

Arthur Danto and the End of Art

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By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Foreword	ix
Introduction	1
Arthur Danto's Work and Life	
Chapter One.....	9
Behind the "End of Art" Theory	
Historical Awareness as the Basis of Modern Aesthetics.....	10
The Development of Art in Romanticism.....	13
The Hegelian Prophecy of the "End of Art"	18
Chapter Two.....	33
From the Philosophy of History to Dantian Art History	
The Importance of History in Danto's Philosophy	36
The Recovery of Narrative.....	45
Danto's "Hegelian Turn" and Acceptance of Narrative Realism.....	55
Chapter Three.....	65
The Transfiguration of the Philosophy of Art	
The Revolutionary Concept of the "Artworld".....	66
The Transfiguration of Art and the Search for its Definition.....	78
The Transfigurative Role of Interpretation	94
The Union of Essentialism and Historicism.....	100
Chapter Four.....	107
Arthur Danto's Development of the "End of Art" Theory	
The End in the Hegelian Sense	108
The End in the Historiographical Sense.....	116
The End as the Beginning of the Post-historic Period	121

Conclusion..... 129
The Future of Art

Bibliography..... 137

PREFACE

Acknowledgments

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FOREWORD

THE IMPOSSIBLE NOTION: ARTHUR DANTO AND THE END OF ART

TIZIANA ANDINA
UNIVERSITY OF TURIN

The end of art is probably one of the most problematic and fascinating notions in the Dantian philosophy of art. This idea, indeed, seems to be intriguing both for Dantian and for Hegelian scholars, especially for philosophers working in the continental tradition. Therefore, the monograph by Raquel Cascales has come out at a particularly timely moment: in fact, not only is the Dantian community trying to focus on all the philosophical tensions implied by the use of the concept of the end of art, but the Hegelian community is also reflecting on the legacy of Hegel's gigantic philosophy. In this framework, the book by Cascales presents two valuable qualities: the first one is its methodological approach, very respectful of the Dantian text and really accurate in interpreting its spirit and logic. The second one is the unusually rich network of philosophical relations used by Cascales to put Danto in the correct context within contemporary philosophy.

The aim of the book, in fact, is to reconstruct, step by step, the logical structure of the Dantian arguments about the end of art without excluding the historical notions of the history of philosophy which have contributed to making that thesis possible. This reconstruction is necessary in Danto's case, because -- especially after the encounter with Hegel -- he ceaselessly attempted to fill the gap between analytical and continental philosophy, at least in the field of the philosophy of art. This attempt made Danto particularly sensible when approaching some of the aspects of continental philosophy -- especially toward its attention to history, which, by and large, implies the idea that the use of logic is not enough to explain much of the reality in the external world.

This awareness was the background of Danto's choice of the title of his masterpiece: *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981). After writing three books that, step by step, constituted the analytical analysis of the world -- an *Analytical Philosophy of History* (1965), an *Analytical Philosophy of Knowledge* (1968) and an *Analytical Philosophy of Action* (1973) -- it would have been obvious to write an *Analytical Philosophy of Art* to complete the picture. But that was not the case, and Danto wrote one of his best books walking on the border between analytical and continental thought. The title wasn't a coincidence but an expression of awareness as well as the first signal of the fact that Danto would follow that track in his future philosophy.

Through this careful analysis, Cascales puts Danto in the correct framework within the context of contemporary philosophy. This operation is exceptionally important because of the particular philosophical approach followed by Danto: it is not very common nowadays to find an analytical philosopher believing in the power of systematic explanation. Friedrich Nietzsche, the philosopher to whom Danto dedicated a small but brilliant book, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (1965), would say that Danto is an outdated analytical philosopher. This outdatedness has to push the interpreter to take the correct direction and I guess that the idea of interpreting Danto's philosophy of art as a dowel of a broader system with the human being in the center. Everything in philosophy -- this is Danto's idea -- is connected with everything else, so a holistic explanation is necessary to reach some progress in philosophy. Because philosophy does progress from time to time.

