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ABSTRACT

Can the meaning of an artwork change over time?

A standard account suggests that an artwork’s meaning remains constant over time. If anything has changed, we have. We have simply made new discoveries about what it meant all along. Our epistemic access to the work’s meaning expands, but the work itself does not.

Against the standard view, my dissertation advances a strong historicist account according to which the meaning of artworks is determined in part by its art-historical context. Strong historicism allows for an artwork’s meaning to change as art history evolves. An artwork itself can acquire new meanings in virtue of entering into new causal relations with works that appear later in art history.

I make my case for the foregoing in the context of defending Arthur Danto from several well-known misinterpretations of his influential philosophy of art history. On some major issues, however, I take issue with him—his well-known thesis that art history has ended, for instance.

Strong historicism provides a novel way of explaining how an artwork’s stylistic predicates emerge and evolve over time. Because an artwork’s features evolve as new artworks emerge, our conception of art will evolve as well. Arthur Danto had originally proposed what he called a “Style Matrix” to explain this phenomenon, but later rejected it as simultaneously both overly historicist and overly ahistoricist. But, I argue that the problem with the Style Matrix lies with
Danto's account of art, rather than with his conception of a Style Matrix. So, strong historicism can save the Style Matrix from these criticisms. This reveals an important sense in which the philosophy of art is intimately tied to the history of art.

Strong historicism also explains how our conception of art seems to expand with each new movement in art. It grants that the features of art may change and evolve, and thereby allows for an explanation of the natural intuition that we now see artworks differently than before: new artworks bring with them a new vocabulary with which to understand art, and allow us to appreciate previous art in ways we could not have before.
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VITA

October 25, 1971...................................... Born, Washington, D.C.
1993 ................................................... B.A. with honors, Philosophy, Stanford University
1993-1994............................................. Grantee, Germany Academic Exchange Technical University of Berlin, Germany
1994-2000 ........................................... Graduate Teaching Associate, The Ohio State University
1996...................................................... M.A., Philosophy The Ohio State University
2000-present ...................................... Lecturer California State University, Bakersfield

PUBLICATIONS

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Major Field: Philosophy
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INTRODUCTION

One current trend in the philosophy of art has been to formulate definitions of art that are sensitive to art history. George Dickie provides one of the first accounts of art that ties being an artwork directly to the social institutions of the artworld. More recent examples of this tendency include Noel Carroll, who defines art in terms of art-historical narratives that link artworks to one another in the history of art and Jerrold Levinson, who defines art relative to how the artists who create them intend them to be regarded as.

Arthur Danto provides an account of art that makes the clearest reference to art history and art-historical trends. As a matter of fact, Danto sees his own account of art as emerging directly out of art-historical events.

Danto has argued that art ended thirty years ago, with the arrival of Warhol's *Brillo Box* in the artworld. Warhol's *Brillo Box* teaches us that artworks are distinguished from mere real things in virtue of their nonmanifest properties, and that anything can look like a work of art. Danto sees both a philosophical and an art-historical lesson here: (1) If anything can look like a work of art, then anything can, in effect, be a work of art; further (2) if anything can look like a work of art, then there is nothing more for artists to do. If (2) is the case, then (3) we have entered into the post-historical phase of art history, in which art-making may continue, but in which art history as we know it has come to an end. While
many have argued against this now infamous end-of-art thesis (3) few have questioned why Danto thinks the end of art is even possible.

These claims – that art has come to an end; that anything can look like a work of art; and that there is nothing more for artists to do – are very surprising and extremely controversial. After all, it is hard to imagine what Danto might mean by the end of art, given all the recent developments in art. And on what grounds might Danto persuade us that artists have nothing more to do?

This dissertation will examine how Danto’s general views about the nature of art, his conception of art history and his radical end-of-art thesis are tied together. Danto’s account alone is worthy of study because of its prominent position in philosophy of art, and because of its comprehensive nature. He is one of the few philosophers of art who attempts to integrate an account of art, art history and a philosophy of art history into a single position.

As an essentialist who sees the definition of art tied to art history, however, one can discover more general implications for developing an account of art that is sensitive to art history. What emerges from this study is that an essentialist who views the nature of art as being revealed through history will ultimately be committed to a form of historicism according to which the meaning of artworks may change over time.

Any attempt to understand Danto’s general views must begin with a careful examination of what he means by the end of art and why he might endorse such a position. Chapter 1 is designed to address these issues. It will emerge that while we can make sense of the idea of the end of art, there is no reason to accept it as fact.

Danto, however, believes that the reason to accept the end of art is that his account of art history and his account of art entail it. There has been much
criticism of this entailment relation. Most famously, Noel Carroll has charged that Danto's definition of art and his art-historical views are circularly related. And Danto himself has accepted this attack in print. This raises a serious question about the relation between Danto's definition of art and his account of art history. In Chapter 2, I argue that although Carroll's criticisms are not correct, a close examination of his arguments reveals that there are far more serious problems that result from Danto's unusual acceptance of an essentialist account of art on the one hand, and his historicist leanings on the other.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on how exactly these two strands in his position - his essentialist definition of art, and his art-historical views - are related to one another. Such an examination is timely, because Danto himself has recently returned to his definition of art, and reformulated it in the context of his account of art history.

Danto's *After the End of Art* explains how his earlier views regarding his essentialist definition of art can be understood in light of his philosophy of art history and the history of art. He argues that his essentialist definition of art commits him to being a historicist, and to defending the end-of-art thesis. And Danto's critics have focused on this seemingly strange mix of historicism and essentialism in order to criticize him.

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Danto's critics are worried about the relationship between essentialism and historicism, because prima facie, these two aspects of Danto's account appear to undermine one another - his accounts either beg the question or are inconsistent. If I am correct, however, these worries are unfounded. But in Chapter 3, I suggest that the way in which we can avoid problems stemming from the relationship between essentialism and historicist gives rise to two further, and more serious problems for Danto's views: if we accept his definition as historicist and essentialist, and grant the end-of-art thesis, then first of all, it's not clear that there will be any art left to which his definition might apply, and second, even if there are still artworks after the end of art, the end of art calls into question the truth of essentialism. These problems are more serious than any of the criticisms that we've seen so far, for they call into question the very point of Danto's entire way of bringing essentialism in line with his historicism.

The real source of Danto's problems, however, is not the way in which essentialism and historicism are tied together, but rather the nature of the historicist commitments that he ought to endorse. Once we grant his generally essentialist account of art according to which art's definition is revealed through history, Danto's troubles arise because of the degree to which he is historicist. In chapter 4, I suggest that his real problem isn't that he is historicist, as many typically assume⁴, but rather that he's not historicist enough. Indeed, an essentialist position of the kind that Danto has defended must be willing to accept a form of historicism that few philosophers are willing to grant⁵.

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⁵ Only Graham McFee has attempted to defend such a few. Levinson has, too, but only in a restricted circumstance: the case of the oeuvre of a single artist. But, this is insufficiently general to reconcile essentialism with historicism.
I shall attempt to defend this somewhat surprising claim about historicism by rehearsing the kinds of problems that arise by accepting the weaker form of historicism, which I term the latency theory.

Recall that the development of the correct definition of art depends on the particular development of art history and art theory. The reason is that what it is possible to discover philosophically about the nature of art depends ultimately on what is possible to discover art historically. Hence, certain properties of artworks may exist, but may not be accessed or discovered at the time of their creation, because we lack the appropriate access to the history of art. These properties remain latent, undiscovered until the suitable theories and history of art have evolved.

Notice that the latency theory is directed at what agents are able to infer about artworks, not about the properties that exist in the works themselves. There are a number of problems with this position. First of all, it cannot explain how the history of art reveals itself – a view to which Danto is firmly committed - but only that our access to the history of art might change. Second, there are general problems with the latency theory: the latency theory cannot explain why our epistemic position may be altered, given that there are no corollary changes in the history of art. And finally, it is inconsistent with the style matrix.

These problems with the latency theory might lead one to believe that making his account less historicist would be fruitful. Surprisingly, though, it is only once we make his account more strongly historicist that we can resolve these difficulties.

Chapter 5 presents the two main benefits of adopting what I term strong historicism: first, that by accepting a stronger form of historicism, he can avoid
the problems that have been raised for his account so far stemming from his art-historical and pseudo-historicist tendencies. And more interestingly, accepting strong historicism will allow him to avoid problems that have plagued his style matrix.
CHAPTER 1

DANTO’S END-OF-ART THESIS

As its name suggests, the end-of-art thesis is a claim about certain events in the history of art—viz., its ending. So, a natural place to begin our investigation into the end-of-art thesis is Danto’s account of art history. We shall begin simply by considering Danto’s conception of the history of art, and examining whether his account can support the end-of-art thesis. Although we shall discover that his account is purportedly inspired by Hegel, the first to endorse an end-of-art thesis, Danto’s Hegelianism cannot provide the end-of-art thesis with the kind of support it needs. From there, we shall explore reasons why the end-of-art thesis goes beyond the scope of the account of art history.

1.1 Danto’s Account of Art History

In his earlier formulations, Danto divides art history into three periods, each of which has its own model of art history with its attendant conception of what art is and what it is about: the representation model, the expression model and the final model, which I shall refer to as the modernist model.

The representation model of art history is the model according to which art’s goal is to represent reality accurately. This model’s internal development is exhausted with the advent of cinematography, purportedly around 1905. At
this point, a new model is introduced in order to explain the rise of Expressionist art:

It became increasingly clear that a new theory was urgently required, that the artists were not failing to yield up perceptual equivalences but were after something not be understood in those terms primarily at all.

Once it is realized that there is a problem with the current representational theory or narrative of art history, Danto suggests that a new narrative of art history is postulated, in order to make sense of this new art:

what was interesting was the fact that since there could be paintings which were purely expressive and hence not explicitly representational at all, representationality must disappear from the definition of art. But even more interesting from our perspective is the fact that the history of art acquires a totally different structure.

It does so because there is no longer any reason to think of art as having a progressive history: there simply is not the possibility of a developmental sequence with the concept of expression as there is with the concept of mimetic representation...So the history of art has no future of the sort that can be extrapolated as it can against the paradigm of progress: it sunders into a sequence of individual acts, one after the other.

As Danto himself notes, this model fails to have an internal development: there is no clearly defined goal, because there is no standard by which to measure the progress or development of the history of art during this period. The model ends, because there is no standard by which to measure the progress and because its conception of art as the expression of feelings is subject to counter-examples once Fauvism arrives on the art scene.

What follows the expression model is the final model of art history. On the modernist model of art history, the goal of art is to formulate the question ‘What is the nature of art?’ Since Danto takes Warhol's Brillo Box to raise this

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9 As we shall see shortly, this fact is problematic for Danto’s account of art history.
question in its proper philosophical form, 1964 marks the end of the history of art and the beginning of the post-historical era.

More recently, Danto has advanced a slightly different view of the history of art. In After the End of Art, the history of art is divided only into two main periods, the first of which he refers to variously as the “Vasari episode”, the “era of imitation” or the “mimetic period”, and the second of which is alternately termed the “Greenberg episode”, “the era of ideology”, “modernism”, or “the Hegelian model”. For simplicity, I shall simply refer to this period as modernism.

Consider Danto’s characterization of art history:

The history of Western art divides into two main episodes, what I call the Vasari episode and what I call the Greenberg episode. Both are progressive. Vasari, construing art as representational, sees it getting better and better over time at the ‘conquest of visual appearance’. That narrative ended for painting when moving pictures proved far better able to depict reality than painting could. Modernism began by asking what painting should do in the light of that? And it began to probe its own identity. Greenberg defined a new narrative in terms of an ascent to the identifying conditions of the art, specifically what differentiates the art of painting from every other art.10

Thus sketched, the master narrative of the history of art...is that there is an era of imitation, followed by an era of ideology, followed by our post-historical era in which, with qualification, anything goes. Each of these periods is characterized by a different structure of art criticism. Art criticism in the traditional or mimetic period was based on visual truth. The structure of art criticism in the age of ideology...characteristically grounded its own philosophical idea of what art is on an exclusionary distinction between the art it accepted (the true) and everything else as not really art. The post-historical period is marked by the parting of the ways between philosophy and art, which means that art criticism in the post-historical period must be as pluralistic as post-historical art itself11.

On both versions of the history of art, art history ends in 1964 with Warhol’s Brillo Box; after this point, we enter into the ‘post-historical’ era. The claim that art history has come to an end is what I will refer to as the end-of-art thesis. Although Danto originally advanced this position as early as 1984, he continues to maintain this view today.

In order to see whether Danto's end-of-art thesis can be supported by his views in art history, let us extrapolate the general features of Danto's philosophy of art history from the above accounts.

First, Danto conceives of the history of art in a teleological manner, such that it makes sense to say that art is striving for, or progressing toward, some goal. The history of art is construed as progressive, and works of art interpreted against the backdrop of art history. Further, since the history of art is constituted by different periods, each period contains its own internal development, and the history of art during any given period is the history of works of art trying to achieve or realize a goal specific to that period.

Because each period is governed by a different narrative charting the progress of art during that period, each period also has its own distinct art criticism. A narrative provides a way of understanding the development of art during a given period. The internal development of each period in art history is characterized by its specific model of art history. Each model makes sense of how, and toward what end, a particular period in art history progresses, because of the narrative tracing the evolution of art in that period.

The reason a narrative explains how a given period in art history progresses is that it contains a conception of what art is about and what its nature is. In other words, each narrative of art history advances its own conception of art's essence. To support this, Danto suggests that every period has its own style, where style is understood somewhat eccentrically to constitute a definition of art for that period:

I am going to use the word style in a somewhat eccentric way in order to get my story told. I shall use it in this way: a style is a set of properties a body of artworks share, but which is further taken to define, philosophically, what it is to be an artwork. For an extended historical period, it was taken for granted that to be an artwork, especially a work of visual art, was to be mimetic..."imitation" was the standard philosophical answer to the question of what art is from Aristotle down into the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth.
Hence mimesis, on my use, is a style...Mimesis became a style with the advent of modernism, or, as I termed it, the Age of Manifestos...The age of Manifestos, as I see it, came to an end when philosophy was separated from style because the true form of the question “What is art?” emerged. That took place roughly around 1964.12

Within the teleological conception of art history, we can make sense of the end of art. A period ends when artworks achieve the goals specified by the narrative (as occurred during the age of mimesis, when artworks achieved perfect pictorial representation, or during modernism, when artworks raised the question “What is the nature of art?” in its proper philosophical form).

But why does Danto believe that these narratives have ended? The answer has to do with Danto’s views about realism in art-historical narratives.

First of all, Danto means to argue that what has ended is not art history proper, but rather the narrative of art history. “…I [Danto] certainly would want to distinguish coming to an end from coming to a stop, and to identify an end with an ending, hence with a moment in a narrative structure.13” So, while art history itself does not stop, a narrative structure of art history has come to an end, in the sense that the story has attained closure14. Our next question is to ask what a narrative structure is, and what it means to say that a narrative structure of art history has ended.

In explaining the nature of narratives, what distinguishes a genuine narrative from a mere causal chain of events is that the former, but not the latter, is structured around achieving a goal and having a telos. So, a narrative charts


14See Arthur Danto’s description, "Narratives of the End of Art," Encounters and Reflections (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986), 335: “The Iliad comes to an end, but the war does not stop. Homer could have stopped, for whatever reason unable or disinclined to complete the story, but that would imply a broken or an aborted story, rather than one consummated through a closure.”
the evolution of history as attempting to accomplish some goal. Such a narrative explains why history evolved in the way that it did by making reference to the goals postulated by the narrative:

We live at a moment when it is clear that art can be made of anything...When I say that this condition is the end of art, I mean essentially that it is the end of the possibility of any particular internal direction for art to take. It is the end of the possibility of progressive development...In my case, however, it means the end of the tyranny of history - that in order to achieve success as an artist, one must drive art history forward, colonizing the future novelty by novelty.15

Moreover, Danto argues that the goals of these narratives are not ones that we impose upon the history of art, but rather exist as part of art history proper. The view that art history itself contains its own narrative structure, along with its own goals, is what Danto terms narrativism de re:

And what I want to say, too, is that if one thinks that art ends, one is committed - or I am - to narrativism de re - the belief that the history of art itself is narratively structured. Its having an end depends, then, not on my goal but on its.16

...it has seemed more and more plausible to me that there are objective historical structures - objective in the sense that, to use the example just cited, there was no objective possibility that the works which Motherwell's Gauloises collages later resembled could have fit into the historical structure to which those works of Motherwell belonged, and no way in which the latter could have fit into the historical structures defined by pop.17

Why Danto would endorse narrativism de re is a topic to which we shall return in Chapter 3. For the moment, I want simply to consider what it means to say that a narrative of art history so construed has come to an end, and why Danto would accept this. The typical explanation is that Danto argues for the end-of-art thesis because he is an Hegelian18. So, let us turn now to how Danto's

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18See, to name just a few who interpret Danto's end-of-art thesis to be inspired by Hegel, Carrier "After the End of Art and Art History", History and Theory, 7; Hilmer, "Being Hegelian After Danto", 12
account as described so far is Hegelian. We shall then be in a better position to consider whether this account of art history is viable, and if so, whether it can support the end-of-art thesis.

Lee Brown, in "Resurrecting Hegel to Bury Art" was the first to consider carefully the way in which Danto may be interpreted as a Hegelian, as well as where Danto and Hegel's views diverge\textsuperscript{19}. In reviewing Danto's Hegelianism below, I shall rely heavily on Brown's discussion.

First, like Hegel, Danto endorses an account of art history that is developmental or evolutionary\textsuperscript{20}. These periods are developmental or evolutionary, because Danto claims that there is also a metanarrative that guides and explains why the history of art evolves as it does\textsuperscript{21}: there is an ultimate goal contained within the metanarrative of the history of art that explains why and how the history of art progresses from one period to the next.

Second, the development of the history of art passes through distinct phases at particular times. Each phase is necessary to reach the next level of art-historical development, and these phases culminate in the realization of the final phase of art history, as expressed by the ultimate goal of the metanarrative.


\textsuperscript{20}Some have suggested that the post-historical era in fact constitutes a third period within the metanarrative governing all of art history. Jakob Steinbrenner, for example, suggests that Danto has divided the history of art into three phases, the last of which he terms 'pluralism'. See his "The Unimaginable" in \textit{History and Theory}, p. 116. I will argue later on in this chapter against this tripartite division of history as an adequate interpretation of Danto's history of art.

\textsuperscript{21}Whether Danto is correct in this assertion is an issue to which we'll return in the next chapter.
Finally, Danto is Hegelian, because he sees modern art as striving to be reflexive, that is, as raising philosophical questions about the nature of its own existence. In particular, Danto characterizes modern art in a way that Danto thinks Hegel would endorse:

In an interview in 1969, conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth claimed that the only role for an artist at the time ‘was to investigate the nature of art itself.’ ...The philosophical question of the nature of art, rather, was something that arose within art when artists pressed against boundary after boundary, and found that the boundaries all gave way. All typical sixties artists had that vivid sense of boundaries, each drawn by some tacit philosophical definition of art, and their erasure has left us the situation we find ourselves in today...Nevertheless it was only in the 1960s that a serious philosophy of art became a possibility, one which did not base itself on purely local facts - for example, that art was essentially painting and sculpture. Only when it became clear that anything could be a work of art could one think, philosophically, about art. Only then did the possibility rise of a true general philosophy of art. But what of art itself? What of ‘Art after Philosophy’ - to use Kosuth's essay - which, to make the point, may indeed itself be a work of art? What of art after the end of art, where, by 'after the end of art,' I mean 'after the ascent to philosophical self-reflection?' Where an artwork can consist of any object whatsoever that is enfranchised as art, raising the question 'Why am I a work of art?'

Here, Danto sees modern art as striving to become conscious of its own self. Art is about its own nature, and so is attempting to become reflexive. Hegel, too, saw the final stage of art's development in this manner. So, to the extent that both Hegel and Danto share a conception of the final stage of the history of art as one where art raises a philosophical question about its own existence, Danto can be interpreted as a Hegelian.

1.2 Problems with the Account of Art History

However, there are three kinds of problems that prompt us to wonder whether this Hegelian inspired account is correct, and whether it is Hegelian at all.

First, one might wonder how to make sense of Danto's adoption of Hegel's teleological conception of art history. Recall that the Vasari period ends as a result of contingent and external facts about the development of art – it
ends, after all, in about 1905 with the development of cinema. The development of new technologies that make narrative cinema possible is of course a purely contingent event. In light of this, what motivation is there for attributing to the history of art a teleological progression, if external and contingent factors drive art's evolution?

Lee Brown raises just this criticism, when he points out the oddity in Danto's account:

Interestingly, we can see ways in which Danto's thinking exhibits a kind of Hegelian pull away from Hegel. For what Danto is saying, if we think about it, is that (i) artistic agendas have their own momentum, and (ii) they possess their own 'globalizing' tendencies. We have a deep urge to think of dominant models of art, indeed of our dominant cultural forms in general, as if they are completely adequate or, as Hegel would say, as if they are 'truth'. But along with these Hegelian ideas, Danto is also telling us (iii) that these forms of life will almost certainly collide with factors, e.g., technological changes, that, contrary to Hegel, were just not parts of any original plan. Danto really comes off saying that new artistic values result from the confrontation between entrenched practices and the sheerly contingent events that impinge on those practices from out of the blue. Foremost among these contingent events, of course, are technological developments, and of these Danto regards photography as primary.

Second, it is strange that in Danto's account of art history, the Vasari model of art history lasts for many centuries while the modern model barely lasts one half of a century. And even during the so-called modernist period, theoretically dominated by reflexive, abstract art raising philosophical questions, Danto himself admits that there was also a very strong realistic movement:

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22 See "The End of Art," in The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 99-100: "I like to surmise that a confirmation of my historical thesis - that the task of art to produce equivalences to perceptual experiences passed, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from the activities of painting and sculpture to those of cinematography - in the fact that painters and sculptors began conspicuously to abandon this goal at just about the same time that all the basic strategies for narrative cinema were in place. By about 1905...painters and sculptors began asking, if only through their actions, the question of what could be left from them to do, now that the torch had, as it were, been taken up by other technologies."

23 Brown, 312.
There is a direct line of descent from Thomas Eakins through Robert Henri to [Edward] Hopper, in that Henri was Eakins's student and Hopper was Henri's - and Eakins himself descended from the Beaux Arts Academy in Paris and the painter Gérôme.24

The presence of realists throughout the modern period is striking, because it questions Danto's assumption that the Vasarian model in fact ended in the beginning of the twentieth century. After all, the Vasarian model is supposed to have come to an end, having reached its goal of perfect pictorial realism. However, if that is correct, then there should be no reason for future artists to be interested in realism. There should be no interest in realism. But as Danto above highlights, there is a consistent and serious interest in realism. The question that arises, of course, is whether these works constitute evidence for thinking that Danto's account of art history is incorrect, historically.

Brown identifies a possible underlying explanation for why Danto's own accounts leave room for realism. The explanation picks up on a further respect in which Danto's Hegelianism diverges with Hegel's own views:

The difference [between Danto and Hegel] is that the type of norm to which Danto appeals doesn't play a developmental role in any Hegelian sense. For Danto, there simply is no ideal concept of art in light of which mimesis could evaluate itself as a model for art - whether the result of such an evaluation turns out to vindicate that model or not. Danto's account only registers the norm that is operative within the sphere of mimesis. Such a norm could only tell us how to determine relative degrees of mimetic success. But it would not authorize an evaluation of mimesis per se. The norm is just a reflection of the mimetic agenda. Furthermore, by Danto's account, mimesis evolves into expressionism after it finds itself outdone by other media, and not because it has been guided along its path by the glow on the horizon of some higher value.25

Unlike Hegel's position, Danto does not provide an explanation for why the mimetic model would come to be inadequate as a model of art. Hence, there is no genuine explanation for why mimesis ends as a model, or why

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expressionism replaces it. As a result, Danto's account still leaves room open for later mimetic art to emerge in other periods, and it should not come as a surprise to find such art later on.

A related problem arises when considering the amount of possible realistic works that never become developed in the Vasarian model, but should if the model ends as a result of having achieved perfect pictorial realism. As Brown suggests,

> Of course the [end-of-art] thesis would be seriously weakened if art hadn't done all it could do. Well, had it? In the face of the rise of photography, there would still seem to be any number of things for mimetic art to do. Indeed, why couldn't art simply throw in its bête noir and take up film? Or holography? Danto himself suggests that imitative perfection is better realized now in film and holography.26

It certainly would not appear that Danto's Vasarian model has reached its full development, and hence it would not appear that the Vasarian model does in fact end with photography, as Danto suggests.

Moreover, if the end-of-art thesis means to be an empirical claim, how can Danto be so sure that the end of art history occurred in 1964? To establish this, Danto surely needs to provide an argument to show why future events and artworks will not be able to serve as a counter-example to his account27.

But independently of these peculiarities, there is a more serious problem with Danto's account of art history. These are highlighted by noting an inconsistency between Danto's earlier defense of the end-of-art thesis in his original essay "the End of Art", and his later views, developed in After the End of Art.

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26 Brown, 305.

27 Carroll, in "Art, Essence and Expression: Arthur Danto's Philosophy of Art", argues that the only argument Danto provides to show why future events and artworks will not be able to serve as counter-examples to his account is one that appeals to his views of art history; he then concludes that his theory of art is circular. We shall question the legitimacy of this argument in Chapter 2.
The most serious problem is reconciling the earlier account of art history, in which the metanarrative contains three distinct narratives (including expressionism), with the account of art history developed later in After the End of Art, in which there are only two periods (excluding expressionism). While expressionism as a period of art history intuitively ought not to be ignored, there are other problems that result from holding onto a metanarrative that includes expressionism as a narrative.

Danto has two options for dealing with this problem: either he can accept expressionism as one of the narratives of art history, as he does in his earlier work; or he can ignore expressionism, as he does more recently. Either horn of this dilemma raises problems for Danto’s general views about art history. I shall suggest that the more plausible route for Danto is the second option.

Consider the first alternative. Danto accepts expressionism as a narrative of art history. There are some other minor problems with the art-historical sequencing in Danto’s earlier account. For Danto claims that the representational model ends in 1905, and that the expression model purportedly ends with Fauvism28. This is very curious, since we now have a model of art history that lasts only three years following one that spans over a century.

28 "The success of the Expression Theory of art is also the failure of the Expression Theory of art. Its success consisted in the fact that it was able to explain all of art in a uniform way - i.e., as the expression of feelings. Its failure consisted in the fact that it has only one way of explaining all of art. When discontinuities first appeared as puzzling phenomena in the progressive history of representation, it was a genuine insight that perhaps artists were trying to express rather than primarily represent. But after about 1906, the history of art simply seemed to be the history of discontinuities. To be sure, this could be accommodated to the theory...But the trouble with this plausible if romantic account lay in the fact that each new movement, from Fauvism down, let alone the Post-Impressionism from which that derived, seemed to require some kind of theoretical understanding to which the language and psychology of emotions seemed less and less adequate." Arthur Danto, "The End of Art," in The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 107-8.
More seriously, however, is that Danto cannot coherently construe the entire history of art (i.e., the metanarrative of art history) as progressive, if not all of its component narratives that constitute it are themselves progressive. The reason is that if there is no progressive or developmental structure to expressionism, then there will be no legitimate or non-ad-hoc ways of explaining how expressionism will come to an end. And if there is no sense of its ending, then we cannot justify how art history enters into a new narrative later on.

The moral is that any progressive metanarrative of art history will have to contain only progressive narratives. Since expressionism is, by Danto's own admission, a non-progressive narrative, Danto cannot consistently maintain both that it is a period within his metanarrative and that his metanarrative is progressive and teleological in nature. Perhaps this fact explains why Danto ultimately gives up expressionism as a narrative within his account of art history in his later account.

Given these problems, let us now consider the second horn of our dilemma. Suppose instead that Danto is best interpreted to endorse an account of art history in which expressionism is no longer a narrative. The problem here is simple: on the one hand the representational model cannot accommodate

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²⁹ See Brown, 310.

