

BEYOND AESTHETICS
Philosophical Essays



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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 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

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 antidefinitive 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.

So far two types of interpretive play have been cited as examples of characteristic responses to art that tend to be overlooked when philosophers of art accord a privileged position to aesthetic responses as the canonical model of our interaction with art. And if interpretation is ignored as an appropriate art response while only aesthetic experience is so countenanced, and if art is identified in relation to the promotion of appropriate responses, then objects devoted exclusively to engendering interpretive play will be artistically disenfranchised. But, of course, one may wonder whether it is correct to claim, as I have, that the philosophers of art tend to ignore the importance of interpretation. For much of the literature in the field concerns issues of interpretation. This, admittedly, is true in one sense. However, it must be added that the attention lavished on interpretation in the literature is not focused on interpretive play as a characteristic form of the experience of interacting with artworks but rather revolves around epistemological problems, for example, are artist's intentions admissible evidence; can interpretations be true or are they merely plausible; and so forth. This epistemological focus, moreover, tends to take critical argument as its subject matter. Thus, the fact that philosophers have such epistemological interests in interpretation does not vitiate the point that interpretive play is an ingredient in our characteristic experience of artworks which philosophers, by privileging the aesthetic, have effectively bracketed from the art experience proper. Indeed, within the philosophical tradition, the kind of intellectual responses I have cited under the rubric of interpretation are not part of the experience, proper, of art. Hume, for example, tells us that though good sense is necessary for the correct functioning of taste, it is not part of taste.¹² Rather, the picture he suggests is that the prior operation of the understanding, engaged in doing things like identifying the purpose and related structure of the artwork, puts us in a position to undergo, subsequently, the central experience of the work, namely, for Hume, a feeling of pleasure.

This citation of Hume provides us with one reason why philosophers are tempted to exclude interpretive play from the art experience proper. The essential experience of art, for them, is a matter of feeling pleasure either of the undifferentiated Humean sort or of the disinterested Kantian variety. Interpretive activity, on the other hand, it might be said, has no obvious connection with pleasure. But I'm not so sure of this.

I have asserted that art spectatorship is a practice, a practice linked with other practices, such as artmaking, within the institution of the artworld. I follow MacIntyre when he writes that

By a "practice" I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.¹³

Within the practice of art spectatorship, among the goals of the enterprise, we find the making of interpretations of various sorts. Finding hidden meanings and latent structures are goods internal to the activity of art spectatorship. Pursuit of these goals in our encounters with artworks occupies large parts of our experience of artworks. Our interpretations can succeed or fail. They can be mundane or excellent. When our interpretations succeed, we derive the satisfaction that comes from the achievement of a goal against an established standard of excellence. That is, satisfaction is connected with success, within the practice of art spectatorship, when we are able to detect a latent theme or form in an artwork. Moreover, I see no reason to deny that this type of satisfaction is a type of pleasure even though it differs from the type of pleasurable sensation, or thrill, or beautiful rapture that theorists often appear to have in mind when speaking of aesthetic experience. The exercise of the skills of art spectatorship is its own reward within our practice. This is not to say that interpretive play is the only source of pleasure, but only that it is a source of pleasure. Thus, the worry that interpretive play is remote from pleasure should supply no grounds for excluding interpretive play from our characterization of the art experience proper.

Apart from the argument that interpretive play is not connected with pleasure, there may be other motives behind the tendency not to include interpretive play in the account of the art experience proper. One concern might be that interpretive play is not essential or fundamental to the art experience because it fails to differentiate the interaction with art from other experiences. In this context, the putative virtue of the notion of the aesthetic experience of art is that it can say how our experiences of art differ from other types of experience. The proponent of the aesthetic experience approach might argue that the interpretive play I refer to regarding the art response is not different in kind from that activity in which a cryptographer indulges.