Cascales recognizes three points as particularly relevant and very useful to put the question of the end of art in the right light: first, according to Danto, the history of art understood in terms of subordination ends when art takes itself as its object and reflects on the question of what art is; second, we must take into account that Danto found support for his thesis in Hegelian philosophy, but also recognize that he carved out his own path when considering what had happened in the history of art. Finally, the particular historiographical feature of the end of art can be separated out and, for this reason, we can also define the "end" as the beginning of a new epoch. These three points taken together make the thesis quite clear and sustainable. By underlying these features internal to Danto's thesis, Cascales tells one side of the story which is fascinating and meaningful at the same time. However, to be able to understand Danto's philosophy of art, it is very important to see the whole structure of the system, of which the philosophy of art is but a small part.

Indeed, things become a little bit more complicated when it comes to understanding the idea of the end of art in the light of the Dantian system. This is a hermeneutic task that the Dantian interpreters have to pursue, also because Danto himself suggested this way to interpret his thought. Having in mind the whole system, one may legitimately ask, for example, how the thesis of the end of art may be compatible with the epistemological thesis developed in the *Analytical Philosophy of History*. More than twenty years had passed when Danto decided to end his philosophy of art with a quasi-philosophy of history. I'm speaking about a quasi-philosophy of history because Danto was conscious of the tension between the thesis expressed in his book on history -- which is still now considered as a milestone to explore the conditions of possibility of a research in the field of history -- and the way in which he finally developed a philosophy of history to explain the conclusion of a particular narration, that of the history of art.

The main thesis of the *Analytical Philosophy of History* is that it is not logically possible to develop a philosophy of history. If this is the case, then Danto can develop a philosophy of history applied to the arts, just because the position he is now occupying in history is exactly the position in which the history of arts has reached its end. In other words, this is the idea: he has written the philosophy of the history of art in the only moment in time in which this becomes possible, i.e. when the history of art is reaching its end. And the turning point that allows the arts to reach their end is Andy Warhol's complex and philosophically inspired artistic production. Warhol is the artist who has expressed the philosophical question about art in the most complete and accurate way. He is the hero of Danto's philosophy of art.

Nevertheless, If -- as Danto says -- everything is extensively associated with everything else, it is impossible to avoid putting the philosophy of art in relation with the whole philosophical system. I'm quite convinced about the fact that this reconsideration of the system will also imply reconsideration and probably new hermeneutics of some of the parts of Dantians philosophy of art.

Turin, March 31, 2019

INTRODUCTION

ARTHUR DANTO'S WORK AND LIFE

A philosopher's death does not usually make the headlines, yet Arthur C. Danto's 2013 death garnered a proverbial standing ovation and praise from around the world. Lydia Goehr, a prestigious Columbia professor, described him in the obituary she wrote as one of the four giants of the Anglo-American tradition, along with Stanley Cavell, Nelson Goodman and Richard Wollheim (Goehr 2013a).

Danto was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1924, and grew up in Detroit. In his intellectual autobiography, he relates the events and life circumstances that influenced his career, including the fact that his mother was an artist, the teachers he studied under, among them William Bossenbrook and Susanne K. Langer, and the artists he met, such as Pollock, Kooning and Giacometti. In 1945, he enlisted in the military, specifically in the American Corps of Army Engineers because he believed that his knowledge of art would help develop more sophisticated camouflage. He served in campaigns in Italy and North Africa where he learned both French and Italian. In addition to studying art at Wayne State University (1948), he also studied philosophy at Columbia University. Thanks to a Fulbright scholarship, Danto studied in Paris from 1949-1950 with Jean Wahl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and personally met George Santayana in Rome. He later returned to Europe to continue studying authors such as Nietzsche and Sartre.

Upon his return, he completed his doctorate at Columbia University (PhD, 1952) on questions of philosophy of history in an analytical environment. He was soon hired as a professor at the same institution and continued studying diverse topics. For example, he attended Dr. Suzuki's famous seminars on Zen philosophy, and began to approach John Cage, Fluxus art and the desire to overcome the gap between art and life. Danto taught in New York until 1992, when he became professor emeritus. He was married to Shirley Rovetch, with whom he had two children, until 1978 upon her death. In 1980, he married Barbara Westman with whom he remained until his death. From 1984 to 2009, he was an art critic for the

newspaper *The Nation*. He passed away on October 25, 2013 at the age of 89 in New York.

