

# UC Berkeley

## Occasional Papers

### Title

"Anything Goes": The Work of Art and the Historical Future

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5pf0q7w3>

### Authors

Danto, Arthur  
Altieri, Charles  
Wagner, Anne M  
et al.

### Publication Date

1997-10-01

DOREEN B. TOWNSEND CENTER OCCASIONAL PAPERS • 14

"ANYTHING GOES"

THE WORK OF ART AND THE HISTORICAL FUTURE

---

ARTHUR DANTO

CHARLES ALTIERI

ANNE M. WAGNER


ANTHONY J. CASCARDI





# **“Anything Goes”**

**The Work of Art  
and the  
Historical Future**



THE DOREEN B. TOWNSEND CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES was established at the University of California at Berkeley in 1987 in order to promote interdisciplinary studies in the humanities. Endowed by Doreen B. Townsend, the Center awards fellowships to advanced graduate students and untenured faculty on the Berkeley campus, and supports interdisciplinary working groups, discussion groups, and team-taught graduate seminars. It also sponsors symposia and conferences which strengthen research and teaching in the humanities and related social science fields. The Center is directed by Randolph Starn, Professor of History. Christina M. Gillis has been Associate Director of the Townsend Center since 1988.

---

*"Anything Goes"* features the text of "The Work of Art and the Historical Future," a lecture given by Arthur Danto, Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Columbia University. Professor Danto's lecture was delivered in October 1997, and was a featured part of the "Futures" program celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Townsend Center. Responding to Arthur Danto's lecture were Professors Charles Altieri, from the Departments of English and Art Practice; Anthony Cascardi, from the Departments of Rhetoric and Comparative Literature; and Anne Wagner, from the Department of History of Art. Arthur Danto's residency at Berkeley was also designated a special program marking the tenth anniversary of the University of California Humanities Initiative sponsored by the Office of the President. The Townsend Center gratefully acknowledges the support of the Office of the President in helping to make Professor Danto's lecture and the related discussion possible.

---

Funding for the *OCCASIONAL PAPERS* of the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities is provided by Dean Joseph Cerny of the Graduate Division, the Walter and Elise Haas Fund, and by other donors. Begun in 1994-95, the series makes available in print some of the many lectures delivered in Townsend Center programs. The series is registered with the Library of Congress. For more information on the publication, please contact the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities, 220 Stephens Hall, The University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720-2340. (510) 643-9670.

---

*Occasional Papers Series*

Editor: Christina M. Gillis

Assistant Editor & Design: Jill Stauffer

Printed by Hunza Graphics, Berkeley, California

ISBN 1-881865-14-2

All texts © The Regents of the University of California and the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities, 1998. No portion of this publication may be reproduced by any means without the express permission of the authors or of the Center.

*Occasional Papers of the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities*, no. 14.

# Contents

Preface

v

The Work of Art and the Historical Future

Arthur Danto

1

Responses

Charles Altieri

17

Anthony J. Cascardi

24

Anne M. Wagner

28



*Celebrating 10 years of the  
Townsend Center for the Humanities*

# Preface

This year, since the Center is moving into a second decade and a new space, not to mention century and millennium, at the Center we are particularly interested in visions and versions of the future. Of course beginnings entail endings, and with that conjunction we are already on the turf of this lecture and lecturer.

Arthur Danto's recent book on what he calls the "end of art" is importantly future-looking; his talk is importantly past-oriented because it looks back to the book and to a history of art and a history of the history of art that are in his view over and done with. The paradoxes of time are all in a day's work for a philosopher: If time is a measure of movement, as Aristotle thought, doesn't that mean that it must not be moving itself, in which case, it wouldn't be recognizable as time? But if time moves, how can we talk about past time, which is already gone, or the present, which is moving into a future that doesn't yet exist? Art has its paradoxes for philosophers too: Plato and a long line of philosophers have wanted to banish artists from utopia. They do so with good reason, though not necessarily for the reason most often put forward: that artists create, at best, pale imitations of truth and beauty. The philosophers' problem, one suspects, is that the images of art can be as powerful and persuasive as truth and beauty.

Arthur Danto negotiates tensions such as these by living and thinking in their midst, mostly with genial good cheer and certainly with great verve. He has come to inhabit a polyglot and cosmopolitan Middle Kingdom of sensibility: art makers, art historians, teachers, philosophers, and critics of art have come to be so bound up with

one another that one cannot separate art from the mix. You have to take the whole complex and ask about it as a functioning whole, all the more so because at present there are no set criteria for what can be a work of art.

Now this mixed Middle Kingdom is a real place embodied—to use one of his favorite critical terms for what art objects do with ideas—in Arthur Danto. He is the complete upper Westside New Yorker who was actually born in Detroit; the Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Columbia who has been a practicing art critic for *The Nation* since 1984; the analytic philosopher in an Anglo-American tradition who went continental in writing about Nietzsche and Sartre, and who admires Hegel; the pluralist who insists on universal definitions; the incisive writer who loves digression and play. Traditionalists accuse him of relativizing, post-modernists of believing in essences; philosophers ask “Is this philosophy?,” art historians wonder whether it’s anything else; artists have supposed, like Barnett Newman, that criticism, not to mention philosophical aesthetics, is as relevant to them as ornithology is to birds. “But it does move,” Galileo supposedly said about the earth in another court of rigid doctrine. Shuttling movement, hybridity, and unaccustomed combinations all reside in Arthur Danto’s Middle Kingdom of sensibilities, and this is where we all live.

—Randolph Starn  
Director, Townsend Center for the Humanities  
Marian E. Koshland Distinguished Professor in the Humanities





# The Work of Art and the Historical Future

Arthur Danto

## 1.

Giorgio Vasari opens his life of Michelangelo with a prophetic exordium, in which the Tuscans are pictured as a kind of chosen people and Michelangelo himself as a redeemer, sent by God, yielding through his example a knowledge to which the Tuscans aspire, but which otherwise would lie beyond their powers to achieve. Here is the passage:

While the best and most industrious artists were laboring, by the light of Giotto and his followers, to give the world examples of such power as the benignity of their stars and the varied character of their fantasies enabled them to command, and while desirous of imitating the perfection of Nature by the excellence of Art, they were struggling to attain that high comprehension which many call intelligence, and were universally toiling, but for the most part in vain, the Ruler of Heaven was pleased to turn the eyes of his clemency toward earth, and perceiving the fruitlessness of so many labors, the ardent studies pursued without any result, and the presumptuous self-sufficiency of men, which is farther from the truth than darkness is from light, he resolved, by way of delivering us from such great errors, to send to the world a spirit endowed with universality of power in each art... capable of showing by himself alone, what is the perfection of art....

The Tuscan genius has ever been raised high above all others, the men of that country displaying more zeal in study and more constancy in labor, than any other people of Italy, so did he resolve to confer the privilege of his birth on Florence... as justly meriting that the perfections of every art should be exhibited to the world by one who should be her citizen. (III, 228)

Clearly modeled on the Christian epic, this passage stipulated the end of a history, defined by the cumulative effort to achieve a perfection artists are incapable of without the revelation through example of a divine intercessor, born, like a savior, in Florentine precincts: a Florentine among Florentines, as Christ was a human among humans. I employ the term “revelation” here as implying knowledge of the highest importance which we would be incapable of attaining through the common cognitive routines—induction, deduction, observation, testimony, experimentation, or, in the specific case of the visual arts, “making and matching,” to use Gombrich’s expression. Artists now know what *perfection* is, and need no longer blindly seek it. Rather, they can, by emulating Michelangelo’s example, achieve perfection in their own work. The history of art, conceived of as the seeking of representational perfection, has concluded through divine intercession.

