

# ARTHUR DANTO'S ANDY WARHOL

## THE EMBODIMENT OF THEORY IN ART AND THE PRAGMATIC TURN

*Stephen Snyder*

ABSTRACT. – Arthur Danto's most recent book, *Andy Warhol*, leads the reader through the story of the iconic American's artistic life accompanied by a philosophical commentary that merges Danto's aesthetic theory with the artist's own narrative. Inspired by Warhol's *Brillo Box* installation, art that in Danto's eyes was indiscernible from the everyday boxes it represented, Danto developed a theory that is able to differentiate art from non-art by employing the body of conceptual art theory manifest in what he terms the 'artworld'. The strength of Danto's theory is found in its ability to explain the art of the post-modern era. His body of work weaves philosophy, art history and art criticism together, merging his aesthetic philosophy with his extensive knowledge of the world of art. If Warhol inspired Danto to create a philosophy of art, it is appropriate that Danto writes a tribute to Warhol that traces how Warhol brought philosophy into art. Danto's account of 'Warhol as philosopher' positions him as a pivotal figure in the history of twentieth-century art, effecting a sea change in how art was made and viewed. Warhol achieved this by conceiving of works that embodied the answers to a series of philosophical puzzles surrounding the nature of art. Danto's essentialist theory of embodied meaning answers the questions that are manifest in Warhol's art, thereby providing a critical tool that succeeds in explaining the currents of contemporary art, a task that many great thinkers of art history were unable to do.

In this essay, after exploring the gains Danto's account of embodied meaning and the artworld have brought to aesthetic philosophy, I will discuss Warhol's art in terms of Danto's theory. On some levels, it seems like the perfect match of an aesthetic theory and an artistic practice. However, I will argue that Warhol's 'philosophical' activity is described better in terms of pragmatist theory, putting his activity at odds with Danto's 'appropriation' of Warhol for his essentialist theory. An exploration of this tension reveals that it stems from the

Hegelian roots of Danto's theory of embodied meaning. Though I agree with Danto's definition of art as embodied meaning actualized through the interpretation of artworld concepts, I ask why he draws the line between philosophy and art as he does: philosophically remaining in an essentialist/ontological bubble, while actually living in the world of art.

As I assess this tension, it is as if Danto discovered a hypostasis that spanned the realms of essence and history, as Aristotle saw the role of math in Plato's spectrum of reality; yet he has no interest in exploring this connection. I concede that it is likely Danto would just as soon keep the separation, not disrupting the division of labor. As others have claimed, one of Danto's great achievements is that he forces a closer examination of aesthetic philosophy, and on this point, it is my claim that he forces a closer look at the embodiment of meaning in art<sup>1</sup>. Danto's significant achievements in the field of aesthetics are, for me, a point of departure. They indicate the demand for further exploration toward development of a more accurately descriptive and prescriptive account of philosophical aesthetics. To conclude, I show a way that the pragmatic turn taken by some members of the second generation of critical theorists, such as Jürgen Habermas, Karl-Otto Apel and Thomas McCarthy, provides an example of how better to integrate rationally-oriented (or in Danto's case essentially/ontologically-oriented) theories into practical activities.

## 1. DANTO AND WARHOL

One of Danto's greatest contributions to aesthetics is his theory's ability to distinguish art from non-art, recognizing that it is the artist's intention that levels the sublimity of art into the commonplace, thereby transfiguring the everyday. Warhol had transformed himself, in a way, into an icon of the times. Because of this, Danto sees Warhol as manifest in his art. Dewey's pragmatist notion that art should undermine the dichotomies that exist between art and life would, by some accounts, position Warhol to be the philosopher that Danto claims him to be. By creating art that imploded the accepted notions of the art of his time, Warhol dissolved the philosophical questions posted by late modern aesthetic thinkers.

However, while acknowledging this achievement, I argue that

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<sup>1</sup> G. Horowitz, *Photoshop, or, Unbanding Art, in Action, Art, History: Engagements with Arthur C. Danto*, D. Herwitz and M. Kelly eds., New York, Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 82.

