

A Puzzle regarding Danto's Definition of Art

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1. Introduction to Arthur Danto

Arthur Danto (1924-2013), along with Nelson Goodman and Richard Wollheim, is one of the most famous scholars in the field of Anglo-American aesthetics of the second half of the 20th century. Before his academic interest turned toward the philosophy of art, he had been already famous in the fields of epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophies of action and history. His writings are insightful, brilliant, and most of all witty. He is an essentialist, even though he emphasizes the history and context of art theory. He is famous for his method of perceptual indiscernibility in the philosophy of art, and for his argument of the end of art in the philosophy of art history. In this paper, I will examine his argument of an essentialist definition of art and, then, try to resolve the apparent tension between his essentialist philosophy of art and his theory of art history. Finally, I will explain why there is a puzzle regarding his definition of art.

2. Preliminary Remarks on the Problem of Definition

To understand the significance of Danto's philosophy of art in terms of his definition of art, it will be helpful to see briefly how the problem of the definition of art has evolved in the second half of 20th-century Analytic Aesthetics.

1) The traditional definition of "art": Necessary and Sufficient Conditions

One of the major problems of aesthetics has been the definition of "art." Every traditional theory has tried to find the characteristics which all artworks have in common and which things other than artworks do not have. To find these characteristics, i.e. to find the essence of art, is to find its necessary and sufficient conditions. A necessary condition for being an X is a characteristic which any object must have in order to be an X. A sufficient condition of an X is a characteristic which, if an object has that characteristic, makes it an X. For example, consider Aristotle's definition of man as a rational animal. According to his definition, rationality and animality are each *individually* necessary for something to be a man and rationality and animality are *jointly* sufficient for something to be a man. A sufficient condition is an intersection of necessary conditions.

Then, what is a definition of art? We can think of the imitation theory of art, expressionism, and formalism as historical definitions of art. But each of these theories is false as a definition of art. There are some artworks which do not imitate, e.g. abstract paintings. There are some artworks which do not express emotions. And there are some artworks whose formal aspects are not the focus, as is the case with representational painting.

When we try to discover the necessary conditions of art, we conduct a thought experiment as

Aristotle did when he tried to discover the necessary conditions of man. We can bring together all the things which people call “art(works)”, and try to find any common characteristic or a property among them. To discover this property is to abstract, i.e. to throw away, any properties which they do not share. Then, we can find out the properties all of them share together. According to Aristotle, the properties that all and only human beings share together are rationality and animality.

But if there is no property which is left behind in the process of abstraction, then the thing in question does not have a necessary condition. In such a case, it does not have a sufficient condition either, because a sufficient condition is only an intersection of necessary conditions. It, therefore, has no definition. This is the reason that Morris Weitz holds that art cannot be defined. He thinks that art is an *open concept*. An open concept is a concept for which there is no necessary condition in order for something to be an instance of that concept. Wittgenstein argued that a game has no necessary condition, because, if we consider the whole range of games, say from football and baseball to Go, and many card games, we will not be able to discover any property which is common to every game. Following Wittgenstein, Weitz holds that art is an open concept, because in the field of art there is always the possibility of an artwork which has a new, novel property that preexisting artworks do not have. It is inevitable, in a sense, that some new kind of artwork will be created because of the essential nature of creativity in the arts.¹

But we have a problem here, because, if we do not have a definition of a word, we cannot classify the things the word designates. To find out the definition of a word is to fix the meaning of the word. If you do not know the meaning of a word in a foreign language, e.g. English, you will look up the word in the dictionary to understand what the word means, i.e. what the word designates. So, if we do not have the definition of the word “art”, i.e. we do not know the meaning of the word “art”, then how can we distinguish artworks from non-artworks? Wittgenstein’s solution to this problem is the notion of “family resemblance”. In his famous dictum, “Look and see,” he argues that when we see the members of a family, we can distinguish them from the members of other families, because they look similar with each other. The important point here is that the reason they look similar is not that all of them share some common properties, since there is no property they share together, but that there are many properties some of them share, that crisscross among them. The members of a family look similar, but there may be no single property all of them share together. Every child inherits the genes from the father and the mother respectively, but since each of them inherits a cross section of these genes, there may be no single property all of the family members share together. Wittgenstein’s point is that there may be many open concepts, but traditional philosophy of language assumed that all words have a definition and, thus, tried to solve the wrong problem in the attempt to discover necessary and sufficient conditions.

