1978. According to French law, any further “aftercasts” or copies beyond the maximum dozen must be clearly and indelibly marked “Reproduction”. Failure to so mark the object, or to sell that object as an authentic “original,” would be to present the object as having “the history of production requisite for the (or an) original of the work,” and so make it a forgery, at least on Goodman’s account. The Musée Rodin leans on French copyright legislation—the *Code de la Propriété Intellectuelle*—to further enforce the matter. The museum warns

Among the moral rights accorded to the artist are the right to paternity, based on which the Musée Rodin contests the fraudulent attribution to Rodin of a work of which he is not the author, and the right to respect of his work, based on which the Musée Rodin acts to ensure that the artistic integrity and spirit of Rodin’s work are respected.

(Musée Rodin n.d.)

The reasoning here is that a 13th *Thinker* would not be an authentic “original” and thus would be a work “of which [Rodin] is not the author.” And, so, to call it such violates Rodin’s moral rights, which as a matter of law never expire.

Of course, the decreed limit on the number of authentic “originals” is an altogether arbitrary limitation. Except for the degradation of casts (which could always be recreated from an authentic original, as the cast for *Eternal Idol* was created from a marble original), there is no *natural* reason to limit the number of authentic “originals”. Rather, this is a cultural limitation, cemented in a legal decision.

Goodman defines a forgery as “an object falsely purporting to have the history of production requisite for the (or an) original of the work,” but, of course, objects do not purport. Rather, objects have things purported *about* them. Forgeries are objects which do not have the history of production which they are purported to have. But even this massaging of Goodman’s definition appears to let in too much. Specifically, it labels as “forgeries” innocent misattributions. Paintings and sculptures are regularly misattributed by historians, art dealers, connoisseurs, and even those institutions specifically founded to authenticate the works of particular artists. But surely an innocent misattribution does not transform a painting or sculpture into a forgery. It is surely

not enough that a thing be *falsely* purported to have a certain history; rather, it seems, it must be *deceptively* purported to have that history. If there is no attempt at deception, there is no forgery. (Similar issues arise in cases where collaboration, enthusiastic editing, or “hyper-restoration” make it unclear exactly who should be called an author of the work, or whether the original work—now heavily edited or restored—even exists anymore.)

Having teased apart the object and the act, we should ask in which the forgery is centrally located. Ely Sakhai was convicted of fraud, but there is no word of what happened to the team of Chinese immigrants who were fabricating the copies of the originals. If these artisans were unaware of the criminal nature of the enterprise—if they were not attempting to deceive anyone and not otherwise complicit in the deception—were they forgers? Or were the products of their labors only forgeries because of Sakhai’s fraudulent representation of them? Similar concerns weigh on the cases of 19th-century Italian artist Giovanni Bastianini, a sculptor of Renaissance-style figures, who may or may not have been party to their fraudulent sale as authentic historical works (see Moskowitz 2004) and John Myatt, who was drawn into the world of forgery by John Drewe, who commissioned a work from Myatt in the style of Braque, selling it at auction—purportedly unknown to Myatt—for \$38,000, before enticing Myatt’s active involvement in the scam (see Landesman 1999). As Anita Moskowitz notes, “there is an ethical imperative on the part of scholars to be scrupulous about assigning to a work the designation of ‘forgery’ and to an artist the status of ‘forger’” (Moskowitz 2004: 167).

Consider an imaginary case (adapted from Kivy 2002): an unscrupulous dealer obtains a painting that he believes he can pass off as an early Vermeer. It matches the vague, surviving description of a lost Vermeer: “a painting of a man washing his hands.” It looks to be about the right age, and our dealer judges it to be at least *close enough* to Vermeer’s early style to fool a connoisseur, if he’s lucky. An anonymous 17th-century Dutch painting in fair shape might bring in tens—maybe hundreds—of thousands of dollars, if it is striking enough. Even a mediocre, newly discovered Vermeer would be worth tens of millions. Our dealer *is* lucky and finds an authenticator who is willing to call the painting a Vermeer, and he rakes in millions at auction. Now, as it happens, the painting that the dealer was trying to pass off as a Vermeer really *is* a Vermeer. Call this the “erroneously-misattributed Vermeer.” The question, then, is whether the erroneously misattributed Vermeer is also a forgery, in virtue of the dealer’s attempts to misleadingly represent the painting as a Vermeer. If our intuition is that it *is* a forgery, then this seems to locate the forgery in the attempted deception—in the beliefs and intentions of the dealer. This dislocates forgery from the object itself. If, on the other hand, our intuition is that the painting is *not* a forgery because it *is* authentic, then this locates forgery centrally (or, at least, significantly) in the object itself. Our intuitions, I think, pull in both directions.

2 Forgery and Authenticity

An object’s authenticity is treated by many philosophers (and non-philosophers) as an aesthetic quality—or, at least, a quality relevant to aesthetic value. Goodman suggests that faced with two apparently indistinguishable works—one the original and the other a referential forgery—knowledge that the one on the left is a fake and the one on the right is authentic makes an aesthetic difference for me, even if I can’t *see* any difference. His suggestion is that knowing that one thing is a forgery, and another the original, could lead me to lean in, to look more closely, and to discover those fine but important differences. So my *future* experiences of these works may well be altered. “Thus,” suggests Goodman, “not only later but right now, the unperceived difference between the two pictures is a consideration pertinent to my visual experience with them” (Goodman 1976: 105). Although I may not be able to see the difference now, knowing what I know *promises* to reveal differences, and *that* makes an aesthetic difference here and now.

Where Goodman's claim rests on a promise to the viewer of future visual—and thus aesthetic—discrimination, others have argued that the knowledge itself should be sufficient to produce an aesthetic difference even if the two works—the forgery and the original—shall forever remain visually indiscernible. Mark Sagoff (1976; 1978a; 1978b; 1985) argues that to assess (say) a forged Chagall *as a* Chagall is to assess it against the wrong reference class. A thing is never merely beautiful, Sagoff argues, but rather beautiful *for* a rose, or *for* a sunset, or *for* a Chagall, or *for* an early Modernist work. When I appreciate a Chagall, I appreciate it against the background of Chagall's other works, and in its place in the development of Western art. To assess a Sakhai forgery *as a* Chagall is to make an error about its aesthetic qualities—to misassess it. Learning that the thing I am looking at is a forgery should force me to change the reference class against which I compare it, producing a very different aesthetic assessment (even if that reassessment produces a higher assessment of the forgery than of the original).

In the case of a referential forgery like Sakhai's, the effects of such misassessment may be minimal and contained. In the case of successful inventive forgeries like van Meegeren's Vermeers, the effects are systemic. *The Supper at Emmaus* mimicked Vermeer's style well enough that experts were fooled, but the series of forgeries that followed it declined drastically in quality. The paintings at the end of the series are comically bad, far from resembling genuine Vermeers. Still, the last resembles the next-to-last, which resembles the next-to-next-to-last, and so on up to the first. As the first is accepted as genuine, so too was more easily the next, and the next after that. Vermeer's surviving body of works is famously small, consisting in only some 37 known paintings (and a handful of these are debatable attributions). These, then, constitute the reference class against which *The Supper at Emmaus* would have been assessed when it was authenticated as a Vermeer in 1936. And, with it accepted as genuine, the next forgery in the series would have been assessed against a reference class including the known, genuine Vermeers *and The Supper at Emmaus*. And so on for the next eight in the series. But, with the series of forgeries accepted as authentic, each of the genuine Vermeers is *also* being misassessed against the wrong reference class: one substantially composed of forgeries.

Some philosophers suggest that knowledge that the thing before us is authentic or inauthentic does not merely give rise to a new aesthetic assessment—it produces a felt phenomenal quality of its own. Carolyn Korsmeyer suggests that a replica simply “does not inspire the same admiring attention as a real thing, even when it is perceptually indiscernible from an original; and this phenomenon suggests the aesthetic dimension of genuineness” (Korsmeyer 2016: 220). Walter Benjamin famously calls this the object's “aura”—a quality experienced in the original but not in its replicas (Benjamin 1968). And experience of aura—of a thing's genuineness—*feels* like something. If our belief about the object before us shifts from the belief that it is a mere replica to belief that it is the real thing—or vice versa—we should expect a shift in our ensuing experience of that thing. As Korsmeyer puts it, “When error is discovered, affective responses change” (Korsmeyer 2012: 376). We seek out originals—and are less satisfied with reproductions—precisely *because* we value the experience of genuineness. David Davies (2006) argues that this shift in experience between replica and original follows from a shift in how we *value* authenticity—that our valuation of genuineness informs our experiences.

Sherri Irvin suggests a critical difference between our understanding of the artist's project and that of the forger—a difference that helps to explain the differences in our experiences of their respective creations. The artist chooses her objectives and makes decisions about how best to accomplish those goals, perhaps changing objectives several times as she goes. The artist—insofar as she is an artist—is, in this sense, free (Irvin 2005: 133–134). When we engage with, interpret, and appreciate a work of art, we typically consider the artist's project, her chosen objectives, and her choices in pursuit of those objectives. Part of what it means to appreciate the work is to appreciate it as the product of such choices. A forger, insofar as he is a forger, however, cannot *but* pursue the

overriding objective of creating a thing that will pass as the work of another. This goal will dictate the subject matter, the style, the materials used, and the methods employed in creating that object. It will dictate *everything* about the object. When we knowingly engage with a forgery, we abandon questions about the creator's artistic project—he doesn't have one. We do not ask why the forger chose to pose a figure the way that he did, or why he chose to carve in *this* wood rather than *that* wood. The answer to all such questions will be the same: because he believed it would help the creation pass as the work of another.

When van Meegeren's ruse was uncovered, the veil lifted and art experts began to wonder aloud how they were ever fooled by these monstrosities. *The Supper at Emmaus*, once hailed by Abraham Bredius as Vermeer's masterpiece (Elam 1990), seemed to immediately display its many flaws. We do not merely disvalue it—we approach it altogether differently. Today, van Meegeren's paintings attract curious attention of their own, though now in their capacity as forgeries. Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, which purchased van Meegeren's *The Washing of the Feet* in 1936—believing it a genuine Vermeer—now displays the painting under van Meegeren's name, along with other works by the forger, evidence from his trial, and (acquired in 2014) his plaster death mask. This seems appropriate. The draw to knowingly view such forgeries is an allure akin to that of the circus sideshow and wax-museum exhibits of notorious bandits and murderers. To study *The Washing of the Feet* as a genuine Vermeer is to study it as a work of art. To study the same painting as a van Meegeren is to study it as a forgery, as a grotesquerie: a true-crime artifact. Certainly, we should expect these experiences to differ.

Now recall the case of the erroneously misattributed Vermeer from last section, deceptively sold as the Vermeer which (as it happens) it was. The work would not, upon the uncovering of our unscrupulous dealer's ruse, be studied as a forgery. It would be studied—as it would before the dealer's ruse was discovered—as a Vermeer, our experience of it essentially unchanged, its authenticity and artistic value intact. Certainly, we might (as with van Meegeren's forgeries) be curious about the painting's role in such an odd criminal enterprise, and this alone might entice the public to see it. As the Rijksmuseum has noticed, humanity has a healthy appetite for true crime stories. The *Mona Lisa* didn't begin drawing crowds until its 1911 theft from the Louvre. Indeed, its conspicuous absence wasn't noticed for some 28 hours. Then, suddenly, its image dominated newspapers around the globe. When the *Mona Lisa* was eventually recovered two years later, throngs of the curious came to see it. But, today, the theft is a footnote in the painting's history, and da Vinci's masterpiece is centrally appreciated as an artwork. We could expect the same of the erroneously misattributed Vermeer, at least after the morbid curiosity-seekers move on. In this way, the erroneously misattributed Vermeer is like any innocent misattribution: once we uncover the truth, we don't call it a forgery, and we don't experience it as one. The attempted deception did not transform the Vermeer into a forgery, only to have it transformed back upon discovery of the ruse—it never was a forgery. However, in both the case of the erroneously misattributed Vermeer and the case of the innocent misattribution, we find some of the same wrongs that we find in true cases of forgery.

3 The Wrongs of Forgery

Philosophers have pointed at a number of wrongs to be found in forgery, which we can divide into three rough categories:

3.1 Failures of Integrity

Where there is no deception, there is no forgery. Certainly, van Meegeren evidences a moral failure of integrity in his deception, on its own a deontological sin that he shares with the dealer

in the case of the erroneously misattributed Vermeer: he lied (or, in the latter case, *attempted* to lie) about the work. In this, forgery differs from a case of innocent misattribution, which lacks deceptive intent. But, Alfred Lessing argues, there is a further failure of integrity in the case of *The Supper at Emmaus*—in the work itself. Forgeries, he contends, pretend to be original achievements at some place in the history of art. The realm of art does not exist as an array of disconnected objects, each independent of the others. Rather, an artwork is only an artwork because of the place it takes in art history. Lessing argues that a work of art carries its aesthetic value on its surface; rather than making a critical about-face upon learning that *The Supper at Emmaus* was a forgery, “critics should have [had] the courage of their convictions” and stood by their aesthetic assessments of it (Lessing 1965: 463). However, while a van Meegeren forgery may be as beautiful as a Vermeer or a Sakhai forgery as beautiful as a Gauguin original, Lessing argues, “it presents nothing new or creative to the history of art,” though it pretends to (Lessing 1965: 468; see also Bowden 1999). While this is neither an aesthetic wrong, Lessing suggests, nor on its own strictly a moral wrong, it is nevertheless an artistic failing of integrity.

3.2 Harms

An array of harms have been associated with art forgeries. Certainly, most forgers engage in forgery primarily for monetary purposes. (Many, like van Meegeren, deny this. But, of course, forgers are liars.) As Hubertus Butin puts it, “whatever is coveted will be forged” (Butin 2013: 46). And so, those relieved of their money by the forger’s deceit will predictably experience some harm arising from the ruse. However, as we have seen, the harms identified by philosophers tend to run deeper. Where Alfred Lessing considers the forgery’s pretense to a history it does not have a failure of artistic integrity, but not an aesthetic failure, Denis Dutton (1983) argues that in misrepresenting its creator’s achievement, the forgery causes us to aesthetically misassess the work. An artwork is a thing that has been *done*—the culmination of a performance, an action; a work of art, insofar as it *is* a work of art, cannot be so easily divorced from its origins. If Korsmeyer and Davies are on the right track, then authenticity is itself part of a work’s aesthetic character—or, in the case of the forgery, absent from it. Insofar as failing to properly appreciate a work, or gaining false beliefs about a work, qualifies as a harm, forgery produces this harm also. If the audience for the forgery is more than one individual, that harm is multiplied.

Harm is further compounded in cases of inventive forgeries: when some previously unknown work by “Vermeer” is uncovered—however minor—it will produce new ripples in our understanding of art history, just as the Piltdown man (for decades believed to represent a missing link between man and ape, but revealed to be a hoax) produced ripples in science. In at least one case, the acceptance of a forgery as the genuine article has led to the rejection of an authentic work as a fake. A forged 14th-century carved head in the collection of the Louvre came to be treated as the “stylistic yardstick” of a period of ancient Egyptian sculpture, leading to the rejection of another sculpture “because certain of its stylistic features were at variance with those of the Louvre piece” (Bianchi 2000: 13). Conversely, a number of works have been erroneously pulled from the oeuvres of artists’ works on the suspicion that they *were* forgeries, suspicions later overturned. The looming possibility of forgery—even where there are no forgeries—is damaging to our understanding of art history. It is impossible to know just how much we misunderstand about art history because we cannot know how many of the works in museums and private collections, accepted and studied as genuine, are fakes. Of course, these are not harms peculiar to forgery. Indeed, precisely the same harms are risked with innocent misattributions.

Not all forgeries will have the broad, reverberating ill effects on art history. As Sherri Irvin points out, some of them sit on private living room walls, little interfering with understanding of art history outside those rooms (Irvin 2007: 302). In general, the *harms* generated by forgery

appear to be wildly contingent. Contrary to the views of Sagoff and Korsmeyer, it's difficult to imagine the viewer, imbued with the knowledge that the object before her is the illicit 13th casting of the *Thinker*, and not the authorized 12th, now making *any* change to her assessment of the object. It is also difficult to think that accepting a 13th *Thinker* as genuine would have any measurably ill effects on our understanding of art history. Such a lack of difference, David Davies contends, is reason to resist such an arbitrary line between the authentic and the inauthentic (Davies 2015: 89). But the harms of forgery are surely not analytic of its nature *as a forgery*: one forgery can be less harmful than another—indeed, could presumably be entirely benign—without negating its status as a forgery. Certainly, once a forgery is exposed, its harms are largely negated, but still, it remains a forgery. That being said, the specifics of the Rodin case do point us at one final sort of wrong in forgery.

3.3 Violations of Rights or Duties

The Rodin case points us to the wrong of forgery probably most overlooked by philosophers.

Forgery is, in an important sense, the inverse of plagiarism. The plagiarist hopes to be attributed responsibility (appreciation, acclaim) for something he did not create, where the forger looks to defer responsibility for something that he did. The plagiarist steals credit; the forger plants it.

The moral right to paternity which the Musée Rodin invokes on Rodin's behalf is treated as a perpetual right on Rodin's part to not be held responsible for things he did not do. That is, to say that a person is a work's creator—or, more generally, *author*—is to hold that person responsible for making the work, and for what is in the work, whether for good or for bad. The suggestion, then, is that such a right extends beyond the author's death. This is at least a contentious issue in philosophy. If it is correct that the dead—being dead—are immune to harm, then the notion that the rights of the dead might be violated seems either a non-starter, or else depends on some notion of harm that is backwardly causative (harming the author in the past from the future), somehow untethered to time, or otherwise baffling (see Feinberg 1984: 79–95; Pitcher 1984; Taylor 2005). Another option is to suggest that it is not Rodin himself who is at risk of being harmed, but rather his reputation: Rodin may be dead, but his reputation is (if only in a metaphorical sense) a living thing. Certainly, reputations can be damaged. However, we seem unlikely to find safe refuge from the mystery that threatens backward causation in the idea that reputations are rights-bearing things.

The particulars of forgery suggest another possibility. I can tell all manner of lies about you: about your age, about your beliefs, about your “real” hair color. But there is something more happening when I lie about your having made an artwork you did not make. In this case, I am knowingly attempting to get others to heap responsibility on you for things you did not do. I have, presumably, the duty not to knowingly hold you responsible for things you did not do, and by extension, not to knowingly work to get others to hold you so responsible. To say that I hold you responsible now for the act you performed yesterday is to say that yesterday—you was right or wrong to perform the act. Strictly speaking, it is yesterday—you that I am blaming or praising. I just assume that today—you is still relevantly the same person as yesterday—you, and so a suitable carrier of that responsibility. Yesterday—you may well be immune to today-harm (so my duty here does not arise from yesterday—you's interest in not being harmed) but is not immune to today-blame. Independent of any harm, it would be wrong to hold today—you responsible for an act that I knowingly, incorrectly attribute to yesterday—you precisely *because* it would be wrong, today, to hold yesterday—you responsible for that act. And, by extension, it would be wrong, today, to knowingly work to get others to hold yesterday—you responsible for things that yesterday—you did not do. If all of this holds true, then at least part of the wrong of forgery lies in the forger's working to get others to hold an artist or author responsible for something she did not do—i.e. make the work

that the forger is attributing to her. The fact that the knowingly misattributed author is deceased makes no difference to this wrongness-aspect of the act.

Unlike the harms of forgery, this is *not* wildly contingent: insofar as a work is a forgery, someone is being attributed responsibility for something they did not do. Vermeer may have been long dead when van Meegeren created his forgeries, but it still seems an egregious wrong to impose responsibility for such grotesque creations on Vermeer. Of course, not every subject of forgery is dead (forged prints falsely attributed to living artists, including Gerhard Richter and Damien Hirst, are not uncommon; see Butin 2013)—and it would be as wrong and for the same reason to knowingly misattribute responsibility to a living author—but an artist's being dead tends to make the ruse easier to pull off.

The wrongs of forgery are several and not reducible to any single misgiving. Forgeries are, by several accounts, artistically hollow things, given a place on the museum wall that they do not deserve. But, of course, this is true of any number of non-forgeries as well. Harms may or may not arise from forgeries, and where they do, such harms may be substantial or they may be minimal, depending on the particulars of the case. So far as it goes, however, the harms resulting from forgery are of a kind with those resulting from misattributions and over-restorations, and do not distinguish forgery from true art. What remains a necessary condition of forgery is the deception: insofar as some painting, sculpture, or other such product is a forgery, someone is being lied to and someone is being lied about. And, unlike other cases of fraudulence, a forgery remains a forgery after the deception is uncovered. *The Supper at Emmaus* was purchased in 2011 by Rotterdam's Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen. The Museum describes the painting:

Van Meegeren's technique remains exceptional. For his masterpiece 'The Supper at Emmaus', Van Meegeren used a genuine 17th-century canvas and historical pigments. He bound the pigments with bakelite, which hardened when heated to produce a surface very similar to that of a 17th-century painting. This technique, combined with Van Meegeren's choice of subject matter and composition, was an important factor in convincing so many people of the authenticity of his works.