Warhol's philosophical contribution actually manifests itself in a manner different from that proposed by Danto. Danto's theory does not take into account the manner in which Warhol transfigured the vocabulary of art – the concepts of the artworld – by superseding the language of modernism. For example, Danto maintains that the internal drive of art leads to the unfolding of art theoretical concepts that ineluctably shift the terrain of the world of art. I agree with Danto that Warhol pushed forward the boundaries of art through the actualization of art's internal drive, almost as Hegel viewed Napoleon as *Geist* on a horse. I disagree that the conceptual nature of art is one that unfolds merely as a relation of concepts and that artists connect to the meaning of history using their unmediated grasp of style. Rather, I will argue that the artist's style is not narrowly bound to the meanings of history. Through their aesthetic articulations, artists initiate a process of social interaction which is both analytical and critical. This process conforms to Danto's analytical claim that art is necessarily interpreted. But the philosophical logic Danto does not see in Warhol's art, and art in general, is art's ability to transform the world of its viewers. Warhol's philosophical contribution does precisely this in his mastery of both the medium of art and the underlying logic of the medium's expression and reception by the audience.

## 2. THE IMPORTANCE OF DANTO

Danto's theory of the artworld shows how the changing morphology of contemporary art can be understood in terms of its theoretical and sensible elements. When art is made that is indiscernible from the object it represents, the theoretical component of the work becomes clear, for without the visual clues needed to identify art as art, a theory is required to recognize that works such as Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* are art. The creation of indiscernibles, in Danto's eyes, signaled the end of the master narrative of art. In this master narrative, art strove to define itself in terms of accurate visual representation or a manifesto. Indiscernibles provided a portal into what Danto envisions to be the new era of post-historical art. In post-history, philosophy and art are separate: art does not seek a definition, art does whatever it wants, without the constraint

of tradition or taste, and philosophy assumes the task of defining art's essence. Philosophy can accept this task when art asks the philosophical question of 'why is this art?'. For Danto, this represents the end of the *philosophical disenfranchisement of art*, freeing art from the limitations of externally imposed definitions. Only two essential requirements remain of art, which are satisfied insofar as a work materially embodies the intention of the artist.

The critical achievement of Arthur Danto's philosophy of art, Gregg Horowitz tells us, is that «by force of argument and example, he has made it possible, and perhaps necessary, for philosophers to engage with contemporary art»<sup>2</sup>. One can hardly deny that Danto's combined use of argument and example finds few parallels in contemporary aesthetics, for his essentialist theory of art demands historical meaning for its actualization. His theory brings us to the crossroads, so to speak, where philosophy and culture meet. Danto encountered this intersection in works of Andy Warhol at a 1964 exhibit at the Stable Gallery. «Had it not been for *Brillo Box* and like works, I would never, I think, have written philosophically about art»<sup>3</sup>. Warhol's works were, for Danto, something like the Rosetta Stone for the philosophy of art – the essence of art's nature is revealed in the indiscernibility of Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* from the commercial Brillo cartons they represent. Prompted by his experience at the Stable Gallery, Danto published his novel theory in the 1964 article *The Artworld*. The *artworld*, as Danto describes it, is «an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art [...] the theory that takes [the artwork] up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is»<sup>4</sup>. The philosophical transformation Danto experienced at the Stable Gallery in 1964 changed the way he viewed art; it was as if he discovered the light that gives sight the power to see. Allegorically speaking, he escaped his chains and emerged from the cave Plato describes for us in *Republic*, to the light of day. True to Plato's allegory, Danto has returned to the cave, with the aim of compelling others to consider art in the light of artworld theory.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 104.

<sup>4</sup> A. Danto, *The Artworld*, «Journal of Philosophy», 61 (1964), pp. 580-581.

If he has not always convinced his readers, he has, like Warhol, who changed the way the world viewed art, shifted the landscape of American aesthetics.

