Art and its objects

Second Edition

With Six Supplementary Essays

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In Memory of Adrian Stokes
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Preface to the second edition

This essay is an expanded version of an essay originally written for the Harper Guide to Philosophy, edited by Arthur Danto. For the second edition I have kept the original text, and appended six additional essays. I have made changes in and additions to the bibliography. In writing the original text I was deeply indebted for advice and encouragement to Arthur Danto, Michael Podro, Adrian Stokes, Bernard Williams, and Margaret Cohen. In preparing this new edition I have benefited a great deal from criticism, suggestion, and assistance from David Carrier, Richard Dammann, Hidé Ishiguro, Jerrold Levinson, Charles Rosen, David Wiggins, Bruno Wollheim, and Henri Zerner: I have a singular debt of gratitude to Antonia Phillips. Two of the additional essays derive from a symposium held during the fifth Bristol Philosophy Conference in 1976 with Nelson Goodman and David Wiggins, from whose comments I learnt. I owe a very great deal to Katherine Backhouse who has typed and retyped the manuscript for both editions. I am grateful to Jeremy Mynott and Jonathan Sinclair-Wilson for editorial advice and assistance.
The argument

1–3 The question posed: What is Art? Scepticism whether a general answer may be given: such scepticism itself to be sceptically considered.

4 The physical-object hypothesis, i.e. the hypothesis that works of art are physical objects, introduced.

5–8 Over a certain range of the arts, e.g. literature, music, the physical-object hypothesis obviously untenable: for there is not here any physical object with which the work of art could prima facie be identified. However the untenability of the hypothesis over these arts said to raise no serious problems for aesthetics. The promise that we shall later return to these arts. (The promise redeemed in sections 35–7.)

9–10 The physical-object hypothesis now considered over those arts, e.g. painting, sculpture, where there is a physical object with which the work of art could prima facie be identified. Two difficulties for the hypothesis to be considered.

11–14 The difficulty presented by Representation or representational properties. A discussion of rep-
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representation, resemblance and seeing-as, and the
suggestion made that resemblance might be
understood in terms of seeing-as rather than
vice versa; the introduction of intention into any
such analysis.

15–19 The difficulty presented by Expression or ex-
pressive properties. Two crude causal views of
expression rejected. Natural expression and ‘cor-
respondences’.

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20 The physical-object hypothesis to be strengthened
by a consideration of alternative hypotheses
about the work of art: specifically, over those
areas of art where the physical-object hypothesis
gains a foothold (cf. 9–10).

21 The Ideal theory, i.e. the theory that works of
art are mental entities, and the Presentational
theory, i.e. the theory that works of art have
only immediately perceptible properties, intro-
duced.

22–3 The Ideal theory considered. Two objections
raised: that the theory would make art private,
and that it disregards the medium. (The bri-
coleur problem, or the problem of art’s diversity
or arbitrariness introduced.)

24 The Ideal theory and the Presentational theory
contrasted. Objections to the Presentational
theory to be considered under two headings:
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those which dispute the exhaustiveness of the distinction between immediately and mediately perceptible properties, and those which insist that works of art possess properties other than the immediately perceptible.

25–31 The first set of objections to the Presentational theory considered. Difficulties for the exhaustive distinction between immediately and mediately perceptible properties are presented by meaning-properties and expression-properties. Sound and Meaning in poetry and the so-called ‘music of poetry’: the representation of movement: the representation of space (‘tactile values’). The Gombrich argument concerning expression. (In the course of this discussion the notion of Iconicity briefly introduced.)

31–4 The second set of objections to the Presentational theory considered. Difficulties presented by properties that indubitably are not immediately perceptible, but are inherent to art. Genres and the ‘radical of presentation’: the spectator’s expectations and the artist’s intentions: the concept of art as something that the spectator must bring with him. The discussion broken off for a parenthesis.

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35–7 The promise to consider those arts where the work of art clearly cannot be identified with a physical object now redeemed. Types and tokens, and the claim made that types may possess
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physical properties. Accordingly the arts where the physical-object hypothesis evidently does not hold are less problematic for aesthetics.

38–9 Interpretation. Critical interpretation and interpretation through performance. Interpretation said to be ineliminable. The contrast between description and interpretation not to be narrowly taken.

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40 The concept of art reconsidered, and the claim that works of art intrinsically fall under this concept. The suggestion, to which this claim gives rise, that the question, What is art?, may best be answered by considering the aesthetic attitude.

41–4 The aesthetic attitude, and distortions of it. Art and nature falsely assimilated. The connexion between seeing something as a work of art and that thing’s having been made as a work of art. The amorphousness of the concept ‘art’, and the pervasiveness of art itself.

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45 Art as ‘a form of life’, and the analogy between art and language introduced.

46–9 The concept of art as a form of life considered from the standpoint of the artist. The artistic intention, and the intentions attributed to indi-
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vidual works of art: the analogy with language properly understood does not require that we should be able to identify either of these apart from art and its objects. The so-called 'heresy of paraphrase'.

50 Art and phantasy contrasted: the fundamental error in the Ideal theory restated in the light of sections 46–9.

51–3 The concept of art as a form of life now considered from the standpoint of the spectator. Understanding works of art: Iconicity reintroduced, and the conditions of expression in art once more examined.

54 The work of art as a self-subsistent object: this conception qualified. The ‘invitation in art’ and ‘the transcendental’.

55 A third point of view on the conception of art as a form of life suggested. Art and how it is learnt. No more than a suggestion thrown out.

56 The analogy so far pursued (sections 45–55) has been between art and language, not between art and code: two contrasts contrasted. Style and redundancy.

57–8 Two limitations to the analogy of art and language. The fact that some works of art are in a (natural) language, and the lack of anything in art parallel to ungrammaticality or incoherence.

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59 The last point suggests a consideration of the traditional demand of unity in a work of art. Unity considered, and three objections to any strict or formal explication of the notion.

60–63 Consideration of unity leads in turn to a consideration of art as an essentially historical phenomenon. Art’s historicity examined. The social determination of art. The *bricolage* problem finally reconsidered.

64 Aesthetics: and how it might divide into the seemingly substantive and the seemingly trivial. The importance of the seemingly trivial in aesthetics for art itself: the perennial and ineradicable self-consciousness of art.

65 An omission recorded.