Of course, it is not clear that aesthetic-experience accounts can do the differentiating work they are supposed to do. First, those versions of aesthetic experience that rely on notions of detachment and disinterest may just be implausible. Second, even an account as detailed as Beardsley's affect-oriented one doesn't differentiate the aesthetic experience of art from all other activities. For example, assuming that there are acts of disinterested attention, Beardsley's affect-oriented account might not differentiate aesthetic experience from the mathematician's experience of solving a problem that is divorced from practical application. So if the argument against including interpretive play in our account of the art experience is that interpretive play does not differentiate that experience from other kinds whereas the notion of aesthetic experience does, then we can say that neither of the putatively competing accounts succeeds at the task of essentially differentiating the art experience. Thus, essentially differentiating the art experience from others might not be a desideratum in our characterizations of it.

I suspect that since art evolved over a long period of time and through the interactions of many different cultures, it may support a plurality of interests such that the art experience is comprised of a plurality of activities of which having

aesthetic experiences of some sort is one, while engaging in interpretive play is another. There are undoubtedly more activities than only these two. Furthermore, it may be the case that none of the multiple types of interactions that comprise the art experience is unique to encounters with art. Of course, this might be granted at the same time that the proponent of the aesthetic theory urges that nevertheless aesthetic experience is a necessary component of any experience of art whereas other responses, like interpretive play, are not. At that point, the aesthetic theorist will have to show that aesthetic experience is such a necessary component. And, at least for those who hold an aesthetic definition of art, that will not be easy to do without begging the question. Suppose my counterexample to the notion that aesthetic experience is a necessary component of every art experience is Duchamp's *Fountain*. I note that it is an object placed in a situation such that it has an oblique significance that supports a great deal of interpretive play. But it does not appear to promote the kinds of response that theorists call aesthetic. So it affords an art experience that is not an aesthetic one. Moreover, the interpretive play available in contemplating *Fountain* involves an art experience of a very high degree of intensity for its kind. The aesthetic theorist can attempt to block this counterexample by saying that *Fountain* is not an artwork and that an interpretive response to it, therefore, is not even an experience of art. But one can only do this by asserting that aesthetic experience is definitive of art and of what can be experienced as art. Yet that begs the question insofar as it presupposes that a work designed to provoke and promote interpretive play cannot be art because interpretive play is not a criterion of the kind of experience appropriate to art.

One might argue that interpretive play is not fundamental to the art experience in the sense that it is not the original purpose for which the works we call art were created. But this faces problems from two directions. First, hermeneutics has been around for a long time and may even predate our notion of taste. Second, if one makes this argument with aesthetic experience in mind, can we be so certain that promoting aesthetic experience was the original purpose for which many of the more historically remote objects we call art were made? Moreover, if it is claimed that many of the ancient or medieval artifacts we call art at least had a potentially aesthetic dimension, it must be acknowledged that most of the self-same objects also possessed a symbolizing dimension that invited interpretive play.

Perhaps it will be argued that interpretive play is inappropriate to the art response proper. This tack seems to me an implausible one since all the evidence – our training in art appreciation and the behavior of the majority of our leading connoisseurs – points in the direction of suggesting that interpretative play is one of the central and esteemed modes of the practice of art spectatorship. Indeed, how would one go about showing that a behavior as deeply entrenched and as widely indulged in a practice as interpretive play in art spectatorship is inappropriate to the practice? Practices are human activities constituted by traditionally evolved purposes and ways of satisfying those purposes. The active traditions of such practices determine what is appropriate to a practice both in terms of the ends and means of the practice. Thus, in art, the continuing tradition of interpre-

tation establishes the appropriateness of the kinds of hermeneutical responses that we have been discussing.

One might try to show the inappropriateness of interpretive play as an art response by arguing that it interferes with some deeper goal of the practice of art. But what could that be? Perceiving aesthetic properties might be one candidate. However, in some cases interpretive play may, in fact, enhance the perception of aesthetic qualities. Nor does this suggest that interpretive play is subservient to the goal of perceiving qualities. For in some further instances, perceiving qualities may be valuable for the way in which it enables the discovery of a richer interpretation, while in other cases the interpretive play and the aesthetic response may remain independent of one another, supplying spectators with separate focii of interest in the work. Of course, proponents of the aesthetic approach may assert that theirs is the only proper response to art, but that, as I have, I hope, shown, is only an assertion.