Imagine, on the model of revelation, a vision granted to Giotto of Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*. A voice calls out: “Is this what you are trying to do?” Vasari’s account assumes that Giotto’s answer would unequivocally be Yes—that he would instantly see not only that Michelangelo had achieved what Giotto himself aspired to, but that, in point of an art criticism that belonged to that project, Giotto’s personages were revealed as wooden, disproportionate to their architectural settings, and visually unconvincing. Of course, it is thinkable that Giotto would have thought differently, and if we could then imagine on what grounds he might have rejected the model of Michelangelo, we would have a very different understanding of Giotto’s art than we now have, which depends upon seeing him and Michelangelo as belonging to the same developmental history. Suppose, however, he were granted a vision of *Les demoiselles d’Avignon*, or Matisse’s *Luxe, Calme, et Volupte*. My counterfactual opinion is that Giotto would not have viewed these as art, or, if it was art, then it must have been done by savages or madmen, or vastly earlier in the same history his work belonged to: these were to

become the fallback positions when Modernism challenged received views of art with precisely these works. Giotto would have had no impulse to emulate, to learn how to do what Matisse and Picasso were revealed to have done. Rather, he would see himself as having made immense progress beyond them, whoever they were and whenever they worked. It would be like Chinese art, were he have had a vision of that. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel writes: “The Chinese have not yet succeeded in representing the beautiful as beautiful; for in their painting shadow and perspective are wanting.” With qualification, Giotto had both.

I think we might use this counterfactual story to make plain what *belonging to the same history* means, and at the same time what it would mean *not* to belong to the same history. So I would assume that while Giotto and Michelangelo belong to the same history, neither of them belongs with Matisse or Picasso, and that, if this were true, then we would have an intuitive grasp of historical discontinuity. To belong to the same history would mean that earlier artists could achieve what later artists achieved, without the labor of searching for it, once they had the example. Vasari’s image is that artists would have stumbled forever in the dark, without finding what they were looking for, and that Michelangelo showed them that. One might argue that Michelangelo appeared when the Tuscan art world was ready for him, and that he had in some measure internalized the history that intervened between Giotto and himself. Certainly we could not imagine him as a contemporary of Giotto, nor as coming immediately after Giotto in an historical sequence instead of the artists who did, like Masaccio. But we could imagine a counterfactual history in which artists were spared the search, and could move directly and immediately to their goal as embodied in Michelangelo’s towering work. Of course, a lot would have had to change for this to happen: were there actually walls high enough to execute something like *The Last Judgment* in Giotto’s time?

In any case, art after Michelangelo would be post-historical with respect to a history whose terminus is the Sistine Ceiling and *The Last Judgment*. There was a great deal of art made after that, so it was not as though the history of art had stopped, but rather had come to an internally defined end. It had moved from search to application, from looking for representational truth to working in the light of that truth. Beyond the figure of Jonah in the Sistine Ceiling, it was impos-

sible to advance. Of course artists were to become more adept than Michelangelo in certain ways: Tiepolo handled foreshortening with an ease and certitude Michelangelo would have envied, had he been granted a vision of Tiepolo's ceiling painting for *Der Rezidens* in Wurzburg. But he would in no further sense have seen it as diminishing his achievement—and in any case he always complained that he was, after all, not a painter. Tiepolo would be entirely a post-historical artist with regard to that history, though three centuries further along: Michelangelo died in 1564—the year of Shakespeare's birth; and Tiepolo in 1770—six years before the American Revolution.

In that long post-historical evening, there were a great many changes in what artists were asked to do, so that in a way the history of art was the history of patronage. Mannerist art was a response to one set of briefs, the Baroque to another, Rococo to yet a third and Neo-Classicism to a fourth. It would be inconceivable that these varying briefs could have been imposed on art if it were as it had been at the time of Giotto. Rather, this variety was a possibility only because the use of perspective, *chiaroscuro*, foreshortening and the like no longer had to be struggled with. They could be mastered and used by everyone, and they defined what the curriculum of the workshop as art school should be. This merits a further observation. Multiculturalism in art is today very much a political ideal, but it is an artistic ideal just because there is no such curriculum—nothing which qualifies artists to enter the world of commissions. Today, a Chinese artist might respond to Hegel that he has exceedingly provincial ideas of beauty as beauty. In the Seventeenth century, on the other hand, Mandarins could see, as immediately and intuitively as Giotto is imagined here seeing Michelangelo, that the way a western artist used perspective was correct, and that their own history would have been different had the ancients the luck to see such models. But in their case, art was too embedded in practices they could not change in order to assimilate the perspective they now knew. That knowledge represented what they freely admitted they should have done, but which (unlike the case of Giotto and Michelangelo) it was too late to do. Art was differently implicated in their life and culture, and a deep transformation in the whole of their society would be required if it were to be accepted. They belonged to a different history entirely. But today the “should”

would drop out of consideration: There is no art-educational curriculum. That is why multiculturalism is a valid ideal as it would or could not have been in 1770, or until the advent of Modernism, however we date that.

To the degree that anyone thought about the future of art, it would not have the form “Someday artists will...”—on the model of “Someday medicine will find a cure for cancer” or “Someday man will walk on the Moon”—but rather the form that the future would be in essential respects like the past, except perfect where it is now deficient. One could learn the meaning of the term “art” through induction over known instances, and could rank artworks in terms of their distance from Vasari’s paradigms. In a way, the class of artworks had the structure of a species, with all con-specifics sharing the defining features, but with enough variation that connoisseurs could single the best out from the better, the way dog or pigeon breeders do in Darwin’s best examples of artificial as against natural selection. These views loosely defined the visual arts through the long interval from Michelangelo and his peers—Raphael, Leonardo, and Titian—until the dawn of Modernism, at which time, for reasons it would be fascinating to discover, a discontinuity emerged in the class of artworks so sharp that even connoisseurs were uncertain whether it was art at all. The historically important painting of mid-to-late nineteenth century did not seem to belong to the future of art as that conception would have been intelligible to someone at home in the Vasarian post-history. It was at times so discontinuous that one could not easily explain it with reference to the kind of grading which went with species-like variations. Modernist works seemed entirely off the scale. Nor could it be explained with respect to the principles of perfection it in fact counter-exemplified. One would rather have explanatory recourse to hoaxes or insanity, to mischief and mockery. This, as in science, was a way of saving the appearances, enabling the concept of art, together with the apparatus of connoisseurship, to remain intact. It was a way of “explaining away” whatever seemed to threaten the concept—an entirely creditable defensive measure, since the new work, if admitted under the concept, would inevitably entail revisions in the tacit schedule of necessary and sufficient conditions for something being an artwork. This of course is not to explain the need to preserve appearances in the case of art, or why, nearly a century after Matisse and

Picasso, Modernist art has still to be explained away. Perhaps it is because we are supposed to be made in God's image, and God could not look like one of the *Demoiselles*. Or, if he could, we were not his images at all.