³⁰ Of course, a further criticism that Brown raises against Danto's view is that he fails to motivate why the history of art is progressive and developmental to begin with. This is a further divergence between Danto and Hegel: "What might trouble Hegel would be the fact that the arrival of this new value [that would prompt the end of one model and the beginning of a new model of art history] would be the very sort of change that, in his opinion, requires his kind of dialectical explanation. For unlike Hegel, Danto would seem to have left this as an unmediated, brute fact. Hegel provides himself with a larger historical context by appeal to which such a fact might be explained. He would not accept that, as Danto puts it, it simply 'seemed like a good idea, for whatever reason', to replace the desire for perceptual equivalences with a stress on the inferential. Providing that larger picture would surely put a heavy strain on Danto's willingness to take Hegel 'seriously'.” Brown, 308.
expressionist art, for the latter is precisely what prompted the representational model to end in the first place. On the other hand, it is not obvious that this art can be incorporated into the modernist narrative either. The modernist narrative sees art as being about itself; and while expressionist art is clearly about something (viz., the expression of emotion), that alone does not entail that the art is about itself. Hence, if we give up expressionism as a model or narrative of art history, there is no way for Danto’s metanarrative to account for it.

This problem can be overcome if we see expressionism as the beginning of or precursor to modernism. On this interpretation, expressionism is taken to be the first step in the realization that artworks have aboutness – they are about the expression of emotions. This way of construing expressionist works allows us to see them plausibly as a variation of the modernist interest in aboutness.

This horn of the dilemma is the least problematic for Danto to take. Unfortunately, even if we can accept this interpretation of Danto, it’s not clear that the account is genuinely Hegelian. And if it isn’t, it’s also not clear that Danto has any grounds for defending his end-of-art thesis.

First, notice that there is a striking difference between the scope of applicability of Hegel’s account and Danto’s own. For Hegel’s account of art history is intended to apply to all media in the arts. Danto, on the other hand, only appears to provide a narrative that applies to painting, in particular. As Brown has pointed out,

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31 There is a further problem with giving up expressionism: in his earlier work “The End of Art”, Danto highlights expressionism and gives it a prominent place in his theory. So, to simply omit expressionism later on deserves at the least an explanation or comment.

32 Interestingly, Carroll argues that Danto’s entire theory of art is a kind of expression theory, since his theory of art depends on its expressing a point of view and being about something. But this seems to suggest on the contrary that his theory is rather a modernist one, insofar as expression is a form or variation of aboutness.

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...why shouldn't mimesis go in for kinetic sculpture, holography - or for whatever possibilities the technology suggests? Surveying a variety of examples from a hypothetical future, Danto passes judgement on them in mordant speculations about a world inhabited by sculptures with whirling arms, ever more perfect life-size plastic lover dolls - and, of course, the feelies of *Brave New World*...The situation is interesting. While positing the mimetic impulse as the engine of his narrative, Danto imagines its future offspring with a shudder. And yet, as far as we can tell, their defects are not due to any *mimetic* failure on their part.33

Moreover, almost all of Danto's examples and cases are restricted to painting. But if his account is intended to be a general one about all kinds of art forms like Hegel's, then the burden lies with Danto to show us how we can extend his account beyond painting34.

Second, the art-historical claims are not those that Hegel endorses, either. Hegel's own story posits an end in 1828, not 1964. Danto, on the other hand, claims that art has ended in 1964. Notice that this tells us Danto's Hegelianism, whatever it turns out to be, is not founded upon accepting Hegel's empirical claims. If it did, then Danto would be committed to accepting that art ended long before the existence of the *Brillo Box*.

The problem here is that Danto has admitted that the end-of-art thesis is an empirical claim35. So, if Danto is Hegelian at all, it is not about the end-of-art

33Brown, 306.

34In "The End of Art?", Carroll himself raises this very criticism against Danto's account. In this paper, Carroll suggests that Danto's end-of-art thesis and accompanying model of art history appears to be restricted to painting. If Carroll is correct, then Danto's thesis is probably more aptly called the end-of-painting thesis - more accurate, but also less grand. Danto himself denies that his claims are to be interpreted as Carroll does, however. Unfortunately, Danto appears to interpret Carroll as arguing for a 'death-of-painting' thesis; and Danto goes on to defend his account as concerning 'ends', rather than 'death'. This is unfortunate, because Danto does not respond to the substantive and more critical question that Carroll raises - viz., whether Danto's account (independently of whether it is interpreted to be about end or death) is restricted to painting, or whether it applies to art of all media. We shall return to consider if Carroll's interpretation is legitimate later.

35 "How can I know this [that art has come to an end], Carroll asks. How can I know that there will not, out of the whole range of artistic choices, be one - performance, say - which gives rise to an entirely new art history? The answer is that I cannot know this. Nor can I imagine this, any more than a medieval artist could have imagined the spectacular illusions the history of painting was to provide. One has, of course, to be open - the end of art theory means to be an empirical theory. But the future is what we cannot imagine until it is present." Arthur Danto, "The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense," *History and Theory*, 37(4): 140 (1998). But in his earlier writings, Danto
thesis, since that would involve accepting Hegel's own periodization of art history, and admitting that the art from 1828 until Brillo Box falsifies Hegel's own end-of-art thesis.

But interestingly enough, Danto doesn't think so.

Here's why. Danto thinks that Hegel's characterization of art as raising its own philosophical awareness fits perfectly with the art that is created from 1828 to 1964. So, that period just is the age of modernism, as Hegel himself predicted it. In other words, notice how nicely Hegel fits the later period from 1828 to 1964!

If we accept this interpretation of Danto's Hegelianism, we are now forced to explain why we would believe that Hegel's prediction of the end of art history was intended to refer to art after Warhol, and not to the art of Hegel's own time. As we can see above, any explanation we could provide, however, would require rewriting the history of art as well as Hegel's own account of art history.

Of course, you might wonder why Danto himself doesn't simply suggest that the representational model ends in 1828. More seriously, you might wonder what rationale Danto originally had for appealing to Hegel in the first place, given that Danto only accepts a particular interpretation of Hegel's own art-historical views. Perhaps, as Brown has argued, Danto simply means to accept that Hegel's broad account of art history is correct, even if Hegel himself didn't get the facts quite right. We might follow Brown in concluding that Danto seems reticent to accept his theory is empirical: "And the art of appropriation was a confirmation of this [the end of art], almost as if mine, like Belting's, were an empirical historical thesis after all. " Arthur Danto, "Narratives of the End of Art," Encounters and Reflections (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986) 333, my emphasis.
is a Hegelian for endorsing a progressive model of art history with two narratives, even though Danto has different periodizations from Hegel.

The problem with this suggestion is that, once again, it assumes that we can reinterpret Hegel’s account of art history as we wish. This is problematic, once we remember that Danto’s own view of art-historical narratives is a realist one.

We can now pinpoint the source of the conflict in this reading of Danto’s Hegelianism: if we rewrite history to save Danto’s end-of-art thesis, we lose our original motivation for the end-of-art thesis. For the end-of-art thesis is plausible only if we accept that there is only one correct interpretation of, or narrative for, any given period in art history. But if we must rewrite Hegel’s art history so that it applies to events after Hegel’s own time in order to motivate Danto’s end-of-art thesis, then we have implicitly rejected a realist conception of narratives. And it is precisely this very acceptance of a realist conception of narratives that lends legitimacy to Danto’s end-of-art thesis to begin with.

So, in attempting to defend Danto’s end-of-art thesis by providing a Hegelian master narrative, we are forced to reject the very realism that underwrites the motivation for advocating the end-of-art thesis in the first place. Any defense of Danto, then, that involves interpreting him as adopting someone else’s account of art history (Hegel’s or otherwise) ultimately requires denying a realist conception of art history (unless, of course, that person just happened to have also suggested that art ends after Warhol).

These problems surrounding Danto’s Hegelianism leaves us in an awkward position: on the one hand, we cannot take Danto to seriously be endorsing Hegel’s factual claims, but we also cannot really take him to be endorsing simply the broad art-historical structure that Hegel posits, since this
undermines Danto's realist leanings which are necessary for the legitimacy of the end-of-art thesis.

It would seem that the only reason Danto takes himself to be a Hegelian is that he argues that art has come to an end. But independently of adopting other features of Hegel's larger picture of art history, Danto's end-of-art thesis cannot be defended on Hegelian grounds alone. So, we must turn to other considerations to find support for the end-of-art thesis.

1.3 Other Reasons for Endorsing the End-of-art thesis

Although Danto is very explicit in suggesting that art history has come to an end, what exactly this thesis amounts to is at best ambiguous. There are two issues to examine: first, what exactly is it that has ended? And second, what does it mean to say that something has ended?

First of all, Danto means to argue that what has ended is not art history proper, but rather the narrative of art history.36 "...I [Danto] certainly would want to distinguish coming to an end from coming to a stop, and to identify an end with an ending, hence with a moment in a narrative structure."37 So, while art history itself does not stop, a narrative structure of art history has come to an end. Our next question is naturally what a narrative structure is, and what it means to say that a narrative structure of art history has ended.

There are two fairly naïve readings of Danto's end-of-art thesis that we can dismiss right off the bat: first, an interpretation according to which painting

36Brown has considered this alternative. The problem, in his view, is that "Danto doesn't keep it straight whether his point of view is that from inside a tradition of art, or whether it occupies a transcendental position outside the whole process. It might be the case - for us, 'from inside', so to speak - that art seems to die because a favored or entrenched model for art is passing from the scene. But we would still have no warrant for drawing the disturbing conclusion about art per se." Brown, 311.

has ended, and second, an interpretation that takes Danto to assert that no more artworks will be created. Let us consider each in turn.

Noël Carroll, in “The End of Art?”, suggests that Danto conflates the end of art with the end of painting. So, what has ended is not art, but simply painting as a medium of driving art history forward. While Danto grants that in both the representational and modern periods of art history, painting was the medium of art history, Danto denies that the end-of-art thesis is really about the end of painting as a medium. Rather, as Danto puts it, the end-of-art thesis is “a theory of consciousness - of how a developmental sequence of events terminates in the consciousness of that sequence as a whole.” While it is true that modernism ends both the power of painting over the arts, and the bildungsroman that Danto finds in the history of art, Danto suggests that the reason art has come to an end has nothing to do with the role of painting in the artworld, but rather has only to do with the end of the developmental progress of the history of art. Hence, while it happens to be true that art ends when painting relinquishes its dominance in the artworld, this is merely a coincidence. The end of art has nothing to do with the end of painting.

A second interpretation of the end-of-art thesis that Danto dismisses quickly is that there are no more artworks to be made after the end of art:

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40Of course, this interpretation presupposes that we can establish that it is coincidental that these two events occur simultaneously. But by Danto's own admission, he himself is not clear about why painting's influential position in the artworld came to an end: "Painting was the medium of development in traditional art...It was the medium of progress under modernism...There is an important historical question of why traditional art gave way to modernism, but I do not know its answer." (Danto, "The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense", 139) Hence, he cannot rule out that there is perhaps a causal relation between these two events after all.

41See also Brown, 310.

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Neither [Hans] Belting nor I was claiming that art had stopped or that it was going to stop, but only that in whatever way it was going to go on, that would be consistent with its having come to an end. A philosophical imbecile in an audience before which I once laid my views out imagined my thesis as something like one which held that the making of chairs had stopped - and seeing chairs being made by chair makers the world round, it seemed to him that my thesis must be spectacularly false - like a claim that there are no material objects or that Achilles can never catch up with the tortoise or that space is unreal.4

It was not my view that there would be no more art, which 'death' certainly implies, but that whatever art there was to be would be made without benefit of a reassuring sort of narrative in which it was seen as the appropriate next stage in the story. What had come to an end was that narrative but not the subject of the narrative.43

These passages highlight two points. First, whatever Danto intends by the end of art, it clearly is a position that allows for the existence of artworks after the end of art. Let us accept what Danto says here as evidence that this interpretation is uncharitable at best, and incorrect at worst44.

These passages also make clear that a more plausible approach to interpreting Danto's end-of-art thesis focuses on taking this claim to be about art history, not art or painting. So, we might imagine that Danto is suggesting the end of the narrative of the entire history of art (the end of the master narrative of art history), or the end of the last period in master narrative. Let's begin by considering this latter option.

Suppose that Danto is really just claiming the end of the narrative called 'modernism' as an art-historical narrative45. We have some reason to think his

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4In Chapter 3, we shall return to this interpretation again. There, we shall see there that Danto's account of art unintentionally entails that there can be no more artworks after the end of art, in spite of his explicit denial of this claim.

4Carroll offers a slightly different, but related argument in "The End of Art?", *History and Theory*. He suggests that Danto is really advocating the end of painting, because painting is the primary vehicle for avant-garde art in the twentieth century. I believe this is a similar argument, because
thesis does concern modernism, not all of art history. For one thing, Danto spends a lot of time showing how the modernist narrative fails to account for a lot of current art. And he does suggest that art history ends with Warhol, the artist who heralds the end of modernism. Given these two facts, it is tempting to think that Warhol announces the end of modernism.

But if this interpretation were correct, Danto's end-of-art thesis would be far less radical and provocative than it really is. Furthermore, it raises more problems than it solves. Although Danto does take Warhol to bring modernism to an end, he also takes Warhol to end all of art history. He takes Warhol to mark the end of the master narrative, not simply the end of a single period in art history:

that is what I mean by the end of art. I mean the end of a certain narrative which has unfolded in art history over the centuries, and which has reached its end in a certain freedom from conflicts of the kind inescapable in the Age of Manifestos.

in our narrative, at first only mimesis was art, then several things were art but each tried to extinguish its competitors, and then, finally, it became apparent that there were no stylistic or philosophical constraints. There is no special way works of art have to be. And that is the present and, I should say, the final moment in the master narrative. It is the end of the story.

These passages clearly suggest that whatever narrative has ended, it is one that extends far longer than the modernist narrative. And if it really is just the end of a single narrative of art history, this leaves unexplained why Danto so

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Carroll is only interested in painting, because he takes painting to be the main form of expression of modernism.

46 Brown, 311, considers a similar case: he suspects that Danto is really just suggesting the end of the mimetic period.


fervently believes that there will not, and cannot, be any more art history after the end of art49.

Here's a likely explanation: the end-of-art thesis does not even apply to a narrative, but to a master narrative. What is the difference? Intuitively, the master narrative refers to a narrative that contains within it narratives of particular periods in time50. Danto sometimes takes there to be two narratives that constitute the master narrative of art history: (a) the narrative governing mimetic art; (b) the narrative governing modernist or ideological art; Warhol ends the modernist narrative, which also marks the end of the master narrative containing these two narratives51:

Thus sketched, the master narrative of the history of art - in the West but by the end not in the West alone - is that there is an era of imitation, followed by an era of ideology, followed by our post-historical era in which, with qualification, anything goes. Each of these periods is characterized by a different structure of art criticism...In our narrative, at first only mimesis was art, then several things were art but each tried to extinguish its competitors, and then, finally, it became apparent that there were no stylistic or philosophical constraints. There is no special way works of art have to be. And that is the present and, I should say, the final moment in the master narrative. It is the end of the story52.

49Carroll thinks he has an explanation for why there cannot be any more art history after the end of art: because it renders his theory of art immune to counter-examples. He then goes on to criticize Danto for begging the question. We shall examine Carroll's explanation in more detail in the next chapter.

50But consider the following passage, where Danto seems to suggest that each period of art history is its own metanarrative, and not merely one narrative: "It is no part of my claim that there will be no more stories to tell after the end of art, only that there will not be a single metanarrative for the future history of art. There will not in part because the previous metanarratives excluded so much in order to get themselves told. As Carrier observes, Greenberg excluded surrealism from modernism since he could not defend his version of modernism if he admitted it". Arthur Danto, "The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense," History and Theory, 37(4): 140 (1998). I do not know what to make of this passage; it seems to imply that Greenberg's modernism is not simply a narrative, but a metanarrative.

51Although narratives and master narratives are supposed to share many of the same features (progressive, goal-driven, etc.), Danto nowhere every gives a characterization of the goal of the master narrative is, above and beyond the goals of the individual narratives that constitute it. This is odd, since one would have thought that if one takes the entire master narrative to end because its goals were satisfied, then one would have to specify the goals of that master narrative. We shall address this issue more thoroughly in chapter 2.

Here, each period of art history, with its own structure of art criticism, constitutes a single narrative within the master narrative. So, the end-of-art thesis refers first and foremost to the end of the master narrative governing art history. Of course, if the master narrative of art history ends, the last narrative in the master narrative also comes to an end too. The interpretation of Danto according to which the end of art is really just the end of modernism is true, but only insofar as the end of art marks the end of both the entire history of art, and the last narrative within that history. So, while it may be trivially true that modernism comes to an end, this is not the relevant or important claim—it is the end of the master narrative that genuinely marks the end of art history53.

But what exactly is supposed to happen after the end of the master narrative? There are two options to consider.

First, one might imagine that the end-of-art thesis amounts to arriving at the last narrative of art history. For art to end just is for this narrative to continue indefinitely. So, the final narrative of art history - what Danto sometimes calls pluralism - will continue indefinitely. This marks the end of art, insofar as there will not be any future narratives after this one. Rather, we shall remain in the pluralist period indefinitely54:

In 1984, I published an essay flatly called 'The End of Art,' which argued not that art would stop but that one reason for making art no longer had validity. I felt that my view meant a liberation from the tyrannies of history. I felt that we had entered precisely that world of pluralistic endeavor that fit to perfection Warhol's inadvertent paraphrase of the promises made in The German Ideology. I thought we had entered the post-historical phase of art

54 This is how Daniel Herwitz, in “Danto on Postmodernism” in Danto and His Critics interprets Danto: “Ours is the beginning of that period called the end of art which goes by the more familiar name of postmodernism” (143). Assuming there is nothing but postmodernism after the end of art, Herwitz is committed to accepting that postmodernism extends indefinitely in time as well.
in which there was no longer the possibility of the historically correct direction. This would be a period then of deep Pluralism.\textsuperscript{55}

If the last narrative of the history of art is a pluralist one in which there is no direction for art history to take and in which any art is acceptable, then this narrative can never come to an end, for the concept of an ending cannot be applied to a period of art history which lacks a specific direction and telos\textsuperscript{56}.

While this may seem appealing as a characterization of the post-historical period, it is unclear that this is a genuine case of art ending. To see why, consider other cases of endings. Suppose there is a period in one's life during one engages in some activity, say, writing one's dissertation. Intuitively, if this activity or phase of history comes to an end, we do not imagine that we continue to write our dissertation beyond the completion of it, let alone to do so forever! To speak of an end to some activity implies that the activity has finished and will not continue.

This analogy should make clear that this way of thinking about an end to art is relatively counter-intuitive. Moreover, we have reason to believe that Danto himself would object to the suggestion that a narrative could continue indefinitely: he believes that narratives cannot be endless, and this is precisely what this interpretation presupposes.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{55}Danto, "Learning to Live with Pluralism", \textit{Beyond the Brillo Box} (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992), 229.

\textsuperscript{56}Consider that post-modernism lacks any real reason for coming to an end. Post-modernism appears to simply emerge 'because there is nothing left for artists to do'. As such, it cannot be the last narrative in the history of art, for it fails to bring closure to the history of art, as an ending ought.

A second way of thinking about what happens after the end of art avoids these problems. One might think that art history has come to an end in the sense that the final narrative of the master narrative and the master narrative itself end, but there may be future narratives. Unlike the previous suggestion, narratives cannot be endless, and the period of post-historical art does not continue indefinitely. Instead, on this view, the period of pluralism is literally post-historical - viz., a narrative that falls outside of the master narrative.

Danto's master narrative has only two main periods: the Vasari period followed by the Modern period. After the modern period, though, art comes to an end. This marks the end of the master narrative. What follows Warhol and the Modern period - pluralism, or post-historical art - does not belong to the master narrative of art history. It is possible that this period in art history has its own narrative; but if it does, that narrative does not belong to the master narrative including the Vasari and modern periods.

This interpretation appears plausible, and consistent with Danto's views so far. However, Danto does not want to suggest that there can be any future narratives after the end of art:

To say that history is over is to say that there is no longer a pale of history for works of art to fall outside of. Everything is possible. Anything can be art. And, because the present situation is essentially unstructured, one can no longer fit a master narrative to it....I would like to suggest that our situation at the end of art history resembles the situation before the beginning of art history - before, that is, a narrative was imposed on art that made painting the hero of the story and cast whatever did not fit the narrative outside the pale of history and hence of art altogether.56

In my view, the deconstructionist account, even if true, does not go [sic!] the heart of the matter - to what I want to think of as the deep structure of art history in the contemporary era. The deep structure, as I see it, is a kind of unprecedented pluralism, understood precisely in terms of the open disjunction of media which at once served a corresponding

disjunction of artistic motivations and backed the possibility of a further developmental progressive narrative of the kind exemplified by Vasari's or by Greenberg's. My own sense of an ending suggests that it was the remarkable disjunctiveness of artistic activity across the entire sector that provided evidence that the Greenbergian narrative was over, and that art had entered what one might call a postnarrative stage.

So, minimally, the post-historical era is one where the modernist narrative has ended. And the above passages make clear that after the modernist narrative, there will be no more narratives to come.

But how could anyone prove that there cannot be any future narratives, after the end of the narrative in which one finds itself? To make such a prediction, one would have to be able to make, from within one's own narrative, predictions about what events can occur outside of that narrative. One would need, in other words, a narrative that could make predictions about events occurring after the end of that narrative.

However, the very concept of a narrative makes this an impossible task: it is not possible for a narrative to make predictions about events that occur beyond the scope of that narrative.

The reason is that narratives can only comment on events internal to that narrative. Narratives provide unity to events within a given time period by explaining their relations to one another. However, narratives cannot unite events within a narrative with events outside of that narrative:

The philosophical point is this: The end of art, meaning the end of a certain narrative of the history of art, is always in terms of an internal history, for which Vasari's is as good a paradigm as I know (though Hegel's is another). It can make no external predictions, but only forecast from within.

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There are two points to notice about this passage. First, notice that Danto is ignoring the fact that on Hegel's own view, the history and development of art is nested within the larger history and development of the *Weltgeist*. Hence, on Hegel's view but clearly not on Danto's, the narratives of the history of art will develop more and more self-knowledge and self-comprehension as it evolves. This model allows that the history of art will gradually become able to understand its progression and hence to predict the evolution to a higher narrative. This is in stark contrast to what Danto claims in this passage – for here he denies the possibility of making any predictions at all.

Second, notice that if Danto's own conception of a narrative is one that precludes it from making external predictions, then it cannot anticipate what will happen after the end of that narrative.

A natural response to this line is to suggest that a narrative could entail an event \( x \) that falls outside of the scope of the narrative. That is, a narrative might predict that after a certain discovery is made within the scope of the narrative in question, then this will cause some other event to occur, after the end of that narrative. For example, one might imagine the modernist narrative ending with Warhol to make the following prediction about an event outside of scope of that narrative: art after Warhol will become interested in creating art that incorporates our ordinary environment as part of that art. This could be a prediction or forecast from within our own narrative, about the nature of future art.

The problem is that it is difficult to imagine is how such a prediction does not, in virtue of making a prediction about the nature of future art, thereby
constitute part of the Modernist narrative. After all, have not the future events after this narrative been subsumed under the modernist narrative, by being explained by and in terms of the modernist narrative? If the very concept of a narrative involves explaining a certain set of events in a causal chain in terms of some larger goal, then it would seem that any event that is purportedly outside of the narrative, and that is explained by that narrative, is going to be part of that narrative.

In conclusion, we have a firmer grasp of Danto's general account of art history and the implications of his end-of-art thesis. But there are a number of issues that remain unresolved. Most generally, we are left wondering what motivates Danto to endorse the end-of-art thesis, for it is not supported by his account of art history. It is to this issue that we will turn to next. Lurking in the background are other issues regarding the relation between his account of art history and his definition of art, which we'll tackle in Chapter 3, and the relation between art history and historicism, which we'll address in chapter 4.
CHAPTER 2

THE RELATION BETWEEN DANTO’S END-OF-ART THESIS, HIS PHILOSOPHY OF ART AND HIS ACCOUNT OF ART HISTORY

We saw in Chapter 1 that Danto’s end-of-art thesis does not derive any support from his philosophy of art history. However, Danto may still appeal to yet other sources of justification for the end-of-art thesis, like his account of art. For recall that Warhol’s *Brillo Box* not only heralds the end of art, but also makes possible Danto’s definition of art. Noel Carroll capitalizes on this tension between the fact that the arrival of *Brillo Box* makes possible Danto’s definition of art, and the fact that the arrival of *Brillo Box* also marks the end of art. He takes this connection between Danto’s account of art history and his account of art to suggest that Danto’s two theories are circularly related.

In this chapter, I will address two issues.

(1) Noel Carroll has argued, against Danto, that the latter uses his end-of-art thesis in an illicitly circular way. The reason is that Danto uses the thesis to indemnify his own essentialist theory of art against the possibility of future counter-examples. I shall argue that Danto’s end-of-art thesis does not presuppose any essentialist theory of art. (2) In the second part, I shall go on to

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argue that, on Danto's own terms, art history cannot come to an end anyway - contrary to his claim\textsuperscript{63}.

2.1 Carroll Contra Danto

Carroll argues that Danto's only motivation for advocating his philosophy of art history stems from its convenient ability to vindicate his philosophy of art. Prima facie, Carroll's charge appears plausible, since Danto himself agrees in print with both his diagnosis of Danto's hidden agenda and his formulation of his definition of art\textsuperscript{64}. Indeed, he says that he "admires" Carroll's critique so interpreted, and he nowhere provides any straightforward reply to it\textsuperscript{65}. I might describe my goal in the first part of this chapter as defending Danto against himself. On his own terms, he should not have accepted the interpretation upon which Carroll's critique is based.

First, let's review how Danto thinks about defining art. According to him, the defining features of an artwork are its nonmanifest properties. Specifically,


\textsuperscript{64}In fact, in \textit{Danto and His Critics}, Danto praises Carroll's interpretation highly: "Carroll's is quite the best account I can imagine, for its lucidity, comprehensiveness, acuity, and sympathy; and it is to Carroll's text that I would send anyone who sought a statement of what I might have achieved...One of his most ingenious thoughts is that, as an essentialist, I really require the kind of historicism which culminates in the theory of The End of Art, with which I have been identified." Arthur Danto, "Responses and Replies," in \textit{Danto and His Critics}, ed. by M. Rollins (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 1993), 205-206.

\textsuperscript{65}Oddly, Danto nowhere offers any response to Carroll's criticisms. See \textit{Beyond the Brillo Box} (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992), 229, where Danto presents and admires Carroll's criticism: "A friendly critic, Noel Carroll, has argued for an internal connection between my view that art has historically ended and the philosophy of art advanced in \textit{The Transfiguration of the Commonplace}. His thought is this: 'The history of the philosophy of art has been the story of philosophical theories overturned, one after another, by counter examples from the artworld. Only a theory indemnified against counter-examples can stand the test of time. How convenient, then, that there won't be any more art history, so far as my own theories are concerned...I admire this criticism.'"
"to be a work of art is to be (i) about something and (ii) to embody its meaning". This definition is unique insofar as it fails to make reference to any manifest properties as the defining properties of an artwork. Prior to Danto, the main essentialist definitions of art relied on identifying the defining features of artworks by reference to their manifest properties. This fact led to the downfall and failure of those essentialist definitions. For, as the history of art reveals, any artwork created in the future may serve as a counter-example to an essentialist definition of art relying on the manifest properties of artworks. Moreover, the introduction of Warhol's *Brillo Box* onto the art scene made it apparent that an artwork can have any manifest properties, and still be an artwork. More seriously, the *Brillo Box* also made it clear that if any essentialist definition of art was possible at all, it must be an essentialist definition that does not rely on the manifest properties of an artwork.

