History and Anti-History in Philosophy, eds. V.Tejera and T. Levine (Kulwer, 1989), pp.256-274.

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ASSUMPTIONS OF ANALYTIC AESTHETICS

A. Berleant

Professor of Philosophy

C. W. Post College

Although artistic activity has been a major social phenomenon in the western world, aesthetics has not always reflected the changes in techniques, processes, themes and uses through which the arts have developed and had their effect. Theory most often comes after the fact, and properly so. Yet aesthetics in its history has not only displayed an unfitting hubris, with thinkers attempting to legislate about style, suitability and materials to the artist; aesthetics has also lagged far behind the living edge of artistic activity and discussed it in anachronistic terms.

The intense activity centering around art in the present is a striking instance of this incongruity between art and aesthetics. On one hand, a century of unusual innovation and experimentation in all the arts has expanded their range and dimensions, from methods and materials to kinds of construction and kinds of occasion for experiencing them. On the other side stand the prevailing judgments of English language theoreticist aesthetics and criticism. The focus of this essay will therefore be on the ideas that dominate this discussion, and which reflect views that originated in the eighteenth century. These views had a part in the history of artistic liberation from earlier constraints of the aristocracies of church and state; but they harbor an unlabelled tradition of taking art and artisanship as activities inferior to the new sciences in value and as knowledge. The eighteenth century was a period which claimed that artistic freedom could be achieved by the separation of the artistic construction from alien social, religious and practical concerns--leaving the viewer free to engage in an

unobstructed contemplation of the aesthetic object, as a disinterested observer capable of clarity and openness.

But the battle cries of two centuries past, in art as in other fields, have become reverential sermons to present ears. The appeals ring empty, a misleading guide to the uninitiated, an irrelevance to the working artist. It will be instructive to reflect on the historical course of aesthetics, for the mapping of its direction will at the same time allow us to judge the appropriateness of its demands upon the present. What are the main assumptions of the theory that has emerged from the rationalism and empiricism of the past? Where, on the other hand, are the vectors of recent art taking us? What are art's dimensions and demands? And how can we develop a reflective stance able fairly to categorize and support the vital activity of the present? To these questions I now turn.

Aesthetics, as a separate discipline, is conventionally regarded as originating in the middle of the eighteenth century with the publication of Baumgarten's *Aesthetica;* but its roots really reach back to classical Greece. During the intervening centuries aesthetics took on the garb of whatever philosophy appropriated it, reflecting in turn cosmological, metaphysical, religious, moral and epistemological theses until, with the Enlightenment, it emerged with an identity of its own. When with the eighteenth century the autonomy of aesthetics was proclaimed, it appeared that at long last a major phase of social activity had finally achieved a sort of recognition and that aesthetics would henceforth enjoy the independence as a discipline to which the distinctiveness of art and aesthetic experience would seem to have entitled it.

For some, this appears to have taken place. The writings of Alison, Shaftesbury, Addison, Hutcheson and others of the British school developed the notion of disinterestedness to denote the perception of an object "for its own sake." This idea became the mark of a "new" and distinctive mode of experience called the aesthetic, distinct from such more recognized modes as the utilitarian, cognitive, moral and religious modes of experience[1] In the writings of the earlier

[1] Jerome Stolnitz "On the Origin of ‘Aesthetic Disinterestedness’," *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism* XX, 1961, pp.131-143.

part of the century, the various fine arts were coalesced into a generally accepted set in which they were compared to one another and organized by the same principles. In the latter part of the century, especially in Germany, the general theory of the fine arts achieved the status of a separate discipline and, with the work of Kant, came to require a distinct and integral place in philosophical systems.[2]

One can identify in the recent Anglo-analytic literature of aesthetics a continuing body of doctrine that derives from formulations shaped during the eighteenth century. For it was out of this period in modern thought that there developed a putatively coherent set of doctrines about art, which were subsequently adapted and transmitted but which were not till lately challenged on theoretical grounds. A brief look at the writing of that period, particularly in the work of Shaftesbury, the first to give expression to most of these ideas, will serve to illustrate the characteristic themes.