Weitz’s argument of the undefinability of art has not been challenged for sometimes because of the authority of Wittgenstein’s philosophy. But Mandelbaum challenged both Wittgenstein’s argument about games and Weitz’s argument for the undefinability of art. He holds that games have in common a certain kind of purpose: “the potentiality of ... [an] absorbing non-practical interest to either

¹ Morris Weitz, “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics,” reprinted in Francis Coleman, ed. *Contemporary Studies in Aesthetics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), pp.84-94.

participants or spectators.”² If this purpose is the property that all games share together, then games have one necessary condition. Wittgenstein failed to notice this feature because he was apparently concerned only with the *exhibited* properties of games. Mandelbaum suggests that, if we looked for *non-exhibited*, e.g. *relational*, properties of art, then art may be defined.

Let us pay some attention to the distinction between exhibited properties and relational properties. The Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblance focuses on the exhibited properties, since he says “Look and see.” But the relation of family membership is not determined by appearances, but the relation of blood. If one of you looks very similar to me, that does not make you my son or my brother. I went to Mt. Kilimanjaro several years ago. If I had made a mistake one night and ended up with a son there, he might not look similar to me, but he would be still my son. In this sense Wittgenstein's choice of the word “family resemblance” is really inappropriate given what he wants to hold. Contrary to exhibited properties, we cannot see relational properties. I don't know who your father is just by seeing you and your father. I don't know who your lover is just by seeing both of you. I can see both of you, but I cannot see the relationship between each of you. But the relational property does classify things, just as the exhibited property does. If I can distinguish an apple from a pear by seeing them, I can still distinguish the people I love from other people. The relation between me and those whom I love distinguishes my love from everyone else. So, since the problem of definition is that of classification, the relational property can be a proper candidate for definition.

2) The Institutional Theory of Art

If art can be defined by relational properties, what are those properties? This question becomes especially acute, when we have ready-mades such as Duchamp's *Fountain* and Warhol's *Brillo Box*. There are many urinals in this world, so why is the urinal which Duchamp picked up in a store an artwork, while the rest of them are not? Why is the urinal in an exhibition room of the museum an artwork, and not the one in any given men's room? They look exactly the same, so how could it be that only Duchamp's urinal is an artwork? Even though we can identify traditional artworks by perceiving them, we cannot distinguish the urinals by just looking. If there is some difference between them, it is due to the different relational properties which they have respectively. Maybe the difference is that we put one in the exhibition room to appreciate it and we use the rest of them in our restrooms. And the one we try to appreciate is an artwork because Duchamp tried to make us to do so.

This is the basic idea of Dickie's institutional theory of art. He borrows the notion of “artworld” from Danto, by which he means the nonlegal social institution of art. An institution is either legal or nonlegal. To become a graduate student of Tokyo University you must pass some legal procedures of admission. To become an artist, you may graduate from an Art School, but, if not, you can still become an artist. Becoming an artist can be achieved through nonlegal procedures. And the world of art consists of its subcategories. For example, the world of painting includes painters, museums, galleries, critics, art reporters of mass media, dealers, and spectators. All of them are members of the

² Maurice Mandelbaum, “Family Resemblances and Generalization Concerning the Arts,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1965), p. 221.

world of painting. It is a kind of social institution. Now Dickie's definition of art is as follows.

A work of art in the classificatory sense is 1) an artifact 2) upon which some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (an artworld) has conferred the status of candidate for appreciation.³

The conferring of status for appreciation upon an artifact is usually made by an artist nonlegally, as we see in the case of Duchamp's urinal. But why does he use the expression of "the status of *candidate* for appreciation" instead of "the status of object for appreciation"? The first reason is that there might be unappreciated artworks. If a painter finished his painting but there was a fire in his atelier before the day of its exhibition, it would be still an artwork, even though no one appreciated it. The second reason is that an artwork may be not good enough to be appreciated. If by "appreciation" we mean "in experiencing the qualities of a thing one finds them worthy or valuable," many artworks do not have such qualities.

Now it seems clear that Duchamp's urinal is converted to an artwork *Fountain*, because he was a member of the artworld. You cannot buy a urinal and sell it expensively as an artwork as he did, because you have no qualification as an artist. And Dickie holds that even though his institutional theory of art has quite consciously been worked out with the recent practices of the artworld in mind, especially with movements such as dadaism, pop art, found art, and happenings in mind, his definition can be applied to all arts of any period. For any artist in any period conferred the status of candidate for appreciation upon his work in the art-institutional context. The only difference is that in the case of traditional arts we can discover the conferring of the status of art by seeing artworks themselves, while in the case of *Fountain* and *Brillo Box* we cannot make any such discovery merely by seeing them.