(Museum Boijmans van Beuningen n.d.)

For all the neutral language in the statement, and despite its correct attribution to van Meegeren, *The Supper at Emmaus* remains a forgery, a stain that can never be painted over.

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MUSEUM AS MIRROR

The Art Museum as Cultural Mirror

Curtis L. Carter

For the most part philosophers, with notable exceptions such as John Dewey, Hilda Hein, Nelson Goodman, and Arthur Danto, have until recently given slight attention to museum as a subject for philosophy. This seeming neglect of philosophers, especially the philosophers working in the domain of aesthetics, is in a sense surprising as museums appear predominantly in the art cultures of the world and have been among the key means of documenting and sharing of the different art cultures.¹

The approach to understanding the philosophy of museums offered here is based in part on research into museum history and philosophy and contemporary literature relating to the philosophy of museums and their place in earlier and contemporary cultures. This investigation has taken place while exploring with culturally diverse students in aesthetics the role of museum cultures in Washington D C, New York, and various cities in China. My experiences as a founding museum director with direct exposures to museums across the world have contributed further to understanding of philosophy's role in understanding the nature and functions of museums. Hence, the focus here will not be on the question of the operating philosophy of a particular museum such as the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles or the Centre Pompidou in Paris with a certain operating approach to museum philosophy.² Rather, the intent is to explore museum philosophy aiming at a philosopher's understanding of the concept of the art museum in the context of other studies of the museum from the perspectives of museology and art history. Museology refers to the practice of the organization and management of museums and their roles in society. Art history, though evolving from a discipline which concentrates on artists and works of art, to a discipline focused more on contextualizing art works in other social and conceptual contexts, even philosophical contexts, for analysis and interpretation, maintains a relation to the art museum. (See Chinese art historian Wu Hung's essay, "Art History and the Museum.")³

The aim here is to capture some aspects of museum origins and evolution that provide a context for understanding philosophy's relation to museum origins and evolution as well as the museum's roles in contemporary culture. Understanding some of the historic and contemporary issues concerning the development of museums will further benefit the development of on-going philosophical discourse pertaining to museums. Important contemporary cultural changes resulting from new technologies and major shifts in social issues relating to gender, race, and education will offer new challenges to our understanding of the museum. The approach to museum philosophy here will benefit from and perhaps on occasion trespass upon developments in cultural history including art history as well as museology (the practices pertaining to organizing and management

of museums). Also of interest to museum philosophy are the contributions of artists who critique museum practices through their exhibitions and other engagements in the museum.

1 Cultural Heritage of the Museum

To comprehend the current state of museum as a topic for philosophy, it is useful to begin our approach with a brief look at the museum's cultural heritage and development in concept and practice over time. An understanding of this aspect of museums is useful to viewing its present state and the philosophical issues that are of concern in reference to today's museum. In the absence of any extensively developed historic philosophies of the museum, it is necessary to mainly abstract the philosophy of the museum from its historic practices into the 20th century.

The term museum has its origins in the Greek word "museion" which referred to a sanctuary dedicated to the muses of Greek mythology. The Greek author Pausianius reports that a building adjacent to the Propylaea on the Acropolis at Athens contained a hall called Pinakothekē where a collection of paintings could be viewed by the public. This gallery was in fact one small part of a grand scheme of public art envisioned by Pericles in the Athenian democracy of 5th century B.C. in Greece. Pericles selected Phidias, a prominent sculptor, to create a system of temples, monuments, theaters, and other public buildings to reflect the artistic accomplishments of Athenian citizens. We do not have details on access to this early museum on the grounds of the Parthenon. However, given the democratic aims of the Greeks during this period, it is reasonable to assume that the space would be accessible to citizens of Athens and visitors.

What then is a museum? First, in the simplest terms, a museum consists of a space dedicated to the presentation and care of art, often of a particular architectural distinction, and its collections of art or other cultural artifacts. Today's museums include a staff of professionals trained in the care and presentation of works of art, and a governing system such as a board of directors who are responsible for policies and funding.⁴ Collecting and curating art are the two essential tasks undertaken by art museums since their beginnings. Collecting art has its beginnings when private individuals or institutions acquire art and display their art in private spaces. Collecting is carried forward in the royal courts of Europe and other government agencies responsible for national and local cultural treasures. Curating refers to the tasks concerned with the care and presentation of art for the museum viewer's understanding.

Origins of the Vatican Museum in Rome, which remains one of the finest museum collections of art, began in the 16th century when Pope Julius II established a collection of classical sculpture. Between 1709 and 1714, Elector Jonathan Wilhelm built a separate gallery for his art collection adjacent to his house in Dusseldorf, and engaged a painter, Lambert Krahe, to reorganize and install the collections. In his approach to curating, the major pictures were installed according to an aesthetic program, while the lesser pictures were relegated to a decorative role in the palace. "Krahe adhered to a hierarchic program of curating in which the best works were placed at eye level on the lower register; larger and more decorative pictures were placed high up on the wall."⁵ A colleague, Nicholas de Pigage, in Rome introduced the catalogue as an important aid to curating. De Pigage saw the catalogue as a means of reaching new art publics. The practice of creating art catalogues based on museum collections and exhibitions is continued today, although with attention to education and broader outreach. These innovations effectively lay down key elements in the museum that continue today.

Grand Duke Leopoldo opened the Uffizi Gallery as a museum in Florence with access to the public in 1769. This gesture was in part a response to the physiocrats, who believed that it was the responsibility of the state to educate its people, and make use of the arts to promote the healthy development of society. Leopoldo's plan was to make the Uffizi in Florence a public facility intended to function as a part of the education system. Initially, however, the gallery was opened only to a

limited public which included the traditional categories of the nobility and foreign visitors as well as artists and students of art.

In France, the Luxembourg Gallery, which functioned from 1750 to 1779, and the Louvre, which opened in 1793, were the main sources of art collections, followed by regional museums throughout France. The ideas of French art theorists, André Félibien and Roger de Piles, were influential in shaping curatorial practices in the Luxembourg Gallery, whose mission included “-the training of aspiring artists and amateurs in the detection of quality in art.” As de Piles wrote in 1677, “True knowledge of painting consists in knowing if a picture is good or bad; in being able to distinguish what is well done in a work from what is not, and then to explain the judgment one makes.”⁶ Quality in this instance is estimated in terms of the artist’s performance with respect to drawing, color, composition, and expression.⁷ The establishment of quality in art as the aim of the museum experience presupposes already an audience, defined by the theorist Petit de Bauchamont in his book *Essay on Painting of 1751*, as “men of good senseand of good faith....” possessed of “sensibility and quality of mind.”⁸ A certain level of social and verbal understanding as well as visual literacy were presumed of the intended audience. Pictures contained in the Luxembourg Gallery were drawn from the royal collections, and consisted of a mix of Italian, Northern European, and a single gallery of French masters. The pictures were not arranged into schools, and no labels were provided. Rather, the gallery was arranged to encourage comparative viewing of the paintings with respect to assessing the quality of drawing, color, composition, and expression.⁹

A notable change for the museum centered on the establishment of the Louvre in Paris in 1793. Initially planned as a part of Louis XVI grand cultural scheme and orchestrated by his minister of culture Comte d’Angiviller, the Louvre was conceived with three main objectives in mind: to reestablish state control of the arts, to show the artistic supremacy of France in the international community, and also to commission artists to create art that would educate the public. The art planned for the Louvre drew upon French history and contemporary affairs and was intended to influence public support in favor of the monarchy. With respect to curatorial practices, a new system of classification based on national and regional schools, arranged chronologically was introduced. For instance, a master such as Rembrandt would be placed in the context of his fellow artists of the Dutch school.

The French Revolution produced radical changes in all aspects of French culture, including the museums. After the collapse of the monarchy, the revolutionaries established the first national public art museum, giving all persons irrespective of rank or profession access to the art treasures previously reserved for the privileged audiences. The words of the painter, Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825), at a festival in conjunction with the liberation of the museum captures the spirit of the day:

All individuals useful to society will be joined together as one; you will see the president of the executive committee in step with the blacksmith; the mayor with his sash in color beside the butcher or mason; the Black African, who differs only in color, next to the white European.¹⁰

The ramifications of this revolutionary concept of the museum were substantial. People came to the museum lacking the basic education in matters of taste and education that had been previously assumed. And yet they came to see the art with a new sense of ownership, as the works there now belonged to them. Still the presence of visitors lacking the conventions for viewing art posed new challenges for the keepers of collection, here to fore unaccustomed to having to address the needs of such visitors.

The new situation posed a dilemma for the leaders of the Republic. The new museum must address the question of visual education for its new audiences, as well as satisfy those who were accustomed to the intellectual demands and learning opportunities provided by the museum’s collections. The immediate task for the museum in this new social context, as Pierre Bourdieu

might argue, was to equip the viewers with the necessary perceptual skills and artistic knowledge to appreciate and benefit from the experience of visiting the museum.¹¹

Perhaps the most radical challenges for the museum at the beginning of the 20th century emerged in post-revolutionary Russia after the Bolsheviks trashed the imperial collections in the Winter Palace. The debate centered on who should be in charge of the museums, and what should be shown. It was determined by the Executive Board of the Visual Arts Section of the Russian state that artists should be in charge of the museum, and that the museum would be dedicated to an exposition of artistic culture as determined by the *avant-garde* artists of their times. The first curatorial program for the new museum, developed under the leadership of the artist-theorist Vasily Kandinsky (1886–1944), proposed that the museum be organized on the principles of formalist or non-objective experiments by artists. Art was allowed from all periods, but the plan rejected chronology and great masterpieces.

In contrast to Kandinsky's plan, the artists Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935) and Alexander Rodchenko (1891–1956) proposed that the museum become a laboratory for living artists focusing exclusively on the future. The Constructivists further defined the exhibition space as a laboratory archive, where it was possible to see art transformed into labor in the process of solving problems of construction. Here, the emphasis is on the artists and their needs for a laboratory for showing invention, experimentation, and production, replacing the viewer's interests in contemplating representational or expressive images concerned with art's relation to the world outside of art. These early 20th-century reform efforts initially found favor with the state, but soon were deemed too narrowly professional and lacking in ideological and historical content. Thus, the Soviet Union in its emerging stages redefined the art museum according to an agenda based on Socialist Realism aimed at maximizing the continuity of art and life.¹²

In the United States, wealthy private collectors such as J. P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie, and later the Rockefeller, the Guggenheim, and the Whitney families claimed a significant role in the development of art collections and museums in New York and other American cities. The early 20th-century artists produced changes in artist's practices resulting in various strands of modern art. In 1921, Duncan Phillips, the son of a Pittsburgh industrialist, established the Phillips Memorial Gallery (now the Phillips Collection in Washington, D C), as the first modern art museum in the United States. The opening of the Museum of Modern Art in New York followed in 1929. Both of these museums reflect the influences of changes in art practices by modern artists and the changing American industrial culture.

Phillips was mainly interested in providing a museum setting where the works of modern artists Degas, Matisse, Van Gogh, Renoir, and Picasso could stand in dialogue with earlier masters (El Greco, Goya, Chardin). Alfred Barr, the first director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, charted a different philosophy for the art museum: "Museums should be platforms of the still controversial figures...as well as artist of classic reputation." He emphasized the necessity for museums that are open-minded and unafraid of the advanced developments in art and culture.

The previous overview of concepts and practices guiding the development of the museum paves the way for emerging interest of philosophers in contributing to our understanding of the museum. Each of these contributions to modern and contemporary museum studies help to set the stage for philosophers to bring the museum into their domain of critical conceptual examination and value assessments.

2 Multidisciplinary Contributions to Museum Philosophy

At present there are two main sources of writings contributory to the philosophy of museums. One source consists of works authored by multidisciplinary writers engaged in, or addressing actual practices of the museum while addressing on issues relating to the development of museum

philosophy. Contributors to the development of museum philosophy in this category include authors such as Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), Stephen E. Weil, *Making Museums Matter* (2002), Hugh H. Genoway, and Mary Anne Andrei's edited collection: *Museum Origins* (2008) and Margaret Tali's *Absence and Difficult Knowledge in Contemporary Art Museums* (2018).

For this group, the philosophical issues generated by museums emerge out of the historic and changing contemporary societal realities in which the museum itself has evolved with changing societal roles. Bennett, with references to Michel Foucault, examines the political demands on the museum and related issues. He argues for example that the museum should offer "parity of representation for all groups and cultures," i.e., theoretical and practical access with respect to collecting, exhibition, and to all activities of the museum.¹³ Weil emphasizes the social usefulness of the museum and its accountability in a democratic society by its manifesting respect for the public and concern for its needs.¹⁴ Among the topics that inform museum philosophy in the pages of Genoway and Andrei's assembled essays are these: purposes and aims of museums, the art museum and the public, museum ethics, the place of museums in education, and museums and universities.¹⁵

The concept of "absence," as Tali relates it to museum philosophy in *Absence and Difficult Knowledge in Contemporary Art Museums* (2018), pertains to the roles that information stored in museum archives perform with respect to concealing "difficult knowledge."¹⁶ In addition to exhibitions of art and information made public pertaining to works on display through labels, texts, and museum catalogues, museum archives serve an important function in the preservation of museum knowledge. Museum archives contain information on such issues as acquisition processes, donations of private collectors, and works acquired thru public funding. Museum archives also reveal such socially pertinent information as the ratio of women artists to men in the collection, the ratio of works exhibited versus the scope of the collection, the condition of art works in the collection, a record of deaccessioning of art from the museum collection, and information concerning art that may relate to societal controversies that relate to the museum.

Among the questions posed by Tali is the philosophical grounding for how museums manage (exhibit and archive) difficult knowledge with respect to community power dynamics and community memories. For example, Joseph Beuys' installation art work, *Tramstop*, with references to the German Nazi history, shown in the 1976 Venice Biennale and later in Bahnhof Museum in Berlin, is dedicated to examining conflicts of interest between the market and the state.¹⁷

Tali's research on museum philosophy, together with the writings of others who have considered the problem of absence with respect to the museum, also focus on the importance of cultural differences with respect to museum archiving processes and exhibitions as they relate to the symbolical and representative roles of their communities.¹⁸ The findings concerning access to difficult materials housed in museum archives as they relate to sensitive public community issues remains subject to different readings depending on community values and the assessment of the knowledge value of archival information in relation to community interests.

3 Artists' Interventions into Museum Philosophy

In the late 20th century and beyond, artists including Marcel Broodthaers and others have sought to intervene with their critique of the concept of the museum. Broodthaers created his own fictional model museum re-invoking a critique of the museum based on a Dadaist notion of culture. Artists of the mid-to-late 20th century and beyond such as Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, Louise Lawler, Chris Burden, and Jeff Koons, among others, have invaded the museum with exhibitions aimed at changing the philosophy of the museum by decoding or subverting the museum's conventional practices. The aim of these artists has been to unmask and create through their participation in the museum public awareness of perceived links between the museum and the dominant political and economic powers operative within the larger culture.

4 Philosophers and the Museum

Among the academic philosophers of the 20th century who have offered substantive reflections on the museum are John Dewey, Hilde Hein, Nelson Goodman, and Arthur Danto. Their efforts will serve as a beginning measure of the interest of philosophers in writing about museums up to the present.¹⁹

4.1 John Dewey

Dewey's charge to those who choose to write on the philosophy of the fine arts is "to restore continuity between refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and every day events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience."²⁰ Accordingly, Dewey's philosophy of the museum is driven mainly by avoidance of the separation of art from common life experiences, with the implication that art in the museum purports to represent a superior cultural standing.²¹ He argues "that theories which isolate art and its appreciation by placing them in a realm of their own, disconnected from other modes of experiencing, are not inherent in the subject-matter but arise because of specifiable extraneous conditions."²² Hence, his contributions to museum philosophy are focused mainly on advancing museum education that would foster exploring aesthetics in everyday life, together with advancing the support of democracy and social justice.

In his essay, "Art Education-Education in Art" published in 1927, Dewey charges the museum with "intellectual celibacy" for its removal of art from everyday experience and thus for contributing to the neglect of aesthetic perception in the realm of education. Apart from his critique of the museum, his main contribution to normative museum philosophy is the argument that, "the role of the museum is to train the viewer of art to see so that these aesthetic lessons can be incorporated into everyday life."²³ One outcome of museum experiences thus is to bring forth the connections between the aesthetic features of everyday experiences that produce enjoyment and the experiences offered by fine art in the museum. Thus, Dewey's point is that the generation of works of art that find a place in the museum is integrally linked to aesthetic experiences of everyday living.

For Dewey, changing conditions in industry such as mechanization have pushed the artist to one side from the main spheres of active interests. Artists, he argued, cannot work mechanically for mass production. Similarly, the gap between museum art and the experiences of everyday is extended when mass society entertains the substitution of cheap mass production and pursues activities that once demanded higher standards of craftsmanship and care with lesser attention to aesthetic considerations.

Not all of Dewey's experiences with the museum resulted in his taking a critical view. He found solace in his collaboration with museum founder Dr. Albert C. Barnes, who shared his interest in aesthetic education. Barnes founded a museum in 1922 in Merion, Pennsylvania, with a particular notion of museum education based in part on Dewey's approach to aesthetic education.²⁴ Dewey and Barnes worked together for many years to advance their mutual understanding of a philosophy of museum education for art.²⁵

4.2 Hilde Hein

Hilde Hein (1932–), author of *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective* (2000, Smithsonian Institution) and *Public Art: Thinking Museums Differently* (2006) grounds her approach to museum philosophy in a combination of her work in philosophical aesthetics with museum internships at the Smithsonian and other museums. Hein argues that the task of museum philosophy is to "seek out the implicit and often unexpressed thoughts that are hidden in the workings of

human institutions and actions.”²⁶ On her view, museums accomplish materially what philosophers do conceptually, introducing multiple worlds through their exhibitions and thus contribute to philosophical understanding. Hein does not see philosophy’s role to give practical advice concerning museums. Rather, the aim of museum philosophy is to seek clarification of thinking concerning museum’s ends in relation to ethical, epistemological, and aesthetics aims.

For example, one of the concerns confronting museums today is tension between traditional object-based practices in the museum and contemporary demands focused on museum experiences. One question that contemporary museums must address is the question, whether a focus on museum experiences and education should preempt the museum’s tradition of care and presentation of art objects. Hein’s main contribution to museum philosophy may well be her call for thoughtful analysis of both “museum experiences” and the role of art objects in the ongoing work of the museum. This issue is of particular importance to assessing the cognitive role of museum experiences. It is also a question raised by funding sources essential to the museum’s continued existence. In a subsequent work on the philosophy of the museum (*Public Art: Thinking Museums Differently*, 2006).²⁷ Hein argues that the museum is an agent, not a repository, with social and moral influence and responsibilities to engage in public service. The Museum in Hein’s view is charged with promoting participatory experiences that aim to elicit subjective experience.

4.3 Nelson Godman

Nelson Goodman (1906–1998) fostered a close relationship to the art museum throughout his life. His interest was both personal and philosophical. As a major art collector and former art dealer in Boston, he engaged with the museum as a collector of art works and as a museum donor of art works from his personal collection to various museum collections including the museums at Harvard University and elsewhere. His writings on the museum address key issues for our topic based on his experience as art collector and professor of aesthetics and his interest in arts education.

Perhaps Goodman’s most salient contribution to museum philosophy resides in his account of the role that museums have in the activation of art works, or making them work in the experiences of museum visitors and the communities that they serve. Apart from traditional museum roles, collecting and conserving art, he views activation of works of art as the central task of the museum while making art accessible for purposes of study, enjoyment, and education.²⁸

Activation here refers to enabling the functioning of art in the experiences of viewers necessary to supporting the cognitive functioning of a work of art in a viewer’s experience, as well as activating art’s and the museum’s roles in education and in the community. Activation takes place through the processes of collecting, archiving, and exhibiting works of art with sensitive attention to lighting, pairings of works for comparison with the aim of enabling art’s contributions to human understanding. Activation also functions through art education and through other roles that the museum serves in the community. In short, the aim of the museum is to bring insight and understanding to art and its place in human societies through its various means of activating art.²⁹

Fundamental to Goodman’s views on the museum is the problem of how to make the art works work, and what would be the measures of success? Goodman’s answer is thus:

Works work when by stimulating inquisitive looking, sharpening perception, raising visual intelligence, widening perspectives, bringing out new connections and contrasts, and marking off neglected significant kinds they participate in the organization and reorganization of experience and thus in making and remaking our worlds.³⁰

For Goodman, the “systematism of symbol theory begun in *Languages of Art* to the study of the differences and interrelationships among the abilities involved in the arts” offers clues to the

activation of art in the museum.³¹ In short, the paintings and sculptures in museums do not ask why museums exist, just as the plays and music answer the call for justification by the experiences that they provide to their audiences, so do paintings and sculptures in the museum.

As Goodman views the role of philosophy, it is not the business of the philosopher to determine the answers to technical problems such as the problems of lighting in a museum setting. However, he notes that a concept of light is both essential to activating art and also contributory to its decay, thus creating issues relating to conservation. Hence, philosophers can weigh in on the value issues concerning the role of light in activation art in the museum, such as preservation versus access of the art to the viewing public.

