HEARING DANTO OUT: A CRITIQUE OF THE “END OF ART” THESIS THROUGH MUSIC

by

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Abstract

Arthur Danto’s “end of art” thesis contends that art followed a progressive historical narrative from about 1300 until 1964 AD, when Danto realized that Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* demonstrates that an artwork can look like anything without thereby losing its status as art. I critique Danto’s revelation that an artwork can look like anything by showing how what Danto really and quite rightly means is that an art object can now look like anything. Making the art object/artwork distinction clear shows how Danto axiomatically excludes important perceptible qualities of artworks from his scope of perception which might provide outlets to the future changes to the definition of art, and thus the continuation of art history. I work up to this criticism by first addressing an apparent blind spot in Danto’s oeuvre: while Danto depicts the history of art as progressing and culminating within the realm of the visual arts, he is explicit that its implications apply to all artforms. It is a *prima facie* interesting question whether music can rightly be subsumed under Danto’s grand claims, since Danto’s history of art centers upon painting’s representational properties, which I argue that music lacks. Despite these differences however, music was, like painting, drawn into a Modernist search for its own essence that resulted in John Cage’s *4′33″*, a piece which showed that music could sound like anything just as much as visual artworks could look like anything. However, *4′33″* is unlike *Brillo Boxes* in that any two instances of the former can sound completely different from each other, while *Brillo Boxes* must always look like Brillo boxes. With reference and reverence to George Dickie, I explain how what I call “institutional cues”, which are devised, implemented, debated and changed within the “artworld”, are needed to perceive art as art in some cases, and especially in the case of *4′33″*. These institutional cues are what allow art objects to be perceived as artworks, and present opportunities for innovation that Danto’s arbitrarily limited account of what is perceived when perceiving an artwork obscured from him.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

One thing that makes Arthur Danto’s “end of art” thesis so engaging and controversial is its totality and finality. In brief, Danto claims that while instances of art production and appreciation will likely continue on as long as humanity does, there was a historical narrative of art, progressing since about 1300 AD, which has come to an end. There will be no more narratives which deliver to art its guiding purpose. Art is now free to do and say anything, but art, at least in isolation from philosophy, will not, cannot, make any more discoveries about its own nature. This allows Danto to be quite confident in issuing forth an essentialist definition of art, since an implication of the “end of art” thesis is that the future will not yield any interesting counterexamples to his definitional claims. So, if Danto can render a definition of art which successfully describes everything currently referred to as ‘art’ (and he believes that he has), it will be an essentialist definition since all future cases of art will share defining criteria with current art due to the stagnation of its heretofore progressive history.

While the idea that there are to be no more major developments in the history of art is conceived and defended by Danto through his expertise in the visual arts, he is explicit that he believes the deep philosophical statement he found in Andy Warhol’s 1964 work *Brillo Boxes* sent its shockwaves to every corner of the artworld. The first task of this thesis (in Chapter Two) is to describe the history, content, and significance of the question posed by Warhol’s work, that a work of art can look and sound like anything (including non-art objects) without endangering its status as an artwork. Once this is made clear, I will compare Danto’s history of painting with several interpretations of the history of Western music to determine if the history of music can be
subsumed under a sort of developmental narrative similar to Danto’s history of painting. In engaging the ear rather than the eye, perhaps music’s own history and the idiosyncrasies of that artform endanger the generality of Danto’s claims. I will argue that while music did have a substantially different history that cannot be subsumed under or made wholly parallel to that of painting, at least prior to Modernism, music is not immune to the implications of the revelation Danto sees in Warhol’s artwork.

On the contrary, in Chapter Three I argue that John Cage’s musical piece 4’33” is an example Danto’s proponents should employ more often, given its even deeper separation from aesthetic or even perceptible qualities than Brillo Boxes. This is because each instance of Brillo Boxes is intended to look like all of the others, while it is possible for all instances of 4’33” to sound radically different from each other, so knowing what one instance of 4’33” sounds like does nothing to help in recognizing another performance of that piece. Even more so than with Brillo Boxes, 4’33” depends upon something besides just the physical object(s) or entities which make up that artwork in order for that performance to be heard as a performance of 4’33”, or of a particular piece of art at all. Without what I call “institutional” cues, some artworks cannot be perceived as artworks because they could not otherwise be discerned from non-art objects.

Chapter Four examines Margolis’ criticism of Danto, which notes that Brillo Boxes must have been somehow discernible from the Brillo boxes in the grocery store if Danto was to ever realize that one was an artwork and one was not despite their similarities. I extend Margolis’ critique by discussing what it is that made Brillo Boxes discernible from Brillo boxes but was overlooked by Danto. I allege that it is institutional cues which Danto overlooks and what Margolis refers to, and in Chapter Five I explain how institutional cues manifest and change over time, with reference to George Dickie’s institutional theory of the artworld and Derek Matraver’s
“weak proceduralism”. Weak proceduralism can describe how a concept like ‘art’ can change radically over time while still remaining historically and institutionally contiguous. While Danto’s definition of art may successfully describe all artworks of the past and present, my argument exposes basic yet undefended assertions at the base of Danto’s claim that art history has come to an end, throwing this claim into serious doubt. In my conclusion, I look as far forward as I can into the future of art, criticizing Danto’s exploitation of the inherent difficulty of this task.
Chapter 2

The Distinct but Convergent Histories of Music and Painting

Danto’s assertion that Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* heralds the end of a progressive history of art depends on a nuanced understanding of the history of painting, and the first task of this chapter is to recount Danto’s history of painting, which depends upon painting’s representational capacities. The second section of this chapter establishes that music cannot have had a history similarly based upon representation because music is not representational; if the end of a progressive history of art has implications for music as well as the visual arts, it is not because of some developmental history based upon representational capacities. In the third section of this chapter I examine several interpretations of music history and suggest that the history of music cannot be construed as developmental at all until Modernism, when the cultural influence of the visual arts sets music off on a developmental narrative similar to that of Modern painting.

*Danto’s History of Painting*

Although Danto’s thesis must apply to all forms of art if it is to be as total and final as it purports, it is the historical narrative of the visual arts and painting in particular, culminated by Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes*, which Danto saw as closing the curtain on the continuance of a Hegelian historical narrative throughout the artworld. As Hans Belting has described, painting from after the advent of Christianity until the advent of the Renaissance was mostly pressed into service to depict religious events and serve as a sort of “Bible of the illiterate”.¹ They were not regarded *qua* art, but as explanatory, educational, and ultimately devotional devices. The history of painting truly became a narrative *about painting* at the beginning of the Renaissance.

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Beforehand, the painting may have served as a window through which the devout could stand in awe of the Ascension, but it was only with the Renaissance (about 1300 A.D.) that the window became recognized as one.² This narrative was sparked by Giorgio Vasari, who recognized that since Cimabue painting had progressively been aiming towards truer representations of the optically beheld world.³ Painting was no longer something that was merely seen through, as the very practice of showing what was represented now had a narrative of its own. Once the window was recognized as such, painting from the Renaissance up until the late 19th century sought to make the window as clear as possible. The ultimate goal was to represent the content of the painting as pristinely as possible, so that it was as indiscernible as possible from what the viewer would directly perceive if she were to witness the represented content “in the flesh”. The drive toward this goal of “optical duplication” progressed over time, marked especially by the development of foreshortening and linear perspective, technologies in the science of representation which enabled the realistic representation of three-dimensional scenes on a two-dimensional plane.⁴

However, a further development in the “progressive shrinking of the distance between representation and reality” was to occur from outside the realm of painting, namely photography and film.⁵ These media represented what was shown not through the delicate touch of the painter’s hand, but by capturing the very light reflected off of the very things represented. The defining drive of painting since Vasari’s time had not come to an end by fiat, but it had been deflated by the seemingly unsurmountable fidelity with which a photograph (let alone a moving

² Danto, After The End of Art, 65.
³ Ibid., 125.
⁵ Ibid., 87-9.
film) depicted reality. Painting was no longer at the helm of the historical process of minimizing
the amount of inference required to understand a representation, and replacing it with the direct-as-possible apprehension of the content of the work.\textsuperscript{6} While Delaroche declared that photography
had made painting all but obsolete (dead, in fact) in 1839, it was not until about 40 years later
that Manet ignited Modernism in painting by turning inwards “from the eye to the psyche”,
which resulted in paintings “being looked at rather than looked through”.\textsuperscript{7} An archetypically
Modernist painting may have been a window insofar as its content was a recognizable
representation of something (e.g. water lilies), but the act of representing physical objects in
paint no longer held transparency as its orienting goal, and representation became increasingly
peripheral to Modernist painting as it progressed. According to its chief narrativist Clement
Greenberg, painting in the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century drifted progressively further away from
representation to contemplate the essences of its form, resulting in non-representational art such
as the Abstract Expressionism of Jackson Pollock. In short, Modernist painting became its own
subject.\textsuperscript{8}

Warhol’s 1964 artwork \textit{Brillo Boxes} marked the end of the progression of Modernism
and art in general because of its indiscernibility from everyday objects, namely the commercial
packaging for Brillo scouring pads, of which Warhol’s piece is, as Danto puts it, a “three
dimensional photograph”.\textsuperscript{9} Up until this point, Modernism’s search for its essence was focussed
on its aesthetic, sensible qualities. Greenberg postulated that the essence Modernism was boiling
down to was the flatness of the canvas, while Danto himself suggests a plausible alternative in

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 88, 91.
\textsuperscript{7} Danto, \textit{After The End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History}, 65, 75, 138.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 7, 125.
\textsuperscript{9} Danto, \textit{What Art Is}, 36.
the brushstroke (i.e. paint looking unabashedly like paint). In contrast, the mission of Warhol’s Pop Art was to “bring art back into touch with reality, and with life”. 

Brillo Boxes showed that the essence of what art is was not to be found in its aesthetic qualities and that art could indeed be unaesthetic. After all, if aesthetics were somehow essential to a thing’s status as art, then how was Brillo Boxes art? This realization precipitated the “end of art” because Brillo Boxes poses the question “What is art?”, or “what distinguishes an ordinary object from a work of art?” in the most fundamental way that a piece of art can ask it. It signals the end of art because now anything is possible in art aesthetically (including the abandonment of aesthetics), and so there is no direction for future progression.

There is little space to delve into G.W.F. Hegel’s complex philosophy of history here, but Danto is explicitly indebted to Hegel for the idea that the history of art followed a progressive narrative that ends with and through self-revelation. I will return to Danto’s invocation of Hegel in the conclusion, but for now it suffices to say that Danto holds Brillo Boxes to be like a step in the process of Absolute Spirit becoming conscious of itself; by being a piece of art that is aesthetically indiscernible from real things and that has few if any aesthetic qualities of its own, it questions the nature of art while exhausting art’s role in producing an answer by removing any perceptibly discernible quality from the possible answer to that question. This question of art’s definition must be taken up by philosophy, which can more cogently pursue it: “art ends with the

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10 Ibid., 74-5.
11 Ibid., 104.
12 Danto thinks that Warhol’s Brillo Boxes might not have any aesthetic qualities at all, and that whatever ones it does have are also those of the Harvey-designed box Brillo Boxes was made to emulate, and belong to Brillo Boxes only because they first belonged to Harvey’s box. Danto, What Art Is, 148.
15 Danto, After The End of Art, 123. If this conjecture seems poorly established, that is because it is, in Danto’s work and so here as well. I will discuss this in depth below.
advent of its own philosophy”\textsuperscript{16}. Art will continue to be made long after the end of art (probably for as long as people are “hanging out”), and although some of it might fall outside “the pale of history”, no new historical narratives will arise from it\textsuperscript{17}.

**Music and Representation**

The goal of this section is to establish that the history of music must differ from the history of painting in at least one vital respect: music has not been and cannot be representational, and so if music did have a developmental history, representational accuracy cannot have been its guiding ideal.

Speaking in very broad terms, music has been intermingled with other artforms for most of its history. It was (and still is) often an accompaniment in aurally relaying literature or folk tales (especially before the Gutenberg Press), and was also used in theatre and for devotional purposes, especially with the rise of Christianity\textsuperscript{18}. The history of music is so intertwined with other artforms that prior to the advent of Baroque music, it is nearly impossible to find music which is totally separate from “theatre, dance, or ritual.”\textsuperscript{19} Indeed, many ancient cultures, including the Greeks, did not have a concept for music by itself, apart from spoken or sung word. My main concern in this thesis where possible is with purely instrumental music (referred to henceforth as “pure music”), which is detached from language and its representational capacities.

\textsuperscript{16} Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, 107.
\textsuperscript{17} Danto, *After The End of Art*, 114. “The pale of history” is one of Danto’s favourite Hegelianisms, and in this context it is used to describe artworks, artists and/or movements which are related to and in various ways responding to the history of art, but cannot be explained as a step in its progressive history, and cannot be seen as continuing or developing a historical narrative of its own. So, while Manet and Impressionism explicitly shirked the guiding ideals of representational acuity, Danto has explained with the help of Greenberg how this movement led to the Modernist developmental narrative. In contrast, Surrealism is essentially Modern in how it seeks to repudiate past art, but it does so not by shirking representational capabilities but rather conventions about what can be represented. Surrealism did nothing to push forward the progression towards displaying the essence of painting, and so it is considered by Danto and Greenberg to be beyond the pale of history. See Danto, *After The End of Art*, 9.
Pure music before Modernism has certainly experienced periods of stylistic change over its history (i.e. the passage from Baroque to Classical to Romantic music, to oversimplify), but its history cannot be construed as a developmental one until at least the advent of Modernism in painting. An investigation into why will require a digression into the representational capabilities of music.