There are several problems in Dickie's definition, but the important one in our context is the following problem. His institutional theory of art may sound like saying "A work of art is an object of which someone has said 'I christen this object a work of art.'" And Dickie concedes that it is rather like that. The only reason that Duchamp's urinal became an artwork is that he declared that it was an artwork. But we may be not satisfied with his explanation of the reason that Duchamp's urinal is converted to an artwork, because we do not have to accept Duchamp's declaration. There may be more reasons that we accept his urinal as *Fountain* than his mere declaration. Actually Duchamp brought his urinal into the exhibition in order to reject the traditional notion of art which holds that an artwork is made by an artist and is beautiful and must be distinguished from other artifacts with its own artistic value. Duchamp attempted to destroy the traditional distinction between artworks and other artifacts, and, regardless of whether his attempt was successful or not, the message of his *Fountain* was accepted as worth being considered. *Fountain* is an artwork not just because of Duchamp's declaration, but because of the message or the content of his *Fountain*. We can say the same thing about Warhol's *Brillo Box*. If he just copied the box of cleansing pads, that would not mean much to us. What he tries to tell us is that we live in the world of mass production which makes

³ George Dickie, *Aesthetics : An Introduction* (Pegasus, 1971), p. 101.

it difficult for us to have individual identities, or we can say that it is about the commodification of art.

3. Danto's Philosophy of Art

1) Danto's Definition of Art: An Essentialist Definition

Danto thinks that art is a representation, i.e. that art stands for or designates something, which is its object. According to him, the whole history of art theory could be considered as a series of responses to Plato's criticism of mimesis. Then, the question of the definition of art, i.e. "what is art?," could be answered by identifying what kind of representation art is.

Now we can compare Danto's theory of art with that of Dickie in terms of the message which the artwork tries to tell us. First, let's turn to Danto's famous thought-experimental exhibition.⁴ In his exhibition there are 6 identical red square paintings and 2 things which look exactly the same as the other paintings. The titles of the paintings are, respectively, "The Israelites crossing the Red Sea," "Kierkegaard's Mood," "Red Square," another "Red Square," "Nirvana," and "Red Table Cloth." The first painting represents the scene of the Red Sea after the Israelites had already crossed over, and the Egyptians were drowned, not the scene of the Egyptian forces chasing the Israelites. The second painting is about Kierkegaard's psychological state, which is similar to the situation of the first painting, i.e. the result of his life is like that painting. The third painting is of the Moscow landscape, which reminds us of the Red Square. Even though the fourth painting has the same title as the third one, it is a minimalist exemplar of geometrical art. The fifth one, "Nirvana," is a metaphysical painting which shows that the Nirvanic and Samsara orders are identical. Since the Samsara world is usually described as the Red Dust, the Nirvanic world is red, too. The sixth painting is a still-life which depicts a red table cloth in Matisse's style. There are 2 more objects which are not artworks in his exhibition. The first one is merely a canvas grounded in red lead by Giorgione, on which he originally planned to paint a painting later. The second one is a surface painted, not grounded, in red lead. Or we can imagine that it is a piece of paper from a packing box which happens to have the same size and the same color as the rest of paintings and the other object.

Danto's intention in including the last 2 objects in his exhibition is to show that art is not something that the eye could descry, as we have already seen in the case of *Fountain* and *Brillo Box*. And more than that, the paintings in his exhibition show that the identity of an artwork cannot be distinguished by just looking at it. Now we not only cannot distinguish artworks from non-artworks just by looking at them, but we also cannot distinguish between artworks, either. If there are still such distinctions between artworks and non-artworks and among artworks themselves, then they must be due to some perceptually indiscernible properties. Then, what are those properties?

To answer this question, we must look at another of Danto's thought experiments.⁵ There are three ties that look exactly the same as one another. The first one is an artwork, since Picasso presented

⁴ Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-47.

it in his exhibition. He had picked up one of his ties and painted it a bright blue all over. The paint was applied smoothly and carefully, and every trace of brushstroke was purged. The second one is just the same as Picasso's, but this one is made accidentally by a child of a painter for fun. We would not say that it is an artwork. The third one is Cezanne's tie which he used as a paintrag. He wiped his brush after each stroke of a bright blue with this rag and did not throw it away until he had completely used it up. The result of his parsimony is this tie that looks exactly the same as Picasso's. But even though this paintrag was made by Cezanne, and not by the child who is not an artist, his tie is still not an artwork. Surely one may say that it is not an artwork, because Cezanne did not present it as an artwork. This may be Dickie's institutionalist solution to this problem, but our question is why Cezanne did not or could not present his tie as an artwork?