In a second essay on the museum, “The End of the Museum?,” presented as an address to an Annual Meeting of the American Association of Museums, Goodman argues that museums, like libraries, are fundamentally educational as opposed to being recreational. Apropos of his interest in the museum’ role in education, Goodman founded Project Zero, at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1967. The purpose of Project Zero was “advancement of the arts through improved education of artists, audiences, and management” as a means of fostering museum and other means of art education.³²

4.4 Danto

Arthur Danto (1924–2013), whose experiences as art critic and aesthetician have led to his commentary on the museum, introduces a different set of issues relevant to museum philosophy. Danto’s reflections on the philosophy of the museum take place during the period of the transition from modern art which began in the early 20th century to contemporary art of the mid-to-late 20th century and beyond. The rapid shifting of artistic modes during this era has proved challenging to museums as they contemplate meaningful responses, including altering museum structures and practices to accommodate the changes.

Danto’s contributions to museum philosophy appear throughout his philosophical essays in aesthetics published in *After the End of Art* and in *Embodying Meanings*, as well as throughout his art criticism.³³ In these writing, the museum is frequently cited as the setting for his interpretations of visual art. *For example*, Danto’s essay, “Museums and the Thirsting Millions” represents the museum as a source of existentially life transformative experiences, or experiences that provide “a vision of the world and of the meaning of living in the world” such as was described by Ruskin in a letter to his father in 1848 after viewing in a municipal gallery Veronese’s painting, *Queen of Sheba*. While it could not be expected that every visit to a museum would result in a life transforming experience, Danto finds the possibility of the museum offering such experiences as justification for its maintenance and continuation of exhibitions of art therein.³⁴

As Danto proposes in another essay dedicated to the museum, “Museum and Merengue,” once people enter the museum, it is important that they find something that they could not already get in the culture outside the museum.”³⁵ This second essay opens with Danto’s reflections on attending a museum event at the Whitney Museum in New York after conversations with a taxi driver on the way to the Museum. His thoughts focus in part on the question of what a museum might offer a taxi driver from the street or an immigrant Dominican child on first entry to the museum. The discussion proceeds to questions relating to how to prepare the child or the taxi driver for entering the museum. How, for example, might the museum show its connection to essential human needs? In some instances, the architecture of the museum itself might even appear forbidding. The discussion proceeds to the question of the contemporary museum’s ability to meet the aesthetic needs of contemporary society.

Until recent times, neither of these issues, preparing the child for entry or efforts to connect the museum to essential human needs, as cited in Danto’s writings here, has received noteworthy

attention from philosophers. Rather, the foundations of much of how museums have approached presenting art to their visitors is focused on art appreciation and art history with little attention to how these elements central to the museum relate to life outside the museum. So, the question is, how, in Danto's words, will museums address the thirsting crowds who "search for an art of their own?" Whether the call is a call for popular culture or "low art" exhibitions, or contemporary *avant-garde* experimental arts on behalf of artists, or ethnic variations in museum collections or exhibitions based on the demand for cultural diversity, or gender-based representation, the museum faces cultural and social changes such that it is called upon to accommodate in order to maintain its role in a time of social and cultural change.

Danto addresses the museum in terms of the changes in the practices of art over time. In his museum philosophy, the museum itself with a history of collecting and exhibiting art is part of a cultural infrastructure that must deal with the changes in art as well as changing issues in the culture where the museum exists. However, he argues that art of the past is available for use by contemporary art, even though the origin of art of the past differs from the spirit of contemporary art. Hence, "all art has a rightful place, where there is no *a priori* criterion as to what art must look like and no narrative into which the museum's content must all fit."³⁶ In short as Danto sees it, the museum as it exists today is open to an array of living artistic options, including addressing the art of the past, while being subject to constant re-arrangements.

5 Other Recent Ventures into Museum Philosophy

Essays which view the museum through the lenses of contemporary philosophical frames are now beginning to appear more frequently. The result is an emerging 21st-century literature of museum philosophy issues in couched in various categories of philosophical discourse. Representative of these interests are collections of essays such as *Philosophy and Museums: Essays on the Philosophy of Museums* (2006) edited by Hugh H. Genoway with 15 essays by contemporary philosophers. Among the topics discussed in these recent volumes focused on the philosophy of the museum are such issues as: the value of museums in general, the ontology and epistemology of museum objects and exhibitions, museum ethics, the cognitive role of the museum in generating knowledge, questions of meaning and interpretation, and various other matters of philosophical interest concerning museums. Among the provocative essays in the volume edited by Genoway is Jean Paul Martinson's "Museums and Restlessness." Martinson argues that at present the museum is a key institution situated in relation to both a past which it protected and preserved and a future into which it is projected.³⁷

Victoria S. Harrison, Anna Bergqvist, and Gary Kemp (Eds.)'s *Philosophy and Museums: Essays on the Philosophy of Museums* (2016) offers additional insights into museum philosophy. This volume of essays, with essays attending both to art museums and other museums, draws upon the thoughts of contemporary aestheticians including those working within analytic philosophy and beyond, as well as museum scholars and museum practitioners.³⁸

Among the issues discussed in this volume are questions concerning the meaning of exhibited objects. In this context, Garry L. Hagberg and Anna Bergqvist employ analytic philosophy to augment subjectivist and objectivist accounts of museum object meanings. Ivan Gaskell, aesthetician and museum curator, contends that the principal value of museums is their contributions to cognitive activities as sites of scholarship through research resulting in exhibitions and scholarly catalogues.³⁹ Other authors represented in this volume address questions relating to museum ethics and the different publics served by museums, with reference to philosophical authors past and contemporary including Heidegger, Popper, Descartes, and Spinoza.

Moving toward other philosophical issues pertaining to the museum are questions concerning museums and public art. This topic is addressed from a variety of perspectives relating to art

history and museum education in the collection, *Museums and Public Art* edited by Cher Krause Knight and Harriet F. Senie.⁴⁰ One of the issues important for understanding philosophy of the museum addressed by Knight and Senie is the question of art in public spaces in reference to museums. For example, does public art refer solely to work that resides outside the secured museum space itself where it is protected with strict security rules, climate control, and limited access? Or should the meaning of the term public art be understood also include the space of the museum itself, which is not always accessible to the public due to open hours or admission fees?⁴¹ As museums face challenging changes in the evolving cultures of the 21st century and beyond, museums find it necessary to review museum identity which requires changes in the concept of museum itself.

Mainly absent from discussions of museum philosophy as considered by the philosophical community is a discussion of the economic role that museums play. However, economic considerations play a major role in all aspects of museum operations from acquisitions policies and the availability of exhibition space to direct or indirect influences on the art market. Within capitalist cultures, museums and their art collections also function as objects of economic interest. The museum as a not-for-profit educational institution does not participate directly in the art market except through its purchases and exchange. However, its collection decisions may affect the art market values as its collection standards serve as an important aesthetic standard for valuing the works of individual artists. Similarly, its choice of exhibition topics may influence art market value by featuring the works of a particular artist or by highlighting a particular period style of art through its exhibitions and publications. On another level, the museum's role with art collectors may indirectly contribute to economic gains when the art is donated to acquire tax deductions. All of these issues may affect the way the core activities of the museum are carried out. As well, the art museum serves to enrich urban cultures through its role as a popular tourist venue.

6 Further Reflections on Museum Philosophy Today

There are a number of ongoing developments today that affect the directions of museum philosophy. In the late 20th century and beyond, artists such as Marcel Broodthaers have sought to intervene with their critique of the concept of the museum. Broodthaers created his own fictional model museum re-invoking a critique of the museum based on Dadaist critique of culture.⁴² Other artists, such as Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, Louise Lawler, Chris Burden, Hans Haake, and Jeff Koons, have invaded the museum with exhibitions aimed at decoding or subverting the museum's conventional practices. Their intent has been to unmask perceived links between the museum and the dominant political and economic powers operative within the larger culture.

No wonder that artists see the need to address museum philosophy. The artists have invested their works with images that are intended to invite a dialogue with the viewers resulting in a contribution to the viewer's knowledge and understanding. For the artist, the museum offers a public presence through contemporary art exhibitions and retrospective exhibitions and gallery selections from the museum's permanent collections and offers an antidote to the problem of absence noted earlier. This public presence for the artist in the museum represents the highest form of cultural legitimization for the artists' creations. It validates the artist's standing in the art world and makes accessible the artist's work for the public to experience. For both aesthetic and economic reasons, artists have seen fit to offer their critique of the art museum.

Curators too have moved beyond the traditional tasks of care and presentation of exhibition art within the walls of the museum.⁴³ For example, already the experimental art works that museums currently display now extends into public spaces. "Museum in the Streets," organized by Moderna Galeria, the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, Slovenia, cited by Cristin Nae, offers a challenge to the conventional idea of a museum by extending the museum into the street in "a month long

series of public events, interventions, installations, and various forms of visual communication.”⁴⁴ This exhibition, together with other contemporary museum experiments with outreach projects, raises important questions of interest to museum philosophy as to the future understanding of the concept “museum” and its material manifestations into the changing cultures of the 21st century.

Such ventures, while in keeping with making art accessible to the public, take the museum well beyond its initial roles of collecting and caring for works of art. Moving beyond the contemplative interior environments of traditional museum spaces, the experiences offered to visitors encountering museum art in the streets link art directly to the environments and objects of everyday life.

Museum archives, which have received relatively little attention in reflections on museum philosophy, also warrant consideration here. The work of Margaret Tali and others in recent museum studies have brought this issue to attention though their interest in the concept of absence as it applies to museums. Discursive absence, as noted in Tali’s study, *Absence and Difficult Knowledge in Contemporary Art Museums*, occurs when the art work does not appear in exhibitions, textual or other means of professional or public communication such as books and magazines specializing in art.⁴⁵ Absence in the museum context refers to physical absence as when the work remains in storage or is deaccessioned. Absence as it relates to museums also concerns phenomenological absence when the work is not present in the experience of the museum or the art public.

Museum archives serve multiple purposes necessary to preserve the identity of art works including maintaining records of acquisition and related donor issues, exhibition records, and records of physical condition of art works in a museum setting. Additionally, the museum archive is responsible to maintain information concerning works not available to the public including records of acquisition processes, confidential donor engagements in museum activities, deaccessioning of works from the collection, exhibition records including the exhibition record of individual works including works not on display in the museum or elsewhere. Questions of museum ethics may arise, for example, with respect to such archives related matters as the influence of major donors on acquisitions, purchases, or display of art works.

Whether, or when, art works emerge from a state of absence in the museum depends mainly on the practices employed by the museum curators who determine both exhibition plans and display or of works from the museum’s permanent collections, and the museum registrar with oversight over records and material condition of works. Such determinations may depend upon aesthetic considerations, political ideology, art historical fashion, changing public taste, the focus of critical and art historical practices. Additionally, practical considerations such as material condition of the art, competition for gallery spaces available to exhibit the works, and the safety of the art work may influence the absence of a work of art.

7 The State-of-the-Art Museum Today

What then follows for understanding of the state-of-the-art museum today? The problems facing museums today are not yet at the state that art museum in Russia faced at the beginning of the 20th century. Recall that when the Constructivists gained control of the museums just after the Revolution, their museum philosophy proposed to place the museum in the hands of the artists and transform the museum into a living laboratory where it was possible to see art transformed into labor, thus aiding in the understanding of work and the worker’s ideology of the Soviet state. Today’s museums face a very different societal climate. But still a climate where traditional roles for the museum as a repository for cultural artifacts with responsibility is to care for and exhibit art for the benefit of the public is called into question and under review on many levels. Museums in war zones or as target of ideological attacks remain vulnerable.

Central to its societal roles are the art museum’s activities as a source of generating communicating, and preserving knowledge both in the forms of physical images (paintings, sculptures,

works on paper, installations, etc.) and in related publications and archival documents. In addition to educating the public toward appreciating and relating art to other aspects of life, including knowledge as well as creative leisure, the museum must join with universities in generating and preserving art scholarship commensurate with knowledge in other fields. Aside from hosting exhibitions, creating art publications, offering innovative art education, one important role of the museum is to serve as an essential force for distribution of knowledge in contemporary cultures across the world.

At the core of questions arising in the minds of both museum audiences and funding sources pertaining to the current and future states of the art museum is the impact of media technology which makes accessible images of art without a trip to the museum. Philosophers (Goodman for example) argue that the experience of a work of art thru media technologies, while useful to reinforce a visit to the museum, does not provide the same quality of experience as viewing art in the museum. Still art's availability thru media technology is deemed sufficient by growing numbers of potential museum attendees.

Museum audiences today differ in their interests in the content of museum exhibitions. Major artist's names of prior stages in art history whether Renaissance, Impressionist, Modern, or Contemporary (Michelangelo, Renoir, Picasso, Warhol) continue to draw attention. But there is a growing lack of knowledge or interest in earlier stages of art history especially among younger audiences.⁴⁶ This is a major problem for museums whose collections are oriented to earlier stages of art history. Add to this the challenges some contemporary museum audience members experience with the changing vocabularies of modern or contemporary arts: abstraction or multi-media.

Also presenting a challenge to art museums today is addressing the role of curatorship and exhibitions with respect to contemporary social issues. What role, for example, might the art museum play in shaping the identities of diverse communities, and in interpreting their cultural identities and history? Or what is the responsibility of the museum to address gender inequities in museum collections and exhibitions? Should the curatorship assume an activist or advocacy position? If so how does this practice relate to the independence of curatorial scholarship? What then might we expect of museum curatorship for the arts and culture in a democratic society with respect to cultural controversies? The challenge of activists to museums is out: museums are being asked to be transparent and socially responsible and to avoid receiving funding from sources that derive their resources from producers of socially harmful sources.⁴⁷

Poet activist Jamara Wakefield poses to museum philosophy a challenge concerning the role of the museum in contemporary social issues such as racism in these words: "Museums could be one of our greatest allies in liberation struggles. They have the physical space, the means, and the public confidence to partake in a large scale social movement against colonial powers...."⁴⁸ Incoming Secretary of the Smithsonian Museums Lonnie Bunch in response to a question about the statement, "Museums are not neutral" means to him. His reply:

"It is crucially important for museums to open the veil of how they do the work they do so that even they understand the complicit bias they carry. They understand the cultural baggage that shapes what we do."

8 Concluding Remarks

Today, the art museum functions as a cultural mirror. When referring to the museum as a mirror, we refer not to a particular reflective surface, but to a process of social mirroring focused on art as a set of cultural practices. The art museum embraces many styles and subjects and features art from across the world. Its concerns include issues relating to the museum's role in the experiences of individuals and its place in the shaping of past and present cultures. At its best, the art museum shines a light on human creativity. The museum reflects both a presence and an absence as it seeks

to contribute to a well-formed society and to individuals' opportunities for acquiring knowledge and cultural understanding. At its worst, the museum exhibits in its structures and its practices the problems of the communities through mirroring discrimination and exclusion.

Today's art museums face a very different social climate, one where traditional roles for the museum as a repository for cultural artifacts whose responsibility is to care for and exhibit for the benefit of the public, is called into question on many levels. The problems of museums in our age differ from the crisis of the museum in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century when the Constructivists who aimed to transform the museum into a living laboratory for the worker artists gained control of the, museums with plans to replace art in the museum with their own machine inspired constructions. The intervention of artists into the museum of recent times offers critique of museum practices, but does not envision replacing the art or the public audiences. The situation of the museum today differs, too, from the times of revolutionary fervor that opened the doors of the Louvre and required accommodating museum visitors lacking in the knowledge of art necessary for appreciating and understanding museum art of the great masters. And yet the concern expressed by philosophers (Dewey, Hein, Goodman) for museum education cited earlier would suggest that the problems of educating museum visitors have not gone away.

Currently, the museum faces a very different social and political climate than has been common in its previous history. Traditional roles for the museum as a repository for cultural artifacts, whose primary role have been to care for and exhibit for the benefit of the public, are being called into question on many levels. At the core of such questioning is the role of museum curatorship and exhibitions and their relation to politics in a democratic society. What roles, for example, might the museum play in shaping the identities of diverse communities, and in interpreting diverse cultural identities? Should the museum assume an activist or advocacy position? If so how does this affect the independence of its contributions to knowledge? What then might we expect of museum curatorship for the arts and culture in a democratic society?

Questions concerning the role of curatorship, exhibitions, and the role of donors in relation to museum advocacy and politics are barely below the surface in contemporary discussions among art museum professionals as they reflect on the role of the museum. What role for example might art museums play in shaping the identities of diverse communities, and in interpreting their cultural identities and history? This topic raises many questions of substance. Should curatorship assume an activist or advocacy position? If so how does this affect the scholarly independence of curatorial scholarship? What exactly might we expect of museum curatorship for the arts and culture in a democratic society? Can the museum serve as a safe place for democratic dialogue on such issues as social justice, global equality?

Such questions involving the social role of the museum figure currently in the agendas of national and international meetings of museum professionals these days. A gathering of three art museums directors of leading US museums to contemplate issues confronting museums today assembled recently at the Brooklyn Museum for a discussion labeled, "Women Leaders in the Arts."⁴⁹ The main problems cited in the discussion were not concerning women leaders in the museum field but on a "culture of intolerance that puts pressure on institutions both from the right and the left." Maintaining the museum as "a space for democratic dialogue and an inclusive audience" in the face of challenges, sometimes even a culture of meanness, seemed to be the main concerns of the museum directors participating in this forum as museums deal with such problems as scrutiny over museum board members and donors' gifts.

A question posed to museum directors gathered in Kyoto, Japan for a meeting of International Council of Museums in September 2019 gathered to discuss the future of the museum in the 21st century was this: "Should museums be more or less ideological?" This question, along with questions aimed at producing a new definition of the concept of museum incorporating democratic values, social justice and human dignity, and planetary well-being, was postponed as being too

controversial. This proposed definition if adopted would replace a prior long-standing understanding of the museum focused on acquiring, conserving, and communicating cultural heritage for the purpose of education, study, and enjoyment.⁵⁰

What then is the role of museum philosophy in aiding the art museum with its challenges today? Perhaps the answer should begin with a question: is there a need for the art museum today given the availability of technology and other forms of access to art as a source of knowledge? One argument in support of interest of the public in sustaining the art museum is the participation of volunteers. Museums in the United States, especially, have been driven by a spirit of volunteerism and the belief that it is a civic duty to provide for cultural institutions. Add to this that, despite growing economic barriers, art museum audiences persisting as crowds at city museums remain strong and serve as an integral part of city life for visitors and resident.

Further, the museum's role as chief presenter of art to the public and as archivist of art and historical records pertaining to art is essential to the collection and preservation of art from past the centuries and into the present. The answer to our question based on the history of knowledge relating to art suggests that, despite its flaws and problems, the museum remains an essential source of the knowledge expressed thru art. And despite other forms of preserving and communicating knowledge, art contributes a range of experiences not available in other symbolic media as shown in the writings of Goodman and other aestheticians.

Philosophy of the museum can facilitate understanding the place of the art museum as an important cultural institute by providing concepts and arguments that contribute to understanding the art museum and help to show the special roles that art museums plays in human experience. As well, philosophy of the museum can assume a role of advocacy for the art museum on the grounds that the museum is essential to accumulate and sustain the ongoing deposits of human culture throughout history.

As it stands, however, it must be said that museum philosophy in its current state of development is in beginning stages. Given our findings here, few philosophers have in depth knowledge or understanding of museums based on attention to the history of the museum or institutional museum practices. For philosophers to limit their interest in viewing the museum simply as opportunities to apply preconceived general philosophical frames drawn from preconceived notions of ontology, epistemology, and ethics, for example, to the museum will be insufficient to advancing philosophy of the art museum.

Here is where the scholarly studies of the museums in other fields as noted here benefit the development of museum philosophy. It is necessary for philosophers who write about the art museum to become well informed concerning the history and evolution of the museum itself and its contemporary practices. A knowledge of aesthetic theories and their relation to the societal roles of art and its institutions can provide a basis for approaching this task. From our examination of art museum philosophy here, it seems clear that the philosophers who have contributed most successfully to museum philosophy are those such as Dewey, Hein, Goodman, and Danto whose reflections on the museum are based on their engagements with art and the role of the museum in education and other societal concerns of relevance to museums.

Museum philosophers of the future will find their tasks increasingly extended as specialized museums raise new issues for discussion. How, for example, do we understand media arts and other innovative art forms in the context of the art museum? Already there exist now museums dedicated to film, photography, and digital media. Perhaps philosophy of the museum in its best efforts will be of assistance to the museum professionals who are wrestling with problems such as redefining the role of the museum and how to address other issues pertaining to museum leadership in the context of contemporary societal changes.

