THE ART MUSEUM AT THE END OF ART

Arthur C. Danto’s Philosophy of Art and its Implications for the Posthistorical Museum

by

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Abstract

Arthur C. Danto’s philosophy of art consists of an essential definition of art and a particular conception of art history. Danto’s definition of art does not dictate how art must look, but describes its history, metaphorical structure and particular relation to the world. The historical sensitivity of this definition indicates Danto’s attention to the nature of art history. Danto describes art history as an Hegelian master narrative which progresses toward its own end in self-understanding. The crux of Danto’s philosophy of art history is the thesis of the End of Art which states that the narrative of art has reached its telos, and we are now in the posthistorical era of art.

In this thesis I will explicate Danto’s philosophy of art in order to apply his ideas to the question of the art museum today—its role and continuing usefulness in the artworld and society. I will argue that the art museum has traditionally functioned to tell the story of art as a grand narrative and to facilitate a single way of seeing art: as history. By taking up Danto’s assertion that this grand narrative of art has ended, I will explore the position of the art museum in the posthistorical era of art. If the contemporary art museum aims to manifest the spirit of the posthistorical era of art, it must find a way to make sense of art which is not constrained by a master narrative and can look like anything. I will argue that one way for the contemporary art museum to do this would be to manifest an understanding of art based on Danto’s definition which is historically sensitive without being historically constrained.
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Introduction

Arthur C. Danto’s contribution to the philosophy of art is singular and far reaching. From a particular vantage point in the history of visual art, Danto develops an essentialist definition of art based on a catalogue of non-manifest properties. His essentialist program presupposes an Hegelian conception of art history as linear and developmental. Danto asks whether art has a telos toward which it gravitates or at which it aims. Further, he adopts a narrative realism to describe art history as “narratively structured, with organic development and culmination as opposed to random sequence.”

The narrative of art history has a predetermined end when art reaches its telos. And Danto’s most startling claim is that art has reached its telos. After the end of the narrative era of art, artists are no longer constrained by an overarching master narrative and are free to produce whatever kind of art they please. This freedom characterizes the present posthistorical era of art. Danto’s project of defining art can only occur after the end of art history when his essentialism cannot be threatened by historical innovations in art. His thesis of the ‘End of Art’ affirms his narrative conception of history and prepares the necessary philosophical space in which his essentialist theorizing can occur. This thesis states that art ended when modernist artists raised the question of the definition of art in its proper philosophical form and handed the project of art’s self-definition over to philosophy. Art culminates in its own philosophy and is simultaneously freed from historical narrativity. It is now up to Danto as a philosopher to discover the essential nature of art, leaving art to do whatever it pleases.
The relationship between Danto's conception of art history and his essential definition of art is complex and mediated by the question posed by indiscernible counterparts in art. An example of indiscernible counterparts in art would be two monochrome paintings which appear identical but are distinct artworks, or Marcel Duchamp's readymade sculpture, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, which is an artwork and an identical snow shovel which is a mere real thing. The question posed by such instances of indiscernible counterparts in art is the proper philosophical form for the question about the definition of art. The question of indiscernible counterparts asks: what makes the difference between a work of art and something not a work of art when there is no interesting perceptual difference between them? The raising of this question by art signals the end of art, thereby confirming Danto's conception of art history as a narrative which contains its own end. This question also allows philosophers to theorize about the essential nature of art.

In *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Danto describes an imaginary exhibit of paintings which manifests this problem of indiscernible counterparts. In the exhibit all the paintings are red squares and they appear to be exactly alike. Yet each painting belongs to a different artistic genre, possesses a different subject, and was created by a different artist at a different time. Despite their identical appearances, we understand intuitively that each of these paintings is a distinct artwork. The question is how we can explain this understanding in a definition of art.

When Danto first describes the exhibit of red squares it serves to illustrate a philosophical problem. However, in the posthistorical era of art such an exhibit is a real possibility. Now an artwork can look like anything, including other artworks or other
kinds of things. We can imagine an art museum hosting an exhibit of contemporary art which all looks the same—for example, an exhibit of monochrome paintings or an exhibit of different artworks which are all appropriated from the same original image. The posthistorical art museum thus faces the challenge of finding a way to display artworks so that the viewer can recognize their distinctiveness even if they appear identical. It is important that the art museum manifests the spirit of the present era in art because it functions to transmit a current understanding of art to the public. It has successfully communicated the spirit of the narrative era of art by presenting art so as to be seen as history and by organizing its display as a progressive story. Now it must find a way to display art meaningfully without a narrative. An attempt by the art museum to find ways of exhibiting posthistorical art so that its meaning and status as art are understood by the public is a practical application of Danto’s attempt to find a definition of art which does not rely on how art looks. The art museum serves as a testing ground for Danto’s ideas about the nature of art history and the nature of art.

This thesis will demonstrate how the question of indiscernible counterparts and the thesis of the End of Art precipitate the dilemma presently faced by the art museum. The art museum today must find a way to exhibit artworks which can all look the same in an era when art can be anything. My thesis will progress in three stages. The first stage is comprised of chapters one and two. Together they provide a foundation for the philosophical work done in the central second stage of chapters three and four. The final chapter represents the third stage by bringing together the description of the first stage with the philosophical assertions of the second stage to reach a new conclusion about the art museum.
In the first chapter of my thesis I will analyze Danto's particular conception of art history as narrative. I will trace the evolution of Danto's philosophy of history by describing his move from a strictly analytical notion of narrative toward a more objective, Hegelian notion of narrative. I will argue that Danto settles on a modified Hegelian account of history when he realizes that there are objective historical structures in art. The second chapter of my thesis will describe how the art museum relies upon such a narrative conception of art history and an understanding of individual artworks as moments in this history. I will argue that the art museum functions to tell a progressive story about art and is therefore caught up in the narrative era of art. The art museum was thus unprepared for the end of the narrative era of art. In chapter 3, I will examine how this era came to an end by looking at Danto's thesis of the End of Art. I will argue that this thesis both presupposes a particular conception of art history and prepares the way for a particular definition of art. Danto's essentialist project in art will then be considered in chapter four as it anticipates the artistic freedom of the posthistorical era in art. In chapter five, I will describe the posthistorical era in art in order to situate the contemporary art museum. Given that the art museum can no longer function to tell the progressive story of art, I will consider some alternative functions for the art museum. Ultimately, though, I will argue that the art museum must tacitly acknowledge the kind of philosophical work done in chapters 3 and 4 in order to survive. The art museum must find a way to communicate the philosophical implications of Danto's gallery of red squares after the end of art—that art is no longer constrained by historical imperatives and thus can look like anything. Only by finding a way to communicate the significance of the question of indiscernible counterparts in art through its exhibits can the contemporary art museum
continue to function as the institution responsible for fostering a public understanding of art which reflects the artistic times.
Chapter 1. Narrative and Art History

From his 1965 *Analytical Philosophy of History* to his most current writings, including *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* in 1997, it is possible to trace an evolution in Danto’s approach to the question of history. This evolution involves a move away from a pure analytical approach toward a substantive, Hegelian approach. Throughout this evolution, Danto maintains the importance of narrative in interpreting history. But he reinterprets his notion of narrative to reflect his growing sympathy for a substantive, Hegelian philosophy of history. Danto is led to revise his approach to history when he recognizes objective structures in art history which determine what art is produced, and what counts as art, at any particular time. Danto wants to call these objective structures “narratives” and argues that art history consists in a master narrative which is progressive and organically structured with a definite beginning and ending. This appears to be a wholly substantive, Hegelian interpretation of art history. However, Danto does not accept the Hegelian idea that we can already ascertain the meaning of the present and the future because the significance of all events is found in their progression toward a predetermined end. Danto holds on to the analytical idea that history is only the ordering of past events by saying that it is only in retrospect that we see objective structures in play. I will argue that Danto is not a wholesale Hegelian, but he draws on the substantive, Hegelian account of history in order to develop an objective notion of narrative which supports his particular conception of art history. In
order to understand Danto's conception of art history it is thus essential to establish the role of narrative in art.

In his Analytical Philosophy of History, Danto builds a narrative description of history in order to reject the substantive philosophy of history expounded by Hegel. Both analytical and substantive philosophers of history use narrative to interpret history. But analytical philosophers of history treat narrative as a linguistic device that we use to reveal and explain changes, and to organize the past into temporal wholes, whereas substantive philosophers of history treat narrative as an objective structure which determines the shape of history and its ultimate meaning. To illustrate the difference between the substantive approach and the analytical approach to history, we can consider how a substantive and an analytical philosopher of history would each ascribe meaning to a particular event in the history of art. At the time of the Early Renaissance, Italian architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) invented the system of linear perspective. This is a geometric procedure for projecting space onto a plane, analogous to the way the lens of a photographic camera now projects a perspective image on the film. It allows for the accurate representation of space as we see it from a fixed point to the extent that the distances represented remain measurable. The importance of the invention of linear perspective in art history is undeniable—the use of linear perspective in painting and relief sculpture resulted in art unlike anything which came before. To give an example, Gothic painters had learnt to enclose their figures in an architectural interior to give a sense of depth. But without knowledge of linear perspective, they appeared to have merely carved out a niche in the panel for their figures. Working with linear perspective in the Early Renaissance, however, the painter Masaccio was able to represent his Holy
*Trinity with the Virgin, St. John, and Two Donors* (1425) as occupying a vaulted chamber which is no mere niche, but a deep space wherein the figures could move freely if they wished. Although the importance of the invention of linear perspective is beyond dispute, analytical and the substantive philosophers of art history would establish its importance in very different ways. The analytical philosopher would employ the tool of narrative retrospectively to tie the discovery of linear perspective to other proceeding events in the past. How this event influenced the work of future artists would be made clear by using narrative to sort and emphasize different art historical events of production which demonstrated the influence of Brunelleschi's method. The substantive philosopher of history, on the other hand, would identify the driving role that the discovery of linear perspective played in the progression of an objective narrative structure. The importance of this event would be established by referring to the future end of the historical progression within which it is contained. In other words, the substantive philosopher of history would ascribe meaning to this event by noting how it contributes to the aim of representing reality perfectly. Both the analytical and the substantive philosopher of history use narrative to establish the art historical importance of a single event like the invention of linear perspective. However, the narrative in which the analytical philosopher places this event would be one that she creates or employs retrospectively, while the narrative in which the substantive philosopher places this event would be one which already exists as an objective structure.

As an analytical philosopher, Danto originally uses narrative to support a linguistic approach toward history which challenges the objective assumptions of substantive philosophers of history. The aim of substantive philosophy of history is to
offer a unified picture of history where individual events are part of an organic, directed progression toward an ultimate meaning. This account makes certain claims about the future by describing present and past events as aimed toward something yet to be realized—the telos of the historical progression. According to Danto, the substantive philosopher of history must claim some kind of cognitive privilege to be able to see what it is toward which all historical events aim. In other words, the substantive philosopher of history “claims to have looked at the end of the book to see how it is going to come out, like readers unable to stand the suspense.”

In response to what he sees as the absurdly prophetic nature of the substantive approach to philosophy of history, Danto offers his analytical approach. In the tradition of analytical philosophy, Danto focuses on the language in which history is couched to uncover its logical structure. The proper domain of history is the domain in which the linguistic elements of history function. Thus, defining history involves analyzing the coordination of statements about past events. Danto maintains that such statements are organized in stories. The principle structuring device of history is, therefore, the story or narrative. As Danto describes in his *Analytical Philosophy of History,*

...narratives...are used to explain changes, and, most characteristically, large-scale changes taking place, sometimes, over periods of time vast in relationship to single human lives. It is the job of history to reveal to us these changes, to organize the past into temporal wholes, and to explain these changes at the same time as they tell what happened—albeit with the aid of the sort of temporal perspective linguistically reflected in narrative sequences.4

In order to describe history, we must analyze the language of history. This analysis will lead us to discover that history is defined by its function of organizing statements about past events. History carries out its function by employing the device of narrative.
This analytical construal of the philosophy of history could not be further removed from the Hegelian perspective. At this stage Danto opposes Hegelian contextualism by treating each historical claim as an isolated statement whose nature can be ascertained by logic. Moreover, his insistence that history is concerned to organize our knowledge of the past exclusively is incompatible with Hegelian historicity which ascribes meaning to the present by locating each event within an unfolding narrative. Danto's analytical philosophy, by contrast, denies any secure understanding of the historical significance of the present.\(^5\) Danto came to realize, however, that his discomfort with the suggestion of prophesy in substantive philosophy of history did not require him to reject everything about this approach. Certain realizations in his philosophy of art drew Danto more and more toward the holism of Hegelian philosophy of history and away from atomism.