Whether or not music can be representational at all remains a lively debate in the literature of the philosophy of art, but even the most vocal proponent of art’s representational properties, Peter Kivy, admits that only select pieces of music are representational – his argument is merely that music can be representational – and that “[pure] music has no such history of (undisputed) representation”.20 I believe he succeeds in this more modest argument, but in doing so he shows that these capabilities are quite limited in the scope of things they can possibly represent and that they were never central to the goals of music as an artform. An example he employs to demonstrate representation in music is Saul, in which the Dead March plays after the deaths of Jonathan and the titular character.21 Kivy asserts that the performance of this piece contains a representation of the funeral march when the “Dead March” section of the piece is played, because the composer Handel intentionally imbued that section of the piece with archaic qualities, so that what is represented (i.e. the funeral march of Saul and Jonathan) is distinct from what is representing it (i.e. Handel’s Saul). The “Dead March” represents a fictional piece of music (no funeral march would have actually played for their deaths), that is distinct from the instancing of Saul.22

22 Ibid., 156.
Unfortunately Kivy has not always been so successful in describing the representational capacities of music, and a contrast between the alleged representational capabilities of Handel’s Saul and Beethoven’s Fidelio illuminate the limitations of music as a representational medium. Often, music which is meant to be representational purports to represent something which is apprehended visually, which Derek Matravers calls “cross-modal” representation. I must concur with Matravers that the possibility of a sound really representing a sight makes “doubtful sense”. Nevertheless, Kivy holds that the “grumbling” cello line of the second scene of the second act of Beethoven’s Fidelio really does represent the boulder which the two characters are pushing at that point in the action. The sound of the cello is simultaneous with the sight of two actors pushing a papier-maché boulder across the stage. Recall the difficulty of cross-modal representation: Kivy cannot justify how the sound of the cello represents the sight of the boulder. The best he can do is claim that the sound of the cello represents the sound of the rolling boulder. However, the grumbling cello, even when exquisitely played, is too opaque to reliably represent the sound of any particular phenomenon without the very sort of visual accompaniment which the action on stage provides. One must imagine that even without the actors on stage, or even knowing anything about Beethoven’s Fidelio, a competently painted papier-maché boulder will be much more readily seen as representing a boulder than the lone sound of the cello would be heard as representing the sound of a rolling boulder.

A piece of music has been shown by Kivy to perhaps represent another piece of music, but this seems to be where the representational qualities of pure music seem to mostly end. This is largely because the form and content of music are usually quite indistinguishable from each

other. Rhythm, pitch, melody, and harmony are the conventional constitutive elements of music, and an appreciation of these elements gives an aesthetic quality to music regardless of what representational intentions might be missed out on. These elements might express emotion, as a piece played in a minor key is often expressive of sadness. But however expressive a piece of pure music may be of sadness, it cannot represent something that is sad or tell the audience something about sadness without textual support, as in the form of lyrics or even a title. This is what Scruton calls “‘reference’ without predication”, which is not representation, but simply expression.

Furthermore, identifying a visual representation of a physical object with a real-world instance of that object requires only what Danto calls nonassociative learning, an innate capacity to identify likenesses between symbols and the real-world objects they visually represent, an ability found even in pigeons. Identifying a sound with its source seems to require more than this. Sounds are simply too representationally opaque to perform this function, and simply creating the desired sound by replicating the real-world action that produces it is too transparent to be representation. The cymbal strike used to imitate the strike of an anvil could be reasonably mistaken for the clanging of a bell or a falling piece of silverware, or simply as a representation of nothing at all, but just an expressive flourish, the exploration of the tonal range of percussion, or a display of virtuosity by the performer. I cannot hope to settle the debate on the representational capacities of music here, but it suffices to say that music is not and never

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27 Scruton, “Representation in Music,” 274.
29 Scruton, “Representation in Music,” 274.
30 Ibid., 277; Danto, The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art, 95.
was a dominantly representational artform, nor were representational ambitions central to any developmental history music might have.

**Is There a Developmental Narrative in the History of Music?**

Now that it has been established that music could not have shared in the developmental history of painting as described by Danto, I will explore several different interpretations of the history of Western music to establish that no other sort of ideal can coherently be seen as an orienting or unifying theme of any part of music’s history before Modernism. This is not to say that the history of music lacks any sort of narrative, but that its narrative, if it indeed has one, is episodic. If it is insisted that the history of painting is also episodic but that some of these episodes contain developmental narratives within themselves, my argument is that none of the episodes of the history of music except Modernism can be characterized by an internal developmental narrative.

Music did not have a developmental history while the Vasarian narrative dominated painting, and at any rate it could not have aspired to a representational narrative with acuity of vision or sound as a goal. There was no history of musical technology which aimed at increasing music’s verisimilitude with the real world.\(^{31}\) The ambiguity between form and content that characterizes much pure music mostly pre-empts its use as a representational medium, but not as an expressive one. However, expression (and description) cannot serve as the basis of a developmental narrative, precisely because no development is possible in the technological sense Danto uses the term.\(^{32}\) Different social and political environments may have increasingly

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\(^{31}\) Recording technology may have progressively increased the accuracy with which it captured and reproduced the sounds of music and the real world, but this is clearly different from music as an artform striving for duplicity.

\(^{32}\) Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, 98, 103.
permitted different forms of expression, especially with the proliferation of liberalism, but this did not change the “mediating technology of expression”, simply because there is none.

There have been several attempts to construe the history of music as a developmental, progressive narrative, and one which even attempts to loosely assimilate the history of music into both the Vasarian and Greenbergian developmental narratives. An examination of why these attempts fail will demonstrate how music’s history cannot fall under a Vasarian narrative, although I argue that the changes to music in Modernism do parallel those of painting as Greenberg described them.

By way of contrast to developmental narratives, Lydia Goehr suggests a unifying theme in the history of music which, like a history based on expression, cannot form an internal, developmental narrative. It is a good example of a sort of history with an episodic, non-developmental narrative. “It is not implausible,” she says, “to view the history of Western music as a struggle on the part of musicians to have their practice regarded as a bona fide part of whatever at the given time counted as good, serious, or civilized living.”33 This goal is indexed to something – “whatever at the given time counted as good, serious, or civilized living” – that is itself subject to influences that extend far beyond the production, appreciation, and criticism of music. Therefore, the history of music on this reading would, like a history based on expression, will have an archipelago-like appearance: as the tastes and prejudices shift over time due to a complex set of extra-musical factors, different episodes of history with different conventions and preferences concerning musical works form an identifiable cluster which can be arranged in chronological order but cannot be connected to form a developmental narrative.34 Additionally,

33Goehr, *An Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 120.
34Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, 108-9. The analogy with an archipelago is meant to convey that such histories are episodic. A comparison to a situation comedy such as *The Simpsons* is instructive. Episodes of *The Simpsons* can be placed in the chronological order of their release, and they can be easily distinguished from
the importance of these “extra-musical ideals” led to an emphasis on the musical word and its meaning (which could reflect these ideals in language), as opposed to elements such as melody, harmony, rhythm, and tempo. Extra-musical ideals were the dominant influences on the production and theorization of music prior to what Goehr calls the “Beethoven paradigm” which emerged around 1800. Up until this time, the questions of what music was and the function(s) it should serve were answered with reference to extra-musical ideals. Such ideals still influence music-making, claims Goehr, but beginning with Beethoven a new attitude towards music emerged which sought to understand music “on its own terms” – music became a “predominantly musical affair” as the theorization and composition of music became concerned with itself. This was not yet the Modernist reflection towards definition, but rather the Romantic urge towards expressing and reveling in the essence of a character, emotion, or sometimes even music itself.

The advent of Romanticism and Beethoven’s work in particular led to the emergence of the concept of an individual musical work, complete in itself and fundamentally separate from extra-musical moorings.

I cannot detect an attempt in Goehr’s work to suggest a developmental narrative in the history of music after the Beethoven paradigm, although I will now scrutinize two attempts to characterize the history of music as a developmental narrative.

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episodes of other situation comedies and television shows in general. However, *The Simpsons* is not developmental whatsoever. The characters have not aged over the decades of the show’s production, and almost no plotlines are continued between episodes, returning the Simpson family and Springfield to normalcy at the beginning of each episode despite the sometimes-extreme tribulations of the previous one. See Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, 108.

36 Ibid., 122
37 Ibid., 123.
38 Ibid., 141. It should be noted that attempting to express the essence of something (a quintessentially Romantic notion) is rather different than attempting to define it – note that the Romantic endeavour of expression did not attempt to discount or exclude competing artistic visions, nor was it attempting to distance itself from its own history.
39 Ibid., 123.
Joanna Demers asserts that the preoccupation of composers from roughly the years 1400-1900 A.D. was “beauty and compositional craft”. To be dedicated to one’s craft is perhaps a universal trademark of artists, even if that consists more in conceiving the sly antics of Duchamp or Warhol’s philosophical question than something that demands exacting technical skill, and so it is difficult to see how such a focus can be developmental or at all particular to this period of history. Beauty is a more plausible candidate, but even if it was a concern universal to all composers during this period, it is not something that could be progressively advanced through technological upgrades. The search for beauty in music changed with the transition of styles, but this is as superficial as the varying styles of representational painting over space and time, which were stylistically distinct despite their common adoption of technologies of representation. Did some innovation analogous to photography and film ignite a sea change in what music as an artform was to strive towards? No. The recording of sound did not threaten music the way the recording of the image threatened visual art, precisely because music is not generally representational. Unlike the history of painting, there was no “guiding ideal” that propelled the development of music towards an ultimate goal which was abandoned with the achievement of that ideal in another medium.

Ultimately, Demers suggests guiding ideals for the history of music which cannot be the basis of a developmental history simply because an account of how they would develop is either incoherent or lacking (in the case of craftsmanship) or can only be accounted for with reference to a host of extra-musical influences (in the case of beauty). Paul Griffiths, author of *A Concise*

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41 Gracyk also indicates that it was the central concern of pre-Modern music, although he does so without reference to Danto or a developmental history of any kind. Theodore Gracyk, *On Music* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 22.
History of Western Music, has suggested a developmental narrative with more merit, and an explanation and refutation of it will require a more in-depth examination of music history. I will argue that this attempt ultimately errs not because how it might develop is unclear, nor because it necessarily involves extra-musical influences, but because it is not at all clear what the apex of such an ideal would sound like, while it is quite obvious what an ideal case of the Vasarian narrative would look like.

Although he spends little time defending the argument, Griffiths notes one progressive pattern over the history of music from at least the Middle Ages until the advent of Modernism: the gradual increase in the complexity and grandeur of music. This can be parsed in several ways, but Griffiths focusses on the number of performers required to perform a piece, and how many separate voices (usually a melody accompanied by harmonizing lines) are written for a piece.

Music of the early-to-mid Middle Ages, be it the music of the liturgy or the troubadours, was typically performed by one person or by a group in a simultaneous, single voice. Religious chanting eventually saw the introduction of the organum, a distinct voice which followed the melody at a consistent harmonic interval. This was followed by the emergence of four-part harmony in the late 12th century. Even at this relatively early point in history, this trend towards complexity was sometimes subject to extra-musical ideals. Although four-part harmony was developed in the 12th century, the 13th century was dominated by three-part harmony because of that number’s obvious association with the Holy Trinity. Four-part harmony experienced a resurgence of popularity with the arrival of the Renaissance, although some early Renaissance composers such as Josquin composed for up to six voices. There are also some artists which

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44 Griffiths, A Concise History of Western Music, 25
45 Ibid., 58.
must be considered “beyond the pale of history”\textsuperscript{46} for a linear progression from simplicity to complexity to emerge. One of these is Matteo de Perugia, a 14\textsuperscript{th}-century composer whose independently-moving voices find their most suitable comparisons not to contemporaneous music but rather to the Modernist works of Boulez.\textsuperscript{47}

The Renaissance saw a new, re-invigorated way of approaching music: it was to attempt to mirror reality. These representational ambitions are seen by Griffiths as parallel to the similar imperative within painting to achieve ocular verisimilitude which was noted by Vasari. The limitations of representing with sound were quickly realized (see above), and so while painting sought to capture how things look when beheld directly by the eye, the goal of music became to produce what sounded “familiar”.\textsuperscript{48} During this period it was fashionable for music – still usually accompanied by prayer or poetry – to “express the text” with imitative polyphony and expressive word-setting, using different instruments and tones to pair expressive flourishes with particular words and passages.\textsuperscript{49} In the 1520s there was an unprecedented rise in popular, secular forms of music, especially the madrigal.\textsuperscript{50} “Serious”, liturgical music carried onwards, but forms such as the madrigal appealed to common audiences with their quotidian (and later, religious) themes and a simpler structure (ideal for performance by amateur players in common settings) based upon major and minor modes, which were beginning to replace the polyphony which had dominated musical theory and composition in the West up until that time. Along with the introduction of modes, the 16\textsuperscript{th} century also witnessed a general decline in the rhythmic

\textsuperscript{46} See footnote 7 for a discussion of this term.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 39.
\textsuperscript{48} Music’s representational ambitions piqued again in the late Romantic period when composers began to write “symphonic poems”, instrumental works which aimed to represent a narrative arch, although the best it could do was accompany and perhaps enhance pre-held knowledge of the work that is ‘represented’. Ibid., 45, 192.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 62, 77.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 66.
complexity of pieces, which began to favour more consistent and less drastic changes in rhythm throughout a piece.\textsuperscript{51}

Perhaps the most lasting innovations of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, besides the proliferation of printed music, are the forms of the opera and the symphony, the latter of which is the form taken by many of the most influential and well-known pieces of what can be considered “pure music”. These forms led to an increase in the number of performers for which pieces were generally written – “the imminence of the opera [and symphony] was thus also the imminence of the orchestra.”\textsuperscript{52} However, by the end of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, it was still remarkable for 16 musicians to be performing a single piece.\textsuperscript{53} Major and minor modes developed into a system of major and minor keys through their use in opera and symphony, until they were fully realized in the Baroque period, especially by Bach. Using music as an expressive supplement to text went out of fashion as the chromaticism it usually employed was incompatible with major and minor keys. Instead, music itself came to be seen as “heightened speech” which could not speak in words but could nonetheless ‘say’ something through its melody and supporting harmonies.\textsuperscript{54}

The development from modes to keys and scales (and later, with Haydn, key \textit{changes} within the bounds of a single piece) provided music with both newfound stability and possibilities because songs could now have chord structures and progressions, things which simply do not apply when writing music polyphonically.\textsuperscript{55} The Baroque period, beginning around 1630 with the work of Monteverdi, is the earliest music that is still widely consumed and familiar to Western ears, because like much of the music up until Modernism and much of the

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 76.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 83.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 94.
popular music during and after Modernism, it exhibits “the system of major–minor harmony, enmeshed with regular rhythm and phase structure in smooth, clear forms” that was first brought to fruition in the Baroque period. The progression of the Baroque period into the Classical was marked in part by the demise of counterpoint, a particularly ornate compositional technique replete within Bach’s repertoire, and simpler melodies come into vogue.\textsuperscript{56} This attitude was reflected towards the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who preferred prominent melodies over complex chords and harmony.\textsuperscript{57} Although the popular madrigals of centuries past had gone out of style by Rousseau’s time, there was still a demand for music to be played in the home which was fulfilled by the premier composers of the day, especially Mozart.\textsuperscript{58} These were either pieces written specifically for piano, or simplified arrangements of more elaborate pieces restructured to account for the amateur player’s skill and the practical limitations of a single piano played with two hands.