## 2.

In 1873, Henry James published "The Madonna of the Future," a story about an artist I—but hardly James—would describe as post-historical. This is Theobald, an American working in Florence, consumed by the ambition to paint a Madonna which will equal Raphael's *Madonna della Seggiola*. He had found a model, a beautiful young mother who embodied the qualities of feminine grace Raphael shows, and which Theobald wished his own Madonna to have. But instead of painting this woman, he devotes himself to the prolonged study of the painting he hoped to rival, seeking to discover what he refers to as "the secrets of the masters." These secrets would at best have an historical interest today, and would have been of incidental use in the history which succeeded the Vasarian history. James sees Theobald as ridiculous and at the same time tragic. He nevertheless entirely accepts Theobald's project of painting what the Narrator refers to as *The Madonna of the Future*, giving James his title. That meant that James and Theobald belonged to the same moment of the same history: one could make valid art by recreating valid art. So James could say that, if successful, Theobald's picture would embody the qualities that Raphael's painting embodied and hence he would be as good a painter as Raphael was. (Precisely such an inference governed Hans van Meegeren's decision to paint what everyone would believe was done by Vermeer.) Theobald once drew a picture of child which could have passed for Correggio, and it is striking to speculate that he would not have made a drawing which could have passed for a Giotto—that would have either have been a deliberate archaism or a mark of not having learned properly to draw. So Theobald and Raphael belong to the same prolonged historical moment. The story now takes a turn: James's Narrator is introduced to the woman in whom Theobald saw his Madonna inscribed, and is shocked to discover she has grown coarse and stout and sexual, though what James calls *les beaux restes* can still be made out. Theobald has waited too long—waited twenty years in fact, in which his model went from youth to thickened middle age. He had studied painting too long to the detriment of

depicting life. Stunned by this truth, he resolves to paint his masterpiece which, he says, pointing to his head, is already created, needing only to be transcribed. In fact transcription is more of a problem than he envisioned, and when the Narrator seeks him out, Theobald is sitting before a blank canvas. Not long afterward he dies an operatic death, which is the only way to end a story like that.

Let us conduct the same kind of historical experiment with Theobald as we did with Giotto. We might imagine someone appointed in 1973 as chief curator of the Museum of Monochromy, in, let us say, Cincinnati. He enters Theobald's studio at the moment when, all passion spent, the artist sits listlessly before a canvas which James describes as "a mere dead blank, cracked and discolored by time"—an object which emblemizes as dramatic a failure as Fremincourt's painting in Balzac's *Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu*. And indeed the canvas is to the curator's eyes a *chef d'oeuvre inconnu*. "It is," he tells Theobald, "a masterpiece." And he assures him that he is ahead of his time. That the history of the all white painting, which includes Rodchenko, Malevich, Rauschenberg, and Ryman, begins with him. "Has it a title?" he asks. Theobald replies: "It has been referred to as 'The Madonna of the Future.'" "Brilliant!", the Curator responds. "What a comment the dust and cracks makes on the future of religion! It belongs in my monograph—it belongs in my museum! You will be celebrated!" This "Ghost of Artworld's Future," as a curator, will have some slides—of Malevich, Rodchenko, Rauschenberg, Ryman. The slides are pretty much all alike, and each resembles Theobald's blank canvas about as much as they resemble one another. Theobald would have no choice but to regard the curator as mad. But if he has a philosophical imagination, he might think this: It does not follow from those blank canvases being artworks, despite the resemblance between their work and my blank canvas, that my blank canvas is an artwork. And it will occur to him that it almost immediately must follow that one cannot tell artworks from other things on the basis of observation, induction and like cognitive practices which served in the art world he knew. At a more human level, he would continue to count himself a failure, even if the site of his failure would be regarded in the future as an artwork. That would not be a future he would wish to be part of: he wants to be the Raphael of the Future, and achieve a work in every particular the peer of the *Madonna della Seggiola*. It is no consolation that there will be works which resemble something he has not relevantly



touched. Still, the Ghost of Artworlds Future will have planted a question. The question is: What is an artwork? That is not a question which could interestingly arise in the reign of Vasari.

“What is an artwork?” became part of every artwork belonging to the Modernist era, and each such artwork advanced itself as a kind of answer: *Anche io son pittura*. It is because artworks could be enfranchised only through an analysis of art that it would be correct to say, as Clement Greenberg famously did, that the mark of Modernist painting was self-critique: “The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline from itself.” Greenberg saw this as a search for what was “unique and irreducible in each particular art,” and hence for a perfection quite different from what Vasari imaged. Modernism, in virtue of this ascent to self-consciousness, marks a new kind of historical reality, and not just a new historical reality. Modernism contrasts, in virtue of this self-consciousness, with everything that went before, and does so, in virtue of self-consciousness, in ways in which the various stages and movements of the tradition did not differ one from another. In some way paintings themselves became objects rather than ways of showing objects. It is not surprising—it was to have been expected—that as Modernism advanced, more and more of the art that had not been considered part of the history of art was admitted as art—folk art, primitive art, oriental art, the art of outsiders—simply because it was no longer considered important that these arts look as if they fit into the Vasarian narrative. This induced an increasingly radical heterogeneity into the *extension* of the term “artwork.” And it raised questions for each tentative definition of art, just because none of the ways in which these objects differed from one another could belong to the definition. If it belonged to the definition, one or the other of the differing works could not belong to the term’s extension. So the answer had to be universal and complete, which is by and large what Hegel meant by Absolute Knowledge. And, in a singularly important way, the answer had to lie outside history, as having to be compatible with whatever art there was or would be, in any possible world in which there was art at all. It would in particular have to explain why a blank canvas from 1873 and a blank canvas from 1973, otherwise entirely alike, differed in that one could not be an artwork, though

the other is one. This I regard as the central question of the philosophy of art. It is scarcely a question that could have arisen for the doomed Neo-Raphaelian painter Theobald. It is after all the mark of history that the future is not disclosed in the present. One might have been able to imagine, at some earlier moment in Vasarian history, that there would be a time in the future when artists would be able to create works so like reality that no one could tell the difference. But they would not know how to generalize upon their own representational strategies to know how—which is why Vasari counted Michelangelo's coming as a revelation.

### 3.

There were, of course, the first stirrings of Modernism by 1873. If we think of the consignment of Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* to the *Salon des refusees* as the first event in Modernism's history, that history was but ten years old when James published his story. The First Impressionist Exhibition was held in (*nota bene*) the studio of the photographer Nadar in 1874. In 1876 there was a famous encounter between the critic Ruskin and the painter Whistler (which James reported on in *The Nation*). Whistler insisted that *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* was a painting, while Ruskin dismissed it as a paint box flung in the public face. Compared to what Ruskin admired, it could hardly have been accepted as art. Compared to Pollock—or even to Bacon who talked about throwing paint at the canvas—it was pretty tame. But it was a quarrel over what everyone thought they knew. The history of Modernism was the history of scandals, as one after the other, works of art bumped some cherished criterion out of the definition of art. The first two thirds of the Twentieth Century saw the end of this history, when works of art began to appear which resembled quite ordinary things—like soup cans and Brillo Boxes—far more than they resembled what would have been counted works of art in the age of Giotto or of Theobald.

It is this moment of closure that I refer to as The End of Art. As with Michelangelo, beyond whom one could not advance, on the Vasarian narrative, there would be no going beyond the Brillo Box in the history of artistic self-consciousness, since the class of artworks includes Brillo Box but excluded Brillo boxes which look exactly like them, so that we cannot base a definition of art on

what meets the eye. It does not mean that art will not be made. It means the closure of a history, not the termination of a practice.