Writing in 1997, Danto admits that he is now likely to take a more charitable view of substantive philosophies of history than he did in 1965 when *Analytical Philosophy of History* was written in the late stages of positivism.\(^6\) The reason for this shift is that Danto comes to recognize objective historical structures in art which determine when a particular artwork can be produced—when the theoretical and critical atmosphere is right to allow for a new kind of artwork to count as art. By recognizing objective structures in the history of art, Danto expanded his philosophy of history beyond the analytical project of simply ordering past events. Now he wants to explain why particular events must occur when they do. But, in doing so, he does not have to abandon narrative. After all, substantive philosophers of history describe narrative structure as essential to history.

Danto is determined to retain a notion of narrative despite the shift in his approach to history in general so that he can describe art history in a particular way. By embracing
narrative realism Danto can describe art history as consisting in narrative phases which contain their own ends. Art history is linear and developmental in the sense that Danto is asking whether art has a telos. He identifies two phases in the progressive development of art: the mimetic phase of traditional, pre-modern art and the self-defining phase of modernist art. The era of art begins with the mimetic phase in the thirteenth century. For Danto, creative production before the thirteenth century is not art because it was not produced to be art. Just as art has a definite end so it has a definite beginning, and there is creative activity both before and after the era of art. The two phases of the era of art are defined by their particular narrative structures which direct artistic production toward a single end. The notion of narrative is thus central to Danto’s description of art history as having an end already prescribed in its beginning and progress.

What makes Danto realize that there are objective structures in art is that historical affinities between artworks cannot be established on the basis of resemblances. For example, the abstract expressionist painter Robert Motherwell used torn labels from Gauloises packages in his collages as early as 1956, but his work could not be described as Pop art. Similarly, a Pop artwork could not fit into the era in which Motherwell was painting simply because it also had Gauloises labels glued onto it. Motherwell’s work is not Pop because Motherwell was painting within a certain historical structure which could not yet allow for the innovation of Pop art. Pop art came later when a different historical structure was in place—a structure which would permit the kind of artistic impulses defining the Pop style. Each historical structure has its own style through its accommodation of certain artistic initiatives following from a previous artistic era. These initiatives take the form of either a repudiation or a refinement of what came before in
style and artistic definition. Although Motherwell’s collages with Gauloises labels might resemble Pop art and some Pop art might resemble Motherwell’s collages with Gauloises labels, a historical affinity cannot be established between them. Historical affinity between artworks is only established when the artworks occur within the same objective historical structure.

In order for Pop art to emerge, the historical structure which allowed for abstract expressionism had to be replaced by a new historical structure whose closed range of possibilities would foster a new style like Pop. The replacing of one objective historical structure by another represents a discontinuity which is “sufficiently abrupt that someone living through the change from the one to the other might feel that a world--in our case an artworld--had come to an end and another one begun.” Danto’s recognition of the possibility for discontinuity within an historical continuum signals his general move away from atomism in philosophy of history. The idea of an objective story unfolding in history is central to substantive philosophies of history, and Danto becomes convinced that such an objective structure does exist.

Danto’s acceptance of narrative realism is central to his portrayal of art history as autonomous and self-directed. That “history is narratively structured, with organic development and culmination as opposed to random sequence” only becomes apparent through hindsight--only by looking back at art from the thirteenth to the early twentieth century does Danto recognize a certain narrative directing its production, a narrative aimed at a “revolutionizing of the way to paint.” This narrative approached its own internal end as the imperatives driving its progression became opaque. The progress in question was largely in terms of optical duplication. The artist commanded increasingly
refined technologies for furnishing visual experiences effectively equivalent to those furnished by actual objects and scenes, such as methods for reproducing natural perspective, depth and shadow. This history records a progressive movement away from visual inference toward direct perception. Visual inference in art involves the artist setting up certain commonly understood visual cues which tell the viewer how to see a work of art. For example, before the discovery of perspective, artists could facilitate the knowledge that we were perceiving objects receding in distance by using occlusion, differential sizes, shadows, and textual gradients. These techniques cue the viewer to recognize the representation of distance and depth. One method for creating the sense of unlimited space in painting was the use of subtle changes of light and colour. The fifteenth-century Flemish Master, Jan Van Eyck, used this method in his panel painting, *The Crucifixion* (1420-25). If we inspect *The Crucifixion* panel slowly, from the foreground figures to the far-off city of Jerusalem and the snow-capped peaks beyond, we see a gradual decrease in the intensity of local colours and in the contrast of light and dark. Everything tends toward a uniform tint of light bluish gray, so that the farthest mountain range merges imperceptibly with the colour of the sky. Van Eyck's method is effective for creating a *sense* of sweeping space, but with the use of scientific perspective artists could actually *show* space and distance, and thus a mere inference to perceptual reality could be replaced with something equivalent to what perceptual reality itself would present.

After the introduction of perspective and its progressive mastery by generations of artists, there remained one inference in artistic representation still to be overcome: movement. Once it is decided that movement is something we want to show in art instead
of infer, a transformation in the medium of representation is needed, for flat canvases and immobile marble cannot show movement. Such a transformation of medium marks the end of the progressive phase of art which aims to recreate reality. The advent of cinema becomes the telos of this progression. Motion-picture technology exemplifies the kind of transformation of medium needed to complete the mimetic project of art, for movement can be shown on film, as well as depth, distance, shade, tone, shape, and eventually colour. While increasingly refined technologies in painting gradually allowed for a narrowing of the visual gap between representation and reality, cinematic technology closed this gap and solved the project of verisimilitude. Thus art—at least those forms previously taken to exemplify the visual arts, i.e. painting and sculpture—was left without a defining project and needed to find something else to do.

Gradually, this something else became the reflexive interrogation of the nature of art which comprises Modernism. The project of modernism is aptly captured by the abstract expressionist Ad Reinhardt when he writes,

The one object of fifty years of abstract art is to present art-as-art and as nothing else, to make it into the one thing it is only, separating it and defining it more and more, making it purer and emptier, more absolute and more exclusive—non-objective, non-representational, non-figurative, non-imagist, non-expressionist, non-subjective. The one and only way to say what abstract art or art-as-art is, is to say what it is not.12

Modernist artists deliberately rejected all the mimetic technologies of traditional art. In order to discover what might be described as the essential nature of art, modernist artists had to establish that art was not just imitating reality, for this definitive function threatens either the collapse of art into reality, or a Platonic devaluing of art as a poor substitute for reality. Modernist artists asserted that art had a distinct definition apart from any reference to an objective reality. Thus, they had to divorce art from those technologies
used to draw art closer and closer to reality; to seek instead a representation of subjective realities in art\textsuperscript{13}--a representation of art itself and of themselves as artists. Modernism supports the possibility of a developmental history of art because artists can come closer and closer to identifying the nature or the essential conditions of art.

Just as the traditional narrative of art progressed in intervals each marked by a certain technological breakthrough in the reproduction of reality on canvas and in marble, so the modernist narrative of art progressed in intervals each marked by the stripping away of a different contingent feature of art. For example, successive generations of abstract painters were engaged in the process of analyzing and simplifying observed reality to the point that only the most fundamental elements of reality were shown. With Cubism, as the first abstract style, figures and perspective space, though fragmented and redefined, were still shown. However, by the time of Piet Mondrian's abstract work, *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*, all we see is a geometric design restricted to horizontals and verticals in the three primary hues, plus black and white. Every possibility of representation is thereby eliminated. Yet Mondrian strove for "pure reality" which he defined as equilibrium "through the balance of unequal but equivalent oppositions."\textsuperscript{14} The abstract painters thus were able to give up representation and still show reality. In discarding various thematic and technological features which had defined traditional art, modernist artists hoped to find one thing remaining which would be the essence of art.

The modernist narrative of art was thus characterized by a progressive reduction of--and a repudiation of--what came before. By describing the history of modernist art in this way, we rely faithfully upon an objective narrative structure. In order to show that both traditional and modernist artists aimed towards something in their art which defined
the entire artistic production of their time, a substantive notion of narrative must be employed. Such an Hegelian notion accounts for progressive development, the nature of individual artistic motivation, and the relative importance of individual artworks. Danto very much wishes to account for such things when he recognizes that there are in fact objective structures in the history of art. And yet he wants to say that these things can only be accounted for in the past because we can only recognize objective historical structures retrospectively. How can Danto accept the substantive idea that there are objective structures in history while simultaneously rejecting the idea that these objective structures, precisely because they are objective, also must determine events in the present and future? Danto avoids having to presuppose a future end in order to make sense of the structures which he sees in the art of the past by claiming that the end has already been reached. Since the end of the narrative of art is now in the past, Danto can follow his analytical inclination to consider only past events when talking about history while adopting the substantive method of making sense of historical events with reference to the telos of their objective narrative. Danto’s idea that the narrative of art has ended will be discussed in a later chapter. For now it is enough to note that this idea is the key to explaining Danto’s modified Hegelian account of art history. The central element in this account is his notion of narrative. Throughout the evolution of his approach to history, Danto must sustain his notion of narrative to support his awakening sense of art’s historical constraints.
Chapter 2. Narrative and the Art Museum

Narrative structure not only defines a particular conception of art history, but also describes the relationship between art history and the art museum as institutions of the artworld. Today art museums are organized around both traditional and modernist art historical narratives. Art museums display works of art as representing moments of art history so that the visitor can experience and thus understand the grand narrative of art. The visitor (at least, the ideal visitor) walks along a preset matrix in the museum which presents individual works of art as collectively telling a certain story about art—a progressive, holistic, indeed Hegelian, story. The art museum is the ideal site for presenting art in this way. Therefore, it depends upon a narrative conception of art history, not just for organizing its collection, but for its very existence as the best institution to inform the public about art. The relevance of Danto’s narrative description of art history is thus felt throughout the artworld, since it serves to connect and define its central institutions.

In their article, “The Universal Survey Museum,” Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach observe that the iconographic program of any museum—formed by the interaction between the space of the museum and its collection—is as predictable “as that of a medieval church and equally dependent upon doctrine.” It is “the art history found in encyclopedic textbooks—in the United States, Gardner, Janson and Arnason—[which] supplies the doctrine that makes these modern ceremonial structures coherent.” The display program of the art museum relies upon the model of art as history, as
distinguished from other accounts of making art, and the history in play is the academic story of art with its traditional and modernist progressive phases. The art museum uses individual artworks as signifiers in an objective, historical story which unfolds around the artworks and continues beyond them. Thus the art museum relies on a narrative conception of art history because narrative is the best device for relating the progressive, connective meaning of the artworks to the museum visitor.

In her account of the historical construal of visual culture, Svetlana Alpers illustrates the art museum’s presentation of the mimetic phase of art history. She describes walking through rooms of Italian painting from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries in London’s National Gallery. Her progression through the rooms as a museum visitor causes her to realize that she is being made to see the paintings in a particular way. Clearly, the sequence of the paintings is carefully planned to give the viewer a certain kind of experience. She is seeing the paintings as representative of an historical visual culture in which “the persistent adjustment and calibration of elements construed as problems and taken up successively by certain artists” serves as the progressive impetus. By simply walking through the rooms of Italian paintings she is following a pre-determined matrix along which the paintings speak of the gradual mastery of appearance which defines the traditional narrative of art.

Alper’s observations characterize the transformation in the experience of art which occurred with the birth of both the public art museum and the modern academic discipline of art history in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. When royal collections of art were opened to the public, the collection had to be presented in a new way to serve new needs. Previously, princely galleries served as reception areas in which
the artworks were devices for impressing the distinguished guests with the wealth and
grandeur of the monarch. The new public museum, however, served the interests of the
state in the name of humanity. Indeed, the display of art as history justified in the name of
humanity the appropriation and exhibition of art by the state: since art appeared as art
history only in the museum, and since only art history made visible the spiritual truths of
art, the museum was its only proper repository. In the new public art museum, the works
were now arranged according to Enlightenment ideas. The paintings were divided into
national schools and art historical periods, and clearly labeled. A guide to the museum
directed the visitor's tour of the collection. A walk though the gallery was an organized
walk through the history of art. In other words, the newly emerging museum was to be "a
repository where the history of art is made visible."

By reorganizing its collection, the new museum transformed the experience of art
such that the work of art now represented a moment of art history. From now on
museums would feel obliged to possess works illustrating key moments of that history.
But as much as the museum depended upon art history for its new iconographic program
and state mandate, the discipline of art history depended upon the existence of the
museum. The artwork, as the object of study in art history, is circulated and deployed
within an entire institution designed for that purpose---the museum. In this way, the art
museum can be described as a facet of the discipline of art history, one of several
institutions and activities which contribute to the practice of the discipline in providing
"evidence and proof, demonstration and explication, and analysis and contemplation" with regard to art objects. Thus the art museum is internal to a definition of the discipline
of art history such that both the discipline and the institution—as they have evolved over the last two hundred years—are inconceivable without each other.