The work of the British theorists of the eighteenth century dealt not with the characterization of art in general, but with the types and location of beauty and the manner of its apprehension. The problem for them was to determine in what objects beauty could be found and what traits of imagination were needed to respond to it with pleasure. That beauty was a property of some objects was beyond dispute: the task was to identify it. In 1711 Shaftesbury writes of the painter that "his piece, if it be beautiful, and carries truth, must be a whole, by itself, complete, independent, and withal as comprehensive as he can make it."[3] Such beauty is not to be found in the material from which art is fashioned until that material acquires something that beautifies it.[4] [Shades of Plato's Hippias in the *Hippias Major!]* It is art that beautifies matter, and since there is no principle of beauty in the physical object, the principle of meaning, regulation and order must be supplied by the mind.[5] A particular sort of attention is necessary to

---

[2] P.O. Kristeller "The Modern System of the Arts," *Renaissance Thought II* (N.Y. Harper 1965). pp.207, 215, 222-225.

[3]Shaftesbury *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711); repr. New York 1900, Vol I, p.94.

[4] *Ibid*. VoLII, p.136-7.
[5] 5 *Ibid*. V 01.11, p.130-1.

apprehend such beauty, one which considers the object for its own sake without regard to further purposes. The rise of this notion of disinterestedness has been well documented, how it was disentangled from moral considerations and consequences, and how it came to be taken as the central trait of the aesthetic attitude.[6] Associated with the notion was the requirement that the art work be demarcated from its surroundings and set off as an independent work instead of being diffused across "the walls, the ceilings, the staircases, the cupolas, and other remarkable places either of churches or palaces."

Shaftesbury states, "we may give to any particular work the name Tablature when the work is in reality 'a single piece, comprehended in one view, and formed according to one single intelligence, meaning or design; which constitutes a real whole, by a mutual and necessary relation of its parts, the same as of the members in a natural body'."[7]

From this formative period in the history of British aesthetics there emerged an identification of the art object as something separate and distinct from its surroundings, and which required a special attitude for its proper appreciation. Later thinkers continued this tradition, as in Muensterberg's notion of isolation, Bullough's of psychical distance and Ortega's of dehumanization. Stolnitz synthesized two centuries of discussion when he defined the aesthetic attitude as "disinterested and (sic) sympathetic attention to, and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone."[8] Of course, the formulation is synthetic, not historical; it takes no account of the mounting contributions of expression theory to the understanding of art. But so thoroughly did these ideas establish themselves in the

---

[6] Stolnitz, *op.cit.* Cf. also the critique of this notion in V. Tejera *Art and Human Intelligence* Chapters 1 and 2 on "The Nature of Aesthetics," and "The Subject Matter of the Philosophy of Art" (N.Y. Appleton 1965).

[7] "A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules" (1712), quoted by M. Fried *Absorption and Theatricality* (U. of Calif. 1980), p.89.

[8] J. Stolnitz *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism* (Boston: Houghton 1960), p.35.

theoreticist literature of British aesthetics that they acquired doctrinal

status, implied as often as articulated, becoming a tightly-knit set of presuppositions that continue to dominate Anglo-analytic aesthetics to the present day.

There are two related cases to be made here. One concerns the persistence of these eighteenth century ideas in contemporary analytic aesthetics; the other their inadequacy in accounting for the arts of our time.[9] In what follows I propose to identify some of the central tenets of recent and current literature in aesthetics that can be recognized as clear echoes of eighteenth century doctrine, and I shall then raise some questions regarding their suitability as an explanatory account of the experience and function of art when seen from the vantage point of the present. I begin by considering what some of these tenets are, recognizing that while they may not have been assumed without exception, their prevalence in Anglo-analytic aesthetics is sufficient reason to render them candidates for inclusion in the official doctrinal canon.

1. Art Consists Primarily of Objects

Too many recent discussions of art, from general accounts to quests for definition and critical labors over its manifestations, have in common the intent to locate and characterize "what art is." A reasonable if anti-

[9] 9 The second discussion has been under way for some time. Cf. G. Morpurgo- Tagliabue *L'Esthetique Contemporaire,* 1960; A. Hofstadter *Truth and Art,* 1964; V. Tejera *Art and Human Intelligence,* 1965; R. Arnheim, *Visual Thinking,* 1969; A. Berleant "Aesthetics and the Contemporary Arts," JAAC XXIX (1970), and *The Aesthetic Field,* 1970; V. Tejera "Contemporary Trends in Aesthetics," JVI, VIII (1974); J. Buchler, *The Main of Light,1974*. It is the first of these issues that will concern me here. The development of a reflective account that is responsive to the changed modalities of creation, action and experience that have emerged in the last century can also be found to be under way in the above-mentioned and other works. Some, like Tejera's *Art and Human Intelligence,* locate the origin of these ideas more specifically in the theoreticist and neoclassicist misunderstanding of Aristotle's *Poetics.*