Danto's essentialist definition provided a single notion of art that is able to encompass the plurality of forms that exist on the contemporary art scene, while also taking into account the varying styles of the past. Using artworld concepts, rather than visual standards of taste or beauty, resolves the problem of differentiating art from non-art, and allows the multiplicity of art's historical forms to be unified under a single concept. Danto achieved this, however, by severing the work of art from the privilege of the critic's taste. Without the constraint of historical taste, the world of art is unified by the meanings embodied within artworks by their creators. Lacking the traditional narrative of art – art's history of striving for representational realism – the critic or philosopher is needed to interpret the artworld concepts that «post-historical» artworks manifest.

Danto's theory, which recognizes a higher level of organization in the aesthetic practice, allowed his approach to flourish in an era when many of the great critics and art historians, such as Greenberg and Gombrich, failed to articulate how the face of non-representational art was changing. Danto is right that art's aim can no longer be the achievement of beauty or a standard of taste. His theory is also able to account for the radically different forms and functions of the art of the past, for the art of each age is tied to a form of meaning that is historically indexed. It is through an understanding of the changing concepts of the artworld that the works of the past are to be interpreted. Otherwise, there is no accounting for differences in styles that reemerge in history, exhibiting common visual characteristics, yet manifesting fundamentally different cultural meanings.

Danto's notion of the artworld also provided him with a way to recognize the historical continuity of artistic practice, which did not, as Hegelian philosophy, rely on the unfolding of cultural totalities. The artworld accounts for historical continuity, insofar as the concepts manifested through it are linked to a time and place and are interpretable. Danto has argued that art cannot be pure expression, for the expression of today cannot be contrasted or interpreted in terms of the expression of yesterday. Expression simply is, and in this sense it has no history or

continuity. It is with theory that Danto interpreted the life and work of Andy Warhol. But, as Danto tells us, without having seen Warhol's works, Danto would never have explored aesthetic philosophy. As Danto understands the convergence of the narrative of art with his own narrative, when art asks the question 'why is this art?', it invites philosophy to aid in its definition.

Danto is insistent that the primary focus of his philosophy of art is art's ontology and its essentialist definition. «I have always been an essentialist, believing that a philosophical definition must apply to art everywhere and always, whatever differences there may in fact be from period to period and culture to culture»<sup>5</sup>. Art as embodied meaning applies universally to all art of all times, and the temporally indexed intention of the artist endows the artwork with a meaning that prevents it from collapsing into the realm of everyday objects. His understanding of the indiscernible provides the theorist and critic alike a gateway, so to speak, which only becomes explicit when the two worlds, the world of the everyday and the world of art, meet. Danto's enormous contribution to the world of criticism stems for his immersion in the world of the arts.

I have inveighed against the isolation of artworks from the historical and generally causal matrices from which they derive their identities and structures. The «work itself» thus presupposes so many causal connections with its artistic environment that an ahistorical theory of art can have no philosophical defense.<sup>6</sup>

Yet despite the strength that recognition of the historical dimension of art gives his theory, his art criticism is disappointedly decoupled from his philosophy. His criticism is informed by, but does not actually constitute, philosophy. The point I make, which echoes in the writings of Michael Kelly, is that Danto's theory, if not privileging the essentialism of philosophy over art, as Kelly argues, draws the line between philosophy's concepts and art's historical embodiment too starkly<sup>7</sup>. True, his aim in

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<sup>5</sup> *Action, Art, History*, quoted, p. 126.

<sup>6</sup> Id., *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 175.

<sup>7</sup> See M. Kelly, *Iconoclasm in Aesthetics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, and Id., *Essentialism and Historicism in Danto's Philosophy of Art*, «History and

*The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* was ultimately to end the ancient quarrel between philosophy and art, not by inviting the poets back in, as Aristotle might have had it, but by postulating separate *poleis* where each does its own according to its nature. Because Danto's division of labor does not view art's essential activity as philosophical, for him, it is the job of philosophers, according to their nature, to define art's essence. In this symbiotic relationship, artists embody the augured meanings of post-history in their art, and philosophers interpret the artworld concepts manifested in their works.