The history of art manifested in the museum is progressive and structured by narrative. The art museum tells a story which charts an upward movement toward a pinnacle of artistic achievement identified by art history. This is clearly evident in the iconographic program of the Louvre, one of the first and most representative public art museums. Upon entering the Louvre through the Denon Pavilion, the visitor can choose between several routes for moving through the museum. First, however, all visitors are confronted by the *Victory of Samothrace* in a magnificent archway on the main staircase. The Ancient Greek statue speaks of a moment in art history and a beginning from which all the art which visitors will subsequently walk past follows. Immediately, then, the visitor is prepared to be told a story about art which establishes its origin in the venerable tradition of Greco-Roman antiquity and yet implies that antiquity is only the beginning and art just keeps getting better and better from here. Classical art developed around a conception of art as imitation, thus manifesting the origins of the Mimetic Theory of art which called for progressive striving by generations of artists to capture reality. The results of this striving are displayed to the visitors at the Louvre in progressive sequence from the Renaissance through to the nineteenth century. Whichever prescribed route through the museum visitors choose to take, within a few minutes they experience an iconographic program in which the heritage of antiquity and the Renaissance leads to French art. First, the visitor must choose between seeing the collection of Greek and Roman art, the collection of Greco-Roman and Egyptian antiquities, and the classical sculpture in the Apollo Gallery. Then, the visitor must choose between various rooms
containing Italian Renaissance art, including the Salle des Etats, the largest and most central room which holds the Louvre’s most important old masters—Raphael, Titian, Veronese, Coreggio, and, above all, Leonardo and his Mona Lisa. From the Italian Masters, the visitor will come to French Renaissance painting, and beyond, the entire progression of French art in the grand tradition up to the mid-nineteenth century. Upon arriving at nineteenth-century painting, the visitor has the sense that a pinnacle of achievement in art has been reached and a story is drawing to a close.

Just as one story ends, however, another one begins with the modernist phase in art. While some museums tell the story of traditional art, others are needed to tell the story of modernist art as it is understood in the popular imagination. Museums are under pressure to present forms of knowledge that have recognizable meaning and value for a broader community. Therefore, museums tend to reaffirm familiar, widely held notions about art and art history. As seen with the Louvre, that translates into conservative art-historical narratives. In her article, “The Modern Art Museum: It’s A Man’s World,” Carol Duncan comments that the narrative of twentieth-century art has been remarkably fixed as it is repeated in the iconographic programs of modern art museums. In effect, the invariable re-telling of the same story of art in museums has affirmed this way of seeing art as the one true way of seeing art. Clearly, then, the museum possesses the power through its public, institutional presence to steer and solidify our understanding of art. Before the modernist story of art was being repeated seamlessly in most modern art museums, however, the curator Alfred Barr first began to advocate its use as an organizing structure in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. As Carol Duncan affirms, the history of modern art as told in the MoMA
would come to stand for the definitive story of 'mainstream modernism.' As the core narrative of the western world's premier collection of modern art for over half a century, it constituted the most authoritative history of modern art for generations of professional as well as non-professional people.9

As it is most often told in the art museum, the history of modern art unfolds as a succession of formally distinct styles.10 This is also how Danto describes art history when he accounts for the discontinuity within narrative continuity which occurs when one objective historical structure is replaced by another. What causes this shift is a change in style, for each historical structure consists in a closed range of artistic possibilities from which the particular style for that era emerges.11 As Carol Duncan describes the modernist narrative of art, it is usually Cezanne who starts off the progression through the sequence of styles. For Cezanne is seen as having taken the first significant step in defining the direction and objective of the modernist narrative. This objective is one of self-identification. It involves turning away from the objective world toward subjective realities where artists explore their role, the nature of their art, and connections between art and artist, art and morality, and art and the real. The progression of this exploration is marked by key artists whose work represents breakthroughs in attaining art’s goal of self-definition. Thus, it makes sense that key works by Cezanne would be used in the iconographic program of the MoMA to signify a turning point and a beginning. Indeed, this signification is achieved quite literally in the MoMA’s installation: Cezanne’s Walking Man greets the visitor at the very threshold of the permanent collection and points forward commandingly.

Cezanne is not always taken as the artist responsible for initiating the modernist narrative, however. Clement Greenburg, whom Danto describes as “the great narrativist
of modernism,"\textsuperscript{12} maintains that "Manet’s paintings became the first modernist ones by virtue of the frankness with which they declared the surfaces on which they were painted."\textsuperscript{13} For Greenburg, the modernist period is defined by the emphasis on flatness and two-dimensionality in painting. In an attempt to get at the essence of art, modernist painters stressed features which are unique to painting to the point that their work was about its very flatness and two-dimensionality. Thus Manet is crucial in introducing this definitive emphasis, for his work heralded the arrival of the Impressionists who "abjured underpainting and glazing to leave the eye under no doubt as to the fact that the colours used were made of real paint that came from pots and tubes."\textsuperscript{14} On Greenburg’s reading, Cézanne then took another step forward in separating out the unique feature of painting by sacrificing verisimilitude, or correctness, in order to fit drawing and design more explicitly to the rectangular shape of the canvas.

Following Cézanne and the Post-Impressionists in both Greenburg’s account and the program of the MoMA, Fauvism makes a brief appearance. But, as Duncan points out, in the MoMA, as in many other museums, it is Cubism which receives the most attention as the style which speaks to the future in art. Cubism, it is claimed, is pivotal in the progression of modernism for its significant contribution to the general orientation toward flatness which Clement Greenburg describes. In fact, Cubism was attempting the complete opposite by reacting against Impressionism in order to revive the sculptural. But just as David’s reaction in the eighteenth century against the decorative flattening-out of pictorial art actually resulted in a kind of painting even less sculptural than before, so the Cubist counter-revolution resulted in a kind of painting flatter than anything which came before in Western art.\textsuperscript{15} Nevertheless, the Cubist style most profoundly and directly
represents the modernist aim of laying bear what is essential and unique to art. All subsequent movements in modernist art took their structure and direction from Cubism, beginning with Dada and Surrealism. They push modern art's earlier conquests of the subjective self to new depths and in new directions. Duncan notes that in museums Miro is usually the most important figure here, but Duchamp and Ernst also receive generous attention. The next big moment after Surrealism comes in Post-World War II New York with the development of Abstract Expressionism. Minimal and Pop Art then follow as Abstract Expressionism's major aftershocks.

The MoMA's presentation of this history is exemplary in both quality and quantity. No other museum offers as many chapel-like rooms exclusively devoted to the major art-historical figures--Picasso, Matisse, Miro, Pollock. Even so, rival collections--in London, Los Angeles, Washington, New York, and elsewhere--offer attractive versions of the MoMA's orthodox plot. In all these museums the story of modernist art is predictably and devotionally focused on individual great works seen as representing climatic moments in the narrative. The public function of the museum to reinforce popular understanding about art requires that all the major museums of modern art organize their installations around the culturally embedded historical narrative of art.

The fact that the examples set by the Louvre and the MoMA in organizing their collections around art historical narratives subsequently became standard practice in the museum world indicates the evolving function of the art museum. As an institution of the artworld, the art museum functions to tell the story of art. This function involves two assumptions, one about the nature of art history itself and the other about the relationship between art history and art. These assumptions are that art history is a narrative, and art
objects demonstrate and facilitate the progression of this narrative. The fact that the art museum depends upon such an understanding of art history indicates the importance of Danto’s notion of narrative. Such a notion explains the interconnection of the art museum and the discipline of art history, and provides the meaning and direction for the art museum’s iconographic program. By relying on a narrative conception of art history, the art museum also fosters a particular way of seeing art: viewers are made to see individual art objects as history. The historical way of seeing art is promoted in the art museum to the exclusion of other ways of seeing art—perhaps aesthetically, politically, philosophically or theoretically. If the historical way of seeing art were no longer relevant, the art museum would be unprepared to offer new ways of seeing and understanding art. Therefore, the predominance of Danto’s notion of narrative is demonstrated by the fact that the art museum is conceived and sustained upon a narrative conception of art history and an historical way of seeing art to the extent that the art museum does not recognize the possibility of understanding art outside history.
Chapter 3. The End of Art

Through the evolution and application of his notion of narrative, Danto describes art history as autonomous and self-directed. This description involves the assumption that art history progresses toward a predetermined end which gives meaning to every artistic event. Indeed, art history must come to an end when the telos of its narrative is achieved. The modernist narrative of art is the last possible narrative because the completion of its project of self-definition forecloses the possibility and the need for a single definitive project in art. However, the modernist narrative does not end with art successfully discovering its own essence. Art lacks the necessary reflexive apparatus to complete such a task. The modernist project must be handed over to the discipline best equipped for answering questions about the essence of things, namely, philosophy. But it is only when art finally raises the question of its own definition in the proper philosophical form that this transition can take place. When art is relieved of its project of self-definition it is also released from its own narrative. The End of Art is thus the end of the narrative era of art which, by an Hegelian account, contained its own end from the very beginning.

Art can and does end for Danto because of his modified Hegelian interpretation of history. Hegel's account of history is progressive in the same way that the mimetic and the modernist phases of art were progressive--by aiming toward a certain telos. However, Hegel's account of the progression of art is broader than the progressive account of either of the two phases of art. For it encompasses the artistic production of both phases by describing art as a stage in a larger historical progression of cognition. Hegel's model of history is narratively exemplified by the Bildungsroman, the novel of self-education which climaxes in the self's recognition of the self. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit is the philosophical work which has this form and Hegel introduces as its hero the Spirit of the World, or Geist, the stages of whose development toward self-knowledge, and toward self-realization through self-knowledge, Hegel traces dialectically. Art is one of the
stages--indeed, one of the final stages--of Spirit's return to Spirit through Spirit. As Danto describes it, art "is a stage which must be gone through in the painful ascent toward the final redeeming cognition."

Art, for Hegel, is thus both a transitional stage in a larger historical progression and an historical progression in and of itself. As a transitional phase in the coming of a certain kind of knowledge, art contributes and completes its role in the larger cognitive progression by moving toward an awareness of itself. But by moving toward this kind of awareness, art itself progresses. Art brings itself to an end by raising the question of its own nature, but art cannot answer this question because the necessary reflective apparatus is not yet in place. It is not until the final stage in the history of cognition is reached that this question--and others like it to do with the essential nature of things--can be answered. Naturally, for Hegel, this final stage is philosophy because philosophy is by nature reflexive "in the sense that the question of what it is is part of what it is, its own nature being one of its major problems." Danto picks up on this idea that it is the task of philosophy to answer essential questions. Whether or not he sees art as a transitional stage in Spirit's realization of itself, he sees his task as philosopher being to discover the essential nature of art.

The progression of art toward its own philosophy can be traced in the artistic movements of modernism in this century--Fauvism, the Cubisms, Futurism, Vorticism, Synchronism, Abstractionism, Surrealism, Dada, Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, Pop, Op, Minimalism, Post-minimalism, Conceptualism, Photorealism, Abstract Realism, and Neo-Expressionism--for each of these movements had to be accompanied by a certain amount of aesthetic theory to explain how their often minimal, commonplace or arbitrary objects could be art. For example, Marcel Duchamp's readymade, In Advance of the Broken Arm (1915), requires an explanation for its status as art with reference to an artistic theory which would allow commonplace items like a snow shovel to be counted as art under certain conditions. The art of the recent past came to depend more and more
on artistic theory for its existence as art. In this way, artistic theory was no longer something external to art, part of an outside world which, in serving as its object, art sought to understand. Instead, artistic theory came to be internal to art so that, in seeking to understand its object, art had to seek to understand itself. What results from this internalization is that

the [artworks] approach zero as their theory approaches infinity, so that virtually all there is at the end of art is history, art having finally vaporized in a dazzle of pure thought about itself, and remaining, as it were, solely as the subject of its own theoretical consciousness.3

In order to reach the point at which art culminates in its own philosophy, Danto holds that it must raise the question of its own essential nature in the proper philosophical form. The manifestos of the modernist movements in art each represent an attempt to raise this question properly and then answer it. Danto describes the modernist movements in art as being driven by manifestos because the manifesto defines a certain kind of movement and a certain kind of style which the manifesto proclaims as the only kind of art that matters. For example, Cubism was engaged in establishing a new kind of order in art, and it discarded everything that obscured the basic truth or order its partisans supposed themselves to have discovered. "That was the reason," Picasso explained to Francoise Gilot, that the cubists "abandoned color, emotion, sensation, and everything that had been introduced into painting by the Impressionists."4 Each of the modernist movements was driven by a perception of the philosophical truth of art: "that art is essentially X and that everything other than X is not--or is not essentially--art."5 So each of the movements saw its art in terms of a narrative of recovery, disclosure, or revelation of a truth about art which would be revealed through a certain philosophical understanding of the history of art. In other words, each movement defined the history of
art in reference to an end-state in which the true art would reveal itself. And once we became fully aware of the nature of this truth in art, we would come to realize that this truth reveals itself in *all* art as its unchanging essence. Danto agrees with the modernist understanding of art: that there is a kind of transhistorical essence in art which only discloses itself through history. But he disagrees with modernist manifestos on two fronts. First, he disagrees that truth can be identified with any particular kind of art—monochrome, abstract, or whatever—as proponents of each modernist movement in art aimed to establish. The problem with a claim about the essence of art being found in one kind of art is that to criticize it merely requires denouncing the kind of art that is supposed to manifest this essence. It always seems possible to denounce one kind of art, especially with the emergence of a new kind of art. So the chances that a claim about one kind of art manifesting the truth will survive future artistic innovations is slim indeed.

