



INTRODUCTION

This volume is a selection of my essays on the philosophy of art and aesthetics written between 1985 and 1999. The earliest essays in the volume coincide with the beginning of my career as a professional philosopher while working at Wesleyan University; the more recent articles, composed at Cornell University and the University of Wisconsin–Madison, seem as though they were written yesterday – undoubtedly a flaw of memory attributable to advancing age. When I look back at these essays, however diverse they may appear to the reader, they strike me as being united by several recurring threads.

The most pronounced thread is a reactive one: an opposition to aesthetic theories of art broadly and to its more distinctive variant, formalism, most particularly. Tutored in its discipline as an undergraduate, I have spent much of my career as a philosopher attempting to combat the limitations that aesthetic theories and formalism impose on the philosophy of art. It is from this reaction formation that the present volume derives its title – *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*. For, in a nutshell, the dominant recurring theme in this book is that we much reach beyond aesthetic theories of art and their various prohibitions.

That is, we must not identify the essence of art with the intended capacity of artworks to afford aesthetic experiences. Nor must we agree with aesthetic theorists of art and formalists that art history, authorial intentions, garden-variety emotions, and morality are alien to proper commerce with artworks. My campaign against aesthetic theories of art, in a manner of speaking, organizes the first four parts of this book.

The first section — Beyond Aesthetics — initiates the argument against aesthetic theories of art, while also propounding a genealogy of the ways in which this theoretical disposition has shaped and distorted the evolution of the philosophy of art. The next section, Art, History, and Narrative, argues (against aesthetic theorists of art, like Clive Bell) for the the importance of art history to the philosophy of art, while also advancing an alternative to aesthetic definitions of art for identifying artworks.

Whereas aesthetic theorists of art typically question the relevance of authorial intentions to interpretation, in the next section, Interpretation and Intention, I defend the appeal to authorial intentions in the analysis of artworks. Likewise, where aesthetic theorists of art tend to regard only aesthetic experience as constituting the essential, appropriate kind of response to art, I maintain in the section

Art, Emotion, and Morality that garden-variety emotional responses and moral responses are not only art-appropriate responses to art, but also that they are relevant to the evaluation and analysis of artworks. Indeed, in this section I also attempt to provide analyses of selected emotional responses of this sort, including suspense, horror, and amusement.

Undoubtedly, part of my animus against aesthetic theories of art derives from my having studied with George Dickie, to whom this volume is dedicated. From him, I inherited my abiding philosophical interests in the concepts of “the aesthetic” and “art.” Like Dickie, or perhaps because of Dickie, I have always resisted the idea that art can be defined in terms of the intended capacity of certain objects to support aesthetic experiences as well as the idea that the aesthetic is best conceptualized in terms of disinterestedness.

I have also always thought that Dickie’s classic article “The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude”¹ can best be read as a demolition of the notion of “the aesthetic” for the purpose, ultimately, of undermining aesthetic theories of art – thereby paving the way for his own Institutional Theory of Art. That interpretation, moreover, is borne out in his book *Art and the Aesthetic*, in which the best known candidates for “the aesthetic” this-or-that are successively derailed in the explicit process of defending the Institutional Theory.² And something like Dickie’s strategy – challenging aesthetic theories of art as a first step in generating new theories – has become my own.

Part I: Beyond Aesthetics can be regarded as a continuation of Dickie’s project. The first essay, “Art and Interaction,” criticizes the limitations of aesthetic theories of art outright, specifically by emphasizing the way in which interpretation (in contrast to aesthetic experience) is an art-appropriate response at least as significant as aesthetic experience. Here, as elsewhere, the implicit dependence on Arthur Danto is evident, while my use of Monroe Beardsley, in this essay and others, as my leading foil also shows the influence of George Dickie, since it was Dickie who taught me always to consult Beardsley’s work for the most worked-out and authoritative position on any subject in aesthetics, even if, in the end, I wound up criticizing it. There are more ways than one to stand on the shoulders of giants.