The ambivalent separation of philosophy and art belies Danto's historical and practical writings in the field of philosophical aesthetics. For instance, Daniel Herwitz notes that Danto's book on Warhol puts a more human face on iconic artist, returning him «to the life he lived apart from the appropriation, to the richness of his adventures in art, film and eroticism, to his enthusiasms and fears, friends and influences [...]. The book is an act of homage: a gift of context back to a life lived in it»<sup>8</sup>. It is in the pivotal role that Warhol played in forming the world of art we know today, that we see the relevance of theory and style, philosophy and art. It would appear that Danto further supports Herwitz's comments on the philosophical biography, citing the claim Hegel makes in *Aesthetics* that philosophy is more relevant to art than ever before.

What is now aroused in us by works of art is not just immediate enjoyment but our judgement also, since we subject to our intellectual consideration (i) the content of art, and (ii) the work of art's means of presentation, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of both to one another.<sup>9</sup>

Warhol's example, and Danto's philosophical appropriation of his life and works, clearly exhibits this. However, contrary to the claims of Danto's published works, it is far from the case that art and philosophy are

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Theory», theme issue 37 (December, 1998), pp. 30-43.

<sup>8</sup> D. Herwitz, *Book Review of Arthur Danto's Andy Warhol*, «Journal of Art and Art Criticism», 68/3 (2010), pp. 303-305.

<sup>9</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 11. See A. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995, pp. 30-31 and pp. 194-195.

separated, for the pragmatic interaction of the two has never been more prominent. Before continuing my critique, which recasts Danto's insights on pragmatic terms, I will examine how the roots of Danto's ambivalence stem from his reading of Hegel. A fundamental difference I have with Danto's account of how art's creation and interpretation are linked to aesthetic critique can be traced to Hegel's writings on this topic.

### 3. ESSENCE AND HISTORY: DANTO'S HEGELIAN LEGACY

Danto makes his commitment to the experiential component of the work of art clear «*esse is interpretari*» art's essence is in its interpretation. «To seek a neutral description is to see the work as a thing and hence not as an artwork: it is analytical to the concept of an artwork that there has to be an interpretation»<sup>10</sup>. Danto's analytical notion of art's concept fits his essentialist definition of art as embodied meaning. Likewise, Warhol fits the mold of the artist who embodies the artwork with the meanings endowed by history. In its application, Danto's essentialist definition of art is extremely flexible. This facet of his theory meshes well with a pragmatist approach that views art as «prefigured in the very processes of living»<sup>11</sup>.

But a tension remains in Danto's work between the essentialist and historicist elements of his theory. It is my contention that an uneasiness exists in Danto's theory of art stemming from the notion of embodied meaning, which, as noted above, he borrows from Hegel. Carlin Romano notes this opposition in his article, *Looking Beyond the Visible*. Here, he suggests tongue-in-cheek that authorship of Danto's works is actually traceable to two *Dantos*<sup>12</sup>. *Danto I* represents the historical idealism of Hegel, and *Danto II* is a pragmatist who takes the backseat to *Danto I*. In this scenario, the ontological definition of the artwork is held in opposition to the artwork's interpretive aspects. This duality can also be

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<sup>10</sup> *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, quoted, p. 124.

<sup>11</sup> J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, New York, The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2005, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> C. Romano, *Looking Beyond the Visible*, in *Danto and His Critics*, M. Rollins ed., Cambridge, MA, Blackwell Publishers, 1993, pp. 175-190.



viewed as resulting from the appropriation of the Hegelian architecture in a post-metaphysical environment. Though Danto and Hegel agree that the artwork is differentiated from the everyday object through the artist's intention (for Hegel, the artist's intention is absolute spirit expressing itself subjectively through the artist), as Danto understands it, art requires the interpretation of an audience for actualization.

Danto sees many advantages in Hegel's aesthetics. It is able to resolve both the failure of mimetic theory, the notion that art strives to mirror the object it depicts, as well as the relativism of theories that reduce all art to expression – thereby placing art on the continuum of the living, but incommensurable, expression of artists. In Danto's words:

Hegel's theory meets all these demands. His thought requires that there be genuine historical continuity, and indeed a kind of progress. The progress in question is not that of an increasingly refined technology of perceptual equivalence. Rather there is a kind of *cognitive* progress, where it is understood that art progressively approaches that kind of cognition. When the cognition is achieved, there really is no longer any point to or need for art.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the advantages he sees in Hegel's notion of embodied meaning, Danto clearly wants to avoid the metaphysical implications of Hegel's philosophical theology. Even if Hegel's theory of art resolves these issues, as well as the problem of the perceptual differences of art and non-art<sup>14</sup>, Danto does not embrace Hegel's metaphysical account of what the art object is. He accepts only Hegel's guidelines for what the role of philosophy should be in determining the art object's essential nature without

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<sup>13</sup> A. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 107.