At this point, Carroll suspects that something funny is going on. According to him, there is a hidden agenda underlying Danto's philosophy of art history, viz., that it renders his philosophy of art immune to counter-examples. In effect, Carroll believes Danto is arguing as follows:

1. Art history has come to an end (according to his philosophy of art history).
2. If art history has come to an end, then there can be no more future possible counter-examples to an essentialist definition of art.
3. Therefore, an essentialist definition of art is possible, and is not subject to future possible counter-examples.

Call this the Hidden Agenda.

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Surprisingly, Danto doesn't seem to notice an important ambiguity in this formulation of his hidden agenda. When Carroll claims that once art history ends, there will be no more counter-examples to Danto's definition of art, it unclear to which type of definition Carroll refers: whether there are no counter-examples to (a) an essentialist definition of art that relies on the kinds of properties that Danto himself claims to be definitive of artworks, or (b) an essentialist definition relying on nonmanifest properties of artworks, or, possibly, (c) an essentialist definition of art relying on manifest properties of artworks. It is crucial to understanding Carroll's accusation that we are clear about which of these three options Carroll intends to advance. In what follows, I shall examine these three interpretations of claim (2) in Carroll's formulation of Danto's hidden agenda.

(a) Of course, it would be extremely uncharitable for Carroll to advance the first alternative, viz., if he interpreted Danto to be claiming that if art history ends, then Danto's own definition of art will be immune to counter-examples; for this reason, I shall discount this interpretation.

(b) Suppose next that Carroll is referring to manifest properties. His diagnosis of Danto's hidden agenda, then, is as follows: (1) art history has ended; (2) if art history has ended, then there can be no more counter-examples to an essentialist definition of art that defines art by reference to its manifest properties; (3) therefore, an essentialist definition of art that defines art by reference to its manifest properties is possible.

Clearly, this interpretation of Danto's hidden agenda is absurd. For one, Danto himself claims that the importance of Warhol's *Brillo Box* is that it reveals that if any essentialist definition is possible, then it cannot be one that makes use of the manifest properties of artworks. Danto takes Warhol to show the
impossibility of an essentialist definition relying on manifest properties of artworks. Danto's own definition is one that invokes the nonmanifest properties of artworks; so, an interpretation of Danto in which Danto claims that an essentialist definition of art relying on the manifest properties of artworks is possible makes Danto look as if he's forgotten his own definition of art, when presenting his account of art history! Hence, when Carroll claims that Danto's hidden agenda is to show that his philosophy of art history renders his philosophy of art immune to counter-examples, he cannot mean counter-examples relying on the manifest properties of artworks.

(c) Suppose finally that Carroll is referring to nonmanifest properties. His diagnosis of Danto's hidden agenda can be reformulated as follows: (1) art history has ended; (2) If art history has ended, then there can be no more counter-examples to an essentialist definition of art that defines art by reference to its nonmanifest properties; (3) therefore, an essentialist definition of art that defines art by reference to its nonmanifest properties is possible. Prima facie, this interpretation appears plausible, insofar as it is a charitable interpretation of Danto's hidden agenda. Before critically examining this argument, it will be helpful to examine why Carroll might adopt this interpretation.

Carroll suggests that:

The Warhol examples along with the logic of resemblance, showed that all of the evidence was vis-a-vis manifest properties since everything is like everything else. Anything, that is, could look like something that was art. What remained for theorists to ascertain was whether there was some nonmanifest property or properties to supply the differentia between art and non-art. Artists could not pursue this investigation any farther. For they work in the medium of manifest properties wherein, once it is admitted that anything can look like art, we can expect to learn nothing further of any theoretical import.

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As reluctant as I am to put words in Carroll's mouth, the foregoing strongly suggests that not only do artists like Warhol work in the medium of the manifest, but that they are *restricted* to manipulations of the manifest. Let us grant this for the sake of argument and consider the plausibility of this interpretation.

Carroll believes that there can be no counter-examples to essentialist definitions of art relying on nonmanifest properties, because of the nature of artworks: artists work in the medium of *manifest* properties; consequently, they cannot produce objects that could constitute counter-examples to a definition that relies on *nonmanifest* properties.

Notice that if Carroll claims that artists work only in the realm of the manifest, then it is extremely unclear what to make of Warhol's *Brillo Box*. Both Danto and Carroll take Warhol's work to raise the question 'What is the nature of art?' in its proper philosophical form. As a philosophical question regarding the problem of indiscernibility, Warhol's work is taken to show that no matter how we identify the nature of art, the defining characteristics of artworks are *not* those very manifest properties. But if artists work *only* in the realm of the manifest, then Warhol cannot be interpreted as having made such a claim. In fact, if Warhol only works in the realm of the manifest, it is not clear that we can interpret him to have made any claims at all.

In addition, even if we could grant that artists do only work in the realm of the manifest, and make sense of Warhol's project, it is not a view that could plausibly be attributed to Danto. Danto takes his definition of art to highlight the fact that what distinguishes art from non-art are the *nonmanifest* properties of artworks. It is inconsistent to suggest both that Danto's definition highlights the importance of the *nonmanifest* properties of artworks, and that artists *cannot* work in the realm of the *nonmanifest*. To attribute to Danto the view that artists
cannot work in the realm of the nonmanifest would defeat his definition of art. So, interpretation (c) of (2) should be rejected.

All three interpretations lead to consequences that Danto would surely reject; hence Danto’s hidden agenda cannot be correct on any interpretation of (2).

But now there is no way that Carroll could advance the hidden agenda on Danto’s behalf. (Again, it is unclear why Danto himself accepts Carroll’s diagnosis.) As we shall see, Carroll’s charge of circularity depends crucially on this diagnosis of Danto’s hidden agenda. It is to this charge which we must turn to next.

If Carroll’s diagnosis of Danto’s hidden agenda were correct, then it would seem that Danto is arguing in a circular fashion. On the one hand, Danto’s philosophy of art history presupposes the truth of an essentialist definition of art; on the other hand, the possibility of an essentialist definition of art presupposes the end of art history. Danto cannot, without circularity, appeal to his philosophy of art history as a defense of his philosophy of art, because his philosophy of art history loads the dice in favor of essentialism. But at this point, it is not clear why this mutual reinforcement between Danto’s philosophies should be stamped viciously circular.

Carroll seems to mobilize two distinct arguments to substantiate his charge. His first argument rests on the claim that indiscernibility is just a way of indirectly assuming an essentialist position; this argument relies on conceptual considerations concerning the relationship between essentialism and indiscernibility. Let’s call this the Conceptual Tie Argument (CT). Carroll’s

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See Danto’s reply to Carroll’s charge in Danto and His Critics, esp. pp. 205-206, as well as Danto’s discussion of Carroll’s criticism in Beyond the Brillo Box, p. 229.
second argument relies on the relation between the evidence for the claim that
the end of art arrives with the advent of Warhol's *Brillo Box* and the evidence to
show that there can be no counter-examples to his definition of art. Call this the
Evidential Tie Argument (ET). In both cases, Carroll endeavors to show that
Danto's philosophy of art history cannot serve as an *independent* argument
supporting his philosophy of art, since the former presupposes the latter -- either
conceptually, or evidentially.

(1) CT focuses on the conceptual ties between essentialism and
indiscernibility. CT argues that the method of indiscernibility reveals the crucial
and defining features of artworks, and it can do so because the issue of
indiscernibility is really just another way of endorsing an essentialist definition
of art. In other words, talk of indiscernibility and talk of essentialism amount to
the same thing. So, Danto's claim that art history ends with the advent of
Warhol's *Brillo Box* presupposes essentialism, since his definition of art stems
from the centrality of the indiscernibility issue. Here is Carroll's argument:

...[T]he method of indiscernibles is nothing but an exquisitely economical way for
focusing attention upon making essential distinctions. It is, so to speak, a tool inextricably
linked with essentialist theorizing. It has been designed expressly for that purpose. But
then to suppose that the advent of the indiscernible issue is the decisive moment in the
reflexive artworld conversation about 'What is the nature of art?' is to prejudge any debate
in favor of essentialist theory. Moreover, to invoke indiscernibility in a characterization of a
philosophy of art history that is meant to defend the possibility of essentialist theory is
circular; for it supposes the viability of essentialist theory - by dint of its assumptions about
indiscernibility - in the course of an argument whose very conclusion is ostensibly that
essentialist theory is viable.\textsuperscript{70}

According to CT, to declare the arrival of the *Brillo Box* as the historical moment
marking the end of art just *is* to announce the truth of essentialism. Here, CT is
implicitly assuming that indiscernibility is only of interest and of use to the
essentialist – that the anti-essentialist would find neither the method of

\textsuperscript{70}Noël Carroll, "Essence, Expression and History: Arthur Danto's Philosophy of Art," in *Danto and
indiscernibles nor Warhol's *Brillo Box* interesting: they do not focus on any interesting aspect of art, given that they only focus on essentialist distinctions.

But Carroll provides no support for the claim that the method of indiscernibles raises only essentialist distinctions, or for the claim that it cannot be useful or helpful to the anti-essentialist. It is entirely plausible to imagine that the method of indiscernibles may raise non-essentialist issues, or may even provide the anti-essentialist with a tool for focusing on anti-essentialist issues. Indeed, the anti-essentialist may find that *Brillo Box* marks an historical moment in the artworld, but fail to take *Brillo Box* to reveal anything at all about the truth of essentialism.

Imagine, for example, that Warhol, or someone like him, loves the brillo boxes from the hardware store. To persuade others to appreciate them, he creates the artwork *Brillo Box*. By hypothesis, it is crucial that the artwork *Brillo Box* be indiscernible from its store-bought counterpart; yet its indiscernibility is irrelevant to essentialist theorizing. Carroll's assumption that indiscernibility (and hence the artwork *Brillo Box*) is solely a tool for essentialist theorizing overlooks the possibility that even someone who doesn't care at all about essentialism can find uses for the artwork *Brillo Box*. His restriction of the function and role of indiscernibility to essentialist theorizing is at best a controversial assumption in need of justification.

But if the conceptual tie between essentialism and indiscernibility can be broken, do we really have a convincing argument that Danto begs the question against the anti-essentialist? It seems Danto may invoke Warhol's *Brillo Box* as the decisive moment in art history without presupposing essentialism: indiscernibility may support a variety of philosophical claims - in support of, against, or neutral with respect to essentialism - privileging Warhol's *Brillo Box*
in his philosophy of art history neither confirms nor denies any of Danto's claims regarding his philosophy of art.

(2) Let us turn now to ET. ET makes the following argument: (a) Danto's philosophy of art ends with Warhol, because there is nothing left for artworks to do after Brillo Box. (b) There is nothing left for artists to do, because there can be no new counter-examples to an essentialist definition of art. So, (c) the evidence that there are no new counter-examples to Danto's definition of art is the very same evidence that art history has ended. Danto's defense of his philosophy of art is—Carroll claims—that there is nothing left for artists to do after Warhol; but of course, there is nothing left for artists to do after Warhol because at that point, there can be no new counter-examples to Danto's philosophy of art:

[T]o maintain that, once the method of indiscernibles has arrived, no further theoretical breakthroughs are possible in the artworld seems to beg the question in the debate between essentialist and anti-essentialist theorists, where anti-essentialist theories might argue that art indeed still has a developmental history, namely the overcoming of the error of essentialism both in theory as well as practice, which, in turn, may produce counter-examples in virtue of non-manifest properties that Danto's theory cannot countenance. The point here is not that Danto's philosophy of art proper will not be able to withstand counter-examples, but rather that his philosophy of art history may not be able to protect it from counter-examples without begging the question.71

ET charges that Danto's philosophy of art can defend itself against counter-examples only because nothing new will occur on the art scene after Warhol. But there is nothing left for artists to do after Warhol only because of his essentialist assumptions.

To evaluate the legitimacy of ET, we must first examine why there is nothing left for artists to do after Warhol. If the reason is that Danto's philosophy of art has been vindicated, then Carroll is correct in his charge that Danto begs the question. If, however, there is an explanation for why artists have nothing to

do after Warhol that is independent of Danto's philosophy of art, then Danto can still avoid Carroll's charge.

Ironically, Carroll himself suggests the following explanation,

But why can artists only raise the problem of the nature of art? Why can't they solve it, once they discover that the crux of the problem revolves around indiscernibility? Though Danto does not state his reasons explicitly, I suspect that the answer is that art - perhaps most especially avant-garde art - does not have the logical apparatus required to generalize or to mount coherent arguments. Art, especially avant-garde art, would seem to be too elliptical and disjunctive to serve the purpose of constructing and defending a coherent theory of art. Thus, it can at best only frame the issue of the nature of art in its most appropriate form. Once art discovers the issue of indiscernibles, the developmental history of art is at an end.72

On Carroll's own interpretation of Danto, the reason art history ends and the reason there is nothing left for artists to do after Warhol, is not because Danto's philosophy of art has been vindicated, but rather because the next logical step for artists to take after they have raised the problem of the nature of art is to answer this question73; but according to Carroll, artists do not have the logical apparatus to answer questions; consequently, there is nothing left for artists to do.

So, on Carroll's own interpretation of Danto, the evidence for art history's end is pried apart from the evidence supporting essentialism. Hence, for the very reasons that Carroll himself notes, evidence the end of art history is not evidence for Danto's definition of art.

Mobilizing the fact that Danto ends art history with the raising of a question, rather than with an answer, we might suggest another way of


73One might worry that there is a prior problem with Carroll's argument, viz., that Carroll has misinterpreted Danto to be assuming that art history ends with the raising of a question, rather than with an answer. However, such a worry is unfounded. Danto has repeatedly maintained that art ends with the formulation of the question "What is the nature of art?" in its proper philosophical form. See, for example, After the End of Art, p. 35, p. 46 and p. 113; see also Philosophizing Art, p. 5 and "The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense", p. 134.
motivating ET that avoids the above criticism on Carroll's behalf. Carroll might note yet another connection between the evidence for the end of art history and for Danto's definition of art: that there is no art history after raising the question implies that the answer favors the essentialist position. Only an essentialist would end art history once the question has been raised - for this implies that the answer is obvious: the end of art history vindicates the essentialist; hence there is no longer any reason for art history to continue. In this way, Carroll might argue, Danto rigs his art history to defend his definition of art. After all, art history ends, once the question 'What is the nature of art?' has been raised, and because there is no art after this point, Danto's philosophy of art history also implies that essentialism is correct. Call this the modified ET argument (MET).

Before considering the central problem with MET, we should note two smaller ones.

First, if Danto can be accused of loading the dice, then he must only be loading the dice in support of a particular formulation of essentialism. For, as Carroll himself notes, Danto's philosophy of art history "at best would show that there can be no counter-examples in terms of the manifest properties of artworks." Hence, MET grants that Danto's end-of-art thesis does not imply that any essentialist definition of art is correct; rather, it shows only that an essentialist definition of art that relies on the non-manifest properties is correct. So, MET applies only if we interpret Danto as claiming that the end of art history implies the truth of an essentialist definition of art relying on non-manifest properties of artworks.

Second, if Danto can be accused of circularity, because his philosophy of art history is used in defense of his philosophy of art, then MET is broader than Carroll perhaps realizes: for then any philosopher who appeals to certain decisive moments in the history of art in defense of his or her philosophy of art can also be accused of circularity. If Danto is susceptible to circularity on these grounds, then he is susceptible to the same extent that any other philosopher who interprets art history in light of their definition of art. Hence, MET applies not just to Danto, but to any philosopher who appeals to art history in support of a philosophy of art.

But there is still a more serious issue with which MET must contend: the fact that art history ends, after the question 'What is the nature of art?' has been raised does not imply that the answer to this question is an affirmative one in favor of the essentialist. If art history ends only once the question has been posed, but not answered, then art history leaves room for the possibility that the question 'What is the nature of art?' either (a) fails to have an answer, (b) is answered in the negative, or (c) is answered in the affirmative. Of course, if the history of art or art itself were to provide an answer to the question 'What is the nature of art?', then surely Danto would be loading the dice in favor of the truth of an essentialist definition of art. In such a case, MET would be appropriate, for the fact that the history of art would end once there were an answer (presumably an affirmative one) to such a question would assume the truth of an essentialist definition of art. But the mere fact that art history ends, once the question has been posed, but not answered, implies nothing about essentialism's truth.

So, what reasons might Carroll have for suggesting that art ends because artists have nothing to do after Warhol? On Carroll's line of reasoning,
(1) art history comes to an end after Warhol’s *Brillo Box* raises the question 'What is the nature of art?' in its proper philosophical form, and (2) art history cannot continue after this question is raised, because artworks, due to their elliptical and disjunctive nature, are incapable of answering this question, since an answer requires mounting a coherent argument. But this line of reasoning further assumes that art history ends after Warhol because (1) whatever art would have been created after Warhol would have to be art interested in answering the question "What is the nature of art?" and (2) there is no art that would even be capable of answering such a question. In other words, whatever art would have occurred after Warhol, it would belong to a period of art history governed by a narrative whose goal is to answer the question "What is the nature of art?", and no art could realize such a goal.

Is Danto genuinely committed to such a view about art history? Must Danto grant that the narrative governing post-Warholian art must address the issues raised by the narrative governing art prior to *Brillo Box*? We cannot begin to answer such questions without first reconsidering Danto’s views regarding the history of art and the narratives that govern art history.

2.2 Danto’s Own Mistake

The lessons learned from chapter 1 about Danto’s account of art history can help us answer these questions.

Recall that the master narrative of art history contains two periods – the Vasari period and the modernist period. These two periods are governed by their own narrative that describes the goals toward which art during that period progresses and specifies the internal development of art during that period. The narrative can accomplish this because it contains a conception of what art
is about and its nature. Recall finally also that modernism and the master narrative end when *Brillo Box* raises the question "What is the nature of art?" in its proper philosophical form.

So far, however, we have seen that Danto's account provides narratives that apply only to a specific period in art history. But Danto also purports to provide a philosophy of art history according to which it is possible that there will be no more narratives of art history, and that there will be no more periods of art history. Indeed, he wants to advance an account of art history on which the end of *all* of art history is possible.

Specifically, Danto claims that after modernism, that is, after the true from of the question "What is the nature of art?" has emerged, art history *itself* (not just some specific period within art history) has ended. But if modernism is merely one of many possible narratives of art history, with its own standard by which to measure progress during a specified period of time, then, we can easily imagine another narrative of art history which could follow modernism. To say that modernism has ended is simply to say that *this* narrative's internal development has been exhausted; but this says nothing about *future* narratives to come. To say there is no more art history generally after modernism presupposes not only that this *specific* narrative ends, but also that there is some standard by which to measure the development of the *entire* history of art, as it moves from one narrative to another. In other words, we need a master narrative that explains how the history of art progresses from one narrative to the next. In addition, that master narrative must provide a goal for the history of art as it moves from one narrative to the next, and that goal must be realized in 1964, when Danto claims art ended.
As it stands, however, Danto's philosophy of art history fails to make good on the claim that the entire history of art has ended, because he specifies neither a standard by which to measure progress from one narrative to the next, nor a goal toward which art history might strive, from one narrative to the next. The failure to provide a standard by which to measure progress from one narrative to the next is what I shall refer to as the "yardstick" problem. Because of the yardstick problem, Danto's philosophy of art history fails to allow for the end of art history as such.

It is strange that Danto fails to specify a yardstick by which to measure progress across all periods in art history, given that his main thesis is supposedly to defend a conception of art history in which the end of art history is possible.

It is equally strange that Carroll fails to notice this omission in Danto's philosophy of art history. It is absolutely essential for Carroll to have asked whether Danto's philosophy of art history can accommodate the end of art history: if Danto's philosophy of art history cannot accommodate such a possibility, neither Carroll's diagnosis of Danto's hidden agenda, nor his criticisms of Danto can be motivated.

Since accepting at face value what Danto says leads to certain problems, it would be uncharitable to simply accept this account as it stands. In what follows, I shall develop an alternative interpretation of Danto's account of art history that avoids the yardstick problem. If such an interpretation is plausible, then we can interpret Danto as claiming that art history has come to an end. After that, we shall need to investigate the reasons for believing that art history comes to end when Danto says it does - i.e., after modernism.
On my interpretation of Danto, it is possible to identify a standard by which to measure the progress of art history from one narrative to the next. Every time a new narrative of art history begins, that narrative not only provides a narrative for that particular period of art history (as Danto's view suggests), but it also provides a narrative of art history that makes sense of and applies to all previous artworks from previous periods. Thus, the yardstick by which to measure progress within a particular period of art history is also the yardstick by which to measure progress from one period to the next.

So, for example, the modernist narrative of art history interprets artworks during modernism as trying to formulate the question 'What is the nature of art?' in its proper philosophical form. In addition, this narrative also re-interprets artworks from prior periods of art history, such as art from the Vasari episode, in light of the goals specified by modernism. Not only is there a standard by which to measure art's progress within a particular period, but also art's progress in moving from the Vasari episode to modernism.

On this interpretation, as we move from one narrative to the next, we will always see previous narratives as false or incorrect. For, each new narrative purports to have discovered the appropriate or suitable way of understanding not just the artworks of its own period, but also all artworks from the entire history of art.

Danto himself hints at this view, when he writes:

In my own version of the idea of 'what art wants', the end and fulfillment of the history of art is the philosophical understanding of what art is, an understanding that is achieved in the way that understanding in each of our lives is achieved, namely, from the mistakes we make, the false paths we follow, the false images we come to abandon until we learn wherein our limits consist, and then how to live within those limits. The first false path was the close identification of art with picturing. The second false path was the materialist.

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75This is not a new or novel approach to art history: expressionism and formalism were also theories which claimed to comment on or to apply to all prior periods of art history as well.

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In this passage, Danto seems to suggest that the goal underlying the entire history of art is to formulate the question "What is the nature of art?" in its proper philosophical form. He presents previous narratives of art history - the Vasarian episode and modernism - in light of the current way of understanding art history - viz., as instances of learning about the essential nature of art. He does not simply take the goal of modernist art to raise the question about the nature of art in its proper philosophical form; he interprets the goal of all of art history to raise this question, too.

One might worry that this interpretation of Danto would require attributing to him a form of relativism with respect to art history that he would surely deny. I think such a worry is unfounded. The entire history of art is progressive; hence, as we move forward, we come to realize that what we believed in earlier narratives to be true was in fact misguided. Danto does not believe that all narratives are equally correct, or that they apply equally to the entire history of art. The above passage serves to highlight that on Danto's view, earlier narratives are mistaken; recent narratives more closely represent the genuine goals of art.

This interpretation allows us to make sense of the possibility that art might come to an end. Of course, whether Danto is correct depends on his arguments in support of his claim. We must now ask whether Danto has provided any reasons for believing that art in fact ends once art raises the question "What is the nature of art?" in its proper philosophical form. That is,

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what reason do we have for believing that there can be no new narratives after modernism? Why can't another narrative follow modernism?

Recall that Carroll's suggestion for why art must end after modernism was that whatever art is created after Warhol would be art intended to answer the question 'What is the nature of art?', and since no art is capable of answering such a question (since artworks are too elliptical and disjunctive to mount the necessary coherent arguments), there is no art after modernism.

But given our careful examination of Danto's own philosophy of art history from Chapter 1, it does not seem as if Danto must grant, as Carroll seems to think, that the narrative governing post-Warholian art must address the issues raised by the narrative governing art prior to Brillo Box. If the art of each narrative is characterized by its own distinct art criticism, there is no reason to believe that art after Warhol would have to deal with any of the issues raised by modernism. There is no reason to suppose that a narrative following the modernist narrative would have to address issues that are even remotely relevant to those that characterize modernism.

Once we grant that the narrative after modernism need not be concerned with answering a question regarding the nature of art, it should be obvious that there is no reason that art history must end after modernism. It appears that Carroll, and perhaps Danto himself, are conflating the conditions under which a particular narrative of art history ends, and the conditions under which the master narrative of art history - the entire history of art history - ends. The fact that according to modernism, art is concerned with posing the question 'What is the nature of art', means that this particular narrative in art history ends once this question has been posed. But this fact alone constitutes insufficient grounds
upon which to conclude that the entire *master* narrative of art history must also end.

There are two lessons to be drawn, one for Carroll, and one for Danto. If art history need not end after modernism, then it is trivially true that Danto's account can avoid Carroll's charge of circularity. For, Carroll's circularity charge requires assuming the end of art after modernism. Until an argument for the end-of-art thesis is given, Danto is not committed to any circularity at all. From Chapter 1, we have seen that Danto's account of art history fails to provide any support for the end-of-art thesis. And we have seen in this chapter that his account of art also does not save him either. We have rescued Danto from Carroll, but now we must rescue Danto from himself. For, Danto can only avoid the circularity charge by admitting that his account of art history and his account of art fail to motivate the end of art. It seems that Danto has traded one minor problem for a far more serious one.

We are left wondering whether Danto should simply abandon the end-of-art thesis, the conclusion to which we are led as a result of these last two chapters. And, the relation between Danto's views about history and his views about essentialism still remains a mystery. After all, *Brillo Box* plays a pivotal role in motivating both Danto's account of art history and his account of art. So, there seem to be ties between the two views. In the next chapter, we shall investigate both of these issues — the relation between his views of history and essentialism, and how these two impact his end-of-art thesis.\footnote{I am indebted to Lee Brown, David Eng and an anonymous reviewer for very helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter.}

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CHAPTER 3

THE INCONSISTENCY BETWEEN DANTO’S DEFINITION OF ART
AND HIS ACCOUNT OF ART HISTORY

The connection between Danto’s accounts of art history and art extends beyond the mere fact that he has views on both issues. His account of art makes explicit reference to art history, and hence indirectly appeals to the philosophy of art history. He sees art history as progressing toward formulating the definitional question “What is the nature of art?” in its proper philosophical form. And once this question is properly posed, Danto believes that his essentialism is vindicated. So, it is not surprising that it is commonly thought that Danto presents an essentialist definition of art and an account of art history that are mutually supportive. In fact, as we saw in Chapter 2, Carroll goes so far as to accuse Danto of arguing circularly between the two accounts.

But I shall argue that his definition of art and his account of art history are actually inconsistent: his definitional project entails that art history cannot come to an end, but according to his philosophy of art history, art history has already come to an end.

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One might wonder why art ends with the raising of a question, rather than with an answer to this question. As odd as this may seem, it is in fact the position Danto endorses: “Not until art reached a stage where it could put the question by exhibiting it did the proper philosophical problem of art become visible. After delivering over this immense gift to the philosophy of art, art could go no further.” Arthur Danto, “The End of Art: A Philosophical Defense,” *History and Theory* 37(4): 139 (1998), my emphasis.

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3.1 The Importance of History in the Definition of Art:

First, let us briefly rehearse how Danto's definition of art invokes art history.

According to Danto, "To be a work of art is to be (i) about something and (ii) to embody its meaning." Call these two necessary conditions 'aboutness' and 'embodiment'. Prima facie, this definition of art does not seem to invoke art history at all. But as we shall see, art history does enter the picture, because it enables us to discover exactly what an artwork is about, and how precisely the artwork embodies its meaning. Since an artwork's aboutness and embodiment are determined by its place in the history of art, art history serves two purposes: first, to distinguish ordinary objects from genuine artworks, and second, to distinguish one artwork from another. Let us consider each of these in turn.

Consider first how the appeal to art history allows us to distinguish ordinary objects from genuine artworks. As we saw in the previous chapter, Danto wants to suggest that artworks, unlike mere real things, are about something and embody their meanings. This concise expression of Danto's definition works well for many cases. Consider, for example, the following kinds of ordinary objects: a piece of driftwood found on the beach, a bookcase, a

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79 Carroll, in "Danto's New Definition of Art and the Problem of Art Theories" criticizes Danto for not including reference to the relevant artwork theories and their implied narratives, and from there argues that Danto's definition needs to be related to an art theory or narrative for objects to qualify as artworks on his view. For the reasons that Carroll himself notes, it would be very uncharitable, as well as highly unlikely, that Danto would have given up the role of art theory in his definition of art. It is reasonable to suppose that these features are in fact implicit in his account, even though he does not make such references explicit. Noel Carroll, "Danto's New Definition of Art and the Problem of Art," British Journal of Aesthetics 37(4): 386-392 (1997).