Composers on the vanguard of musical innovation wrote for popular audiences in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century as well. For example, Claude Debussy reached prominence mostly by writing piano pieces and chamber music for small ensembles, and the likes of Stephen Foster by popular songs such as “Camptown Races”. This is in stark contrast with Richard Wagner’s contemporaneous work, which is seen by Griffiths as the apex of the development of \textit{harmony} over the 200 years before it, which was present in Medieval music but altogether more effective in the system of musical keys which was consolidated in the Baroque period.\textsuperscript{59} Mahler and Strauss would

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 123.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 144.
\textsuperscript{59} The length of the longest musical works also seemed to generally increase over time: 14\textsuperscript{th}-century composer Phillipe de Virty was pushing the boundaries of his time by producing works which could last up to six minutes, and Beethoven’s symphonies were consistently longer than his predecessor Mozart’s. There was also the debut of 5-act “grand operas” in the 1820’s, the duration of which pale in comparison to some Wagnerian operas, such as the four-hour \textsl{Tristan and Isolde} or \textsl{The Ring}, the latter of which took place over four installments in as many nights.
increase the size of their orchestras beyond even Wagner’s proportions while Schoenberg assembled the largest orchestra, numbering some 135 musicians, and these are the largest orchestras seen in Western music to this day, especially since the invention of electronic amplification made some practical concerns around volume obsolete. However, these composers wrote for large ensembles because they sought to create music that was a maximal, even overwhelming experience in terms of the lushness and expansiveness of the harmonies and tones employed in the piece. Such large orchestras were required not necessarily to achieve a sufficient volume, but rather a “more varied colour and greater dynamic range”. Schoenberg and his massive orchestra stood at the cusp of Modernism; his massive ensemble reflected both Romantic grandeur as well as the Modernist desire to test the limits of the past. He was the first composer working in the 20th century to fully dispense with the system of major/minor keys, which heralded not a return to polyphony but rather a shift to atonality. I will discuss the trajectory of music in the Modern period shortly, but now ask whether Griffiths is successful in identifying a developmental narrative within pre-Modern music.

Even once aberrations such as Josquin are dismissed from the historical record, these increases in complexity cannot be compared to the technological development of representation within painting. The goal of painting during the Vasarian narrative is relatively easy to describe, however difficult it might be to produce. The medium of the painting should be transparent, as though one really is looking directly at what is after all only represented by paint. Not only does music lack the representational capacities to share painting’s particular goal, but other goals it might have cannot be evaluated with the sort of perceptible, comparative test which is intuitively used to assess visual realism. It is just unclear what the ideal musical experience, construed in

60 Ibid., 213.
61 Ibid., 213.
terms of complexity or harmony or ensemble, might sound like, and it is equally unclear if and how anyone has achieved this goal.

Can the history of Modern music be compared to the history of Modern painting? This immediately seems more plausible than comparing their pre-Modern histories, as one of the defining characteristics of Modern painting is precisely its increasing distance from representational ambitions. While music was not developmental during the Vasarian period, and no technological usurpation turned music down the path of Modernism, Demers does outline some of the ways in which music went in a Modernist search for its essence during the first half of the 20th century. While arrhythmic and especially atonal elements had already long been a part of music, electronic instruments and the use of recording technology as an instrument enabled some of the explorations of the limits of tone and/or rhythm, although there is no way in which these technologies caused music to take this turn.62 Artistic movements in one artform are by no means hermetically sealed from others, and so the Modernist movement in the visual arts no doubt had some influence in encouraging similar explorations in sound, partly because music itself lacked its own internal catalyst due to its lack of a developmental history.

It seems that music was pulled into the current of Modernism by painting, increasingly honing in on the essences of its form until the dissociation of aesthetics from the concept of art became possible in music as well as in the visual arts. There were Modernist experiments in music reminiscent of those in painting. Consider, for example Henry Cowell, who played a piano

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62 Demers, Listening Through The Noise, 158; Kathleen Marie Higgins, The Music Between Us (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012): 4. Demers is correct in identifying some of the major avenues through which the boundaries of music were explored in Modernism (e.g. electronic instruments), but she errs in suggesting that these innovations inspired a turn away from music’s history comparable to the way Modernism did to painting. The differences between the pre-Modern histories of music and painting prevent are too different for this to be right. For instance, the striking of a real anvil was used to create the sound of an anvil strike in Wagner’s 1869 opera Rheingold – pre-Modern music was much closer to launching into a deconstruction of itself in search for its essence than pre-Modern painting was.
but sometimes depressed groups of keys with his forearm or plucked the piano strings with his fingers.\textsuperscript{63} Once atonality had dispensed with keys and scales, the next thing was to dispense with tonality altogether, and to abolish the distinction between sound and noise. Composers such as Varèse blurred this distinction but still controlled these sounds in a deliberately rhythmical way, a crucial difference from Cage’s 1952 aleatorical piece, \textit{4’33’’}.\textsuperscript{64} Modern music and painting occasionally shared visions, and sometimes artists as well. Luigi Russolo was a Modernist composer, evident from his explicit associations with the futurists, who foresaw the future as an impending age of machinery, a reality to be reflected in their art. Russolo did not limit his exploration of this theme to music, and he began his artistic career as a painter.\textsuperscript{65} Another example of the interaction between Modern music and painting is Picasso’s collaborations with the composer Igor Stravinsky.\textsuperscript{66} Griffiths notes the intuitive parallel between the jarring atonality of Modern music with the abstract, non-representational painting at the vanguard of Modern painting at the time. Just as the emotive lenses which distanced Expressionist and Impressionist painting from accurate representations of reality eventually became abstract masses of paint with no representational ambition to be distanced from, the limits of dissonance explored by the later Liszt, Mahler and Strauss gave way to atonality, within which the concept of dissonance has little relevance.\textsuperscript{67}

In the next chapter, I argue that \textit{4’33’’} by John Cage stands at the end of the Modernist developmental narrative within music. This piece not only establishes for music what \textit{Brillo Boxes} did for visual arts – that art can have any perceptible qualities whatsoever – but it goes

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 257
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 257
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 240
\textsuperscript{67} Griffiths, \textit{A Concise History of Western Music}, 228.
even further than *Brillo Boxes* in distancing particular perceptible qualities from an artwork, in a manner which illuminates a powerful critique of Danto which I will explain in the fourth and fifth chapters.
Chapter 3

Is 4’33” to Music What Brillo Boxes is to the Visual Arts?

Brillo Boxes certainly established that art could look like anything, but did it establish that art could sound like anything? Not directly perhaps, although another piece of art, John Cage’s 1952 piece 4’33”, conclusively demonstrates that sonic aesthetics are no longer required to define heard art either. This is good news for Danto’s theory, as he believes that the breaking down of the distinction between music and mere noise “parallels” Warhol’s breakthrough “in every way”.68 I argue that 4’33” does slightly more than this; Cage’s particular piece more fully demonstrates than Brillo Boxes the ontological separation of art from aesthetics that is characteristic of the “end of art”. Although beholding 4’33” was not the catalyst for Danto’s philosophical thought that Brillo Boxes was, Danto and his proponents might be wise to make more use of 4’33” as a conclusive demonstration of the fundamental separation between any perceptible quality of an artwork and its status as art, at least in the realm of music.

Some might argue that Brillo Boxes fails to ask the question Danto believes it to pose because Warhol’s work is not sufficiently indiscernible from mere real piles of Brillo boxes. It is, after all, technically true that Brillo Boxes consists of wooden boxes with a duplication of the real box’s decals screenprinted on the sides, and not a set of commercially manufactured cardboard Brillo boxes (i.e. it is not a readymade).69 Despite their initial indiscernibility, they could be determined to be wooden reproductions upon further inspection. Danto need not be perturbed by this counter-argument because i) he holds that initial indiscernibility (which Brillo Boxes achieves) is all that is needed to ask the philosophical question Warhol’s work poses, and

68 Danto, After The End of Art, 35.
ii) there are plenty of works of art which are indiscernible from the real thing because they simply are the real thing, but transfigured into art by an infusion of meaning (so that the piece embodies that meaning) by an artist.\textsuperscript{70}

\textit{4’33”} is a sonic example of the latter. In this piece, a pianist sits at a piano (or some other instrumentalist sits with their chosen instrument), and “plays” the three movements of the piece by never striking a single note. The pianist remains silent for the duration of the piece, but this should not indicate that the piece is meant to entail four minutes and 33 seconds of silence. Rather, Cage intended the sonic qualities of the piece to be whatever sounds the audience member happens to hear during that time, from the hum of the air conditioning system to the bustle of the street outside.\textsuperscript{71} It is completely indiscernible perceptibly from the sounds of the real world in real time, however subtle, because the sonic qualities of the work just are the sounds audible to the audience during the performance.

However devoid of aesthetic qualities it might be,\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Brillo Boxes} will always look the same. It is not as if Warhol or anyone else could have taken some non-art object, declare it to be art and refer to that as \textit{Brillo Boxes}, whether the end result looked like a Brillo box or a spatula. Warhol did not produce \textit{Brillo Boxes} on a single occasion, but in multiple runs over time. However, all of the individual wooden screenprinted boxes he created over time were indiscernible from the box of a particular brand of soap pads, and a particular design of that brand’s box at that. It was not the only brand of box he replicated, but those indiscernible boxes were separate artworks with separate titles to match their real-world counterparts, such as \textit{Mott’s}

\textsuperscript{70} Danto, \textit{What Art Is}, 37-8.
\textsuperscript{72} Danto seems to think that \textit{Brillo Boxes} might not have aesthetic qualities, while it is clear that Cage intends the sounds of an instance of \textit{4’33”} are to be attended to aesthetically, regardless of what they sound like. Whether or not a piece is beheld for its perceptual/aesthetic qualities is neither here nor there when discussing the (in)discernibility between the aesthetic/perceptual qualities of an artwork with a non-artwork. Danto, \textit{What Art Is}, 41, 148.
Box (Apple Juice). It is a fine line for Danto to draw to claim that a work has no aesthetic qualities when a work of art must look like a certain thing to be that particular work of art.

However, such a line does not have to be drawn, much less navigated. It can be avoided entirely by employing 4’33” as an example demonstrating the end of art thesis.

This is because performances of 4’33” need not share sonic qualities with each other. 4’33”, like all music, theatre, and literature, is an artwork that is a type which is instanced by a token of that type, a performance.73 Danto discusses this “type/token theory” in Transfiguration of the Commonplace: burning a copy of a poem (or sheet music) does not burn that actual artwork itself the way it would if I took a match to Warhol’s boxes.74 Cage’s piece totally avoids necessarily sharing perceptible properties between its token instances because it can be repeatedly instanced, and because the aleotoric nature of the piece means that whatever a particular performance sounds like is beyond the control of the performer (or the audience, for that matter).75 If a furnace explodes in a paint shop across the road from the recital hall during a performance, the sound of that explosion is part of what that token of 4’33” sounds like. It is a sound that is likely unique to that token of 4’33” amongst others, and indeed it is very possible that no two tokens of this type will ever sound exactly alike, not by accident but by design. Brillo Boxes might be aesthetically empty as a piece of art, but it still must look a certain way (i.e. initially indiscernible from real Brillo boxes) if they are to be individuated from other art and

74 Arthur C. Danto, Transfiguration of the Commonplace (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981): 33. Note that this would be true even if I were to burn all the copies of a piece’s sheet music or recordings. The Beatles’ early music certainly existed (in the minds of the Fab Four and their many fans) before any of it was committed to sheet music.
75 It is for this reason that Blacking’s definition of music as “humanly organized sound” does not apply to 4’33”. The sound of this piece itself is not organized, it is only that a period of time is indicated during which the audience listens to the unorganized sound. Davies comes to this same conclusion, noting that the structure of 4’33” is just so that no sounds are ambient; they are all part of the piece, and therefore the sounds within the piece cannot be said to be organized. Davies, Themes In The Philosophy of Music, 24; Higgins, The Music Between Us, 22.
non-art objects. 4’33” obviously does not look like anything (just as *Brillo Boxes* does not sound like anything), but nor does it have to sound a certain way in order for it to be an instance of 4’33”.