What then has museum philosophy to offer the study of the art museum? One approach to museum philosophy would be to develop museum philosophy under the standard categories of

philosophy: ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, or analytic aesthetics. In its present state, however, the most fully developed approaches to art museum philosophy remain focused on museum education and societal issues including museum ethics pertaining to the workings of art museums with attention to knowledge claims concerning exhibited art objects in the art museum setting. These developments in museum philosophy take place alongside and benefit from, what is occurring in museum history, museology, art history. Philosophers Dewey, Hein, Goodman have each pioneered in providing conceptual foundations for important art education practices in art museums. Danto in his reflections on the art museum calls upon the art museum to offer experiences not available elsewhere and challenges the art museum to be prepared to meet major cultural changes that may challenge its relevance. Each of these philosophers has chosen to use philosophy as a means of reaching out into the worlds where the art museum functions by offering philosophical insights that, alongside the views of others, may benefit the museum in implementing its personal and societal roles. In short, the task of art museum philosophy is to critically examine and advance the art museum as “a public heritage”⁵¹ (Bourdieu) where people can explore past and new ways of experiencing art as one of the essential human symbolic expressions.

*Note: Thanks to Wang Zhi, Peking University School of Arts, for comments on a prior draft of the paper and for providing a translation of Wu Hung’s “Art History and Art Museum” from Chinese to English.

Notes

- 1 Recent efforts to address this lacuna include a collection of essays, on the philosophy of museums: Victoria S. Harrison, Anna Bergqvist, and Gary Kemp (Eds.), *Philosophy and Museums: Essays on the Philosophy of Museums* (Cambridge University Press, 2016). Questions posed in this collection included: the value of museums, the meaning of exhibited objects, knowledge claims and museum presentations, emotional and cognitive aspects of museum experiences, and the need for museums to direct their focus toward innovative thinking. Ivan Gaskell’s essay, “Museums and Philosophy of Art –and Many things, Part II,” *Philosophy Compass* 7, 2012, offers further arguments as to why philosophy has an interest in museums.
- 2 See for example, Urs Rausmüller, “The Museum as Concept and Philosophy,” Lecture published in *Denkraum Museum, Arkitektur Forum*, Zürich, Editor Moritz Küng, 1992.
- 3 Wu Hung, “Art History and Art Museum,” in *Ten Essays on Art History: Meishushi Shi Y* (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2008), 27–39.
- 4 The discussion here will focus on the art museum, as there are also historical, scientific, and other culturally specific museums.
- 5 Per Bjurstrom, “Physiocratic Ideals and National Galleries,” in *The Art Museum in the 18th Century* (Stockholm: National Museum, 1993), 30.
- 6 De Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes* (Paris, 1708), McClellan, 62.
- 7 Andrew McClellan, “The Museum and its Public in Eighteenth Century France,” in *the Art Museum in the 18th Century*, Ed. Petit de Bjurström, 62.
- 8 Petit de Bauchamont, *Essay on Paintings*, 1751.
- 9 The Capitoline Museum began in 1471 with a contribution of sculptures to the citizens of Rome. The British Museum in London was founded in 1753 and opened to the public in 1759. The Hermitage in Saint Petersburg in Russia was founded by Catherine the Great in 1764 and opened to the public in 1852. The Charleston Museum in the United States was founded in 1773 and opened to the public in 1824.
- 10 J. L. David, *Rapport decret sur la fe'te de la Re'union re'publicaine du 10 aout* (Pari, 1793), 4.
- 11 Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *The Love of Art: European Museums and Their Public* (Stanford University Press, 1980), 37–70.
- 12 David Bestley, *Douglas Macagay and the Foundations of Modern Art Curatorship* (Simcoe, ON: Davus Publishing, 1998), 114, 115.
- 13 Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), 8, 9.
- 14 Stephen E. Weil, *Making Museums Matter* (Washington, DC and London: Smithsonian Institute Press, 2002), 200–213.
- 15 Hugh H. Genoways and Mary Anne Andrei, *Museum Origins: Readings in Early Museum History and Philosophy* (Left Coast Press, 2008), 49–96.

- 16 Margaret Tali, *Absence and Difficult Knowledge in Contemporary Art Museums* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 14.
- 17 Joseph Beuys's *Transstop* was first created for the Venice Biennale in 1976 and then transferred to the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin.
- 18 Roger I Simmons, *A Pedagogy of Witnessing. Curatorial Practice and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (New York: SUNY Press, 2014).
- 19 Pierre Bourdieu's collaboration with Alain Darbel and others in the study recounted in their book, *The Love of Art* represents another engagement of a philosopher with the experiences of the art museum is based on empirical research comparing the visitors' experiences of viewers from different social backgrounds.
- 20 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch, & Company, 1934), 3.
- 21 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch, & Company, 1934), 8, 9.
- 22 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch, & Company, 1934), 10.
- 23 John Dewey, "Art in Education-Education in Art," [1926] *John Dewey: The Latest Works 1925–1953*, Vol. 2, Ed. Boylston (Carbondale: Sothern University Press), 113–114.
- 24 George E. Hein, "John Dewey and Albert C. Barnes: A deep and Mutually Rewarding Friendship," *Dewey Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 2017), 44–78. Barnes, founder of a pharmaceutical manufacturing company in Philadelphia, introduced the study of philosophy to his employees' daily schedule. The Museum established by Barnes now resides in Philadelphia.
- 25 Hilde Hein, *The Museum in Transition* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 2000).
- 26 Nelson Goodman, "Art in Action," *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, Vol. 3, 2014–2018.
- 27 Hilda Hein, *Public Art: Thinking Museums Differently* (New York: Altamira Press, 2006), 15–23.
- 28 Nelson Goodman, "Art in Action," *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, Vol. 3, 2014–2018.
- 29 Nelson Goodman, "Art in Action." *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, Vol. 3, Michael Kelley, editor, 217.
- 30 Nelson Goodman, "The End of the Museum?," in *Of Mind and Other Matters* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 179–184.
- 31 Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc, 1968), xi.
- 32 Nelson Goodman, "Art in Action," in *Of Mind and Other Matters* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 150, 151.
- 33 Arthur C. Danto, in *After the End of Art* (Princeton University, The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1995). Arthur C. Danto, *Embodied Meanings: Critical Essays and Aesthetic Meditations* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994).
- 34 Arthur C. Danto, "Museums and the Thirsting Millions," in *After the End of Art* (Princeton University, The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1995), 176, 177, 180.
- 35 Arthur C. Danto, "Museum and Meringue," in *Embodied Meanings: Critical Essays and Aesthetic Meditations* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994), 349–362.
- 36 Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton University, The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts: 1995), 5.
- 37 Paul Martinson, "Museums and Restlessness," in Genoway, *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-first Century* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 60.
- 38 Victoria S. Harrison, Anna Bergqvist and Gary Kemp (Eds.), *Philosophy and Museums: Essays on the Philosophy of Museums* (Cambridge University Press, 2016). This volume addresses both art museums and other forms of cultural museums.
- 39 See also Ivan Gaskell, "Museums and Philosophy of Art and Many Things" Part I, Part II, *Philosophy Compass*, 7, 2012. In these essays, Gaskell examines the topic of why philosophy of art and museums should have so little to do with each other. He attributes this to the alleged "fall from epistemological grace" of museums as sites of scholarship in the 20th century. Gaskell offers a series of reasons as to why philosophers have good reasons to engage with museums related to the role of aesthetics, ethics, and epistemology and other cultural issues.
- 40 Cher Krause and Harriet F. Seine, *Museums and Public Art?* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), xviii.
- 41 An alternative take on public art and the museum is Larry Shiner's research on museum architecture. See and Larry Shiner, "Architecture versus Art: The Aesthetics of Art Museum Design," *Contemporary Aesthetics*, Vol. 5 (2007) and Larry Shiner, "On Aesthetics and Function in Architecture: The Case of the Spectacle Art Museum," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (2011), 31–41.
- 42 Marcel Broodthaers, Museum, Musée d'art Moderne, Département des Aigles, 1968.
- 43 For further information on the state of curating in the art museum see Curtis L. Carter, "Curating: Overview," *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, Second Edition, Michael Kelley, Editor in Chief (Oxford University Press, 2014), Vol. 2, 231–236.

- 44 Cristian Nae, “‘Museum in the Streets’”: Ljubljana’s Museum of Modern Art and the New Institution-alism,” in Cher Krause and Harriet F. Seine, *Museums and Public Art?* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 162–180.
- 45 Margaret Tali, *Absence and Difficult Knowledge in Contemporary Museums* (New York and London, 2018), 1–3
- 46 Judging from some multiple years directed to engaging university students in art museum experiences, I found only a handful in each class came with noteworthy knowledge of the history of art or experiences in regular visits to art museums.
- 47 Vickie Elmer, “The Future of Museums,” *CQ Researcher*, CQ Press, Vol. 29, No. 43 (December 6, 2019).
- 48 Mike Murakowski, “Interrupting White Dominant Culture in Museums,” in *Art Museum Teaching: A Forum for Reflecting on Practice* May 31, 2019. The author of this essay is a young museum professional at the Portland, Oregon USA Art Museum who joins other young museum professionals in calling on museums to serve as agents of positive social change with respect to race and other social issues.
- 49 Katie White, “What are the Biggest Challenges Facing Museums Today?” (*Artnet.com*, February 5, 2020). Members of the panel titled “Women Leaders in the Arts,” which took place February 4, 2020, were directors of three major metropolitan museums: Kaywin Feldman of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Natalie Bondil of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and Anne Pasternak of the Brooklyn Museum.
- 50 Vivienne Chow, Should Art Museums Be More or Less Ideological? After Pushback, A Gathering of Museum Leaders Refuses to Address the Question,” *Artnet.com*, September 9, 2019.” Kate Brown, “Are Art Institutions Becoming Too ‘Ideological’,” *Artnet.com*, August 20, 2019. This question resulted in a debate at a gathering of museum professionals of the International Council for Museums meeting in Kyoto, Japan (September 1–7, 2019) over what a museum in the 21st century should be. Seventy percent of the members voted to postpone discussion of this question with 28 percent against the proposal arguing that a proposal for democratizing the traditional museum definition was too ideological and downplayed education. The vote on the changes was postponed.
- 51 Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *The Love of Art* (Stanford, CA, 1990), 113.

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CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION

Rafael De Clercq

Conservation comprises a range of activities aimed at preserving or restoring objects, including paintings and sculptures. Conceptually, preservation and restoration are easy to distinguish: to preserve is to keep an object in its present condition—more realistically, to slow down its deterioration—whereas to restore is to return an object to a condition it used to be in (Muñoz-Viñas 2005, 15–23). However, it is not always easy to distinguish preservation and restoration in practice, since one and the same activity (for example, cleaning or relining a painting) may have both a preservative and a restorative aim.

An object can be preserved by controlling the humidity, light, and temperature in its environment, but restoration always requires changing the object itself. Therefore, restorations are more likely to give rise to controversy. Among the most well-known controversies is the National Gallery's cleaning of paintings, including Velázquez' *Philip IV of Spain in Brown and Silver*, between 1936 and 1946. The cleaning was heavily criticized by prominent art historians such as Cesare Brandi (Brandi 1949) and Ernst H. Gombrich (Gombrich 1962; see also Gombrich 1960, 49–52). In a similar vein, art historian James Beck and artist Michael Daley have taken aim at the more recent cleaning of masterpieces such as Jacopo della Quercia's *Ilaria del Carretto* and Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling frescoes and his *David* (Beck and Daley 1994). Interestingly, they open their book on the subject by noting that restoration is not a purely technical matter that can be left to the “faceless specialist in the favored white coat”, because “we are really dealing with a field that has divergent *philosophical* positions and approaches” (*Ibid.*, ix; my italics).

The word “philosophical” is well-chosen. Underlying the controversies are often philosophical disagreements, for example, regarding the aim(s) and permissible means of restoration. More specifically, the disagreements may concern such questions as the following: Should restoration return the original appearance of the object, that is, roughly speaking, the appearance around the time of completion of the work? If not, then which appearance is to be returned? And can the restorer recreate this appearance by any means necessary? In what follows, these questions will be addressed in terms of the ethical (Section 1) and the metaphysical (Section 2) issues they raise.

1 Ethical Issues

1.1 *Should the Intentions of the Artist Be Respected?*

It seems obvious that we should take into account the intentions of the artist whose work is being considered for conservation; for example, his or her preferences regarding varnishes, patina, and

so on. The intentions of the artist plausibly determine which alterations are permitted during restoration, and even which alterations can count as restorative. But should the intentions of the artist always be respected? That is, should they outweigh other important considerations such as the historical value, use value, and even aesthetic value of the work, when these other considerations suggest a course of action that is different from the one desired by the artist? At least one reputed expert on restoration, Ernst van de Wetering, has denied that they should, on the reasonable ground that artists sometimes have wishes or hopes for their work that “nobody in his right mind”—no one who cares about conservation—would want to fulfill (van de Wetering 1989, 195). For example, van Gogh preferred some very aggressive procedures for flattening the surface of his paintings, including the use of a razor blade and, possibly, a hot iron. Apparently, he never managed to apply these procedures to some of his paintings, which left them with a crisp impasto. Should the conscientious conservator then carry out the aggressive procedures on van Gogh’s behalf? It seems not.

In a similar vein, one may not want to remove old repaints just because they do not correspond to the original artist’s intentions. After all, their removal may result in a seriously incomplete image (Bomford et al. 2009, 48). But if the intentions of the artist are not guaranteed to be of utmost importance, then it seems that we should not state the aim of restoration in terms of these intentions. For example, the following statements about the aim of restoration must seem to be misguided:

Restoration implies returning the appearance of a painting to a state as close as possible to that which the artist originally *intended*.

(Bomford 2003; my *italics*)

[R]estoration is to make as few alterations as possible while aiming to return those properties that the artist *intended* the work to have, and which at some point after completion it actually had.

(De Clercq 2013, 274; my *italics*)

Art historian and conservator David Scott has argued that we should reject such principles on the ground that we are free to let our own cultural preferences regarding the appearance of an artwork prevail over the artist’s intentions (Scott 2017, 89–90). However, note that the quoted principles apply only once a decision has been made to *restore* the work. In other words, the principles do not apply where the decided aim is mere preservation, as may be the case with some of van Gogh’s paintings, or with ancient Chinese bronze vessels whose patina and corrosion we may have come to value over their intended appearance (Scott’s example in *Ibid.*, 90). Moreover, even where the principles apply, they do not prescribe, for example, getting rid of the crisp impasto on behalf of the artist. After all, the principles state explicitly that the aim of restoration is to *return* properties to a work. Obviously, the only properties that can be returned are properties that the work once had. But some of van Gogh’s paintings never had a smooth surface after they were completed. Hence, the principles do not imply that there is an obligation on the part of the restorer to return this smoothness to the painting. In other words, restoring a work is not the same as finishing a work.

1.2 Can Integral Restoration Be Justified?

The restoration of Michelangelo’s *Pietà* sculpture, which was severely damaged in 1972 as a result of vandalism, involved the replacement of parts carved by Michelangelo with parts cast by a restoration team. Crucially, the naked eye cannot tell the new parts from the old parts. Some find such ‘integral’ restorations objectionable (for example, Sagoff 1978). They favor a different, ‘purist’

approach, one that highlights the changes that have been made by the restorer. The difference between the two approaches has been usefully summarized by Mark Sagoff:

An integral restoration puts new pieces in the place of original fragments which have been lost; a purist restoration limits itself to cleaning works of art and to reattaching original pieces that may have fallen. Purists contend that nothing inauthentic—nothing not produced by the original artist—may be shown. If damage obscures the style of the original, a purist may allow a few substitutions, but only in outline or in another color, to avoid any pretense of authenticity.

(Sagoff 1978, 457)

Integral restorations have long been regarded as unproblematic. However, from the 19th century onward, a preference for purist restoration has been gaining ground. One consequence has been the undoing of previous integral restorations out of a concern for authenticity. For example, both the famous *Laocoön and his Sons* and the Lansdowne *Herakles* sculpture have been subjected to de-restorations in the 20th century (the latter, however, was eventually de-de-restored; for a philosophically informed recounting of its restoration history, see Scott (forthcoming)). Moreover, many contemporary guidelines for the conservation of artworks and, more generally, cultural heritage explicitly require that what is added during restoration be marked as such, so that even ordinary viewers can tell what is by the hand of the original artist and what is not. To give just a few examples:

If compensation is so extensive that it forms a substantial portion of the cultural property, then the compensation should be *visually apparent to all viewers* (American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Work; my italics).

Source: <<https://www.culturalheritage.org/docs/default-source/administration/governance/commentaries-to-the-guidelines.pdf?sfvrsn=15>> accessed 27 June 2019

All conservation procedures should be documented and as reversible as possible, and all alterations should be *clearly distinguishable* from the original object or specimen (International Council of Museums [ICOM] Code of Ethics for Museums; my italics).

Source: <<https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf>> accessed 27 June 2019

Similar guidelines have been issued for the conservation of buildings.

Now the question is why purist restoration might be preferred. Perhaps it is found to be more honest, because it requires one to highlight the changes that have been made during restoration. In this way, restoration can be prevented from turning into “hyper-restoration”: the kind of creative and deceitful restoration—if “restoration” is the appropriate word—that the Flemish restorer Jef Van der Veken (1872–1964) has become well-known for. However, integral restoration is compatible with textual and photographic documentation of the changes that were made. As long as the documentation is made publicly available, it seems that no dishonesty is involved.

Purist restoration might also be preferred because it is less likely to cause permanent damage. However, integral restoration is compatible with reversible changes (or “re-treatability”). In sum, as long as one follows commonly adopted guidelines, recommending documentation of changes and reversible interventions, it seems that there is no reason to prefer purist restoration to integral restoration.

Still, there is a more philosophical worry that integral restoration gives rise to. The worry is based on the plausible assumption that works of art cannot acquire parts after having been

completed (Ruskin 1989[1880], Sagoff 1978, Elgin 1997, De Clercq 2013, De Clercq 2020). In other words, anything added after completion inevitably remains extraneous or alien, especially if it has been added by someone other than the original artist. As a consequence, it might be argued that integral restoration creates a *hybrid* object: a combination of an original work of art—by an artist—and a replica—by a restorer—of lost or damaged parts. (Think again of Michelangelo’s *Pietà*.) But now the question arises of how we can experience such a hybrid object in an appropriate way, if we do not perceive the boundary between the original and the replicated part. As Sagoff formulates the problem:

An integral restoration confronts the viewer with a juxtaposition at cross-purposes with itself—an art object, created at a particular place and time for artistic purposes, and a replica created to resemble it, which is a practical purpose, with no line between.

(Sagoff 2017, 329; see also Sagoff 1978, 460–461)

A proponent of integral restoration might want to challenge the assumption on which the worry is based, namely, that a restorer cannot, for metaphysical reasons, add parts to a finished work. However, it is not clear whether rejecting the assumption is enough to put the worry to rest. After all, even if an artwork can acquire new parts, it remains the case that parts produced by a restorer will have a different origin. In particular, as Sagoff points out, they will have been made with different intentions; first and foremost, with the intention of replacing the old parts. In addition, the new parts may have been produced using different materials and techniques; for example, casting instead of carving. As a result, it seems that they should not be experienced in the same way as the old parts (*pace* Wreen 1985).

Perhaps a more successful response to the worry raised by Sagoff is the following: an integrally restored work of art such as Michelangelo’s *Pietà* can still be experienced in an appropriate way, even if its new parts are not visibly different from its old parts. After all, we are not supposed to experience a work of art in a fragmented way, by focusing exclusively on the aesthetic character of its parts (say, the nose of the Madonna). Instead, we are supposed to experience it as a whole. And the perceptible—stylistic, representational, and aesthetic—properties of the whole can be revealed to us in experience even if we cannot precisely locate the boundary between what is old and what is new. For example, after it was restored, we can still perceive Michelangelo’s *Pietà* to be a magnificent Renaissance sculpture representing the Madonna with Christ, even if this characterization does not apply (any longer) to some of its parts. (This response can be reformulated easily to avoid the assumption that new parts are parts: just replace “new part” with “pseudo-part”.)

In sum, an integral restoration may make an appropriate experience of *parts* of a work more difficult, but it need not prevent us from having an appropriate experience of the work as a *whole*, that is, an experience revealing its stylistic, representational, and aesthetic properties.

What is more, an integral restoration is more likely than a purist restoration to enable an experience that approximates the experience intended by the artist. In other words, an integral restoration is more likely to return the intended perceptual and aesthetic properties of the work, for the simple reason that it allows us to replace lost or damaged parts with indistinguishable new parts (if you like, pseudo-parts). As Catherine Elgin put it, these new parts are “artificial substitutes designed to reenable damaged works to perform their aesthetic functions” (Elgin 1997, 101). In the case of Michelangelo’s *Pietà*, these substitutes have returned harmony, splendor, and wholeness—in short, classical beauty—to the sculpture, something that would have been very hard to achieve if a purist approach had been adopted.

Considerations of this sort have made a number of philosophers conclude that integral restoration is permissible, and even preferable, in some cases (for example, Wreen 1985, Janowski 2006, De Clercq 2013, Hulatt 2016, Lamarque 2016). The cases where purist restoration is considered

preferable typically are cases where one is not confident enough to have the knowledge, skills, or techniques required for a proper integral restoration, or where the dominant concern is preservation rather than restoration. For example, preservation is naturally the dominant concern in the case of archeological or pre-historical objects that are valued primarily for what they can reveal about a past that is very distant from us (for more on the restoration of such objects, see Hulatt 2016).