80 Morris Weitz originally considers this example to show that even the condition of artifactuality is not necessary for something being an artwork: "None of the criteria of recognition is a defining one, either necessary or sufficient, because we can sometimes assert of something that it is a work of art and go on to deny any one of these conditions, even the one which has traditionally been taken to be basic, namely, that of being an artifact: Considering 'This piece of driftwood is a lovely piece of sculpture.'" Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 15(1): 34 (1956).
pen, a garden hose. For ordinary objects like these, Danto can appeal unproblematically even to this terse formulation of his definition to explain why an ordinary piece of driftwood or a garden hose cannot be an artwork: the driftwood or the hose are not about anything, and hence fail to qualify as art on his definition.

If all examples were as straightforward as these ordinary objects considered above, then Danto’s condensed statement would suffice; most ordinary objects are not about anything. But this terse statement does not quite succeed in encapsulating what Danto wants to say about other ordinary objects, about which it is less straightforwardly obvious that they lack aboutness and embodiment.

After all, some ordinary objects, like an ordinary Brillo box, may be about something and may embody a meaning. An ordinary Brillo box has a certain kind of typography, and a certain set of images that are about cleanliness. Moreover, it embodies this meaning in a particular way: the advertising is designed to embody cleanliness in a way that also expresses, for example, its strength and durability. As Danto himself admits, "[the ordinary Brillo box] celebrates the product it contains through a certain visual rhetoric, enlisting color, shape and lettering. (It may even make the worse soap-pads look better than their competitors!).81"

That ordinary Brillo boxes and the artwork Brillo Box share aboutness is problematic for Danto’s account – aboutness would have been shown not to distinguish artworks from mere real things. This kind of case calls into question his definition of art, according to which aboutness is a necessary condition for

something being an artwork. However, it was only much later that he realized this potential problem:

It has latterly become clear to me that the ordinary Brillo carton is a poor example of the latter category, largely because it exemplifies the same philosophical structures that *Brillo Box* itself does. It is about something - Brillo, namely - and it embodies its meaning. The difference is only that it is commercial art, whereas *Brillo Box* is fine art. And at the least that reveals what must have been a prejudice of mine when I began using the example - I was unwilling to consider commercial art as art.82

So, Brillo boxes are not entirely honest examples of ordinary objects, because they are genuine examples of commercial art. As a result, we can distinguish these two kinds of cases fairly straightforwardly using aboutness: although we cannot say for sure that *Brillo Box* is not about cleanliness, it does not follow that its meaning is equivalent or reducible to the meaning of ordinary Brillo boxes. Danto argues that the meaning of *Brillo Box* goes beyond merely being about cleanliness. He interprets *Brillo Box* to be raising a philosophical question about the nature of art in its proper philosophical form. What makes it possible for *Brillo Box* to make such claims is its relation to art history:

To see something as art at all demands nothing less than this, an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art. Art is the kind of thing that depends for its existence upon theories; without theories of art, black paint is just black paint and nothing more. Perhaps one can speak of what the world is like independently of any theories we may have regarding the world, though I am not sure that it is even meaningful to raise such a question, since our divisions and articulations of things into orbits and constellations presupposes a theory of some sort. But it is plain that there could not be an artworld without theory, for the artworld is logically dependent upon theory. So it is essential to our study that we understand the nature of an art theory, which is so powerful a thing as to detach objects from the real world and make them art of a different world, an art world, a world of interpreted things83.

Art historians who advance particular interpretations of what they take the *Brillo Box* to be about and how they take it to embody its meaning do so by placing

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the artwork within its art-historical context and by explaining its relation to art history and art theory.

So, the aboutness and embodiment of artworks are related to art history in a way that the aboutness and embodiment of nonart are not. The role of art history in determining aboutness and embodiment allows us to distinguish art from ordinary objects.

Art history helps us distinguish one artwork from another, too. Individuating artworks from one another requires interpreting the artworks in the context of their art history and art theory. To illustrate this point, Danto considers a fictional example originally raised by Borges of two visually identical artworks whose meanings differ dramatically:

...the possibility [that there should exist visually indiscernible artworks] was first recognized, I believe, in connection with literary works, by Borges, who has the glory of having discovered it in his masterpiece, Pierre Menard, Symbolist Poet. There he describes two fragments of works, one of which is part of Don Quixote by Cervantes, and the other, like it in every graphic respect – like it, indeed, as much as two copies of the fragment by Cervantes could be – which happens to be by Pierre Menard and not by Cervantes.

Although the two texts by Cervantes and Menard share the same manifest properties, since Menard's work is word-for-word identical to Cervantes', they are two completely distinct artworks. They are distinct because they could not share a same 'aboutness' or 'embodiment', having been written in the context of different art theories and art histories. The information provided by Borges about his example makes it clear that what makes these artworks distinct from one another is the fact that they occupy different positions in different artworlds:

Borges tells us that the Quixote of Menard is infinitely more subtle than that of Cervantes, while that of Cervantes is immeasurably more coarse than its counterpart even though every word contained in the Menard version can be found in Cervantes' and in the corresponding position. Cervantes 'opposes to the fiction of chivalry the tawdry provincial reality of his country.' Menard on the other hand (on the other hand!) selects for its reality 'the land of Carmen during the century of Lepanto and Lope de Vega.' These are of course descriptions

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of the same place and time, but the mode of referring to them belongs to different times: it would not have been feasible for Cervantes to refer to Spain as 'the land of Carmen,' Carmen being a nineteenth-century literary personality familiar, of course, to Menard. And 'the tawdry provincial reality of his country' is a false characterization when applied to Menard's book, since the country designated is Spain and Menard was a Frenchman.

It is not just that the books are written at different times by different authors of different nationalities and literary intentions: these facts are not external ones; they serve to characterize the work(s) and of course to individuate them for all their graphic indiscernibility. That is to say, the works are in part constituted by their location in the history of literature as well as by their relationships to their authors, and as these are often dismissed by critics who urge us to pay attention to the work itself, Borges' contribution to the ontology of art is stupendous: you cannot isolate these factors from the work. And so, graphic congruities notwithstanding, these are deeply different works.

Because each artwork occupies a distinct place within art history, each artwork will be individuated from others in virtue of its aboutness and embodiment. In fact, they could not even exist in the same art-historical context, because the aboutness and embodiment of each artwork make reference to certain facts about the particular time and place of the artwork; were the aboutness and embodiment of Menard's text to be determined by the art-historical context of Cervantes' time, the text would no longer be Menard's artwork, but would rather be the work of Cervantes! By the same reasoning, were either text to have been created in a different time or place, then what the object is about and what it embodies might differ sufficiently for that object to be a different work of art.

So, although art history does not feature explicitly in Danto's definition of art, what transforms an object into an artwork - aboutness and embodiment - can only occur within an art-historical context that determines what an artwork is about and what meaning it embodies. The art-historical context serves two purposes: first, to distinguish artworks from ordinary objects, and second to distinguish artworks from one another.

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3.2 Can There Be Any More Art After the End of Art History?

Given the foregoing, it does not seem that Danto's definition of art would have any implications for any view about art history. One might wonder how Danto's appeal to art history in his definition of art would pose any threats to his account of art history. So, let us briefly review the lessons learned about Danto's philosophy of art history from Chapter 1.

Recall from Chapter 1 that according to Danto, art history came to an end in 1964 with Warhol's *Brillo Box*, at which point we enter the post-historical era. The claim is what I referred earlier as the end-of-art thesis. Before we can examine how his account of art poses a problem for endorsing the end-of-art thesis, we need to briefly remind ourselves of what the end-of-art thesis amounts to.

Danto means to argue that what has ended is not art history properly speaking, but instead, a narrative of art history that charts the evolution of art history as attempting to accomplish some goal. Second, recall that Danto argues that the goals around which the narrative is organized exist as part of art history proper. This view that art history itself contains its own narrative structure, along with its own goals, is what Danto terms narrativism *de re*.

We argued in Chapter 1 that the most plausible interpretation of Danto's end-of-art thesis takes Danto to be suggesting that the master narrative of the entire history of art is what has come to an end, and not some narrative that governs a particular period within the history of art. Given his endorsement of narrativism *de re*, this means that not only has the master narrative ended, but so has art history itself. So, when Danto refers to the end of art, what he is in fact discussing is the end of the master narrative of art history. To avoid any
confusion, I shall refer explicitly to the end of the master narratives, rather than merely the end of art, a more ambiguous claim.

Let us accept for the sake of argument that Danto’s end-of-art thesis refers to the progressive master narrative that ends after Warhol. A natural question at this point is to wonder what happens next. What is life in the post-historical era like? Danto is eager to claim that although art comes to an end, it does not thereby come to a stop. He suggests that the case of institutionalization of an art form is analogous to what he means in claiming that art has come to an end, without it thereby having come to a stop:

In any case, the institutionalization in academies of the great progress traced by Vasari from Giotto to Michelangelo would give a vivid example of how it was possible for art to come to an end without coming to a stop. By analogy, we might think of our era as the age of the art school, in which, in a certain sense, academicians go forth in vast numbers — from Cal Art and Yale and Pratt and RISD and the Boston Museum School and perhaps the Columbia University School of the Arts — to stock the increasing numbers of museums, just as their predecessors went forth from the Vasarian academies to embellish walls and design tapestries and plan monuments, even if art had come to an end.

Danto argues that although the narrative of art history may come to an end, art will still continue. In other words, it is consistent with the master narrative of art history coming to an end that art continue to be made.

Or so Danto wants to claim.

I, however, shall suggest that Danto’s views about the definition of art prevent him from being able to defend this claim. To this end, I shall show that an unfortunate consequence of the end-of-art thesis is that there can be no more artworks after the end of the master narrative of art history. To superficial

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87 You might think that since Danto accepts narrativism de re, there is no reason for me to be explicit in making reference to the master narratives. After all, on his view, the end of the master narrative of art history just is the end of art history. This is true. But the argument against Danto that I want to advance later does not hinge on accepting this narrativism de re; to show this, it is important not to conflate the two positions.

readers of Danto, this thesis may not appear surprising, because they think that this is exactly what Danto means to say. For such a reader, the end of the master narrative of art history implies the end-of-art-making. Since the master narrative of art history has ended there isn't any more art\textsuperscript{89}. For such a reader, of course, the view seems outlandish, since he sees an abundance of art everywhere around him. Our reader concludes that Danto's end-of-art thesis must be utterly false.

Now, Danto considered this superficial interpretation of his position. In response, he purports to repudiate this interpretation, by denying that the end of art history does imply the end of art-making:

Neither [Hans] Belting nor I was claiming that art had stopped or that it was going to stop, but only that in whatever way it was going to go on, that would be consistent with its having come to an end. A philosophical imbecile in an audience before which I once laid my views out imagined my thesis as something like one which held that the making of chairs had stopped -- and seeing chairs being made by chair makers the world round, it seemed to him that my thesis must be spectacularly false -- like a claim that there are no material objects or that Achilles can never catch up with the tortoise or that space is unreal\textsuperscript{90}.

As this passage suggests, Danto obviously does not want us to accept the superficial reading of his position. He himself does not believe that the end of art history entails the end of art-making. On the contrary, he wants to allow for the possibility of all kinds of art in the post-historical era. In fact, the one advantage of Danto's account that both his friends and foes alike have taken for granted is that his philosophy of art is supposed to entail pluralism in the post-historical era, and by extension, that there is art in the post-historical era.

\textsuperscript{89} Notice that the interpretation of Danto on the superficial reading is not nearly as plausible or persuasive once we make explicit that Danto is referring to master narratives of art history, rather than art history tout court.

Everyone has simply assumed that Danto’s account of art and art history are mutually supportive, and this has always been taken as a virtue of his position.

To show that the end of the master narrative of art history does entail the end of art, I shall defend Danto’s notorious imbecile. I shall suggest that the end of the master narrative of art history does entail the end of art, although not for the same reasons that our imbecile advances. So, I shall argue that in Danto’s case, the end of the master narrative of art history also entails the end of art itself, given the way in which Danto defines art. There are two points to offer on behalf of our philosophical imbecile – a clarificatory comment and a more substantive argument to support his ultimate conclusion.

First of all, there is a minor point to make on behalf of the philosophical imbecile. The simple-minded reading of Danto’s position is the result of a conflation that Danto himself encourages, by referring to the end of art history as the end of art simpliciter. And in fact, this confusion is compounded by Danto’s legitimate conflation of the end of art history and the end of the master narrative of art history.1

Nevertheless, Danto wants to argue that just because art history has come to an end, it does not follow, as our imbecile (supposedly mistakenly) believes, that there cannot be any more artworks. Of course, as Danto rightly suggests in the above passage, the mere fact that there is still art tells us nothing about whether art history has come to an end, as the imbecile might worry. Moreover, we also know that the end-of-art thesis refers to the end of art history’s master narrative, not to the end of art-making. And as Danto has always been at pains to emphasize, the end of art history and the end of the

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1 The conflation is legitimate, because the end of the master narrative just is the end of art history on a de re account of art history of the kind Danto accepts.
master narrative of art history are consistent with there continuing to be art. So, to suggest that art history or that its master narrative has not ended because there is still art is to conflate the end of art with the end of art history or with the end of the master narrative of art history.

Ironically, though, matters are not as Danto thinks they are. Within the context of Danto’s view that the essence of art reveals itself, the supposed conflation is not a confusion. Here’s why.

Recall that for Danto, to be an artwork is at least to exhibit aboutness and embodiment. And as we saw, these features in turn are determined by the art-historical context in which the objects appear. So, in order for there to be artworks, there must be an art-historical context which enables the artworks to exhibit aboutness and embodiment.

The problem is that in the post-historical era that follows the end of art history, there is no art-historical context in which objects may exist as artworks; after all, what would it mean to say that there is art history after the end of art history? If anything ends after the end of art history, it surely is art history itself. And surely there can be no art-historical context without art history. So, if there is no art-historical context in which objects may exist as artworks, then no object created after the end of art history will be able to possess either aboutness or embodiment. In other words, no object after the end of art will satisfy Danto’s definition.

An immediate objection to the above argument against Danto is obvious. Remembering that Danto’s end-of-art thesis refers to the end of the master narrative of art history, it surely seems plausible to imagine that there may well
be that there continues to be an art-historical context after the end of the master narrative of art history.

This line of criticism, however, ignores Danto's views about narrativism *de re*. According to narrativism *de re*, remember that the narratives are objective features of art history itself; so the end of the master narrative just is the end of art history itself. So, this objection to the above argument only succeeds only if we are willing to give up narrativism *de re*. I shall return to this alternative in the next section.

But given Danto's commitment to narrativism *de re*, the end of art does entail the end of art history after all, although not for the same reasons that our philosophical imbecile advances. This is a serious problem for Danto's supposedly mutually supportive accounts of art and art history: to discover that Danto's package deal is not what it appears to be raises some serious problems not just for Danto's views in particular, but also more generally for how essentialists ought to invoke art history in their definitions of art.

3.3 Possible Objections to the Foregoing Critique

One might reply to the above charge in three ways.

First, one might object that I have falsely assumed that there are no art-historical contexts in the post-historical era. Of course, if it can be shown that there are still art-historical contexts in the post-historical era, then obviously there will be objects that can fulfill Danto's definition of art, even after the end of art.

Second, one might try to pry apart the art-historical context from the narratives governing art history. Doing so would enable an opponent to claim
that while the narratives of art history have finally been brought to completion, there still remains an art-historical context. And again, if it can be shown that there are still art-historical contexts in the post-historical era (even if there are no longer any art-historical narratives), obviously there will be objects that fulfill Danto's definition of art, even after the end of art.

Finally, one might challenge my assumption that Danto genuinely is committed to accepting that artworks are defined in terms of art history. This is an assumption I have made which Danto never really states explicitly. So, a last way for Danto to challenge my argument is to suggest a way to explain how artworks may exist without appealing to art history.

Let us turn now to consider each of these criticisms.

Objection 1: There may be art-historical contexts that transform objects into art even after art's end.

One might notice that to argue that there can be no artworks after the end of art history, I have assumed that the art-historical context necessary to transform an object into an artwork must be the context in which the artwork is created. This is the only way that artworks made in the post-historical era would lack an art-historical context.

But why should we accept this assumption? Why should we believe that the art-historical context that transforms an object into an artwork must be the art-historical context when the object is created? After all, even in the post-historical era, we could believe that previous art-historical contexts (art-historical contexts that existed prior to the end of art) were sufficient to transform objects created in the post-historical era into art. And if this is plausible, then there may still be artworks after the end of art - viz., artworks whose aboutness
and embodiment depend on art-historical contexts existing prior to the end of art.

To defend this claim, we need to show why the end-of-art thesis really does preclude appealing to art history in a way that would transform ordinary objects into artworks. In other words, we must show that it is illegitimate to appeal to art-historical contexts prior to the end of art in order to justify how objects created after the end of art may be artworks. The reason why it's illegitimate is that Danto's account ends up being anachronistic — objects will qualify as art in virtue of being placed within art-historical periods that are not the ones in which it was created. Although anachronisms may not be problematic per se, there are reasons for believing that Danto himself would not approve of them on his own grounds.

We can appreciate Danto's commitment to avoiding anachronisms, by considering the motivation that underlay his original vision of the style matrix, and his reasons for later rejecting his formal characterization of the style matrix. The style matrix was originally designed to capture the idea that art can be described in terms of aesthetic predicates and their negations, so that for any predicate Q, either the artwork is Q or it is not-Q. Moreover, as new artworks emerge, new terms come to apply to not just the new art, but provide us with a new vocabulary with which to describe earlier artworks, as well. With these aesthetic terms, we may classify objects on a style matrix:

Consider once more the rather complex stylistic notion that Stokes had introduced [quattrocento], which I shall continue to call Q, and then the stylistic predicate malerisch, as used by Wölflin, which I shall call P (since after all the word means ‘painterly’). With these terms and their negations, we can characterize every painting there is, albeit crudely: it can be both P and Q, P and ¬Q, ¬P and Q, and finally ¬P and ¬Q. Cézanne is quattrocento and painterly; Monet is painterly but not quattrocento; Piero is not painterly but is paradigmatically quattrocento; and (let us say) a late-eighties white square by Ryman is neither quattrocento nor painterly. I will admit we can quarrel over cases, but let us forbear: there is always that problem with stylistic terms...the point is that however large the matrix, every painting can be located somewhere on it, and the more terms we have to work with, the more precise our stylistic characterization of each work. Actually, each
stylistic term defines what we might call an affinity class of works, though all we mean by affinity is that there is some property of style which works in different columns but on the same row of the style matrix.

The intuitive motivation behind the style matrix is that as new artworks emerge, new style terms are invented. The style matrix is supposed to be designed to capture the idea that as the art-historical context evolves, we come to recognize properties of previous artworks that we could not have identified earlier on, in part because we would not have had the appropriate style predicates. Danto takes it to be an advantage of the style matrix that it can accommodate these properties of art, which he calls latent properties:

Part of the interest of the style matrix lies in the status it lends to what one might term latent properties in paintings, properties of a kind to which viewers contemporary with the painting would have been blind, just because these become visible only retrospectively, in the light of later artistic developments. Correggio is again a good case: the Carracci, a century later, saw him as a predecessor, and hence as early baroque. Indeed, he became keenly appreciated in the eighteenth century, when his reputation was perhaps at its height, for such works as his Loves of Jupiter, seen as anticipating the rococo. The features that made Correggio hard to grasp as an artist by his contemporaries suddenly become clarified when the baroque style is invented, and further clarified from the perspective of the rococo.

Danto clearly desired the style matrix to be historically sensitive in this way. Ironically, he later rejected his formal account of it, on the grounds that it is not sensitive to history. The problem with the style matrix, he later said, is that it causes us to associate artworks that share similar visual properties - affinities - rather than artworks that are art historically and causally related. He sees this

94 Danto later acknowledges two other problems with the style matrix that Carroll discusses: (1) the problem that it is inconsistent with his view that intentions are relevant to determining certain aesthetic properties of artworks; and (2) it implies backward causation. He notes Carroll's criticisms in After the End of Art, 162. Carroll's criticisms are raised in "Danto, Style and Intention," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 53(3): 251-57 (1995).
problem as very similar to the problem some raised against the 1984 Museum of Modern Art’s “Primitivism and Modern Art” exhibit:

The heavy criticism the 1984 "Primitivism and Modern Art" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art came under was partly due to its casual bracketing of pieces of primitive art under the same affinity classes as modern art, which overlooked, as stylistic analysis inevitably must, all the deep differences between primitive and modern art. Thus a tall thin effigy from Africa doubtless has some 'affinity' with a characteristic Giacometti, but affinity overlooks the reasons why either of them is tall and thin, and this must do great damage to our perception of either. But that is one of the problems with affinities, and it is, I am afraid, one of the problems, perhaps one of the main problems with the style matrix itself. For all the historical sensitivity of the style matrix, it implies an ahistorical vision of art - and I of all people should have been alert to this. From the beginning of my speculation on art, I have worked with - worked from - examples in which two outwardly similar things may nevertheless differ in so radical a way that the outward similarity proves altogether fortuitous. The African effigy and the Giacometti are not perfect semblables, but even if they were, there would be the fact to contend with that their affinity screens their profound artistic difference.6

Because the style matrix emphasizes the visual affinities among artworks and allows artworks to be related on the basis of such visual similarities, rather than on the basis of genuine casual relations among the features of artworks, the style matrix is unable to take the historical relations among artworks into account. In other words, it cannot take into account the relations of artworks to art history. Danto's own criticism of his style matrix highlights his resistance to anachronisms: what makes something an artwork depends on its causal relations to other artworks, and the art-historical context in which that object emerges as an artwork.

The idea that what makes something an artwork depends on the art-historical context of that time is also highlighted in Danto's general views about art. To see how the art-historical context is crucial to an object being an artwork, consider how some objects can only be transformed into artworks in certain art-historical contexts. For example, a Brillo box may qualify as art in the 1960s, but

would never qualify during the 1760s (even if they had been invented then). What makes the difference in this case is the art-historical context: the art-historical context of the 1760s is not one that would admit something like a Brillo box as art; such an object could not be causally related in any way to the art-historical context of the times. By the 1960s, however, the art-historical context had evolved in such a way that things like Brillo boxes could be accepted as art. This kind of case suggests that the reason why something can be an artwork at some period in time has to do with the particular context in which the object exists as art. We do not appeal to the art-historical context of the 1500s to explain why something cannot be an artwork in the 1760s. Instead, we appeal to the context in which the object is presented. So, Danto seems to endorse the assumption that what transforms an object into an artwork is the particular art-historical context in which the object exists. And this in turn would imply that objects created after the end of art cannot ever be art, because there would be no art-historical context at that point.

But you might just wonder more generally why Danto believes that the art-historical context of the time that the artwork was created is what transforms an object into an artwork at all. You might accept that Brillo Box could not have been placed within the art-historical context of 1760; but this does not show that an artwork must be placed in the art-historical context in which it was created. For example, you might wonder why the Brillo Box could not be an artwork because it exists in any and all art-historical contexts after 1964. Hence, Danto need not claim that it is the particular art-historical context of 1964 that transforms it into an artwork. If this is right, Danto may be happy with certain kinds of anachronisms.
So for example, consider an object that could be transformed into an artwork by appeal to two different possible art-historical contexts - one in which the object is actually created (like the *Brillo Box* in 1964), and some other art-historical context later on, say one century later (like the *Brillo Box*, in 2064). Why appeal to the art-historical context in which the object is actually created, and not to the later art-historical context (we may even imagine that this later context allows that object as art, even though it is not the context in which it is actually created)? If either context is sufficient to transform the object into art, what reason do we have for relying on one context over another?

I want to suggest that the particular art-historical context in which the object is created provides his definition of art with explanatory power. The art-historical context at the time of the artwork's creation can explain why we take an object to be the particular artwork it is. Placing that object into a different art-historical context will result in a different artwork.

So, in the case of our *Brillo Box*, if Danto wants to suggest that the *Brillo Box*$_{1964}$ is about raising a question about the nature of art in its proper philosophical form, we can only plausibly attribute this meaning to the work by appealing to certain art-historical beliefs and ideas that occurred in 1964. Moreover, these ideas would probably not be available in 2064, given that they were raised once before in 1964. The *Brillo Box*$_{2064}$ would have an entirely different meaning, in spite of the fact that its meaning may well be related to the meaning of *Brillo Box*$_{1964}$. In 1964, a *Brillo Box* could represent the healthy dose of optimism about technology's ability to clean and the current obsession with cleanliness. In 2064, on the other hand, a *Brillo Box* could only be an ironic or sarcastic commentary on the naïveté of those times, or a nostalgic remembering of the simplicity of the times. But *Brillo Box*$_{2064}$, could not be
about what *Brillo Box*₃⁰⁶₄ is about. And we could not explain this fact, without reference to the particular art-historical contexts when the works themselves were created.

Return to an earlier example - compare again our two versions of Don Quixote. The difference between Menard's and Cervantes' Don Quixote highlights how deeply different these two works are, because they are created in different art-historical contexts. Suppose that just any art-historical context could transform a text into Menard's artwork. Then, Menard's artwork would be an artwork simply in virtue of the fact that it could be placed in the art-historical context of Cervantes' time. In fact, in this scenario, Menard's artwork would be indistinguishable from Cervantes'. But this is not possible. To place the text into the art-historical context of Cervantes' time and place is to create a work of art that is not Menard's work. Hence, it is not just the mere placement of an object into an art-historical context that is relevant on Danto's account. Rather, the object must be placed into a particular art-historical context — viz., into the art-historical context in which that object is created, because this explains why the object can be the particular artwork it is, and not some other visually indiscernible, but very different, work.

So, many problems arise when we allow any art-historical context to transform an object into an artwork. For this reason, we are justified in assuming that the only art-historical context that can transform an object into an artwork is the one in which that particular artwork is created.

**Objection 2:** There is an art-historical context - but no narrative

A similar line of reasoning can be used to show that there may well be an art-historical context that can transform objects into artworks even in the post-historical era. This argument relies on distinguishing the art-historical context
from art-historical narratives. If we recall that Danto’s end-of-art thesis is really about the end of narratives of art history, then one might suggest that an art-historical context may well exist after the end of art, even though there may no longer be any art-historical narratives. This would amount to denying narrativism *de re*, because this argument seeks to establish that there may still be art-historical contexts (and so, presumably, there may be art history) without art-historical narratives.

If the art-historical context can be pried apart from art-historical narratives, then the end of narratives will not entail the disappearance of art-historical contexts, as I have assumed. And since art-historical contexts are necessary to transform objects into artworks, then the end of art does not preclude the possibility of art.

So, let us return to Danto’s views about art-historical narratives. We need to look more carefully into the function of a narrative, and how that differs from the features of the art-historical context that transform an object into an artwork.

Recall that the general features of the position Danto endorses concerning the role of narratives in art history. Narratives of art history unite a causal sequence of events through explanatory relations among the different events in the chain. Because Danto argues that unity is inherent within art history itself, not something we impose upon it, Danto endorses a *de re* view of narrativism. On this view, there cannot be a history of art without a narrative of that history. But if Danto suggests that there are no longer any narratives of art history, then there cannot be any more art history itself. After all, if there could be art history without narratives, then Danto could not be genuinely committed to endorsing narrativism *de re*.  

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But if narrativism *de re* commits Danto to believing that the end of narratives entails the end of art history itself, then Danto faces a problem. The end-of-art thesis, when coupled with narrativism *de re*, requires Danto to accept not only the end to the art-historical narratives, but also the end of art history itself. And if there is no art history, there surely cannot be an art-historical context to support the existence of artworks, either.