Imagine that 4’33” was scheduled to be performed by a Cage devotee at a recital hall for 100 consecutive nights. A provocateur who fundamentally misunderstands Cage’s piece thinks that this is all ridiculous and plans to show up each night to make a racket during the performance, destroying the silence that he erroneously believes to characterize the piece. He creates this racket outside of the recital hall for the first 99 nights, but falls ill and misses the final night’s performance. The performance of 4’33” that the audience hears on the 100th night is the exact same piece that was heard the previous 99 nights despite the radical sonic dissimilarities, and the racket-making cannot be said to have ruined any of the first 99 performances. Aesthetic considerations are thus deeply if not totally separated from 4’33” as a piece of art, even more so than in *Brillo Boxes*. This does not necessarily mean that the example of *Brillo Boxes* is unsuccessful in demonstrating the separation of the question of the definition of art from any particular aesthetic attributes, but that 4’33” is a clearer example of art which is more thoroughly separated from any of its own perceptible qualities.

This analysis of Cage’s piece demonstrates that the philosophical question posed by *Brillo Boxes* was not limited to the visual realm. However, I argue that 4’33”, with its even deeper separation between the artwork and its own perceptible qualities, illuminates an interesting challenge to Danto’s essentialist definition of art that does not *necessarily* invalidate his end of art thesis, but certainly adds a shade of doubt to the finality of his claims.

4’33” *and the Artworld*
Imagine a room in an office building where candidates for jobs are waiting to be interviewed. The atmosphere is formal and reserved, and the candidates are doing nothing in particular besides waiting their turn. Behind a curtain there sits in the corner of this room a record player, featuring a silently spinning record, playing consecutive recordings of 4’33”. The record plays continuously as the interviewees continue to wait. Did the candidates listen to 4’33” by John Cage? No. Even though they experienced basically the same atmospheric noise that they would have had they known of the sounding of the piece, they were simply unaware that any of the sounds they heard in that office were intended to form a part of any piece of art, let alone a currently-ongoing instance of 4’33” (as opposed to following Cage’s advice of listening to any sound aesthetically, as if it is art, whenever we can). The recordings of 4’33” that were played were silent so as to allow the atmospheric sounds of the office to become the embodied element, the artistic object of that particular instancing of 4’33”, but they were never perceived as such by the occupants of that room.

This is crucially not the same as putting a curtain between the group and a painting, or Brillo Boxes for that matter. 4’33” is a piece of music, a sonic work. Brillo Boxes is a work of visual art. The curtain over Brillo Boxes is preventing the audience from beholding the physical aspect, the embodied element of the work, while a curtain between the interviewees and the

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76 An objection could be raised at this point. It is that 4’33” is not a piece of music but a piece of performance art, which would importantly involve a visual aspect which would be obscured by the placement of the curtain in the thought experiment. I take most of my information on Cage’s authorial intentions from Stephen Davies’ chapter on the piece in Themes In The Philosophy of Music. Even though Davies comes to the conclusion that 4’33” is not music, I hold that the quotes from the composer Davies supplies indicates that the intent and meaning of the piece is in its sonic qualities, and that it is to be considered a piece of music. The pianist situated at the front of the performance or some other means of indicating the beginning and ending of the performance or recording is crucial to the piece, but the need for such an indication is not indicative of its status as a work of performance art, but it does demonstrate the necessity of institutional cues from the artworld in perceiving Cage’s piece in every instance. Furthermore, I doubt that 4’33” could be considered a single piece of performance art if the signification of the piece’s beginning and end could be achieved in such a wide variety of ways, including a live performance or recording. 4’33” is undoubtedly a single work of music, instanced in tokens of its type. Davies, Themes In The Philosophy of Music, 15.
A title often performs this function. I will turn to the importance of titles as well as Danto’s conception of the relationship between title and artwork on page 35 below.
unnecessary or jointly insufficient. I do not find 4'33" to be a compelling counter-example to Danto’s more recent abridged definition of art as an object which embodies an interpretable meaning, or any of the five conditions of the more comprehensive definition formulated by Noël Carroll:

Something is a work of art just in case it (1) is about something (2) about which it projects some attitude of point of view (this is what Danto means by the work’s possession of a style) (3) by means of metaphorical ellipses which (4) depend on some enthymematic material from the historico-theoretical artworld context (this material is generally what Danto thinks of as art theories), and which (5) engage the audience in interpreting the metaphors elliptically posed by the work in question.79

However, 4'33" seems to require a stronger indication that certain objects or sounds are to be perceived as art than Brillo Boxes. What is additionally required is a sort of institutional condition, demonstrating the importance of an artworld of the sort George Dickie imagines. This will challenge Danto’s definition not by contesting its criteria but by doubting that these criteria are as indefinitely immutable as Danto claims. In order to demonstrate the importance of an artworld as well as the cues it gives to regard certain objects as art to the definition and future of art, I must begin with a criticism of Danto put forth by Joseph Margolis which is alluded to in my thought experiment above.

Had Danto been in that waiting room, he too would have been oblivious to those instances of 4'33", despite all of his connoisseurship. So, despite the fact that the sounds of those instances of 4'33" are identical to non-art sounds (i.e. those sounds heard by the oblivious interviewees), the indiscernibility between art and non-art sounds would never have arisen in the mind of Danto or anyone else. In fact, Margolis argues, without the perceptible aid of some things beyond the two boxes he found to be indiscernible, Danto would never have realized the

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indiscernibility between Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* and those mass-produced ones found in a grocery store. In the next chapter, I will describe Margolis’ critique and show how the concession it forces upon Danto powerfully alludes to the importance of the artworld and how it is perceived in a way which largely vindicates George Dickie’s institutional theory of art.
Chapter 4

Danto’s Account of Perception

My basic contention in this chapter is that Danto’s account of perception has ignored or otherwise excluded the undoubtedly perceptible qualities which obtain between the *art object* and its institutional setting in space and time. Because of these cues art objects can look and sound exactly like non-art objects without being ultimately indiscernible from those non-art objects. The art object, as I will discuss in the final chapter, is the physical element of an artwork. There is reason to believe that such a distinction can be made, as Dickie and Danto agree that the physical element of an artwork is not all there is to the artwork, as it must also have some meaning or aboutness, which is embodied in the physical object of that artwork.  

Fundamental to my critique of Danto is the identification and dismissal of two undefended assertions he makes regarding the relationship between the art object and the artwork. Danto asserts that *only* perceptible qualities which belong *solely* to the art object are relevant to apprehending the artwork which that art object embodies, but he does not provide a cogent defence for this assertion. Relatedly, there seems to be no precise reason why Danto equates the reality that art can look or sound like anything after the end of art’s history on the one hand, and its exhaustion in contributing to its own definition on the other. This seems to commit Danto to an ironic view of the relationship between art and aesthetics: aesthetics, being art’s only option for the expression of its own definition, squanders itself as it makes its only insight directly relevant to the definition of art by proclaiming that it is no part of that very

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80 See page 47.
81 He does not say this explicitly, but he must take this to be the case if he is to consider Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* to be indiscernible from Harvey’s, and if he is to ignore the obvious counter-argument to his counter-argument to William Kennick, which I discuss below.
definition. It appears that the sole philosophical point of aesthetics, at least as far as the enterprise of defining art is concerned, was to excuse itself from definitional consideration.

*Danto’s Dilemma: How Does The Question of Indiscernibility Arise?*

Joseph Margolis’ criticism is essentially this: *just because art objects can look and sound like non-art objects does not mean that they are ultimately indiscernible from these objects.* If they were *totally* indiscernible from each other either both or neither of them would be seen as art. Danto failed to realize that the perceptible properties of the art *object* do not exhaust the perceptible qualities of the *artwork*. For example, while the art object of *Brillo Boxes* might not have been more than screen-printed wooden boxes, more than just these boxes had to be perceived in order to know one was perceiving *Brillo Boxes*, a work of art meant to look just like a non-art Brillo box seen at home or at the grocery store. It is worth quoting Margolis at this juncture, who poses the conundrum Danto’s theory is in quite pointedly:

> If the eye cannot ‘determine’ the real or actual ‘difference’ between an artwork and a ‘mere real thing’, we cannot ever discern the real presence of an artwork; and if there are no artworks discerned as such … then indiscernibility never arises as a real puzzle. If artworks happen to be sensorily discernible from real things, but exist, then artworks must be discernible in some sense, and if there is no discernible difference that marks an artwork as really different from a thing that is not an artwork, then there are no artworks unless…artworks are identical with real things. (Which, on [Danto’s] argument, is false.) Artworks cannot be real enough to be denoted and individuated if they are not real enough to have discernible properties *qua* art.\(^82\)

Margolis extends this critique to question not only the paradoxical nature of Danto’s indiscernibility puzzle (i.e. that artworks are thought to be indiscernible from non-art objects only once one is able to discern an art object from its identical non-art object counterpart), but also Danto’s account of perception when it comes to works of art:

> If they [artworks] are real, if they possess sensorily discriminable properties as well as the non-sensory but perceivable, intentionally complex properties we usually adduce,

then it is pointless to insist that ‘perception’ should or can be confined in such a way as to exclude the discernibility of just what distinguishes artworks from mere real things.\(^83\)

What sort of “non-sensory but perceivable, intentionally complex properties we usually adduce” are these? There are examples from Danto’s own art criticism. James Shelley notes that Danto appreciates Duchamp’s *Fountain* for its “daring, impudence, irreverence, wit, and cleverness”.\(^84\) These are qualities of *Fountain* which are not be directly perceived in the way whiteness or smoothness are, but are nonetheless as crucial to a proper understanding of the piece as appreciating the “elegance and grace” of Mozart’s 39th Symphony is to its proper understanding.\(^85\) What is the status of the attributes Danto notes, and how does one perceive them in order to note them?

I do not think that Danto can offer a convincing answer to these questions without conceding that the “daring, impudence, irreverence, wit, and cleverness” of *Fountain* have something to do with seeing that particular object *within that particular space*,\(^86\) something which is seen just as plainly as one sees that the art object itself is a urinal with a signature scrawled upon it. This is not to say that daring, impudence, and those other qualities of *Fountain* are literally seen the way its white gloss is; keep in mind that these qualities are *non-sensory but perceptible*, and so it is not, for example, that one actually sees irreverence, but to appreciate the irreverence of the piece one must see (even if only via a photograph) that there is a urinal with a signature scrawled upon it placed in an art gallery, and *this* is what is seen just as plainly as its whiteness or smoothness.

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\(^{83}\) Ibid., 369.


\(^{85}\) Ibid., 370.

\(^{86}\) Timing is also important. While Danto obviously did not see the piece when it debuted in 1917, at least part of the reason that *Fountain* is so irreverent and daring is that *Fountain* was a urinal displayed as an artwork in an art gallery in 1917, not 2007.
Even if an audience member knew that *Fountain* had been rejected by the Society of Independent Artists but subsequently displayed in Alfred Steiglitz’s gallery, one would have to somehow perceive that they are in that gallery to be sure that the urinal before them is *Fountain* and to actually perceive the juxtaposition between the art object and its institutional setting which is presumably behind the aforementioned qualities which Danto identified in the work. Similarly, Danto could not have been sure, and would probably not even have realized that Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* were works of art at all, were they not prominently displayed in the Stable Gallery, or some other space in which the objects therein (most of which are indicated and individuated by their title or in some other way) are meant to be seen as art. When Danto entered the Stable Gallery on the fateful day he first witnessed *Brillo Boxes*, he knew that the objects he was about to see were art. It may have been a shock to see *Brillo Boxes* as art (it was, after all, worthy of philosophical epiphany), but it was only because of Danto seeing an art object that, apart from its being seen in an art gallery and likely with a clearly associated title, was indiscernible from a non-art object that he was able to have “consciousness” of what he believed to be the end of art history.

Unlike theory, the institutions of the artworld and the cues they generate to perceive art as art *can* themselves be perceived, and can therefore have relational properties between themselves and the art object which are a part of the artwork, but cannot be countenanced by recourse to the perceptible properties of the art object alone. Danto seems to overlook the place that the perception of relational properties between an art object and its surrounding play in apprehending an artwork. As Thomas Leddy points out, a given object will have many relational properties to other objects which, at least from certain vantage points, are not perceivable (e.g.
the spatial relation between an apple tree and Alpha Centauri, especially at noon).\textsuperscript{87} However, depending on the context, certain relational properties \textit{will} be perceivable between an art object and its surroundings. Danto admits that such relational properties are perceivable when he holds that perceiving the relation of similarity between what is represented and what represents is an ahistorical feature of perception.\textsuperscript{88}

\textit{Perceiving Art Objects With Other Things: The Role of Institutional Cues in Perceiving Art}

I seek to develop Margolis’ criticism by suggesting that the conditions of the discernibility between art and everyday objects are what I call “institutional cues”, perceivable things which indicate that certain physical entities in a certain place and/or time (i.e. the art object) is to be attended to as an artwork. How these cues manifest, change over time, and bear on the definition of art can be best explained with the use of George Dickie’s institutional theory of the artworld. This leads to an implication of Margolis’ argument which Margolis does not realize or at least under-develops: that Danto is probably wrong about the end of art history because he excludes from his scope of what counts as “perceivable” the very perceivable cues which initially allowed him to see \textit{Brillo Boxes} as art while still seeing ‘indiscernible’ everyday Brillo boxes as non-art.

Margolis does hint at the argument I am pursuing, but does not use the language of artworlds and institutions. He notes that “the ‘sensory’ indiscernibility of the difference between an artwork and some ‘mere real thing’ is (must be) internal to the common conceptual space in which artworks and mere real things are themselves differentiated,”\textsuperscript{89} or there would be no way to tell which of two identical objects (one art, one not) is an artwork, or, in cases like \textit{Brillo Boxes}.