I want to pause and reflect upon the kind of concept the concept of art is. Logicians distinguish between what they term the *intension* of a concept, and the concept's extension. The extension of a concept (or a term) will be all and only those things which fall under the concept—robins and sparrows and ducks if the concept is “bird.” The intension comprises all the conditions deemed necessary for something to be classed as a bird—wingedness, oviperousness, and the like. Everything in the extension has, through meeting these criteria, to resemble the rest. Whatever the difference between ducks and sparrows, both of them are birds. The history of Modernism, by adding disjunctively to the extension of the concept Artwork, tended to bump from the intension one or another condition—and when that happened, things became candidates for art that would not have been before. The intention of “art work” is transhistorical: it specifies the invariant condition for something being art in every world in which there is art at all. But the extension of the concept is entirely historical in the sense that Theobald's canvas could not have been an artwork in 1873 though something just like it could already have precedents a century later. Indeed, the possibility was realized a few years after Theobald's death, albeit as a spoof by the artist Alphonse Allais, who, in 1879, printed a blank white rectangle with the joky title *Premiere communion de jeunes filles chlorotiques par un temps de neige*. Chlorosis is a disease due to iron deficiency, leaving the skin greenish (it is called “greensickness” in the vernacular), and “chlor” means “green—think of chlorophyll. “Albino” would have served Allais's purpose better, since he clearly intended a picture of abnormally white-skinned girls in white communion frocks in white snow. He did an all black picture as well: *Combat de negres dans une cave pendant la nuit*. Both, however, are *pictures*, and though the difference between one of them and Theobald's blank canvas could have been invisible, it is no less profound for that. It is a picture of an all-white world, whereas the blank canvas is not a picture at all (not even a picture of nothing), however great the resemblances (let them be arbitrarily close). The blank canvas can become an artwork only with the advent of abstraction, which bumped “is a picture” from the concept of the visual arts. And in that, startling as it may seem, the concept of visuality itself was bumped from

the concept of the visual arts, even if the extension of the concept was filled with objects of visual beauty and interest. What delayed the advent of Absolute Knowledge in the case of art is that, for historical reasons, certain features of objects in extension were believed to form part of the intension of the concept, when in fact they lay outside the essence of art entirely.<sup>1</sup> Even if there were no conceptual analog, it is valuable to see in what ways the concept of art is different from such concepts as “bird,” with which the old logic texts concerned themselves. This would explain why the history of Modernism differs from the Vasarian history as well. Giotto could have made great strides in approaching Michelangelo by studying the future great man’s secrets, just as Theobald did in studying the secrets of Raphael. But Modernism is conceptual. Its history is the history of adding to the extension of art and at the same time modifying its intension until it becomes plain with the fullness of self-consciousness that there is no way a work of art cannot appear. That anything can be a work of art, the question now being what must be true of it for this to be true.

This way of seeing the problem did not disclose itself all at once. But there is a marked difference between Modernism’s approach and that of the art which in a way put an end to Modernism. Modernism’s was a pursuit of essence, of what art solely and truly is, hence of a kind of pure art, very much as if the art which resulted was like an alchemical precipitate, from which impurities had all been purged. This suggests a Grail-like narrative, in the framework of which the all white painting might have been regarded as the climax—the work beyond which it was impossible to go. I heard Robert Colescott explain his reasons for making comic paintings of blacks, namely that Ryman had gone as far as one could go with his all white paintings, and that in consequence a history was over with. There is, I think, a logical flaw in this agenda, namely that though the all-white painting could be considered art and be considered pure—it would not follow that it was pure art—art in a pure state. That is because white is at best a metaphor for purity. The essence of art must be possessed by every work of art, even the least pure—like Colescott’s cartoon masterpieces.

The other and succeeding strategy was to put pressure on the intension of the concept by advancing something as art which violated some accepted criterion, and to see what then happened. Wittgenstein talks about a chess-player who

puts a paper hat on a king, which of course, whatever meaning it has for him, means nothing under the rules of chess. So you can really take it off without anything happening. In the Sixties and beyond, it was discovered how many paper hats there were in art. They were thought to be part of the meaning of art when in fact they were subsidiary properties of certain works of art of surprisingly local interest. I think of Warhol as having followed this line of investigation with greater conceptual imagination than anyone else, erasing false criteria at every step, until it began to be appreciated that there was nothing that could not be art. But that was happening everywhere at that time in the arts—in dance, in theater, in music. Since anything could be art, the question arose why everything wasn't art: what made the difference between what was and what was not? A number of fairly bad answers were given. One would be that whatever an artist says is a work of art is through that fact a work of art period. Or—this is the Institutional Theory of Art—whatever an artworld decrees is a work of art is one through that declaration. This makes the history of art a series of proclamations, which leaves the problem of why Theobald's blank canvas was not an artwork in 1873 a mere matter of his not declaring it to be one. And that seems to leave a great deal out of the picture. It seems simply unacceptable that the members of the class of artworks have only the fact that someone called them art to license their being in the class at all. But what then can they have in common if there are no limits on what can be an artwork, especially if two things can look entirely alike but only one of them be an artwork? That question is philosophical, and when I speak of the end of art I mean specifically that progress from this point is philosophical progress, progress in the analysis of the concept. It is not that art has turned into philosophy but that the history of art has moved onto a philosophical plane. Art making may go on and on. But so far as self-understanding is concerned, it cannot take us further.

I might only add that the history could not have attained this point by philosophical reflection alone. It has been entirely internal to the history of art, and the progress to artistic self-consciousness has emerged through the kind of philosophy in action which the history of Modernism has been. Philosophers could not have imagined a situation like the present one in which, with qualification, anything goes.

#### 4.

So what does it take to be an artwork in what I term Post-History? I want to concentrate on an interesting example which should make the problem vivid, and which shows to what degree art-making has been penetrated by philosophy. This was an installation by an artist with the surprising name (in fact a pseudonym) L.A. Angelmaker, in the Momenta Art gallery in Brooklyn, New York, in Spring of 1997. The work has a title— "Bad Penny: For Museum Purchase Only." And it consists of articles of antique furniture which were either not works of art, because they were instead works of craft, or were works of art only because they were made at a time when the line between art and craft was not considered firm. These articles in any case had once been in the decorative arts galleries of museums, and had subsequently been deaccessioned. But through Angelmaker's intervention they constitute works of contemporary art, or are in any case integral to a work of art which would not have been possible as art in an earlier moment, and certainly not under Modernism. Whatever else we can say about them, their being art now has nothing greatly to do with an artist or a group of artworlders transforming them into art by saying simply "Be thou art." One of Angelmaker's objects is a French Henry II Style walnut extension table incorporating renaissance elements. It was given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art by J.P. Morgan in 1916. The other object is described as A French Provincial Late Renaissance Walnut Armoire, early 17th Century. Both are handsome pieces of furniture which anyone would love to live with, but I am interested in them through the fact that they are offered as art today in a different way from any perspective under which they might have been viewed as art before. The items of furniture were, as said, "deaccessioned" by museums, and offered at auction to a public which doubtless bid on them as luxurious articles of use. Angelmaker "is offering to resell the furniture to museums as contemporary works by dint of their participation in his project." So the seventeenth century armoire is transformed into a late twentieth century piece of art as part of a complex performance. The artist is attempting "to disrupt the flow of objects from public collections into private ownership." In any case, the art criticism of Angelmaker's project is obviously vastly different from the art-criticism of the pieces of furniture as such, with reference to the patina of the wood, the design of doors, the cabinetry. In becoming art, the articles of furniture

retain those now irrelevant properties, which form no part of their status as art in the late twentieth century.