At this point, my opponent would urge us to simply reject narrativism *de re*, and then argue that the end-of-art thesis does not entail the end of art, as I have suggested. My opponent is likely to mount an argument along the following lines against me: according to narrativism *de dictu*, narratives are structures that we impose onto art history. If the end-of-art thesis is legitimately construed as the end of narratives, and if we accept narrativism *de dictu*, then prima facie, there can still be art history and an art-historical context, even after the end of art. And hence, there can still be artworks after the end of art.

Unfortunately, the problem with the end-of-art thesis here is not rooted in Danto's potentially controversial assumption that narrativism *de re* is true. A plausible argument can be made to suggest that even if narrativism *de dictu* is true, there will still fail to be sufficient art-historical context to transform objects into artworks.

Here's why. If narrativism *de dictu* is true, then the end-of-art thesis will still preclude artworks whose meanings are focused on the narratives themselves. Artworks whose interpretations require not only reference to the art-historical context, but also to art-historical narratives, will not be able to exist after the end of art.

Consider an example. Lichtenstein's *Brushstroke* is an artwork whose meaning derives from understanding the relationship between Abstract
Expressionism and Pop Art. As a Pop artist, Lichtenstein is poking fun at the Abstract Expressionist’s view that art’s goal is to develop a completely flat and painterly work. By making a painting of a brushstroke in the style of a pop artist - a carefully delineated, stylized, brushstroke with bright primary colors whose traces of the actual brushstroke are entirely invisible - he is challenging the assumptions that Abstract Expressionists made about the goals of art. This is a paradigmatic case of art whose meaning depends on its relation to the narratives of art history. Hence, if there were no such narratives, this kind of artwork would not be possible. Narrativism *de dictu* would only allow a restricted set of artworks to be possible after the end of art.

But there are many artworks whose meaning at least in part depends on a narrative of art history, even if it does not depend on it directly. And these artworks probably would not be possible after the end of art, either. Narratives often constrain what counts as a suitable or appropriate interpretation of an artwork, and many times narratives help determine the meaning of artworks. This is because much art is explained in terms of its place in art history, relative to the goals and interests of the time. Since these features of art history are part of the narrative of art history, artworks of this kind will also be disallowed after the end of art, even if narrativism *de dictu* is true. If there is any art at all after the end of art, there is very little, and what little there is left will have even less meaning. If there are no narratives, and no art history (because narratives are inscribed in art history), then how do we imagine this post-historical era? What is left after the end of art will simply be a causal chain of events, without unity, [96]

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96 We could simply say that art history after the end of art will only have certain kinds of artworks. But this would run directly counter to the pluralist era that is supposed to follow the end of art.
without explanatory links, and without the possibility of redescription of the kind described above. And one might suggest that a causal chain of art-historical events might be sufficient to establish the kind of art-historical context necessary for there to be artworks in the post-historical era. But this would be difficult to defend. For the meanings of all artworks derive in part from their position relative to other artworks. And to appreciate the position of one artwork relative to other works, you'd need more than a mere causal chain of events. You'd need to be able to redescribe past artworks in terms of future artworks. And that just is to create a narrative of art history.

Objection 3: We don't need art history for there to be art

A final response involves simply denying that you really need art history in order for artworks to exist. There are two reasons one might have for such a denial, both of which stem from Danto's oft-cited passage: "to see something as art requires a knowledge of the history of art - a theory of art." But notice that Danto does not state which exactly is required – a history of art or a theory of art. He writes here as if they are the same. But are they? In this section, I shall examine two ways they may be pried apart.

It is natural to think that Danto here means to suggest that it's art theory, but not art history that transforms an object into an artwork. We might then imagine that there can be art theories with which to interpret artworks even after the end of art history. This would be the case under two possible scenarios: (1) suppose that art history and art theory are completely independent of one another; in such a case, there may continue to be art theory after the end of art history.

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97 Lee Brown has suggested that without such narratives, we would have a situation that resembles the case of fashion. In the case of fashion, trends go back and forth, are introduced and then changed. There is simply a sequence of different fashions, the one after the other. However, in the case of fashion, there is no over-arching narrative that can chart its evolution or progress.
history; or (2) we can suppose that art history and art theory are not completely independent of one another, but rather that our art theory entails the end of art history; in such a case, there may continue to be art theory even after the end of art history.

Consider the first option. Suppose we conceive of art history as entirely distinct from art theory. This would allow art history to end, without art theory also ending; further, if all we need to interpret artworks is that there be an art theory with which to interpret artworks, then an object may exist within an art-theoretical context, even after the end of art history.

An example of how our account of art history may prove to be irrelevant to our account of art theory might be something like the following. Suppose our account of art history traces the development of technological innovations in art. Art's history is marked by the discovery of paintbrushes, of certain types of paint, by the invention of the easel, etc, and it is also independent of our interpretations of artworks. So long as there continue to be theories with which to interpret artworks, we can imagine that art history end, but that there continue to be artworks.

The problem with this option is that if art theory continues, it is unclear how or why history of art wouldn't continue as well. After all, the history of art is in part the history of theories with which artworks are interpreted. So, the mere existence of an art theory would seem to presuppose the existence of art history.

Consider next the second option. Suppose our account of art history and art theory are not completely independent of one another, but that our art theory entails the end of art history. There surely have been many theories of art that
have predicted the end of art history. Theories of art that imply the end of art history might be of two types: (a) theories according to which no theoretical constraints are placed on the nature of artworks; (b) theories according to which artworks lack meaning or content.

(a) Theories of art according to which there is no theory can be understood as follows. We might imagine systematic eclecticism or rampant pluralism to be theories according to which there is no theory. These theories do not prescribe any particular style or make any requirements on the kinds of entities that constitute works of art. However, they are actually theories, viz., they are theories according to which there are no stylistic preferences. So, this is not a coherent option.

(b) Consider the second type of art theory that may allow for the end of art history: theories of art that deny that artworks possess meaning. On such a view, theory is irrelevant to interpreting artworks. But once again, this approach is itself a theory, viz., a theory that suggests that interpretations of artworks need not rely on theory. So, this too is an incoherent position.

These two ways of constructing an art theory that implies the end of art are incoherent. So, our second option for construing how there can be art theories with which to interpret artworks even after the end of art history fails, too.

In either case, it appears that there is no coherent way of prying apart art theory from art history so that art history would end, and so that there would continue to be artworks after the end of art history. Since no response to our

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original paradox seems satisfactory, Danto ought to deny that art history ended, if he wants to maintain that there are still artworks after the end of art.

Many readers have assumed that Danto's views about art and art history are mutually supportive. If my argument is correct, however, Danto's essentialist-historicist account of art and his views about the end-of-art thesis not only are not mutually supporting, but they are not even consistent. What shall we make of this?

Of course, the natural reaction here is to simply conclude that Danto's problem stems from his end-of-art thesis, and not with his definition of art. After all, to endorse an essentialist account of art that makes reference to art history does not seem particularly radical, while the end-of-art thesis seems so very extraordinary.

But while I see no reason for accepting the end-of-art thesis, I do not think that the real root of the problem with Danto's views really stems from this claim. As radical a claim as it is, I do not think it is the source of Danto's problems. Surprisingly, I think the way in which his definition attempts to incorporate art history into his definition of art that should give us cause for doubt.

Because Danto's definition of art is historicist, art is defined in part as the kind of object located within an art-historical context. However, as the above two objections have highlighted, the kind of art-historical context that the definition requires is fairly strong: first, the account requires a narrative account of art history; second, a de dictu account of narratives is likely to be unacceptable, for reasons considered earlier. This leaves us committed to a very strong account of art - a de re account of narratives which many may find implausible. Whether a de re account of narratives is as implausible as it
appears is a topic for another paper; but if it is, the moral of the story is perhaps that we should seriously question the way in which Danto attempts to reconcile his essentialism with his historicism. It is to this concern that we must turn our attention to in the next chapter.
Although Danto has always claimed that his philosophy of art is essentialist, he has recently characterized it as historicist, too. Some have argued that a joint commitment to essentialism and historicism is not a viable option. But, I do not think his official position supports a genuinely historicist account at all. I shall argue that, in his own philosophical writings, Danto confuses genuine historicism with what might be called pseudo-historicism. Oddly enough, his art criticism has often reflected a genuinely historicist position, which tells against his explicitly endorsed philosophical views. Danto’s philosophy of art would be better defended were he to endorse a full-blown historicism. But if he were to adopt such a view, there will be a price to pay, namely, that he cannot also remain an intentionalist, a view to which his formal definition of art commits him.

4.1 Historicism

Danto’s philosophy of art is straightforwardly essentialist, in the sense that it purports to provide a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for an

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object being an artwork. What is less clear are his views regarding historicism. He often claims that his account is historicist, and he frequently defends his historicism by citing Wölfflin's slogan that "Not everything can be art at every possible time".101

But, what exactly makes Danto think his account is historicist at all? Let's begin by evaluating the plausibility of Danto's self-diagnosis as a historicist. Consider the following statements Danto makes about historicism and his definition of art:

What may look like historicism on my part is my recognition that except and until art revealed its deep philosophical nature through history, there was nothing philosophers could do, not knowing the way art was to reveal itself.102

In any case it is consistent with an essentialist philosophy of philosophy or of art that the essential nature of either should only reveal itself through history and expose its face to general consciousness only at a specific historical moment.103

So one can have a historical view of this revelation without having a historical view of that which is at last revealed.104

But, as an historicist I am also committed to the view that what is a work of art at one time cannot be at another, and in particular that there is a history enacted through the history of art in which the essence of art - the necessary and sufficient conditions - are painfully brought to consciousness.105

There is a kind of transhistorical essence in art, everywhere and always the same, but it only discloses itself through history.106

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105 Arthur Danto, After the End of Art (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 95, my emphasis.

[It is consistent with an essentialist philosophy of philosophy or of art that the essential nature of either should only reveal itself through history and expose its face to general consciousness only at a specific historical moment.]

The concept of art, as essentialist, is timeless. But the extension of the term is historically indexed - it really is as if the essence reveals itself through history, which is part of what Wöflin may be taken to have implied in saying, 'Not everything is possible at all times, and certain thoughts can only be thought at certain stages of the development.' History belongs to the extension rather than the intension of the concept of art.

...the extension of the term ['art'] is historically indexed - it really is as if the essence reveals itself through history, which is part of what Wöflin may be taken to have implied in saying, "Not everything is possible at all times, and certain thoughts can only be thought at certain stages of the development." History belongs to the extension rather than the intension of the concept of art, and, again with the notable exception of Hegel, virtually no philosophers have taken seriously the historical dimension of art.

Do these passages actually support a historicist view, as Danto believes? It depends on what exactly Danto means when he claims that the essence of art is revealed, disclosed, or brought to consciousness through history. Let us consider two interpretations of this suggestion — a weaker one, and then a stronger, more plausible interpretation. Doing so will put us in a better position to evaluate whether these claims commit Danto to adopting a historicist account.

4.1.1 The Essence of Art Is Historically Revealed

Why, then, might Danto believe that art's essence reveals itself through history?

(1) It might be that Danto believes that all definitions are historically revealed in the following sense. The discovery of any definition takes time, simply because we are limited by our cognitive faculties. It just takes us time to realize which features constitute necessary and sufficient conditions of the

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definition of some term. It's not that we are unable to identify these features because we lack relevant information, or even because we lack the appropriate theories with which to understand or evaluate the relevant information; rather, even with all that, we are just unable to think of the correct definition immediately.

So, the essence of art reveals itself through history, because it's only with time — and hence trivially through history — that we are capable of discovering the definition of art. On this construal of historicism, establishing a definition of art is not contingent on any particular discoveries in, or evolutions of, the theory or history of art. Further, the discovery of a definition of art does not require any more information than is currently possessed.

I take this interpretation of historicism to be unacceptable as an adequate interpretation of Danto for two reasons.

First, on this interpretation of historicism, art's definition is independent of artistic, art-theoretical or art-historical discoveries. On this line of reasoning, we would not need art theory or art history in order to discover the necessary and sufficient conditions of art. But, this is incompatible with Danto's interpretation of Warhol, the object that motivates his definition of art. (Recall that Danto interprets Warhol to show that what transforms an ordinary object like a Brillo box into an artwork like *Brillo Box* is the history and theory of art in which it is created.) This interpretation of Warhol implies that the theory and history of art do play an essential role in identifying the definition of art. So, art's definition cannot be independent of artistic, art-theoretical and art-historical discoveries, as the above interpretation of historicism implies.

Second, this interpretation makes the definition of any concept historical, since it is surely true that it takes time to develop and identify the definition of
any term. On this interpretation, any definition whose discovery requires time is historicist. This is problematic, because Danto wants to suggest that art’s definition is unusual, precisely because of the role that history plays in the discovery of the definition. Danto wants to make art’s definition historical in some more important, and stronger, sense than this interpretation of historicism allows for.

(2) A more plausible interpretation of what Danto means when he says that the essence of art reveals itself through history is the following. It isn’t that our definition of art is historicist because the discovery of such a definition takes time, for the simple reason that it depends on our general cognitive abilities. Rather, the definition of art is historicist, because the evolution of art theory and art history is what makes possible our discovery of the essential features of art. So, as art history and art theory evolve, we will come to be able to have access to certain features and properties of the nature of art that we were unable to know about earlier.

In support of this suggestion, consider Danto’s comments:

These philosophical discoveries emerged at a certain moment in the history of art, and it strikes me that in a certain way the philosophy of art was hostage to the history of art in that the true form of the philosophical question regarding the nature of art could not have been asked until it was historically possible to ask it - until, that is, it was historically possible for there to be works of art like *Brillo Box*. Until this was an historical possibility, it was not a philosophical one: after all, even philosophers are constrained by what is historically possible110.

Mine [my theory] is also grounded in a reading of the history of art, according to which the question of the right way to think philosophically about the history was only possible when history made it possible - when, that is to say, the philosophical nature of art arose as a question from within the history of art itself111.

In these passages, Danto wants to claim that there are certain features of art that we cannot discover unless and until a certain art history or art theory makes those features available. As a result, whether we can discover the definition of art depends ultimately on the appropriate development of art history and art theory. In turn, whether philosophers of art are in a position to make the appropriate kinds of discoveries about the essence of art hinges on whether the history and theory of art have evolved in a way to make such discoveries possible.

Notice that this construal of historicism avoids the two problems raised earlier.

First, this construal of historicism is consistent with Danto's interpretation of Warhol. Recall that his interpretation of Brillo Box highlights how our thinking about art depends on the current state of art theory and art history. Brillo Box could not have been an artwork at any moment in art history, because its existence as an artwork depends on a particular way of thinking about art history. Unless and until that kind of thinking about art history is possible, objects like Warhol's would be not capable of existing as artworks. But, this way of thinking about Warhol only emphasizes the extent to which our discoveries about the concept of art depend on our progress in art history.

Second, and more importantly, the development of an appropriate definition of art depends not simply on our general cognitive abilities, but rather specifically on the development of art history and art theory. What is possible to discover philosophically depends ultimately on what is possible to discover art historically and art-theoretically. On this view, whether we can discover the definition of art is constrained by our discoveries in art history. This seems to be what Danto means to imply by saying that we have a historical view of the
revelation of the definition of art: there are certain features or properties to which we lack access, until a certain evolution of art history and art theory has been developed.

4.1.2 Latent Properties

4.1.2.1 Historicism and the Latency Theory

One reason Danto may be tempted to endorse an account that is historicist in this second sense is that it seems to have an interesting implication for explaining why we seem to come to discover new properties of artworks over time, another epistemically claim like the one above. On this view of historicism, we will be unable to see certain features of artworks at the time of the work's creations. But, these features will be disclosed to us later on, as the appropriate history and theory develop. If some features of artworks can only be accessed in virtue of a particular theory of art, then we will not be able to discover those features until after the art theory in question is itself discovered. On this view, some properties of an artwork exist, but cannot necessarily be accessed or discovered at the time of its creation; in cases where our understanding of the properties depends on an art theory or art history that will only emerge in the future, then those properties will only be revealed to us at that later time. Call this the latency theory\textsuperscript{112}. 

According to the latency theory, latent properties are ones which are hidden or remain undiscovered until some time after the creation of the artwork, and which can only be identified or discovered after the appropriate theories and history of art have evolved.

\textsuperscript{112} Jerrold Levinson's \textit{backward retroactivism} is similar to what I call the latency theory. He develops these in "Artworks and the Future" \textit{Music, Art and Metaphysics} and "Work and Oeuvre," \textit{The Pleasures of Aesthetics}. For consistency, I shall refer to this view simply as the 'latency theory' (I find his terminology somewhat confusing).
At first glance, latent properties would seem to be very mysterious: why would some properties of artworks only be discovered after a certain period of time? Why do some features of artworks only become revealed after a particular evolution in the history of art?

By adopting the above kind of historicism, perhaps Danto believes that he will be in a position to explain the gap between the creation of artworks, and the revelation of certain features of those artworks. From the very outset, Danto has been interested in explaining this gap. According to the original conception of the style matrix, first proposed in "The Artworld", style predicates only come to be discovered as new theories of art come to evolve. Danto saw one virtue of the style matrix to be its ability to explain how latent properties become revealed over time. This is probably why Danto has more recently explicitly referred to the style matrix as a historicist device. For example, consider how Danto has recently described how the style matrix explains the discovery of latent properties:

...the moment Mannerism is established as a style in its own right, one can begin in a positive way to characterize any number of works as Mannerist which were made outside the specific period art historically designated Mannerist that begins with Correggio and extends through Rosso Fiorentino, Bronzino, Pontormo, and Giulio Romano himself. Thus one might unhesitatingly identify as Mannerist certain roman stuccos, El Greco, but also Brancusi and Modigliani. But second, part of what helped firm Mannerism up as a stylistic category comes from modernist art, specifically Picasso, who sheds a certain retrospective light over the seicento. So the style matrix is historically fluid along its forward edge, in terms both of adding stylistic predicates - "New York type painting," for example - or changing older ones in such a way that what had appeared to be a phase of the late Renaissance becomes a style of its own. And who can say in advance whether the category of Mannerism itself is not too crude, that some division in the light of the future of style might not have to be effected somewhere between Correggio and Rosso Fiorentino?113

Part of the interest of the style matrix lies in the status it lends to what one might term latent properties in paintings, properties of a kind to which viewers contemporary with the painting would have been blind, just because these become visible only retrospectively, in the light of later artistic developments. Correggio is again a good case: the Carracci, a century later, saw him as a predecessor, and hence as early baroque. Indeed, he became


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keenly appreciated in the eighteenth century, when his reputation was perhaps at its height, for such works as his Loves of Jupiter, seen as anticipating the rococo. The features that made Correggio hard to grasp as an artist by his contemporaries suddenly become clarified when the baroque style is invented, and further clarified from the perspective of the rococo. Mannerists prized grace at whatever cost to naturalness, and the disregard of the latter helps explain the term's synonymy today with a kind of extreme artifice such as we find in Correggio's contemporary Parmigianino. But Correggio, though what was later called a Mannerist, also reacted against what his contemporaries regarded as maniera in the direction of something more naturalistic. So Correggio gets reinvented when Mannerism is stabilized as a concept in the twentieth century, just as he was reinvented in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and on each occasion latent features became released and made available to appreciation. In a similar way, the late Monet gets to be an early New York type painter. André Breton classed Uccello and Seurat as anticipatory surrealists, but there are any number of others - Archimboldo and Hans Baldung Grien come instantly to mind - who were waiting for surrealism to be invented in order to be adequately appreciated.114

The style matrix is historicist because it is supposed to reveal how the creation of new artworks allows us to re-examine earlier artworks in a new light. Danto thinks they can perform this function, because when new artworks are created, a new set of predicates with which to understand and describe art is also created. But of course, these new predicates can be applied to earlier art, and when we do so, we come to see new properties that we did not previously see in those works (because we were lacking those predicates).

Typically, such predicates will help sharpen or clarify what we took the earlier art to be about. In cases where later artworks result in the creation of new predicates that could not have been known in earlier times, later art will help us see earlier art in ways that those contemporary to that early art could not. In other cases, the new artworks introduce predicates that those contemporary with the earlier art could have known about, but simply did not think of, perhaps because those predicates were not useful in describing the art that existed.

4.1.2.2 Application of the Latency Theory: Cézanne

Consider an example to illustrate how the latency theory applies to artworks.

For part of his career, Cézanne worked very closely with the Impressionists. Impressionist painting is characterized by its attempt to capture the immediate impressions, usually impressions of a brightly lit outdoor scene. Impressionists were interesting in capturing what we see at a glance and in painting the ordinary scenes of the world around them. To do this, they painted with very quick, short brushstrokes to create 'color patches', used bright, vivid colors, and avoided shading or contouring around objects. As a result, forms are generally simplified and objects are not well delineated. Critics of the time focused on their use of color patches and the composition of the works. These were the aesthetically relevant properties of artworks in the 1870s and 1880s.

Cézanne's *Mont Saint Victoire* of 1876 is a characteristically Impressionist painting of the mountain he painted so often. This painting possesses typical Impressionist features: short, angled brushstrokes; strong, bright, contrasting colors that give the scene an overall sense of brightness and sunshine; few details of the objects painted.

Now, according to the latency theory, we may come to discover certain latent properties in this work that could not have been seen in the 1870s, but that emerge later as the appropriate art theory and history evolve. If the latency theory is correct, the history of art from 1870s to 1900s should allow us to discover new predicates with which to see Cézanne's art, and with which to see new features in his work that had remained hidden from those contemporary with his work. We can see how different Cézanne's work looks to his contemporaries of the 1870s than it does to someone in the 1900s.
By the 1900s, Cézanne's paintings of Mont Saint Victoire had changed significantly. The forms and shapes appear larger and more abstract - there are no longer any clear images of houses or individual trees that can be identified; the depth of the painting appears compressed and flattened to the point that it is difficult to imagine how far in the distance the mountain appears, or how high it is. By the 1900s, critics had become interested not so much in the color and brushwork in Cézanne's work, but rather in some aspects of his work that are by-products of his method of painting - the flatness and abstraction of his works. Because of the short brushstrokes and strong colors, the paintings appear very flat and there is no general perspective that allows us to see the depth within the picture plane. These features are especially evident in his paintings of Mont Saint Victoire from 1904-1907.

According to the latency theory, looking at Cézanne's earlier landscapes of Mont Saint Victoire in light of his later paintings helps us discover new features in his early works. The latency theory would suggest that the earlier works really did possess flatness and abstraction but that they remained latent, undiscovered at the time of their creation. It is only after the beginning of cubism that we are able to realize the importance and interest of the flatness and abstraction of Cézanne's earlier works. We are able to discover these new features in Cézanne's early works, because of a change in our epistemic status toward the work.

According to the latency theory, placing Cézanne's earlier works within the broader history of art that includes later cubist art helps us see what the former really meant. If the latency theory is correct, placing Cézanne's work in the context of these cubist works reveals properties of Cézanne's work that we could not have seen in the 1870s. Once cubism came along, we are able to
see Cézanne's early work as indicative of a more general trend in the history of art towards shaping space and expressing movement. But we could not have discovered this about Cézanne's early works unless cubism had emerged in the 1900s. Latency theorists like Danto will claim that the historical evolution leading up to cubism reveals to us these new features in Cézanne's work - it uncovers this features that we could not have seen before. This explains why we now see Cézanne's work differently from the way his contemporaries did in the 1870s.

4.2 Is the Latency Theory Correct?

We are now in a position to assess this view. There are two related issues to consider: (1) Is Danto's conception of historicism in fact genuinely historicist? (2) Whatever its status, do we have reason to accept Danto's conception of historicism?

4.2.1 Is Danto's Historicism Genuine?

One feature of our interpretation of Danto's claim that art's essence is historically revealed is that this is primarily an epistemic claim: it is a claim about what agents are able to infer about artworks, given the current art theories and art history. But, of course, this is a claim about the abilities and capacities of agents, and not a claim about the concept of art.

So, if we have understood Danto's conception of historicism correctly, then it is our epistemic position with respect to identifying the definition of art that is historicist, not Danto's definition itself. Call this sense of historicism required for the latency theory pseudo-historicism.115

115 I interpret Levinson to be committed to pseudo-historicism too, since he endorses the latency theory (what he calls 'backward retroactivism').

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As we have seen, the latency theory presupposes a form of pseudo-historicism. However, pseudo-historicism is actually inconsistent with more robust forms of historicism. The latency theory, recall, posits that properties that we discover at a later point in time actually exist in the artwork at the time of its creation. So, the properties of artworks remain constant over time, and our epistemic position relative to these works changes. As a result, if one accepts the latency theory, one cannot also accept that the properties of an artwork actually change over time. Rather, the latency theorist would suggest that what we discover in the art will change (because of our change of epistemic position relative to the artwork). Levinson expresses the spirit of pseudo-historicism very aptly, when he says116:

It is not artworks that, in the crucial sense, change over time, it is rather us. We think more, experience more, create more - and as a result, are able to find more in artworks than we could previously. But these works are what they are, and remain, from the art-content point of view, what they always were. It is not their content that changes over time, but only our access to the full extent of that content, in virtue of our and the world's subsequent evolution. The latent and unnoticed must not be confused with the newly acquired and superadded; later history may bring out what was in earlier art, but it does not progressively bring about that there is now more in it117.

If the reason Danto believes himself to be committed to any form of historicism is that he endorses the latency theory, then he is really only committed to a form of pseudo-historicism according to which our epistemic access to artworks changes over time. This is a pseudo-historicist position, because it does not entail that the properties of artworks themselves change, but only that our access to them does118.

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116Levinson's claim is what he intends to argue, contra the historicists, including Danto and Graham McFee. He interprets Danto to be endorsing a stronger form of historicism. If I'm right, though, Danto endorses only a weak form of historicism – pseudo-historicism. Pace what Levinson presumably intended, I think Danto would accept Levinson's thesis.


118There is an interesting consequence to this position for another argument often raised against Danto's philosophy of art. Both Carroll and Kelly have argued (for different reasons) that Danto
The question to which we must now address our attention is whether the latency theory is correct.

4.2.2 Should We Accept Pseudo-Historicism and the Latency Theory Anyway?

According to pseudo-historicism, when we evaluate the properties of Cézanne's work, we must say that some of the properties of his work exist undiscovered in the artwork in 1870s, and that we will not have access to these features until later. We must say that we can have access to the rest of the properties of Cézanne's work only at this later time, because it is only then that our epistemic position allows us to discover these further properties in the artwork.

But why couldn't we have had access to the properties of Cézanne's work at an earlier time? It cannot be simply that we generally become smarter, for the later properties of his work to be revealed are features that it always had — its flatness, its abstraction, its lack of depth of perspective. So, why couldn't we see these in his work when they were first created? And, how can the pseudo-historicist explain why we make these discoveries when we do?

The problem is that the pseudo-historicist cannot explain why flatness and abstraction suddenly becomes aesthetically relevant or why the color patches and brushstroke techniques suddenly become aesthetically irrelevant to Cézanne's work. Relying on the latency theory, it would seem entirely accidental that we discover what we do about artworks when we do.

More generally, the pseudo-historicist's insistence on the epistemic also forces him to accept that the evolution of the history of art is accidental, too.
That the evolution of our way of thinking about art and the changes in art history seem to occur simultaneously can only be a pure coincidence, according to the pseudo-historicist. For the latency theorist, the history of art really only traces the history of our epistemic access to the art, not the history of art proper. And, since all the facts about an artwork exist from the moment of its creation, the evolution of our way of thinking about art is simply a matter of our own human psychology, and not a matter of tracking changes in art.