“Beauty and the Genealogy of Art Theory” does not confront the aesthetic theory of art directly, but instead attempts to disclose its subterranean influence on the contours of the philosophy of art. If one accepts the arguments that I have made concerning aesthetic theories of art, then, this essay functions as a debunking genealogy, one that traces various tendencies in the philosophy of art – such as the prohibitions against art history, authorial intention, garden-variety (as opposed to aesthetic) emotional responses, and moral responses – as flowing from historical misinterpretations and prejudices that have remained unexamined for too long.

In “Four Concepts of Aesthetic Experience,” I take a closer look at the concept of aesthetic experience that serves as the fulcrum of aesthetic theories of art. I argue against three well-known views of aesthetic experience: the pragmatic (Dewey’s), the allegorical (Marcuse and Adorno’s), and the traditional account (almost everyone else’s).³ But this essay is not merely critical. It concludes with a positive characteriza-

tion of aesthetic experience that I label the deflationary account. In the vocabulary of my first essay in this volume, “Art and Interaction,” it is what I call a content-oriented account. Unlike George Dickie, I do not contend that aesthetic experience is a myth, but rather that something is an aesthetic response if it involves design appreciation or the detection of aesthetic or expressive properties or the contemplation of the emergence of formal, aesthetic, or expressive properties from their base properties, or a combination of any or all of these responses.

Dickie, I have argued, parlayed his attack of aesthetic experience (and intimately connected aesthetic theories of art) into the case on behalf of his Institutional Theory. I have not traveled all the way with Dickie to embracing the Institutional Theory. However, I agree with him that the putative failure of aesthetic theories of art puts pressure on us to find some other way to account for how we go about identifying objects and performances as artworks.

In Part II: Art, History, and Narrative, my solution to this problem is the suggestion that we achieve this result by means of historical narratives.⁴ Just as the biological concept of a species is a historical one, so I maintain, is the concept of art. That is, we determine membership in the category of art by providing narratives or genealogies of the descent or lineage of present candidates from their established forebears.

The essay “Art, Practice, and Narrative” represents my first attempt to craft a historical account for classifying artworks as artworks. As the result of criticism of it, I produced two more overlapping essays – “Identifying Art” and “Historical Narratives and the Philosophy of Art” – in order to refine and defend the historical approach. Since the notion of narrative figures so importantly in this section, and others, I have also included the essay “On the Narrative Connection” to provide a clarifying account of what I mean by “narrative” in the most abstract sense. And finally, since I uphold a realist account of historical narratives, including art-relevant identifying narratives, I conclude this section with a defense against the relativist view of narrative propounded in the influential writings of Hayden White.

As already noted, an opposition to the relevance of authorial intention to the interpretation and evaluation of artworks is a recurring theme of aesthetic theorists of art, such as Clive Bell and Monroe Beardsley. For them, it diverts attention away from the artwork itself to something outside the work, namely, the author’s intention. In Part III: Interpretation and Intention, I try to reinstate the acceptability of the relevance of authorial intention.

The opening essay, “Art, Intention, and Conversation,” attempts to refute the major arguments of anti-intentionalists like Monroe Beardsley and Roland Barthes, while also invoking what I call our conversational interests with respect to artworks (which involve, among other things, certain moral considerations) in order to say why authorial intentions are relevant constraints on our interpretive practices. Since one of my complaints against the way in which debates over the relevance of authorial intention usually proceed is that they are overly focused on questions of linguistic meaning, I use examples from outside literature where the lack of conventional semantic and syntactic structures

clearly require hypothesizing authorial intentions as the royal road to interpretation, due to absence of anything like conventions (rather than, say, merely rules of thumb).⁵

In “Anglo-American Aesthetics and Contemporary Criticism,” I attempt to defend intentionalism against recent critics who indulge in what is called the “hermeneutics of suspicion.” In this essay, I show that rather than being antithetical to the aims of politicized criticism, intentionalism is not only compatible with them, but even generally presupposed by them.