I regard this work as a deeply post-historical object in that it could not, unlike Michelangelo's work—or a blank canvas—be imagined as of use in showing what earlier artists in their respective histories were trying to do, since they culminated those histories. Nor can we imagine some later work showing what Angelmaker really aspired to achieve. Angelmaker's work develops no history, nor will it develop into further history, at least not as art. This is the mark of contemporary art, in which each work has only its own history. But that is to say that contemporary art has no mark, which is the external side of the slogan that anything can be art. Beyond that it is clear that *Bad Penny's* status as art has nothing to do with its maker merely declaring it to be art. Its being art instead is implicated in its conceptual complexity, its purpose, and its means. One might notice in passing that one would have to view antique furniture as part of the material of the artist, like paint and plaster. The materials of the artist are as diverse as the class of artworks themselves, since anything is subject to having its identity transformed by someone who sees how to use it in a work. The art supply store would then have to carry *everything*. Their inventory would have to be as rich as the inventory of life.

I want to conclude with one further example. The sculptor Tom MacAnulty recently completed a commission he had received from a monastic order in Indiana, to make an altar for their church. The brothers had been struck by the magnificent altar in Aachen, from the time of Charlemagne, and wanted something exactly like that, though not an imitation of it. This left the artist a great deal of room when it came to the gilded bronze panels, which decorated the four sides of the altar (the frame would be built by a monk gifted in cabinetry). It was a wonderful commission, and involved a great deal of discussion as well as reading the Bible carefully, but at the same time it left MacAnulty uncomfortable. What business, he wanted to know, has a modern sculptor working on a Carolingian altar? I told him that a *modern* sculptor would have had no business producing such a work. But it was perfectly all right for a *contemporary* artist to do. For an object not deeply different from an 8th Century AD altar can be a work of contemporary art. His work may enter into subsequent history in many ways: he may

go on to execute other liturgical commissions, he may start a trend in which non-liturgical artists find satisfaction in liturgical art. But this is not a master narrative. To say that the work is post-historical is merely to stress that. If we think laterally of everything actual and possible as art—that is, the art being made all across the artworld at a given time—then it must be clear that the heterogeneity today is of so high a degree, the media so interpenetrate one another, and the purposes are so diffuse, that a next lateral cut will be strictly unpredictable. All that one can predict is that there will be no narrative direction. And that is what I mean by the end of art.

When I first wrote about this concept, I was somewhat depressed. I concluded my text by saying that it had been an immense privilege to have lived in history. I wrote that as a New Yorker who had lived through many changes, each surprising and yet each developing what went before. So one went to exhibitions to try to determine where art was heading. I felt about that history, in truth, as I did about analytical philosophy, which also seemed to be moving inevitably toward certain ends. But now I have grown reconciled to the unlimited lateral diversity of art. I marvel at the imaginativeness of artists in finding ways to convey meanings by the most untraditional of means. The artworld is a model of a pluralistic society, in which all disfiguring barriers and boundaries have been thrown down. (For what it is worth, I have no use for pluralism in philosophy.)

Hegel's final speech in the course of lectures he delivered at Jena in 1806 could be describing this moment in the history of art:

We find ourselves in an important epoch, in a fermentation, in which Spirit has made a leap forward, has gone beyond its previous concrete form and acquired a new one. The whole mass of ideas and concepts that have been current until now, the very bonds of the world, are dissolved and collapsing into themselves like a vision in a dream. A new emergence of Spirit is at hand; philosophy must be the first to recognize it, while others, resisting impotently, adhere to the past.... But philosophy, in recognizing it as what is eternal, must pay homage to it.

From that tremendous perspective, the liberation of a life beyond history might be experienced as exhilarating.



**ENDNOTE**

1. It would be fascinating to find some other concept of which something like this is true. It has at times seemed to me that the concept of number, which has its own history, beginning with the whole numbers, the integers with zero, the rationals, the reals, and so on has something like the structure of the concept of art, but I do not wish to develop that comparison here.

## Response

### Charles Altieri

I want to express my gratitude to Arthur Danto for a talk that was as elegant and lucid as it was telling. He provides a superb, economical way to talk about what comprises a shareable history in terms of how extensions and intensions come under pressure and shift their provenance. And he powerfully maps what has been at stake in twentieth century artists' fascination with the concept of art, making it clear how an art world that has lost any common curriculum takes on deep affinities with the pluralist logic informing multicultural thinking. And he now shows that even within analytic philosophical traditions philosophers can turn the condition of historical orphanage into a locus for sublime experiences of freedom and invention.

But I am not here to praise Caesar; I was invited to make trouble for him and that is what I will now attempt. I said that Danto's is a superb, economical way to talk about history. But I am not sure that any economical way to talk about history is likely to be a sufficiently supple and intricate one. So I will devote my remarks to indicating what is problematic in Danto's approach to the history of Western art in terms of extensions and intensions afforded by specifiable curricula and shared models of perfection. Danto's arguments depend on his ability to wield a stable concept of "the same," and also of what it means to live in "different" histories. To accomplish that he has to evade hermeneutic questions raised by how various agents might understand what constitutes that sameness or difference. And he justifies that by locating "sameness" entirely in manifest shared criteria and practices, not by beliefs about those practices (much as Nelson Goodman defines style in extensional terms). Consequently a concern for "intensions" has to take the place of talk about "intentions."

I do not think that move is a feasible one if one wants to preserve anything like the sense of history that artists and critics actually use and fight over. On the simplest level, I suspect that what allows us to use “same” for our histories will be different depending on whether we speak of agents within a similar epoch, agents interpreting the past, or agents with specific views of how history might be more intelligible in retrospect than it was to specific agents situated in their cultures. And such intentions will partially define the relevant criteria so that there is no one body of extensions that shapes firm boundaries. For a Marxist, there may be more differences between Giotto and Michelangelo than there are between Michelangelo and Picasso (each with his cult of genius). And for a historian of Dutch art, the idea of perfection of a style in terms of some single avatar may not be a crucial part of the history of picture making (although the idea of genres as species may remain). More important, I think that a focus on specific extensions determining a history will not capture the strange strands of idealization and competition and citation that give artists their particular senses of the history to which they most intensely belong. Danto turns art history in the history of the concept of art, and that leaves out most of the internal drama and external relevance of what artists actually do.

For my example of how this complex intentionality creates challenges for the theory of history I want to invoke Cézanne’s relation to the history of painting. Danto acknowledges the peculiar nature of modernist views of history by speaking of their pursuit of some essence, as if all modernism could be explained by a certain rhetoric of abstraction. But while Cézanne could be gerrymandered within this district, his concerns in fact seem to me somewhat different. Clearly art critics of Cézanne’s time thought that Cézanne was somehow outside of the history that provided as its measures work by Michelangelo and David. He certainly did not meet academic criteria based on interpretations of those artists. Yet Cézanne saw himself as very much within that history. He thought he was extending the structural sensibility of painters like Poussin. And it would be difficult now to argue that he was wrong, or that he is less a part of the history that his contemporaries refused to grant him than, say, Bougereau, who at the time seemed one possible model of historical perfection (an end to history in more than one sense).