<sup>14</sup> Poetry has the task of distinguishing in its expression poetic ideas from prosaic ideas, yet poetry must express itself in the common language of prose. «Hence once again a double duty is to be undertaken. (i) Poetry must so organize its inner conceptions that they can be completely adapted to communication in language; (ii) it must not leave this linguistic medium in the state in which it is used everyday, but must treat it poetically in order to distinguish it from expression in prose by the choice, placing and sound of words», *Aesthetics*, quoted, p. 969. All art objects acquire the «double duty» undertaken by poetry in the Hegelian schema when the question of artistic interpretation cannot be discerned as object *qua* object or word *qua* word.

heeding the role Hegel gives to philosophy within the schema of the Absolute. For Hegel, the opposition between the universal and the particular – the content or meaning of art and its physical manifestation or embodiment – is resolved into the non-material expression of philosophy. Of course, Danto argues that this is observed as art's being set free from philosophy in the post-historical era. But the unification of content and form in the artwork represents a phase of Hegelian idealism that has no place in Danto's philosophy of art, for Danto is primarily concerned with the ontology of the artwork, and not its sublation into world-spirit. This divergence in theoretical ends leads to a series of dualisms in Danto's theory, leaving questions as to how the dialectical oppositions appropriated from Hegel are resolved without Hegel's Idealism.

Danto's account of style does not reflect the unbroken connectivity to the audience that exists in Hegel's account of artistic creation and reception. As Danto defines style, the subjective consciousness of the artist cannot know its own style save through presenting it to others. The ontology of the artwork is not continuous with its interpretation, for art must be interpreted in order for it to exist fully actualized. Yet Danto defines the artwork in an essential manner that necessitates, but does not include, its interpretation. The concepts of the artworld act, in Danto's schema, as a bridging mechanism, needed to distinguish works of art from mere real things, or indiscernibles. Thus, the ability to discern art from non-art is dependent on a common layer that the artwork and the viewer inhabit. «To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decri – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld»<sup>15</sup>. In Hegel's aesthetic philosophy, the common conceptual element that unifies subjective creativity with the audience is the self-reflection of the Absolute. There is no analogue to this in Danto's theory. Not wanting to adopt the metaphysics of the Absolute, which unifies the dualities of subject and object, the artworld adopts the dimensions of the Absolute on a cultural level. Danto's initial account of the artworld was very thin, merely a conceptual plane, inhabited by artworks and the theories that surrounded them<sup>16</sup>. But, Danto concedes

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<sup>15</sup> *The Artworld*, quoted, p. 580.

<sup>16</sup> *Responses and Replies in Danto and His Critics*, quoted, pp. 203-204.

that there is also a «tale of two artworlds», one conceptual, fitting the non-material role that Hegel's Concept plays, and another, involving a discourse of reasons<sup>17</sup>. This interpersonal layer, which despite Danto's essentialist intentions emerges out of the need to account for the formation of artworld concepts, would match subjective spirit's reflective interaction extant on the other side of the Hegelian dialectic. But without an absolute consciousness, the intersubjective interaction necessary for forming and recognizing artworld theories must be viewed as a social activity.