Second, Danto disagrees that art is *merely* grounded in philosophical understanding. He wants to go further to say that art is not only sustained by its theories, but that it ends when its true philosophical nature becomes apparent. The modernist manifestos aimed at revealing this true nature, but they did not foresee the consequences of its revelation. Because their artistic projects were defined by manifestos about a particular kind of art, they could not actually get at the kind of philosophical revelation toward which they aimed. What was needed to get at this revelation was an abandonment of manifestos which championed a particular kind of art and the raising of another question, what makes *all* art, in its infinite forms, art?

This question, raised in its proper philosophical form, indicates the End of Art when the final project of art to find its own essence is handed over to philosophy.
Ultimately it is the job of philosophers to answer the question that art itself raised because philosophy is concerned with finding the essence of things. By handing over the question of its own definition, art completes its final narrative. The modernist narrative of self-definition is necessarily the last narrative for art because, once art is no longer responsible for its own definition, it is freed from historical imperatives to strive toward the purest form of itself. Art is no longer compelled to exhibit mastery of a feature of its production or of its representation of realities in an attempt to prove its ontological and critical status in the artworld. The End of Art is thus signaled by a freedom from narrative constraints compelling artists always to strive, prove and justify their art against history.

In their article, “Atomism, Art, and Arthur: Danto’s Hegelian Turn,” Kathleen Higgins and Robert Solomon dispel the negative connotations of the term ‘end’ by substituting for it the term ‘transformation.’ Before the end of art, artists could identify the teleological structure which constrained their styles, and they could “ask themselves if being artists require[d] them to carry art history forward another notch.” In asking this question, “a deeper and deeper understanding of what it was that was being carried forward” developed until the narrative was transformed. The transformation at the end of art occurs in the structures of the art world and not necessarily in how art looks, for art goes from being shaped by a particular narrative to being freed from its own imperatives. After this transformation art can look any way it pleases. The transformation in art thus involves self-knowledge and signals the move from art to philosophy. Higgins and Solomon also remind us that, at the end of art, only one thing is ending and everything else can continue—narrative ends but artistic production and innovation continue. This explains why Danto can be so cheerful about the end of art, because art is not dead, it is
just released from its historical narrativity. And it is a very particular narrative which is ending: the final narrative of self-definition which completes the possibility for narrativity in art.

For Danto to make his argument work, he must describe the modernist narrative of art as definitively final. He must do this in order to avoid the claim that art history need not end here, since other narratives could pick up after the project of self-definition ends. Daniel Herwitz raises just this objection in his description of the postmodern artworld. He identifies several relevant projects being carried out simultaneously since the modernist period, including the use of play as a stylistic invention to capture a certain postmodern cultural expression, the projection of feminist, anti-racist, and other politicized agendas of world transformation, and the expression of love of sculptural form, colour and other aesthetic qualities. Clearly, these are projects carried out in the postmodern artworld. What is absent is a single, overarching project. The question, then, is whether this plurality of purposes and conceptions is a problem in accounting for art’s historical continuation. Herwitz asks how big a project has to be according to Danto to count as a narrative structure. If all that is needed for the story of art is a project, then why not a collection of projects to tell the postmodern story? After all, the postmodern era is defined by its plurality and scepticism of grand narratives, and its very multidirectionality could be described as the progressive impetus in a postmodern narrative.

Herwitz concludes that “even if a project must be in place in order for art history to live, it is far from clear that art history is dead now.” But here Herwitz reveals his misunderstanding about Danto’s thesis of the End of Art. He implies that Danto’s thesis declares art to be dead with the end of narrative. But, as Higgins and Solomon insist,
Danto is not saying this at all. Rather, art continues as vigorously as before, perhaps with more vigor now that it is no longer constrained by an overarching narrative. The historical drive toward self-consciousness was a stage in art—the narrative stage—which ended when art could do no more with this project and handed it over to philosophy. Afterwards, it is up to artists what to do and where to go with their art, for they are no longer directed by imperatives to do what is historically correct. This freedom, of course, leads to all kinds of artistic projects being tested by individual artists. Indeed, Danto believes that “we are living in a time when there are marvelous artists making marvelous art everywhere,” but they do not embody a discernible historical direction: “they point in so many directions the concept of direction is meaningless.” Thus, in response to Herwitz’s question whether multiple projects in art satisfy the conditions for historical continuity, Danto would say no. The very multiplicity of projects cancels out the possibility for a master narrative—a single project compelling art in a single historical direction. Herwitz’s description of the postmodern artworld actually confirms Danto’s statement that art has ended, but only if this statement is not taken to mean that art is dead. For taking the end of art to mean the death of art reveals a basic misunderstanding of Danto’s notion of narrative.

Herwitz goes on to ask whether projects are even necessary for the existence of art history. He questions Danto’s portrayal of art history as a series of autonomous projects ending as the next one begins. He thinks this account denies actual continuity between artistic phases. Herwitz argues that the external changes Danto identifies as catalyzing endings and beginnings within art history could only have such a transformative effect if there existed internal preconditions for historical change in art. Art responds to external
events precisely because it anticipates change, and because there is something within art which can respond to external events. In this way, the character of the postmodern era was anticipated and formed during the previous modernist era, and external changes just precipitated a shift in focus from modernist priorities to postmodern priorities. The postmodern project—as ‘non-project’ or as plural projects—evolved from the modernist project and no sharp ending and beginning can be found to divide the evolutionary shift.

With this objection Herwitz is no longer offering a direct critique of Danto’s thesis of the End of Art because he is rejecting the particular conception of art history in which the end of art can occur. With regard to Herwitz’s scepticism about his conception of art history, Danto would agree with Herwitz’s assertion that the conditions for postmodernism existed in the modernist era. After all, it was the striving by modernist artists to discover the essence of art which led to the end of art and the beginning of the posthistorical era. In that sense, modernist artists set the conditions for the emergence of postmodern art. But they were not postmodern artists for doing so. Herwitz himself recognizes a distinction between the Modern and postmodern. Even if the postmodern evolved out of the Modern, it still possesses a distinct character unlike any historical era in art which preceded it. By questioning whether there need even be projects in art for there to be a history of art, Herwitz weakens his earlier argument in support of a postmodern art history where he describes various definitive projects being carried out by postmodern artists. It is not clear, therefore, what Herwitz wants to say to Danto—whether he wishes to work with Danto’s narrative conception of art history and simply question the finality of the modernist narrative of art, or whether he wishes to reject Danto’s narrative conception of history and the thesis of the End of Art along with it by claiming
that defining projects do not make a history of art. If Herwitz wishes to reject Danto’s entire conception of art history, he must offer a critique of Danto’s cited evidence for accepting narrative realism. Danto’s identification of objective historical structures in art presents a convincing reason for adopting a substantive narrative interpretation of history. The strength of Herwitz’s objections to Danto’s thesis of the End of Art depends upon whether he can explain these objective historical structures without reference to a substantive notion of narrative.

Danto’s thesis of the End of Art stands up to criticism when taken within the context of his narrative conception of art history. The thesis hinges upon the fact that art ends with a question—the question about the essential nature of art in its proper philosophical form. The raising of this question by art is crucial for explaining how we came from modernism to the present postmodern or posthistorical era and the essential difference between then and now. However, the raising of this question by art is important for a second reason: it sets the conditions for a particular definition of art. This definition of art will have to account for art in both the historical, narrative period and the posthistorical period. With an eye to this challenge, Danto develops his philosophy of art from a posthistorical perspective. He sets up an essentialist project in direct response to the question that art handed over to philosophy at the end of art.

Previous essentialist theories of art put forward by the illustrious likes of Plato, Aristotle, Tolstoy, Bell, Collingwood and Langer, which are based upon the art of their time, “were subsequently refuted by the appearance of types of art not imagined or countenanced by the theories.” For example, imitation theories of art were problematized by post-impressionist painting, while philosophies of art that claimed that
art was the expression of emotion were followed and effectively refuted by an art movement like modernism that was committed to the notion that art stated cognitive theories about the nature of art with no reference to emotion.\textsuperscript{11} Since Danto’s philosophy of art is also an essentialist project it seems at risk of the same kind of refutation. We could imagine a future artwork which would represent an innovative development in art history unimagined by Danto. Perhaps his theory of art would not accommodate such a development and it would be refuted like its predecessors. But Danto protects his theory of art against such a possibility with his thesis of the End of Art. A logical consequence of the claim that art history has ended is that the possibility of future artistic developments which might refute Danto’s theory of art is foreclosed. If art history is over, then there is no future to contain further artistic development. As Noel Carroll puts it,

all the evidence is now in: essentialist theorizing can proceed with no anxiety about future counter-examples. If art history has ended, then we are in a position to determine that no art-historical development contradicts the rest of the theory of art. We know everything of the sort we need to know in order to produce conclusive generalizations.\textsuperscript{12}

The thesis of the End of Art is the crux of Danto’s philosophy of art history because it reaffirms Danto’s narrative conception of art history and links his philosophy of art history to his philosophy of art. Part of accepting narrative realism involves recognizing that the progressive, objective nature of history as narrative means that history contains its own end. In order to confirm his commitment to a conception of history as narrative, Danto must develop a thesis showing how art as a history comes to an end. With the thesis of the End of Art at its centre, Danto’s philosophy of art history prepares the necessary art historical and art theoretical space for Danto’s philosophy of art. At the end of the modernist narrative, art is released from both history and
philosophy—it is no longer required to pursue a historical *telos* or to discover its own essence. It is now up to philosophers to define art and Danto accepts the challenge gladly.

Since the thesis of the End of Art speaks of a release from historical constraint and the beginning of complete artistic freedom, Danto approaches the posthistorical era of art with complete optimism. This motivates him to undertake the daunting project of producing an historically sensitive definition of art from outside history.
Chapter 4. The Question Art  Hands Over to Philosophy

For Danto, the question about the nature of art is a question about the essence of art. The essence of philosophically relevant categories of things is discovered by applying the question of indiscernible counterparts.¹ This question arises in art only when a certain kind of art appears in a certain art historical and art theoretical atmosphere. The particular artwork which speaks to Danto of this moment is Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Box* of 1964. This work consisted of a pile of Brillo boxes which look exactly like the Brillo boxes found in supermarket storerooms. And yet, Andy Warhol’s pile of Brillo box facsimiles is art. For Danto, the deep and relevant question raised by this work of art was “wherein the difference lies between [Warhol’s Brillo boxes] and the Brillo cartons of the supermarket storeroom, when none of the differences between them can explain the difference between reality and art.”²

Danto argues that all philosophical questions have this form where two outwardly indiscernible things can nevertheless belong to different philosophical categories. For example, as Descartes famously observed, dream and waking experience bear no outward marks with which to tell them apart and yet they are different; a moral action and an action that only appears to be moral also cannot be told apart by outward identification; and, an action and a mere bodily movement appear identical. Until the twentieth century, Danto maintains, it was tacitly agreed that works of art could be identified as such by a process of comparison with other kinds of things—for example, mere real things. But Andy Warhol proves that art does not have to appear different from other kinds of things in order to be art. In fact, it does not have to appear any particular way at all—art can look
like a Brillo box. Warhol was among a group of artists who made this discovery, and subsequently presented Danto with the philosophical project of discovering what does, indeed, make art different from other kinds of things.

Danto tackles this project in his seminal work on the philosophy of art, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. By presenting a series of examples based around the problem of indiscernible counterparts, he puts pressure on theories of art which base themselves on manifest properties of artworks. The result is a multi-faceted account of the essential nature of art which yields a catalogue of non-manifest features of art. This account is important because it demonstrates the depth and significance of the question of indiscernible counterparts. The question of indiscernible counterparts provides a definition of art which is outside history but recognizes the role of history in determining the possibility of individual artworks. In this way, the question of indiscernible counterparts provides a definition of art which has relevance both in the historical era of art and in the posthistorical era of art. The question of indiscernible counterparts stands at a point when both a completed catalogue of historical art and an awareness of the freedom of the posthistorical era in art are available for use in defining art. Thus, the exploration of the question of indiscernible counterparts in art undertaken in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* defers to history while heralding post-history.