2 Metaphysical Issues

2.1 Are Paintings and Sculptures Incorruptible?

Conservation efforts would not be called for if paintings and sculptures were not subject to deterioration. But they are, because they—at least paintings and carved sculptures—are concrete objects constituted by matter that makes them vulnerable to all sorts of destructive forces. Still, some philosophers have argued that paintings and sculptures have perceptual and aesthetic qualities that do not change as a result of deterioration or restoration. For example, Richard Wollheim has stated that “asked the color of Bacchus’ cloak in Titian’s *Bacchus and Ariadne* we should answer ‘Crimson’, and this would be the correct answer to give alike when the painting was freshly painted, when discolored varnish and dirt had turned the relevant part of the canvas brown, and now that it has been cleaned” (Wollheim 1980, 182–183). As a consequence, Wollheim calls works of art, including paintings, “in incorruptible” (*Ibid.*). Of course, this goes against our impression that deterioration and restoration bring about perceptible changes. However, according to Wollheim and others (Savile 1993, Budd 2002, and Lamarque 2010), these changes merely concern perceptual and aesthetic properties that the work *appears* to have at a given time. In other words, it does not concern the work’s true or timeless properties.

Not everyone shares the linguistic intuitions invoked by Wollheim to support the view that works of art are incorruptible (for example, Rohrbaugh 2003 and Zangwill 2007 do not). Moreover, it seems that some of our less contentious intuitions about the permanent properties of works of art can be accounted for without postulating invisible or timeless perceptual and aesthetic properties over and above the visible and time-bound ones. For example, the intuition that the artistic value of a work of art does not change over time—what was once a masterpiece will always be a masterpiece—can be accounted for by equating the artistic value of a work with its aesthetic value around the time of completion (De Clercq 2013).

2.2 Do Paintings and Sculptures Survive Deterioration and Restoration?

Another metaphysical question raised by cases of deterioration and restoration does not concern qualitative change—change of properties—but substantial change: do paintings and sculptures *survive* the changes brought about by deterioration and restoration? The answer to this question depends on what one takes paintings and sculptures to be. As said, they are generally taken to be concrete objects, occupying a particular place at any given time. More specifically, paintings and carved sculptures are generally taken to be concrete artifacts. However, they may not be like ordinary concrete artifacts such as (token) cars and (token) coffee machines. First of all, paintings and carved sculptures are not able to survive a complete replacement of their parts, while at least some philosophers believe that ordinary artifacts can survive such a replacement (De Clercq 2013, 271–272). Second, paintings and carved sculptures may not be able to undergo the replacement of even a single part, but surely a (token) car or a (token) coffee machine can have at least one of its parts replaced. The second hypothesis, if true, could explain why the first hypothesis is true. However, the first hypothesis could easily be true while the second hypothesis is false.

As we have seen, several philosophers (Elgin and Sagoff, among others) believe that the second hypothesis is true; that is, they believe that a work of art cannot undergo part replacement, at least once the artist responsible for the work has passed away. If they are right, then the question immediately arises why works of art are different from ordinary artifacts in this respect. One possible answer is that works of art are parts arranged in a certain way, for example, painting-wise or sculpture-wise. Strange as this answer may seem, it is possible to explain it as bound up with one of the most common ideas regarding the function of art: the idea that art has an aesthetic function (De Clercq 2020). Moreover, the answer can be found in works by contemporary philosophers. According to Jerryd Levinson, for example, a sculpture is “is a hunk of material configured in a certain way and governed or structured by a certain intention in the making, namely, the intention that it be regarded-as-a-work-of-art” (Levinson 1988, 720; see Levinson 1996, 134, for a generalization of this view).

The answer that artworks are parts arranged in a certain way implies that artworks do not survive deterioration and restoration, at least not if these result in changes of parts. This may strike one as an absurd consequence. Artworks, it seems, do not stop existing as soon as they lose one part. If they did, then how could we ever appreciate them for the marks that time has left on them, that is, for their age value? As Carolyn Korsmeyer observes, “[t]o have age value an object has to be old” (2019, 84; see also Ibid., 197). However, when an artwork loses one of its parts, the remaining parts obviously still have the same age value, and a proponent of the artworks-as-parts view could say that it is *these* parts that we should now identify the artwork with. In other words, he or she could say that a painting or sculpture is different parts at different times, somewhat like the President of the United States is a distinct person at different times. Note that such a response would identify a sculpture such as Michelangelo’s *Pietà* with the material *occupants* of a role rather than with the role itself (in contrast with Oddie 2016, who regards at least non-art museum objects as roles). In any case, as long as there is sufficient overlap between the original parts and the current parts, it seems that there is sufficient reason to attribute age value to the work that is now on display.

2.3 Why Do These Metaphysical Questions Matter?

At this point, one may start to wonder why these metaphysical questions concerning qualitative and substantial change are worth addressing at all. They may seem to be unconnected to the practice of conservation. In fact, they are not. First of all, if one believes, as Wollheim and Savile do, that paintings and sculptures have unalterable perceptual and aesthetic properties, then one is likely to take restoration to *reveal* these properties, not to return them (since the properties were never lost). Incidentally, this is also the terminology used in some conservation charters. For example, the Venice Charter for the conservation of monuments and sites says that the aim of restoration “is to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historic value of the monument” (https://www.icomos.org/charters/venice_e.pdf, accessed on 02/05/2019). However, the difference between “revealing” and “returning” properties is neither purely terminological nor purely theoretical. It may have important practical consequences, because if the aim of restoration is to return properties, then there can be more than one successful restoration. After all, different (i.e., mutually exclusive) sets of properties can be *returned* to a work of art; for example, the set of properties it possessed around completion time, or ten years later, or 20 years later. However, only one set of properties can be *revealed*: the set of properties that the work possesses. (Of course, different subsets of this set could be revealed, but that would not introduce the degree of variation that the alternative view allows for.) In sum, different states of a work can serve as a reference for returning properties; only one state can serve as a reference for revealing properties. Moreover, the latter is likely to be identified with the *original* state of the work. For example, Anthony Savile has suggested that the properties

timelessly possessed by a work usually are “fixed” around the time the work is completed (Savile 1993, 471). In a similar vein, Yuriko Saito has argued that the original state of a work has a special status, because it shows the artist’s creative activity in its “integrity” (Saito 1985, 148). Since it has been argued that there are serious risks (for example, excessive cleaning) attached to the assumption that works of art ought to be restored to their original state, the metaphysical question of whether restoration reveals or returns properties obviously is of some practical importance.

Another way in which the metaphysical questions bear on practical issues is by justifying some of the ethical norms that are supposed to guide conservation. For example, if it is true that paintings and carved sculptures cannot undergo part replacement—a metaphysical assumption—then this may help to justify the widely accepted norm of *minimal intervention*. More specifically, if part replacement is impossible, then the removal of any part whatsoever brings the work closer to destruction, which obviously is undesirable from the point of view of conservation. Hence, restorers should take great care not to remove parts unnecessarily, which means that their intervention should be minimal.

It is easy to state the norm of minimal intervention, but, like that other famous principle of parsimony, Occam’s razor, it is less easy to determine what it implies. For example, if the norm prohibits interventions that go beyond what is necessary, then the question immediately arises: necessary for what? One cannot simply answer, “for achieving the goal of restoration”. Although it may be possible to give a very general characterization of that goal (as in Section 1.1), it can be more or less ambitious in a particular case (partial or full restoration?), and also, as we have just seen, involve reference to a variety of former states of the work (that is, if one conceives of restoration as returning rather than revealing properties). Hence, it seems that a more informative statement of the norm of minimal intervention would be this: “the restorer should not make more changes than are necessary to achieve the goal of restoration, where that goal has been specified in terms of *which* properties are to be returned by the intervention”.

The foregoing statement also brings out the limits of a philosophical inquiry into the conservation of paintings, sculptures, and other works of art. Although such an inquiry can prevent us from basing our decisions on logical fallacies and mistaken theoretical assumptions, it cannot tell us exactly how to specify the goal of restoration in a particular case. It cannot even tell us whether restoration is called for at all. Making such decisions about whether, and how, a particular work ought to be restored inevitably involves weighing a variety of considerations. For example, do we value the work primarily for historical reasons or (also) because it represents an exceptional artistic achievement? How certain are we about the artist’s intentions? Would restoration significantly rejuvenate the work, and if so, how much value do we place on the aged appearance—the so-called “age value”—of the work? When was the work in its best condition from a purely aesthetic point of view? What nonaesthetic functions is the work currently expected to perform? And so on. There is no reason to expect a philosophical inquiry to produce a rule for weighing such considerations, given the diversity of the values and the works involved.

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44

SPACE IS PLACE

Why the Placement of Sculpture Matters

Jason Miller

Ozymandius

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert.... Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandius, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

Percy Bysshe Shelley

I begin with this well-known poem because it captures poetically an insight about sculpture that has yet to be fully articulated philosophically, namely, that *how* a work of sculpture is experienced depends on *where* it is experienced. In the poem, Shelley introduces the reader to an “ancient traveler” who reports bearing witness to what remains of the once towering monument to the late king, Ozymandius. The description of its “trunkless legs” and “shattered visage” half-sunken in outstretched sands conjures a striking contrast of imagery. The fictional setting is at once a distant, thriving civilization, replete with “mighty works,” as well as an empty expanse of ruin and decay. One can just as well imagine Ozymandius in its former glory, upright and intact at the center of a bustling civic life, inspiring the sense of awe and despair of which its pedestal boasts, as one can the “colossal wreck” that now sits in the sand, giving silent testament to nature’s victory over human hubris. Through the poetic juxtaposition of these radically contrasting visions of the same object, Shelley vividly illustrates how profoundly one’s perception of a thing like Ozymandius can be shaped by its surrounding environment.

Philosophically, the attempt to articulate the distinctive features of sculpture has been thin relative to other arts. The sheer diversity of things claiming the title of “sculpture,” many of which push the conceptual boundaries of the art form, frustrates the ontologist’s efforts at definition and proves equally resistant to efforts to pin down the uniquely aesthetic character of sculpture. What is the essence of that which takes the form of an amulet, a Sphinx, or tiles laid flat on the

floor; whose materiality comprises wood, stone, metal, clay, a bundle of string, stretches of fabric, or lights; which is both permanent and ephemeral; both object and subject (as in Joseph Beuys' "social sculpture")? More importantly, how do we respond to and evaluate such works *as sculpture*? What is the common denominator of appreciation when a work can be experienced in relief or in the round, indoors or outdoors, in spaces both private and public, on the ground, on a pedestal or atop a cathedral, at the center of a plaza or removed to a niche or alcove, and so on? How do we experience sculptural works?

A common suggestion is that sculpture is distinct in the way it occupies what we might call "real space." Whereas a painting might be said to *represent* space fictionally or imaginatively, a sculpture occupies physical, three-dimensional space. Sculpture might be further distinguished from other arts that occupy space (e.g. dance, performance art, and architecture) by the way it is integrally related to its spatial environment. How "integrally" related? One influential suggestion, originating with J.G. Herder (2002/1778) and variously developed in the writings of Susanne Langer (1953), Herbert Read (1958), Robert Vance (1995), and others, is that sculpture is uniquely related to space through tactile or proprioceptive awareness rather than visual perception. A similar suggestion is that a work of sculpture has a unique capacity to affect or transforms the space around it. This line of thought emerges from G.W.F. Hegel's notion that a sculpture "remain[s] essentially connected with its surroundings" (1974; 720) and is more fully developed by F. David Martin's concept of "enlivened space" (1981).

Oddly, however, the notion of "real space" to which sculpture is uniquely related, and which grounds the aesthetic distinctness of sculpture in either case, is discussed almost exclusively as an abstraction, as though the appreciation of sculpture concerned the experience of spatiality itself rather than the concrete and particular spatial environment in which a work of sculpture is situated. For a work of sculpture doesn't just occupy space in general, it inhabits a specific, identifiable space—i.e. a *place*—which of course includes the space of galleries and museums, but also (and more importantly) those spaces inscribed by symbolic or functional significance: parks, boulevards, churches, courthouses, memorial sites, etc. By overlooking the specificity of place, I argue, such accounts tend not only to minimize the aesthetically distinctive feature of sculpture, but also to mischaracterize the experience of sculpture as something both uniform and uniformly positive. The aim of the present essay, then, is to address the way that the *placement* of sculpture bears uniquely on the aesthetic appreciation of it.

Shifting attention from abstract space to the particular place of sculpture, I argue, makes for a more nuanced phenomenology that more accurately reflects the variety and complexity in the aesthetic experience of sculpture. First, it shows that sculpture is unique in that its relation to its physical environment is *causally reciprocal*: a sculpture can profoundly shape the perception of its surroundings, and yet the place that a sculpture occupies can also profoundly affect how it is perceived. Further, it follows from this that the experience of sculpture can take a variety of forms (both positive and negative), depending on the particular place that a particular work of sculpture occupies. Finally, the question of placement shows sculpture to be uniquely resistant to the autonomist's insistence on the purely aesthetic appreciation of art. Insofar as sculpture is aesthetically distinctive in its relation to the space of lived experience, questions of the form "Does it work here?", "Is it a good fit?", or "Is it out of place?" concern the way a particular sculpture relates, not to three-dimensionality in general, but to *place*—that is, to a spatial environment marked by the various social, cultural, moral, historical, and political norms in which it is inscribed.

An important upshot of this discussion is that it bears significantly on the present debate concerning the removal of Confederate monuments in the U.S. While it is not my intention to wade directly into that controversy here, clarifying the significance of placement in the appreciation of sculpture in general may help clarify what is at stake in debates concerning the placement of

Confederate monuments in particular. Thus, in the final section, I focus specifically on the evolving history and controversy of Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia in order to illustrate the practical implications of this view. First, whether a Confederate monument is placed in a history museum or at the center of urban life makes a qualitative difference in how it is experienced in space, aesthetically or otherwise. By the same token, however, the placement of sculpture can function as an aesthetic strategy to reshape or reclaim a sense of space, as evidenced in the later addition of African-American figures to Monument Avenue: the Arthur Ashe monument, and, more recently, Kehinde Wiley's Confederate counter-monument, *Rumors of War*.

1 The Space of Sculpture

The quest for a distinct aesthetics of sculpture typically proceeds by distinguishing it from other, more familiar forms of art. Often, the best that can be said is that sculpture is *unlike* painting, architecture, or music in such and such a way. One thing that can be said positively, however, is that sculpture is special in the way it is spatial. Even amidst widespread disagreement about the particular sense of spatiality most relevant to the appreciation of sculptural art, the thing that distinguishes sculpture from other arts is that it doesn't just represent space, it exists in actual, physical space. There is a general consensus, as Robert Vance has noted, that "even if some sculptures generate illusory or fictional spaces, what counts for sculpture is occupancy of real space" (1995; 217). What makes the appreciation of Michelangelo's *Pieta* akin to that of Claes Oldenburg's inflatable hamburger? Both are integrally related to their spatial environment.

Given sculpture's distinctive relation to real space, it makes sense that many theorists emphasize the tactile quality of sculpture in distinguishing it from other arts. Sculpture connects the body with the surrounding spatial environment in a way that neither visual nor auditory arts can. Even with respect to arts that make use of three-dimensional space in various ways (e.g. performing arts, architecture), sculpture stands alone in its inviting us to know its form through touch. Hence, Herbert Read's suggestion (borrowing a distinction from William James' psychology) that sculpture is "primarily an art of 'touch-space' rather than 'sight-space'" (1956; 48) is compelling, if only because sculpture comes closest to any other art to giving an affirmative answer to the Molynaux question: one *might* know the "look" of sculpture solely through the sense of touch.

There are, however, reasons to be skeptical of touch-centric explanations. The question is not whether touch is uniquely involved in sculpture, but whether it is the primary vehicle of perceptual transmission. It's not clear that it is, or even that touch is even necessary to fully appreciate sculpture. Often, sculpture *can't* (or at least shouldn't) be touched. Does this make appreciation impossible? Even with the qualified view that in such cases the visual substitutes the haptic, so as "to make tactful space visible," as Susanne Langer puts it (1953; 90), it is not clear that the experience of sculpture consists solely, or even primarily, in imaginatively touching it. Responding to Herder, Rachel Zuckert points out that for most sculptures, a darting visual, cognitive apprehension of the form—for example, to recognize that it represents a human being—seems crucial for our appreciation (2009; 290). Others deny the primacy of touch altogether. Rhys Carpenter argues, for example, that sculpture is "made for the eyes to contemplate and not for the fingers to feel. (1960; 34)

Touch is certainly a distinct phenomenological feature of sculpture. But it is not, in my view, the most relevant. This is because there is a more basic question concerning the sculpture's relation to space which has yet to be addressed, but which bears on the role of touch in the experience of sculpture. That question is: How does sculpture affect the perception of real, three-dimensional space? What does it mean, in other words, to say, as Hegel does, that sculpture is "essentially connected with its surroundings"?

I'll return to Hegel's thought soon enough, as I think there's more to be excavated from it that will be helpful to the present discussion. For now, I want to consider the more developed version of this thought present in F. David Martin's concept of "enlivened space." To be sure, Martin too is drawn to the seductions of the touch-centric theory of sculpture. Necessarily, he thinks, a sculpture "directly and significantly stimulates our tactile sensation" (1979; 14). But this view emerges from a more basic conception of sculpture's relation to space, according to which sculpture is phenomenologically distinct in being both *in* and *of* our worlds (*Ibid.*). Any form of art can be in our world, "but only sculpture," he claims "is of our world, in the sense of belonging to our world as spatially present" (1981; 66). What distinguishes sculpture from other arts is its relation to real rather than fictional space, which, notably, he describes in distinctly causal terms: sculpture *transforms* space, makes it "more perceptible and impacting" and thus "more real" (*Ibid.*). This, then, is the essence of sculpture on Martin's view: it "*enlivens*" the space around it.

How does one experience "enlivened space"? Martin offers a variety of phenomenological descriptions, many formulated in a distinctly Heideggerian vernacular. Central among these is the idea that sculpture evokes a sense of spatial "withness" with things (*Ibid.*; 134; Cf. also 1979; 12). What does this mean? Here again, the contrast with painting is instructive. Whereas a painting draws the viewer into a two-dimensional, imaginative space, perceptually dissociated from the immediate spatial environment, sculpture amplifies and enhances the awareness of real space. The experience of sculpture affords an unmediated perception of space, allowing us to come into "direct contact" with things from which we otherwise distinguish ourselves and our bodies (1981; 77). Sculpture closes the gap, as it were, between the perceiving self and the world perceived.

This experience, moreover, is described as having a euphoric and edifying effect. To be *with* things in the sense that sculpture makes possible is to lose oneself to a sense of "primordial unity" with the spatial world (1979; 12–13). Tacking from the descriptive to the normative, Martin claims that being separated from the thingness of things "injures our sense of being-in-the-world," a malady to which sculpture provides the antidote. The experience of sculpture restores a sense of presence, satisfies the human craving to be fully part of the physical world, and so on. Thus, on Martin's account, sculpture has "a special healing role in our times" in that it makes our presence in the world "more sensitive, informed, and explicitly valuable" (*Ibid.*).

This account is appealing for several reasons. First, there is something to the idea that the signature aesthetic feature of sculpture consists in its distinctive, causal relation to its spatial surroundings. Admittedly, Martin's vivid account of enlivened space as nothing short of aesthetic euphoria is itself descriptively compelling. Precisely for this reason, however, one should be skeptical. Apart from the sometimes handwavey elements of this account,¹ there is a troublesome tendency to idealize the aesthetic experience of sculpture as uniformly uplifting and absorbing. Even if sculpture does enable the kind of ecstatic oneness with space Martin describes, it seems a rare phenomenon (I, for one, am not sure I've experienced such "withness" with things). More problematic still is the idea that the aesthetic experience of sculpture is reducible to the experience of enlivened space, and thus exclusive of other kinds of aesthetic responses. It is one thing to say that certain works of sculpture can do this, and another to say that they must (or, conversely, that the creative mandate of sculpture is to "bring out spatial withness!" (1981; 134)). As Sherri Irvin points out, "the idealization of objects or the creation of immersive spaces through sculpture may, in some instances, distance us from the physical particularity of the world we live in rather than reconcile us to it" (2013; 611). There may be any number of reasons a sculpture might fail to produce the kind of experience Martin describes. A sculptor might aim to produce a sense of alienation or uncanniness, as might be said, for example, of Damien Hirst's work involving a dead shark entombed in a giant vat of formaldehyde. A sculpture might also maintain distance through the use of humor

or postmodern irony (does Jeff Koons' porcelain sculpture of Michael Jackson and his pet monkey Bubbles create a sense of “*withness*” with things?). That is not to discount the profound effect such sculptures may have on their spatial environments. But it does suggest that this effect can take a variety of forms, and indeed, for a variety of reasons.