functional effort, one might agree; but an attempt which, in nearly every case, harbors the assumption that the subject under consideration is a set of objects or **things** which it is the writer's task somehow to identify and explain. Notwithstanding its etymology, the term "art" has come to signify a class of objects rather than the activity by which "they" are fashioned. So too, is this the case in the popular mind, where art is associated with economic value, and the possession of art objects with the achievement of social status. By art is meant, in some uncritical sense, a poem or painting, a sculpture or novel, a piece of music or a film. Despite the difficulty of locating exactly what the object of art is[10], the analytical approach has no doubt that the art referred to is some **thing** requiring a special kind of attention called the aesthetic attitude, and that the art in criticism is an artifact to which a careful scrutiny is directed by an analytic intelligence informed by a knowledge of past and present forms. It also believes that the art in art history is a collection of objects accepted, through careful scholarship, by reason of their contribution to the evolution of technique and their influence on subsequent art.

The issue of definition has centered typically around the term "work of art." That Morris Weitz's discussion quite confounds "art" with "work of art" is an interesting reflection of the dogma we are illustrating.[11] For Weitz the search for a definition of art becomes a quest for necessary and sufficient properties of objects that entitle them to be classified as art, and an attempt to understand the logic of definition as it applies to so protean a class of objects as "art," in order to furnish recommendations about what to look for as traits of such objects. Beardsley's proposal to substitute "aesthetic object" for "work of art"

[10] R. Wollheim's detailed but inconclusive discussion of the question is the subject of his book *Art and Its Objects* (Cambridge U.P. 1980). The usefully critical discussion of this question in Tejera's *Art and Human Intelligence,* in Chapter I and throughout the book, is not taken account of or even cited by Wollheim. This seems to say something about the inattention of the Anglo-analytic tradition to relevant works in other traditions. J. Buchler's *Main of Light* should be cited for the way in which it sees art as a product and locates it in the order of exhibitive judgment.

[11] M. Weitz "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," JAAC XV (1956), p.27 ff.

may free discussion from some inherited difficulties, but it creates other difficulties and does not alter our point.[12] The narrow definitional approach does not try to identify a distinctive activity, mode of response or judgment; it looks only for the determination of a particular sort of object or thing whatever else we call it, "work of art," "aesthetic object" or simply "art." Such an approach has also never confronted the fact that in taking "what is art" as a theoretical question, it has begged the question of the relation of theory to production. In Aristotle, the poetics of art (i.e. aesthetics) is a productive knowledge and not theoretical. The relevance of theory to art, as a kind of productive knowledge or reflective product, is to say the least problematic.

Insofar as epistemological issues have attracted Anglo-analytic thinkers, these have led them to treat the general problems of representation, identity and definition as relating only to the understanding of objects rather than to the creation or experience of them. Goodman's analysis of the arts as classes of objects to be explained as conventional symbol-systems reflects such an attitude; it is an attitude that seeks to understand the aesthetic by reference to the extra-aesthetic.[13] Danto at least recognizes the essential contribution of the interpreter. The latter, informed by a knowledge of art history and "theory," is able to take objects "indistinguishable" from other things in the "real" world and see them as part of "the art world" which is made up of interpreted objects. Indeed, it is only as an embodiment of an artist's seeing that the work of art stands before us, an externalization of his consciousness (sic).[14] Danto's work exhibits a pervasive dualism between the interpreter and the object, the viewer and the work, that, despite Danto's psychological discriminations, persists as a necessary gap between the appreciator and the object.

It may not seem controversial to assert that the function of criticism is to explicate the art object, to identify its features, explain its use of the medium, relate its style to other art and judge the

---

[12] 12 M. Beardsley "The Definition of the Arts," *JAAC* XX (1961), p. l75
[13] 13 N. Goodman *Languages of Art* (N.Y. Bobbs-Merrill 1968), pp. 210, 217, 221, 245, 252-255.

[14] A. Danto, *The Transformation of the Commonplace.* A Philosophy of Art, (Harvard *V.P.* 1981).

effectiveness with which the product has been fashioned. And to hold that the duty of the philosophy of criticism is to establish the rationale of the product, its status and suitability, and judge the evidence invoked amounts to resting the philosophy of criticism on the same assumptions as the practice of this kind of criticism.