Picasso's tie is a repudiation of painterliness, of that doctrine of paint-and-brushstroke (or drip) which defined New York painting of the 1950s as a movement. Picasso's smooth paint made fun of the movement of Abstract Expressionism across the Atlantic and tried to suggest that brushstroke was not the only way to make a painting. But Cezanne could not make such a statement with his tie, because at that time there was no such movement in New York or anywhere in the world. To put the matter in other words, an artwork must be about something, while mere real things such as the child's tie and Cezanne's tie do not say anything. The artist must have an intention to say something with his work. In this case Cezanne did not have any intention to say something with his paintrag, because a rag is just a thing, not an artwork. We can now say that in Danto's exhibition each of the six red square artworks has a different content because of its artist's intention, even though they look exactly the same.

Picasso knew what was happening in the USA as an artistic movement in 1950s, and that made it possible for him to make fun of it with his "Le Cravat." In this sense Danto uses the word "artworld" as *an atmosphere of art history and art theory*. Cezanne did not live in such an artworld, but in a different artworld, so he could not make such a statement. If an artwork is about something and makes a statement about it, we must interpret that statement. The six artworks in Danto's exhibition are different works, because they make different statements. We can know this by their titles. The title is not just a label, but suggests the direction of interpretation. Thus, we have the following formula.

$$W = I(O)^6$$

W is an artwork and I is an interpretation, and O is a physical or material object. Even though the O looks exactly the same, each of the works is a different artwork, because they have different interpretations. An object O is an artwork only under an interpretation I, where I is a sort of function that transfigures it into an artwork. The interpretation of an object *constitutes* an artwork, and it is not the case that an interpretation can be given to an artwork which already exists. The last two objects in Danto's exhibition are mere real things, because they do not have interpretations. We do not interpret mere things around us, but just use them. In the example of the ties we can also realize the importance of art history and art theory. As Heinrich Wöflin has written, not everything is possible at every time. The history and context of art is a necessary condition for an object to become an artwork.

⁶ Ibid., p. 125.

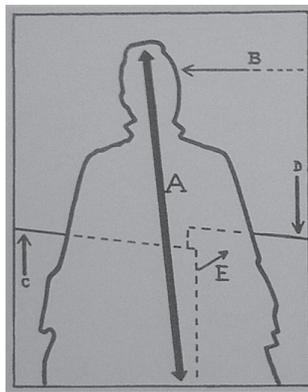
2) The Mode of Representation

Even though it is true that every artwork must have an interpretation, there are many other things which also require interpretations, such as maps, diagrams, a discontented look from your lover, and even this paper. Interpretation is, therefore, only a necessary condition for something to be an artwork. We must find another property or properties which distinguish artworks from mere representations, i.e. things which require interpretations. What are those properties?

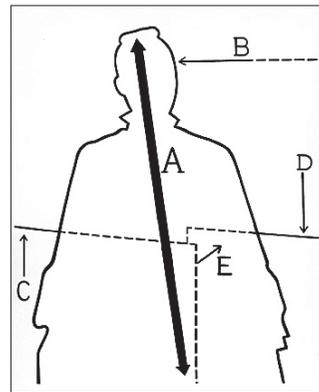
To answer this question, let's look at another of Danto's examples. He compares Earl Loran's diagram of Cézanne's *Portrait of Madame Cézanne* with Roy Lichtenstein's *Portrait of Madame Cézanne*.⁷ Loran's diagram is just what a diagram should be, with arrows, dotted lines, labeled areas which show the formal structure of the picture. Lichtenstein copied Loran's diagram, differing in scale and substance from it, and entitled the copy, *Portrait of Madame Cézanne*. The two are diagrams whose photographs may look exactly the same. Putting aside the problem of plagiarism Loran charged against Lichtenstein, consider the serious philosophical difference between the diagram of an artwork and an artwork that consists in what looks like a diagram. How can Lichtenstein's diagram be an artwork, while Loran's diagram is just a diagram? Loran's diagram is about a specific painting and concerns the volumes and vectors of it. Lichtenstein's painting is about the way Cézanne painted his wife: it is about the wife, as seen by Cézanne. Lichtenstein tries to tell us that Cézanne's geometrizing vision was applied even to his wife, as if he did not have any feeling for this woman. His artistic impulse overrode his affection to her for his artistic purpose. Lichtenstein's painting does not say anything about the formal structure of Cézanne's *Portrait of Madame Cézanne*, but it does say something about the way he perceived the world, in this case even his wife.



Paul Cézanne,
Portrait of Madame Cézanne,
1885–1887



Loran's diagram of *Portrait of Madame Cézanne* from *Cézanne's Composition*,
1943



Roy Lichtenstein, 1962,
Magna on canvas,
Private collection

But one may object to the above explanation that it only says that the two representations have

⁷ Ibid., pp.142-44.

different contents. Since every representation has a different content, it is not enough that the difference of depth in content make some representations artworks and others non-artworks. For example, even though the “Nirvana” is much deeper than the two “Red Squares” and the “Red Table Cloth,” all of them are artworks. The distinction between artworks and mere representations must be more than the difference in content. Then, what is the criterion of artworks which excludes mere representations?