2 Placement and the Experience of Sculpture

Martin's tendency to idealize the experience of sculpture is representative of a broader tendency to oversimplify and idealize sculptural space. The powerful insight that the aesthetics of sculpture rests on its distinctive capacity to transform real space only gets us so far if “real space” refers to the abstract idea of three-dimensionality rather than the particular, concrete spaces that works of sculpture actually inhabit. If, however, we turn attention to the particular space of sculpture—to its *placement* in real space—the relation between a work of sculpture and its spatial environment begins to resemble the more familiar, diverse, and interesting ways that sculpture is actually experienced.

The discussion of placement, though not wholly absent from the philosophical discussion of sculpture, is surprisingly sparse and limited in both depth and scope. Martin devotes a mere ten pages to the question of “place”²; Read mentions it only briefly and in passing; and in the writings of Herder, Vance, and Langer, it is (so far as I can tell) hardly addressed at all. Where the question of placement *is* addressed, it is typically restricted to the gallery or museum setting. A particular work of sculpture is said to be “out of place” in the narrow sense that it is positioned too low or high; that it is too large or too small for its space; that it does not allow itself to be seen fully in the round; etc. On Martin's account, the question of placement serves to illustrate the broader distinction he aims to draw between sculpture and painting. “Most paintings,” he claims, “are detachable and moveable from place to place without the inevitable loss of ‘rightness’ suffered by most sculptures.” Whereas a sculpture “belongs ‘here’ or ‘there,’” usually “a painting can be almost ‘anywhere’” (1981; 194).

Such narrow consideration of the placement of sculpture, however, is precisely what threatens the aesthetic distinctness of sculpture. As Rob Hopkins argues, a picture can similarly relate to gallery space in the sense that it can appear cramped or out of place in its spatial environment (2003; 10). This comparison dissolves, however, when we take account of the broader range of spaces that sculptures actually inhabit. In fact, it is the sculpture that can go almost anywhere, in the sense that it is uniquely versatile with respect to placement. Beyond gallery space, a sculpture can be placed in a church, temple, palace, office building, plaza, park, garden, cemetery, etc. To say, then, that a sculpture is a “good fit” or “out of place” in its environment is not just a matter of its relation to space in general; it is a matter of how it relates to these kinds of spaces. Sculpture, in other words, uniquely occupies *place*: a particular, identifiable location inscribed by a specific function or symbolic significance. A sculpture is indeed related to real space in a way that other arts are not. But this means, more precisely, that sculpture is fundamentally related to the normative dimensions of *place*. It is precisely this essential connection with the purposiveness of space that a phenomenology of sculpture must account for.

Accounting for place thus adds another layer to the complex phenomenology of sculpture. For, so far, the discussion has assumed that the relation between sculpture and space as causally one-directional: that sculpture transforms the perception of surrounding space. This assumption rests on a conception of space as not only abstract, but also passive and inert—a lifeless domain enlivened by sculpture's presence. Construed in terms of *place*, however, it is clear that the space of sculpture often has a normative shape of its own. The particular shape that it takes can likewise affect the perception of the sculpture within that space. In this respect, the relation between sculpture and space is better understood as *causally reciprocal*. Sculpture can indeed transform how

its spatial environment is experienced; but that spatial environment, bound up with the normative dimensions of *place*, can also transform the experience of sculpture.

I take it that something like this is going on in Shelley's *Ozymandius*. The image of the statue shapes the perception of its surrounding space (as the loss or decay of civilization, etc.). But likewise, the poetic image of an open, empty expanse presents the forlorn figure of Ozymandius as a symbol of human vanity. A more concrete example of this effect is evident in Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*, erected in New York City's Federal Plaza in 1981 and decommissioned eight years later under a cloud of controversy. At the heart of this infamous debate over the 120-ft. expanse of Cor-Ten steel in the center of lower Manhattan's principal government complex is a question concerning the norms governing the relation between public art and public space. That question might be framed simply as a matter of how the installation of *Tilted Arc* affects the space of Federal Plaza, with proponents alleging that it enhanced the surrounding space and detractors alleging that it merely disrupted or obstructed it. But here too the causal relation cuts both ways: how one reads *Tilted Arc* as a work of sculpture is partly contingent on how one reads Federal Plaza as a space. So the question might also be framed in terms of the kind of place that Federal Plaza is taken to be and the bearing this has on the perception of *Tilted Arc*. As Gregg Horowitz has incisively argued, public dissent was in no small part shaped by ideological conceptions of what common spaces—particularly those designed to symbolize the beneficent functions of federal government—are or ought to be. Complaints that *Tilted Arc* failed to enhance the beauty or utility of the plaza turned on a distorted perception of the space as beautiful or useful. "The plaza was held to be beautiful," writes Horowitz, "not because it is but because it had to be" (1996; 11). The broader point to be drawn from this, then, is that the perception of the sculpture as aesthetically out of joint with its surrounding space issues directly from the perception of the surrounding space as a positive symbol of public good. Whether and to what extent *Tilted Arc* enlivens the space of Federal Plaza has just as much to do with the nature (or *perceived* nature) of place as it does the nature of the sculpture itself.

3 Sculpture as "Essentially Connected" with Place

To address more fully the question of how the placement of sculpture affects the experience of it, it will be useful to return to Hegel's promising suggestion that sculpture is "essentially connected" with its environment.

Famously, Hegel characterizes sculpture—particularly the figurative sculptures of Ancient Greece—as the pinnacle of art's achievement. Like many of his contemporaries, Hegel understands art as one of the primary modes of human self-understanding. We need not examine all the philosophical assumptions behind this view to appreciate the claim that the beauty of sculpture was for the ancient Greeks much more than a form of art: it embodied the divine in human form. As such, the beauty of sculpture is akin to religion or mythology. It forms the highest expression of what Hegel calls Greek *Sittlichkeit*, or "ethical life," the shared cultural awareness that gives normative grounding to the communal lives of ancient Greeks.³

Nor are we committed to wholesale buy-in of Hegel's admittedly idealized and culturally homogenous notion of antiquity to appreciate the sense in which sculpture is essentially connected with a distinctly *social* environment. As Hegel goes on to explain, the places that Greek sculpture occupy are places that symbolize shared sources of value and meaning, such as "temples and churches" (1979; 702) as well as public sites such as "halls, staircases, gardens, public squares, gates, single columns, triumphal arches, etc." (*Ibid*). Sculpture, in other words, is essentially connected with *place*.

Adapting Martin's signature distinction, we might say that the sculptures of Myron and Praxiteles are *of* the shared space of the polis. They are fundamentally bound up with the socio-cultural

significance of their spaces; so much so, in fact, that for Hegel it is crucial that sculpture be aesthetically responsive to its environment:

A sculptor should not first complete his work and only afterwards look around to see whether it is to be taken: on the contrary, his very conception of the work must be connected with specific external surroundings and their spatial form and their locality.

(*Ibid*)

Similarly, we might say that how a sculpture relates aesthetically to space has to do with the kind of space it is (or is supposed to be). A sculpture can, of course, profoundly impact and enhance the experience of space. But insofar as sculpture is experienced in relation to a particular place, the socially normative dimension of place can also profoundly impact the experience of sculpture. For Hegel, then, sculpture is “essentially connected with its surroundings” in the more robust sense of standing in causally reciprocal relation with its spatial environment. Sculpture doesn’t just act on space; it interacts with place.

4 Placement and Displacement: The Confederate Monument Debate

A significant consequence of the account I’ve sketched so far is that it disrupts the myth of a purely aesthetic phenomenology of sculpture. Being “essentially connected” to its environment, it is impossible to detach the perception of sculpture from the broader normative dimensions of place. Recognizing this insight can go some way toward explaining why it matters aesthetically whether a sculpture is experienced, for example, in a museum or at a traffic intersection.

Take, for example, just one of the six Confederate statues situated along historic Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia: that of Robert E. Lee, dismantled in February 2022. Apart from the stately poise and “heroic” proportions that underwrite the monument’s aesthetic, it had above all been its landmarked presence informing the experience of it. Centrally situated along the East-West artery connecting downtown with the residential spaces of the city’s historic Fan district, the Lee statue quite literally occupied a major part of the urban landscape. Pedestrians and traffic had to circumnavigate the oversized traffic circle at the center of which sat the towering, bronze likeness of Lee mounted on horseback. In notable contrast to the space of Civil War museum or other historically contextualized setting, its site on Monument Avenue long sanctioned its presence, conferring on it authority over the common space. The Lee monument had been thus “essentially connected” with its environment in a way that does not admit of a purely aesthetic experience of it. To ask, “Does it fit well with its environment?” or “Is it out of place”? is to consider how the monument relates, not to space in general, but to that particular *place*. And to consider the placement of the Lee monument—at a major urban center of the former Confederate capitol—is to consider it in its ideological relation to space.

Here, however, the autonomist interjects: “But this is not *aesthetic* experience!” For the autonomist maintains that art is distinct from other kinds of practices and should therefore be valued independently of those practices. Such non-aesthetic considerations, says the autonomist, threaten the “autonomy” of aesthetic appreciation. Even for the moderate autonomist, who readily acknowledges various historical, cultural, moral, or political as relevant to the experience of art will nevertheless insist that the *aesthetic* valuation of art set such consideration aside. The autonomist is right, of course, that the estimation of an object *as a work of art* should be independent of the particular political cause it advances, the price it fetches at market, or other such extrinsic measure of value. But the autonomist errs in assuming that this separation is always and in every case possible. The autonomist does not allow that the aesthetic character of a work may be inseparably bound up with its moral, social, or political character. Mary Devereaux (1998) offers a poignant

example of this in her discussion of Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda film, *Triumph of the Will*. Her critique of the autonomist's view turns on what she calls the "artistic vision" of the film, according to which its admittedly praiseworthy cinematic features are inextricably linked to the glorification of National Socialism. Appreciation of the film's innovative use of tracking shots, its musical score, its meticulous editing, etc. thus necessarily entails appreciation of the ideological vision with which its aesthetic features are essentially connected.

Something similar is going on with respect to the placement of Lee's statue on Monument Avenue. Contextualized in the space of a museum or educational setting, it is *perhaps* possible to separate historical from aesthetic considerations of a Confederate monument. Placed in the center of a town square, a courthouse, a public park, or college campus, however, the monument's aesthetic features are essentially connected with the ideological narratives of those spaces. One could say, then, that the "artistic vision" of the Lee monument renders any purely aesthetic appreciation of it impossible. This, however, will not satisfy the autonomist. For, as Noël Carroll argues in response to Devereaux, even if Nazism is an essential feature of *Triumph of the Will*, it doesn't follow that it is necessarily an *aesthetic* feature (2012: 171). Yet there is an important difference between Riefenstahl's film and the Lee monument. At issue with the latter is not just the way certain aesthetic features give the nod to the "Lost Cause" narrative of the Confederate South, but rather the way that it was essentially connected with its surroundings *as a work of sculpture*. At issue here is not a particular feature of a particular work, but the essential aesthetic feature of any sculpture: its relation to real space. As with any sculpture, the Lee monument related to its environment in such a way that its environment affects how it is perceived. It is precisely in virtue of sculpture's distinctive interaction with the space of lived experience that the appreciation of sculpture is irreducible to the purely aesthetic. To appreciate sculpture is to appreciate its interaction with space.

As for the removal of Confederate monuments, here is not the place to defend any particular position within that debate. I will say, however, that the discussion concerning the placement of sculpture becomes especially relevant where removing a monument is not an option, or at least not the only option. In many states (Virginia included), Confederate monuments have historically been legally protected from relocation or removal. But, wherever the placement of a monument is at issue, *displacement* presents itself as a viable response, both politically and aesthetically. Even if the Lee monument had remained in place, it could be *displaced* by the presence of other works that reconfigure the relation between sculpture and space. After all, if a sculpture has the power to claim space, it also has the power to *reclaim* it.

This insight offers a powerful coda to the controversial history of Monument Avenue. In 1996—nearly 100 years after the dedication of the Lee monument—saw the addition of a monument to African-American tennis legend, Arthur Ashe. From a strictly visual standpoint, the fairly conventional, figurative depiction of the Richmond native in his role as athlete, educator, and humanitarian, the monument itself is not especially noteworthy; some even describe it as awkward or ugly.⁴ But its placement on Monument Avenue, just a few blocks west of the Stonewall Jackson monument, powerfully transforms the surrounding environment. Its presence there displaces that of its Confederate neighbors. The Arthur Ashe monument works aesthetically in the way that it activates the space by contesting the symbolic and historical significance of Monument Avenue. Placed alongside Confederate heroes, the singular figure of a celebrated African-American assumes a presence that it would not have elsewhere.⁵ If such questions seem separable from the aesthetic, it is worth observing that the chief complaint among Confederate heritage groups was that it "violates categorical distinction of motif."⁶ The Ashe monument was deemed aesthetically out of place because it did not fit thematically with the others. The aesthetic judgment concerning the appropriateness of certain monuments is, of course, predicated on a certain historical and cultural narrative assigned to Monument Avenue. This ideological perception of space, in other words, gave shape to the perception of the Ashe monument as a "symbol of a racially factional

commemorative turf invasion, conveniently using a sports arriviste for a pretext.” By the same logic that aesthetically evaluates the Arthur Ashe monument as a “turf invasion,” however, it is also possible to appreciate the placement of the monument as a positive aesthetic feature of the work. The presence of the Ashe monument activates its environment by reacting to it. It transforms the surrounding space by displacing the symbolic monopoly held over Monument Avenue.

There is, however, a more recent twist to the spatial narrative of Monument Avenue. Kehinde Wiley’s *Rumors of War* bears all the visual queues of a conventional Confederate monument—the patinated bronze, the enlarged figure of a man on horseback, the large stone pedestal—except for one crucial detail: the figure is African-American. Save for the hoodie, the high-tops, and the bundle of dreadlocks, *Rumors of War* looks and feels like it *belongs* on Monument Avenue. Indeed, Wiley, the celebrated African-American painter best known for his presidential portrait of Obama, modeled the statue after Monument Avenue’s J.E.B. Stuart monument, just one block east of the Lee monument. Though *Rumors of War* is Wiley’s debut sculptural work, it draws on the same principle of aesthetic appropriation that informs his paintings, in which hyper-realist figures of contemporary Black youths are juxtaposed against a painterly vocabulary of traditional, Eurocentric styles and motifs. Much the way Wiley recasts Napoleon on horseback as a young Black man on canvas, *Rumors of War* retrofits the aesthetic conventions of the Confederate monument with an alternative cultural narrative. In both cases, Wiley effectively exposes the myth of aesthetic autonomy: appropriation reveals the subtle but intractable socio-cultural roots of a seemingly pure aesthetic style. While the painting does this in the 2D space of its canvas, the *Rumors of War* does this in real space—through the aesthetic placement of the work. After its initial unveiling in New York’s Times Square, where placement ensures maximal public visibility (Wiley characterizes it as the “crossroads of human movement on a global scale”),⁷ the work is now permanently installed at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, a few blocks from the intersection of (the recently renamed) Arthur Ashe Boulevard and Monument Avenue. The Confederate monuments, though still present on Monument Avenue, are *displaced* by the presence of a counter-monument, which, in the artist’s own words, “allow[s] a moving and constantly changing America to be the context in which we see this young man riding a massive horse.”⁸ The placement of *Rumors of War* will, no doubt, profoundly transform (one might even say “enliven”) the perception of its surroundings. It would be ironic, then, to suggest that aesthetic appreciation of Wiley’s sculpture concerns its relation to space in general rather than the more complex dynamic that exists between the work and the specific, symbolically laden place of Monument Avenue. For in that case, aesthetic “autonomy” would imply a narrowly restrictive way of appreciating sculpture.

Notes

- 1 One otherwise sympathetic reviewer poignantly characterizes Martin’s style of discourse as a “poetic phenomenology, in which metaphors often take the place of explication” (Arnheim 1982; 435).
- 2 Ch. 11, “Sculpture and Place,” pp. 185–196.
- 3 According to Hegel, the creation of sculpture for the Greeks then is “itself a religious activity” and “for the people the sight of such works is not contemplation merely but something itself intrinsic to religion and life” (1979: 720).
- 4 The statue has been widely noted for its somewhat awkward composition. To many, the figure of Ashe, with both arms raised, holding a tennis racket in his left hand (the wrong hand) and in his right hand some books, seems to instill a sense of fear rather than inspiration in the multicultural assortment of children seated beneath him. The online magazine, *Mental Floss*, included the Arthur Ashe monument among its “10 Unintentionally Horrifying Statues of Famous People.” Incidentally, many have also objected to the fact that the sculpture was conceived, proposed, and executed by a white sculptor, Paul DiPasquale, known to Richmonders for his giant sculpture of a Native American perched atop the entrance to “The Diamond” baseball stadium, home of Richmond’s minor-league baseball team formerly known as “The Braves.”

- 5 The original proposal included plans to place the monument at the future site of an African-American Sports Hall of Fame. When that project failed to materialize, L. Douglas Wilder, Virginia's first African-American Governor, proposed that the statue of Ashe be placed on Monument Avenue. <https://acwm.org/blog/monument-avenue-avenue-all-people-how-arthur-ashe-came-monument-avenue>.
- 6 <https://acwm.org/blog/monument-avenue-avenue-all-people-how-arthur-ashe-came-monument-avenue>.
- 7 "Artist Kehinde Wiley's First Sculpture in Times Square Is a Powerful Rejoinder to Confederate-Era Monuments," *Artnet News*, October 3. Available at: <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/kehinde-wiley-times-square-2-1669708>.
- 8 Kennedy, M. (2019) "Artist Kehinde Wiley on What We Can Do With Offensive Art" *AP News*, October 2. Available at: <https://www.apnews.com/adca7d46ac204d2ab304c2439b2945d2>.

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45

TASTE FOR PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

Stephanie Ross

1 The Nature of Taste

A person's taste is revealed by the set of things she likes. While gustatory taste encompasses flavors and presumably much more that underlies and contributes to taste experience – smells, textures, cultural connections, moral consequences, taste more broadly construed extends to all aesthetic opportunities.¹ These include not only foodstuffs but also everyday items and experiences, the contents of the natural world, and of course those cultural products that count as art.² In this enlarged realm, taste can be defined as informed preference. Key questions include whether some sort of normativity applies – is there a standard of taste? – and if so, whether and how such taste is educable.

In the discussion that follows, I will be operating with a neo-Humean account of taste. In his 1757 essay “Of the Standard of Taste,” Hume argued that we can indeed make objective, evidence-based pronouncements about the arts.³ I believe his approach was revolutionary because he did not attempt to locate value in art by solving the age-old problem of defining beauty. Instead, he proposed an aesthetic version of Kant’s Copernican Revolution, asking not what makes for good art but rather what makes for competent judges or critics. Hume’s insight was that we can identify valuable art by channeling the judgments of true judges or ideal critics. In the Essay, he characterized these individuals in terms of five characteristics. They possess delicacy of taste, have extensive practice with the art form(s) about which they hold forth, can summon up enlightening comparisons to illuminate and justify their claims, are free from prejudice, and can employ reason or “good sense” to facilitate formal analysis as well as to judge artistic success in terms of apparent intentions and means-ends applications. As Hume sums things up,

Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty.

(p. 241)

While most of the traits Hume assigns to ideal critics can be fairly easily understood, delicacy of taste might require a bit of a gloss. I take it Hume has in mind some sort of sensory acuity – the modality would vary depending on the art in question – that allows its possessor to make fine discriminations.⁴ Thus, appreciators possessed of delicacy would be able to discern timbres and tonalities in a musical performance, brightness and color in a painting, weight and materiality in

a sculpture.⁵ Delicacy can be trained to some extent. Consider how aspiring oenophiles benefit from the elaborate vocabulary of wine tasting.⁶ Similar scaffolding aids our appreciation of various arts. But some degree of innate capacity must be in place for training to take hold. Color blind or tone deaf appreciators will be left behind. One final point. Delicacy seems foundational for the other traits Hume describes. This is especially clear with practice and comparison, each of which mandates thoughtful engagement with specific works. Humean practice involves returning repeatedly to a given work to better plumb its depths, while comparison recruits other works – different pieces by the same artist, similar pieces by other artists – to illuminate aspects of the work in question.

Hume's approach obviously calls on us to rehabilitate the notion of expertise. While some disparage the Essay claiming it merely entrenches elitism, those more in sympathy with the program acknowledge the effective contextualization Humean critics can provide for the works they consider. This flows directly from the abilities and experience Hume demands of them. I do think Hume's account must be amended in various ways in order to suit the present-day artworld. If we leave behind his sentiment-based theory which glosses aesthetic appreciation as the pinging of sentiments of approbation or disapprobation, then a competing account of proper appreciation can be put in place, one that recruits all our faculties. In particular, I believe two additional traits, emotional responsiveness and imaginative fluency, must be added to Hume's portrait of the ideal critic.⁷ It seems almost a cliché that art and emotion are closely intertwined. Many theorists ascribe emotion a role in the creation of art as well as in its reception.⁸ Much art also triggers trains of prescribed imagining in appreciators, and many theorists foreground this in their accounts of our interactions with works of art.⁹

In sum, proper appreciation is a multi-faceted affair. Perception, understanding, imagination, and emotion all have roles to play. Accordingly, I will follow writers like Noel Carroll and Peter Lamarque who endorse elaborate accounts of critical response/assessment. In his book *On Criticism*, Carroll claims that the primary task of criticism is reasoned evaluation.¹⁰ He goes on to acknowledge six components to critical practice that lead to and support a summary assessment, though there is no requirement that appreciators run through the entire list nor that they visit these stages in order.¹¹ In the section of his book *The Philosophy of Literature* devoted to critical practice, Peter Lamarque posits a similarly rich account of critical activity.¹² I believe his account can be extended beyond the art in question. We can of course be autodidacts, developing and enlarging our taste for art entirely on our own.¹³ But the Humean model suggests that considerable time and extensive study are required for this task. These are luxuries many of us can't afford. Therefore, in what follows I will assume that properly situated critics serve as our guides here. In contemplating the development of taste for painting and sculpture, I will emphasize the help that recourse to such critics can offer.