Worse still, the pseudo-historicist must be willing to accept that at least sometimes, the evolution of our own thinking about some artwork now may retrospectively shed light on earlier work – even if there is absolutely no connection between the earlier work and the later work. This is because later artworks may always reveal properties latent in earlier works, under any conditions. So, any new feature that we discover about new artworks will automatically have an impact on earlier works, even if these two works are entirely unrelated. This seems very counter-intuitive.\textsuperscript{119}

Finally, it is not clear why the pseudo-historicist is so certain that those meanings really do exist latent in the artworks. After all, by the pseudo-historicist's own arguments, it has already been established that we cannot have access to those meanings. There are two problems here. First, there is no reason for thinking these meanings are actually there in the artwork to begin with (by hypothesis, we cannot access it; so, how would we know it's there?). Second, this theory is not falsifiable – any explanation we could give for thinking that these meanings are actually there in the artwork to begin with is an

\textsuperscript{119} Notice that this is precisely the complaint that many (including Levinson and Carroll) have made against the Style Matrix. The reason the Style Matrix is committed to this possibility is because Danto is implicitly accepting pseudo-historicism. As we'll see in the next chapter, however, the style matrix can easily be altered to avoid this unpleasant implication simply by rejecting pseudo-historicism.
explanation that cannot be proven false. Any feature that the pseudo-historicist would want to say is latent in the work is also a feature that, by hypothesis, one to which we cannot have access. Hence, we cannot refute the theory.

We might suggest the following seemingly plausible line of reasoning to explain the latency theorist's claim that we only discovered this other properties later on. Intuitively, we only discover that flatness and abstraction are aesthetically relevant to understanding and appreciating Cézanne's work in the early 1900s because by this point, art history and art theory had progressed to a point where cubism is becoming more established by artists like Braque and Picasso. Hence, it would make sense that against this general background of thinking about art, we could now see Cézanne's work in relation to cubism's interests and concerns. So, perhaps abstraction and flatness only become revealed to us in the 1900s because only then do we come to think about art in such a way that we can retrospectively discover these features in the earlier art.

Unfortunately for the latency theorist, however, this line of reasoning does not show that these features were really latent in the artwork from its very inception, and this is the claim the pseudo-historicist must establish. So far, all we have accepted is that appreciating how flatness and abstraction are aesthetically relevant to Cézanne's early work depends for its discovery on the future context, composed of future artworks, and a future way of thinking about art. But, this does not establish that these features existed in the earlier works all along. In fact, it suggests quite the opposite: it suggests that flatness and abstraction only can become an aesthetically relevant property after cubism becomes established as an art-historical concept.

I would like to suggest that properties may actually change as a result of the later art historical context and later art historical developments. To motivate
this genuinely historicist position, let us consider how this way of thinking about properties applies to Cézanne's early works.

Once cubism arrives on the scene, there is a new way of perceiving Cézanne's works. By the 1900s, critics focussed not on Cézanne's adoption of Impressionist painting techniques, but rather on the flatness and abstraction of his paintings. In light of cubist works, the flatness and abstraction in Cézanne's early works now become aesthetically relevant features that are used to explain how cubism developed and evolved. This seems plausible, since it is relatively common to suggest that Cézanne's work was inspirational to the cubists and their works.

What is important about this case is that Cézanne's early works have undergone a transformation: his work has acquired new properties that are aesthetically relevant that were once aesthetically irrelevant – flatness and abstraction. Its aesthetically relevant features, in other words, have changed. In addition, flatness and abstraction emerge as an aesthetically relevant property only as a result of the emergence of cubism. Had cubism not followed Impressionism, flatness would continue to be irrelevant to Cézanne's works.

One might wonder why this case shows that the properties actually change, and do not exist in the artwork from its inception, waiting to be disclosed. If these properties were latent in the artworks, then their disclosure would depend entirely on our own epistemic capacities.

But, intuitively, these other features (flatness and abstraction) only come to be aesthetically relevant, because of the later events that occur - only because of the later art movements. To see why, consider whether we could

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120 Of course, it is trivially true that these properties did exist latent in the artwork. Of course, an artwork cannot become more and less abstract or flat. However, what has genuinely changed is its aesthetic relevance. Flatness and abstraction were aesthetically irrelevant in the 1870s, but became aesthetically relevant by the 1900s.
have discovered these properties in Cézanne's work, had no other artist at all come along after him. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to discover these other features in Cézanne's work, had there been no more artists after him. The only explanation is that our discoveries depend not on our epistemic capacities, but rather on future artworks and future art historical developments. In other words, our epistemic discoveries are underwritten by metaphysical changes in the works themselves and the art historical relations among artworks.

If the features do in fact change, and these changes depend on later events, we can explain why the latency theorist would be at a loss to explain why we might not 'discover' such properties. The reason would be that the relevant future artworks, on which these other meanings depend for their existence, do not exist. Since the relevant future artworks do not exist, then the new meanings of Cézanne's art cannot exist either. So, trivially, we cannot come to 'discover' these meanings as the latency theorist would have it.

This line of reasoning is genuinely historicist, in the sense that the actual properties of an artwork will change from one period of time to the next. These new features genuinely characterize the artwork, in virtue of new facts or new artworks being created. As a result, the properties of an artwork depend in part on its relations to other future art. So, as new artworks are created, the aesthetically relevant properties of earlier artworks will be revised and changed. In this way, some properties of an artwork will not be aesthetically relevant until well after the creation of the artwork. As a result, later art can be essential to the properties of earlier artworks.

This way of thinking about the evolution of the properties of artworks can help explain why there is a correspondence between the evolution of artworks
and the evolution of art history and art criticism (which, as we saw, the pseudo-historicist is at a loss to explain): if we can appeal to the creation of new facts about artworks that come to exist, say, in later artworks, then we can explain how new art theories and new art criticism evolve. The evolution of how art historians make sense of artworks will track how art actually evolves, because there’s a correlation between what art historians can know and learn, and what facts exist. There is a correlation, because the properties of artworks depend in part on the existence of other artworks. So, as art history evolves, so will the properties of artworks evolve, too\textsuperscript{121}.

There is yet another benefit to endorsing the view that the properties of artworks actually changes over time. As we saw in Chapter 3, Danto is eager to admit that he has yet to discover the rest of the definition of art. On his view, if all the properties are revealed from the very beginning, then it is not clear why he cannot discover the rest of the definition. But, if we suppose that some properties of artworks will not come to exist until later artworks are created, then we have a plausible explanation for why Danto has yet to discover the rest of the definition of art: it is not because we are dumb (this is the explanation the pseudo-historicism requires Danto to give), but rather that the relevant artworks that would allow these new meanings to be discovered have not yet been created.

4.3 Can Danto Accept Genuine Historicism?

\textsuperscript{121}This account can explain rather nicely why there are often radical advances in art history with the discovery of new works or a new artist. When there are undiscovered works or unknown artists, the way art historians make sense of art does not track the actual evolution of art. In such cases, there is a gap between the way we make sense of art history and art history itself, because of latent properties. And, our understanding of latent properties explains this gap nicely in a way that pseudo-historicists cannot explain.
The above considerations strongly suggest that Danto would be better off endorsing a form of genuine historicism, rather than the pseudo-historicism he officially supports.

But, is genuine historicism compatible with Danto's other philosophical commitments?

4.3.1 Danto's Intentionalism: a Problem for Accepting Genuine Historicism?

There is a possible problem: some have argued that any form of genuine historicism, according to which the meanings of artworks can change over time, conflicts with any endorsement of intentionalism. And, Danto's definition of art seems to require a commitment to intentionalism. If Danto does in fact endorse intentionalism, then he must give up this view in order to accept genuine historicism. So, let us examine whether Danto is in fact an intentionalist, as he claims to be.

Danto argues that interpretations of the meaning of an artwork must be constrained by what the artist could have intended in the following sense: we cannot attribute to an artwork a meaning that the artist could not have known about:

In any case, it seems to me that the same such considerations have general application to the structures of interpretation, which in part at least must be governed by what the artist believed... This is certainly germane to what is called the intentional fallacy, inasmuch as the work-as-interpreted must be such that the artist believed to have made it could have intended the interpretation of it, in terms of the concepts available to him and the times in which he worked. Not only must you know something about Newton's first law in order to interpret K's painting as you do; you must also believe that K knew something about Newton's first law; otherwise your interpretation is simply like seeing faces in clouds. The limits of your cloud musings are the limits of your knowledge, but we have the artist's limits as special constrains [sic] when interpreting works of art. Moreover, the limits of our interpretation when it was intended as Newton's first law are defined by how much K knew about the first law. Say we seek a grounded explanation for the fact that the line goes form edge to edge, but this cannot be part of our interpretation if J really knew no more about the law than that it said something about linear velocity. His ignorance sets some limit to the range and variety of identifications we are justified in making. But I have so far said too little about the structures of artworks to have anything more profitable to say on the vexed issue of artistic intention than that it is difficult to know what could govern the
The concept of a correct or incorrect interpretation if not reference to what could and could not have been intended.

This official statement seems to be inconsistent with what a genuine form of historicism would require. Here's why. If the meaning of an artwork can change over time – say, as a result of new artworks, then it is possible that an artwork comes to mean something about which the artist could not have known. And this is precisely what Danto in the above passage would seem to object to.

Fortunately, Danto does not seem to take his own official position regarding intentionalism too seriously. First, as Carroll has noted, Danto’s views on stylistic predicates entail that some predicates may apply to artworks regardless of the artist's intentions. Second, when we turn to his official art criticism, he seems to ignore his own philosophical views entirely. His interpretations of certain artworks appear to be independent of the artist’s intentions. In fact, when we examine his art criticism more carefully, we shall discover that his unofficial view that underlies his art criticism may well be a form of genuine historicism, after all!

Danto admits that some features of artworks cannot be properly understood by reference to the artist's intentions:

If the work of Masaccio were contained already in the work of Giotto, we can see this, after Masaccio - but what we see will have been there when Giotto painted at Assisi and at Padua. Let me hasten to add that the artist himself will be blind to these features, as much as the critic, for just the reason that the artist does not know his future work. From this, I think it must follow that these are not features to be explained with reference to the intentions of the artist, though - when they do become known - they may explain the intentions.

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The kinds of features Danto probably has in mind here are stylistic predicates, over which intentions have no control:

Now insofar as we explain a work through a banked individual style, construed as having psychological reality, intentions do not have explanatory power: or the style explains the intentions.25

Now I grant that these passages do not directly contradict his position stated in Transfiguration. His point there is simply that “the work-as-interpreted must be such that the artist believed to have made it could have intended the interpretation of it, in terms of the concepts available to him and the times in which he worked.” So, correct interpretations minimally have to be ones that the artist could have intended. Notice that this leaves open the possibility that a correct interpretation might be one that the artist did not in fact intend, but could have intended. For example, if the artist is blind to certain features, but could have intended those features, had he known about them, then the interpretations which would make reference to these features would still be consistent with Danto’s official line regarding intentionalism.

But, elsewhere, Danto himself seems to provide interpretations of artworks that are not consistent with what the artist could have intended. In fact, it seems that even his interpretation of his favorite artist - Warhol - is not constrained by what the author could have intended:

To be sure, Warhol's way was clearly a via negativa. He did not tell us what art was. But he opened the way for those whose business it is to provide positive philosophical theories to at last address the subject. It is difficult to pretend that Warhol's intention was to clear the underbrush and make room for a finally adequate theory of art. In some ways it is perhaps impossible to say what his intentions ever were. White, perhaps for effect, called him 'a brilliant dumbbell.' The speaker in Thom Jones's story says, 'I don't think he knew the half of it.' Warhol's name is associated with frivolity, glamour, publicity, and making it big.26

25Arthur Danto, Beyond the Brillo Box (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992), 246, my emphasis.

Although Danto does not provide an interpretation of Warhol that outright contradicts Warhol's own stated intentions, this passage implies that it is not clear what exactly the artist could have intended; as a result, following the dictum of Transfiguration that we constrain our interpretations on the basis of what the author could have intended, seems very difficult. In fact, given the characterizations of Warhol by others in the above passage, Danto's interpretation of Warhol as raising a philosophical question about the nature of art does not seem like one that Warhol himself could have intended. To this extent, Danto is not heeding his own advice when it comes to interpreting the work of his favorite artist.

A more clear-cut case of blatantly ignoring the artist's intentions when it comes to interpreting the artist's work can be seen in the following passage:

In a 1987 interview with John Gruen, Mangold declared: 'I have a hard time defining what I am doing and why I'm doing it and the reason I'm doing it. When I do these things, I don't have philosophical thoughts. I simply keep involved...As far my metaphysical or spiritual implications are concerned, I have no connection with any of that.' In 1974, he told Krauss: 'I've been very much an intuitive artist. I have followed intuitive feelings or hunches...I do not have a clearly rational justification for the decisions I have made.'...These are responses of an artist injured by critics. For all that, there is a consistent evolution of Mangold's work from the early sixties to the present moment, a corpus which is expressive of a strong artistic personality. Still, it does not look like rough, intuitive work. Those really were large industrial panels in the Fischbach Gallery, and whatever the artist may encounter or fail to encounter at the level of access to his motives, some historical explanation of the work has to be found.127

The statements by Mangold himself strongly suggest that he takes his own work to be intuitive. Rather than provide an interpretation that is consistent with Mangold's intention to create intuitive work, Danto tries to explain why it does not look intuitive. And then he claims that any appropriate interpretation of his work would have to account for why it does not look intuitive. But, interpreting Mangold's work as not-intuitive requires that Danto ignore Mangold's own

127Arthur Danto, Beyond the Brillo Box (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992), 51, my emphasis.
explicit statements to the contrary. It is difficult to reconcile this passage with Danto's explicitly stated view that interpretations ought to be constrained by the intentions of the artist.

When it comes to actually interpreting artworks and engaging in art criticism, Danto seems to ignore his own philosophical views, and is willing to give up his commitment to intentionalism, in spite of his official claims to the contrary.

But, if intentions do not determine the meaning of certain artworks, then what does? Surprisingly, Danto's actual art criticism seems underwritten by a commitment to genuine historicism. Although he is often ready to say that it is our epistemic access to certain works that expands as art history evolves, his explanation for our changes in epistemic access is that later artworks reveal new meanings in earlier art. But, this would imply that the meanings are not latent from the beginning in the art, but emerge as later artworks are created.

Let us consider some of Danto's art critical remarks on Jennifer Bartlett and Eva Hesse. This will make clear how Danto's art criticism seems to tempt him toward genuine historicism.

4.3.2 Danto Working as Art Critic: Genuine Historicist

4.3.2.1 Jennifer Bartlett

Consider first the work of Jennifer Bartlett. According to Danto, we see her work much differently now than we did when her work first appeared. Danto is interested in understanding why art critics in the 1960s attribute to her work a very different style than Calvin Tomkins does in the mid-1980s. His explanation
has to do with the fact that some features of her style emerge in her work later on that could not have been known earlier:

Tomkins, in 1985, speaks of the dots ‘bouncing around.’ Had you said that in the Paula Cooper Gallery in 1972, you would have drawn scornful glances. Anderson was in the spirit of the times in suggesting that the works were like ‘frames cut from a film about atomic interaction,’ in which case the atoms might bounce but not the dots, which would, contrary to Ratcliff, be signs. Tomkins sees the surface, Anderson saw them as within pictorial space, out of the question if really Minimalist. Bartlett once said to me that she felt as though she ought to be a Minimalist, but that she could not live with that. And her work, early and late, was by way of an impulsive subversion of its own premises. This would have been as much true of the early, seemingly austere squares as of Rhapsody in 1975, which made her famous, or the Fire Paintings of 1988-1990. The works in fact are by way of a battlefield in which the severe imperatives of Minimalism war with something warm, human, possibly feminine, certainly romantic, rebellious, playful. The works are allegories of the artistic spirit in the age of mechanical reproduction, or a wild collision between the esprit de géométrie and the esprit de finesse. That is not a reading that could have been given when the work was first shown, though what it claims was there when the work was shown, like a resident contradiction, a destiny, a Proustian essence accessible to memory having been screened from perception128.

In this passage, Danto clearly suggests that features of Bartlett’s style are latent in her earlier work. These features were in her earlier work, but at that point, nobody had access to those features. This is a clear expression of the latency theory and of pseudo-historicism.

But, notice that Danto reverts to a seemingly genuine historicist account in order to explain why we do not have access to these features of Bartlett’s style earlier:

an artistic style which is essentially her [Jennifer Bartlett], which emerges through her work as the work develops, and which we finally can discern in the earlier work where it was occluded by surrounding noises in the art world129.

There are two reasons why we cannot identify her style: first, her style emerges through her work as the work develops. So presumably, her style does not exist in a full-blown sense until later on. Hence, trivially, we cannot access it.

Second, what little of her style did exist earlier on was difficult to discern because of the ‘surrounding noises in the artworld’.

This explanation for why we cannot access her style earlier on is not an epistemic one; instead, Danto suggests that changes in the artworld and the artist herself explain why we cannot access her style. This would imply that as the art world changes and evolves, later events allow us to see her work properly. But, this is just an expression of genuine historicism, according to which the meaning of art changes as later artistic developments occur.

What is problematic here is that Danto cannot endorse both suggestions. He cannot both argue that these features of Bartlett’s style are latent in her earlier work and that they only evolve as her later artworks are created.

4.3.2.2 Eva Hesse

In a more clear-cut case, consider Danto’s interpretation of Eva Hesse’s work. Here is his assessment of her piece *Hang Up*, made in 1966:

Throughout Hesse’s work, there is an ambiguity between something being a base, as against being part of the work which, in virtue of having absorbed the only natural candidate for the base, then has no base. Her celebrated and admired *Hang Up* consists of a very large frame, around which she has carefully wound painted rags, and then a large irregular loop of metal tubing which comes shooting out of one corner, invades our space, and then slinks back into the frame at the opposite corner. A decision has to be made as to whether the loop is the work, a wormy sort of sculpture, or whether the work is a kind of balletic interplay between two components in a work which has no base at all. Hesse’s work forms in fact a pretty consistent corpus which constantly expresses a strong artistic vision... All this, in my view, is internal to the corpus and is made explicit through the discourse of reasons which her work requires\(^\text{130}\).

What is interesting here is this. *Hang Up* was made in 1966. It was only in 1965 that Hesse had begun making sculptures, her earlier work having only been paintings and drawings. Moreover, her sculptural works investigate what

\(^{130}\)Arthur Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992), 45-6, my emphasis.
constitutes a sculpture, and since her earlier works are paintings and drawings, these issues cannot be ones developed in her earlier works. So, when Danto interprets Hesse's work in light of her 'consistent corpus', notice that he cannot be relying on her work from prior to 1965. The considerations that he references to the particular interpretation of Hang Up are only relevant to her sculptural work; so, he cannot be reflecting on her earlier work. This would mean that the decision to interpret Hang Up, one of Hesse's first sculptural works, must be both because of other works contemporary to it, and because of her later works, which develop the same themes.

In describing the appropriate interpretation of Hang Up, Danto is appealing to its relation to her other work. But this is to say that the meaning of Hesse's art is in part the result of its relation to her other, mostly later work. So, her earlier works may not be understood very well until her later works are created. But, this just is a genuinely historicist explanation for how her work acquires its meaning.

Although Danto's official views regarding intentionalism conflict with a genuine historicism, his own art critical writings come very close to expressing a commitment to genuine historicism. I have argued above that genuine historicism is more plausible than pseudo-historicism. But, there are advantages to accepting genuine historicism. For one, if Danto were to accept genuine historicism, he would be in a position to explain why he has not yet identified a complete definition of art -- because the relevant facts have not yet occurred. In the next chapter, I shall provide another reason for preferring genuine historicism over pseudo-historicism: genuine historicism allows Danto to respond to a number of criticisms that have been raised against the style matrix.
CHAPTER 5

USING GENUINE HISTORICISM TO SAVE THE STYLE MATRIX

In the preceding chapter, we suggested that Danto’s art critical writings reflect a stronger form of historicism than the one to which he is officially committed. Danto’s pseudo-historicist position proves problematic not only because of its inconsistencies with his art criticism, but also because it is the source of many problems afflicting the style matrix. In this chapter, I will argue that genuine historicism not only is more faithful to his art critical views, but also helps save Danto’s style matrix as well.

Although Arthur Danto introduced the idea of the style matrix over three decades ago, it has received little attention since that time. Moreover, what little attention it has received has been primarily critical in spirit. Noël Carroll and Jerrold Levinson have both criticized the style matrix on the grounds that it is overly historicist: Carroll worries that it is anti-intentionalist, while Levinson complains that it licenses what he calls “forward retroactivism” – a view according to which the meanings of artworks may change over time. Danto has even accepted Carroll’s charge in print131; so one would think that if Danto were to give up his style matrix, it would be because he too found it overly historicist. Surprisingly, however, Danto has rejected the style matrix for just the opposite

reason! He dislikes the style matrix not because it is overly historicist, but rather because he thinks it is too ahistoricist.

This is very puzzling. How can the style matrix be simultaneously too historicist, and ahistoricist?

In this chapter, I intend to defend the style matrix from these charges. Contra Carroll and Levinson, I shall explain why Danto's original formal proposal for the style matrix is not overly historicist. And I shall also suggest that Danto's criticisms of his own view also miss the mark. But, this does not mean that Danto's formulation of the style matrix ought to be accepted, either. Instead, I shall sketch an alternative way of understanding the style matrix that is more in line with the general spirit that underwrites the style matrix.

Before turning to the criticisms raised against the style matrix, let us begin by considering the spirit of the idea, and Danto's formal proposal for it.

5.1 Danto's Style Matrix:

In "The Artworld", Danto provides the initial formulation of his general view of art - what transforms an object into an artwork is the art-historical context and art theory in which it exists. The style matrix is introduced in this same article, as a mechanism with which to place artworks in their suitable context. The style matrix is a way of tracing the history of an artwork and of explaining why an object is an artwork in virtue of having emerged out of a certain art-historical context. Moreover, the style matrix can explain how all artworks can be characterized in terms of new predicates that arise as a result new artworks being created.

In practice, the style matrix represents graphically the predicates any given artwork may possess at a given moment in time. The style matrix is a grid
on which we may place artworks, given the style predicates that are operative at that point in time. Artworks appear on different rows, and the columns of the matrix indicate the different possible style predicates that might apply to a given artwork. On any given row, either the predicate in some column will or will not apply to the artwork in question. If the predicate does apply to the artwork in question, we may place a '+' on the row under the appropriate column to indicate that the artwork possesses that predicate. If it does not, we may place a '-', to indicate the artwork does not possess that predicate. Since Danto construes these stylistic predicates as opposites, for any predicate P, either an artwork possesses P, or it posses not-P.

Consider an example. Suppose we attempt to construct a style matrix to represent the styles of Monet's Waterlilies, Duchamp's Fountain and Carravaggio's Sick Bacchus in 1950. We may imagine constructing a matrix whose columns have the following possible predicates: impressionist, ironic, and realistic. The Monet may possess the first, but not the other predicates; Duchamp, however, possesses only the last two predicates, while Carravaggio's work possesses only the last. Thus, in 1950, our matrix would be:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>impressionist</th>
<th>ironic</th>
<th>realistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waterlilies</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fountain</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sick Bacchus</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 1: Style Matrix)
As new artworks are created, new predicates may come to characterize the style matrix. If the new artwork contains features that previous artworks did not, then those new predicates may be added to the style matrix. From that point forward, all previous and future artworks will be characterized in terms of those new predicates.

The style matrix has an interesting consequence for the number of aesthetic properties that can apply to artworks. Contrary to what you might expect, when a new aesthetic feature is discovered, the artworld does not simply gain a new aesthetic property with which to describe art. Rather, two new features are added to the style matrix: the possession of some property, and the lack thereof. So, once a new feature P is revealed in a new artwork, the artworld 'gains' two new predicates that can apply to all artworks - both P and not-P. All artworks prior to the work in which P exists become characterized as not-P. And, all future artworks will possess either P or not-P.

So, if we reconsider our style matrix from 1950 in 1965 in light of the Pop art movement, there will be new predicates with which to characterize earlier artworks\textsuperscript{132}. For example, Warhol's artworks require new predicates with which to characterize his art. On at least one interpretation of his work, his art celebrates the consumer society, and this element of celebrating consumer society is a feature that has been previously absent from all earlier art. Hence, in light of the new developments in the artworld brought about by Pop art, we

\textsuperscript{132} Danto initially restricts his account to 'artistically relevant properties', not merely artistic properties. However, later on, he seems to describe the style matrix as one interested in all aesthetic properties, relevant or otherwise. I will be interested in simply making sense of how new predicates (artistically relevant or otherwise) can come to be attributed to artworks. There are two reasons for diverging from Danto's initial project: first, the very concept of relevance is itself difficult to understand; second, it is easier first to begin with the relatively simple project of identifying how new predicates come to be attributed to artworks, and then to narrow the focus to particular predicates like artistically relevant ones. In any event, I take it that he will be unable to provide such an account without first making sense simply of properties more generally.
come to see previous artworks as not-celebrating-consumer-society, but rather as insulated from their environment in a way that Pop Art was not. So, a style matrix highlighting the relationships among our same three artworks will be different were it created in 1950 and 1965. In 1965, there would be an additional predicate with which to describe these three artworks: celebration of contemporary society. And, all three of these artworks would lack such a feature, while the Pop art would possess it. So, as new predicates are revealed, we come to have more stylistic characteristics with which to describe earlier artworks. As a result, the style matrix is supposed to help us see how our view of earlier artworks may change, as we have new ways of describing and seeing them:

The vision the style matrix underwrites - or which underwrites it - is the way works of art form a kind of organic community, and release latencies in one another merely by virtue of their existence. I was thinking of the world of artworks as a kind of community of internally related objects...To be a work of art was to be a member of the art world, and to stand in different kinds of relationship to works of art than to any other kind of thing. I even had a kind of political vision that all works of art were equal, in the sense that each artwork had the same number of stylistic qualities as any other. When a new style row was added to the matrix, everyone got richer by one property.

So-called latent features are revealed when an artist creates an artwork whose description requires making use of a new predicate, say, Q. Q is then applied to the new artwork in question. But, the invention of Q has an effect on all previous art: assuming Q is genuinely new, all previous art can now be described in terms of not-Q. When this happens, Danto claims that not-Q is a latent feature

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133 You might find it strange, even wrong, to construe previous art as 'not-celebrating-consumer-society', since this feature was not one they were aware of prior to the rise of Pop art. I agree, and will introduce an alternative construal of the style matrix that avoids this counter-intuitive implication later.


135 Carroll, in his "Danto, Style and Intention" seems to imply that these new predicates allow us to apply that predicate (and not its lack) to earlier artworks. This would imply that such predicates did in fact exist, and we simply did not realize they did. Of course, this may be right; but if so, then it is infelicitous to call them new and constitutive of an artistic breakthrough. After all, if those
of earlier artworks which is released by the artwork that possesses Q. Not-Q is a latent feature of previous artworks because it cannot be seen at the time of their creation, but only once an artwork possessing Q is created. So, as we discover new predicates, it becomes possible to attribute to earlier artworks certain predicates that could not have been attributed to those artworks at the time of their creation. Notice however, that Danto is not claiming that these latent properties did not truly apply to the artworks at the time of creation -- they surely did. It's just that we did not know and indeed, could not have known that these latent properties applied to those artworks at the time of their creation. That's what makes them latent.

Consider, for example, how the discovery of certain latent aesthetic predicates come to change our conception of mannerism, and how our new conception of mannerism in turn comes to change how we classify certain artworks:

The moment Mannerism is established as a style in its own right, one can begin in a positive way to characterize any number of works as Mannerist which were made outside the specific period art historically designated Mannerist that begins with Correggio and extends through Rosso, Fiorentino, Bronzino, Pontormo, and Giulio Romano himself. Thus one might unhesitatingly identify as Mannerist certain roman stuccos, El Greco, but also Brancusi and Modigliani. But second, part of what helped firm Mannerism up as a stylistic category comes from modernist art, specifically Picasso, who sheds a certain retrospective light over the seicento. So the style matrix is historically fluid along its forward edge, in terms both of adding stylistic predicates -- "New York type painting," for example -- or changing older ones in such a way that what had appeared to be a phase of the late Renaissance becomes a style of its own. And who can say in advance whether the category of Mannerism itself is not too crude, that some division in the light of the future of style might not have to be effected somewhere between Correggio and Rosso Fiorentino?136

As a result of the discovery of these new stylistic predicates, the style matrix is supposed to help us see how our conception of a given style can be refined

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predicates legitimately apply to the earlier art, the predicates themselves are not new. What is new is only our discovery of such predicates

over time. These new predicates allow us to realize that our conception of earlier styles needs to be refined and fine-tuned. Notice that Danto even leaves open the possibility that the predicates with which to characterize a given style may not only be refined or developed, but even completely changed, too.