Notice now that we have two additional factors that will complicate what extensions and intensions we see as basic to a history. Better, we have two additional factors that complicate the level on which we decide what might count as the relevant extensions and intensions. We have the artist's understanding of what binds him or her to history, often as a principle of exploration rather than as a specific commitment to practices whose principles of judgment are clear. (I suspect that Poussin himself was a problem for those whose tastes were shaped by Michelangelo.) And this artist's understanding can be quite complex because there is no central question around which clear single histories can be formed. As Danto says, the issue of defining works of art was not central to the Renaissance. What was central was an idealization of beauty that brought that concept into the gravitational field of the concept of truth. And while Cézanne's exploration of that same field created problems about what the art work was, that concern was certainly not something that troubled him. Cézanne probably saw himself continuous with that history because he still worked within a grammar of linking beauty to truth. So what counted as truth still had an ideal dimension that bound its pursuit to the highest accomplishments of Western art. But for his peers and their successors art came to seem congruent entirely with languages of truth, however redefined by aesthetic theory, and then the classical concept of perfection simply loses its relevance because truth so secularized has nothing to do with perfection. Art can still idealize style, but as invention or as transformation—not as perfection. Yet these are less matters of a new history being born than of exploring possibilities within what there remain reasons to treat as the same history engaged by the artists' predecessors and heirs. Ironically, it would soon become feasible to reconsider the very idea of perfection so that it became as tied to specific projects as the idea of truth had been. Specific powers of expression can realize themselves more or less perfectly even though there is no single exemplar of what perfection is.

Second, Cézanne's insistence on a continuity based on different criteria than his critics use forces us to recognize not only the range of possible constructions of "same" histories, but also the need to account for different historical perspectives on history, each with their specific orientations and agendas. Over time what seems outside history or problematic within it turns out to be consis-

tent with certain underlying concerns that gradually come to the fore. Imagine how strange Cubism would seem were there not Cézanne to look back to; or perhaps imagine how strange Cézanne might still seem were there not Cubism to make us accustomed to how deformation might be inseparable from realization. We handle such imagining, I add, by shifting among possible master terms and not by relying on the specific extensions yielded by a determinable concept of art held by the agents. And among these master terms we might want to use not only intentionalist ones but also materialist causal ones that in their way also find categories beyond the extensions of the prevailing aesthetic as their ways of positing historical continuity where there seems to be aesthetic differences. Think here of what Bourdieu might say about the end of history argument. Danto could reply that Bourdieu only puts the arts within a different history, but the issue is whether that different history can explain why we now need the end of history argument, in which case it is a comprehensive history and not simply a different one.

The example of Cézanne also encourages us to ask whether there has to be a strong interpretation of narrative direction for there to be a sense of history. Perhaps just an awareness of filiation and responsibility to some aspect of a model will suffice, as we see in his relation to Poussin's sense of space and volume. Or, better, Cézanne shows that if there is to be a sense of narrative direction or filiation, that sense need not derive from a model of *techne* or an ideal of perfection. History can also simply indicate possibilities for further explorations and modulations, with realization in space rather than perfection in time the momentary fulfillment of that history.

But recognizing this does not warrant my ignoring Danto's own basic narrative distinction between those modernists like Cézanne who intended to engage history and Warhol's entire rejection of historical categories. So I must now turn to Danto's more important and stronger argument—that he has given us a way to understand how artists might understand their projects when they imagine themselves at the end of history, where questions about what perfection is are replaced by speculations on what might constitute art as it pushes boundaries with “non-art.” Yet here too I think there are problems—one with the role he gives to philosophy as now central to the arts because of its ways of pursuing questions

about what constitutes art, and yet one more problem with the exclusive use of intensional categories as his measure of sameness within history.

Here my example will have to be an indirect one. After the '95 Whitney Biennial Benjamin Buchloh suggested that the chagrined relation of left wing aestheticists like Hal Foster and Rosalind Krauss to the overt politics of that show might stem from their reactionary clinging to aestheticist notions of value while the artists were exploring rhetorical understandings of their tasks. (Rhetorical motives justify choices directly by their possible effects on audiences, not by their initial power to flesh out the expressive surface of an art object.) Yet while Buchloh's ideas managed to dignify the work collected in that Biennial in ways much stronger than any other critical stance, not even he has pursued this idea of painting as rhetorical practice. And certainly the '97 Biennial shows a massive withdrawal from such political ambitions.

What does this show? Minimally it shows that there can be wrong histories, or that some versions of the history of art do not take. Yet we cannot explain the failure of Buchloh's notion simply from its resisting the force of current curricula practices, because Danto is committed to the belief that these no longer dictate overall artistic ambitions within this culture. So it seems that we have to locate whatever blocks Buchloh's ideas in constraining forces mediated by examples and idealizations that still affect how artists represent themselves to themselves. The history bearing these examples and idealizations usually is not now presented in the form of specific narratives cast as necessary forms for historical experience; and those narratives that are invoked are rarely located entirely in art history but instead cross art with analogous historical forces manifest in other areas of social life. In fact there seems to me so much shared concern with social history that this concern itself, along with the fascination by questions of what art is that Danto so brilliantly traces, may turn out to be the phenomena that later generations will use to define what are the common traits in our artistic culture so that it can make those somehow continuous with a single narrative of pressures and responses to pressures. Then Duchamp and Warhol and Angelmaker and MacAnulty will all be seen as sharing one history, different from the old history only in that it does not overtly emphasize progress. Probably it will be what was

common in their intentions, in how they understood their own historicity, that seems the most compelling evidence that they have been participating in the “same” cultural processes.

Now I want to shift from argument to my own speculative historical interest in why it does seem that art now enters more complexly into something like dialogue with philosophy. There have always been philosophers who interpreted art and gave it a place in their systems. But now philosophical inquiry about the nature of art itself, apart from a more comprehensive system, becomes a necessary feature of contemporary art. Danto is careful to assure us that artists do not depend on philosophers; they simply carry out experiments of interest to philosophers in ways that earlier art was not, since questions of boundaries, and hence of what differences make a difference, are so fundamental. Yet it is difficult not to see underneath this diffidence another step in a long history of philosophy conceiving itself as the necessary fulfillment of what artists manage to stumble into. Suppose however that the tables are now being turned—that rather than art submitting to philosophy for its approval, artists are fascinated with issues about boundaries in part because it provides them a means of seducing philosophers into their domain, not as authoritative interpreters but as those whom the artists hope to bring closer to the languages of values by which the artists live.

Daniel Dennet provides an interesting analogue for the case I am suggesting. He holds out the possibility that rather than libraries existing for the interests of scholars, scholars might be considered the sememes by which libraries reproduce themselves. Analogously contemporary art may be less dependent on philosophy than it is eager to reproduce its values within a broader domain, perhaps making philosophers more responsive than they typically are to the crucial roles that attention to intentions and singular working processes can play in a culture that is losing its capacity to appreciate those values. Perhaps it will take such seduction for the culture at large to recognize how deeply contemporary art does continue ambitions for art shaped by the ideals of its predecessors. For the artist’s dream in this regard may be that when philosophers become fascinated by questions of what art is, they will also experience the range of ways that their concepts can be adapted and extended within the play of the working intelligences making that art.