Responding to Romano's accusation of dual authorship, Danto writes, it is «no wonder the philosopher who takes these responsibilities seriously begins to look schizophrenic». After all, «a philosopher who does not look like two distinct personalities is neglecting half the labor that defines him»<sup>18</sup>. The contrast between «architectonic and organic» Danto argues, is a choice between systems, and philosophy cannot decide which side should lead. For this reason, Danto seeks to take up «with the reality [he is] trying to systematize». Of the dualism that appears in his writings, Danto states, «Danto I and Danto II are not in truth different men so much as the same me living in the world and at the same time seeking to fit it into a box»<sup>19</sup>. The world is not always cooperative in such attempts. This analogy, which explains the oppositions in Danto's philosophy of art, is exhibited in his extraordinary ability to speak philosophically and critically about art. But the analogy of systematizing the world in which we live while we are in it is reminiscent of the paradoxes Kant draws out in his antinomies<sup>20</sup>.

Kant is willing to live with this opposition, which in some manner is articulated in his notion of the aesthetic idea, the counterpart of the rational idea. Though no intuition can adequately express the rational

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 216.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>20</sup> In the third antinomy, Kant holds that reason's demand for unity is beyond the phenomenal capacity of the understanding. Reason places demands on our ordering of appearance into a unified experience. When the understanding's demand for consistency and coherence in its ordering of appearance is held to reason's demand for completeness, the pure concepts of reason and the pure concepts of understanding fall into contradiction.

idea, the aesthetic idea can be manifest in art. Indeed, Danto compares his notion of embodied meaning to Kant's aesthetic ideal, the manifestation of the form of finality or the non-purposive purpose. But Kant refuses explicitly to acknowledge the sociological implications of his account of aesthetic experience, leaving the reader to question how one develops the sense of taste necessary to raise a judgment to the level of the Beautiful. But Hegel, like Danto, is concerned with the object of art in terms of its historically changing morphology, as well as its ontological status. Thus, the notion of embodied meaning is Hegelian, and Hegel's philosophical aim is the resolution of these contradictions. Danto's neglect of the artworld's cultural dimension leaves him with a dialectical tension that is neither resolved nor explained in his philosophical writing. Nonetheless, I contend that a solution can be found in the works of the neo-Hegelian American pragmatist tradition, which has already worked toward resolving the dilemmas found in Danto's works. In particular, I will examine the pragmatic aesthetics of John Dewey.

#### 4. ART AND PRAGMATISM

In *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, John Dewey examines philosophy's separation of theory and practice. He argues that the theory of knowledge, in the philosophical tradition, is in need of reconstruction. Philosophy should focus on «how knowing [...] is carried on, instead of supposing that it must be made to conform to views independently formed regarding faculties of organs»<sup>21</sup>. The use of knowledge in the world we experience is central to Dewey's philosophical approach, and as he construes it, an approach which places essences outside of existence only contributes to the ills confronted by contemporary society. My own recommendation for how to explain Danto's appropriation of Warhol would agree with Dewey's claim that the task of philosophy should not be to carry out isolated historical studies; rather, it should focus on cultural history. Philosophy becomes «intensely significant»

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<sup>21</sup> J. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, New York, New American Library, 1952, p. 11.

when it connects with the real issues confronting the human condition, rather than deliberating on ultimate realities<sup>22</sup>. In light of this new focus, one of the tasks of philosophy is to resolve the separation of social forms of knowledge from the lived experience.

From a pragmatic perspective, it would be logical for Danto to have seen Andy Warhol as the philosopher who transfigured the commonplace into the realm of art. Supporting my pragmatic 'appropriation' of Danto is Dewey's belief that the genuinely transfigurative aesthetic experience is found in the everyday, not in the archives of high art and theory. But the relationship of aesthetic theory to artistic practice is problematic, for theories of art lead art production away from the genuine aesthetic experience. On the elusive nature of theory and practice, essence and history, Dewey writes: «by one of the ironic perversities that often attend the course of affairs, the existence of the works of art upon which formation of an esthetic theory depends has become an obstruction to theory about them»<sup>23</sup>. Art in the contemporary world manifests a conceptual complexity that belies the true nature of aesthetic experience. Art theory, in turn, is formed based on the analysis of those rarified works collected for display in museums. Thus, art theory blocks the actual theoretical understanding of the aesthetic experience because, as a society, we have fetishized the object, and not the actual aesthetic phenomenon. In light of the problem Dewey sees confronting the world of art, the primary task of the philosopher writing on art is to «restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience»<sup>24</sup>.