\textsuperscript{88} Danto, “The Pigeon Within Us All,” 41.  
\textsuperscript{89} Margolis, “Farewell To Danto and Goodman,” 370.
Boxes where the art object looks like an everyday object, no way to tell that there is an artwork present at all.\textsuperscript{90} The indiscernibility between what seems to be two identical non-art objects (like two or two dozen Brillo boxes stacked neatly in a grocery store) would have been the rather mundane observation which would have occurred to Danto despite his erudition had Brillo Boxes been taken out of its institutional context and placed beside its cardboard inspiration on the grocery store shelf. This is hardly the same as the realization of indiscernibility which ignited his grand theory!

The “common conceptual space” Margolis describes is precisely an institutionalized space of the artworld. Art can be shown or sounded anywhere, but there are cases in which any audience, regardless of their knowledge of art theory, require cues to see certain objects as an artwork or part of an artwork. \textit{4’33”} obviously does not have to be sounded in a concert hall or other music venue, but as I have shown in the thought experiment above, the art object (i.e. the sounds of \textit{4’33”}) is only perceived as an art object at all if something external to the art object itself directs the audience to do so.

A counter-argument of Danto’s to a thought experiment by William Kennick and a counter-argument to Danto put forth by Carlin Romano further show how Danto’s concept of perception led him away from what otherwise seem to be obvious answers. Kennick imagines a

\textsuperscript{90} This may seem like two iterations of the same example, but a response to Danto should make the distinction in passing because Danto himself does. In his work on interpretation, Danto notes that, however unlikely it may be, a random event may lead to the creation of an object which is indiscernible from the art object, even if that art object is something which would be uncontroversially classified as art, like Michelangelo’s \textit{David}. It this instance, both objects would look like art objects, although only one would be an art object because one embodies a meaning while the other is a creation of chance. In the second case, an artist creates an art object which is deliberately indiscernible with an already-existing non-art object, as is the case with \textit{Brillo Boxes}. In the first case, the question which arises relies on the art object looking uncontroversially like an artwork. I will explain later that this is because artworld conventions and cues, especially pre-Postmodern ones, rely on forms or styles which are perceptible by perceiving the art object alone, denuded of any cues external to its object. In the latter case, the question of indiscernibility, as Margolis notes, relies on some sort of discernibility that has to do with something other than just the perceptual qualities of the art object in isolation.
very large warehouse filled with a full array of objects, some art and some not. His point is that even someone who cannot fathom a very convincing definition of art (i.e. most people, including philosophers of art) will have reasonable success in differentiating artworks from non-art.91 Danto denies this by imagining two warehouses, one filled with art objects, and the other filled with identical objects which, however they were created (e.g. furnace explosions or other serendipitous events), are perceptibly indiscernible from the objects in the art warehouse. In the post-Warhol age, art can look like anything and so imagining these indiscernible warehouses is possible at this stage in art history. According to Danto “we now have enough clarity on the matter to say that no perceptible criterion can be given, that whatever is involved in knowing which are the artworks, it can only contingently be a matter of recognitional capacities of the sort exercised by Kennick’s warehouseman.”92

While this may be correct, it is also true that Danto too would have been unable to determine which warehouse was the one actually full of artworks. This is because Danto excludes the perceptions of which objects are in which warehouse – as Romano notes, “it seems clear that one could give a perceptible criterion – say like “the artwork in Kennick’s warehouse” to distinguish which objects are art (and are to be seen and interpreted as such) and which are not.93 It is without a perceptible quality such as this – one cannot see or hear that this warehouse is full of art, and that one is not by perceiving the art object by itself, but by perceiving a spatial relationship between the art object and the warehouse which is somehow designated as the one filled with art. Without this cue, even the artists of those pieces would be helpless, if the objects are really as indiscernible as Danto says they are. This is why Margolis is correct in saying that

91 Danto, Transfiguration of The Commonplace, 60.
92 Ibid., 61. Emphasis original.
the “indiscernibility” between art and non-art objects really relies on some sort of discernibility after all, or the idea of there being an art object which looks identical to a non-art object would never have arisen. This discernibility also depends on perception, on apprehending the art object in a certain space and time, which Danto for some reason decided was outside the scope of what it is that is perceived when one perceives art.

**Titles and Artworks**

A primary example of these sorts of institutional cues are *titles*, which can provide varying degrees of information about their bearers. What importance do titles have to perceiving art, especially Postmodern art, and are these titles a part of the artwork to which they belong?

Of course artworks are not the only things with titles bestowed upon them, but when it comes to artworks and the sorts of titles they have, “mere things are unentitled to titles”. Romano notes that “ever-sensitive to the real-world problematic situation, [Danto] agrees that a title “is a direction for interpretation” that can’t be ignored as data”. Danto holds that titles give clues as to the meaning of a piece and how it is to be interpreted. However, titles are important not only to correctly interpreting a piece, but also to correctly making the distinction not only between two otherwise identical artworks (e.g. Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* and Mike Bidlo’s 2005 Appropriationist piece *Not Warhol*) but between artworks and non-artworks as well. Titles are both i) directions for interpretation in the sense of guiding an artistic interpretation (even if the piece is titled *Untitled*), and often ii) an indication that the titled object is to be interpreted artistically at all.

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94 Margolis, “Farewell To Danto And Goodman,” 366.
95 Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 3.
Is the title of an artwork part of that artwork? Danto does not offer a clear answer, but it seems that they are not. This is because Danto equates the perceptible qualities of the art object with the perceptible qualities of the artwork: in many cases, the title of an artwork is not a perceptible property of the art object, and would therefore not be a perceptible property of the artwork as Danto defines “perception”. Even in cases where the title of the work is printed upon the object, one cannot be certain (especially when it comes to Modern art and beyond) that those words are really the title (although it might make for an obvious choice). This becomes clear when Danto discusses one of Sterne’s monochromes:

Sterne gives the reader [the theoretical and interpretive background] required to understand why it [Sterne’s monochrome black square] was there. Otherwise the reader, however much cultural baggage he carried, would not have perceived it as other than a black square. Sterne shows – in words – how it is a meaningful black square. But it would have hardly been possible to see monochrome squares as art before, perhaps, 1969.97

Given Danto’s knowledge of art theory, I am sure that merely a title would have sufficed to direct him to Sterne’s artwork instead of the mere “black square” he would have seen should the title have been absent, although without the title or anything else as assistance he would have been as oblivious to the artwork as the hoi polloi. So there are cases, including 4’33”, Brillo Boxes and Sterne’s monochromes, where Danto must concede that the knowledge of history and theory on the part of the beholder are simply not all that is necessary to see art as art, even when the piece is shown or sounded in one’s presence. Danto demonstrates this himself when he admits that no-one, “however much cultural baggage [they] carried” would perceive Sterne’s black monochrome pieces as art, as anything more than non-art black panels, without an adjacent piece of text. Does this mean that Sterne’s paintings are not really paintings at all, but

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multimedia pieces composed of theoretical literature and monochrome painting? Danto clearly thinks not.\textsuperscript{98} So then, what is the relationship between Sterne’s painted black panel and this text? It does not necessarily play a significantly \textit{theoretical} role, as someone could know all about Sterne’s paintings and still, according to Danto, see it as a mere black panel when the title and explanatory text is absent. Instead, the title and text play an \textit{institutional} role, acting as a curator, or signifying the artistic atmosphere deliberately cultivated by galleries and exhibitions.

Danto would be similarly oblivious if he found himself in the same gallery of red squares he imagines at the beginning of the \textit{Transfiguration of the Commonplace}: in the presence of what appear to be the visually identical art objects as well as some non-art objects (also identical to each other and the art objects) but, unlike in Danto’s though experiment, without titles affixed to the artworks. Within this gallery, there are several identical red squares. Most of them are artworks, each of their own style and interpretation, but two are non-artworks.\textsuperscript{99} Without titles, Danto would not be able to tell which artwork is which, or even which red squares are artworks and which are not – if he could, then how are they indiscernible? Furthermore, unless the Danto in this thought experiment lived in a society in which red squares were considered art by convention (the way even children in our society generally know that finely painted flat squares hung on walls are generally art), he would not have known that he was looking at art at all had he not somehow perceived that he was inside an art gallery.

The cases which most vividly show Danto wrong in his account of perception – and ultimately about the end of art history – are those in which the perception of art as art requires institutional cues regardless of the erudition of the audience. This is precisely the case with

\textsuperscript{98} Even if he did, affirming this would seem to ridiculously entail that every artwork with a title is in part a piece of literature.

\textsuperscript{99} See Danto, \textit{Transfiguration of the Commonplace}, 1-3.
4’33”, which can act as a brief case study in institutional cues in preparation for a more intensive discussion of the artworld and change within it. In order to hear 4’33” as art and not simply non-art sounds – the sort of which you may be hearing right now – will require institutional cues in every single instance, even if the intended audience is John Cage himself. The institutional cue in this case is not merely the instruction to listen to everyday sounds with an aesthetic ear or with special attention to the emotions those sounds might evoke: this may seem novel and strange to some audiences, but as Cage points out, this can be done at any time with any sounds.100

Doing so might very well be an aesthetic experience, but it is not an instance of the artwork 4’33” unless one were to intentionally listen to the sounds around them in this way for four minutes and 33 seconds, somehow indicating the beginning and end of this timeframe to oneself (perhaps silently), as well as to anyone who is to be a member of the audience of that instance of 4’33”. In order to be the audience to 4’33” and not the performer, a person will not only have to realize that the “background noises” of the “silent” performance really constitute the sounds (i.e. the object) of the piece, they will also need some way of knowing which four minutes and 33 seconds actually contain that particular performance. Although an instance of 4’33” or a portion of it may sound exactly similar to freely listening to everyday sounds with an aesthetic ear, those who are perceiving an instance of 4’33” know that those sounds are part of that work, a performance, and not their own free aesthetic adventuring; “the ‘real’ sounds of ‘his’ ‘work’ have been made subject to all the traditional, temporal, presentational, organized constraints associated with any concert hall performance”, and some indication of these

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100 See John Cage’s essay “Experimental Music” (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Music Teachers National Association, Chicago, Illinois, Winter 1957), 3. In addition to listening to ordinary sounds aesthetically, he also encourages their listener to listen to these sounds in a manner which evokes emotion. The following quote is representative: “Hearing sounds which are just sounds immediately sets the theorizing mind to theorizing, and the emotions of human beings are continually aroused by encounters with nature…sounds, when allowed to be themselves, do not require that those who hear them do so unfeelingly.”
constraints must be made clear to the intended audience. Otherwise, although they might be following Cage’s aesthetic missive, they will not perceive any particular instance of 4’33”.

Griffiths notes that music, even before the advent of notation, had to deal with the problem of boundaries in time: how to end a piece, how to transition from music to silence, another piece, or whatever sound surrounds the audience. Once music can sound like anything, as it can in any instance of 4’33”, the perceptible qualities of the art object alone can no longer serve to distinguish the sounds of the artwork from the sounds which are not part the artwork (or at least that instance of 4’33”). The additional cue required to apprehend a performance of 4’33” as an artwork could come in many forms. Two ready examples are the use of some instrumentalist to signify the beginning and ending of the piece, or a timed recording of the piece with an accompanying piece of explanatory text, similar to the blurb of text appearing beside Sterne’s monochromes. This reliance on institutional cues is perceptible and, as Margolis rightly notes, must be in place for the question of the indiscernibility between some works of art and everyday, non-art objects to arise in the first place.

Consider this quote of Danto’s: “the work vindicates its claim to be art by propounding a brash metaphor: the brillo-box-as-work-of-art. And in the end this transfiguration of a commonplace object transforms nothing in the artworld. It only brings to consciousness the structures of art which, to be sure, required a certain historical development before the metaphor was possible”. I concur with Margolis’ reading of the quote, which is to say that for Danto the art object really is just the plywood, paints, sounds, dead sharks or whatever material the artwork

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101 Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 265
103 As I will discuss in the next chapter, the possession by a piece of a form or style (which is itself theoretically and historically connected to the artworld) served as a prominent institutional cue for indicating that certain objects are artworks even on the vanguard of art until well into Modernism.
is made out of; it is when the consciousness of art theory is thrust upon these objects that the transfiguration takes place seemingly before our eyes - although Danto is very clear in the quote above that it is really in our minds. How then, is the recognition of art as art, and the institutional cues which are clearly necessary to apply a theoretical mindset to an art object whose meaning is inextricable from that mindset, a different enterprise entirely from the search for art’s definition, if that definition has anything to do with correctly identifying artworks as such? Considering how important the recognition of Brillo Boxes as art by Danto despite its innovative ‘indiscernibility’ from non-art objects was to his conclusion that the end of art is upon us because art can no longer say anything about itself definitionally, it is interesting that institutional cues and settings play no acknowledged role in Danto’s account of perception, or that he so rigorously distances recognition of art as art from its definition.\footnote{Ibid., 61.} Indeed, Danto admits that it was not Warhol but he who realized that art and the aesthetic were now asunder and that the history of art was now over: “I cannot credit Warhol with more in this regard [i.e. bringing about the end of art] than awakening me to consciousness through the vivid example of Brillo Boxes.”\footnote{Danto, “Replies To Essays,”, 304.} It is a philosophically significant piece to Danto because the perceptible indiscernibility of the art object requires external institutional cues to recognize it as art, although Danto does not realize it this way because his scope of perception does not extend beyond the art object.