By the end of his talk Danto's appreciative remarks show how fully he has responded to that invitation. But I think he still needs to ask how his philosophical claims about history might be better attuned to the history of such wonder. Then he might not want to end with Hegel, whose claims to be at the end of history are now painfully within history (despite the fantasies of Thomas Fukiyama). Instead he might turn to Wallace Stevens' very different meditation on history in which only "the the" manages to resist the dump on which all our explicit values soon come to reside. Philosophy can clarify how that "the" functions, but art's historical role may be to keep fresh its force, not by moving the history of art onto a philosophical plane but by relying on a more or less continuous history in which the working specificity of choices is what makes value claims on our imaginations.



## Response

Anthony J. Cascardi

Arthur Danto's talk represents an intriguing attempt to calculate, even predict, something about the "future of art" on the basis of the baffling array of contemporary art practices. Danto offers a thesis about the future of art that is not susceptible to proof or disproof, verification or falsification, on the basis of any empirical evidence we might have. In this respect, his project is reminiscent of Kant's attempt to answer the question whether the human race was constantly progressing ("An Old Question Raised Again") for which, Kant said, one needed to know not just the past, but future history, in order thereby to calculate the shape of history as a whole. This was a problematic project, to say the least, because the true shape of history would be visible only to prophets or seers, which is to say by means of those very modes of insight from which the Enlightenment wished to protect itself. Kant's solution to this dilemma was, not unlike Danto's, based upon a reading of the future from the signs of the present.

The substance of Danto's claim (and here it is very unlike anything Kant would have had to say) is that the art of the future will not, indeed cannot, resemble the art of the past—that in this sense we stand on the far side of a historical discontinuity whose consequence is the elimination of any historical connection between the art of the future and that of the past, indeed, the end of the very notion of "history" upon which such a conception of continuity might rely.

But this is not the first time such a claim has been made, and perhaps something of what Professor Danto means can be clarified by comparing his claim to others like it. One antecedent of the claim is to be found in Hegel's famous comment in the Lectures on Aesthetics that "art is for us a thing of the past." Something Heidegger says about Hegel's remark in the essay "The Origin of the

Work of Art” seems in one respect at least strikingly close to what Danto is arguing. According to Heidegger, Hegel could not possibly have meant that artworks would not continue to be made, but rather that they would no longer serve the purposes they did in the past. For Heidegger, this meant that they would no longer serve to disclose the truth.

Hegel’s and Heidegger’s claims were, in their moment, no more assessable, no more susceptible to proof, than are Danto’s arguments about contemporary art. And yet we continue to grapple with them. Why? First, because Hegel and Heidegger made powerful statements about what is at stake in “art”: that art provides a means for the disclosure of the truth in ways that our cognitive and moral categories do not allow—specifically in the case of Hegel, that art discloses that truth sensuously, that art is, in Hegel’s words, the “sensuous manifestation of the Idea,” the Idea in sensuous form. (I would want to ask analogously, What about art is at stake in Danto’s claim that it is in essence a “thing of the past? This is something that I think needs to be further spelled out.) We continue to grapple with these questions, second, because they invoke a claim about the future in order to say something important about the world of the present and the past. In Hegel’s case, this was to say something about a world that had lost touch with truth as it might be apprehended sensuously, hence about a world that had become mired in reflection; in Heidegger’s case, this was to say something about a world in which poetry and technology, poesis and techne, stand dangerously (but also seductively) close to one another.

What is at stake in the question about the eclipse of art for Danto? What we recognize as past or eclipsed when we recognize that a certain set of practices can no longer count as art might at first seem to be a certain “look,” a particular way of painting or making that endows the things so produced with what Wittgenstein would call a “family resemblance.” It would at least seem that the “look” of a work is for Danto a crucial factor in charting the historical continuities and discontinuities that would entitle us to link Giotto and Michelangelo but not Michelangelo and, say, Jackson Pollock (never mind Michelangelo and L. A. Angelmaker). But I think it is closer to the heart of Danto’s argument to say that what is eclipsed is the possibility of delimiting “art” from everything that is “non-art.” That is what seems to be at stake in the claim that art has no distinctive

“mark, “which is not to say that it is not marked with the signature of the individual artist, but that it is not any longer marked as art. The difficulty I find with this approach lies in the attempt to define something that is said to encompass any possible practice, to have, in Danto’s words, an “infinite lateral diversity.” Danto the philosopher remains a purist who has no use for the pluralism this would require; but Danto the art critic remains a post-historical pluralist whose search for a definite concept of “art work” cannot possibly succeed. Better, I would suggest, to replace Danto’s philosophical question “What is an artwork?” by a question that would seem germane to both the philosophical and critical pursuits he wishes to embrace: “What is the importance of art?” That, I take it, was the question for which Hegel and Heidegger also wished a response.

If one believes that we as a culture have been diminished by having cordoned off “art” as something special from the wide array of other worldly practices, then the post-historical expansion or “art” to embrace all such practices is likely to seem a great achievement. Indeed, this would be close to a heroic feat if the potential cost were not something like art’s critical edge—the very edge that Adorno said art is able to maintain only insofar as it remains at a distance from the world. But if one looks at certain efforts of self-criticism within modernism (and here I think it maybe necessary to modify some of what Clement Greenberg is credited with having said about the importance of such self-criticism) one can see that modernism was already aware of this dangerous game, that it knew or at any rate discovered that overcoming autonomy might lead to self-effacement, as for instance with the passage beyond the minimalist or “subjectless” image to the blank canvas, the silent musical performance, etc.

But no more than modernism, post-historical art has not succeeded in—or succumbed to—the complete effacement of art; nor has this been its goal. I think it would be more accurate to say that art remains, for better or for worse, however minimally, marked—though perhaps the term “re-marked” would be better, thinking about the ways in which an Angelmaker implicitly reflects upon, re-marks, the difference between “art” and “craft,” or between “museum piece” and “utilitarian household object.” To be sure, the art of the present cannot be identified on the basis of its “look”; the notion of “family resemblance” is simply too unreflective a concept to account for the ways in which any look is situated

within a history and a network of purposes, intentions, and means whose origins are external to art. While it may well be true that the art of the future will not “resemble” the art of the past, I think it is also true that it will not, could not, exist without it. Try as it might to overcome the past, the art of the future seems destined, pace Danto, to reflect upon it. Its prior history may well be something it regards as a nightmare, but it is one from which it cannot escape.

Finally, I think there is a “moral of the story” to be told not just about art but about the ways in which we calculate the course and the fate of those modes of self-consciousness that appear to have come to an end in the moment of post-history that Danto associates with the art of the future. Here, I am speaking in response to—and in partial agreement with—Danto’s own response to the question whether the increasing philosophical impingements on art are or are not to be taken as a mark of “progress.” In his answer to one of the audience comments provoked by his talk, Danto elaborated on his reference to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, likening it provocatively, following Josiah Royce’s image, to a *Bildungsroman* whose culminating moment lies in Absolute Knowing. From the perspective of a post-historical reader of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the question is what there is for *Geist* to do once Absolute Knowing is attained. If the *Phenomenology of Spirit* were a narrative, linear and roughly chronological in shape, there would be nothing for *Geist* to do once this moment is reached. Once all the logical and moral categories have been revealed and full satisfaction achieved, there is nothing left for *Geist* to accomplish, hence no desire to spur it onward. Whether satisfaction is not also the source of boredom is something we might well debate.

But it seems to me that the story of *Geist*, and like it the (post)history of art, is rather more like a spiral, a snail’s shell, or even a slinky toy, which through continuous revolutions keeps returning to, and in the process transforming, its own prior modes of thinking, perceiving, acting, and feeling. If this image of *Geist* is plausible at all, then even those moments that appear to mark a radical break with the practices of the past would have to be counted as moments of reflection upon it—which is to say that the unrecognizability of the art of the future is also itself a reflection upon the art of the past.

