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Since the beginning of the eighteenth century the philosophy of art has been engaged in the project of finding out what the fine arts might have in common, and thus how they might be defined. Peter Kivy's purpose in this very accessible and lucid book is to trace the history of that enterprise and then to argue that the definitional project has been unsuccessful, with absolute music as the continual stumbling block. He offers what he believes is a fruitful change of strategy: instead of undertaking an obsessive quest for sameness, let us explore the differences among the arts. He presents five case studies of such differences, three from literature, two from music.

With its combination of historical and analytic approaches this book will appeal to a wide range of readers in philosophy, literary studies, and music, as well as to nonacademic readers with an interest in the arts. Its vivid style requires no technical knowledge of music on the part of the reader.

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For Frank Sibley,
who showed me the way

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Now from hence may be seen, how these Arts
agree, and how they *differ*.

James Harris (1744)

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Preface

In the fall of 1992 I was privileged to deliver the Presidential Address to the American Society for Aesthetics on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary. The event called, I thought, for some stock taking and perhaps something in the way of a suggestion, at least, of one direction the philosophy of art might take in the coming years. For I thought we were at a point where an alternative to the single-minded pursuit of art's "definition" was open, and beckoning.

I saw my task in that lecture as twofold: to try to show how we had come to the place we were at in Anglo-American aesthetics, which might well be called the period of Danto, without exaggerating that philosopher's importance to the discipline; and to try to mark out, by precept and example, another direction that some of us, at least, might take: the direction of "differences."

In the speaker's allotted fifty-minute hour I could present only a historical sketch and two minute "case studies" in "differences." But the project continued to possess me. The result is the present monograph: an attempt to trace in more detail the theoretical pathway that has led from the origination of the task of defining the work of art, in the eighteenth century, to the present state of affairs in which that task still seems to dominate discussion and, so it seems to me, to discourage philosophers from the equally interesting task of studying the arts in their particularity.

The organization of the volume is fairly straightforward. In the first two chapters I give an account of how I see the history of aesthetic theory from Hutcheson to Danto, in its attempt to

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define the “modern system of the arts,” with absolute music as the litmus test of success or failure. Chapters 3 through 7 provide case studies in literature and music as an antidote to the obsessive search for what is common to the arts: they provide, that is, “differences,” the “philosophies of arts,” as opposed to the philosophy of art, that my title is supposed to suggest.

In no way am I urging, on philosophical grounds or any other, that the traditional task of defining the work of art is either impossible or exhausted as a philosophical enterprise. Nor am I recommending that it be given up for any other reason. What I am recommending, or gently suggesting, perhaps, is that at least some of us give it a rest and try to study the arts, *as philosophers*, in their differences rather than in their sameness: that alongside the philosophy of art we have philosophies of arts. Many of my colleagues in the profession may not be by nature or learning so inclined. Those who are I hope will join me in a task that is not so much new as new to these times. It is a task that deserves to be revived to the enrichment and diversification of the discipline.

I am indebted to a number of people who were immeasurably helpful to me in producing the final manuscript of this book. Stephen Davies and Richard Eldridge read the entire manuscript, and provided valuable and searching criticism. Professor Eldridge motivated me to include a whole new chapter on truth in fiction, which I had been working on as a lecture and an article. And I also tried to respond to his worries over my avoiding any discussion of the value component in the concept of poetry. I tried to answer a number of objections Professor Davies made with regard to my treatment of Jerrold Levinson on musical profundity, the theory of musical value sketched in the final chapter, and various other points.

But some of Eldridge’s and Davies’ comments and criticism I had to let alone, not because they were off the mark, but, to the contrary, because they raised such broad issues that they could not be treated in short responses. Rather, such issues will have to be addressed at length as the discussion develops (or I hope develops) after the publication of my book. In any event,

Preface

Messrs. Davies and Eldridge are responsible for numerous improvements in my text and, of course, for none of its remaining faults.

My colleague and friend Laurent Stern was kind enough to accede to my request to read, on very short notice, the new chapter (Chapter 5) on truth in fiction. I am most grateful for his help in that regard and absolve him from complicity in its remaining weaknesses.

I would also like to thank Terrence Moore of Cambridge University Press, who has, for the past few years, been a constant source of encouragement to me in my work. He has eased my manuscript through the intricate maze that leads from a gleam in the author's eye to a real book one can hold in one's hand. I greatly appreciate his help and support.

This book is dedicated to the late Frank Sibley. Alas, he died before he could know that I had done so. It is a pitifully inadequate tribute in comparison with the contribution he made to the profession, and to my work.