What is more, Danto has no explanation for what stops these perceptible relations between an artwork and its institutional surrounding from providing a further avenue for art’s historical progression which could produce a counter-example to Danto’s definition of art regardless of how valid it might be now, largely because these cues are obscured in his account of perception. Fully exploring this potentiality will require a more developed account of both
sides of these relations which Danto perceives but seems to ignore: the art object on the one hand, and institutional cues on the other. I will spend the next chapter elucidating these concepts with recourse to George Dickie’s institutional theory of the artworld.
Chapter 5

The Institutional Theory of Art and the Art Object/Artwork Distinction

In this chapter I will explain how perceptible qualities which cannot be countenanced solely by reference to the art object are some in some cases (including Brillo Boxes and 4’33”) necessary to perceive an art object as an artwork at all. First, I must make clear a distinction I have so far only alluded to: how an art object is different from an artwork. Making this distinction will in turn demand an account of what it is that ultimately makes such a distinction possible to observe: the artworld. The idea of an artworld is inspired by Danto’s 1964 theory in which he posited that what is needed to see an indiscernibly ordinary-looking artwork from its non-art doppelganger is “something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: and artworld.” George Dickie adopts and develops Danto’s notion of the artworld in Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis (1974) and The Art Circle (1984). Despite his indebtedness to Danto, Dickie’s focus on the issue of art’s definition differs somewhat from his: while Danto pursued an essentialist definition of art, Dickie does not provide a definition for art so much as a definition of the decentralized, informal institution, or artworld, within which art is created, appreciated, interpreted, critiqued, and ultimately defined by those such as Danto. A definition of art is contained within Dickie’s definition of the artworld, but are Dickie and Danto’s definitions of art similar? They can be made compatible once Danto’s definition of art is amended to state that no-one can be certain that his essentialist definition (or anyone else’s) will not be invalidated by a future counterexample from the artworld.

Let me start with Dickie’s notion of “the artworld”. Dickie has developed two versions of his institutional theory of art. My approach is derived from the later version, articulated in 1984’s *The Art Circle*, which was in part a response to critics of the first version from a decade before. This is the definition of the institution of the artworld he proffered in 1984:

(1) an artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of an artwork…

(2) a work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public…

(3) a public is a set of persons who are prepared in some degree to understand an object that is presented to them…

(4) the artworld is the totality of all artworld systems…

(5) an artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld.¹⁰⁸

*The Art Object vs. the Artwork*

Dickie admits that his definition is circular. Before I address the circularity of this definition, some of its terms deserve further elaboration. The first is the idea of artifactuality. Both Dickie and Danto agree that a work of art must contain some sort of physical aspect, which is to say that every artwork contains some art object. Danto says as much when even his later, simplified definition describes art as “embodied meanings”.¹⁰⁹ Dickie similarly holds that every artwork must be an artifact (and parallel to Danto’s notion of meaningfulness, Dickie holds that works must have “aboutness”).¹¹⁰ To be clear, there is more to Dickie’s notion of artifactuality

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¹¹⁰ The physical nature of music is difficult to account for, but it is at least physical insofar as music depends on perturbations of the air (or the lack thereof in the case of silence, even if it is just a rest between notes) produced by token performances. A similar difficulty might also arise with literature, which is not totally reducible to the written word. Remember that not all music pieces have been notated, or exist on some sort of recording - but the sound of music is an undeniably physical thing, as is the performance of the piece, even if the instancing in question is a recording of that performance.

What is the relationship between the meanings or aboutness of an artwork and the practices of the artworld? As opposed to established practices, conventions, and cues, what is nonconventional about a particular piece of art is its subject matter, or aboutness.¹¹⁰ I think the meaning or aboutness of the piece can be nonconventional in two different ways, although Dickie primarily intends the first. Meanings of artworks can be nonconventional in light of artworld conventions when what an artwork is about is simply unrelated to what allows it to be perceived as art. The piece of art may be quite conventional in how it is perceived as an artwork but be radical in its subject matter when judged by other social or political metrics (Mapplethorpe’s erotic photography, or Country Joe McDonald’s “I Feel Like I’m Fixin’ To Die Rag” are two examples). This point is more difficult to make with pieces that somehow subvert one or more artworld conventions, as they can be about the very conventions which allows it to embody the
than physicality, principally the notion that an artifact, unlike physical objects which are not artifacts, must be physically altered by the human who intended to produce that artifact.\footnote{The notion of physicality is easily retained within the notion of artifactuality even if - as, for example, with ready-mades - what Dickie calls “pointing and calling” is sufficient to turn an object into an artifact of the artworld (as opposed to say, an artifact of the military-industrial complex, however more formal this institution might be) (Dickie, \textit{The Art Circle}, 46). Once again, why this seems so obviously to the case has to do with institutional cues. Would the situation that Danto observed in the Stable Gallery have been much different had Warhol seen a Brillo box lying on a vacant lot, declared it to be art and built the Gallery which Danto saw around it? Sure, the box would have been made of cardboard instead of wood, and would have been a true ready-made, but the apparent indiscernibility which Danto observed and the implications he believed it had for art history would have been the same. What is done to the sounds of any performance of \textquote{Fi33} beyond listening to them with an ear towards the aesthetic, or in the case of \textit{Brillo Boxes}, marvelling at how unaesthetic and ordinary an artwork can be? If an auditory signal is used to indicate the beginning and end of performances, it must be somehow distinguishable from the aleatoric noises which make up the piece. If they are not, they too will fade into these}

The \textit{art object} is not the sole referent of all of the perceptible qualities of the \textit{artwork}, as the cues which indicate that the art object is an artwork are perceptible as well as the art object itself. The art object is a particular physical thing or collection of things (with the caveat of footnote 110 above concerning music in mind) which can be specified and delineated apart from artworld cues and the rest of its surroundings. It would be self-injurious for Danto and his proponents to deny the discernibility of an art object from its surroundings, as his indiscernibility problem relies on identifying two objects which are indiscernible, and they would hardly be indiscernible if he was unable to specify which two rectangular cuboids were indistinguishable from each other, however different their surroundings obviously were. In the case of \textit{Brillo Boxes}, the art object (the wooden, screenprinted boxes) is separate from the Stable Gallery, and all the institutional cues which identify that building as an art gallery, as well as the cues which identify those particular boxes as a work of art titled \textit{Brillo Boxes}. Similarly, the sounds of any instance of \textquote{Fi33} are clearly separate from the institutional cue(s) used to signify the beginning and ending of the performance, as well as the performance’s venue.\footnote{If an auditory signal is used to indicate the beginning and end of performances, it must be somehow distinguishable from the aleatoric noises which make up the piece. If they are not, they too will fade into these}

\footnote{The art object is not the sole referent of all of the perceptible qualities of the art object, as the cues which indicate that the art object is an artwork are perceptible as well as the art object itself. The art object is a particular physical thing or collection of things (with the caveat of footnote 110 above concerning music in mind) which can be specified and delineated apart from artworld cues and the rest of its surroundings. It would be self-injurious for Danto and his proponents to deny the discernibility of an art object from its surroundings, as his indiscernibility problem relies on identifying two objects which are indiscernible, and they would hardly be indiscernible if he was unable to specify which two rectangular cuboids were indistinguishable from each other, however different their surroundings obviously were. In the case of \textit{Brillo Boxes}, the art object (the wooden, screenprinted boxes) is separate from the Stable Gallery, and all the institutional cues which identify that building as an art gallery, as well as the cues which identify those particular boxes as a work of art titled \textit{Brillo Boxes}. Similarly, the sounds of any instance of \textquote{Fi33} are clearly separate from the institutional cue(s) used to signify the beginning and ending of the performance, as well as the performance’s venue.}
While an *art object* is separable from institutional cues, it is much less clear that the *artwork* is separable from these institutional cues. In many cases, these cues are so engrained that it may not seem like cues are being taken at all. Especially from the art of (early) Modernism and before, institutional cues were often contained within the piece because of conventions such as *style* and *form*. It is no coincidence that many of the essentialist definitions of art which do not attempt to grapple with the reality that art can now look or sound like anything often base their definition on style or form, which are often perceptible with sole reference to the art object. It therefore seems that institutional cues can manifest themselves through certain ways of *producing* an art object, as well as certain ways of *displaying* it.\(^{113}\) Now that, post-Warhol, art can look or sound like anything, reliance on the latter sort has become increasingly necessary, since in some cases (the ones most interesting to the philosophy of art), no perceptible qualities which make reference to only the art object can differentiate the art object from some non-art object(s). Where Danto is wrong, and where Dickie’s institutional theory can be helpfully deployed, is when Danto declares – ironically, as we shall see, by fiat – that only those perceptible qualities which make reference only to the art object are necessary to the perception of the art object as an artwork. Danto is clear in the quote above that perceiving something as a work of art changes nothing materially – the sounds heard in the waiting room of my thought experiment really were the exact same sounds as those that would have been heard by those people at the same time had they been aware of the recording of *4’33”*. Danto is correct that the *art object* is (at least in the case of *4’33”* and *Brillo Boxes*) is indiscernible from the non-art object, but he is wrong that the *artwork* is indiscernible from the non-art object.

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\(^{113}\) The production of an art object could refer to a performance or instancing, during which the physical element of music (or theatre, or literature) is produced or manifests.
A work of art is irreducibly embodied, and similarly, it is irreducibly meaningful. This is why the art object alone is sometimes insufficient to be considered the artwork, because without institutional cues and the work’s perceivable relations to them, the art object that is truly indiscernible from a non-art object has no artistic meaning, even though the object does not change physically at all when it is attended to as art. This is why it matters that a work of art must be perceivable as a work of art if it is to be a work of art at all. 4'33" vividly shows how

114 Andina, The Philosophy of Art: The Question of Definition, 164; “Herwitz warns against those who seek to understand works of art simply as instantiations of particular philosophical theories. As he argues, works of art are never merely illustrative of theoretical schemas but contain elements which are often not entirely in conformity with the theory which informs them. Even in the most conceptually based artworks, the work always exceeds the theoretical framework which underlies it. Rather than simply being derivative of a particular theory, the artwork is just as much a product of the artist’s interaction with his or her materials which can lead the artist in unexpected directions – ones that resist or call into question the underlying philosophical premises of the work. Thus, for example, he demonstrates how some of the visual features of Mondrian’s work resist the philosophical claims Mondrian makes on behalf of his work.” Llewellyn Negrin, “Art and Philosophy: Rivals or Partners?” Philosophy and Social Criticism 31.7 (2005): 816.

A recent objection to this claim has come from Goldie and Schellekens with the “Idea Idea”, or the contention that conceptual art "has no physical medium: the medium of conceptual art is ideas, and any physical presence is merely the means by which the artist lets us gain access to his ideas. . . . The idea idea, thus understood, is that conceptual art works with ideas, or with concepts, as the medium, and not with shapes, colours, or materials.” (Wesley D. Cray, “Conceptual Art, Ideas and Ontology,” The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 72.3 (2014): 235). Conceptual Art, it is contended, is a form of art that is made up of nothing but thoughts, concepts and meanings. In the case of Conceptual Art, the physical element of the artwork does not just approach zero, it reaches it. This is incorrect. Conceptual Art is still irreducibly embodied, and the confusion seems to largely arise from the muddling of a crucial distinction. Just because an instance of conceptual art does not have to have any perceptible qualities in common with another instance of that same work (think of how different two isolated performances of 4′33″ might be) does not entail that work of conceptual art is in no way embodied. I have already discussed how auditory pieces of art including 4′33″ are physical because each instance relies on perceiving vibration in the air, or the lack thereof. Literature is also perceptual, despite the argument of Lamarque, who uses this claim to assert that conceptual art is also non-perceptible (Peter Lamarque, “On Perceiving Conceptual Art,” in Peter Goldie and Elizabeth Schellekens (eds.) Philosophy and Conceptual Art (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 5-6). He is quite correct that the size or font of the text has no bearing on the meaning of a piece of literature, but it is nonetheless the case that one must see, hear, or feel (i.e. Braille) some sort of text which is the medium for that piece of art and the meaning it contains within its words. Much the same is true for pieces of conceptual art, which are held to no more than thoughts. A quote from Mel Bochner is representational of this position: “two relevant features of the ‘ideal Conceptual work’ would be that it have an exact linguistic correlative, that is, it could be described and experienced in its description, and that it be infinitely repeatable. It must have absolutely no ‘aura’, no uniqueness whatsoever.” (Lamarque, “On Perceiving Conceptual Art,” 5). Despite appearances, this quote actually does precious little to establish the disembodiment of Conceptual art. Even if a piece of conceptual art really can be experienced fully in its description, there must be some way of communicating this description to the audience, unless you are the artist of this description. So, it seems like Conceptual Art will force me to make a small concession: art is irreducibly embodied when it is experienced by anyone other than the artist, and even then it seems that only the kind of art one can perform for oneself as an artist in an unembodied way is Conceptual Art. So, to the extent art involves anything more than thinking thoughts to oneself, it is embodied.

113 See the block quote from Margolis on page 33 above, in which he notes that artworks must be in some way discernible from non-artworks if we are to be sure that they exist as artworks.
knowledge of artistic theory alone can sometimes be insufficient. Recognizing and defining art are therefore not different enterprises, because how art is recognized as art at that point in history is certainly relevant to the definition of art at that time. While institutional cues and conventions were often contained within the object of the past, these cues have become external in an increasing number of pieces, so that the historical conventions surrounding the production, criticism, display and sometimes the censorship of artworks (i.e. the artworld, even before such a thing as ‘the artworld’ or even ‘art’ was conceptualized) are operative in enabling an audience to perceive artworks in a manner that can no longer be satisfied with reference to form, style or the art object alone.