There is hardly a better illustration of the fixation of criticism on the art object than what came to be known as the New Criticism in its formalist revision by Cleanth Brooks. The founders of the New Criticism were all poets like Ransom, Eliot, Empson and Winters and cultural critics as well as literary critics. Their criticism was based on their poet's knowledge of poetry, their historical or socio-semantic interest in language, and their conception of a poetic tradition as an accumulation of techniques and experiments in the making of poetry. Thus, they were both poets interested in the individual design of the poem as a thing made (poiema), and historically sensitive contextualizing critics. But Brooks, who was neither a contextualist nor a poet, turned the New Critics' interest in how individual works are put together, and what they respond to, into a general formalist approach to poetry as a whole.[15] In Brook's formalist revision it was essential to remove all that he found distracting from or peripheral to a literary work, whether historical, biographical or social. He deemed such concerns external and therefore irrelevant. For him, the sole object of critical consideration had to be the poem or novel, and a clear and sufficient elucidation of the work was to be obtained through an undistracted study of the text alone. And this same tendency to give exclusive attention to the object itself, as a selfvalidating thing, has also been prevalent among those seeking to define art and describe its ontological status. Noteworthy recent exceptions to this trend, in the English language, have been the coordinative analysis of poetry to be found in J. Buchler's *The Main of Light,* my own *The*

[15] 16 C. Brooks "New Criticism," in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry,* ed. A. Preminger (Princeton U.P. 1974), p.568. I am indebted to Prof. Victorino Tejera for noting the marked difference between Brooks and the poets who were the originators of the New Criticism. His association with them as their spokesman has misrepresented their cultural and formative concerns as a formalist concern rather than the concern that it was with the design and deep meaningfulness of the individual poem-in-the-making.

Aesthetic Field, Tejera's *Art and Human Intelligence* and the works of S.K. Langer and Rudolph Arnheim.

2. Art Objects Possess a Special Status

The separateness of the art object is the ground on which a number of related doctrines have been planted. Having identified art with its objects, the desire to assign them special standing naturally reinforces their apartness. This is a move, so to say, from the distinct to the distinctive. This kind of aesthetics has proposed an impressive array of features that supposedly set off the objects of art from other things.

Readers of British aesthetics soon encounter the concept of significant form, a concept that obtained pre-eminence through the writings of Roger Fry and Clive Bell. Fry detected in the historical evolution of painting a discerning recognition whereby purely aesthetic criteria replaced representation as fundamental to the nature of art. These criteria involve the use of forms that have a direct emotional effect on the viewer. Such "emotional elements of design" include line, mass, space, light and shade, color, and plane which, while associated with the physical conditions of life, have in art a direct and immediated appeal.[16] To these relations and combinations of lines and colors Bell assigned the term "significant form," which he considered to be "the one quality common to all works of visual art" and "the quality that distinguishes works of art from all other classes of objects."[17]

Where in the tradition of expression theory art is continuous with other human enterprises and also a dimension of them, in the representationist tradition the distinctness of the art object has seldom been challenged.[18] In this tradition the task of the commentator is

[16] Roger Fry *Vision and Design,* 1920 (N.Y. World 1956), pp. 12, 3335, 37f.
[17] 17 C. Bell *Art,* 1913 (N.Y. Capricorn 1958), p.17f.

[18] 18 J. Dewey's *Art as Experience* (N.Y. Minton 1934), A. Berleant *The Aesthetic Field,* 1970 and V. Tejera *Art and Human Intelligence,* 1965 are among Americans who have questioned the separateness of art. Among Europeans are E. Veron *Aesthetics* transl. (Philadelphia: Lippincott 1879) and B. Croce *Aesthetic as the Science of Expression* transl. (London: Macmillan 1922).

assumed to be that of discerning what it is that makes such an object distinctive. For example Hampshire, in discussing the role of the critic as against the moralist, insists that the purpose of the critic is to lead people to look at the work of art as a unique object, to see it not as representative of a class of objects but as individual and unrepeatable.[19] Sibley initiated a search for aesthetic concepts as terms which require taste or perceptiveness to be applied.[20] These were to be distinctive in the language of art description or criticism, although Sibley despaired of being able to establish sufficient conditions for their application, since for him the aesthetic Quality rests on a unique combination of such features.[21] And Margolis is intrigued by the ontological peculiarity of works of art.[22]

In an exploration of the notion of uniqueness as applied to a work of art, Ruby Meager probes the issue of whether universalizable evaluations are possible.[23] The traditional view, she notes, is to hold that to be valuable as a work of art, an object must be valuable "in itself" and not for what it can do or we can do with it. There are, however, general rules which artists use and critics appeal to, and there may indeed be general rules that identify "what gives us aesthetic satisfaction in most cases." Yet after a lengthy consideration of comparative instances in ethics, of logical issues and numerous analogous cases, Meager concludes that it is possible to make comparative evaluations of works of art by means of what she calls an "ostensive general principle of evaluation," where objects exhibit certain characteristics in common but where the resemblance is too complex and subtle to be formulated as a rule. When such ostensive principles are applied to individual works, it is precisely the particular form in which they are manifested in an object that is the basis for

---

[19]S. Hampshire "Logic and Appreciation," in W. Elton ed. *Aesthetics and Language* (Blackwell: 1954), p.165.