The problem of indiscernible counterparts is first introduced in the paradigmatic example which begins *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. Danto asks us to imagine an exhibition of paintings all of which are identical red squares: expanses of red paint on canvases of the same size and shape. There are nine pieces on display, all of them identical to the eye. Six of these are paintings, each belonging to a distinct artistic
genre: historical painting, psychological portraiture, landscape, geometrical abstraction, religious art, and still life. Two of the pieces on display do not belong to any artistic genre, for they are not works of art, but rather mere real things: one is a canvas grounded in red lead by Giorgione in preparation for painting his next masterpiece, and the other a square surface painted red. The ninth piece is a late addition to the exhibit, about which more will be said below.

By describing each of them Danto shows that, despite appearing identical, the paintings on display are very different. The first, described by Soren Kierkegaard, has as its subject the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. The artist of this work explains that in his painting the Israelites have already crossed over and the Egyptians have already drowned, so the red square of paint that he produces is his representation of the Red Sea. The next painting is intended by a psychologically insightful Dutch portraitist to represent “Kierkegaard’s Mood,” as it is revealed by Kierkegaard himself in his description of “The Israelites Crossing The Red Sea.” Here Kierkegaard comments that all the spiritual turmoil of his life is like that painting: in the end it melds into “a mood, a single color.”

There are then four more identical paintings: an example of Moscow landscape entitled “Red Square,” a minimalist exemplar of geometric art also called “Red Square,” a metaphysical painting representing “Nirvana,” and a still-life “executed by an embittered disciple of Matisse called ‘Red Table Cloth.’” The late addition to the exhibition is also a painting, produced by Danto’s imaginary antagonist ‘J.’ J’s painting is untitled and J insists that the work is about nothing. He also insists that his red square is a work of art, and not a mere real thing, simply by virtue of his declaring it one, and that it should be included in Danto’s exhibition. Danto is only too happy to oblige the truculent J, for J’s
painting will serve an edifying purpose, revealing something new about art to add to the store of revelations embedded in the exhibition as a whole.

Danto’s imaginary exhibition represents a strategy for getting at what is essential to art. It does this in two ways: by upsetting non-essentialist theories of art and by revealing non-manifest, essential features of art. It seems that Danto has already determined what the essential properties of art are and why theories of art other than his own do not work, or work in only a limited way. The exhibit is a way of showing what he already knows in an accessible and intuitive format. However, it is also a way of demonstrating how the question of indiscernible counterparts can be applied when defining art. The fact that this question can be applied to art indicates its philosophical nature. In order to define art, we must have a philosophical understanding of why art occupies a distinct ontological category. In order to reach this understanding, Danto extracts each of the lessons offered by the exhibit of red squares in the many further examples developed in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*.

Part of the strategy for getting at what is essential to art involves testing other theories of art against the premises of the exhibit of red squares. The Mimetic Theory of Art needs to be tested in this way because it presents an essential definition of art which excludes some of the artworks in Danto’s gallery of red squares. The Mimetic Theory describes art as a mirror of nature. Therefore, all artists in the mimetic tradition aim to produce the most perfect imitation of reality, and what is essential to their work as art is its imitating reality. If the artworks in the gallery of red squares were only artworks because they imitated reality, then they seem to be going against or even denying their essential nature. Most of them do not attempt to show reality as it is, except perhaps the
painting of the red tablecloth by Matisse’s student, and some of them do not attempt to mirror reality at all, such as the minimalist Red Square. By the Mimetic account, either the paintings in the gallery of red squares are very bad art, or they are not art at all. And yet this doesn’t seem right simply on an intuitive level: surely they are art and quite possibly good art. The Mimetic Theory of Art cannot accommodate this intuition and some explanation of why not is needed.

The Mimetic Theory of Art rests upon an understanding of the nature of imitation as it is defined by its relationship to reality. According to Plato’s account in Republic, reality consists in forms which stand, unchanging, behind and above things which exemplify these forms and which may come and go. The forms, then, exist independently of their exemplifications and are not affected by their gaining or losing individual exemplifications. While a thing at least exemplifies the form, an imitation of a thing doesn’t even manage this, for it is two degrees removed from reality “and can claim in consequence only the most inferior status.” Thus, Plato perceived art as opposed to the search for truth and knowledge, for art as imitation draws attention away from reality. Whether or not we agree that art is corrupting in this way, the description that Plato offers for how imitation stands to reality is useful for furthering our understanding of the essential nature of art. For the kind of gap which Plato identifies between imitations and things is the same kind of gap which exists between art and reality. The gap between reality and art must be maintained for art to exist as a class of representations. As representations, “works of art are logically of the same sort to be bracketed with words....[For] artworks as a class contrast with real things in just the way in which words do.” Both words and works of art are about something, or can have the question of what
they’re about legitimately asked of them, and both words and works of art “stand at the same philosophical distance from reality.”

By identifying the gap between reality and art in defining the nature of imitation, the Mimetic Theory of Art makes a useful contribution toward creating a catalogue of essential properties of art. But its contribution stops here, for the Mimetic program proceeds to make a fatal step by aiming to close this gap. This move results in the Euripidean dilemma:

once one has completed the mimetic program, one has produced something so like what is to be encountered in reality that, being just like reality, the question arises as to what makes it art.

An artist engaged in the mimetic program aims to create a perfect imitation of reality. If the artist manages to reach his/her aim of perfection, there is nothing interesting left to distinguish between art and reality. For art is defined solely in relation to reality and will always remain a poor substitute for it. Ultimately, then, the Mimetic Theory of Art fails to account for the paintings in the gallery of red squares because it cannot say all that needs to be said in order to explain their artistic status. The Mimetic Theory of Art cannot explain the unique position of these paintings to the reality which they represent but do not necessarily imitate.

In order to escape this dilemma, an artist can exaggerate the non-mimetic features of art which were previously purged in the name of the mimetic program. For example, an artist could emphasize the act of painting itself as the unique feature of his/her artform. The early Abstract Expressionist painters did just this in their action paintings, most notably, Jackson Pollock who engaged in a frenzied process of splattering and pouring paint onto a canvas to create and define his paintings. What results from this effort,
however, is “something so unlike reality that the question just raised [concerning the
difference between reality and art that imitates it perfectly] is stunned.” Instead, a new
question emerges, of equal significance:

what, given that at the extreme we have something discontinuous with reality,
remains to distinguish this as art—and not just another piece of reality, supposing that
we want to say that not just every novel thing is ipso facto an artwork and we want,
after all, to suppose that reality can be enriched without this having to be through art?9

Undoubtedly, there are things which enrich reality by being novel forms which
nevertheless are by common consent not works of art. For example, we can imagine the
first can opener ever made, described by Danto as something never before seen, “a model
of utility and economy,”10 enriching reality by its novelty. Thus, any claim that art works
are those things which exclusively enrich reality by their novel forms cannot be made in
an attempt to get at the essential nature of art. A theory about the fact of historical novelty
defining art cannot explain the status of the paintings and the mere real things in the
gallery of red squares. If it were claimed that Red Square were an artwork because of its
novelty, Giorgione’s red canvas prepared with ground lead would also be an artwork for
sharing the same novel form. To deny that Giorgione’s canvas is an artwork would
require claiming that it only resembles a novel form. But if this were the case, all the
paintings in the gallery of red squares apart from Red Square would also have to be
denied their status as art for merely copying the novel form of the one true artwork among
them.

A theory which defines art by its novelty cannot explain why some of the items on
display in the gallery of red squares are artworks and some of them are mere real things.
Nor can such a theory explain why all of the items on display in the gallery of red squares
are unique and not facsimiles. The inadequacy of such a theory reintroduces the Euripidean dilemma at the other end of the spectrum from where it is first seen within the mimetic program. The first case of the dilemma occurs when art is desperately trying to confirm that it is the same thing as reality, so perfect is its imitation of reality. The second case emerges when an artwork appears to be just like a real thing and yet denies that it is representing reality. The dilemma is that the necessary gap between art and reality is lost so that art cannot be told apart from reality and we therefore cannot say what makes it art.

A solution to this dilemma is clearly needed. But the dilemma will always emerge as long as we try to define art with reference to its manifest properties--those features that compare or contrast with reality. To avoid the dilemma, then, would entail finding something else upon which to erect a theory of art. An answer which suggests itself here—though one Danto will reject—would be that the difference between art and reality is just a matter of conventions: whatever convention allows to be an artwork is an artwork.

When J declares his untitled red square an artwork, he is relying upon conventionalism to insist upon its inclusion in the exhibit of red squares. By declaring his red square art it is art. If the other paintings in the exhibit of red squares are artworks by convention, there is no way to account for their uniqueness as distinct yet perceptually indiscernible artworks. The emotional depth of Kierkegaard's Mood would go unnoticed or unexplained so that this painting might as well be as empty as J’s untitled work. A more pointed illustration of the inadequacy of conventionalism is introduced later in the Transfiguration of the Commonplace where Danto has us suppose that we are looking at a painting which appears to be Rembrandt’s The Polish Rider. But this painting is
actually the result of a statistical miracle which allowed for lots of paint projected from a centrifuge to produce an exact replica of Rembrandt's painting. The question is whether this statistical miracle should be considered a work of art. To illustrate the problem of conventionalism, Danto has us suppose that someone declares it a work of art and that therefore it is one. If this were the case, why is Rembrandt's *The Polish Rider* an artwork, especially since something else which happens to look just like it has simply been declared to be art? If *The Polish Rider* is an artwork simply by convention like its miraculous double, then nothing more can be said about Rembrandt's painting—about, say, its depth, or its creator and his beliefs—to explain its status as art or its distinctiveness. Nothing can be said to explain why it is considered such an emotionally and conceptually deep painting other than that it is considered to be deep in virtue of convention declaring it to be deep. Thus, Conventionalism would have us declare that, like Rembrandt's *Polish Rider*, the painting resulting from the centrifugal fluke is "one of the deepest paintings in the history of the subject,"\(^1\) which is clearly ridiculous. While conventionalism steps around the Euripidean dilemma, maintaining a gap between art and reality by conventional agreement, it cannot account for the non-manifest differences between distinct artworks such as Kierkegaard's *Mood* and J's untitled red square, or *Polish Rider* and the centrifugal miracle. The same obstacle to finding an essential definition for art remains: a failure to acknowledge or explain the non-manifest properties of art.

Turning our attention away from manifest properties of art does not entail abandoning the search for an essential definition of art. Danto must make this point perfectly clear, for his essentialist agenda takes him beyond all those theories of art which
cannot explain the gallery of red squares. Danto illustrates this point by means of Borges’ short story, “Pierre Menard, Symbolist Poet,” in which Borges describes two fragments of literary works, one of which is part of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote,* and the other, which is “like it in every respect—like it, indeed, as much as two copies of the fragment by Cervantes could be—...”[^12] but by Pierre Menard and not by Cervantes. This is not a case of an artwork and a mere real thing which are consciously or unconsciously identical. Nor is this a case of an artwork and a copy of an artwork. Rather, this is a case of two distinct artworks, produced at different times, which happen to be identical. Through an effort of poetic imagination, Menard writes the same words as Cervantes a century after *Don Quixote.* Although every word in Cervantes’ work and in Menard’s work is the same, Cervantes’ writing “opposes to the fiction of chivalry the tawdry provincial reality of his country,” while Menard’s writing is about “the land of Carmen during the century of Lepanto and Lope de Vega.”[^13] These are descriptions of the same place and time, but the modes of referring to them are different and could not be switched around. Cervantes could not be writing about the land of Carmen because Carmen hadn’t been born when he was alive, and Menard could not be opposing chivalry because it was long since dead when he was writing in nineteenth-century France. The style of the two works can also be described differently: “The archaic style of Menard—quite foreign after all—suffers from a certain affectation. Not so that of his forerunner, who handles with ease the current Spanish of his time.”[^14]

These two literary assessments indicate how the distinctiveness of the two artworks rests upon knowing the facts of who wrote them and when. Historical origin and causality play an internal role in characterizing the artwork and in individuating it from its
indiscernible counterparts. These are not manifest properties of an artwork and yet they are essential to it. There is, then, something other than manifest properties on which to base an essentialist definition of art. So it isn’t necessary to give up the project of definition altogether and turn to conventionalism. Danto has introduced historical causality as the first component in his essential definition of art. On its own this component goes some distance toward explaining the ontological possibility of the Exhibition of Red Squares. For example, the fact that *Kierkegaard’s Mood* was painted by a Dutch psychological portraitist, that *The Israelites Crossing The Red Sea* depicts the sea after it closed over the Egyptians, and, that *Red Table Cloth* was executed by a student of Matisse, can now be taken into account in distinguishing one red square from the next. To distinguish the paintings from the mere real things which are red squares, however, will require additional defining components.