“Art, Intention, and Conversation” was attacked from two directions. First, predictably enough, by anti-intentionalists; but also from a position within intentionalism itself, called hypothetical intentionalism (the view that the correct interpretation of an artwork corresponds to our best hypothesis of authorial intention, even where the author’s actual intentions are known to deviate therefrom). I address the anti-intentionalist challenge in “The Intentional Fallacy: Defending Myself” and the second attack in “Interpretation and Intention: The Debate Between Hypothetical and Actual Intentionalism.”⁶

Garden-variety emotional responses (as opposed to the alleged aesthetic emotions) and moral responses to artworks have been traditionally regarded as not part of (and even at variance with) aesthetic experience and, therefore, have fallen outside the purview of the philosophy of art, notably as that is construed by the aesthetic theory of art. As a result, they have not received the philosophical attention they deserve. Part IV: Art, Emotion, and Morality seeks to repair this lacuna. The opening essay “Art, Narrative, and Emotion” sets out a framework for philosophically examining the relations that obtain between these terms, while the subsequent essays – “Horror and Humor” and “The Paradox of Suspense” – extend this framework by considering several case studies.

Similarly, “Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding” introduces a general framework for discussing questions of art and morality, while “Moderate Moralism” defends the moral evaluation of artworks as a legitimate form of artistic evaluation against the aesthetic viewpoint that I call autonomism.⁷ Part IV concludes with an essay entitled “Simulation, Emotions, and Morality” that critically considers a framework, simulation theory, that is a rival to the one developed in this section.

If the range of topics belonging to the catch area of philosophical aesthetics (or the philosophy of art) has been narrowly circumscribed under the influence of an aesthetic conception of art, my own view of our field of research is much wider. Thus, in the last section of this book – Part V: Alternative Topics – I include a handful of essays that examine a group of disparate topics I believe are worth pursuing once we divest ourselves of our obsession with Aesthetics and Art (both with capital As). My alternative topics include: jokes, junk fiction, visual metaphors, and the appreciation of landscape. Of course, further topics are readily imaginable. But my essays about them, of course, remain to be written, let alone anthologized.

PART I: BEYOND AESTHETICS



ART AND INTERACTION

Ideas of the aesthetic figure largely in two crucial areas of debate in the philosophy of art. On the one hand, *the aesthetic* often plays a definitive role in characterizations of our responses to or interactions with artworks. That is, what is thought to be distinctive about our commerce with artworks is that these encounters are marked by aesthetic experiences, aesthetic judgments, aesthetic perceptions, and so forth. Furthermore, the use of aesthetic terminology in such accounts of our interactions with artworks is, most essentially, “experiential” or “perceptual” where those terms are generally understood by contrast to responses mediated by the application of concepts or reasoning.

Second, notions of the aesthetic are also mobilized in theories of the nature of art objects; the artwork, it is claimed, is an artifact designed to bring about aesthetic experiences and aesthetic perceptions, or to engender aesthetic attitudes, or to engage aesthetic faculties, et cetera. Thus, these two claims – that aesthetic responses distinguish our responses to art, and that art objects can be defined in terms of the aesthetic – though ostensibly independent, can, nevertheless, be connected by means of a neat, commonsensical approach that holds that what an object is can be captured through an account of its function. The art object is something designed to provoke a certain form of response, a certain type of interaction. The canonical interaction with art involves the aesthetic (however that is to be characterized). So the artwork is an object designed with the function of engendering aesthetic experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and so forth.

The purpose of this essay is to dispute both the thesis that aesthetic responses are definitive of our responses to artworks and the thesis that art is to be characterized exclusively in terms of the promotion of aesthetic responses. It will be argued against the first thesis that many of our entrenched forms of interaction with artworks – what may be neutrally designated as our art responses or art experiences – are not aesthetic in nature nor are they reducible to aesthetic responses or experiences. The argument here proceeds by enumerating and describing several of our nonaesthetic though eminently characteristic responses to art objects. That is, along with doing things like attending to the *brittleness* of a piece of choreography – a paradigmatic

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aesthetic response – we also contemplate artworks with an eye to discerning latent meanings and structures, and to determining the significance of an artwork in its art historical context. These art responses, often interpretive in nature, are, it will be claimed, as central as, and certainly no less privileged than, aesthetic responses in regard to our interactions with artworks.¹ Moreover, if an expanded view of the art response is defensible, then our concept of art, especially when construed functionally, must be broadened to countenance as art objects that are designed to promote characteristically appropriate art responses or art experiences distinct from aesthetic responses. And this, in turn, has consequences for attempts by theorists, armed with aesthetic definitions of art, who wish to exclude such objects as Duchamp's *Fountain* from the order of art.