[20]F. Sibley "Aesthetic Concepts," in J. Margolis ed. *Philosophy Looks at the Arts,* (Temple U.P. 1978), p.64.

[21]Ibid. pp.65, 70, 74.

[22] J. Margolis "The Ontological Peculiarity of Works of Art," op.cit. p.213-220.

[23] Ruby Meager "The Uniqueness of a Work of Art," in Levich op.cit. pp.520-540.

the evaluation of that object and the sole force which any such principle obtains. Thus, this foray into uniqueness ends finally by reasserting the convention that the uniqueness of a work of art rests on its being evaluated for itself and not for the uses to which it may be put.

I cite these discussions in the Analytic literature of aesthetics, as instances of the view that art objects possess a special standing. Whatever disagreements may arise are likely to be around that belief rather than with it. This conviction is not confined to theoreticists alone; it finds apparent confirmation in Western societies by the sequestering of art objects in museums, cultural centers and other hallowed halls. This practice appears to give countenance to the theoreticist belief that art is qualitatively unique and separate, and should be kept so.

3. Art Objects Must Be Regarded in a Unique Way

The eighteenth century notion of disinterestedness has reappeared under various guises. Associated with the special status accorded art is the correlative notion that to appreciate them properly one must approach these objects with a special attitude, an attitude peculiar to the contemplation of art. This aesthetic attitude, as it has been called, refers to a characteristic of the perceiver not of the object, and is distinguished by some identifying traits.

The aesthetic attitude has received continued attention, developing to the point where it is not the object but the attitude which has become for some the sole basis for the designation of art.[24] Not without previous challenges, the idea that art requires a distinctive attitude has again become controversial, with commentators altering or rejecting it. Without surveying extensions of the idea or the whole debate about it, I will document its continued prevalence.

Bullough's notion of psychical distance is perhaps the best known and influential of attempts to formulate the distinctive character of

[24] "Anything which, when attended to in the proper way...can be an aesthetic object." R.L. Zimmerman "Can Anything be an Aesthetic Object?" JAAC XXV (1966) p.186. See also H.S. Langfeld *The Aesthetic Attitude* (N.Y. Harcourt 1920).

aesthetic perception.[25] The metaphor of distance is taken to represent the sense of dissociation within which the difference lies between our practical relation to objects and the aesthetic relation. In the same vein Ortega contrasts the lived reality of the human point of view with dehumanized reality, which allows aesthetic sentiments to flourish.[26] More recently C.I. Lewis adopted a similar convention, distinguishing the aesthetic attitude in which an object is taken in its presentational quality alone, from both the moral attitude in which there is preparation for action and the cognitive attitude which is concerned with prediction and theoretical knowledge.[27] It is notable that this discussion continues to perpetuate the unquestioned use of the concepts of disinterestedness and distance while baldly reasserting the notion of a distinctive attitude.

Stolnitz, for example, regards disinterestedness as the defining condition of art, dismissing avant-garde art that programmatically rejects such an attitude.[28] Aldrich distinguishes an aesthetic mode of perception, which he calls prehension, from the non-aesthetic mode of observation.[29] And Beardsley represents a similar position when he proposes that "a work of art ... is any perceptual or intentional object that is deliberately regarded from the aesthetic point of view"--which comes from attending to the formal unity or regional qualities of an object.[30] Other instances could be cited; but these should suffice to represent the nature of the belief in Analytic aesthetics.

---

[25]E. Bullough "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Esthetic Principle," *British Journal of Psychology* V (1913), repro in M. Rader ed. (N.Y. Holt 1960) p.394-411.

[26] J. Ortega y Gasset *The Dehumanization of Art* (Garden City: Doubleday 1956) p.16.

[27] C. I. Lewis *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (La Salle: Open *Court* 1946) p. 37, 444.

[28] J. Stolnitz "The Artistic and the Aesthetic 'In Interesting Times'," JAAC XXXVII 4 (1979) p. 4llf.