Before moving on to the special demands of the two arts in question, let me note a few further consequences of the view of critical practice I have set out. For a start, I believe the Humean model gets very little traction unless we hold some sort of intentionalist view about interpreting art. That is, putting any sort of normativity in place seems to require that there was something the artist was trying to do, and that our task as appreciators is to retrieve and assess that offering. There is some latitude here. I want to allow works to be multiply interpretable yet stop short of claiming anything goes. Next, I believe we must construe so-called Humean true judges or ideal critics as real beings here among us, not ideals we simply try to approximate. I suggest this result follows inevitably from the nature of Humean practice and comparison; these can only be achieved through the gradual accumulation of experience in real time.¹⁴ I will continue to refer to the individuals Hume singles out as “ideal critics,” though I have just denied that they are ideal in the metaphysical sense. Thirdly, the picture I am painting suggests that critics, as well as the amateurs they advise, develop their taste gradually. There is a process of maturation, and the resulting

developmental arc suggests that the notion of juvenilia applies not only to artists but to critics as well. They can refine and even vacate former opinions as their backlog of relevant experience grows. Finally, the problem of identifying the ideal critics among us is a real one. Hume himself notes “Though men of delicate taste be rare, they are easily to be distinguished in society, by the soundness of their understanding and the superiority of their faculties above the rest of mankind” (p. 243). While critical opinion is dispensed loudly and widely, many of those holding forth do not meet the expanded criteria we have developed from Hume’s Essay. Hume himself and philosophers following his lead rely on the Test of Time to patch this problem.¹⁵ Only those critics who properly admire the masterpieces of the past can guide us in appreciating present-day work. Elsewhere, I have acknowledged the problem of projection that undercuts this suggestion.¹⁶ Since those in western artworlds expect that new works will challenge and surpass those that preceded them, it is not clear that critics tuned in to the latter are reliable guides to the art of their time. While this is not the place to spell out a full answer to this problem, I would say that all of us can, by carefully sampling the critical voices around us, find bona fide critics whose taste we share. They are the individuals who can best guide us in shaping and enlarging our own taste.

I have been sketching a neo-Humean account of taste in order to suggest that the development of taste for a given art, school, genre, work, or artist often proceeds with the aid of critical advice. However one fills out this story, further questions arise concerning the routes along which any given individual’s taste can be expanded or altered. Given where we are now, in what direction can our current preferences and prejudices shift? Anna Ribeiro addresses this issue in her paper “Aesthetic Luck,” indicating the contingencies involved in the works and arts to which we are initially exposed.¹⁷ This of course affects the possible trajectory of our taste, as our backlog of aesthetic experience at any given time determines the comparison class against which newly introduced works are measured. Still there remains, at base, a deep mystery about just what things we can come to like and why our preferences evolve in this manner.¹⁸ I have found it helpful to consider an analogy with friendship here. The goal is to model changes in aesthetic taste on changes in our circle of friends – the formation of new friendships, the dimming or dropping of older ones.

Questions about what new friendships we can form turn on receptivity and opportunity. While some friends are tied to us by a web of mutual acquaintances, others are outliers, singletons in terms of our overall network. Sometimes current friends introduce us to new people to whom we take an immediate liking. Other individuals “grow on us” more slowly as aspects of their personality or awareness of their values and interests gradually emerge. People often remark on the ease of rekindling longstanding friendships. They speak of feeling as if no intervening time has passed. But we also form friendships that we later come to regret. We cool to some friends gradually, becoming more distant as shared interests wane, but friendships can also end precipitously if a particular act or perhaps a newly announced affiliation strikes us as unacceptable. I suggest that each of these possibilities has a counterpart in our relations to art. We come to admire some works because they are similar to others we already enjoy, but on occasion new and startling works can win us over immediately, an aesthetic version of the *coup de foudre* that enlivens the realm of romance. Our earlier aesthetic enthusiasms can wane as new artworld acquaintances come to the fore. I don’t know that we ever explicitly regret past affiliations here, but recent theoretical interest in linkage between the aesthetic and the ethical realms suggests some possible grounds for sudden changes in aesthetic taste. I hope the many tendrils of this analogy will motivate the discussion that follows of developing our taste for painting and sculpture.

2 Painting and Sculpture: Distinct Arts with Distinct Appreciative Challenges

In order to track the development of our taste for painting and sculpture, we must first set out the appreciative demands of each of these arts. There are significant differences that flow from the fact

that painting is essentially a two-dimensional art, while sculpture is by definition an art of three-dimensions. That is, paintings are ontologically characterized as a set of marks on a surface. The marks must be left by some from a specified set objects and materials – thus we distinguish paintings from charcoal sketches, pastels, pen, and ink drawings, and more as these count as different media. I was tempted to demand that the marks inhabit a plane surface. And most characteristically in the present day, we think of easel painting. However, in the past painters created frescoes on walls, domes, and other architectural surfaces and structures. And of course we acknowledge cave paintings from prehistoric times. Sol Lewitt's wall paintings return us to these origins in thought-provoking ways. The notion that the stark white marble statues we now associate with ancient Greece were once polychromed indicates another loci for marked and decorated surfaces. In the latter case, I would rule we have painted statues rather than a painting; I would not similarly dismiss, say, a trompe l'oeil vista on a wall in ancient Pompeii. Though not portable, this definitely strikes me as an instance of painting. In his book *The Art of Sculpture*, Herbert Read reminds us that sculpture, too, originated as architectural adornment. He proposes that the emancipation of this art proceeded first through the fashioning of small amulets, only later achieving the scale we associate with free-standing pieces.

Let me concede that there are borderline cases that complicate the distinction I am trying to draw. I have in mind examples of paintings that engage in flirtation with the third dimension. These include Anselm Kiefer's Burning Rods with its thick accretion of paint with embedded lead, straw, porcelain, and iron, Robert Raushchenberg's Bed, a painted bed, sheet, and quilt, and other of his so-called combines that affix objects of varying size to the painted surface of a canvas, Frank Stella's Indian Bird series comprising brightly painted pieces of aluminum that overlap and curl out into space. Nonetheless, we can still maintain an intuitive painting/sculpture distinction. If we take as our starting point a basic contrast between two- and three-dimensional works, then a question immediately arises about proper appreciation: how should we take in instances of each art? An Acquaintance Principle prevails for most aestheticians. It demands that for the plastic arts of painting and sculpture, we must be physically in the presence of works to understand, assess, and appreciate them. Thus, we must stand in front of paintings and we must be able to circumambulate at least some sculptures. The Acquaintance Principle rules out the possibility of vicarious encounters of various sorts – those facilitated by testimony or delivered through reproductive media. I will return to these possibilities in a moment. But for now, consider some further consequences of our initial statement of the dimensional difference separating these arts. The requirement that we have direct perceptual acquaintance with the works we come to know still leaves open a considerable degree of freedom. I will turn my attention to painting then see how many of the conclusions drawn for this art hold for sculpture as well.

How close should – must – I stand to a painting? For each work, is there some ideal or optimal viewing point? Surely this will vary with the scale of the work, the visual acuity of the viewer, the circumstances of display. Most paintings are such that viewers can position themselves to take them in a single glance but then zoom in to savor certain segments, examine specific details. Interestingly, Michael Baxandall takes up this point early in his book *Patterns of Intention*. He notes that

When addressing a picture, we get a first general sense of the whole very quickly, but this is imprecise, and, since vision is clearest and sharpest on the foveal axis of vision, we move the eye over the picture, scanning it with a succession of rapid visual fixations.¹⁹

Cognitive scientists contributing to the field of neuroaesthetics could certainly specify some of the neural goings-on that underpin such scanning activity. I don't want to get mired in details at the sub-personal level. But I do think that toggling between overall and zoomed-in views is an

important part of our appreciative repertoire, especially for representational painting. Consider William Frith's *Paddington Station*, a work disparaged as otiose by Clive Bell precisely because it is representational and in fact highly anecdotal. Those of us encountering this piece might first acknowledge the overall setting, an immense barrel-vaulted space replete with incident, then step forward to interpret the many human dramas unfolding. Individual viewers' patterns of attention might vary depending on which of the many foreground anecdotes they found most appealing. Bell grudgingly admitted the work had several nicely painted passages but wouldn't extend/allow it the honorific "work of art."

Some paintings – I have in mind anamorphic works that reveal portions of their content only when viewed from extreme oblique angles – do come with specific station points that are key to proper appreciation. Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* might be one of the most frequently cited examples. Such guidance could prove helpful in other cases as well. Marks on the floor of the Sistine Chapel or interiors similarly adorned with *trompe l'oeil* features or illusionistic scenes overhead could show visitors where to stand to best take in those depictions. Arthur Danto cites the example of a marble disk on the floor of St. Ignatius in Rome indicating the proper place from which to view Andrea Pozzo's fresco dramatizing the apotheosis of the saint.²⁰ But advice of this sort is not always called for. Who is to say where I should plant myself to view one of Monet's huge Waterlily canvases? In fact one of the joys with such pieces is to move around and vary the taking. Viewed from far off, the images on these immense canvases do coalesce into floating pads and blooms. From closer up, one can admire portions of the canvas as abstract presentations. Even with wholly abstract works, for example, paintings by Franz Kline, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Morris Louis, viewers are likely to engage in a counterpoint between all-over summary viewing and close-up attention to detail, though of course detail here would involve notice of formal patterns, color relationships, brushstrokes, and other textures rather than the interpretation of representational content.

Richard Wollheim theorizes the duality under discussion here in the section of his book *Painting as an Art* that introduces the notion of twofoldness. Starting from the assumption that painters create "in order to produce a certain experience in the mind of the spectator," Wollheim focuses in on the characteristics of this experience. He insists that it must track the intention of the artist – the "desires, thoughts, beliefs, experiences, emotions commitments that motivate the artist to paint as he does" – and that this experience must come about through looking at the picture (p. 44). This is the Acquaintance Principle at work. After specifying three key perceptual activities that spectators recruit in looking at paintings – seeing-in, expressive perception, and the capacity for visual delight – Wollheim posits a pictorial feature he calls twofoldness (pp. 45,46). He defines this as an ability to simultaneously see a picture as marks on a surface AND as the representation of something standing in front of or receding behind that surface (p. 46). So for Wollheim, in viewing a Cezanne still life I both see red, green, brown, and yellow patterns on a canvas *and* a bowl of apples sitting on a table. Wollheim insists that these are inseparable aspects of a single experience, not separate simultaneous experiences nor two separate alternating experiences (46). This is a metaphysical claim about the components of our viewing experience. Presumably, it can only be confirmed through query and introspective report. I am myself inclined to think we can toggle back and forth between the two aspects at will, somewhat as we can choose which creature to foreground in Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit figure. Our recent discussion of choosing different station points for viewing a painting hung on a museum wall certainly suggests that we can choose viewing conditions that suppress one of the components of Wollheimian twofoldness while enhancing the other. I want to insist on this willful aspect of foregrounding as an aspect of our visual experience and not worry about whether it remains inextricably linked to the companion aspect that Wollheim posits. Overall, I think our visual experience of pondering a painting, an experience we can isolate and examine via introspection, remains the same whatever the

underlying metaphysics. That is, whether we're attending to one of two inseparable aspects of a single experience or toggling between components that can in fact be pried apart, what we note and attend to seems the same. More important for our purposes, taste for painting – for a particular work, for the oeuvre of a particular artist, for the achievements of a particular school – can be enhanced when critics guide us by pointing out what can be savored in either or both of these two aspects. “Note how the receding diagonals of the road lead your eye into the depths of the landscape.” “Consider how the pronounced brushwork reinforces the overwrought emotional tone of the scene.” “Attend to the black mass in the foreground that announces itself immediately,” ... Through comments like these, discerning critics can school our eyes both to qualities of the marks on the surface and to aspects of the scene (or formal arrangement, for abstract works) that they depict. In doing so, they can help us understand what the artist was attempting, what he or she has in fact accomplished, and how this relates to the work of others, whether drawing on predecessors and contemporaries or influencing later artists.

Does twofoldness apply as well to sculpture? Certainly, we can focus on the materials from which a work has been carved or assembled as well as to the three-dimensional volume it occupies. That is, we can notice what Aristotle would label the work's material and formal causes – the matter or medium from which a work was created as well as the patterns it traces in three-dimensional space. This would seem to be the counterpart to attending to the marks on the surface of a canvas as marks rather than as signifiers. We can then also consider how a given sculpture “reads” as a human torso, a rearing horse, etc. Sometimes these two factors intertwine in our appreciation. Peter Kivy, in *Sound and Semblance*, noted that in assessing sculpture we should take into account the recalcitrance of the medium.²¹ That an artist can cause cold marble to represent warm flesh is remarkable. That a given portrait bust by Bernini can present to us warm flesh, intricate lace, wiry hair, limpid eyes, stiff fabric, all rendered from one and the same block of marble, is truly wondrous. How far should we attempt to plumb the two-dimensional marks on a surface or the three-dimensional patterns of volume and void presented by specific paintings and sculptures? Knowing that a certain blue pigment was far more costly in Renaissance times than paint of other hues makes its choice for the Virgin's robe significant. I suspect it does not matter whether the damaged auto body parts from which John Chamberlain assembles his sculptures come from a Ford Fiesta, a Jaguar XKE, or a Dodge Ram Pickup. More immediate aesthetic properties – size, shape, surface finish, and the like – are surely more important here.

The question of proper station point does, however, become more vexed with the art of sculpture. Figures contained within an architectural setting – for example, lining the portals at Chartres or inhabiting a niche in St. Peter's – look out at us and invite a gaze from directly in front of them. With works created and exhibited in the round – free-standing pieces displayed so that appreciators can fully circle them – it isn't clear whether the view from some one spot has priority. Encountering, say, a standing nude, it might matter whether the figure is presented in a full frontal posture – consider hieratical Egyptian pharaohs or archaic Greek nudes – or is instead more sinuous, inscribing a Gothic S curve or oriented in one direction while simultaneously looking away from that implied line of travel. In such cases, are we to align ourselves with the orientation of the body or the direction of the gaze? There is surely not one correct answer here. For example, a work as expressive and dramatic as Bernini's Ecstasy of St. Teresa in Rome invites viewers to position themselves orthogonal to the line uniting swooning nun and visiting angel. This suggestion is reinforced by the flanking columns and backing golden rays, which with other architectural details form the containing shrine or aedicule. Contrast what is involved in savoring one of Henry Moore's more staid and highly abstract reclining nudes. There does not seem to be a privileged station point for taking in these figures. Instead, they generate a symphony of changing configurations when circumambulating viewers register positive and negative space, projecting and receding masses, pierced and intact volumes, occluded and foregrounded features.²² While the sculptures comprising David

Smith's Cubi series are not explicitly figural, I think they too invite us to circle and take them in from all angles. Especially when exhibited outside at the artist's Bolton Landing studio, such perusal would guarantee that these spare objects were read against an ever-changing background scene.

Scale is certainly relevant here as well. Peering at a tiny ivory diptych that tells an entire Biblical tale is a quite different experience than encountering a sculpture large enough to enter. Richard Serra's *Joe*, for example, is a massive COR-TEN steel spiral, a Nautilus-like chamber that visitors can penetrate. An online article by the Regional Arts Council introducing St. Louisans to this piece includes a quote from Serra about the experience of his work: "The perceptual fragmentation, the multiplicity of views, the discontinuity in the process of viewing contribute to the fact that the installation cannot be reduced to one attainable image."²³ This certainly coheres with the claims made above about taking in one of Henry Moore's many Reclining Nudes. Note that Serra's infamous piece *Tilted Arc* generated controversy in part because it broke up the surrounding space that inhabitants of the neighboring federal buildings were accustomed to traverse and occupy. *Tilted Arc* seems a case where critical commentary explaining the notion of site specificity and detailing the analogy between the impediments provided by large-scale sculpture and overweening government might have at least earned the work some grudging admiration, though its intrusion into the public space would have continued unabated.

Given the suggestions made above about the proper appreciation of both painting and sculpture, return for a moment to the Acquaintance Principle. Are second-hand encounters – through photographs, videos, descriptions, testimony from acquaintances, friends, or experts – adequate substitutes for being face-to-face with the real thing? Given the difference in dimensionality, a photograph of a painting might seem a more reasonable proxy than a photograph of a sculpture, especially if the photo is full frontal, in good light, with high-quality camera and lens.²⁴ A photograph of a sculpture seems less satisfactory as the photographer must privilege one station point from the 360 degree circuit around the work. As noted above, some figural pieces are oriented in a way that invites viewing from one specific spot, but this is hardly the norm. And let me note in passing that the caveats proposed here for experiencing sculpture hold true in spades for the case of architecture, an art whose instances are not only meant to be entered but are often also meant to be used for specific functions. Obviously, compromise is necessary. Generations of art history students have been introduced to masterpieces of painting, sculpture, and architecture on the basis of photographs, slides, videos, and other such second-hand reproductive media. Never having been to Italy, I know of countless of these works only second hand. Art history classes, critical writing, aesthetics presentations, and more have contextualized many of them for me, setting out their place in the history of Western art. Still, were I ever lucky enough to finally make a pilgrimage and meet some of these icons face to face, I might well decide "Admittedly great, but not for me." That is, individual taste is not entirely lock-step and uniform. Within the canon of admired works, we will inevitably each pick and choose depending on the past experiences that have shaped our taste today.²⁵ Just as life experiences can add to the set of works we come to value, we also cull this set as our taste evolves. I may slowly wean myself from my attachment to works I currently like. In his short memoir in the *New Yorker* as he confronts a terminal cancer diagnosis, that magazine's art critic Peter Schjeldahl cites his method for attempting to alter his current taste. Faced with works to assess, he notes "I retain, but suspend, my personal taste to deal with the panoply of the art I see. I have a trick for doing justice to an uncongenial work: 'What would I like about this if I liked it?' I may come around; I may not. Failing that, I wonder, What must the people who like this be like? Anthropology."²⁶ To me, Schjeldahl's closing declaration ("Anthropology") indicates that at some point, variation in taste must be explained by considering aspects of appreciators rather than traits of the works they take in.

Before turning to some specific cases, I would like to take up one additional factor in the appreciation of painting and sculpture, namely, the trajectory some theorists posit in setting out

the history of each art. In his piece “The End of Art,” Arthur Danto proposed a Hegelian overview according to which the history of Western art proceeded with artists becoming ever more accomplished in capturing the realistic appearance of the external world. According to Danto, artists who aspired to duplicate the experience of perceiving actual objects sought to substitute direct perception for “mediating inferences to perceptual reality facilitated by cues” (p. 10). Thus, he traces the evolution from symbolic and hierarchical representations to those guided by the rules of linear perspective. Since even the Photorealist painters of the 60s and 70s were unable to capture one aspect of the real world – movement – Danto expands his historical account to include the art of film, noting rightly that the very first films captured subjects like surging crowds, approaching trains, tree limbs moving in the wind (p. 18). Danto plays with the idea that moving holograms might be the next step in this sequence, as this would eliminate problems of parallax leaving palpability as the final frontier. In the end, Danto rejects both this account of art’s history and another centered on expressiveness to instead focus on a more strictly Hegelian narrative that sees art turning into philosophy. This allows the move to abstract and conceptual art to count as a continuation, in fact culmination, of the sequence already proposed. Yet interestingly, in presenting the first alternative, the one that charts the history of art as a tale of representational progress, Danto notes that this linear or progressive model “finds its best examples in painting and sculpture” (pp. 18. 20).

Danto switches to a *Bildungsroman* trope to characterize the favored view with which he closes, but it says something important about the two arts under consideration here that they so ably fit the progressive narrative. In another of his works, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Danto voices the worry that art reaches an end when its products are indistinguishable from the real things it seeks to represent. That is, in capturing them perfectly, art works are no longer simulacra but simply additions to the collection of mere real things. Representational paintings realistic enough to truly deceive us – the literal meaning of that phrase “trompe l’oeil” – are endpoints in a progression when the art of painting is under consideration. Turning to sculpture, I was tempted to say there is no genre equivalent to the still life enshrined in Western painting. But Danto’s entire philosophical exploration was prompted by musings on such Pop Art icons as Andy Warhol’s Brillo Boxes and Campbell Soup cans. Here are artworks nearly indistinguishable from the real-world counterparts their creator was modeling. Claes Oldenburg’s inflated hamburgers, electric plugs, and more perhaps serve as ironic insertions into this portion of sculpture’s history. And some sculptors who take as their subject the human body can count as participants in this progression. Consider the work of George Segal and Duane Hanson, both of whom I believe created hyper-realistic figures by wrapping actual people in plaster, and Ron Mueck, whose resin-based figures are disturbingly lifelike. As Danto noted about hyperrealistic paintings, Mueck’s figures lack only the capacity for movement. And perhaps some basic bodily warmth!