The story I allude to, of Andy Warhol as the champion of pragmatic philosophy, is not farfetched. Prior to 1964 the artworld was not ready to accept Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*. In Danto's terms, no classification existed for the art Warhol appropriated from the everyday, yet these works defined Warhol. His early works, charming, expressive, well executed, and fitting neatly into pre-1964 artworld categories, had no impact on

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>23</sup> *Art as Experience*, quoted, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 2.

the New York art scene. Warhol was a commercial artist, and his works were deemed unworthy of the imprimatur of high art. Warhol despaired, believing for a time he could have no place in the world of contemporary art, but his perseverance broke through the barriers placed before him. As we know, Warhol succeeded, but not on the terms of those who would not allow him into the academy. Warhol's appropriation of the commonplace redefined the 'artworld'. It was a theoretical *coup d'état* of sorts; because the artworld before Warhol did not recognize his style, he transformed the artworld so that his quotidian style was the norm.

The new artistic paradigm that issued from Warhol's art was world-forming; it forced the body of theory surrounding art to a new level. The artworld was not disclosed to Warhol such that his work anticipated the next level. His aesthetic performance changed the theory of art, resolving the problem, as Dewey put it, of the art on which theory was based by creating a new art for a new theory. Warhol's 'philosophy', performatively articulated in his art, is whimsical at best. When asked by a Milanese reporter how he liked Rome, Warhol claims to have responded, «Well, I really like Rome because it's a kind of museum the way Bloomingdale's is a kind of museum»<sup>25</sup>. Warhol understood what 'the people' liked because it was also what he liked. He saw that the world of consumer goods had a leveling effect; everyone drank the same Coke, the rich and the poor, and the ballpark hotdog that President Eisenhower bought Queen Elizabeth for forty cents was the best hotdog in the world because it's at the ballpark that you get the best hotdogs<sup>26</sup>. Clearly, Dewey's observation, that «when, because of their remoteness, the objects acknowledged by the cultivated to be works of fine art seem anemic to the mass of people, esthetic hunger is likely to seek the cheap and the vulgar»<sup>27</sup> is played out in Warhol's art. And Danto's experience of Warhol's transfiguration of the commonplace effected Danto's own *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. The transfiguration of the everyday occurs because the artist's intention makes a *Brillo Box* art, and the lack thereof prevents a Brillo carton from becoming art. The marriage of theory and practice, it

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<sup>25</sup> A. Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*, New York, Harvest Books, 1975, p. 167.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 101.

<sup>27</sup> *Art as Experience*, quoted, p. 4.

would seem, could not be more appropriately matched. Or could it? To address this question, I conclude with some general remarks that address how a pragmatic rendition of aesthetic experience might proceed.

5. CRITICAL THEORY AND THE PRAGMATIC TURN: RECASTING DANTO, WARHOL, AND EMBODIED MEANING

The pragmatic turn taken by second generation critical theorists, represented by Habermas, Apel, McCarthy and others, is the attempt to overcome philosophical problems that emerge from the gap between reason and reality, the universal and the particular, or essence and history. Seeking to overcome the Kantian opposition of the ideas of reason and the knowable phenomenon, which we can read in terms of the tension between Danto I and Danto II mentioned above, Habermas shifts «the level of critique of reason to that of social practice», looking «for ideas of reason among the pragmatic presuppositions of communicative interaction»<sup>28</sup>. This pragmatic turn is not a wholesale embrace of pragmatic principles, as critics such as Richard Rorty, who feels «we should just let the notions of reason and rationality wither away», make clear<sup>29</sup>. Rather, it is the attempt to detranscendentalize the use of reason by relocating the ideas of reason in social practice. In this aim, critical theorists do share common ground with pragmatists<sup>30</sup>. But, the question remains as to whether reason is disclosed through historical context and language, or if it entails «world-formative» characteristics that allow for the critique of social contexts used for communication. Habermas argues this last attribute is needed for actors to come to a mutual understanding<sup>31</sup>. The gap between the real and the idea, the knowing subject and the world, is

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<sup>28</sup> Th. McCarthy, *Ideals and Illusions*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1991, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> R. Rorty, *The Ambiguity of 'Rationality'*, in *Pluralism and the Pragmatic Turn: The Transformation of Critical Theory*, W. Rehg and J. Bohman eds., Cambridge, MIT Press, 2001, p. 42.