[29] V. C. Aldrich *Philosophy of Art* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall 1963) p.19f.

[30] M. C. Beardsley "The Aesthetic Point of View," in *Contemporary Philosophic Thought* Vol.3, ed. Kiefer and Munitz (SUNY Press 1970) p.219-237.

This historical sketch reveals a way of taking art that is integral to the Analytic literature of aesthetics. Deriving from the formative period of modern aesthetics, it has hardened into a set of axioms which have acquired the status of unquestioned dogmas. Our engagement with the arts which aesthetics must clarify now requires that we test this set of assumptions against the arts they are supposed to illuminate. The inadequacy of these doctrines becomes visible from a perspective willing to appeal to the art of the present.

The evolution of the arts in the twentieth century has sometimes seemed chaotic; it has most often been experimental and controversial. It is probably fair to say that there exists a greater variety of diverse, independent or conflicting movements and strands of development than in any previous period. The contemporary arts exhibit more than an expansion of styles, materials and techniques; for the latter do not stand alone. They shape not only the product itself but the manner in which we engage with and appreciate it. It is here, in our relation to the arts, that thorough-going changes have occurred; for artists have altered our very ability to identify what art does and our capacity for experiencing it. And these two kinds of change affect both what we accept as art, and re-order the character of our experience of it. At the same time, they have undermined the aesthetic through which we accepted, comprehended or appreciated art. Given these developments, it is presumptuous for the theory of art to legislate its practice rather than the converse. It behooves aesthetics to consider how philosophic reflection can best respond to this enlargement of and alteration in the traditional position of the arts.

The axioms of the Analytic tradition of aesthetics have been rendered inadequate by the direction which modern art has taken. Their insufficiency can be exhibited by setting them against cases in the recent history of the arts, works whose very existence denies one or another of the received dogmas. For, if the axioms are inadequate in any important case they are inadequate in general. And these instances cannot be dismissed as exceptions, since for universal claims exceptions become contradictions. For the sake of clarity, the discussion will consider the principles seriatim, but many of the cases to be mentioned refute them all. For indeed, these are not independent axioms but interdependent supports for a single philosophic position.

With increasing frequency during the past century, the art object has become a less important factor in the aesthetic situation, and has at times disappeared altogether. In the visual arts the disappearance of the object was prefigured by the gradual dissolution of the represented

object within the painting and a consequent shift of importance to perceptual experience. The impressionists reduced the substantiality of things to atmospheric qualities, offering a painterly counterpart of Berkeley's "to be is to be perceived." Analytical cubism transformed the thickness of things into purely visual appearances by delivering a multiplicity of perspectives simultaneously on the same picture plane. While some artists flattened objects, others like the futurists and Duchamp rendered the temporality of the perceptual process by fragmenting things into their dynamic patterns of motion. The expressionists shifted the perceptual process in a direction of spiritual utterance, while the surrealists replaced the old visual world with a new dream world. Painting became as much metaphor as visual image. These developments expanded into the many modes of non-objective painting and sculpture, art which, in such forms as abstract expressionism and optical art, requires the active participation of perceptual responsiveness in order to work at all.

These disappearances of the object occurred within the enduring boundaries of larger things, and it may be argued that howsoever objects may vanish within a painting, the picture as an art object remains. There are, however, instances in which the entire art work recedes into insignificance, becoming merely the occasion for exciting a condition of awareness. Dada illustrates this in the frequent cases where the object is trivial or obscure, and where the center of appreciation rests in the meanings associated with the object rather than in the work itself. Dada is more than a parody of the sanctimonious attitude toward art that its name signifies: it is the transplantation of the exhausted art object into the realm of meaning. The dadaist metamorphosis of the object into its meaning attains its fullest degree in conceptual art, where the meaning so dominates aesthetic consciousness that the object often devolves into trivial gestures as occasions for consciousness, or disappears altogether.

Happenings were another recent example of the dissolution of the independent object. This is a development somewhat akin to theater, in which there is no audience but only participants who pursue, in an improvisatory fashion, the directions contained in a scenario. Currently, performance art carries on in the same direction, providing an occasion for display and participation in which the object is replaced by activity. As a protest against the commercialization and exploitation of the art object, the work of performance artists is deliberately ephimeral and characteristically overrides the conventional boundaries between the traditional arts through mixed media

performances, so that even if there were an object it could not be identified. Just as Newton proved in 1666 that color was not a property of matter but of light as it interacts with objects, so artists of this century seem to be showing us that art is not a property of objects but emerges from the perception of human beings in interaction with objects and events.