## Response

Anne M. Wagner

The pale was first mapped for me by my mother, not, as it happens, as part of a lesson in history or geography or their fraught intersections—nothing could have been further from her mind. The term was instead an element in a battery of injunctions and directives and categorizations wielded to produce and police behavior. One was to “buck up and be somebody,” “to sit up straight and address one’s self to one’s food”—which always produced giggles and mutterings on the order of “Dear Food.” When decent behavior was not forthcoming, the risk was of being declared “beyond the pale”—being located past the boundary demarcating civilized conduct, in some no-man’s land of indecency.

These reminiscences are one by-product of reading *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, and then hearing last night’s related lecture, an installment in which the plot, I think, got thickened and also refined. How odd to be transported back to the maternal schoolhouse as a result of reading a book about which my mother would have nothing to say. The oddity is underscored by my sense of a relation, however obscure or illicit, between Mother’s will to order her children, and Danto’s picture of the workings of history in the realm of art. The connection goes something like this: the sequential narratives of mimetic invention and then formalist aesthetics once offered adequate accounts of the development of art in the early modern and modern periods; the latter in particular described and simultaneously regulated modernism’s search for self-definition. This account satisfied by virtue of its philosophical breadth and ambition—it was handed from Kant to Greenberg, remember—until the debacle of 1964. This is the moment of fatal unraveling, by implosion or explosion, call it

what you will. Danto has come to call it the emergence of radical pluralism; along the way—a route retraced in *After the End of Art*—he reads the watershed as a demonstration of a variety of adages: “nothing can’t be art,” “anything goes,” anyone and everyone can be an artist, and so on, to last night’s account of an art without history, yet with a future that is strictly unpredictable. By his own admission this understanding had something of the status of a Revelation, a visionary encounter with a new aesthetics that rerouted him from his prior Damascus, formalist aesthetics (however reluctantly he has surrendered his admiration for Greenberg), and enabled him both to grasp the enormity of artistic misbehavior and to grant explicit permission, as he put it in his recent lecture, to artists to do whatever they choose. Anything goes.

Danto is describing a kind of artistic free-for-all—this is his view of our present state: *anything*, he says, anything goes. Heterogeneity rules, media interpenetrate, and purposes are wildly diffuse. And nothing is beyond the pale. Can you see now why my mother, with her regulating injunctions, swam up to the surface of my mind? Danto likewise sees unregulated behaviors as defining the realm of a fictional promised land. What are we to make of an art critic—a tastemaker, a discriminator—who takes this particular anti-criterion as his rallying cry? What are we to make of his declaration that this new condition marks a break with the structures and frameworks of history? We have learned just last night that these are circumstances in which he has only slowly come to feel any comfort or confidence: are his new attitudes—we seem to be invited to inquire—are his new attitudes justified?

From these questions, you will no doubt be gathering another reason my mother has been on my mind. Am I about to misbehave? No—I just have a few observations, that’s all. I shall give two, which are raised by what for me is *the* problematic juncture in Professor Danto’s project: the points of cross-over from philosophy to criticism, or from aesthetics to their descriptive and interpretive applicability—I don’t think the two projects align. First, I want to ask how true it is to say of what he calls the Post-Historical moment—art since 1964—that “anything goes.” I find it hard to feel quite his confidence, at a moment when the National Endowment for the Arts limps along, a multiple amputee on life-support, until somebody pulls the plug; when fall-out from the Mapplethorpe show trial is still with us, in the form not just of public policy but the inevitable

ensorship and self-censorship. A San Francisco gallery was repeatedly vandalized this autumn for showing paintings of same-sex kissing. Nor are such responses mere simulacral echoes of the reception given “authentic” *avant garde* efforts to outrage. I was struck that one of Professor Danto’s counterfactual characters was a curator from Cincinnati: so was Dennis Barrie, who showed “The Perfect Moment” and was arrested for his pains. He was acquitted and later left town. I wonder what real curators in Cincinnati feel moved to exhibit these days. “Anything goes” may work as a purely formal descriptive—though I have my doubts, as my next point shows—but it says nothing about the contents or purposes or reception of contemporary art.

Let me emphasize that this comment doesn’t concern Professor Danto’s own attitudes to Mapplethorpe: on the contrary, his long essay on the artist, now a UC Press book, demonstrates his responsiveness to the work. My observations concern the consequences of his asking us to understand artistic production as proceeding from sweet volition: there are no audiences, no contexts, no institutions, no formations, no references, no politics, no circumstances of production. Just happy free agency.

This brings me to my second point. I wonder about the artist, her- or himself, in the world of post history—happy free agent, radically different, contributing to hyper-heterogeneity? I’m not so sure. I was struck, during his lecture, by how the images Professor Danto used to invoke both Cindy Sherman and Nan Goldin seem to warp under the hothouse quality of that idea (again let me say that he has written appreciative studies of two moments in Sherman’s photography). Yet Sherman’s beginnings, we learned, place her before the mirror, playing around with her image; Goldin, for her part, grabs a Polaroid and starts to shoot—enlightened amateurs, clever monads, rather than the art school products both women are. They are artists whose work, moreover, from the beginning necessarily gave an account of the various visual practices—including conceptualism and photography—which were its inheritance and base line. And about the wonderful L.A. Angelmaker we can say the same thing. His real name is Robert Thill, and he has a 1985 BA from Cal State Long Beach and a 1993 MFA from Pratt, with a minor in art criticism, not surprisingly, and a major in “New Forms.” His gallery, Momenta, reckons he was born in 1964.

To insist on such contexts is to say that current art practices come from somewhere, that histories do exist, and moreover that the conditions which forward them have been in place for twenty-five years. They are motivated by ways of proceeding which art long since institutionalized. And this is to say that the genealogies which for Danto are non-existent—or philosophically irrelevant—may simply have escaped the limits philosophizing seems to impose on his gaze.

Such histories are of course not what Professor Danto means by History, though they go on just the same. Their persuasiveness is in their facticity, and in their insistence on raising necessary issues of production and power, license and constraint, as well as providing some reason for confidence in a measure of predictability—at least as much, for example, as gets us from Picasso in 1917 to the same artist in 1920 or 1927, or moves Duchamp along year by year. Moreover, *because* the issues that histories raise have become so urgent, we may begin to hope for an end to the retelling of art's internal history.





#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**ARTHUR DANTO**, who was a member of the faculty in philosophy at Columbia University from 1952-1992, serving as chair 1979-1987, has been since 1992 the Johnsonian Professor Emeritus of Philosophy. A selection of his published books includes *Narration and Knowledge*, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, *The State of Art*, *Encounters and Reflections*, *Beyond the Brillo Box*, *Embodied Meanings*, and, most recently, *After the End of Art* (1996).

Chair of the Department of the Rhetoric, Professor **ANTHONY J. CASCARDI** is also a member of the Departments of Comparative Literature and Spanish and Portuguese. His most recent publication is *The Subject of Modernity*.

**ANNE M. WAGNER**, Professor in the Department of History of Art, is the author of *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe*.

**CHARLES ALTIERI**, Professor of English and Chair of the Department of Art Practice, is a specialist in twentieth-century theory, the history of ideas, and the connections between literature and the visual arts. His published work includes *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry: The Contemporaneity of Modernism*.