I think that it is obvious that the types of activities I have used, so far, to exemplify interpretive play diverge from what was earlier called the content-oriented version of the aesthetic approach. There the notion was that an aesthetic response to art was one that was directed at the qualitative features of the object, such as its perceptible or expressive features. And though interpretation may, in different ways, sometimes be involved with aesthetic responses, it should be clear that interpretive play is not equivalent to aesthetic or expressive apprehension both because it is not evident that interpretation is an element in all instances of aesthetic perception, and because the objects of interpretive play extend beyond aesthetic and expressive qualities to themes and their adumbrations, and to structures and their complications.

But what about the affect-oriented variant of the aesthetic approach? First, it should be noted that many of the candidates in this area rely centrally on a characterization of aesthetic experience that rests on notions such as disinterested pleasure or detachment from practical interest. But one may successfully engage in interpretive play without being devoid of practical interest – one may be a critic whose reputation has been built on clever interpretations. So interpretive play differs from aesthetic experience as the latter is typically explicated.

But the Beardsleyan affect-oriented account of aesthetic experience is more detailed than many of its predecessors and it seems to have room for interpretive play. That is, in later versions of his account of aesthetic experience, Beardsley includes a new feature to the characterization of aesthetic experience – namely, active discovery – which is not included in previous accounts, either his own or, to my knowledge, those of others. By the inclusion of active discovery, it may be felt that interpretive play has been successfully wedded to aesthetic experience.

I disagree. For even in Beardsley's new variant, a response still requires much more than active discovery to amount to an aesthetic experience. It would also have to be at least object-directed as well as meeting two of the following three criteria: afford a sense of felt freedom, detached affect, or a sense of wholeness. But surely we could, via interpretive play, engage in active discovery without felt free-

dom – that is, the absence of antecedent concerns – and without detached affect – that is, emotional distance. Imagine a Marxist literary critic, pressed by a deadline to finish her paper on the hidden reactionary meaning of a Balzac novel. Nor does it seem likely that interpretive play often correlates with Beardsley's criterion of wholeness, that is, a sense of integration as a person. Indeed, I suspect that this is a rather unusual concomitant to expect of many interactions with art. And, furthermore, many instances of interpretive play may not meet the requirement of object directedness. A work like Duchamp's *Fountain* surely supports a great amount of interpretive play although most, if not all, of this can be derived from attention to the art historical context in which it was placed rather than to the object itself.

Even Beardsley's account of the element of active discovery, as it is involved in the art response, has an affective component. For under the rubric of active discovery, he not only has in mind that we actively make connections but that this be accompanied by a feeling of intelligibility. One is uncertain here whether this feeling of intelligibility is simply seeing a connection or whether it is something more. If the former, then it is true of every interpretive insight. But if it is the latter, which is a more likely reading given Beardsley's overall program, I am not sure that a sense of intelligibility accompanies every interpretive insight. I may come to realize that *The Turn of the Screw* is structured to support at least two opposed interpretations but that doesn't result in a sense of intelligibility.

What these considerations are meant to show is that even with the inclusion of active discovery in Beardsley's formula, interpretive play remains a mode of response to art that is independent of and not subsumable under aesthetic experience. Often, instances of interpretive play will not amount to full-blown, Beardsleyan-type aesthetic experiences because they will not score appreciably in terms of the criteria he requires over and above active discovery. And it may also be the case that instances of interpretive play may not even count as examples of Beardsleyan active discovery because they will not result in the appropriate sense of intelligibility.

But interpretive play nevertheless still remains a characteristic form of interaction with artworks. And, *pace* aesthetic theorists of art, I think that if we encounter an object designed to support interpretive play, even though it affords no aesthetic experience or aesthetic perception, then we have a reason to believe it is an artwork. Of course, an aesthetic theorist might try to solve this problem by saying that interpretive play, sans any particular affect or perceptual focus, is a sufficient condition for calling a response "aesthetic." However, this move involves abandoning not only the letter but also the spirit of the aesthetic approach, for the tradition has always used the idea of the "aesthetic" to single out a dimension of interaction with objects that is bound up with perceptual experience, affective experience, or a combination thereof. In short, to assimilate interpretive play as a mode of aesthetic experience misses the point of what people were trying to get at by use of the notion of the "aesthetic."