Theater provides abundant illustrations of the rejection of the second axiom, the one which accords a special status to art objects. Some artists in this century have been intrigued with the ordinariness of things, with those very features that make them undistinguished, and where their significance lies not in what is presented but in what emerges, so to say, from between the cracks. The tragic hero becomes a nondescript, unsuccessful salesman; the dramatic situation is discerned in the transcript of a trial; the poetry of language is reached through the enigmatic banalities of common speech.

Dada also offers striking denials of this second principle in the form of Duchamp's readymades, often cited and frequently ridiculed yet broadly acknowledged as artistically significant and widely exhibited. Much of the eloquence of the readymades lies precisely in their ordinary and undistinguished appearance and in the playfulness with which they twit our serious aesthetic expectations. Bicycle wheels and urinals parody our search for significant form and our perception of aesthetic qualities. As for uniqueness, a readymade is by definition a standardized object, and placing it on a pedestal thrusts its ordinariness upon the viewer while challenging his perceptivity. Other recent examples of art that denies the claim to distinguished status consist in assemblages, which bring together into sculptures and the surfaces of paintings articles from ordinary occasions; musique concrete, utilizing the chance arrangement of sounds that constitute the aural ambience of our industrial culture; pop art, characteristically presenting the unadorned forms and surfaces that pervade popular culture; found poetry, fashioned from chance arrangements of words found in everyday sources; objets trouves, sculpture made out of the detritus of an industrial society. Older and recent technologies, moreover, have generated lithographs, woodcuts, photographs, movies, and music recordings for which there is no original but only copies.

Most interesting of all is the ingenuity with which many artists have contradicted the precept that art objects must be regarded with a unique attitude. Indeed, much of the recent history of the arts reads almost as an intentional denial of the doctrine of disinterestedness.

Works in every medium have been fashioned in which the active participation of the appreciator is essential to their aesthetic effect.

Appreciative participation takes many forms and requires such a variety of kinds and extent of overt activity that it is difficult to single out an example or a specific art that exemplifies it most particularly. In innumerable recent instances the appreciator must perform some particular action in order for the art work to function completely. Artists have devised paintings that must be approached closely or looked at while walking past, causing them to generate sounds or change their appearance. Sculptures have been made whose appreciation requires they be walked through or into, climbed upon or repositioned. There is music which the audience must complete by singing or making percussive sounds, and detective novels to be read and solved at a computer. Innovations in theater have also disrupted dramatically the conventional protection of distance. Theater in the round is now a commonplace; Grotowski's ritualistic theater has moved on to his paratheatrics, which abolish all separation between the actor and the spectator.

Yet it has always been the case that art using traditional forms and technologies works in similar ways, by requiring the active participation of the perceiver. Most object sculpture requires a circumambulating viewer to activate its potentialities, its shifting surfaces, planes and interrelations of volumes, reminding one of Barbara Hepworth's confession "I love working on a large scale so that the whole body of the spectator becomes involved." Such active discernment is a demand of all painting, from color field and minimalist art to traditional landscape and portraiture, where the distance and direction of the viewer, as well as his activating eye, set the forces of the painting in motion. In theater the audience is aware of itself as such and becomes, in effect, the chorus, functioning as a silent witness addressed by the actors with questions, explanations, pleading.

Film captures the whole attention of the viewer, making him join with the moving eye of the camera in the process of events so that he is lost in the action and becomes a participant. Architecture and urban design do not offer contemplative objects but require human activity to complete them, perceptually as well as functionally. The modernist novel makes the reader a collaborator in an inventive process where the narrative is no longer an orderly or clear linear sequence of continuous events. The reader is compelled to fit together situations, events and perceptions in order for the novel to become coherent. Even music, often considered the art of receptive enjoyment,

can be held to demand an active contribution in which "the listener reacts and becomes a partner in the game initiated by the creator," as Stravinsky put it.[31] There are, then, modes of appreciation which take us far beyond the psychological manner of appreciative enjoyment found in the attitude that assumes a psychical distance. If there is one distinctive trait of contemporary art, it is its insistent demand for appreciative engagement: disinterested contemplation is an academic anachronism.

How then are we to understand the set of postulates which are at the origins of Analytic aesthetics? Cannot the artistic developments just reviewed be mere exceptions, aberrations even, in the history of the arts? Might not such innovations be a facile appeal to selfindulgent and childish interests, as Stolnitz characterizes them,[32] a surrender to the inconstant tastes of a sensation-seeking public that is cynically exploited by artists and business persons?