This essay is motivated by a recent development in the philosophy of art, namely the popularity of aesthetic definitions of art. As is well known, the anti-definitional stance of post-World War II philosophers of art provoked a reaction formation called the Institutional Theory of Art.² Dissatisfaction with the Institutional Theory has, in turn, elicited several countermoves of which the aesthetic definition of art is one species. For though the Institutional Theory has been judged wanting in numerous respects, it has reestablished the respectability of attempts to define art.

Examples of this development include articles such as “An Aesthetic Definition of Art” by Monroe Beardsley and “Toward an Aesthetic Account of the Nature of Art” by William Tolhurst.³ These writers attempt to construct theories that discriminate between art and nonart by reference to aesthetic experience, which is taken as the canonical mode of our interaction with artworks. In this, I think that these authors are symptomatic of the tendency within much contemporary philosophy of art to equate the art experience with the aesthetic experience. Given this propensity, both articles define an artwork as an object produced with the intended function of fostering aesthetic experiences. Beardsley's statement of the theory is “An artwork is something produced with the intention of giving it the capacity to satisfy the aesthetic interest.”⁴ To have an aesthetic interest in an object, for Beardsley, is to have an interest in the aesthetic character of experience that a given object affords. Simply put, our aesthetic interest in an object is predicated on the possibility of our deriving aesthetic experiences from the object.

Tolhurst's statement of the aesthetic theory of art is more complex. As a rough indication of the way in which an aesthetic definition might go, Tolhurst writes

A thing, *x*, is a work of art if and only if, there is a person, *y*, such that 1) *y* believed that *x* could serve as an object of (positive) aesthetic experiences, 2) *y* wanted *x* to serve as an object of (positive) aesthetic experiences, and 3) *y*'s belief and desire caused *y* (in a certain characteristic way) to produce *x*, to create *x*, or to place *x* where *x* is, etc.⁵

Both Beardsley and Tolhurst are involved in the attempt to limit the range of things we shall count as art. Broadly speaking, this attempt is carried out by two maneuvers: invoking the condition that the producer of a putative artwork had an

appropriate intention, which, in turn, is specified in terms of a plan to afford aesthetic experience. Given this twofold requirement, Beardsley believes that he can deny the status of art to such things as Edward T. Cone's "Poème symphonique" – a composition that involves one hundred metronomes running down – and to Duchamp's *Fountain*. In a similar gesture, Tolhurst thinks that Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* and *L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved* are not art. With such cases, Beardsley and Tolhurst believe that the artists could not possibly have been motivated by the intention of promoting aesthetic experience.

For the purposes of this essay I shall put the issue of the intentional component of the aesthetic theory of art somewhat to one side. I am more interested in the job that the concept of aesthetic experience is supposed to perform in the theories. It must be said that the commonsense approach of the aesthetic theory of art is very attractive. It conceives of the artwork as an object designed with a function, a function, moreover, that is connected with what a spectator can get out of an artwork in virtue of its facilitating or promoting certain types of responses or interactions. As a theory of art, it has the strength of acknowledging the mutual importance of the artist, the object, and the audience; it does not emphasize one element of the matrix of art over others in the manner of a Croce or a Collingwood with their preoccupations with the artist and his expression of intuitions.

Also, this type of theory puts its proponent in a strong position to systematically tackle further questions in the philosophy of art, such as what is the value of art and why are we interested in seeking out artworks? Clearly, the aesthetic theorist of art can answer that the value of art and the interest we have in pursuing artworks reside in whatever positive benefit there is in having the types of experiences and responses that art objects are designed to promote.

On the other hand, the delimitation of the relevant art experience to the aesthetic experience – the maneuver that gives the aesthetic theory of art much of its exclusionary thrust – appears to me to be a liability. The aesthetic definition of art privileges aesthetic experience to the exclusion of other nonaesthetic forms of interaction that the art object can be designed to promote. I shall argue that there is no reason for the aesthetic experience to be privileged in this way insofar as it seems to me that we cannot rule out other, nonaesthetic forms of response to art as illegitimate on the grounds that they are not aesthetic responses. Indeed, when discussing these other responses to works of art. I think I will be able to show that denying the status of art to such works as *L.H.O.O.Q.* and "Poème symphonique" is a mistake.