Perhaps these points are mere curiosities to some. Philosophical studies often ignore authors' biographical background and directly engage with and discuss their arguments. However, each scholar's biographical background has a decisive influence on his or her interests, concerns and arguments. If this applies to scholars more widely, it is also important in the case of Arthur Danto.

First of all, as noted, Danto experienced Europe firsthand, which must have influenced his openness toward and study of the European philosophical tradition, which was unusual among North American philosophers at the time. His effort to then integrate this tradition with his own, analytical philosophy, was certainly noteworthy. And in turn, as Andina points out (2010, 11-15), he allowed life to shape his philosophy, just as Pop artists reflected everyday life in their works. His first publications demonstrate rigorous analytical research in the philosophy of history,¹ the philosophy of action and the philosophy of knowledge—fields in which he established himself as a reference.

However, his career took a sharp turn when he discovered Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box*. This piece, which he first saw in 1964 at a Stable Gallery exhibition in New York City, had a powerful impact on Danto. In fact, it inspired his first theoretical foray with the publication of his famous 1964 article, "The Artworld."

Although not an extensive publication, it squarely confronted the dominant Wittgensteinian theories of art. Danto managed to shift the focus of the question of art that prevented philosophers from advancing to another question, namely why is it that between two indiscernible objects one is a work of art and another is not? In this way, he reinvigorated aesthetic reflection and once again stood out in the American philosophical field.

Many years passed until Danto returned to reflection on art, but once he did, he did not pause again. In 1986, he garnered attention for proclaiming the "end of art" based on Hegelian aesthetics. This is

¹ Among all the professors he had, two decisively influenced his thinking, including the famous philosopher Ernest Nagel and the successor to the Cassirer Chair, Suzanne K. Langer. Nagel, an expert in philosophy of science, distinguished deductive and probabilistic models, as well as functional and genetic models, and identified the latter as closest to historical explanation in his book *The Structure of Science* (1961). Langer wrote convincingly about Nagel's influence on Danto in *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (1942). For a deeper look, see Danto's autobiography (Danto 2013b, 1-70).

undoubtedly Danto's best-known thesis, which reopened debate on contemporary aesthetics. Many professors at the time, as well as a broader audience outside of academia, discussed his intellectual acuity and novel arguments, making him one of the most prominent figures in the philosophy of art in America.

Danto's wide intellectual reach led him to touch on very different disciplines, significantly contributing to each of them, but he sometimes was unable to fully develop his ideas, which has led many to study his texts in isolation. His concept of action, that of history and narration, that of mental states, and his concept of art and the end of art thesis have all been studied separately. This way of approaching his work emphasizes its inconsistencies rather than its valuable contributions.

However, I believe that examining Danto's thought more holistically makes for a much more coherent and appealing philosophy. This does not involve assigning him some kind of external unity, but rather analyzing his philosophy from the perspective of the philosophical system that Danto himself proposed in his youth and styled after the philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952). Danto met Santayana in the summer of 1950 during his Fulbright scholarship, as he himself recounted (Danto 1988, xv-xxviii). This Spanish philosopher wrote *The Life of Reason* (1936), a work in five volumes dedicated to different aspects of reason, including science, art, religion, politics and common sense. It fascinated Danto and influenced how he understood his "system:"

I cannot remember when I conceived of the project of writing a system of philosophy in several volumes, something vaguely on the model of Santayana's *The Life of Reason*. It was very much a sort of nineteenth-century ambition, but for reasons comparable to those that compelled me to go from writing an article to writing a book, I felt compelled to move from writing a book to constructing a system. *Analytical Philosophy of History* was to be the first volume. There was to be a philosophy of knowledge and a philosophy of action, and then a philosophy of art. The last volume was to be a philosophy of mind. (Danto 2013b, 29)

To build this system, Danto focused on human beings and better understanding our relationship to the world. Danto conceived of human beings as *ens representans*, beings that use a variety of representations to relate to and understand the world. In this sense, representation is a fundamental part of Dantian philosophy and lends coherence to his philosophical system (Snyder 2018, 148-150).