Prima facie, the style matrix seems to do justice to many of our intuitions regarding the way we see artworks\footnote{As we shall see later, there remain a number of serious problems with the style matrix. Specifically, as Lee Brown has suggested, the style matrix also has the counter-intuitive result that Greek wall paintings are non-impressionist. I admit that, as formulated, the style matrix is committed to such a consequence. However, it need not be. I shall explain how to avoid this in Section III of this chapter.}. Intuitively, the way artworks appear to us has changed over time; and the stylistic categories with which to classify artworks have also evolved over the course of art history.

So, what went wrong with the style matrix?

5.2 Criticisms of the Style Matrix:

The two main criticisms pull us in opposite directions: on the one hand, Carroll and Levinson have suggested on independent grounds, that we ought to reject the style matrix because it is too historicist, that is, it allows that some of the properties and meaning of an artwork may change over time. Danto himself has accepted this criticism. Given this fact, the second criticism seems even more surprising: Danto himself has also criticized the style matrix for being ahistoricist.

Moreover, there are some minor technical issues that must be addressed, before any of the above charges can be meaningfully directed against the style matrix. So, it makes sense to begin our critical assessment of the style matrix by tackling these minor difficulties first.
5.2.1 Minor Technicalities:

The overall goal of the style matrix is to provide us with a way of comparing stylistic features from one period to the next, and seeing how latent features from earlier periods come to be revealed by later art. But comparisons are possible only if more than one style matrix is examined. So, we need at least two different matrices that reflect the current state of thinking about stylistic predicates and artworks at two different times in order to make comparisons that help us understand the changes and evolution of art history.

Worse still, there are two kinds of problems that threaten the style matrix. Consider the following kind of case. If I compare the stylistic features in place in Chinese art in the second century with the features that characterize contemporary German art today, the mere establishment of two matrices will not allow us to make any kinds of meaningful comparisons. Two problems arise. For one, I doubt very much that we can see any features of German art from today as having existed latently in second century Chinese art. Intuitively, these two time periods are too far apart to allow us to learn anything about how our conception of art has changed. Moreover, intuitively, these two periods are also too far apart culturally speaking to learn anything by comparing them. Both problems seem to indicate that some kind of causal relations among artworks - temporal or cultural - is required.

We shall return to this problem later on, but it is enough to note now that not all style matrices can be compared with one another in a meaningful way\(^\text{138}\). By the end of this paper, I hope to provide an explanation for why we have this

\(^{138}\)Stephen Melville has also pointed out that we also need at least two artworks in order for the style matrix to do any work, as well. For there can be no comparisons whatsoever if there is merely a single artwork.
intuition, and to suggest a constraint on the kinds of matrices that can be
legitimately compared.

So, what is wrong with the style matrix?

5.2.2 Too Historicist:

Carroll and Levinson advance three criticisms of historicism: first, Carroll
argues that historicism entails an anti-intentionalist position that Danto ought to
reject, because it's inconsistent with his general aesthetic views; second,
Carroll worries that historicism entails backward causation, a position that he
thinks is dubious; and finally, Levinson argues that a particular version of
historicism (what he calls 'forward retroactivism') ought to be rejected because it
entails that the art content of artworks depends on what succeeds those
works\textsuperscript{139}. Let us begin with an evaluation of Carroll's worries, first.

Carroll thinks the style matrix endorses a form of anti-intentionalism
because of the way in which the style matrix identifies stylistic features to
artworks. Let us see what Carroll means by reconsidering our earlier example.
In 1965, after the rise of Pop Art, the style matrix allows us to see a latent
property in earlier artworks: not-celebrating-consumer-society. This is a feature
of the Monet, Carracci and Duchamp paintings that we come to discover only
after Pop Art. In fact, we would also willingly accept that such a property could
not have been known at the time of the creation of these artworks, nor could the
painters themselves have had this property in mind while creating their

\textsuperscript{139} Levinson argues for this thesis in "Artworks and the Future". However, he later argues in "Work
and Oeuvre", for a different claim -- viz., that at least in cases concerning the set of artworks
constituting an artist's oeuvre, the art content of earlier artworks may depend at least in part on
what succeeds those works. So, while Levinson has modified his earlier view, the criticisms
against the style matrix would presumably still apply, since the style matrix allows that the content
of any earlier artwork may depend at least in part on what succeeds those works, independently of
who made them.
artworks. It is, however, a feature that we can attribute to these artworks after 1965.

Carroll worries about being able to attribute to artworks properties that no artist could have known about, an anti-intentionalist position. Here is his worry:

...there is another element of Danto’s writings on artistic style that is irreconcilably at odds with the intentionalism of his constraints on art-identifying interpretations. This is his idea of a style matrix which he introduced at the end of his article ‘The Artworld’ and which he has never recanted\(^\text{140}\).

For Danto, objects are identified as the artworks they are by interpretations that are constrained by what the artist could have believed. The style matrix, on the other hand, can impute properties to artworks that are completely anachronistic and beyond the ken of the artist. For the style matrix warrants stylistic attributions that have no basis in the historical past. The style matrix allows imputations of properties to works of the past on the basis of conception of art available only in the recent present. Moreover, insofar as these imputed properties figure in the identification of artworks, the style matrix funs afool of Danto’s own doctrine that interpretations not outstrip the knowledge stock of the relevant artist\(^\text{141}\).

As Carroll rightly points out, Danto surely seems committed to a form of intentionalism, given his claims in *Transfiguration* and "The Artworld". But, as we saw in Chapter 4, Danto is not really committed to any from of intentionalism.

So far, Carroll’s worry about intentions alone does not provide a conclusive reason for rejecting historicism. So, let us now turn to particular worries with historicism itself.

Carroll also attempts to develop an independent argument against Danto’s style matrix. He suggests that we ought to reject the style matrix because it encourages anachronisms and what he calls ‘backward causation’:

The style matrix, on the other hand, can impute properties to artworks that are completely anachronistic and beyond the ken of the artist. For the style matrix warrants stylistic attributions that have no basis in the historical past. The style matrix allows imputations of properties to works of the past on the basis of conceptions of art available only in the recent present. Danto’s idea of a style matrix, like Eliot’s view of perpetually readjusting artistic traditions, is dubious insofar as it suggests the possibility of backward causation.


Both views have artworks acquiring essential properties after they have been loosed upon the world and after their makers are long dead. This commitment is problematic in and of itself in ways that I will not dwell upon here.142

What does Carroll mean by ‘backward causation’, and what’s wrong with it? In the above passage, he seems to make the following argument:

(1) The style matrix allows us to attribute a property P to an earlier artwork from T1, even though P was only discovered at a later time T2 (and hence was unknown to the artist at T1).
(2) So, the style matrix implies that the later events at T2 cause an artwork created earlier at T1 to acquire P.

Carroll begins with the plausible interpretation of the style matrix, according to which the style matrix does justify attributing to an artwork created at an earlier time T1 properties that were only discovered at a later time T2. This is true. But, notice that this does not imply that later events literally cause an artwork to acquire new properties, as Carroll suggests when he claims that the style matrix has “artworks acquiring essential properties long after they have been loosed upon the world and after their makers are long dead.” There are three reasons why this subsequent charge is illegitimate.

First, the style matrix does not impute a causal chain whose direction takes us from a later artwork to an earlier artwork. In fact, there is no causal chain that involves a shift in time at all – or at least, not one of the kind Carroll imagines. The reason is that the causal chain involves (a) a later artwork with newly discovered property P, and (b) the attribution of that property to an earlier artwork. But, presumably, the attribution of the properties of the earlier artwork occurs around the time of the discovery of that later artwork's properties. And, even if the discovery of P and the attribution of P to earlier artworks are not

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simultaneous events in a causal chain, this is very different than the causal chain Carroll imagines, taking us from a later artwork to an earlier one.

But, this just highlights the second reason why Carroll's conclusion is illegitimate. The style matrix does not suggest that later artworks literally cause an earlier artwork to acquire new properties. It is not intended to establish a causal relation between artworks. Rather, the causal relation is between a later artwork, and a claim about the properties that an artwork possesses. So, it is misleading to characterize the style matrix as a mechanism in which artworks literally cause other artworks to acquire new properties.

Finally, we are led to a third problem with Carroll's reasoning here. Given the above two comments so far, it is clear that the causation warranted by the style matrix occurs between the discovery of a new property \( P \) in a later artwork and the justified attribution of that property to earlier artworks. Since these properties are, by definition, latent, they must have existed in those earlier artworks, but were simply beyond the ken of the artist, and could not have been justifiably attributed to those earlier artworks, until the creation of certain later artworks. It is only after the new artworks are created that we can see earlier artworks in a new light. But this means that these properties always have existed in the earlier artworks; they were just latent, and hence hidden from the artist until later events revealed them. So, it is incorrect to say that these artworks acquire essential properties long after their makers are long dead; they have always had these essential properties. It's just that we only come to discover some essential properties (that always existed in those artworks, but remained latent) long after their makers are long dead.

So, if these artworks do not acquire new features, and if there are no dubious causal relations among artworks, what exactly is bothering Carroll
about the style matrix? He cannot simply object to the style matrix on the
grounds that later artworks allow agents to justifiably attribute to earlier artworks
certain properties, which properties may have been beyond the ken of the artist.
For, this just is to object to the style matrix, because it endorses latent
properties. After all, to say that certain properties are latent just is to say that
they exist in the artwork, though no one might know about them at the time.
This, however, isn't a criticism of Danto's view; it is Danto's view.\textsuperscript{143}

Perhaps Carroll just doesn't like the idea of latent properties. But without
an argument against the latency theory, however, Carroll has yet to provide a
reason for rejecting the style matrix.

In his defense, Carroll cites Levinson's "Artworks and the Future" to
support his claim that earlier artworks do acquire essential properties after
having been created. This is ironic, because Levinson himself dismisses this
very interpretation of Danto as incorrect:

First, it should be noted that Danto does not claim that it is only when F-ness is first
exemplified that all earlier works become non-F; he admits that earlier work was non-F all
along, just that this went unremarked.\textsuperscript{144}

Unlike Carroll, Levinson is careful to note that the changes brought about by
later art are epistemic in nature: they concern how we see earlier artworks. But,
Levinson interprets Danto to accept that new art does not change the actual
properties of earlier art, just those to which we have access:

\begin{quote}
[N]ew work may restructure the artistic past in making us view that past with refocused
eyes, so as to grasp such new work aright, but it does not therefore make the artistic
future of earlier work a necessary part of understanding such of such earlier work. The
artistic lines of the past may well be redrawn with every new development, \textit{but only from
\vspace{1em}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{143}In defense of Carroll's criticisms of Danto, Carroll cites Levinson's "Artworks and the Future". But, notice that Levinson does not think Danto can be interpreted in any of the ways Carroll has suggested. So, the problems that Carroll raises for Danto are in fact probably not ones that Levinson would endorse.

Levinson here characterizes Danto's position as one endorsing the latency theory. But it is not the latency theory that Levinson is interested in criticizing. He takes the latency theory — a view which he calls “backward retroactivism” — to be legitimate and acceptable. Instead, Levinson is worried about genuine historicism — what he calls ‘forward retroactivism’. In particular, he is worried that the style matrix leads Danto to commit two mistakes: first, Danto has conflated genuine historicism and the latency theory, and as a result, second, Danto ends up endorsing genuine historicism as a result. This is problematic, because although Levinson finds the latency theory acceptable, he argues that genuine historicism is not. If this is in fact Levinson’s charge against the style matrix, then Carroll has misunderstood Levinson, and hence can be accused of having made the very same mistake that Levinson wages against the style matrix itself.

What Levinson finds objectionable (and presumably, what Carroll intended to find problematic) about historicism is genuine historicism, not the latency theory. So, let us consider first what genuine historicism is, evaluate whether the style matrix rests on a confusion about genuine historicism and the latency theory, and then determine whether the style matrix commits Danto to endorsing a form of genuine historicism (which he should not endorse).

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146 Levinson refers to the latency theory as ‘backward retroactivism’. However, I find his use of terminology a bit misleading (the term misleads one to believe that the view accepts that the meanings of artworks may change). For this reason, I shall consistently refer to this position as the latency theory.

147 Levinson refers to genuine historicism as ‘forward retroactivism’. However, I find this use of terminology confusing, and so I will only refer to this position as genuine historicism.
Recall that the latency theory is a process by which we understand earlier art in light of later artworks. So, later artistic developments and discoveries allow us to understand or appreciate aspects of earlier art that were not identified until these later discoveries made them possible. The claims involved in the latency theory are purely epistemic: later developments provide access to features of earlier artworks, which were previously inaccessible to us. Forward retroactivism, on the other hand, makes not simply an epistemic claim about the properties to which we have access, but rather makes an ontological claim. According to genuine historicism, the actual content of an earlier artwork (and not just our access to that content) is determined by later artworks. The shift from an epistemic claim suggested by the latency theory to the ontological claim suggested by the genuine historicism is easy to make. Here is how Levinson diagnoses the alleged slip between these two concepts:

The root error involved in Danto's analysis is plausibly the equating of what may be labeled backward and forward retroactivism. The former is, perhaps, legitimate, but it does not legitimate the latter. If we have two works, W1 and W2, created in 1887 and 1987, respectively, then adopting the perspective of backward retroactivism to them now, in 1987, involves first reconstruing W1 in light of W2, and then reflecting that new illumination forward, as it were, onto W2. Here the present permits us to see the past more clearly, as it could not have seen itself, which in turn clarifies the present understood in relation to, and as a development out of, that past. Adapting to these works the perspective of forward retroactivism, on the other hand, involves first construing W2 in light of W1, which is just traditional historicism, and then projecting this understanding backward onto W1...Backward retroactivism is fair game because its after-the-fact reconceivings do not flout the principle that the basic content of artistic acts - i.e., roughly, what is said or conveyed in them - cannot be a product of what succeeds them. It simply makes use of the idea that what succeeds may allow one to discern and delineate more effectively and perspicuously the preceding context in which such content emerges. Forward retroactivism, however, does flout this principle, and I suspect that it is the failure to distinguish the one kind of retroactive critical maneuver from the other that gives the forward-aiming variety an air of legitimacy it doesn't deserve.\footnote{Jerrold Levinson, "Artworks and the Future," in Music, Art and Metaphysics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 197.}

Is this charge against Danto legitimate? I don't think so.
First of all, as we've seen, the style matrix does engage in the latency theory; the style matrix allows us to see earlier artworks in light of concepts that were unavailable before. This is precisely the beauty of the style matrix that Danto hoped to capture.

But, does the style matrix slide from the latency theory to genuine historicism? That is, does the style matrix require Danto to accept that what is said or conveyed in an artwork is (necessarily) a product of what succeeds it? No. I shall argue that while Danto's particular formulation of the style matrix mistakenly slides illegitimately from the latency theory to genuine historicism, it need not do so. Later on, I will develop an alternative account designed to avoid this very problem.

Let's begin by considering why it is uncharitable to interpret Danto's particular formulation of the style matrix as illegitimately sliding from the latency theory to genuine historicism. Recall that the style matrix commits us to the claim that the features we identify in artworks always existed in the artwork, even if we cannot identify them until (sometimes long) after the artwork has been created. But, genuine historicism requires that later artworks determine the content of earlier artworks, at least in part. If the content of a past artwork is a product of what succeeds it, then this would imply that there is some content to an artwork created at T1 that does not exist until a later time T2. But, this in turn implies that the content in question did not exist at T1. And this just is to deny that properties not identified at the time of the creation of the artwork are latent. So, if we interpret the style matrix as endorsing a form of the latency theory, then it cannot also consistently be interpreted as requiring us to accept any kind of genuine historicism.
So, if Levinson and Carroll are correct in interpreting Danto's style matrix as endorsing the latency theory, then it is uncharitable to also interpret the style matrix as also endorsing genuine historicism. And, since even Levinson and Carroll both agree that the style matrix is best understood as accepting the latency theory, it is unfair to also charge the style matrix with endorsing genuine historicism, too.

But, there's a more general moral to be drawn here: the latency theory is inconsistent with genuine historicism. Accepting a latency theory requires assuming that some properties of artworks always existed in the artwork since its creation, but only come to be discerned later on. But this in turn implies that from its inception, all properties of an artwork already exist. Since genuine historicism simply denies this claim, by suggesting that at least some properties only come to exist after the artworks' creation, genuine historicism denies the central thesis of the latency theory. Hence, genuine historicism and the latency theory are inconsistent.

So, in developing our own style matrix, we must take care first to avoid sliding between these two concepts, and we must also decide whether we want to accept genuine historicism or the latency theory. In what follows, I shall argue that we ought to endorse forward, not backward, retroactivism, by considering some issues that the latency theory has trouble addressing.

By definition, latent properties exist in the work from the moment of its inception, but we simply cannot identify them until later artistic developments occur. Presumably, later artworks possess new features in virtue of which we can see earlier art in a new way. Later artworks then make new breakthroughs, and those breakthroughs allow us to reexamine how we see earlier artworks. It
is reasonable to believe that the breakthroughs brought about by new artworks shed light on those latent properties to which we were blind earlier.

The latency theorist's characterization of how latent properties emerge seems plausible enough when we consider cases where a later artwork L's artistic breakthrough is that L has p, and we realize that all earlier works prior to L can suddenly be seen as having not-p\textsuperscript{149}.

But, trouble emerges when we consider cases where we come to see earlier artworks as having positive stylistic predicates. In such cases, later artworks L have an artistic breakthrough in which L is discovered to have p. P, however, turns out to be latent in earlier artworks, which means that it existed in earlier art, but we were unable to see it as having p for some reason or another. Consider, for example, the case of Mannerism:

The moment Mannerism is established as a style in its own right, one can begin in a positive way to characterize any number of works as Mannerist which were made outside the specific period art historically designated Mannerist that begins with Correggio and extends through Rosso, Fiorentino, Bronzino, Pontormo, and Giulio Romano himself\textsuperscript{150}.

Danto clearly wants to allow that after discovering Mannerism as a style, it is possible to retroactively attribute Mannerism as a stylistic predicate to artworks that precede the actual discovery of Mannerism. Presumably, the latency theory endorses such a possibility: if Mannerism is a stylistic predicate that was latent in earlier art, then it is quite plausible to suppose that earlier artworks can come to be described a mannerist, once Mannerism is a stylistic predicate that is discovered.

\textsuperscript{149}As we saw earlier, this is a strange position, because it commits us to saying that, for example, Baroque art really is non-op-art. However, as we'll see in section III of this chapter, the genuine historicist may avoid this counter-intuitive result.

\textsuperscript{150}Arthur Danto, \textit{After the End of Art} (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 161.
But, this is very strange. The latency theory implies that there is some new feature $P$ that we discover in later art, and that we are then able to retroactively identify in earlier art. By hypothesis, this latent property $P$ already existed in the earlier art, even though we were unable to see it. But, if $P$ already existed in earlier art, then it’s not possible for that property to have been created as a result of an artistic breakthrough, as we initially supposed. After all, the very idea of an artistic breakthrough seems minimally to require that the property created as a result of the breakthrough not have existed prior to the breakthrough$^{151}$.

Of course, the latency theorist at this point may well accept that the artistic breakthrough is perhaps not a genuine ontological creation of a new predicate, but only an epistemic discovery; if so, then there is no problem for the latency theorist.

But, the latency theorist now owes us an explanation for why we come to discover these supposedly new features only at some later point in time, and not when they first arise. Why? Intuitively, it would seem that we discover new properties as the artworks are created. However, the latency theorist now must accept that at least sometimes, we discover properties long after the works of art

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$^{151}$ Sherri Irvin, at the Canadian Philosophical Association (May 2001) raised an interesting alternative interpretation of Danto’s style matrix and relevant aesthetic properties. On her view, when a new predicate is added to the Matrix, there is simply an epistemic change in how we see artworks, rather than a change in the works themselves. So, what constitutes an aesthetically relevant property will depend entirely on our epistemic situation, and not at all on whether the content of an artwork has changed. On this interpretation, we can explain why we come to discover these supposedly new features of artworks later on: because of new epistemic situation (created by new artworks), we can see earlier artworks differently. But, it is only in the context of comparing the new artworks to earlier art that we can ‘discover’ these latent properties.

I find this interpretation plausible, but not without its problems. For one, there is still no new evidence or information that comes to explain why an attribution is unjustified at one point, but justified later on. Second, this view commits us to accepting that relevance is a purely contextual notion. This may be, but requires defense. Finally, on this interpretation, the style matrix tracks changes in our epistemic views, not in the properties of the artworks themselves, and this seems contrary to Danto’s own view of the Matrix.
are created. This now seems at best a puzzling phenomenon in need of an explanation\textsuperscript{152}.

Moreover, the latency theory leaves us without a way of explaining why stylistic attributions that were previously unjustified suddenly become justified. On this view, a new breakthrough may allow a viewer to discover a new style predicate. As a result, this discovery will purportedly justify stylistic attributions to earlier artworks that, prior to the discovery, would have been unwarranted or unjustified.

This seems plausible. The problem is that by his own admission, the latency theorist takes the discovery to be a purely epistemic matter. But, this in turn means that there is no new evidence or information that comes to exist to explain why a set of facts result, in one situation, in an unjustified belief, while in another situation, the very same set of facts produce a justified belief. This is counter-intuitive, because it would seem that a set of facts either justify, or do not justify, a stylistic attribution. But, the latency theorist would have us believe that a given set of facts may in some cases provide warrant for a stylistic attribution, but will not in other cases. This is puzzling.

The latency theorist will be quick to note that while the facts remain constant and fixed, there is a shift in the facts possessed by the agent making the stylistic attribution. This explains why in some cases, a stylistic attribution is warranted, while it is not in other cases: it's because there is a shift in the facts possessed by the agent, (even though there is no shift in the facts themselves). This would seem reasonable, if justification were a matter of the evidence one possesses. As one's evidence evolves and enlarges, it would seem natural to

\textsuperscript{152}Lee Brown has suggested, in defense of the latency theorist, that these properties are never created, but only always discovered. But again, what would explain why we ever come to discover certain properties when we do?
think that one's justification of different attributions will also expand and shift. In our case, then, if one makes a new discovery, it may well be sufficient to justify a stylistic attribution that, prior to the discovery, would have been unwarranted.

The problem with the latency theorist's defense becomes clear when we remember that it is only the agent's evidence that may shift or expand, but the evidence itself does not. In other words, what an agent is justified in believing shifts as the agent makes discoveries; but, there is no corresponding shift in the facts. But, if there is no shift in evidence, the latency theorist will be at pains to explain why there ought to be a shift in justificatory status.

These issues may threaten the latency theory. However, they need not threaten the style matrix. I think the style matrix can be reformulated more coherently without reference to latent properties at all.

What shall we take from this examination of the latency theory? If the style matrix is historicist at all, it endorses either genuine historicism, or the latency theory, but not both. We have considered problems for the latency theory both here, and in the previous chapter. So, we must ask whether the style matrix can accommodate genuine historicism, in order to reflect a commitment to genuine historicism. We shall return to this issue; but first, we must consider whether the style matrix is too ahistoricist, as Danto himself suggested it is.

5.2.3 Ahistorical: (Danto's own criticism)

Danto himself worries that the style matrix is too ahistorical because it connects artworks solely on the basis of visual affinities, i.e., on the basis of visual similarities:

for all the historical sensitivity of the style matrix, it implies an ahistorical vision of art...\(^\text{153}\)

In any case, we can imagine two red squares, one executed in the spirit of Kierkegaardian jokes and one in the spirit of Suprematism, which look enough alike that the temptation would be to place them in the same position on the style matrix, but which actually have very different stylistic attributes, not to speak of different interpretations and meanings. But one can also think of monochrome monotonous paintings done in neither of these spirits, and whose stylistic similarities or dissimilarities are purely accidental.154

The style matrix classifies artworks on the basis of visual features. So, if two artworks share similar features, then Danto worries that we will place them in the same place on the style matrix. The problem that arises is that often, artworks have similar visual properties, but which are stylistically very different, because of the different interpretations each has. Hence, Danto worries that, for example:

Thus a tall thin effigy from Africa doubtless has some "affinity" with a characteristic Giacometti, but affinity overlooks the reasons why either of them is tall and thin, and that must do great damage to our perception of either. But that is one of the problems with affinities, and it is, I am afraid, one of the problems, perhaps one of the main problems, with the style matrix itself.155

Since the style matrix relates artworks on the basis of what they look like, it will fail to differentiate these artworks on the basis of reasons that require reference to art history. Danto suggests we ought to reject the style matrix at least because it fails to capture our intuition that the visual properties of an artwork are not the ones in virtue of which we think artworks share stylistic features.

5.3 Constructing a New Concept of the Style Matrix:

5.3.1 A Style Matrix that Reflects Danto's General Views about Art.

While it may be true that as formulated, Danto's style matrix is constructed using only visual affinities, I see no principled reason why it must be so constructed.

As an alternative proposal, we might construct a style matrix based on the morals drawn from Danto's philosophy of art – viz., that the nonmanifest


properties of artworks are what are relevant. Relying on the art-historical context, we might suggest that stylistic properties be determined not by visual affinities, but rather by the causal relations among artworks. The style matrix would then classify artworks in virtue of the historical relations among artworks, rather than their visual similarities. This proposal has a unique benefit of killing two birds with one stone: first, by relying on historical relations, the style matrix will entail genuine historicism. So, we can avoid the problems considered earlier facing the latency theory. But second, because the relevant historical relations can (though need not necessarily) be spelled out by reference to the intentions of the artist, we can avoid Danto's worry that the style matrix is ahistoricist, as well.

This proposal for the style matrix could explain why, for example, an effigy from Africa and a Giacometti are different artworks: they're different, because of the different art-historical contexts to which both works make reference. This would also explain why the stylistic properties shared by artworks whose visual features may vary. Stylistic properties like irony, tension, humor, or reactionariness are nonvisual features. So, a style matrix emphasizing these nonmanifest properties would help us explain how such visually different artworks can be classified as sharing the same stylistic properties.

In fact, Danto sometimes seems to think of the style matrix in just this way. Consider the following passage, where Danto himself emphasizes the importance of causal and art-historical relations among artworks in explaining shared stylistic properties. He relies, in other words, on nonmanifest properties to identify the relevant stylistic features of artworks with which to construct a style matrix:
Every painting in history will fit somewhere on the matrix, with perhaps some jostling. Van Dyck, influenced by Rubens, is (late) baroque, and, as he is committed to a certain concept of grace in his depiction of figures, which are svelto, he comes out Mannerist, whatever his influences. But since I see no trace of the rococo style in him, he belongs on row 2 (+++). The Carracci belong on row 6 (++), since fully baroque (they invented it), but repudiating Mannerism and far too energized to be rococo. One feels that Malevich’s Black Square belongs on row 8 (---), namely as a sum of negations, the dark hole into which all stylistic qualities disappear. (Malevich described one of his black squares as ‘The embryo of all possibility,’ which means in effect the absence of all actualities). Malevich’s Black Square, which explicitly belongs to the iconic tradition - he exhibited it, remember, across a corner of a room, as an icon might be displayed - is neither Mannerist nor rococo, but might just qualify as baroque. An early green monochrome by Brice Marden, titled Nebraska, is witty enough to be Mannerist and decorative enough to be rococo, and hence belongs on row 3. Where would Ryman fit? My hunch is that different works of Ryman would fit on different rows.

Notice here the strongly causal and art-historical language that Danto uses to characterize the stylistic predicates of these artworks: “influence”; “come out”, “invent”, “repudiate”. These verbs all express a causal relation among objects. Moreover, consider the kinds of stylistic properties Danto emphasizes: grace, sum of negations, wit, decorative. These are not properties that prima facie seem purely visual – rather, grace, wit, decorative and negations are all features that can be instantiated by a variety of visually distinct looking objects.