Before charting several forms of nonaesthetic responses to art, it will be helpful to clarify the notion of an aesthetic response to art. One problem here is that there are a number of different, ostensibly nonequivalent characterizations available. Let a sample suffice to initiate the discussion. Tolhurst intentionally refrains from characterizing aesthetic experience, though Beardsley, of course, has offered a number of accounts. Writing on aesthetic enjoyment, which as I take it is nothing but positive aesthetic experience, Beardsley has claimed that

Aesthetic enjoyment is (by definition) the kind of enjoyment we obtain from the apprehension of a qualitatively diverse segment of the phenomenal field insofar as the discriminable parts are unified into something of a whole that has a character (that is, regional qualities) of its own.⁶

This account offers what might be thought of as a content-oriented characterization of positive aesthetic experience. It is “content-oriented” because it stresses the properties of the object, here “regional qualities,” to which attention is directed. This approach corresponds to J. O. Urmson’s notion that what marks an aesthetic reaction is its attention to how things look and feel especially in terms of qualities such as appearing spacious, swift, strong, mournful, cheerful, and so on.⁷ I will take it that one major variation of the aesthetic response approach – the content-oriented approach – designates a response as aesthetic when it takes as its focus the aesthetic or expressive or “qualitative” appearances of the object. I will argue that this leaves us with a particularly impoverished view of our customary reaction to art that has extremely problematic consequences for any theorist who would want to use aesthetic experience as definitive of the function, vis-à-vis the spectators’ reaction, which artworks are designed to produce.

Beardsley has not always characterized aesthetic experience primarily by reference to content. Often he attempts to characterize aesthetic experience through the analysis of its internal-feeling-structure, which we might call an affect-oriented account of aesthetic experience. In recent essays, Beardsley has placed more weight than the previous quotation did on the affective features of aesthetic experience. In a formal statement of his criteria for aesthetic experience, one mirrored informally in *What Is Art?*, Beardsley says that an experience has an aesthetic character if it has the first of the following features and at least three of the others. For Beardsley, the five relevant features of aesthetic experience are: object directedness, felt freedom, detached affect, active discovery, and wholeness, that is, a sense of integration as a person.⁸ Apart from “active discovery,” these criteria allude to affective attributes of experience. And even in the case of “active discovery” the criterion is a case of both content-oriented and affect-oriented considerations, for though said discoveries are achieved through seeing connections between percepts and meanings, such insights are to be accompanied by a sense of intelligibility.

There are many problems with this characterization of aesthetic experience. First, it is possible that either there is no experience that meets this account or, if this account can be read in a way that grants that some experiences meet it, then other-than-aesthetic experiences, for example, solving theorems in nonapplied mathematics, may also meet it. But, most important, it is clear that many of our typical responses to art will, under a rigorous reading of Beardsley’s formula, not stand up as aesthetic, with the consequence that objects that support only certain typical but nonaesthetic interactions with art will not count as art. Of course, the desiderata canvassed in what I’ve called the content-approach and the predominantly affect-oriented approach do not reflect every belief about aesthetic experience found in the tradition; other beliefs will be mentioned in the ensuing

discussion of nonaesthetic responses to art. However, frequent return to these two models of the aesthetic response will be useful in discussing typical nonaesthetic interactions with art.

A great many of our typical, nonaesthetic responses to art can be grouped under the label of interpretation. Artists often include, imply, or suggest meanings in their creations, meanings and themes that are oblique and that the audience works at discovering. Mallarmé wrote

To actually name an object is to suppress three-quarters of the sense of enjoyment of a poem, which consists in the delight of guessing one stage at a time: to *suggest* the object, that is the poet's dream... There must always be a sense of the enigmatic in poetry, and that is the aim of literature.