To be sure, judging the new and different by the standards of the old and customary can generate the appearance of failure. Such a showing is the product of a tendentious choice of data. Reflection must respond to what is done in and with the arts; and, as the arts and our perceptual capacities alter within a changing culture, so too must their explanation. But a twentieth century aesthetic that accommodates the changes in the manner and method of the arts need not repudiate
the art of the past. It may revivify that art, as well as explain it anew, bringing it into the mainstream of the present by making it accessible
to modern sensibility. Such art may outlast the theory by which it has been explained and gain in force through the use of a more inclusive aesthetic. An aesthetic that can do this will help us re-establish contact with our traditions so that they become, not historical curiosities but living forces in a present enlarged by historical resonance.

This kind of historical understanding will allow us to recognize eighteenth century British aesthetics as an attempt to characterize the nature of the attention involved in the distinctive mode of experience

[31] 31 Igor Stravinsky *Poetics of Music* (N.Y. Vintage 1956) p.p.137, 140.

[32] J. Stolnitz op.cit. p. 411f.

which is termed aesthetic. It was a theory through which aesthetic I experience received a special emphasis and a non-functional coherence. Yet as Aristotle observed long ago, a distinction is not a separation, and to give aesthetic awareness an identity does not require making it ontologically separate. To insist on the disinterestedness of aesthetic attention is thus both unjustifiable and unnecessary. To describe aesthetic experience as the disinterested contemplation of an object with distinctive aesthetic qualities goes well beyond the data of experience, and is anti-expressive. This rather reflects a cognitivist tradition which limits knowledge to the disengaged contemplation of a distinct and separate object, and sees detached appreciation rather than unencumbered involvement as the respectable attitude to take towards art.

What alternative explanation is possible that can account more adequately for the phenomena of art in the most inclusive and undistorting way? The articulation of such an explanation must await other occasions, but it is possible to indicate the outlines of an account that is more responsive to the practice and processes of art. It must initially be recognized that art consists rather of situations in which experiences occur that often, but not invariably, include nameable objects. As I point out in my *The Aesthetic Field,* this situation is a field of interacting forces involving experiencers, objects or events, creative initiative and activating implementation. These four factors-appreciative, independent, creative and performative--serve to delineate the constitutive components of the unitary experience of art. Thus, to single out anyone of these as the locus of art is to misrepresent the whole by a part. The products of art are not necessarily different in kind from other objects; rather they possess features that, as a matter of degree and qualitative difference, render such products particularly effective for functioning in the aesthetic field. Thus art objects are continuous with objects that do not ordinarily function in an "aesthetic" context, just as art is distinguishable but not distinct from other activities. What is generically different is not the objects of art but the experience we call aesthetic. Aesthetic experience is thus a mode of experience that is not discontinuous with other modes of experience, such as practical, social or religious experience, but which combines features in its own distinctive way.

Given the data we have invoked, an aesthetic broad enough to encompass all of art would have to be molded on quite different lines from the tradition of eighteenth century British thought. Such an aesthetic would have to comprehend the traditional arts as well as more recent developments; and doing this will require specific studies of particular arts to demonstrate and illustrate its applicability. Whatever its details, the main tenets of any such account are at least two: the continuity of art with other human enterprises, and the interactional engagement of the appreciator with the product. The principle of continuity does not have to sacrifice the identity of art as a mode of experience when it also sees it as integrated into the whole range of cultural and individual experience. The continuity must be explored between the products of art and other human products, between the artistic and the sociohistorical or cultural factors that influence the kinds and uses of art, between aesthetic experience and other human experience, between what is called perception and the full range of the individual's imaginative powers. between the dwelling in the aesthetic situation and the broader social and personal uses of art. Then there is a principle of engagement which stresses the active nature of aesthetic experience and its participatory quality. Such involvement occurs in many different orders of activity, and needs to be explored and illustrated through studies of particular arts, genres, movements and individual works. It is probably this participatory factor which stands most opposed to traditional Analytic aesthetics. Yet, the way in which it is present in the actual functioning of the arts requires the notion of participation to be central in any alternative aesthetics.

The direction I have outlined cannot be new, for the reason that it reflects both the history of art and the place of the arts in human culture. Nor does it threaten apostasy from the artistic achievements of the past two centuries. But it does mean recognizing that art and the experience of art are not to be sequestered and that they enter more pervasively into the varieties of cultural activity than the Analytic tradition has been willing to acknowledge. It should also renew our understanding of how art both influences and responds to the forces that make culture humanly exciting and unpredictable.