In order to separate *Red Square* from Giorgione’s canvas grounded in lead, we must return to the question of indiscernible counterparts in its original form: what makes the difference between a work of art and something not a work of art when there is no interesting perceptual difference between them? The best way to answer this question is with an illustration of the problem it presents. Thus, Danto has us suppose that Picasso, just before his death and “as the crowning work of his already amazing corpus,” created one last work of art by painting an old tie completely blue in such a way as to represent “a repudiation of painterliness.” As well, Danto has us suppose that Cezanne kept an old tie on which to wipe his brush for blue paint after every stroke. When he puts the used-up paint rag aside, the result is a tie covered in blue paint identical to Picasso’s artwork, *Le Cravat*. Picasso’s tie is a work of art. But is Cezanne’s paint rag also a work of art? This
question presents the problem of indiscernible counterparts in an interesting way: it confronts directly the possibility of having indiscernible counterparts from different ontological categories and it requires us to find the basis for this possibility. The answer to this question has several components each of which reveals an essential feature of art. First, Cezanne’s paint rag cannot be a work of art because of its historical location. Picasso’s *Le Cravat* was created in an artistic atmosphere that was ready historically and theoretically for such a transfiguration of a commonplace item. In other words, “there was room in the space of the artworld by then and in the internal structure of Picasso’s corpus, which did so much to define the space of the artworld, for such an object by Picasso there and then.” When Picasso produced *Le Cravat*, he did so with a style in mind which he wanted to repudiate; namely, painterliness. Thus, his work speaks of the art theory and art history which preceded it by self-consciously rejecting an element of this tradition. Cezanne, however, was working at a time when such a rejection would not have made sense to his contemporaries in the art world. It would not have been possible to include his paint rag in the category of art because the theoretical revolution which it represents would be discontinuous with the preceding events in the art world. For a revolution in art to occur it has to be recognized as a revolution by the artworld in light of what came before. Other art historical developments needed to be inserted between the art of Cezanne’s time and the paint rag as art. By the time Picasso produced *Le Cravat*, these necessary theoretical and historical stages had occurred allowing a move from Cezanne’s paintings to Picasso’s *Le Cravat*.

What counts as art in any particular era is not just determined by the artist as J would have it when he declares his untitled red square to be art. For the artworld must be
ready for works declared by artists to be art in order for them to be art. Indeed, an artist could not even declare one of his/her works art unless the artworld in which s/he participates and which shapes his/her understanding of art is ready. For, "to see something as art at all demands nothing less than...an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art,"17 which together form the artworld.

An enveloping atmosphere of art theory and art history is an essential component of art. With this component in place, we can begin to distinguish artworks from mere real things, and, in doing so, discover what is essential to art. Further components need to be considered, however. Continuing with Danto’s example, there is a second reason why Cezanne’s paint rag cannot be a work of art. This reason has to do with the notion of having a subject or being about something. Danto explains how we can reasonably and properly ask of Picasso’s work what it is about. As it happens, Le Cravat has no subject. But, it could have a subject, for all art is about something, even if that ‘something,’ as J insists, is nothing. On the other hand, we cannot reasonably ask the same question of Cezanne’s paint rag, for a paint rag as a material object isn’t about anything, it just is.

When J declares his untitled red square to be about nothing he does not mean that it is about nothing like Sartre’s Being and Nothingness “is about nothing, about absence”18 Rather, he means that his work lacks content; it is empty. But the emptiness of J’s work is assigned and it can be assigned only because the work is included in the category of art. J chooses the content of his work because content can be meaningfully ascribed to the category of art. The nothing of J’s untitled red square is neither its subject nor the logical absence of reference. It is a “willed”19 absence.
In order for something to be an artwork, we must be able to ask sensibly what its subject is. Aboutness is another essential feature of art. If a work is about something it can have a title. This is important, for the logical possibility of attaching a title to something points toward another essential feature of art. When asked the title of his submission to the gallery of red squares, J "predictably tells [Danto] that 'Untitled' will serve as well as anything."[^20] Although J is presumably ascribing "Untitled" to his work just to reinforce its emptiness, he is actually giving it a title as meaningful as "The Israelites Crossing the Red Sea." By saying that his work is untitled, J relies upon the presupposition that an artwork is something to which a title can be deliberately attached or not attached. J has already declared his work art, thereby entering his work into a category in which titles are applicable. But a title attached to an artwork is not just a name like a linguistic label attached to a mere real thing. A title satisfies a purpose other than identification: it serves as a direction for interpretation.[^21] And interpretation is essential to art.

In asking about the subject of a work, how it functions as a type of representation apart from mere real things, and about its historical location and the circumstances of its creation, we are interpreting that artwork. We are also implicitly recognizing the necessity of this process of interpretation for our seeing it as a work of art. Interpretation consists in speaking of the structure of an artwork: its subject and historical causality. By speaking of a work of art in this way, we are offering a particular theory about its subject. The nature of the theory we offer is determined by the kind of identifications we make about a particular artwork, identifications to do with the history of the work, what the artist was trying to show, and which features of the work are most important for its definition.
according to the theoretical atmosphere in which it was produced. How we interpret an artwork will affect the system of identification and the structure of the work so that they will change in accordance with different interpretations. In this way, two indiscernible artworks can receive very different interpretations depending upon the kind of identification the interpreter makes about each work’s causal history and historical location and how the interpreter speaks of the structure of each work. These different interpretations, in turn, distinguish the artworks from one another despite their identical manifest appearance. Thus, *Red Square* is seen to be a minimalist work and the identical *Kierkegaard’s Mood* is seen to be an example of psychological portraiture. The transformative effect of interpretation not only distinguishes one artwork from another, however; it also distinguishes artworks from mere real things. An artwork is essentially an *interpreted* work even before it is a particular kind of artwork according to a particular interpretation. The capacity of interpretation to distinguish art from other ontological categories marks it as an essential feature of art.

Art is essentially interpreted because it forms a special class of representations. A representation is “something that stands in the place of something else,” and interpretation determines what the representation stands for. In this way, a representation is told apart from reality. Danto describes works of art as transfigurative representations. By this he means that an artwork transfigures rather than transforms what it is about, for the artwork’s subject is not changed into something else to the point that what it is in the real world is lost. Rather, the original identity of the subject remains and the artist endows it with attributes which indicate a particular way of seeing the subject and the world in general. This transfiguration can be explained by examining the metaphorical structure of
artworks. In his essay, "Essence, Expression, and History: Arthur Danto's Philosophy of Art," Noel Carroll says metaphor involves "exploring a target term in light of a source term," such as seeing "'the moon' in light of 'ghostly galleon.'" As such, "metaphor is the rhetorical trope with respect to art since art involves our seeing one content in a certain light."\(^23\) It is because "the structure of artworks is, or is very close to the structure of metaphors,"\(^24\) that artworks can be described as transfigurative representations, for transfiguration--and not transformation--is a metaphorical process. This is seen through Danto’s example of a portrait of Napoleon as a Roman emperor. The metaphor in this portrait is showing Napoleon \textit{as} a Roman Emperor. This metaphor would not work if Napoleon’s identity as Napoleon was lost in the depiction of a Roman emperor—if Napoleon was transformed into a Roman Emperor so that we thought either Napoleon was a Roman emperor or we were looking at a Roman emperor who coincidentally looked a lot like Napoleon. Rather, Napoleon remains as the subject of the portrait, but he is transfigured so that we see him in a particular way: as a Roman Emperor. The metaphorical structure employed here distinguishes artworks from other kinds of representations, such as words. For artworks are not just about something; they are about something which has been transfigured so as to be seen in a certain light.

The artist enables the viewer to see the subject of his/her artwork in a particular light, and does this by means of style. Danto describes style as "those qualities of representations which are the man himself."\(^25\) By "the man himself" Danto is referring to the artist as a system of representations of the world--as a system of ways of seeing. What the artist does by way of his/her style is to project his/her particular way of seeing the world through his/her art. Thus, the artist does not just represent the content of the subject
in his/her artwork, but also the way that s/he sees this subject. The interplay of the artist's style and the metaphorical structure of an artwork is essential to art. This interplay separates art from other kinds of nonartistic representation.

In arriving at the feature of style, the essentialist catalogue is complete, containing all those elements which "as a matter of intuition belong to the concept of an artwork." An artwork is a transfigurative representation which expresses a point-of-view about its subject through its metaphorical structure. As well, the artwork's historical causality and origin, its subject, and the enveloping presence of an art world or art theory are all intrinsic to a definition of art. This catalogue of artistic features and conditions comprises the unified theory of art which Danto generates through the methodology of indiscernible counterparts. Answering the question of indiscernible counterparts in art involves separating out the kinds of distinction implicit in the question: the distinctions between one artwork and another artwork identical to it, between an artwork and another kind of representation, and, between an artwork and a mere real thing. All those features which place art in its own ontological space apart from reality are essential to a definition of art.

The question of indiscernible counterparts in art thus both facilitates and directs Danto's essentialist project: it creates the philosophical space needed for Danto's definition of art by signaling the end of art, and, it acts as the measure against which ideas about the nature of art must be tested. Ultimately, though, it provides an understanding of art which prepares us for the posthistorical era.
Chapter 5. The Art Museum after the End of Art

In her collection of essays on art, *Beyond Modernism*, Kim Levin describes the 1970s as “a decade that felt as if it was waiting for something to happen,” as if “history were grinding to a halt.”¹ This decade had the sense of a defiance against the purity of modernism, such that all those predicates rejected by the Abstract Expressionists—illusionistic, decorative, literary—were reclaimed by art that was ornamental or moral, grandiose or miniaturized, anthropological, archaeological, ecological, autobiographical, or fictional.² The rejection of all the proscriptions of modernist purity was without a direction or agenda in the seventies, since it was occurring at the end of an era without any certainty over what would come next. But what was clear was that “Modernism had gone out of style,”³ as Levin puts it, or even that style itself had been used up as a modernist preoccupation with the invention of forms. This momentous shift led to plenty of predictions by Modernist critics and artists of the death of art. But, as Levin writes in the late 1980s, “by now it is obvious that it was not art that was ending but an era.”⁴ Danto would surely agree with Levin’s assessment of the nature of change in the seventies. This is the first decade after the end of art and thus bound to be one of critical confusion and artistic impulsiveness. Although it was apparent just by looking at the art of the seventies that Modernism was over, what might not have been apparent was that the entire narrative era of art, encompassing both traditional and modern periods, was also over. Thus, without knowing it, the artists of the seventies were working in the posthistorical era of art without a master narrative constraining the direction, meaning or appearance of their work. Art as an ontological category did not end with this transition,
but emerged unburdened by history to allow for further experimentation and expansion. Indeed, Danto asserts that it is "quite consistent with the end of the era of art..., that art should be extremely vigorous and show no sign whatever of internal exhaustion." Art does not require the direction of a narrative to endure and develop. But whether the same can be said for the art museum is not clear.

As previously demonstrated, the art museum has always functioned to tell the story of art through its progressive phases. Now that there is no longer a story to tell, the art museum is left without a function. The art museum is the ideal site and device for presenting art as a narrative and there are perhaps other kinds of space more suited to presenting art as what it is now, namely, anything. I will examine E. H. Gombrich's argument that the museum today needs to turn back to its original function of offering profit and delight to the viewer. In order to delight at an artwork, the viewer must have some level of understanding about the nature of art and art history in order to see an artwork as unique. I will argue that teaching the viewer how to delight at, say, one monochrome painting surrounded by other monochrome paintings is an essential function of the posthistorical museum. Gombrich rejects completely the didactic function of the art museum where artworks are seen as instructional specimens of art history. But I will argue that the art museum must carry out a different kind of didactic function which does not rely upon the narrative conception of art but involves helping viewers to understand the spirit of posthistorical art. Danto's gallery of red squares, introduced as a playful demonstration of the problem of indiscernible counterparts, is a real possibility in the posthistorical era. Therefore, the art museum must be prepared to show its visitors how to appreciate the uniqueness of artworks which all look the same, as well as artworks that
look like other kinds of things or conceptual artworks which are not to be looked at. Here I will pick up on Joseph Margolis’ discussion of the importance of collecting for rendering art objects legible to suggest that the posthistorical art museum must direct its collecting to demonstrate the difference between art and reality. Ultimately, if the art museum today is going to display contemporary art, it has to find a way to make its visitors understand why some contemporary artworks which all look alike are in fact all distinct, why some contemporary artworks are even art, and why contemporary art is different in spirit than anything that came before.