<sup>30</sup> J. Habermas, *From Kant's 'Ideas' of Pure Reason to the 'Idealizing' Presuppositions of Communicative Action: Reflections on the Detranscendentalized 'Use of Reason'*, in Id., *Pluralism and the Pragmatic Turn. The Transformation of Critical*, quoted, p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

not closed in discourse alone, but «it can be pragmatically closed by a rationally motivated transition from discourse to action»<sup>32</sup>. To summarize, the ideals of reason are embedded in discourse when people seek genuine understanding among themselves. This resituates the ideas of reason in a social practice, uniting reason and action when employed in interpersonal communication.

Responding to Romano's observation of dual perspectives, Danto indicates his awareness of the gap left between essence and history. But, as stated earlier, he prefers not to allow the line between art's philosophical concept and life to be disturbed. It was, however, Andy Warhol's art that disturbed that boundary in 1964, for without having seen Warhol's works, Danto would never have been inclined to write philosophically about art. My argument has shown that without mapping the philosophical tenets of critical theory's pragmatic turn directly to the problem of an essentialist definition of art, we can still follow this lead by looking at how the relocation of Danto's essentialist definition into aesthetic practice makes the current state of the arts possible. As Danto has shown us in other works, the world of art before Warhol was one of the continued attempts at self-definition, each manifesto declaring that its art was the true art. The era of art ended in «a Babel of unconverging artistic conversations»<sup>33</sup>.

Commendably, Danto has realized that pluralism has already manifested itself in the style of the post-historical world of art, but there was a conversation. It is the immanent manifestation of the essence of art, the essence that Warhol pushed to the surface, that makes the panoply of contemporary art forms possible. Danto concedes as much, claiming that «despite my embrace of postmodernist art, mine was not a theory of postmodernist art»<sup>34</sup>. Danto has embraced the pluralism, while holding to a decentered notion of art as the style of making styles that emerged through the practice itself. This theory is the contemporary articulation of the artworld, but its 'post-modern' pluralism is made possible through a theory that unifies all styles. Danto's theory has a unifying effect insofar

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<sup>32</sup> *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, quoted, p. 148.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> *Action, Art, History*, quoted, p. 126.



as contemporary audiences are shown a new way to understand the non-representational art of the contemporary scene. But Danto is not creating this theory. His theory is a response to the essence of art revealed in the works of Warhol and others like him, and it must, in turn, take into account the philosophical currents which emerge in the aesthetic process. To remain practically valid, Danto's theoretical moves must adapt to the theoretical components that underwrite the process of artistic creation, interpretation and critique – the aesthetic experience, which I have laid out via the works of Dewey and Habermasian critical theory.

As Aristotle claimed that people could not possess philosophical concepts, but philosophy would possess them, the concept of the artworld effected by the action of Warhol cannot fall under the purview of philosophy. It is just the task of philosophy to explicate it. If, returning to our Platonic metaphor, Danto has discovered through the indiscernibles the artworld concepts that are the key to interpreting contemporary art, the light that lets us see, he has shown the audiences of art today how to view and understand the new art. This is not the separation of art and philosophy. Rather, it is showing how philosophy is more than ever embedded in the works themselves. Danto's theory, as one that seeks to draw the line between art and non-art, could function as an idea outside of the practice if it were not also required that an artwork be interpreted, and in some manner be understood in the context of a historical body of work. For these prerequisites to hold, the essential definition of art – that the artist embodies a work with a meaning that is interpretable and historically unique – requires that this definition be embedded within a practice that emerges through a progressive learning process. Otherwise, the art of our time would simply be an incomprehensible Babel, not conversations that are striving to converge<sup>35</sup>.

STEPHEN SNYDER

Fatih University - Istanbul  
stephensnyder@earthlink.net

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<sup>35</sup> I would like to thank Jonathan Bowman for his helpful comments and critique.