Loran’s diagram and Lichtenstein’s *Portrait of Madame Cezanne* both have the format of a diagram. Loran’s diagram does not say anything except the formal structure of Cezanne’s painting, which is what a diagram should be about. Meanwhile, Lichtenstein’s painting self-consciously exploits the format of the diagram to make a point, and it itself is not a diagram. In other words, Lichtenstein uses the format of a diagram to say something that a diagram cannot say. Usually the medium is not the message, but the form in which the message is given. But in this case Lichtenstein has become conscious of the structure of the medium and uses it to make a point.

To clarify the meaning of the last paragraph, let’s think of an imaginary novel by a revolutionary artist, M.⁸ M tries to reject the traditional notion that a novel is a fiction and has its own literary style. So he writes a novel which tells a story of an actual accident and uses the form of newspaper articles. His novel happens to be exactly the same as an actual newspaper article. In the newspaper article, we just read it and find out what happened, i.e. we do not concern ourselves with the format of a newspaper article, because that is the way newspaper stories are. But, when we read M’s novel, we are not only concerned with the content of the novel, but also wonder about the way it is presented to us. When we wonder why M uses the format of a newspaper article, we realize that M uses the format deliberately in order to say something about it. He uses it consciously as his style, i.e. he uses it rhetorically. In such a case the medium is no longer transparent, but becomes opaque. In this sense, the traditional theory of mimesis is false, because it concerns only the content of representation. As we see in Dürer’s woodcut of perspective, the traditional theory of representation presupposes that the canvas is a transparent glass between the object and the perceiver.

Lichtenstein uses the diagrammatic idiom rhetorically. Loran does not use the idiom of diagrams; he simply uses diagrams. Just as M uses the format of a newspaper article rhetorically, but does not use it in the ordinary way a newspaper article does, whatever Lichtenstein is doing, he is not diagramming. Now it is clear that the artwork uses the way the non-artwork presents its content in order to make a point about how that content is presented. To appreciate the artwork properly we must notice not only its content but also the way its content is presented. Now we understand Danto’s thesis that

works of art, in categorical contrast with mere representations, use the means of representation in a way that is not exhaustively specified when one has exhaustively specified what is being represented.⁹

⁸ Ibid., pp. 145-46.

⁹ Ibid., p. 148.

We cannot appreciate the artwork properly, just noticing its content. We must also focus on the way its content is presented to us. What distinguishes artworks from other representations is the mode or the form of representation.

Now we find out that, to appreciate the artwork properly, we must focus not only on the content of representation but also on the form of representation. Since the form of representation is contrasted with the content of representation, the former cannot be a part of the latter, even though it is a part of the whole representation. Because of the representational form, the medium of art can no longer be transparent, while those of mere representations are transparent. And this opaqueness of the artistic medium is implicated in the notions of metaphor, expression, and style.

At first, the notion of "expression" seems to fit nicely with what we have discussed up to now. Usually expression is more than representation. When we say that the artwork expresses the artist's emotion, it means that we must notice more than the content of representation, since the content of representation is at most times not enough to know the meaning of expression. But expression is a complex and difficult notion to grasp in its nature, and to find out what it is would lead to another difficult topic. So Danto suggests that what he means by the form of representation could be clarified by the intersection between style, expression, and rhetoric.

We said that in his *Portrait of Madam Cezanne* Lichtenstein made a *rhetorical* use of the diagrammatic format. As a practice, it is the function of rhetoric to cause or persuade the audience to take a certain attitude toward the subject of that discourse, i.e. to see the subject from a certain point of view. And this characterization of rhetoric cuts across a distinction between words and pictures. When Lichtenstein used the diagram rhetorically, he wanted us to see the way Cezanne perceived his wife. Meanwhile, Loran's diagram just shows us how the picture is constructed diagrammatically, i.e. how it elicits the eye movement when we see it.

One of the best ways to perform the function of rhetoric is metaphor, since metaphor is considered as the most familiar rhetorical trope. Consider the following example.¹⁰ Napoleon is represented as a Roman emperor. The sculpture does not represent Napoleon just wearing Roman costumes, but makes the viewer take toward the subject (Napoleon) the attitude appropriate to the more exalted Roman emperors – Caesar or Augustus. That figure, so garbed, is a metaphor of dignity, authority, grandeur, power, and political utterness. We see Napoleon in terms of these attributes. The description or depiction of *a* as *b* always has this metaphoric structure. But if Napoleon is just a model for representing a Roman emperor, he would lose his identity. For, if the sculptor aims just at representing a Roman emperor, it does not matter who the model is, and the fact that Napoleon is a model is just an accident. But in a metaphor the subject keeps its identity and is recognized as such. Thus, it is a transfiguration rather than transformation, in which the subject changes its identity.