One key feature of the notion of the aesthetic, mentioned by Beardsley and others,¹⁴ is object directedness. In this light, having aesthetic experiences or aes-

thetic perceptions is, in large measure, a matter of focusing our attention on the artwork that stands before us. The implicit picture of spectatorship that this approach suggests is of an audience consuming artworks atomistically, one at a time, going from one monadic art response to the next. But this hardly squares with the way in which those who attend to art with any regularity or dedication either respond to or have been trained to respond to art. Art – both in the aspect of its creation and its appreciation – is a combination of internally linked practices, which, to simplify, we may refer to as a single practice. Like any practice,¹⁵ art involves not only a relationship between present practitioners but a relationship with the past. Artmaking and artgoing are connected with traditions. As artgoers we are not only interested in the artwork as a discrete object before us – the possible occasion for an aesthetic experience – but also as an object that has a place in the tradition. Entering the practice of art, even as an artgoer, is to enter a tradition, to become apprised of it, to be concerned about it, and to become interested in its history and its ongoing development. Thus, a characteristic response to art, predictably enough, is, given an artwork or a series of artworks, to strive to figure out and to situate their place within the tradition, or within the historical development and/or tradition of a specific art form or genre. This implies that important aspects of our interaction with artworks are not, strictly speaking, object directed, but are devoted to concerns with issues outside the object. We don't concentrate on the object in splendid isolation: our attention fans out to enable us to see the place of the art object within a larger, historical constellation of objects. Nor is this attending to the historical context of the object undertaken to enhance what would be traditionally construed as our aesthetic experience. Rather, our wider ambit of attention is motivated by the art appreciator's interest in the tradition at large. Yet this deflection of attention from the object is not an aesthetic aberration. It is part of what is involved with entering a practice with a living tradition.

To be interested in the tradition at large is to be interested in its development and in the various moves and countermoves that comprise that development. For example, encountering one of Morris Louis's *Unfurleds*, we may remark upon the way in which it works out a problematic of the practice of painting initiated by the concern of Fauvists and Cubists with flatness. The painting interests us not only for whatever aesthetic perceptions it might promote, but also for the way in which it intervenes in an ongoing painterly dialectic about flatness. To be concerned with the significance of the painting within the tradition of modern art is not inappropriate, but rather is a characteristic response of an appreciator who has entered the practice of art. From one artwork to the next, we consider the way in which a new work may expand upon the dialectic or problematic present in earlier works. Or, a later work may, for example, amplify the technical means at the disposal of a given artform for the pursuit of its already established goals. So we may view a film such as Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* as the perfection of primitive film's commitment to narration. Such an interest in *The Birth of a Nation* is neither the viewpoint of an antiquarian, a filmmaker, or a film specialist. It is

rather the response of any film appreciator who has entered the practice of film spectatorship.

Confronted with a new artwork, we may scrutinize it with an eye to isolating the ways in which it expands upon an existing artworld dialectic, solves a problem that vexed previous artists, seizes upon a hitherto unexpected possibility of the tradition, or amplifies the formal means of an artform in terms of the artform's already established pursuits. But a new artwork may also stand to the tradition by way of making a revolutionary break with the past. A new artwork may emphasize possibilities not only present in, but actually repressed by, preceding styles; it may introduce a new problematic; it may repudiate the forms or values of previous art. When Tristan Tzara composed poems by randomly drawing snippets of words from a hat, he was repudiating the Romantic poet's valorization of expression, just as the Romantic poet had repudiated earlier poets' valorization of the representation of the external world in favor of a new emphasis on the internal, subjective world. Tzara's act wasn't random; it made perfect sense in the ongoing dialogue of art history. Concerned with the tradition at large, we as spectators review artworks in order to detect the tensions or conflicts between artistic generations, styles, and programs. We interpret stylistic choices and gambits as repudiations and gestures of rejection by later artworks of earlier ones. This is often much like the interpretation of a hidden meaning; however, it requires attention outside the work to its art historical context. The significance we identify is not so much one hidden in the work as one that emerges when we consider the work against the backdrop of contesting styles and movements. Call it the dramatic meaning of the artwork. But as participants in a tradition, we are legitimately interested in its historical development and especially in its dramatic unfolding. Recognizing the dramatic significance of an artwork as it plays the role of antagonist or protagonist on the stage of art history is not incidental to our interest in art but is an essential element of immersing ourselves in the tradition. Following the conflicts and tensions within the development of art history is as central a component of the practice of art spectatorship as is having aesthetic experiences.