And in a similar vein, John Updike says "I think books should have secrets as a bonus for the sensitive reader". These statements are by writers but there are artists in every artform who strive to incorporate oblique or hidden meanings or themes, and nonobvious adumbrations of the oblique themes in their work.⁹ In Peter Hutchinson's interpretation of *Tonio Kroger*, we find an example of an oblique theme, that of the split personality, and of an adumbration thereof, the use of the character's name to convey, in a camouflaged way, extra inflection concerning the nature of the split personality, Hutchinson writes

In *Tonio Kroger*, Mann's most famous early story, the eponymous hero bears features of two distinct qualities in his name: those of his artistic mother, and the more somber ones of his self-controlled father. It is his mother from whom Tonio has inherited his creative powers – she comes from "the South," a land lacking in self-discipline but rich in self-expression, and its qualities are symbolized in his Christian name (with its clear Italian ring). His father, on the other hand, the upright Northerner, the practical man of common sense and sound business acumen, bears a name suggestive of dullness and solidity (it derives from the Middle Low German 'Kroger,' a publican). The very sound of each component reinforces those ideas and explains the split in Tonio's character, the major theme of this Novelle.¹⁰

The presence of such obliquely presented themes and adumbrations occurs frequently enough, especially in certain genres, that audiences customarily search for hidden meanings that are likely to have been implanted in the artwork. Though Hutchinson's interpretation might be thought of as "professional," I think that it is reflective of one central way in which we, in general, have been trained to think, talk, and in short, respond to art. This training began when we were first initiated into the world of art in our earliest literature and art appreciation classes. Moreover, we have every reason to believe that our training in this matter supplies dependable guidelines for appropriate art responses since our early training is reinforced by the evident preoccupation with oblique meanings found in discussions of art by critics, scholars, and connoisseurs in newspapers, journals, and

learned treatises. And clearly our training and behavior regarding the search for hidden meanings are not beside the point since artists, steeped in the same hermeneutical traditions that spectators practice, have often put oblique meanings in their works precisely so that we, excited by the challenge, exercise our skill and ingenuity, our powers of observation, association, and synthesis in order to discover oblique themes and to trace their complex adumbrations.

With certain forms of interpretation, the spectator's relation to the artwork is gamelike. The spectator has a goal, to find a hidden or oblique theme (or an oblique adumbration of one), which goal the spectator pursues by using a range of hermeneutical strategies, which, in turn, place certain epistemological constraints on his or her activity. This interpretive play is something we have been trained in since grammar school, and it is a practice that is amplified and publicly endorsed by the criticism we read. The obliqueness of the artist's presentation of a theme confronts the audience with an obstacle that the audience voluntarily elects to overcome. How the artist plants this theme and how the audience goes about discovering it – in terms of distinctive forms of reasoning and observation – are primarily determined by precedent and tradition, though, of course, the tradition allows for innovation both in the area of artmaking and of interpretation. Within this gamelike practice, when we discover a hidden theme we have achieved a success, and we are prone, all things being equal, to regard our activity as rewarding insofar as the artwork has enabled us to apply our skills to a worthy, that is, challenging, object. But this type of interpretive play, though characteristic of our interaction with artworks, and rewarding, exemplifies neither the content-oriented form, nor the affect-oriented form of aesthetic response.

Though so far I have only spoken of the interpretation of obliquely presented meanings, it should be noted that our interpretive, nonaesthetic responses also include the discernment of latent structures. That is, when we contemplate art, we often have as a goal, upon which we may expend great effort, figuring out the way in which a given painting or musical composition works. In the presence of an artwork, we characteristically set ourselves to finding out what its structure is as well as often asking the reason for its being structured that way. Or, if we sense that an artwork has a certain effect, for example, the impression of the recession of the central figure in Malevich's *Black Quadrilateral*, we examine the formal arrangement and principles that bring this effect about.¹¹ Again, this is something we have been trained to do and something that pervades the discussion of art in both informal and professional conversation. Indeed, some radical formalists might hold that understanding how a work works is the only legitimate interest we should have in art and the only criterion of whether our response to art is appropriate. This seems an unduly narrow recommendation given art as we know it. My claim is only that identifying the structure or structures of a work – seeing how it works – is, like the identification of a hidden meaning, one criterion of a successful interaction with art. Moreover, this form of interaction is not “aesthetic,” as that is normally construed, but it should not, for that reason, be disregarded as a characteristic and appropriate mode of participating with artworks.