What is more, there is a rhetorical ellipsis in metaphor. To understand the metaphor, "Life is a river," we must find the middle term *t* ("flow") which makes life metaphorically a river. When we say that *a* is metaphorically *b*, there must be some hidden middle term *t*, which we must find and fill in the metaphor. To find and fill in *t* to the metaphor in question is the way to induce the audience's active participation, i.e. to persuade him/her more effectively as in the case of the enthymeme.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 167-68.

Now consider again Loran's diagram and Lichtenstein's painting. Cezanne's *Portrait of Madame Cezanne* is the subject of the two representations. In the one case the diagram maps the eye's trajectory. In the other case Lichtenstein's painting is the *Portrait of Madame Cezanne* as a diagram. It is a transfiguration of Cezanne's portrait in which the portrait retains its identity through a substitution which is meant to illuminate it under novel attributes: to see that portrait as a diagram is to see that artist as seeing the world as a schematized structure. Therefore, the artwork is constituted as a transfigurative representation rather than a representation in itself. In general, to understand an artwork is to grasp its metaphor. Now we can understand that the structure of metaphor has to do with some features of the representation other than content. Metaphor is one of the criteria which distinguish artworks from mere representations.

The form of representation can also be explained in terms of style. The term "style" derives etymologically from the Latin term "stilus," a pointed instrument for writing. Though a stilus is an instrument of representation, its interesting property in our context is its depositing of something of its own character on the surfaces it scores. In addition to whatever it does represent, the instrument of representation impresses something of its own character in the act of representing it, so we can know not only what the content of representation is but also *how* it is represented. So we can consider style as what remains of a representation when we subtract its content.

There are styles of periods, schools, and artists. We can find some common characteristics among the artworks in question. If these characteristics are not derived from the contents of representations, they are due to the way these representations are made, to how the artist or artists in question see the world. In this sense style is the expression of a certain period or a certain school or an individual artist himself. In other words, style is the externalization of how the world is perceived.

4. The Problem of Danto's Definition of Art

In the Preface of *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* Danto seems to pursue the definition of art. Talking about the indiscernibility of the the Brillo boxes, he says that "It was this insight that equipped me with the method I use in my book, in which I pursue *that elusive definition*."¹¹ But later he says that the two necessary conditions of art are (i) to be about something and (ii) to embody its meaning. He adds that "... my book (*The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*) ekes out two conditions, and I was (and am) insufficiently convinced that they were jointly sufficient to have believed the job done. But I did not know where to go next, and so ended the book."¹² Since many people thought that Danto propounded his definition of art in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, his statement in *After the End of Art* made them perplexed. For example, Carroll summarizes five necessary conditions for art in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* as follows: "something x is a work of art if and only if (a) x has a subject (i.e., x is about something), (b) about which x projects some attitude or point-of-view (this also may be described as a matter of x having a style), (c) by means of rhetorical ellipsis (generally metaphorical ellipsis), (d) which ellipsis, in turn, engages

¹¹ Ibid., p. vii. The italics are mine.

¹² Danto, "Modalities of History: Possibility and Comedy," in *After the End of Art* (Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 195.

audience participation in filling-in what is missing (an operation which can also be called interpretation), (e) where the works in question and the interpretations thereof require an art-historical context (which context is generally specified as a background of historically situated theory)."¹³ And it would be natural to suppose that these five necessary conditions are jointly sufficient for x being an artwork.

In Carroll's five necessary conditions, we can put the conditions (b) and (c) under Danto's condition (ii) "to embody its meaning," i.e. how the artwork embodies its meaning. And the condition (a) is identical with Danto's condition (i) "to be about something." Carroll's condition (d) has some relation both to (i) and to (ii). The problem is that Carroll's condition (e) does not seem to fit nicely with either of Danto's (i) and (ii). Why did Danto drop the historicity of art from the necessary conditions of art?

According to Carroll, this problem is due to the essentialist character of Danto's definition of art. An essentialist definition of art holds that the essential characteristics of art are independent of its history, i.e. that artworks must have those essential characteristics at all times and at all places. This ahistorical character of art should be guaranteed against any possibility of counter-examples in future art. Every theory of art has been refuted by a counter-example which appears in the future. How can this possibility of counter-examples be blocked right now, even though we do not know what will happen in future art?