The dilemma faced by the art museum is a result of the very nature of the posthistorical period. In order to establish what the posthistorical museum must accommodate and represent in art, and what is available to it as organizing structures, we need a clear picture of what the posthistorical period in art is like. The best way of approaching such a description is to lay out two important distinctions: the difference between ‘modern’ and ‘contemporary’ as terms describing both kinds of art and art historical periods, and the difference between ‘postmodern’ and ‘posthistorical’ as terms describing the same art historical period. In making these distinctions, a profile of the posthistorical artist and his/her art emerges. To begin, then, it is important to note that the art historical predicates ‘modern’ and ‘contemporary’ do not only refer to the provenance of an artwork. At first, ‘contemporary art’ would have been just “‘the modern art that is being made now.” Modern, after all, implies a difference between recent art and art from a long time ago in order to indicate change and growth. As well, ‘modern’ implies an historical structure which defines and directs artistic production. Therefore, ‘modern’ has both a temporal meaning and an art historical meaning. ‘Contemporary’ also acquired a
second meaning when it came to imply a different historical structure which defines contemporary art as distinct from modern art not just temporally but also art historically. Modern art and contemporary art occur within different structures of production. These structures remain distinct because of their relation to history. Whereas modern artists were working under the historical constraints of an overarching narrative, contemporary artists are working after this narrative has come to an end. The different historical conditions under which modern and contemporary artists work defines the spirit of each era. The fact that contemporary art manifests a new spirit in the artworld indicates that the contemporary is not continuous with the modern. The modern is thus a closed style and period. The contemporary, however, is not closed in the same way because it is not historically constrained. As Danto describes it, ‘contemporary’ “designates less a period than what happens after there are no more periods in some master narrative of art, and less a style of making art than a style of using styles.”

The contemporary structure of production is described by Danto as ‘posthistorical.’ It is a kind of structure of production never before seen because it emerges after all other art historical structures have ended. Rather than being defined by a particular style, a particular grand artistic aim, or a refinement of a particular aspect of production, the posthistorical period in art is defined by its lack of any such agenda. No longer constrained by an historical narrative, the posthistorical artist has complete freedom to work in any style, toward any goal, and either with or without hope of refinement. Danto prefers the term ‘posthistorical’ to the term ‘postmodern’ because he thinks that ‘postmodern’ refers to a particular style which excludes the work of some posthistorical artists. Indeed, it is possible to learn how to pick out instances of the
postmodern amongst various posthistorical artworks. In Robert Venturi's 1966 book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, he describes particular features to look for in identifying the postmodern style: "'elements which are hybrid rather than 'pure,' compromising rather than 'clean,' 'ambiguous' rather than 'articulated,' perverse as well as interesting'". If it is possible to label particular works as 'postmodern' with reference to this neat catalogue, it is equally possible to deny that other works within the same structure of production are postmodern. This implies that contemporary art has to look a certain way to belong to the present postmodern era. By using the term, 'posthistorical' instead Danto implies that the present artistic era is not continuous with previous artistic periods. It is not defined by a stylistic unity, and there is in consequence no possibility of a narrative direction.

In the posthistorical era all possible styles have equal play and offer themselves to the posthistorical artist for manipulation and combination. The end of period-specific styles is perhaps best exemplified by the emergence of appropriated art in the nineteen seventies. Appropriated images involve "the taking over of images with established meaning and identity and giving them a fresh meaning and identity." Since any image can be appropriated, it immediately follows that there could be no perceptual stylistic uniformity among appropriated images. An example of appropriated art dear to Danto is Kevin Roche's 1992 addition to the Jewish Museum in New York. The original Jewish museum was simply the converted mansion of the Warburg family built in the Mannerist tradition. The new addition to the museum looks exactly like the Warburg mansion. Kevin Roche intends the addition to duplicate a building from another period (in this case, the original museum itself) and to offer this appropriated image for postmodern
interpretation. Roche’s is a distinct artwork, and not merely a copy of the Warburg mansion, because it carries an entirely different meaning. The fact that Kevin Roche can produce a postmodern artwork in the style of “a Mannerist chateau”\textsuperscript{10} indicates that no one style denotes the posthistorical era in art.

The motivation behind appropriated art implies a strategy for describing posthistorical art in general and the role of the posthistorical artist. This strategy must avoid making assertions about what posthistorical art should look like, and describe instead what posthistorical art can be like. In his postmodern reading of Danto’s thesis of the end of art, Daniel Herwitz extracts two possible conclusions for the condition of art today. The first conclusion is that “serious art is today identical with philosophy,\textsuperscript{11} and the second conclusion is that “the highest expression of art today is not achieved through its identity with philosophy but in its romping, Duchamping polymorphous playfulness.”\textsuperscript{12} Both these descriptions apply to some posthistorical art. But Herwitz is mistaken if he thinks either description can stand as a normative claim about how posthistorical art should be. Posthistorical art does not have to be philosophical or playful, although it could be either if it wanted. Whether it is playful or philosophical reflects an artistic choice in order to achieve a certain effect or transformative end.

Herwitz is wrong to try to extract normative claims from Danto’s thesis of the end of art. The posthistorical era is an era of complete artistic freedom defined precisely by the absence of any normative structures. It is enough that art is produced in the spirit of the posthistorical era for it to be posthistorical art. One kind of art which predominates in the posthistorical era, however, is political art. Whereas Herwitz sees political art as embodying the postmodern era, Danto sees political art as one option for posthistorical
artists. Danto describes this kind of art as “disturbatory,” meaning that it not only has a disturbing content, but it aims at disturbing the viewer in some way:

disturbatory art...is intended...to modify, through experiencing it, the mentality of those who do experience it. This is not art one is intended to view across an aesthetic distance that serves as an insulating barrier, but art intended to modify the consciousness and even change the lives of its viewers.\textsuperscript{13}

While Danto explains how disturbatory art exploits artistic means to social and moral change, Herwitz similarly describes how postmodern art aims at world-transformation and frequently turns “its materials into a philosophically laden rhetoric which addresses the whirl of the art market, of commodity capitalism, of its own social construction, and its own complex nature.”\textsuperscript{14} Here Danto and Herwitz are describing the same art from the same era. Whereas Herwitz thinks he is describing the definitive features of all postmodern art, however, Danto thinks he is describing just one kind of art in the posthistorical era. Nevertheless, both their descriptions emphasize the aim of much contemporary art to repudiate what came before. This repudiation implies the distinctiveness of the present era in art and prepares the way for a thesis such as Danto’s about art having ended to explain this distinctiveness.

The often political nature of posthistorical art reveals something about the role of the posthistorical artist. Making political art requires the artist to paint, sculpt, perform, etc. as a representative of a particular political group in order to address the viewer in a politicized and affective way. The notion of ‘painting as...’ describes the identificatory stance that the posthistorical artist often maintains. Danto thinks ‘painting as...’ is much like the form of reading identified by Roland Barthes, reading as a writer. This is one of two forms of reading, the other being when we read as readers getting out of the text what
the writer put there. Reading as a writer involves re-creating the text in conformity with our own agendas. Authorial intention and causal explanation no longer control our interpretation of the book and there are in consequence multiple possibilities for how the books reads depending on our own interpretive stance. In the same way, it is possible “to paint as a woman...or as a black...or as anything one chooses.”15 The strategy of painting as...is perhaps “one way of adjusting to the end of art,”16 because it allows for infinite interpretations by the artist of one subject, thereby freeing the artist to reuse old styles, themes, materials and objects in new ways.

Adopting a political, identificatory, and interpretive position in making his/her art allows the posthistorical artist to capture something of the spirit of the contemporary. However, Danto asserts that this spirit is best understood as it is embodied by a kind of art museum:

the basic perception of the contemporary spirit was formed on the principle of a museum in which all art has a rightful place, where there is no a priori criterion as to what the art must look like, and where there is no narrative in which the museum's contents must all fit.17

The styles of past periods in art are used by posthistorical artists as if they were decorative possibilities or different techniques. The art museum, therefore, becomes a resource for artistic options where the artist scavenges for available forms to recycle, parody or blend. The result is art which is hybrid, appropriated, subversive or conceptual. Whatever it is, however, is acceptable because the posthistorical period, like a wholly democratic and representative art museum, allows for any kind of art just as long as it really is art.
While the idea of a museum for every kind of art is useful for conveying the spirit of the contemporary, it is hard to see how such an idea could become a reality. As Harold Rosenberg points out in his article, “The Museum Today,” there is an equal if not greater chance that the art museum in the posthistorical period will stand empty of art because it is incapable of accommodating contemporary art or presenting historical art from a posthistorical perspective. To illustrate the possibility of an art museum without art, Rosenberg refers to a television interview conducted with Mr. John Hightower, director of the MoMA in New York. When asked what the museum experience should be like for the visitor, Mr. Hightower replied that “first of all it ought to be fun,” and said that he hoped this fun might be ‘connected with some sort of visual experience which they [the spectators] may not get anywhere else.’\(^{18}\) Mr. Hightower characterizes the art museum as a form of spectacle in the tradition of mass entertainment. He then goes on to propose an unlimited expansion of the museum’s critical-aesthetic function by advocating that the museum become the depository for all things in contemporary society of aesthetic value. The art museum would “recognize what is, essentially, a very valid artistic expression, whether it’s gardening or pulling the magnificent bird out of the oven on Christmas Day.”\(^{19}\) Although Mr. Hightower’s remarks suggest that he recognizes the plurality of posthistorical art along with the notion that art can be anything, Rosenberg fears that the kind of wholly inclusive museum that Hightower advocates will fail to distinguish art from other aesthetic forms. Pulling the Christmas turkey from the oven could be a piece of performance art, but only if the necessary non-manifest properties of an artwork are present, such as having a subject, projecting a point-of-view, requiring interpretation, and relying upon a background of art history and theory. If the act of pulling the Christmas
turkey from the oven does not have these properties, the fact that it is aesthetically interesting does not give it the necessary status to be included in an art museum. What Rosenberg recognizes in Mr. Hightower's remarks is the aesthetic taking precedence over art and in opposition to it: in order to find the most aesthetically valuable items in contemporary society, the art museum looks past art. The danger here is that "when everything has found its way into the museum, the place of art will have to be outside it." 20

The possibility of an art museum which contains no art occurs when Danto's principle of an art museum for all kinds of art is applied without a clear understanding of what separates art from other kinds of visual experience. If the essential non-manifest properties of art are not taken into account when assessing what should be in the art museum, everything beautiful or visually interesting can gain entry. In order to avoid this mistake, two strategies are possible: either everyone in the museum world needs to be educated about the essential definition of art, or the aesthetic needs to be brought back to art. As Danto points out, late modernist, as well as much art in the seventies and eighties, is aesthetically impoverished which leads curators and museum directors to look more widely for the aesthetic in contemporary society. If the aesthetic were brought back to art, museum professionals would no longer feel required to look beyond art. This option is perhaps more viable than attempting to educate the museum world about definitions of art which will always be contested—and which probably belong to the domain of philosophy anyway. Danto holds that the return of the aesthetic to art will happen on its own as artists, critics and museum professionals become more comfortable with the nature of the posthistorical period.
Danto believes we are in "bad aesthetic times" in the sense that "an awful lot of high art seems flagrantly bad, aesthetically," but also in the sense that "something deeper has happened as well—namely, that none of this appropriation can conceal the fact that there is a central emptiness, and the times are bad because art is stalled." Similarly, Rosenberg points to the aesthetic poverty of contemporary painting as compared with the infinite forms of nature and the man-made. It is understandable, then, that the art museum, sensitive to this impoverishment, would look to the aesthetic outside art. Danto thinks that the reason for these bad aesthetic times is that artists mistakenly still believe that they are locked in history and carrying it forward to the next stage. There is still an historical urgency to artistic production which entails a striving to do something brand new, dramatic and progressive. Unfortunately, this striving has lead to a lot of ugly art. What is needed, then, is for artists to reach an understanding of the period in which they are working: they are working outside history and are therefore not required to produce any particular kind of art. Posthistorical artists need to grasp the irony of their position in which they rely on history for their standing in the artworld when they are actually working outside history. Once this irony is grasped, Danto thinks, "there is no historical need or urgency to persist with the awful sorts of paintings we have been forced to endure." He asks, "with so many roles to play with, so many ways to choose, so absolute a posthistorical freedom, why not good aesthetics for a change? Beauty, after all, knows nothing about history." If beauty was reintroduced into the artworld as an option for posthistorical artists, museum professionals could surely find the necessary richness in art to stop them looking outside art for something with which to fill their galleries.
Although the posthistorical art museum doesn’t have to be empty, it remains to be seen what it does have to be to survive as a useful and relevant institution. The survival of the art museum will depend upon which functions it adopts and how it carries them out. Either the art museum must return to some of its original functions or adopt a brand new function. In his article, “The Museum: Past, Present and Future,” E.H. Gombrich advocates returning to the functions on which the concept of the art museum was founded. Gombrich identifies the ancestors of the modern art museum as two contrasting types: the treasure house and the shrine. Together, these early types carry out what Gombrich thinks are the most fundamental functions of the art museum: to offer “profit and delight” to the viewer. In the treasure house delight dominates over profit, for the amassing and display of treasures in temples, churches and palaces “has always served to enhance the prestige of the owner and to overwhelm the visitor with these tokens of wealth and power.” The treasure house gives the effect of an “Aladdin’s cave of gold, jewelry and exotic marvels,” where we need not learn anything but simply “relish the experience of being dazzled and overawed.” On the other hand, the museum as shrine emerges in the context of “the awareness that there are things which are not simply rare but unique.” Visiting these objects is like carrying out a secularized form of pilgrimage with the aim of profiting from the experience of seeing something that must be seen.