Danto himself provides us with a way of conceiving of the style matrix as underwritten not by purely visual affinities, but by art-historical causal explanations. His general characterization of the style matrix does avoid the very criticism he himself raises against the matrix – which it focuses on visual affinities alone:

Claiming an affinity is the very opposite of inferential art criticism, for it entails no historical explanations at all...it suffices that the one work ‘recalls’ the other in the mind of the art historian. In the bitterly criticized exhibition Primitivism and Modern Art, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1985, the principle of affinity was much the principle of the show: there were ‘affinities’ between Giacometti and Ibo sculptures, meaning that they resembled one another at the level of abstract form, though it was unclear that Giacometti had ever seen the alleged affines of his work... Now there may be an explanation subtended by the claim of an affinity, but it would be mostly transhistorical, viz., that there is some explanans common and peculiar to all members of an affinity class. Usually, these stand to the explanans as a set of instances do to some platonic form, and affinitistic art criticism is essentially platonist in spirit. But I say only that until some legitimate explanation is forthcoming, the response to the claim

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of affinities is really "So what?" A lot of art historical ingenuity goes into these claims, as it does in the art historical lectures which move forward on affinities, and with the demonstration through juxtaposed slides of formal similarities between things that may have no causal relationship to one another at all157.

In this passage, Danto himself seems to be offering a way of conceiving of the style matrix that can avoid the very criticism that he raises against it! So, there is no reason why we should not rely on causal relations as a way of identifying the relevant stylistic properties, and no reason to think Danto would object to this way of modifying the style matrix.

5.3.2 Other Benefits to a Modified Style Matrix

Constructing a style matrix using causal relations among artworks allows us to see how to solve some other problems facing the style matrix as Danto originally formulated it.

5.3.2.1 Relating Style Matrices to One Another

Recall that even our initial attempt to characterize the style matrix was conceptually confused. We noted that the style matrix is intended to capture how our conception of styles change over time, by allowing us to see how different stylistic predicates characterize artworks from one moment to the next. One problem we considered earlier was that it did not seem that we could always meaningfully or informatively compare two different matrices. For example, comparing contemporary German art with Chinese art from 1200 may not yield any interesting or helpful insights into the evolution of style predicates. We are now in a position to see why. The style matrix is intended to reflect the causal relations among artworks, and to reveal how the evolution of stylistic predicates are the result of changing causal relations among artworks. It follows that the only matrices that will yield relevant or insightful information will

be those that reference artworks that are causally related to one another. So, in our example, if there are no causal relations among contemporary German art and Chinese art from 1200, then a style matrix tracking these two periods will probably not be illuminating.

Rather than comparing style matrices in a purely arbitrary and ad hoc manner, we now have a criterion with which to identify plausible periods to compare: compare those periods in which there are causal relations among artworks from those periods. These causal relations, in turn, will allow us to perform the kind of inferential art criticism that Danto takes to reveal the relevant stylistic predicates. And, of course, this is precisely what the style matrix was designed to do.

So, Danto's very own characterization of how we might use the style matrix itself contains the beginning of a solution to his own criticisms of it. Given the ways that Danto himself relies on the style matrix, we might construct a style matrix on the basis of nonmanifest properties using the causal and art-historical relations among artworks. This captures Danto's conception of the role of art criticism, and reflects more faithfully the central tenets of his philosophy of art more generally.

Let us suppose that relying on the causal relations among artworks provides us with a method with which to identify the relevant stylistic predicates. We must now consider whether such a modification will result in an acceptable formulation of the style matrix.

5.3.2.2 We Can Explain Shifts in Justified Stylistic Attributions

Relying on the causal relations to identify the relevant stylistic predicates has another advantage: we can explain why we may justifiably attribute different (perhaps even opposing) stylistic predicates to the same work of art at different
points in time. Because the attribution of a given stylistic predicate to an artwork depends in part on the causal relations between the artwork in question and other artworks, it is natural that as the artwork enters into new causal relations, it will acquire new stylistic predicates.

Consider an example. Consider an artwork A that is causally related to artworks 1-3. Relative to evidence E, which captures the causal relations between artworks 1-3 and the artwork in question, we may well be justified in attributing some property F to A. However, over time, A may enter into new causal relations with future artworks 4-6. Then, it is possible that relative to evidence E*, which reflects the causal relations between A and artworks 1-6, we may realize that our earlier attribution of P to A was incorrect (though justified relative to E), and that actually, we are justified in attributing Q to A instead.

Notice that in this case, the latency theorist, and the genuine historicist can equally explain why we are justified in both cases: relative to the evidence E we have at one time, and to E* later on, we are justified in different stylistic attributions. Both positions can explain how our shift in what we're justified in believing will reflect our new discoveries about the new artworks.

But this is where the similarities end. The latency theorist, unlike the genuine historicist, will be at a loss to explain why it is that later on, we make these new discoveries. After all, for the latency theorist, our epistemic discoveries are just that - purely epistemic and hence do not track any corresponding ontological changes. The genuine historicist, however, has an explanation for our change in stylistic attributions: as A's relations with other, and new, artworks evolve, new stylistic attributions will occur. There is new evidence available -- new causal relations -- that can explain why new stylistic attributions are justified, too. Had those new causal relations not occurred, we
would probably deny that the new stylistic attributions were justified. Notice here that our explanation for our justifications depends on the causal relations in question, and that our (epistemic) discoveries about the artworks actually reflect genuine ontological changes in the artwork's causal relation to other artworks.

5.3.2.3 We Can Explain Why Danto Thinks the Essence of Art Is Revealed as Art History Evolves.

Finally, construing the style matrix as a historicist claim allows us to understand why Danto thinks that as art history evolves, the essence of art is revealed and that we have not yet discovered the essence of art. We saw in Chapter 3 that, as a purely epistemic claim, Danto is unable to explain why we have not yet discovered the rest of the definition, except by admitting ignorance. However, if we construe the revelation of the essence of art as an ontological claim, then we may easily explain why it is that we have not yet discovered the rest of the definition: if the facts do not yet exist to complete the definition, then the essence will not yet have been revealed. If art history evolves, resulting in new causal relations among artworks, then it is possible that these new causal relations result in new aesthetic predicates – perhaps one or more of which completes the definition.

The above considerations motivate preferring a genuine historicism to a latency theory. However, before we can advocate genuine historicism tout court, we must explain why genuine historicism is not problematic, as others have suggested. In the final section, I shall respond to some of the criticisms that Carroll and Levinson have raised against genuine historicism.

5.3.3 Why Genuine Historicism Is Not Problematic, as Carroll Suggests

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1. Recall that Carroll objects to historicism (what he refers to as ‘backward causation’) on the grounds that it allows artworks to acquire properties that are beyond the ken of the artist. We did not consider the legitimacy of this complaint earlier, because we found that it only really applies to genuinely historicist accounts; since Danto’s account is not genuinely historicist, we did not need to respond to this worry. However, it is time to evaluate this objection.

Before we can evaluate this objection, we must consider why an aesthetic predicate might be beyond the ken of an artist. Let’s consider a case where Carroll’s objection might arise in a clear and forceful manner.

Suppose that S’s artwork A has property P, not in virtue of its relations to earlier artworks, but rather in virtue of later artworks that have not yet been created. So, at t1, S creates A. At t3, new artworks E and F are created. As a result, A comes to acquire property P in virtue of these new relations to these new artworks. But, it is in principle impossible for S to be aware of such properties, because they have not yet been created. Carroll’s worry is that the historicist is committed to accepting that A has P, even though it is impossible for S to even know about such properties.

Is a genuine historicist committed to accepting that A has properties that S could not have known about – properties, that is, that are beyond the ken of the artist?

According to Carroll, the historicist is committed to accepting that A possesses P at t1, because of A’s future relations to E and F at t3. But, the problem with Carroll’s criticism is that it presupposes that historicists must accept that A has P at t1, in virtue of what will occur in the future time t3. But, there is no reason an historicist must accept this. The historicist is committed to accepting that at t3, A possesses P, and that P did not exist prior to that point.
But, if this is true, then A at t1 does not possess a property that is beyond the ken of the artist.

You might worry that while A at t1 does not possess a property that is beyond the ken of the artist, it does at t3. Is this a problem? Why should it be? If artworks can acquire new meanings as a result of later developments in the artworld, then over time, artworks will come to acquire new properties and meanings that they may not have had at the time of their creation. And, if we accept that artworks can come to acquire new meanings, then it seems that we must accept the possibility that at least some of these meanings will be beyond the ken of the artist.

Is this wildly implausible? I don't think so. The genuine historicist may suggest that the meanings of artworks may change over time. In the kind of scenario under consideration, the historicist will simply suggest that the meaning of the artwork in question has evolved. Its meaning at t1 has changed and now its meaning at t3 has come to include features that might be beyond the ken of the artist. This is not problematic, though, because the historicist need not say that at the time of its creation at t1, the artwork possessed properties that were beyond the ken of the artist.

To see why this is not an unusual claim, consider an analogy.

Suppose I own a plant that I grew from seed. It happens that five years later, at t2, my plant will come to possess the property of being owned by the next Nobel Peace Prize winner. Presumably, at t1, when I first owned my plant, it did not have this property. But, if I did not track my plant's future living conditions, then my plant could well acquire a property at t2 that is beyond my ken. Even though I created my plant from seed, it may in the future come to acquire properties that are beyond my ken. There's nothing strange about that.
So similarly, an artwork may acquire properties that are beyond the ken of the artist. Insofar as the features of artworks are relational and supervene on certain art historical facts about the world, it is not surprising that artworks come to possess features beyond the ken of the artist. A strong historicist here has a perfectly plausible way of making sense of the kind of case that worries Carroll.

Ironically, it is the latency theorist who is in a uncomfortable position when it comes to explaining this kind of case: if the latency theorist accepts that later on, we discover that an earlier work has P, then he is also committed to accepting that even at t1, that is, at the time of its creation, A does have P – even though P is beyond the ken of the artist. The latency theorist must accept this commitment, because he requires that the features of an artwork not change or evolve over time. Hence, if they grant that some features of an artwork will only be discovered at a later point in time, they must admit that those features have always existed in the artwork all along as latent properties.

However, the beauty of the historicist position is that she may allow that the features of an artwork do change and evolve over time. As a result, she does not need to accept that an artwork possesses features that are beyond the artist's ken at the time of the artwork's creation. Instead, she may suggest that over time, the features of the artwork have evolved in such a way as to include new features that may be beyond the ken of the artist.

Carroll's worries face the latency theorist, but not the genuine historicist. So, once we adopt a genuinely historicist position like a version of genuine historicism, the kinds of problems that Carroll anticipates dissolve away.

\[158\] Of course, the latency theorist may simply deny that A has P in virtue of its relation to later works. But, then it is no longer clear that the latency theorist would ever accept the existence of latent properties. After all, if artworks cannot be discovered to possess a new property after its creation, there won't be any situations in which there are latent properties. Hence, there would be no reason to endorse the existence of latent properties, and no motivation for the Latency theory.
2. We can also avoid Carroll's other worry that historicism requires us to give up intentionalism. Although it is still unclear whether Danto himself would prefer to include intentions as a constraint on interpretations, I would like to conclude by sketching out how intentionalism may be built into a historicist position.

We have suggested that an artwork's relevant stylistic predicates may evolve in virtue of becoming related to later artworks that possess predicates that did not exist before. But, we have not discussed what predicates an artwork possesses at the time of its creation. Of course, there are at least two ways to explain an artwork's predicates: an artwork may possess certain predicates, in virtue of being causally related to earlier artworks possessing certain predicates. However, an artwork may also possess certain predicates because of the artist's intentions. So, even if we adopt a genuine historicism, we can still allow that intentions initially fix the possible stylistic predicates that are relevant to an artwork.

5.3.4 Levinson's Worries:

Adopting a genuine historicism will also allow us to respond to Levinson's complaint against Danto's original proposal for the style matrix. Recall that for Danto, if at t3, we come to discover property P, he allows that we may then retroactively characterize all earlier artworks as possessing either P or not-P. Levinson objects to this approach, because it assumes that all earlier artworks have as a relevant stylistic predicate, either P or not-P. Intuitively, they do not all have this property or its denial as a relevant predicate. Hence, the style matrix should not imply that they do.
As was the case for Carroll’s objection, Levinson’s worry only is a legitimate one if we accept a latency theory, rather than a genuine historicism relying on causal relations among artworks.

If we adopt a latency theory, we must accept that even though P is only discovered at t3, earlier artworks prior to t3 had P or not-P all along. There are two problems: first, presumably, P and its contrary are not relevant to every single earlier artwork. Intuitively, P and not-P are only relevant to some artworks; second, they are not relevant to artworks in existence prior to the discovery of P. We are committed to both of these counter-intuitive positions if we accept the latency theory.

However, we can avoid both situations by adopting a genuine historicism that relies on causal relations. Here’s how.

First, because we can allow the properties of artworks to change, then the historicist will suggest that if we discover at t3 some property P, then artworks at that point may come to acquire this property. So, A at t1 or t2 will not have P. But, if p is discovered at t3, then it might be that A will come to acquire P at t3. Notice, however, that unlike the latency theorist, we need not say that at t1, A had P. Artworks need only acquire properties at or after the discovery of those properties. Only the latency theorist has to accept that artworks possess properties before their discovery.

However, notice that even at t3, A need not necessarily acquire P at t3, just because P is discovered at t3. Here’s why: if we accept that artworks only acquire stylistic predicates when they are causally related to earlier artworks, then A will only acquire P at t3 if A is causally related to the artworks having P at t3. If A is not causally related to artworks having P, then P will not be a stylistically relevant property of A.
If we accept a causal requirement for stylistic predicates, then we need not be committed to requiring that all earlier artworks be characterized in terms of either possessing or lacking a newly discovered predicate. Rather, only artworks that are causally related to the later artworks may be redescribed in terms of possessing or lacking some predicate.

This ought to motivate us to introduce a neutral term, like neutral-with-respect-to-P. Such a property will be used to characterize an artwork's relation to a predicate, when that artwork is not causally related to artworks in which the predicate P is created. Adopting a neutral term will allow us to reflect Levinson's intuition that not all predicates are relevant to all artworks. If an artwork has P, then P is only relevant to those artworks causally related to that artwork. All other artworks will be neutral with respect to P\textsuperscript{159}.

The criticism that Levinson raises against the style matrix is only applicable if we assume a latency theory. Once we realize that genuine historicism can avoid this problem, we can once again retain the style matrix.

Interestingly, Levinson himself argues in support of a restricted version of genuine historicism – or forward retroactivism - in his "Work and Oeuvre\textsuperscript{160}". In this paper, he suggests that when considering cases of artworks of a single artist, later artworks may inform and even alter the art content of an earlier work.

\textsuperscript{159} I believe that this solution allows us to consider relevance to be a property most naturally predicable of artworks, not our own epistemic position, as Sherri Irvin suggested. It seems counter-intuitive that relevance is a purely epistemic notion, since presumably what counts as relevant depends more on the features at issue in the artworks themselves, and less on the viewers. Alternatively, it seems that the reason viewers might see certain features in artworks as relevant has to do with the relations of artworks to one another). In either case, once again the epistemic position of the agent is justified or explained by reference to the actual ontological features of the artwork itself.

So, Levinson endorses a form of genuine historicism, but restricts it to cases involving the *oeuvre* of a single artist.

Levinson gives two main reasons for restricting genuine historicism to the oeuvre of a single artist. First, he suggests that a necessary condition for one artwork to legitimately change the meaning of another artwork is that there be a locatable agent whose artworks constitute a single oeuvre:

> It is important to see that whatever principle of limited content retroactivism may have purchase within the scope of an oeuvre could not validly be extended to the series of artworks constituting the whole of art history, or even to the large subsets thereof that constitute artistic periods. The reason is that these cannot form a single, overarching work in the same way; they cannot be taken to represent a comprehensive enterprise of meaning on the part of a locatable agent. And only this seems adequate to license the kind of backward amplification or retroactivism revision we have been discussing.\(^{161}\)

Presumably, the reason an earlier work’s meaning changes in light of some later work is that a single agent created both, and the later work’s meaning helps clarify or disambiguate what the artist may have been trying to express in the earlier work. Assuming the two artworks are both part of a same body of work on some issue, it is natural to see the meaning of the first being influenced and altered by later works.

This seems correct: in cases where multiple artworks are part of a single body of work, the meanings of earlier artworks may well be modified or altered by later artworks. Levinson, however, means to restrict this kind of retroactivism not simply to any group of artworks that form a larger body of work, but only to a group of works that belong to a single agent. However, when we consider cases where a number of different artists work collaboratively, or cases where a later artist attempts to extend or refine the work of an earlier artist, a natural question arises regarding these cases: why shouldn’t we allow genuine

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historicism to apply in these cases? After all, if the reason genuine historicism applies in the case of a single agent’s work is that they form a ‘single overarching work’, then intuitively, whether that single body of work is by a single artist, a group of artists working together, or artists who continue another's work should be irrelevant.

Levinson offers the following justification for not extending genuine historicism beyond a single agent:

The reason is this. Later works of A can reasonably be thought, since part of A’s life work or large-scale artistic action, to manifest or disambiguate or render more definite what was latent or equivocal in the early works of A. But obviously later works of B don’t have the same evidential authority in regard to supporting hypotheses about what was really there in A’s early efforts, though in more inchoate fashion, since B’s works are not psychologically continuous with, not literally a further stage of, A’s own work. Actions of agents other than A and subsequent to the completion of the oeuvre to which a belongs are irrelevant to optimal reconstruction of A’s expressive intentions at early stages in his artistic endeavor, since they cannot be accounted a part of A’s project of articulating meaning across a series of related works. Perhaps another way of putting it is this: later works of A, but not later works of some unrelated individual B, have a prima facie relevance to plausible reconstruction of what A’s intentions and actions in earlier works actually were, if perhaps less pointedly displayed than in their successors. Levinson’s second reason, then, for restricting genuine historicism to a single artist’s oeuvre is that retroactivism requires psychological continuity of the creator from one work to the next. The reason we need psychological continuity, in turn, is that intuitively, only the artist knows what and why she has made what she has; hence, only her own later works, but no one else’s, will help clarify the meanings of her earlier works. And, since no one other than the artist herself is psychologically continuous with the artist at an earlier point in time, presumably, it is not possible to expand genuine historicism beyond the scope of a single artist’s work.

The question before us then is whether we genuinely need psychological continuity in order to disambiguate the meaning of an artwork. For if we do not,

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then we lose our grounds for restricting genuine historicism to the oeuvre of a single agent.

Levinson’s general reasoning is that later works may render more clearly what was confused in earlier works of a single artist because these works all form part of a large-scale artistic action by that artist. So, insofar as various artworks may come to form a large scale artistic action, the meanings of earlier artworks may be altered by later ones.

Levinson here has simply assumed that large-scale artistic actions can only be made by a single artist\textsuperscript{163}. But, there are many cases of artistic groups, movements or simply different artists who work collaboratively. And in such instances, intuitively it is natural to think of these groups, movements and collaborations as creating works that together form a large-scale artistic action. Insofar as it is plausible to suppose that groups might perform artistic actions, we may well imagine that later works by some group may alter the meanings of earlier works made by that same group in the same way as later works by a single artist may alter the meanings of earlier works made by that same single artist.

The response to this argument for expanding genuine historicism is to remind us that the real reason later artworks may render more clear what was in earlier works is that later works provide a certain ‘evidential authority’ with

\textsuperscript{163}Levinson admits that "When artists act within a school or movement framework, there is a sense in which the outlines of their individual actions begin to blur a bit...The example of a group of loosely associated artists with shared, mutually declared objectives, who have some joint work history behind them but are currently pursuing independent activity, plausibly marks a boundary beyond which backward [latent] content completion of the sort we have been considering is invalid. If it falls on the good side of the boundary - and I am not at all sure that it does - this will only be because such a group is enough like a single agent for some of the same ways of thinking about its productions, both individually and collectively, to apply." ("Work and Oeuvre" 264). Levinson here implies that if artists have shared, mutually declared objectives with some joint work history behind them, then genuine historicism will be acceptable in such cases. I do not see how this avoids threatening his thesis.
respect to identifying what an artist was trying to get at in her earlier works. In other words, Levinson is suggesting that A at t2 has a better idea than anyone else ever could about what she may have meant in her earlier works at t1. Since no one else knows what A meant at t1 better than she would at t2, only A's works at t2 could alter the meanings of her earlier works from t1. So, this argument concludes that genuine historicism should be restricted to a single artist's oeuvre.

The problem with this response, however, is that it fails to motivate why A at t2 would have any better an idea about what A at t1 meant in her earlier works. It does not explain why B at t2 cannot know what A's works at t1 meant. Recall that by hypothesis, in cases where genuine historicism will apply, the artist herself at t1 does not have a full grasp of the meanings of her works. So, at t1, she herself is in no better a position to comprehend her earlier works than anyone else is. Instead, it is only at a later time t2 that the meaning of the earlier works will become clear by reference to later works. But, if A at t1 didn't know the meaning of her earlier works, what makes us think that by t2, she will have any better idea of what those earlier works meant? Presumably, if she does have a better idea, it is because she has thought about those earlier works. But, surely someone else could have thought just as carefully about those earlier works sufficiently to grasp their meanings as well. If so, then there is no reason to suppose that B's later works cannot inform A's works at t1 any more than A's later works could. Of course, typically, A may think about her own work more than others; but this is not always the case. And, in cases where we are considering collaborations, or groups, it seems highly likely that someone other than the artist's whose work is in question may well grasp the works better.
The style matrix is best defended by adopting a full and unrestricted form of genuine historicism according to which later artworks may influence the meanings and stylistic predicates of earlier artworks, in cases where there are sufficient causal relations among them to support such changes. While some of the most serious criticisms of the style matrix stem from worries about respecting the intentions of the artist, making the style matrix more historicist alleviates the force of this objection. Moreover, a stronger form of historicism also allows us to understand why and how the meanings of artworks do change – something the latency theory leaves mysterious.
CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have been concerned with the relations between essentialism and historicism, and between accounts of art and accounts of art history. An examination of these connections is very timely, given the recent trends in analytic philosophy of art to propose historicist accounts of art, and given the recent trends in art to create artworks which presuppose a careful understanding of philosophy and theory.

As we have seen, Danto's position is notorious for its attempt to defend three claims: (1) an essentialist definition of art is possible; (2) this definition reveals itself through art history; and (3) the end of art has arrived.

Our first task was to examine what Danto means by the end of art. Chapter 1 was devoted specifically to this interpretive project. I argue that Danto when Danto claims that art history has ended, he does not mean the end art history properly speaking, but rather, a narrative of art history. This narrative transforms a mere causal chain of events around the progression towards a goal, and charts the evolution of history as attempting to realize that goal. Moreover, it is the master narrative of the entire history of art that has come to an end, and not simply some narrative that governs a particular period within the history of art. So, when Danto refers to the end of art, what he is in fact discussing is the end of the master narrative of art history.
Many have assumed that Danto's views about art history support his views about art. However, we have strong reasons to believe otherwise.

First, as we saw in Chapter 2, Carroll has argued against Danto on the grounds that the end-of-art thesis and his theory of art are circularly related. However, it turned out not only that the end-of-art thesis does not presuppose any essentialist theory of art, but worse still, on Danto's own terms, art history cannot come to an end.

Even more serious, though, is the fact that Danto's definition of art is actually inconsistent with his end-of-art thesis. Chapter 3 considered why there cannot be any more art after the supposed end of art, despite of what Danto would like to believe. As an historicist, Danto believes that part of what transforms an object into an artwork is the art-historical context in which the object exists. So, in order for there to be artworks, there must be an art-historical context which enables the artworks to exhibit aboutness and embodiment. The problem we encountered was that in the post-historical era, there is no art-historical context in which objects may exist as artworks. (After all, what would it mean to say that there is art history after the end of art history?) If anything ends after the end of art history, it surely is art history itself. And there can be no art-historical context without art history. So, if there is no art-historical context in which objects may exist as artworks, then no object created after the end of art history will be able to possess either aboutness or embodiment. In other words, no object after the end of art will satisfy Danto's definition.

This led us into a more careful examination of the relation between his essentialism and his historicism. In chapter 4, I suggested that Danto's account is not genuinely historicist, contrary to how many of his critics interpret him. Rather I argued that he endorses a latency theory - the epistemic view
according to which certain properties of artworks may be revealed or discovered after the creation of the work. This view contrasts with Strong Historicism, an ontological view according to which the properties of artworks can in fact change over time (not merely that we perceive different features, but that there are different features in an artwork). I suggested that the latency theory poses two main problems for Danto’s account: first, it does not allow Danto to explain why the essence of art has not revealed itself yet, and second, it appears to be inconsistent with his art critical comments. In the same chapter, I argued that Danto ought to accept strong historicism – first because it explains more clearly why he might think that the history of art reveals itself over time, and second, because it is more consistent with his art critical views.

Of course, the burden was then upon us to defend strong historicism more generally. Chapter 5 provided such a defense. Carroll accuses strong historicism of endorsing ‘backward causation’ and anachronisms. I defended strong historicism from this charge by suggesting that Carroll has presented us with a straw man interpretation of the view. I then considered a more plausible conception of strong historicism that can avoid Carroll’s charges. Levinson has suggested that strong historicism of the kind I proposed is acceptable, but only if it is restricted to cases of the works of a single artist. I argued that Levinson’s reasons for imposing such restrictions are not legitimate, and that a full-blown account of strong historicism is hence a viable option for Danto.

There is an additional benefit to strong historicism: it allows us to save Danto’s style matrix from the two main criticisms that have so far been raised against it. On the one hand, both Noël Carroll and Jerrold Levinson have criticized the style matrix for being overly historicist. We can dispense with this objection by noting that Danto’s position actually only endorses a latency
theory, not strong historicism. On the other hand, Danto has rejected the style matrix for just the opposite reason: he thinks it is too ahistoricist.

Chapter 5 ends by developing a strategy for constructing the style matrix that relies on the nonvisual features of artworks, based on Danto's general intuition that the nonmanifest properties of artworks are the relevant ones for determining stylistic features of artworks. This suggests that we rely on the causal relations among artworks to determine the stylistic predicates. If we allow that causal relations be used to identify the style predicates that apply to artworks, then as the causal relations among artworks evolve, new stylistic predicates might apply to the artworks in question. By having stylistic features depend on the genetic history of the artwork, we can avoid Danto's worry that the style matrix is too ahistoricist.

Finally, an admission needs to be made about two underlying assumptions I have made throughout this inquiry.

First, I have accepted Danto's general definition of art — that is, that an artwork is about something and that it embodies its meaning — without examining its legitimacy. While Danto's particular definition of art has been a working premise in my general line of argumentation in this dissertation, nothing I have suggested hinges on its acceptance. The general conclusions we have drawn regarding the relationship between essentialism and historicism, regarding the relationship between art and art history and regarding the style matrix do not depend on the truth of this definition. These conclusions can be extended to other essentialist accounts of art that attempt to define art by reference to the art-historical context in which those artworks are created.

The second assumption that this dissertation has accepted is Danto's claim that the essence of art reveals itself over time. Although I have not argued
for this claim specifically anywhere, there are good reasons for accepting it. Given that many competing definitions of art have been advanced in the past fifty years (Dickie's institutional account, Carroll's narrative account; Levinson's intentional-historical account, to name a few), there remains fairly widespread disagreement regarding the correct definition of art—indeed, even about the possibility of even providing a correct definition of art. Moreover, a number of these definitions are prompted in part by certain key artworks and movements - pop art for Danto, avant-garde art for Carroll, found objects for Dickie. These two facts provide prima facie evidence for believing that there is a tie between proposals for definitions of art and art history. Put generally, it is not unreasonable to assume that art history guides the construction of, or the amendment of, definitions of art.
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