The institutional theory recognizes that all artworks contain physical entities in some way, but not every single perceptible property of the art object is necessarily a part of the artwork. The back of a painted canvas, and whatever perceptible properties it might have, is an example of this. That we generally ignore the back of a painted canvas when perceiving it as art is a rather durable convention of the artworld by and large, and it is supported by another – that the audience, unless otherwise instructed, does not touch (or overturn!) the artworks they appreciate. By contrast, if a painted canvas were deliberately suspended from the ceiling in the middle of a room, allowing the audience to walk all around it and view all of its sides, the piece would adhere to the convention of not touching artworks while clearly flaunting another by explicitly giving the audience the opportunity to disregard one convention of the artworld (or possibly two, if one considers the mounting of paintings on flat, vertical surfaces another artworld convention). This hypothetical sculpture-painting derives its novelty as an artwork from

117 Another example of a rather durable convention noted by Dickie is the audience-non-participation convention which is still largely prevalent in theatre. Dickie, *The Art Circle*, 76.
playing on the conventions which it is able to wield only because it is in a space where it is indicated that artworld conventions are in effect (and there to be broken).\textsuperscript{118}

\textbf{The Mechanisms of the Artworld}

The artworld relies on human activity, and people can assume multiple roles within the artworld. The two most prominent roles are those of the artist and the audience member, but the membership of the artworld extends beyond these two simplified roles.\textsuperscript{119} This quote from Dickie vividly portrays the complex, decentralized nature of the overlapping institutions which make up the artworld most broadly construed:

The core personnel of the artworld is a loosely organized, but nevertheless related set of persons including artists (understood to refer to painters, writers, composers), producers, museum directors, museum-gogoers, theater-gogoers, reporters for newspapers, critics for publications of all sorts, art historians, art theorists, philosophers of art, and others. These are the people who keep the machinery of the artworlds working and thereby provide for its continuing existence. In addition every person who sees himself as a member of the artworld is thereby a member.\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{118} It should be noted that many artworld conventions are not likely to have any bearing on the definition of art, including the conventions discussed in this paragraph.

\textsuperscript{119} Dickie identifies two requirements for fulfilling the role of artist: i) that artists be aware that they are making art when they are indeed making art and ii) that artists employ some sort of technique in the process of making art (Dickie, \textit{The Art Circle}, 72). I take the first requirement to be basically tantamount to \textit{intention}: if someone is aware they are making art, they are also intending to do so (Ibid., 80) The second requirement of technique to be essentially historical. Even the finger-painting child employs some sort of technique to produce their crude representations or abstract morasses when they make decisions about colour choice and hand movements, for example. With the advent of Modernism, theory became increasingly central to the application of technique, to the point where the artworks of Duchamp, Cage, and Warhol can sometimes employ theory as their technique, or at least a substantial portion of it. There is no reason to disqualify the wielding of theory as a technique, because theoretical aspects have been a component of techniques such as painting since at least the time of the first perspective-enhancing technologies, and because the theory-oriented techniques are historically and institutionally contiguous with more traditional techniques. This is the case even if the artist seeks to subvert technique, as this is done with reference to and perhaps even with disdain for the centrality of technique to much of art’s history.

Dickie then identifies two aspects of those fulfilling the role of the artworld public, and the first and second requirements of the roles of artist and artworld public reflect each other. The first is that the artworld public be aware that what is being presented to them is art (Ibid., 72). The second requirement, like that of the artist, is essentially historical: that the public has the “sensitivities” to recognize the artistic technique that was executed in the production of the artwork (Ibid., 72) The reflection between the requirements of the two roles explains why artists often make for ready art audiences. It also explains why the interviewees of my thought experiment were not an audience to an artwork, even though they were in the full presence of an art object; the art object, denuded of institutional cues, is insufficient in the case of 4'33" for being aware of the art object as an artwork, regardless of how fully the second requirement of theoretical knowledge/sensitivity is satisfied.

Not every member of the artworld, and not even every self-inducted member of the artworld, sees themselves as literally part of something called “the artworld”, for the simple reason that some members of the artworld may vehemently deny that the artworld exists without thereby excluding themselves from it. Instead, they may see themselves as attached to a particular bricks-and-mortar institution of art, or see themselves as picking up on or paying homage (or insult!) to an artistic tradition (be it stylistic, cultural, or even familial), without being aware of such a thing as ‘the artworld’ and the particular theoretical baggage related to this concept. What is also important about the last sentence of the quote above is the deeply anti-elitist nature of art institutions and the artworld in general. The requirements for admission into the artworld are very lax – merely produce what you yourself realize as a piece of art, or, to become an audience member in the artworld, simply behold somebody else’s art object as an artwork. Had I not been already, I would become a member of the artworld merely by writing this thesis. It is important to note that this carries no guarantee of the quality of these acts (including my own!), and attempts to criticize the artworld as too inclusive or elitist rely on a confusion between classification and evaluation and an implicit and unexplained aversion to recognizing that the artworld will likely be replete with many works of art and thoughts about them which are simply bad or wrong, however one chooses to define badness or wrongness, as long as criticism in such terms remains applicable to art.

Dickie is clear that the artworld institution is not a totally elitist one: he says that “when I call the art world an institution, I am saying that it is an established practice”.121 Although this quote is from well before the final iteration of Dickie’s institutional theory, the point remains

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121 Dickie in Andina, The Philosophy of Art: The Question of Definition, 61. Emphasis mine. I say that it is not totally elitist because there are particular artworld institutions which are prestigious, exclusive and sometimes downright snobbish. However, the artworld broadly construed is a highly permeable institution.
vital: artworld institutions do not depend on particular physical institutions of art, nor is some sort of special authority required to establish one; all one needs to do is use an established practice of the artworld, even if the central point of the artwork is to undermine one or more of these practices – see the example of the suspended painting above. These practices or conventions can be enacted anywhere, but in some cases there must be some way of perceiving not only the art object, but also that the setting in which it exists has been institutionalized\(^\text{122}\) by an artist (or other people presenting an artist’s art) by using or making reference to an established practice of the artworld of that period of time.\(^\text{123}\)

Challenges and changes to the established practices of the artworld can come from within the artworld without thereby undermining that institution. If artists only created art that they were certain would be accepted by the current conventions of the artworld, the conventions would be static and innovation non-existent. When a piece of art breaks the rules of the artworld yet remains art, it relies on some sort of institutional cue in order to signify its status as art, and possibly to explain how the rule was broken without the surrender of its status as an artwork. For instance, if *Brillo Boxes* had not been placed within the Stable Gallery as art, but instead in a

\(^{122}\) When a space is *institutionalized* to become one or more perceptible aspects of the artworld, it means that there is some perceptible cue in that space which indicates that some art object is to be perceived as an artwork. Furthermore, all that is needed to create artworld cues is *some* knowledge of art history and theory, as well as the intention to create this cues and, if an audience is desired, some means of making these cues known to others. (This last distinction acknowledges that it is perfectly possible for someone to perform 4’33” for themselves only, even on a crowded subway platform.) This is what I mean when I say that a space has been “institutionalized” so as to give cues indicating certain objects as art objects. This is why while we might be able to speak of an artworld that encompasses all of art, but institutionalized spaces are particular places in space and time which are not necessarily contiguous with one another.

\(^{123}\) Even if the artwork is deliberately anachronistic, it is anachronistic in a way that what it imitates, duplicates, or pays homage to is not. Compare, for example the *Don Quixote* of Cervantes with the *Don Quixote* of Menard from Borges’ short story. Although the language is the same verbatim, and so both use a vocabulary that has long fallen out of common use, the language used to write Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* was written in a vernacular contemporaneous with artist, while Menard’s *Don Quixote* was deliberately written in a style already archaic by the time of its production. Jorge Luis Borges, “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote”, in *Borges, A Reader: A Selection From The Writings of Jorge Luis Borges* (New York: Dutton, 1981): 94.
grocery store or even the counter-warehouse of non-works Danto constructs to foil Kennick, he would not have recognized *Brillo Boxes* as art as all, except maybe the artwork of James Harvey (this is essentially Margolis’ point). Danto’s argument against Kenncks fails because of Danto’s arbitrarily narrow scope of perception. The main criticism Danto levies against Dickie, that it renders the definition of art to be arbitrary, is also misguided, and why that is the case shall occupy me next.

**Danto on Dickie: Proceduralism and The ‘Problem’ of Circularity**

What does Danto have to say of Dickie’s theory? Although he spends much of his time attacking the supposedly elitist nature of Dickie’s theory, he offers his most substantial critique in the following quote:

> The difference, philosophically, between an institutionalist like Dickie and myself is not that I was an essentialist and he was not, but that I felt that the decisions of the art world in constituting something a work of art required a class of reasons to keep the decisions from being fiats of arbitrary will. And in truth I felt that according the status of art to *Brillo Box* or to *Fountain* was less a matter of declaration and more a matter of discovery.\(^{124}\)

The most pressing issue about this quote is that it presents a straw-man of Dickie’s institutional theory by indicating that it allows objects to become artworks by “fiats of arbitrary will”. Danto and others seem confident in critiques such as these because of the bald circularity of Dickie’s definition. Dickie is not troubled by this circularity simply because he believes the artworld to be an *inflected* institution, and an adequate account of the artworld simply must reflect this, however puzzling this circularity might be philosophically. Kasher sums it up: “rather than saying that the rules which define “work of art” have an inflected nature because art

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\(^{124}\) Danto, *After The End of Art*, 195.
itself has such a nature, one should say that art has an inflected nature because it is introduced and governed by an inflected, constitutive system of rules.”

This definition of the artworld is circular because it is a definition that omits the historical conventions that operate within the artworld at any given time, so the definition of the artworld which Dickie supplies above can apply trans-historically even when whatever conventions that the artworld employs cannot. This includes the roles which people assume within the artworld. For example, Davies is doubtlessly correct that not everyone at any time could be an artist like they can today, and that a defensible conception of the artworld must account for this. What prevents the operation of an institution that is defined circularly from operating circularly and issuing the arbitrary fiats of will which Danto fears is precisely the historical nature of the artworld and its conventions. This is because the inflected artworld institution operates according to what Matravers calls “weak proceduralism”. This is opposed to “strong proceduralism”, which simply entails that whatever the artworld or some section of its membership says is art is thereby art. Strong proceduralism really does seem to operate by fiat, and Richard Wollheim is correct to say that in this case there must be some sort of reasons, considered by those who wield them to be good reasons, why an artwork is declared as such. If this is so, then the definition of art really has nothing to do with the institution, but rather with these reasons. If there are no such good reasons, Wollheim argues, there is no difference to be made between good or bad reasons for something becoming art, and then the importance of this status or attempting to determine how it is bestowed and obtained is fundamentally endangered.

126 Davies, Definitions of Art, 96.
128 Ibid., 243.
129 Ibid., 243.
Dickie has refuted this criticism of Wollheim’s by noting that any good reason which could be offered, and could therefore make up the definition of art, can be putatively satisfied by non-art objects. What is additionally required, Dickie claims, is “some sort of institutional recognition” of particular reasons within the artworld. When this institutional recognition is more accurately categorized according to weak proceduralism it can be shown how the very content of art history and the conventions that have developed in the artworld until whatever point in time the question of art’s definition is being asked is precisely what prevents the artworld and subsequently the definition of art by operating according to “arbitrary fiats of will”.

Weak proceduralism, like strong proceduralism, entails that for every work of art, there is a reason why it is a work of art, and that “there is no trans-historical reason governing the choice of objects as works of art,” although some reasons will be more widely applied and long-lived than others. However, the definition of art provided by weak proceduralism is much more robust than the specious one rendered from strong proceduralism, because it recognizes that an account of the reasons why something is deemed to be art by an agent or agents of an artworld institution will always be a historical one, related to the reasons why artworld institutions of the past deemed certain objects to be artworks. So at any one time, a definition of art can be offered that consists of the reasons why certain things are considered to be art at that point in time. Danto’s elongated definition of art, arguably, does a fine job of holistically characterizing the reasons operative up to the present, and of recognizing that at this point in art history, an art object can look like a non-art object, and that any definition of art that seeks to include the art of the past and the present must account for this, and that the reasons for this are to be clearly found

131 Matravers, “The Institutional Theory: A Protean Creature,” 243
132 Ibid., 244
in art history. So, Danto’s theory is correct in that I hold his definition of art, especially in its more elaborate form, to really be the definition of art...for now.

Therefore, a definition can be accurately offered of the art of the past and present as long as it is done with the understanding that it cannot be essentialist, and could be invalidated by a change with the artworld’s reasons for declaring something to be art. As Matravers describes, “weak proceduralism is indexed to time; there is no more reason to be surprised that it applies to different objects at different times than there is to be surprised that the referent of ‘yesterday’ changes.”133 The fundamental difference between a workable definition of art on one hand and an essentialist definition on the other is that a definition of art can only hope to successfully account for past and present cases. Therefore, while I agree with Danto that the five criteria he identifies do an excellent job of accounting for past and present cases of art (or even just assuming that it does, for the sake of argument), I disagree with Danto that art’s definition cannot change at any point in the future. While accounting for past and present cases may successfully account for all future cases for some time due to stasis within the artworld, there is no guarantee how long it will be before the artworld offers up a counterexample, nor is there any guarantee of precisely what this change will be. These are questions for art history.

A definition which can only certainly apply to past and present but not future cases of what it defines cannot be characterized as essentialist because whatever essence or essential characteristics art is currently defined by might change. However, this quasi-essentialist definition is also fundamentally different from the Wittgensteinian ‘family resemblance’ approach favoured by Morris Weitz, which holds that although every instance of ‘art’ will resemble at least one other and will collectively form a family of inter-resembling things

subsumed under a single term, it will not be possible to construct a list of criteria which cumulatively apply to all objects called ‘art’ (and only those objects) at any time. So, the definition of art differs from essentialist theories in that it makes no guarantees for future accuracy, but rather more different from the ‘family resemblance’ approach because it is a definition, constructed with careful reference to the historical record, which sets a list of criteria describing what is referred to as art, at least at that point in time. Such a definition is merely descriptive and not prescriptive or regulative, as a change in the practices of the artworld may necessitate a change in the definition of art, but never vice versa. These changes come from within the inflected institution of the artworld, and it is this inflected nature which leads to inherent uncertainty about the future of art’s definition.