These early museum types became submerged, however, with the birth of the modern art museum which combines the further functions of the depository and the didactic display. Here the artwork was no longer seen primarily as a treasure or as something to be enjoyed, but as an instructive specimen which would help the viewer learn the history of art. Individual artworks were used to mark points at which art was
said to have reached a certain kind of perfection or advancement in its historical progression. Gombrich sees a problem with valuing individual artworks in a museum merely for their instructive ability to point to something beyond themselves. He illustrates this problem by describing gloomy visions of a future museum in which the contents of Aladdin’s cave have been removed to the storeroom, and all that will be left will be an authentic lamp from the period of the Arabian Nights with a large diagram beside, explaining how oil lamps worked, where the wick was inserted and what was the burning time. In order to instruct the viewer most effectively about art history, a curator might decide to store away all but one artwork which s/he accompanies with a lengthy description. In doing so, s/he might be correct in assuming that this will teach the viewer more than looking at an array of different objects. But, surely, this is not what viewers want to see when they go to an art museum--if they did want this kind of experience they could just stay home and read a book on art history. There has to be a reason for seeing each and every artwork in an art museum’s collection. Otherwise, the art museum will turn into an Aladdin’s cave stripped bare with nothing more to offer than an art textbook. For this reason Gombrich urges a return to the original functions of the art museum to offer delight and profit so that the importance of seeing each individual artwork in a collection is justified. In order to offer delight to its visitors, however, the posthistorical art museum must be able to teach them the difference between identical artworks and between an identical artwork and real thing so that they can experience the delight associated with seeing something unique.

Gombrich’s prescription for the art museum of the future offers a solution for the posthistorical museum faced with the problem of how to organize its collection now that
there is no longer an art historical narrative. He sees the didactic function of the art museum as unsatisfactory even during the historical era of art, let alone during the posthistorical era of art. Also, Gombrich anticipates the unrestricted nature of posthistorical art by stating that a return to the original functions of the art museum depends upon the visitor’s ability to discern what is art and what is not. Visitors can only delight at seeing something unique, but their understanding that something is unique does not depend upon visual identification, but upon a knowledge of the historical causality, meaning and role of the object. Therefore, informed posthistorical museum visitors could delight at seeing a pile of Brillo boxes which they know to be an artwork, and remain unimpressed by the identical Brillo boxes in their supermarket.

If the posthistorical museum is to teach its visitors to discern artworks from mere real things, it must find a way to turn its principle activity of collecting toward this aim. Joseph Margolis describes collecting as more than the stockpiling of art objects: collecting also involves ordering arrays of objects in unifying ways. The art museum assigns coherence to art objects by manifesting a certain interpretation of them in a selective collection. Margolis wants to say that, as a collection, the art museum is a warehouse, but not in the sense of a neutral depository. Rather, the art museum is a warehouse in which new meanings for arrays of choice objects are tested. There are always new meanings to be tested because “history itself is gradually transformed in interpretive retrospect, without actually being corrected,” and as a result, “the most powerful interpretive and appraisive categories and the most prized and most salient specimens change over time.”

Thus, using a historical narrative structure to organize museum collections is only one way of ascribing legibility to an array of art objects.
Given the relative nature of artistic categories, there are numerous ways to organize art objects depending upon how art is understood in each era. The activity of collecting reflects the spirit of an era in art with its particular interpretive impulses and tastes, and its contingent history. Therefore, the nature of collecting in the posthistorical era will be entirely different from what it was in the historical era because art is seen in different ways before and after the end of art. The definitive activity of collecting in the art museum does not have to stop after the end of art, but rather must embody ways of making posthistorical art accessible to museum visitors. Perhaps, then, the posthistorical museum might direct its collecting to demonstrate the difference between art and reality.

If the posthistorical art museum concentrates on demonstrating distinctions between artworks and other kinds of things through its methods of collection, it is assuming a didactic function. This does not mean, however, that the posthistorical museum would have the same functions as the art museum in the historical period of art. The didactic function of the historical art museum encouraged perceptual discrimination by instructing visitors to identify visual clues to the position and status of an artwork in the grand narrative of art. The didactic function of the posthistorical museum, however, would encourage a kind of conceptual discrimination. It would be pointless for the posthistorical museum to instruct its viewers to look for differences and similarities between artworks because, as Danto points out, in posthistorical art, "visuality drops away." The emergence of appropriated art and conceptual art indicates that posthistorical art can all look the same or not look like anything. Therefore, a new kind of didactic function is required for the posthistorical museum, one that avoids the dangers of
basing attributions of style, and critical and ontological distinctions on what meets the eye.

The dangers of attempting to understand art by visual clues alone is illustrated by Danto in his discussion of monochrome painting from 1915 to the present. Here he demonstrates that perceptual discrimination can lead to entirely different stylistic conclusions about artworks than those reached through historically-sensitive conceptual discrimination. Different monochrome painters working in different periods produced works which, despite appearing similar, manifest very different styles. The first appearance of serious monochrome painting in our century was when Kazimir Malevich’s Black Square was displayed at the great 0-10 exhibition in Petrograde from December 1915 to January 1916. Malevich saw this work “as an erasure, an emblem of a wiping out of the art in the past,” in order to make “way for Suprematism and new worlds to conquer.”

Black Square, executed in the spirit of Suprematism, is not abstract but pictorial, depicting some kind of spiritual or mathematical reality which Malevich calls ‘nonobjective reality.’ It is thus very different stylistically from the monochrome art of the fifties which was non-pictorial and non-representational. The work from the fifties “reflects the philosophy of pigment of the abstract expressionists: the artist is alive to pigment and canvas, and forms are applied deliciously, like frosting on a cake.”

The monochrome art of the sixties, however, becomes minimalist and in a way materialist: “the paintings being surface, support, and pigment and nothing more.” Monochrome art of the eighties and today is again different due to its internalization of the pluralism of our times. If we were to focus on how monochrome art looks, we would assume that it all belongs in the same stylistic category. However, this would be an incorrect assumption
because style, as it embodies the artist's point-of-view or way of seeing the world, is dependent upon the historical features of the artwork.

The fact that monochrome paintings can and do differ dramatically in style indicates that, however obvious and direct the resemblances between works, to identify and know each work properly requires that we think of their individual histories:

We have to explain how they arrived in the world, and learn to read them in terms of the statement each makes and evaluate them in terms of that statement, deciding whether they are mimetic or metaphysical, formalist or moralist. Therefore, the new didactic function of the posthistorical museum must focus upon encouraging a historical sensitivity in the viewer. The posthistorical art museum must find a way to make viewers see the aesthetic differences between identical or similar artworks by providing them with the necessary information about the historical causality of each work.

Perhaps, then, the issue of survival for the art museum in the posthistorical era is not really an issue. For art, the 'End of Art' meant the end of an era and not the end of its production. Similarly, for the art museum, the 'End of Art' meant the end of an era in which the museum based its function upon perceptual discrimination. The end of art does not have to signal the end of the art museum as a integral institution in the artworld. There is still plenty for the art museum to do in the posthistorical era. It can inspire delight in the viewers of posthistorical art by tacitly familiarizing them with the problem of indiscernible counterparts. When the posthistorical museum-goer understands that an artwork can look like a mere real thing and still be art, the art museum must provide historical and conceptual evidence for the distinction between art and reality. In an era when Danto's gallery of red squares is a real possibility, an institution is needed in the
artworld to teach people how to see identical red squares as aesthetically distinct and as art.
Conclusion

In order to understand Danto’s ideas about art, we must recognize the interconnection of his philosophy of art and his philosophy of art history. Danto’s conception of art history is Hegelian in the sense that he recognizes objective historical structures in art which direct its production and identification. These objective structures, however, can only be identified in retrospect. Danto wishes to avoid the prophetic tone in the Hegelian account of history which explains both the past and the present with reference to an unrealized, but predetermined future goal. So he holds on to the analytical practice of making sense of events only in retrospect, while claiming that the narrative structures which allow him to make sense of events are already there because they are objective and contain the events of history. In order to claim that the narrative of art history is objective, Danto must recognize that it contains its own end. But he does not have to allude to some indistinct future end to make this claim because he argues that the end has already happened. After the end of art Danto can look back on the whole narrative history of art and recognize its progressive, objective nature. In this way the thesis of the End of Art facilitates Danto’s modified Hegelian conception of art history.

As well as facilitating his conception of art history, the thesis of the End of Art creates the necessary art historical and theoretical space for Danto’s philosophy of art. Danto’s philosophy of art is an essentialist project which he carries out in the posthistorical era of art. Here there is no danger of historical innovations in art which might threaten his essential definition. Danto constructs this definition by using the methodology of indiscernible counterparts in art. He searches for those features of art
which can explain the difference between an artwork and its indiscernible counterpart.

The question of indiscernible counterparts, however, also leads back to the thesis of the End of Art. This is the proper philosophical form of the question about the nature of art which signals the end of the narrative of art. Here the question of art's essential nature is handed over to philosophy and art is released from the historical burden of striving toward a realization of itself.

The fact that the thesis of the End of Art and the question of indiscernible counterparts facilitate both Danto's conception of art history and his conception of art reveals the complex relationship between art and history in Danto's thought. It is impossible to grasp fully his essential definition of art without considering his conception of art history. And it is in the art museum that we see a manifestation of this interconnection. The public art museum has always functioned to tell the narrative history of art. And in doing so it presents art objects to be seen as history. After the end of art, however, art is no longer defined by its position in an historical progression. The art museum can no longer rely on its traditional practice of displaying art as history in order to make sense of contemporary art. The question, then, is: what will the art museum do in the posthistorical era of art?

It is quite possible that the art museum will do nothing new. It might boldly decide to continue doing what it has done so well for so long—telling the narrative history of art through its established collections of traditional and modernist art. And then there might be a few problematic galleries of unexplained contemporary art which people just don't like. However, if the art museum wishes to continue in its function of manifesting the spirit of the artistic times for the public, it must find a way of displaying
contemporary art so that its significance can be understood by the average museum visitor. In order to succeed in making people understand contemporary art, the art museum must adopt a new didactic function. It must instruct the viewer to recognize the uniqueness of every artwork by referring to its non-manifest properties. The art museum has always supplied its visitors with some background information about each artwork on display, such as the name of its creator, when and where it was produced, the style or school in which it was produced, and its physical composition. But the art museum now needs to emphasize the fact that such information is not merely a context for the artwork but an internal part of its definition. There is no reason why the museum cannot enable viewers to experience delight at viewing contemporary art as long as they understand what it is that makes every artwork unique. In this way, the art museum will come to manifest the significance of the question of indiscernible counterparts in art. The posthistorical art museum could thus function to demonstrate Danto’s ideas about the nature of art and the historical freedom of contemporary art. Here we could actually have something like the exhibit of red squares. Since Danto’s written description of the exhibit is so philosophically rich, the actual exhibit would surely have a deep impact on a viewer’s ideas about the nature of art.
Notes

Introduction


Chapter 1: Narrative and Art History

2 Ibid. p. 459.
6 Danto, After the End of Art, p. 43.
7 Ibid.
8 Danto, After the End of Art, p. 43.
9 Higgins and Solomon, “Atomism, Art, and Arthur,” p. 120.
10 Ibid.
11 Janson, p. 426.
14 Janson, p. 729.

Chapter 2: Narrative and the Art Museum

5 Ibid. p. 455.
6 Ibid.
Chapter 3: The End of Art

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid, p. 111.
4 Arthur C. Danto, After the End of Art, p. 28.
5 Ibid.
6 Higgins and Solomon, "Atomism, Art, and Arthur," p. 120.
9 Arthur Danto, "Responses and Replies," in Danto and his Critics, p. 213.
10 Noel Carroll, "Essence, Expression, and History: Arthur Danto's Philosophy of Art," in Danto and his Critics, p. 90.
11 Ibid.
12 Carroll, p. 91.

Chapter 4: The Question that Art Hands Over to Philosophy

2 Danto, After the End of Art, p. 35.
Chapter 5: The Art Museum after the End of Art

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Levin, p. 3.
6 Danto, After the End of Art, p. 4.
7 Ibid., p. 10.
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9 Ibid., p. 12.
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12 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Danto, *After the End of Art*, p. 5.
19 Ibid, p. 132.
20 Ibid, p. 133.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid, p. 311.
24 Ibid, p. 312.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Gombrich, p. 112-113.
30 Danto, *After the End of Art*, p. 16.
33 Ibid, p. 169.
34 Ibid.
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