1) The End of Art in Danto's Philosophy of Art History

The answer to this question is Danto's famous thesis of the end of art history. To understand his philosophy of art history more thoroughly, we must first consider the history of painting. It could be considered as the procedure of art's finding its true nature through the question of what art is. Danto considers the history of painting as a series of progressive narratives of art. The progressive narratives of history set up their goals, and when the goal is achieved in an objective standard at a certain historical moment, the narrative ends. The first model of art history is the representation theory of art, i.e., painting as mimesis. If the aim of painting were merely to produce perceptual equivalents of our actual perception, the progress of perceptual representation could be achieved objectively with the discovery of linear perspective and the invention of moving pictures. And we could say that the development of representational art ended with the invention of moving pictures. When the narrative of representational art was over, painting had to ask itself what was left for it to do, and ended up with another definition of art, i.e. art as expression. Expressionism, which flourished in the second half of the 19th century as the second model of art history, did not have its own program of objective development, since it had no mediating technology of expression, compared with linear perspective and the technology of moving pictures in the realm of mimetic representation. Every artist had his/her own feeling as the unique object of expression, thus art was relativized subjectively to individual artists, but there was no way to measure the objective progress in the succession of the expressions of each artist's own feeling.

¹³ Noël Carroll, "Essence, Expression, and History: Arthur Danto's Philosophy of Art," in *Danto and His Critics*, ed. Mark Rollins (Blackwell, 1993), p. 80.

At the beginning of the 20th century there was a series of new art movements under the name of expressionism, without showing any continuity. Every movement needed its own theory to explain how its works expressed the feelings of artists. The more each subsequent movement depended on its own theory of unique expression, to show how it differed from the earlier ones, the less its theory seemed adequate to our normal understanding of sensuous expression. Now art depended more and more on its own theory which seemed to be no longer a theory of expression, and this trend finally ended up with Modernism, another progressive model of art history. Modernist painting asked itself the reflexive question of what painting is, and culminated in Abstract Expressionism, which finally holds that painting is just painterly material on plain, two-dimensional canvas.

When the appreciation of art becomes the understanding of its theory, the history of art can be considered as a cognitive progress, which covers the whole history of art. According to Danto, who appropriated Hegel's philosophy of history, this is the third model of art history, "a model narratively exemplified by the *Bildungsroman*."¹⁴ Now art can be considered as something whose identity consists in self-understanding. Art asked itself what it was, and once misunderstood itself as representation or expression, but finally discovered its true nature in its theory. When art becomes a theory of itself, then art becomes a philosophy, since philosophy is reflexive in its nature. The history of art ends with the advent of its own philosophy.

Danto believes that the proper philosophical form of the question "What is the nature of art?" can only be framed in a philosophically appropriate way in terms of indiscernibles. When *Fountain* and *Brillo Box* raise the question "What is art?," the progressive history of art is over. For the artist can no longer answer this self-reflexive question with his perceptual artworks. Artworks cannot generalize or provide coherent arguments which explain the difference between the indiscernibles. Only philosophers like Danto can do that.

But we can still ask why another narrative cannot arise after the end of modernism? If the history of art is a successive chain of narratives, how can Danto proclaim the end of art history? The answer to this question is that there is no possibility for a new progressive narrative in art, since every possibility is exhausted by the *Brillo Box* and appropriation. The *Brillo Box* showed that there is no distinction between art and mere real things. Appropriation is an exact copy of an artwork or a style, and these days art can copy anything in the history of art to produce a new artwork, because its meaning is different from its original, due to the artist's intention. Then, there is perceptual indiscernibility between artworks and mere real things, and among artworks themselves. If you can do anything and it is acceptable, then there can be no narrative with exclusive character, but only *pluralism*. Traditionally, style played the role of a criterion as to whether something was art or not and, if so, to which school or to which artist it belonged. Today style cannot play its traditional role and works of art can be of all kinds. There cannot be a new progressive narrative, when everything is already tried and accepted as an art. Art is, then, no longer explicable in terms of a progressive historical narrative.

Danto called the period after the *Brillo Box* "the Post-Historical Period of Art." It is a post-narrative period of art in which everything is permitted, since nothing any longer is historically

¹⁴ Danto, "The End of Art," in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 110.

mandated. Now art no longer needs to comply with a doctrine of what art is, and the making of art can be put subserviently to human ends or to individual ends. Art can be closer to the public and the public will no longer be afraid of being isolated from the world of art.