I have been riffing on Danto’s idea that both painting and sculpture reach a dead-end of sorts when artists become so capable of reproducing the appearance of reality that their creations simply add to the stock of mere real things. How can art progress beyond this point? Building on Robert Rauschenberg’s posit of a gap between art and life, Danto suggests that artists turn their attention to this interval.²⁷ In doing so, they become practitioners of philosophy. Thus, for Danto, contrasting a Brillo Box by Andy Warhol with its counterpart on a supermarket shelf tells us much about art. And abstract and conceptual works that prompt challenges from scoffing viewers – “I could do that!” “A child could do that!” “A monkey could do that!” – because they appear to lack artistry are compellingly glossed by critics who explain how they effectively examine the resources and limitations of various arts: flatness and color in painting, volume and presence in sculpture, and so on.

The Hegelian account of the history of Western art that Danto sets out in his essay can certainly be contested. But I think his narrative flags in a compelling way some of the sticking points

that appreciators encounter in trying to develop a taste for painting and sculpture. In addition to preferences for style and subject, the philosophical questions underlying art's history become urgent in our era. If the discussion to date has succeeded in highlighting some important attributes of Western painting and sculpture as these arts have evolved to the present time as well as some indication of what we should notice about particular works – the features we should take in and the background information we should seek out to properly appreciate them – this goes some way to showing how taste for these two plastic arts can be formed. In the closing section, I will set out a few hard cases and ask how appreciative progress might be achieved.

3 Some Test Cases

As announced at the outset, I have placed my inquiry about appreciating painting and sculpture in a Humean frame. In asking how taste for these arts can be enhanced, I assume that the most effective answer incorporates guidance from critics whose taste we share.²⁸ With that idea in place, let me consider some specific challenges that arise for the arts we are following. I will start with the art of painting. Inevitably, we will all form different preferences from the vast array that makes up the history of this art in the West. Some of us will be drawn to portraits, others to landscapes, some will prefer history paintings, others still lives. While these differences flow in part from our different experiences in the real world and the world of art, there is also an aspect of deep mystery about the determination of preference. In all likelihood countless past associations we can no longer retrieve play a role. That I prefer a wooded landscape with a foreground path receding into a forest of oaks to a seascape with frigates plying churning waves may have much to do with where I grew up and the sorts of outdoor adventures I most enjoy. Putting aside such idiosyncratic and impenetrable factors, there may also be preferences or prejudices we develop in response to what are clearly art-historical and/or aesthetic factors.

Humean critics are specially positioned to address these last issues. Their expertise flows from the accumulation of knowledge flagged by Hume's practice and comparison criteria as well as the sensory acuity that travels with their delicacy of taste. When critics draw on their art-historical knowledge to situate works, flag salient properties, propose interpretations, and more, they further our understanding and appreciation. Thus, Giotto's earth-bound figures might seem awkward and uncouth until his paintings are situated in the ongoing development of linear perspective. The old envelopes and dead game painted by William Harnett might seem without aesthetic interest until the goals of 19th-century *trompe l'oeil* art are explained. The frieze-like arrays in Poussin's many historical and mythological paintings might seem both interchangeable and impenetrable until the component figures and tales are glossed. Of course some viewers might find themselves drawn to Poussin's classical, cool Apollonian style, while others will be more moved by the electric manner in which, say, Delacroix treats historical subjects. While I don't think these sorts of deep-seated preferences can be overcome, critical comment can at least position appreciators to grant the objective importance of works, artists, movements that they do not find personally moving or rewarding.

Turning to contemporary works, greater effort may be required to create effective matchmaking. Appreciators fond of bucolic landscapes might not warm to Cezanne's many renditions of Mt. Sainte Victoire or to Monet's documentation of squat haystacks in different times of the day and seasons of the year. Explanations of the stylistic choices and innovations of these two artists might well earn these works greater admiration. Again, the distortions and anatomical inaccuracies of Picasso's *Demoiselles* might seem off-putting. A critic explaining some of the goals behind this stage of the cubist enterprise might rehabilitate the canvas for some. The idea of simultaneously presenting incompatible viewpoints on a specific figure shows how cubists were challenging some of the limitations ascribed to painting since the time of Plato's screed in the *Republic*. Comparisons

with African masks – a form of contextualizing that took a considerable hit during the infamous Primitivism exhibit at New York’s Museum of Modern Art in 1984 – attempts to establish a greater cultural resonance for this work.²⁹ One friend has suggested that *Les Demoiselles* is inviting on its own terms; its arresting shapes and colors and clear figural content draw in viewers even though they remain aware of the inaccuracies and distortions when this painting is evaluated in terms of traditional linear perspective as well as its violation of ensconced (and perhaps objectionable) Western canons of beauty. Perhaps the severe analytical cubist canvases of bottles, guitars, and the like that Picasso, Georges Braques, and Juan Gris painted together in the early 1900s present a tougher case for generating a welcoming embrace. It is hard to read anything in these works, their depiction of volume and depth is hardly standard. Unless one is especially fond of a subdued palette of brown and green, the surface liveliness is not compelling. And it can be disconcerting not being able to find tags of individual style that might separate and individuate the productions of these three different artists. Again, contextualizing these paintings by chronicling the practices and goals of analytical cubism can secure their place in the history of contemporary western painting. And importantly here as elsewhere, there should be room for appreciators to grudgingly acknowledge the importance of a given work while simultaneously noting “not for me.”

Willem De Kooning’s *Woman* series represents another challenging example of figurative yet off-putting art. While the bared teeth and evident breasts flag these as paintings of female figures, they seem fierce and aggressive. Moreover, the prevalence of these traits across the series suggests that the painter himself did not hold women in great esteem.³⁰ If so, then what Tamar Gandler calls imaginative resistance – our unwillingness to entertain or endorse morally objectionable content – may block admiration of these works. Again, knowing critics can situate these paintings in a historical sequence, showing their affinity to figures in Max Beckman’s expressionist canvases as well as to entirely abstract pieces that exhibit similar surface texture. A different sort of resistance comes into play when novices are asked to admire abstract work so seemingly simple as to entirely lack artistry. Kasimir Malevitch’s black on black canvases, allegedly the first monochromatic pieces in the Western canon, are a case in point. Josef Albers *Hommage to the Square* series might seem equally bankrupt, though their execution surely calls for draughtsman-like precision. Comparing and contrasting them with Monet’s returns to country haystacks or to Rouen Cathedral might at least secure them a place in a narrative presenting the evolution of western art. The fact that each artist returned repeatedly to a theme or format encourages us to search more carefully for the differences separating each canvas in the series. I do suspect that our preferences for abstract art, once we acknowledge the trajectory that leads to its emergence, are prompted in part by non-rational and idiosyncratic factors – What palette do I prefer? Do I respond more to angular or to curvilinear forms? To balanced or to asymmetric compositions? To spare or to busy canvases? – as by art-historical details that a critic can fill in.

The last point to make in this brief traversal of the development of taste for painting is the reminder that this process involves shedding as well as acquiring enthusiasms. Weaning an appreciator from her taste for Thomas Kinkade might do as much to advance her taste as putting in place an interest in landscapes by van Ruisdael, Constable, or Cezanne. I am all for the role art plays in promoting fantasy and escapism; artworks allow us to explore imaginary worlds and these can constitute a welcome antidote to the actual realm we inhabit. Still, criticisms can mount of Kinkade’s repetitive and overly sentimentalized nighttime scenes with warm light emanating from the windows of pristine yet retro stone cottages. In his paper “Personal Taste and Artistic Worth,” Jerrold Levinson notes that even ideal critics need down time from the set of masterpieces they anoint, yet they never lose touch, while visiting lesser works, of the overall ranking where these find their place.

Many of the examples I have offered of sticking points in the appreciation of painting have parallels with the appreciation of sculpture. Thus, admirers of exemplars from classical Greece – finely delineated, anatomically accurate nudes carved from smooth white marble – might find it

hard to come to terms with the quite different aesthetic properties of Rodin's figural works. His hulking Balzac seems looming, unfinished, perhaps even threatening. The changes in treatment and in scale need to be explained. Though here again, how appreciators respond might in the end turn on how they align on some sort of Apollonian/Dionysian continuum we can construct by gathering sets of opposing aesthetic qualities. Note that a further capacity – the ability to appreciate figural sculptures with missing parts! – is required for admiration of ancient Greek sculpture. The Venus de Milo is armless, the Winged Victory of Samothrace lacks arms, feet, and head, yet they are universally revered and admired. And in fact there is a famous puzzle case in aesthetics that asks how a classical marble statue, destroyed by vandals, is best exhibited: as a set of shards lying on the floor (they are, after all, what remains of the original); as a total reconstruction of the original piece (in order to regain for viewers intended aesthetic experience); or as a restoration using colored fill to mark places where contemporary additions replace now-lost original material (allowing appreciators to distinguish what came from the hand of the original artist).³¹ As with most thought experiments in philosophy, the point is less to highlight one correct answer than to point out the presuppositions and values underlying each approach.

Clearly, developing a taste for sculpture requires accommodating differences of scale and style. Compare and contrast female figures by Alberto Giacometti, Gaston Lachaise, and Henry Moore, who overlapped during the first third of the 20th century. Giacometti's women are attenuated, Lachaise's inflated, Moore's "disassembled." The work of each artist can be contextualized by detailing his materials, methods, aims, and influences. Such information can be provided by an art history or a more narrow history of sculpture course, but it is also something properly situated critics can set out. Similar caches of information can encourage appreciation of abstract works, whether the sleek and simple shapes of Jean Arp and. Isamu Noguchi, the more complex assemblages of David Smith and John Chamberlain, or the intricate creations of Louise Nevelson. While the labor that went into each of these artist's pieces remains clear, there are certainly some sculptors who elicit worries about fraudulence and absent artistry. Duchamp's readymades go one step further than Warhol's soup cans and Brillo Boxes, as Duchamp did not deign to fashion a simulacrum but simply plucked an object from the everyday world for display. By contrast, Donald Judd and Carl Andre might seem to be artists who do indeed make or install things yet generate totalities with no artistic worth. Can a taste for these artists be inculcated?

Since Duchamp's Fountain may be the sculptural piece most discussed by contemporary aestheticians, I will allow that his "prank" raises real and substantial questions about the nature of art. He can be seen as following Danto's prediction that art will at some point transmogrify into its own philosophy. Validating the work of Judd and Andre might take some additional effort. Not only can Judd's repeated boxes be assimilated to some of the work painters have produced in series (recall the previous discussion of Monet's haystacks and cathedrals and of Albers' squares), but the installations of both artists can call attention to a factor overlooked in my discussion of sculpture to date, namely, the ways sculptural pieces can inhabit and alter an exhibition space. In his book *The Sculptural Imagination*, Alex Potts comments on a photo of a famous installation Robert Morris created for New York's Green Gallery in 1964. The component pieces effectively command and divide the containing gallery. Potts remarks that the installation "... transforms the gallery space into a set on which a viewer/performer is being invited to carry out his or her routine."³² Similar effects can be ascribed to works by Judd and Andre. In inviting visitors to come walk on the grid of squares he positions in a room, Andre effects connections between the component pieces, the surrounding space, and the bodily postures and movements of those who enter. Their kinaesthetic assessment of the situation inevitably includes an acknowledgment of and resistance to the underlying plates. Thus, the space they share with the installation is inevitably altered by the inclusions orchestrated by the artist. A limiting case of such installation art might be the lightworks Robert Irwin, James Turrell, and others have created by altering spaces with scrims and directed artificial

and natural light.³³ If these too count as sculpture, they are works created not from any physical material but from manipulated beams of light. Coming to understand the wider reach and ambitions of these works might win over appreciators first inclined to scorn them.

Again paralleling our treatment of painting, the inculcation of taste for sculpture can also involve persuading appreciators to forsake less worthy works and artists. There is a genre of highly sentimentalized bronze sculptures of children engaged in activities that harken back to idyllic and retro notions of childhood in America – young boys with fishing poles and frogs, young girls with kittens, and more. They epitomize the themes that Anthony Savile sets out in his article arguing that sentimentality is always a flaw in works of art.³⁴ He singles out children and domestic pets, the prime subjects of the works just cited, as common objects of sentimentalization. The work of Jeff Koons is perhaps more controversial. Critics are divided on its merits. Koons definitely trades in subjects that fall within Savile's net. Consider his massive balloon sculpture dogs and rabbits, his topiary (Chia pet?) terrier, his porcelain renditions of Michael Jackson and his monkey Bubbles. Koons has certainly been rewarded by the art market, as his balloon sculptures have repeatedly broken the records for price paid for work by a living artist, first when a balloon dog sold for \$58.4 million, then when a balloon rabbit topped that at \$91.9 million. One source says that

Koons' crucial point is to reject any hidden meaning in his artwork. ... He tries to reach a widest possible audience by using familiar objects with sentimental value. He considers it his mission to make the viewer confident of his own judgment and taste.³⁵

The critic Robert Hughes conveys his less sanguine assessment through this vivid put-down: "He has the slimy assurance, the gross patter about transcendence through art, of a blow-dried Baptist selling swamp acres in Florida."³⁶

It may well be that we must await the test of time before arriving at a consensus view about the merits of Koons' work. I hope that the examples offered in this section indicate the bewilderment and on occasion the hostility that can arise when we encounter new works of art. Developing taste requires expanding the set of works we understand and admire, and this can require effort and aid. Painting and sculpture are pre-eminent arts in the West, and nurturing our appreciation for exemplars of these arts is surely one way to enhance life.

Notes

- 1 For a theory of gustatory taste that proposes six distinct components, see Carolyn Korsmeyer's book *Making Sense of Taste*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1999). The componential analysis, conducted in the section on the phenomenology of taste in Chapter Three ("The Science of Taste") is summarized on p. 98.
- 2 Allen Carlson has published a series of papers addressing the aesthetic appreciation of the natural world; Yurikio Saito and Thomas Leddy are two authors who have spearheaded the exploration of everyday aesthetics. See for example Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, (Buffalo, NY: Broadview Press, 2012)
- 3 David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *Essays Moral Political and Literal* ed. Eugene F. Miller, (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Classics, 1987). In what follows, I will for convenience refer to this piece simply as the Essay, and additional references to the work will be cited parenthetically in the text.
- 4 It is acknowledged to be the perfection of every sense or faculty, to perceive with exactness its most minute objects and allow nothing to escape its notice and observation. p. 236.
- 5 It is not so clear what traits delicacy discerns in literary works. I consider literature an outlier among the arts as understanding and appreciation here are not keyed to immediate sensory takings – the look of letters on a page, the sounds of speech.
- 6 Hume famously illustrates this capacity by recounting an episode from Don Quixote in which Sancho Panza's kinsmen dispute the flavors and value of a hogshead of wine.

- 7 I first made this case in my paper “Humean Critics: Real or Ideal?” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 48:1 (2008), pp. 20–28.
- 8 For example, R. G. Collingwood and Leo Tolstoy offer theories that accord emotion a central role in the creation of art, while Suzanne Langer, Noel Carroll, Jesse Prinz and Jenefer Robinson theorize various ways in which works express emotions that are not necessarily the artist’s own.
- 9 .See for example Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), Emily Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), Kathleen Stock, *Only Imagine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- 10 “For me, the critic is a person who engages in the reasoned evaluation of artworks.” A footnote appended to this sentence adds: “This is the primary task of criticism on my view.” Noel Carroll, *On Criticism*, (New York: Routledge), 2009, p. 7.
- 11 “Criticism comprises many activities, including: the description, classification, contextualization, elucidation, interpretation, and analysis of artworks.” Carroll, *On Criticism*, p. 13.
- 12 In a chapter entitled Critical Practice, Lamarque focuses the activities of formal analysis, explication, elucidation, and interpretation. See *The Philosophy of Literature*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 132–173.
- 13 Noel Carroll closes his paper “Hume’s Standard of Taste” with the suggestion that recourse to Humean ideal critics is otiose since each of us can cultivate this role on our own. But I believe the practical exigencies of accumulating the requisite practice and comparison, not to mention the initial requirement of extreme delicacy, rule this out as a truly practical alternative. See Noel Carroll, “Hume’s Standard of Taste,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43:2 (1984), pp. 181–194.
- 14 See my paper “Humean Critics: Real or Ideal?” for a fuller setting out of this argument.
- 15 Consider Hume’s declaration that “The same Homer, who pleased at Athens and Rome two thousand years ago, is still admired at Paris and at London. All the changes of climate, government, religion, and language, have not been able to obscure his glory” (p. 233). In a pair of papers on Hume’s Essay, Jerryold Levinson elaborates on the test of time by proposing three dimensions constituting masterpieces’ appeal: they are durable, wide, and broad. See Jerryold Levinson, “Hume’s Standard of Taste: The Real Problem,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 60:3 (2002), p. 233. This proposal is reiterated in his subsequent paper “Artistic Worth and Personal Taste,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 68:3 (2010), pp. 225–233.
- 16 See Chapter Four, “Identifying Critics,” of *Two Thumbs Up: How Critics Aid Appreciation*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2020).
- 17 Anna Christina Ribeiro, “Aesthetic Luck,” *The Monist* 101:1 (2018) *The Monist* 101: 1 pp. 99–113.
- 18 Some of this may be due to past associations that we cannot now summon up or consciously retrieve. Kevin Melchionne plumbs some of these mysteries in his paper “On the Old Saw ‘I know nothing about art but I know what I like’” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 68:2 (2010), pp. 131–141.
- 19 Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 3.
- 20 Arthur Danto, “The End of Art” in *The Death of Art* ed. Berel Lang, (New York: Haven Publications, 1984), p. 15.
- 21 Peter Kivy, *Sound and Semblance: Reflections on Musical Representation*, (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 96–98.
- 22 See, for example, Rudolph Arnheim, “The Holes of Henry Moore: On the Function of Space in Sculpture,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 7:1 (1948), pp. 29–38.
- 23 <https://racstl.org/public-art/joe/>.
- 24 I believe that for a time, museums were creating reproductions by using immense polaroid cameras whose negatives were the size of the paintings whose appearance they sought to capture.
- 25 Again, see Anna Ribeiro’s paper “Aesthetic Luck” setting out some of these contingencies and their expected effects. Jerryold Levinson makes clear how the taste even of Humean ideal critics will vary, individuals forming ties to different exemplars in the equivalence class of worthy works. See his two papers on Hume’s Essay, “Hume’s Standard of Taste: The Real Problem”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 60:3 (2002), pp. 227–238 and “Artistic Worth and Personal Taste”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 68:3 (2010), pp. 225–233.
- 26 Peter Scheldahl, “77 Sunset Me,” *New Yorker*, Dec. 23, 2019, p. 40.
- 27 “The American artist Rauschenberg once said, ‘Painting relates to both art and life (I try to work in that gap between the two).’ Perhaps it is not altogether an accident that Rauschenberg should once have exhibited a bed, as though, like philosophy according to Whitehead, art were but a collection of footnotes to Plato...” *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 12.

- 28 I owe this formulation – of following not just any critic but one whose taste we find congenial – to Alan Goldman. See *Aesthetic Value*, (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995).
- 29 See Thomas McEvilley's ringing criticism of that exhibit in his 1984 ArtForum piece "Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief." <https://www.artforum.com/print/previews/198409/on-doctor-lawyer-indian-chief-primitivism-in-20th-century-art-at-the-museum-of-modern-art-in-1984-35322>. One select summary quote: "In depressing starkness, 'Primitivism' lays bare the way our cultural institutions relate to foreign cultures, revealing it as an ethnocentric subjectivity inflated to coopt such cultures and their objects into itself."
- 30 Though de Kooning insisted that his real subject, here and elsewhere, was "space and the figure ground relation"! <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/de-kooning-willem/>.
- 31 I believe the credit for coming up with this puzzle goes to Mark Sagoff.
- 32 Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*, (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 240–241.
- 33 Along with other artists, Irwin and Turrell were members of the Light and Space movement that originated in southern California in the 1960s. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light_and_Space.
- 34 "... sentimentality is always open to criticism. There is always something wrong with it. ... There are no situations the proper perception of which demands a sentimental response." Anthony Savile, "Sentimentality" in *Arguing About Art*, ed. Alex Neil and Aaron Ridley, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1995), p. 223. In essence, Savile's complaint is that sentimentality is always false. He proposes that "the sentimentalist achieves a certain gratification by false-colouring an object in his thoughts" (p.225).
- 35 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeff_Koons.
- 36 Robert Hughes, "Showbiz and the Art World," *The Guardian*, 30 June 2004.



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