The "other directed," as opposed to the "object directed," interpretive play we characteristically mobilize when interacting with art takes other appropriate forms than those of detecting stylistic amplifications and repudiations. For example, we may wish to contemplate lines of influence or consider changes of direction in the careers of major artists. These concerns as well are grounded in our interests, as participants, in an evolving tradition. However, rather than dwell on these, I would rather turn to a proposal of the way in which the detection of a repudiation – insofar as it is an important and characteristic interpretive response to art – can enable us to short-circuit the dismissal, by aesthetic theorists of art, of such works as Duchamp's *Fountain*.

Let us grant that Duchamp's *Fountain* does not afford an occasion for aesthetic experiences or aesthetic perceptions as those are typically and narrowly construed. Nevertheless, it does propose a rich forum for interpretive play. Its placement in a certain artworld context was designed to be infuriating, on the one

hand, and enigmatic and puzzling on the other. Confronted by *Fountain*, or by reports about its placement in a gallery, one asks what it means to put such an object on display at an art exhibition. What is the significance of the object in its particular social setting? And, of course, if we contemplate *Fountain* against the backdrop of art history, we come to realize that it is being used to symbolize a wealth of concerns. We see it to be a contemptuous repudiation of that aspect of fine art that emphasizes craftsmanship in favor of a reemphasis of the importance of ideas to fine art. One might also gloss it as a gesture that reveals the importance of the nominating process, which George Dickie analyzed, of the institution of the artworld. And so on.

Now my point against aesthetic theorists of art is that even if *Fountain* does not promote an aesthetic interaction, it does promote an interpretive interaction. Moreover, an interpretive interaction, including one of identifying the dialectical significance of a work in the evolution of art history, is as appropriate and as characteristic a response to art as an aesthetic response. Thus, since *Fountain* encourages an appropriate and characteristic art response, we have an important reason to consider it to be a work of art even if it promotes no aesthetic experience.

Aesthetic theorists hold that something is art if it has been designed to function in such a way as to bring about certain appropriate responses to art. This seems to be a reasonable strategy. However, such theorists countenance only aesthetic responses as appropriate. Yet there are other characteristic and appropriate responses to art. And if an object supports such responses to an appreciable degree, then I think that gives us reason to call the object art.

One objection to my reclamation of *Fountain* might be that my model of the standard artgoer is unacceptable. It might be said that someone involved in trying to decipher the moves and countermoves of artists within the historically constituted arena of the artworld is not the standard spectator but a specialist or an art historian. My response to this is to deny that I am speaking of specialists and to urge that I take as my model someone who attends to art on some regular basis, and who is an informed viewer, one who “keeps up” with art without being a professional critic or a professor of art. It is the responses of such spectators that should provide the data for philosophers of art concerned to discuss the experience of art.

On the other hand, I am disquieted by the implicit picture that aesthetic theories project of the standard artgoer. For them, it would appear, the spectator is one who goes from one encounter with art to the next without attempting to connect them. Such a person, for example, might read a novel every year or so, hear a concert occasionally, and go to an art exhibition whenever he or she visits New York. But why should the casual viewer of art be our source for characterizing the art experience? If we want to characterize what it is to respond to baseball appropriately, would we look to the spectator who watches one game every five years? Of course, this is an *ad hominem* attack. Aesthetic theorists don’t say that we should use such casual artgoers as our model of the standard spectator. Nevertheless, there is something strange about their standard viewer, namely, that he or she responds to each work of art monadically, savoring each aesthetic experience as a unitary event

and not linking that event to a history of previous interactions with artworks. As a matter of fact, I think this picture is inaccurate. Such an artgoer would be as curious as the dedicated baseball spectator who attends games for whatever excitement he can derive from the contest before him and who does not contemplate the significance of this game in terms of the past and future of the practice of baseball.