While we can predict with reasonable certainty which day will be referred to as ‘yesterday’ tomorrow and every day thereafter, this is not necessarily the case with weak proceduralism, as weak proceduralism “does provide … constraints [on what can become an artwork at a given time]; however, it puts no constraints on what can count as constraints”.

Tomorrow, what is referred to as ‘yesterday’ will be whichever day it is today. As of my writing this ‘yesterday’ refers to September 6th, 2014, although tomorrow that same word ‘yesterday’

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134 See Morris Weitz, “The Role of Theory In Aesthetics,” in Morris Weitz (ed.) Problems of Aesthetics (2nd ed.) (London: Macmillan, 1970): 174-5; see also Carroll, “Identifying Art,” for criticisms to the ‘family resemblance’ argument against definitions of art. Carroll’s approach to defining art shares enough of an affinity with the weak proceduralism of Dickie and Matravers that it deserves some mention. Like Dickie, Carroll’s focus is not on supplying a definition of art, but rather of defining art-historical narratives (see “Identifying Art,” p. 37 for his seven-criteria definition). Once particular art-historical narratives are identified, identifying art is a matter of identifying what was produced as art within these narratives. Change at the conceptual boundaries of the artworld is explained through that innovations connection to an art-historical narrative. Both Carroll’s approach and weak proceduralism acknowledge the importance of pre-existing artworks and art theory to changes to the definition of art, but I prefer weak proceduralism and the institutional theory of the artworld in general because the narratives which Carroll identifies are only a part of the artworld. As Davies notes, Carroll holds that narratives of art history proceed over time by means repetition, amplification and repudiation, but he fails to address the question of how these rules are governed (Davies, Definitions of Art, 168). An answer to this question must involve the artworld, and moreover one which operates according to weak proceduralism.

will correctly refer to a different day, and not to September 6th, 2014. Similarly, what is referred to now as ‘art’ is (for the sake of argument) whatever meets Danto’s five criteria, but ‘art’ could also come to refer to something else, although this change is less regular and predictable than the referent of ‘yesterday’. The difference between the two is that what is referred to as ‘yesterday’ changes daily as a function of the definition of that word, whereas what is referred as ‘art’ changes because its definition itself must answer to historical developments within the artworld. The standing definition of art details the current constraints on what the artworld refers to as ‘art’, but no part of that definition nor the artworld itself can constrain what the constraints of the concept of art can become over time. One can see Danto’s criticism rearing its head again: at any one point in time, there will be constraints on what can and cannot be (perceived as) art, but what is to stop these constraints by being altered by arbitrary fiat?

I think the only response is that they possibly could be, and possibly have been in the past, and that these fiats will often be oppressive, creatively if not socially as well. However, these fiats are themselves constrained in the same way that a critic or denier of the artworld remains a member of the artworld. Those who seek to control the artworld by fiat can only do so with reference to the current constraints on what can be art: constraints on what can and cannot be art must make reference to what constraints were being placed on what can be art at the time the fiat was conceived and enforced. Instances where fiats occur in the artworld do not prove that the constraints of the artworld are historically arbitrary, and they are not the fault of the inflected nature of the artworld. These fiats might be moral wrongs, but this is neither here nor there when discussing how the artworld operates and develops because “an answer to [why the constraints
on art at a given time are what they are] would be to provide a defence of art and its role in a worthwhile human life”.\textsuperscript{136}

Perhaps the importance of the artworld in putting constraints on what can be art at a given time has only recently been noticed with the emergence of Postmodernism, when art objects can be indiscernible from non-art objects. This is merely a reflection of the way that history has panned out. Perhaps one day art will not rely on any sort of institution at all because of some currently unpredictable future development, but I doubt it: because of the informal, anti-elitist nature of the artworld, any socially organized means of deciding upon and enforcing constraints on what can be art could be characterized as the re-emergence of the artworld. It seems there needs to be some sort of artworld if there are to be conventions about how art is perceived as art which involve perceptible relations between an art object and its context in time and space. These conventions are the non-sensory but perceptible qualities which relate certain institutional cues with certain art objects so that they may be attended to as artworks. These cues are what ultimately render art objects discernible as artworks from non-art objects. In cases in which an art object alone (i.e. discounting relational properties between an art object and its surroundings, as Danto does) is indiscernible from a non-art object, these conventions are they only things which indicate that the object in question is not a non-art object, but rather an object which has been transfigured so as to be perceived as art. That such conventions might not exist at some point in the future would surely frustrate any attempt at even a quasi-essentialist definition of past and present cases, although the lack of conventions might make it difficult to even form a Wittgensteinian “family resemblance” of objects that could be subsumed under the single term “art”.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 249.
Danto’s interpretation of the history of art is totally compatible with an inflected artworld which changes over time according to weak proceduralism. The institutional theory when properly construed along the lines of weak proceduralism “has no commitments as to the value of the reasons that are operating in the artworld…it assumes them, it does not defend them.” This removes any difficulty in imagining Danto’s history of painting as belonging to the artworld without forfeiting the teleological narratives of Vasari and then Greenberg – they are simply an account of the evolving reasons that certain objects were made and/or appreciated as artworks at a certain time.

In summary, Danto’s definition is like art definitions of the past in that they really did aim to account for all artworks of their past and present. Danto errs in suggesting that his definition is profoundly unlike other such definitions in that it logically cannot be assailed by a future counter-example. Danto believes this because his definition of art accommodates artworks which are (according to Danto) perceptibly indiscernible from non-art objects, and because Danto believes that art (at least without the aid of, or outright becoming, philosophy) cannot speak further to its own definition once an art object can be perceptibly indiscernible from non-art objects (which is the real content of Danto’s discovery, if it is indeed his as he claims). This is because Danto’s account of what is perceived when perceiving an artwork is arbitrarily narrowed to the art object by itself, which allows Danto to imagine the indiscernibility between the Brillo Boxes of Warhol and the Brillo box of Harvey. This indiscernibility vanishes when one perceives the perceptible, relational properties which obtain between the artwork and the space around it, which may include instructions on how the audience is to interact with the art object in a given space and/or time. In this chapter, I have investigated how these cues manifest by distinguishing

137 Ibid., 246.
an art object from an artwork, and I have also described how the conventions which determine how these cues identify an art object as belonging to an artwork are established and change over time. Danto overlooks the perception of these cues in his account of perceiving an artwork, and in doing so he has excluded from his consideration perceptible qualities of artworks which I have demonstrated are necessary in perceiving them as artworks at all. His assertion that art exhausts its own contribution to its definition when it can look like anything is undefended even when the perceptible qualities which made *Brillo Boxes* and Brillo boxes discernible to Danto as art and non-art respectively are excluded. The rightful inclusion of perceptible qualities that obtain between an art object and some artworld cue make Danto’s claim even more vulnerable to future innovation. In concluding this thesis, I shall explore if there is overlooked importance of these artworld cues not only in identifying art, but in changing its very definition as well: if Danto is wrong that the art object is all we see when we see an artwork, meaning that there is more to perceive of an artwork than Danto surmised, is there an avenue for the further development of art which Danto’s ultimately indefensible convictions obscured from him?
Chapter 6

Conclusion: Can Art Have A Future Beyond Our Horizon?

Before discussing a possible future of art history, it is incumbent that I discuss the relationship between Danto and Hegel, an influence that enters, sometimes fleetingly, into Danto’s theory. As I explained in the first chapter, Danto’s contention that art can have no history beyond the current stage is defended mostly by a Hegelian reading of art history, although Danto has explicitly stated that he is not himself a Hegelian.\textsuperscript{138} Indeed, despite the similarities between Hegel’s philosophy of history and Danto’s combination of the narratives of Vasari and Greenberg, it must be made clear that Danto invokes Hegel’s history of art because it, like the narrative Danto wants to establish, has a teleological structure which ends in self-revelation. However, employing Hegel’s historical narrative as some sort of evidence to defend the accuracy of Danto’s account is utterly misguided, as Hegel and Danto are talking about two very different things. Hegel believes that art, developing through the Classical, Symbolic, and Romantic periods, is a part of process of the Absolute Spirit, the ultimate self-consciousness of humanity, revealing itself to itself, the revelation of which is a point in its own development. Danto, on the other hand, shrinks away from Hegel’s “curious idioms” written “in the portentous jargon of the Continent”\textsuperscript{139} and believes that the revelation which Warhol brought to his consciousness reveals a truth about art, not a truth about humanity or its Spirit. The parallel with Hegel aids understanding because of the similarities between the unfolding histories, but it does not describe at all what Danto believes to be revealed at the end of art.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{139} Danto, \textit{The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art}, 15-6.
One reason that Danto’s end of art thesis seems so convincing is that we quickly become stymied in searching for counter-examples or ways in which the future of art can progress beyond Danto’s sights. Moreover, he seems correct about his thesis that art history is at its end insofar as I cannot imagine art without some sort of artworld. But does the failure to generate a counter-example really validate Danto’s claim that art’s history is at its end? Carroll thinks not:

One reason Danto gives is that we cannot imagine what such [future definitions of art] would be like. But this does not seem persuasive. We cannot imagine what scientific theories one thousand years from now will be like. If we could imagine them now in any detail, they would be contemporary scientific theories, not future ones. But we do not argue on the basis of our inability to imagine future scientific theories that there will not be any.141

This is a crucial point by Carroll, as it exposes the unfairness of Danto’s challenge to others to disprove his claim: if no existing works of art can serve as counterexamples, the only way to prove Danto wrong is to actually push art history forward, developing the art theory and perhaps producing the resultant artworks which are analogues of the scientific theories and their products (e.g. the polio vaccine or the Hubble telescope) of scientists of the future. The philosopher must either become an artist, or wait for history to produce an artist to produce the counterexample which brings the future of art into the present. I am not going to attempt to live up to Danto’s immense challenge here, although it is an important implication of my argument that philosophers of art who hope to give even a quasi-essentialist definition of art must pay rigorous attention to the artworld and art history to do so. Instead, I will do something more modest: suggest how art might have a future beyond Danto’s horizon, a future more imaginable when the relational, perceptible qualities between an art object and its institutional context are

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rightly included as perceptible qualities of an artwork. This can occur without endangering the existence of the artworld, although it would indelibly alter it.

How might the perceptible qualities between institutional cues and art objects change what it means to be seen as a work of art? Although he imperative that I answer this is lessened by Carroll’s critique above, it seems incumbent upon me to at least attempt to describe a way in which the expanded scope of what is perceived when one perceives an artwork – expanded, that is, to include perceptible qualities which obtain between on art object and its institutionalized context – might develop in ways that push art beyond the present. One way in which art institutions can seek to upset the current definition of art is to remove the necessity for any sort of prior theoretical knowledge of what is currently considered “art history” to perceive art as art. What if an institutionalized space could provide all of the knowledge required to see something as art? It would be especially jarring if all of the required information is somehow unknowable to the audience prior to perceiving the artwork (i.e. the art object within a particular institutional setting). Granted, this would radically destabilize the definition of art, and would place new importance upon the artworld and the cues it provides. However, this is still compatible with weak proceduralism, as the definition of art which required the knowledge of art theory/history will be historically and institutionally linked to the definition that lacks it (if only through this thesis), even though the artworks it defines have a relationship with art history more remote than anything considered art today.

Whether or not some change like this ever comes to fruition, with time Danto’s end of art thesis will ultimately become a Vergangene Zunkunft, a vision of the future from the past.\textsuperscript{142} If this vision of the future turns out to be accurate, it will doubtlessly stand out amongst the myriad

\textsuperscript{142} Danto, \textit{After The End of Art}, 101.
failed attempts to predict even small aspects of future human life and culture.\textsuperscript{143} What makes the perpetual applicability of Danto’s theory more plausible than other such visions is that it does not attempt to trace the course of future change, but rather to demonstrate that there is no future, or at least that it is already here. However, there is some of the same conceit in arguing that all there ever will be is already here as there is in imagining futures that look so radical in their time but are pervaded with timely social mores in retrospect.

Members of the artworld, inflected as it is, have and will act out of defiance to the concept of essentialist definitions of art, which might be seen by artists as it was by Weitz as potentially ossifying to the practice of art.\textsuperscript{144} In a similar vein, Herwitz suggests that postmodern art is doing too much philosophizing of its own post-Warhol to have had this function decisively taken over by philosophy.\textsuperscript{145} My analysis of 4’33” vindicates Danto insofar as it shows that music, like visual arts, can have any perceptible or aesthetic qualities and still be art, but it ultimately upends his end of art thesis. 4’33” shows even more vividly than \textit{Brillo Boxes} how the perception of the art object alone is sometimes insufficient for the perception of the artwork. Explaining the distinction between an art object and an artwork, crucial in describing exactly how Danto demarcated his scope of perception, requires an account of the artworld. The artworld contains a historical set of conventions concerning all aspects of its operation, and some of these conventions concern what I have called institutional cues, which are perceived along with the art object in order to perceive the artwork, or at least to be able to perceive the art object as an artwork. This illuminates the importance of not only an \textit{art-historical} context, but an \textit{art-}

\textsuperscript{145} Herwitz, “The Beginning of The End: Danto on Postmodernism,” 220.
institutional context in perceiving 4’33” as art. I cannot hope to show that artworld institutions will necessarily evolve in ways that disprove the end of art thesis, but I hope to have demonstrated that artworld institutions factor in the perception of art in ways that might allow them to change art’s definition in ways inconceivable to Danto or I. Time will tell.
Works Cited