2) Toward a Solution to Danto's Definition of Art

If this is a correct summary of Danto's thesis of the end of art, then Carroll's criticism of Danto's essentialist definition of art is that it presupposes the correctness of his philosophy of art history. Since the history of art is over and everything has been tried out, there is no possibility of counter-examples in future art. Carroll's charge of circularity in Danto's definition of art is that there is a possibility of counterexamples with non-manifest properties. Even though the possibility of a counter-example with manifest properties is excluded with the method of indiscernibility, there may be artworks that have non-manifest properties, generated by theories that are opposed to any essentialist definition of art. Carroll's example is the theory of the socio-ideological nature of art.¹⁵ According to these theories, the history of art is not at an end yet. But Danto argues that the history of art is over, because the essence of art has been discovered. But his claim is only possible on the condition of the correctness of his essentialist position. Thus Danto's philosophy of art and his philosophy of art history depend on each other.

One way to escape Carroll's charge of circularity is to dissolve the apparent tension or contradiction between Danto's essentialist definition of art and his assertion of the historicity of art. The apparent contradiction is this: how can art have an immutable essence, if art has always changed throughout history? Such a contradiction can be resolved, when we notice the implication of his method of perceptual indiscernibility between artworks and mere real things and among artworks themselves. If we can no longer differentiate artworks from mere real things by observation, nor, in consequence, can we arrive at a definition of art by induction over the cases, then the essence of art must have nothing to do with its ever-changing, contingent features. That is, the intension (meaning) of "art" is immutable, even though the extensions (references) of "art" have changed throughout history. In other words, even though the essence of art is transcendent and universal and, therefore, ubiquitous whenever and wherever, the moment of its revelation depends on the art-historical context. The ahistorical essence of art has been always there, but the moment of its revelation or discovery depends on the artworld, i.e., an atmosphere of art history and art theory. Danto's emphasis on the historicity of art could be compatible with his essentialist definition of art.

If Danto's philosophy of art does not depend on his theory of art history, i.e., the end of art, then how can we know that his essentialist definition of art is correct? How can we defend his definition of art from any possible future counter-examples? Even though the essence of art is transcendent, how can we know that Danto's conclusion that the two necessary conditions of art are (i) to be about something and (ii) to embody its meaning is correct? These are not the essence of art according to the socio-ideological theorists Carroll mentioned. But their theories are not universal in the sense that they do not apply to all kinds of art. For example, Marxist theories of art can be applied only to the

¹⁵ Noël Carroll, "Essence, Expression, and History: Arthur Danto's Philosophy of Art," p. 97.

artworks they generate. It cannot be applied to those artworks whose artists had no notion of communism. For what the artists of those works intended to say had nothing to do with communism. But those theories still assert what art should be, i.e. what the essence of art should be. In this sense the works they generate satisfy the condition (i) to be about something. And all of them also satisfy the condition (ii) to embody their meanings. Thus, Danto's theory of art could apply to all kinds of art, since the artworks of the socio-ideological theories are covered by Danto's theory of art.¹⁶ If Danto's theory of art is a meta-theory about other theories of art, then his essentialist definition of art could be defended.

To reject Carroll's charge of circularity, we might think that Carroll's condition (e), i.e. the historicity of art, can be included in Danto's condition (ii) to embody its meaning. For it is plausible to think that (ii) must subsume the way it embodies its meaning. To know that the artwork in question succeeds in embodying its meaning requires or presupposes knowing how it embodies its meaning. Since to do the latter we need the artworld, we might conclude that Danto's condition (ii) also includes the historicity of art. Then, all of Carroll's five necessary conditions of art might be subsumed under Danto's conditions of (i) and (ii).

If we conclude that Danto correctly selects the two necessary conditions of art, our next problem will be to answer the question of why Danto thinks that they are not jointly sufficient. He must have had such a case as the following in mind: something x which satisfies the two conditions is, nevertheless, not a work of art. And if there is such a thing, then we must have a third condition which can distinguish artworks from the mere representations which satisfy the conditions of (i) and (ii).

It is my guess that the reason they are not jointly sufficient is that there are many things which show how the world is perceived, but which are still not artworks. Since the mode of representation is the externalization of how the world is perceived, many ancient items and remains can satisfy this condition. For example, an ancient map of the world is about the geography of the world as thought by its maker, and also shows the way he perceived the world. This is not an artwork, but it still satisfies the conditions of (i) and (ii). Today's nuclear bombs may tell us of the power of human species, but also speak metaphorically about the possibility that human beings will be the first species on earth to be destroyed, not by a meteorite or a change of climate, but by their own power.

If my guess is correct, my puzzle regarding Danto's essentialist definition of art is what the third condition is. To find this third condition will require a keen insight into what the true nature of art is.

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¹⁶ Danto, "Responses and Replies," in *Danto and His Critics*, p. 207.

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