The aesthetic theorist may, of course, admit that interpretive responses to the hidden meanings, dramatic significance, and latent structures are appropriate within the practice of spectatorship. But he might add that they are not basic because the practice of art spectatorship would never have gotten off the ground nor would it continue to keep going if artworks did not give rise to aesthetic experiences. Our desire for aesthetic pleasure is the motor that drives the art institution. These are, of course, empirical claims. Possibly aesthetic pleasure is what started it all, although it is equally plausible to think that the pleasure of interpretation could have motivated and does motivate spectatorship. But, in any case, this debate is probably beside the point. For it is likely that both the possibility of aesthetic pleasure and the pleasure of interpretation motivate artgoing, and that interacting with artworks by way of having aesthetic perceptions and making interpretations are both appropriate and equally basic responses to art.

My dominant thesis has been that there are more responses, appropriate to artworks, than aesthetic responses. I have not given an exhaustive catalogue of these but have focused upon various types of interpretive responses. This raises the question of whether or not something like the aesthetic definition of art, amplified to incorporate a more catholic view of the appropriate experiences art avails us, couldn't be reworked in such a way that the result would be an adequate theory of art. The theory might look like this: "A work of art is an object designed to promote, in some appreciable magnitude, the having of aesthetic perceptions, or the making of various types of interpretations, or the undertaking of whatever other appropriate responses are available to spectators."

Attractive as this maneuver is, I doubt it will work. It does not seem to me that any given type of response is necessary to having an appropriate interaction with the artwork. With some artworks, we may only be able to respond in terms of aesthetic perceptions while with others only interpretive responses are possible. Nor, by the way, does any particular response supply us with sufficient grounds for saying something is a work of art. Cars are designed to impart aesthetic perceptions but they are not typically artworks, while we might interpret one artist throwing soup in another artist's face as the repudiation of a tradition without counting the insult as art. Likewise an encoded military document with a hidden message is not art despite the interpretive play it might engender.

At the same time, if we are trying to convince someone that something is an artwork, showing that it is designed to promote one or more characteristic art interactions – whether aesthetic or interpretive – supplies a reason to regard the object as art. Suppose we are arguing about whether comic book serials like *The Incredible Hulk*, *Spiderman*, and the *Fantastic Four* are art. And suppose we agree that such exercises do not afford aesthetic experiences of any appreciable magnitude.

But, nevertheless, suppose I argue that these comic books contain hidden allegories of the anxieties of adolescence, such that those allegories are of a complexity worthy of decipherment. At that point, we have *a* reason to regard the comics as art, and the burden of proof is on the skeptic who must show that the alleged allegories are either merely fanciful concoctions of mine or are so transparent that it is outlandish to suppose that they warrant a response sophisticated enough to be counted as an interpretation.



BEAUTY AND THE GENEALOGY OF ART THEORY

Within the analytic tradition, those of us who take art as our field of study call ourselves either philosophers of art or aestheticians. From one perspective, these alternative labels could be seen as a harmless sort of shorthand. For two major concerns of the field, however it is named, are the theory of art, which traditionally pertains to questions about the nature of the art object, and aesthetic theory, which pertains primarily to certain dimensions of the experience of art (and also to the experience of certain features of nature). Thus, rather than identifying ourselves longishly as philosophers of art *and* philosophers of aesthetics, for economy's sake, we may simply refer to ourselves as one or the other, leaving the remaining label unstated, but understood. And where this is the motive behind the alternations of title, the ambiguous labeling seems quite harmless.

However, the ambiguity can also be understood to rest on a substantive and controversial claim – namely, that the theory of art and the theory of aesthetics are conceptually linked in such a way that the former can be reduced to the latter; that, in other words, there are not two, generally independent areas of philosophical inquiry here, but one unified field. Thus, we are called either philosophers of art or philosophers of aesthetics because, in most contexts of any significance, those titles signal a concern with the selfsame issues.

The view that the philosophy of art and the philosophy of aesthetics are conceptually linked is explicitly stated in what have been called aesthetic theories of art. On this approach, which is enjoying quite a resurgence nowadays,¹ the artwork is functional; such works are designed to create a certain experience in spectators, namely, an aesthetic experience. Thus, with aesthetic theories of art, our conception of aesthetic experience is the most crucial feature in the identification of artworks. In effect, the theory of art is virtually reduced to aesthetics, insofar as aesthetic experience is the