The method he used to investigate these questions pertained, without a doubt, to analytical philosophy. In this way, we better understand why after *Analytical Philosophy of History* (1965), which analyzes the type of

knowledge that corresponds to historical representation, came *Analytical Philosophy of Knowledge* (1968), in which Danto concretely analyzes what knowledge is like, and then *Analytical Philosophy of Action* (1973), which contains analysis of how to distinguish between seemingly indiscernible actions and argues that we can only say that an event is an action using a description. However, *Analytical Philosophy of Art* never saw the light of day. Instead, in 1981, he published *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*:

I did not call it *Analytical Philosophy of Art* because that is not what it was. The Wittgensteinian theories, or the Institutional Theory, were what I thought of as the analytical philosophy of art, and I clearly wanted no part of either of them. (...) The viability of such examples had come from within art as a kind of necessity, so I knew, or felt I knew, that had to allow myself to be guided by art rather than the philosophy of art, at least as that had been practiced up till then. (Danto 2013b, 44-45)

This represented significant change in Danto's thought as he apparently moved away from analytical philosophy in an "institutional" way. Although he continued to use analytical tools to carry out his work, he was motivated by artistic practice rather than by theory. As Lydia Goehr says: "Danto designed his analytical method to lie between the substantive and reductionist extremes to avoid committing the error of each" (2013b, 361). Indeed, a large number of examples demonstrate his interest in understanding how everyday, ordinary objects can be indiscernible from works of art. As we will later explore, Pop Art, and Andy Warhol in specific, mostly drove Danto's changing perspective.

In this way, Danto's reflection on changes in artistic practice during his time led him to examine the history of art, assigning to the history of Western art a mimetic desire to capture reality in the best way possible. As the engine that impelled history, it would find its fulfillment in the emergence of photography and cinema, when art would reach its end. The idea of the "end of art" thus developed:

In consequence, there has been a certain internal evolution in what the idea means, and understanding the logic of this evolution opens up the possibility of what I came to think of as philosophical art history... I had in mind Hegel's famous and somewhat dispiriting utterance that when philosophy paints its gray in gray, then has a form of life grown old. In 1984, when 'The End of Art' was published, I was somewhat saddened by the idea of the art having come to an end. (Danto 2013b, 54)

Indeed, his argument that art contains an internal logic that propels its evolution in one direction or another brought him squarely into Hegelian territory. His thesis was so misunderstood and controversial that it garnered unanticipated attention. Everyone talked about it, often without having read it, and Danto was forced to continue writing to justify his positions. Thus, many intellectuals began to study Danto's philosophy of art separately from the rest of his philosophy, analyzing in many cases his last book without taking into account his previous ones. This is how many examined his work without noticing that his "end of art" thesis is continued in other books or the relationship between his philosophy of art and the rest of his philosophical thought.² However, with Danto's work now complete and enough time having passed, I believe that we are in a position to analyze his philosophy of art and assign it the proper place within his thought.

For this reason, the best way to study Arthur Danto's philosophy of art and, specifically, his end of art thesis involves beginning by analyzing his analytical philosophy of history. Danto sought after the conditions of possibility of historical knowledge in a positivist context, and his reflection on narrative led him to broaden his conception of what historical statements should look like. He postulated that narrative is a kind of representation that allows us to understand events in history since the work of the historian allows us to access the meaning of what happened in retrospect. Many of his contemporaries listened to these conclusions, but they most influenced his own thinking, leading Danto to unexpectedly approach Hegel's thought and redirect his own philosophy.

Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins called this redirection his "Hegelian turn" for the first time in 1993 (2012, 172-196). It is mainly characterized by acceptance of narrative realism—that is, acceptance of objective historical structures—and of history's teleological and progressive character. Hegel's thesis on the progress of history and his proclamation of art's past character seemed evident to Danto when trying to account for developments in the history of art. From then on, he argued that the history of art demonstrates an expansion of self-consciousness, thanks to which art can eventually free itself from the heteronomous elements that once conditioned it. All this led Danto to speak of the "end of art." The importance of grasping his philosophy of history becomes evident in that it directs us to Hegel and to better understanding Danto's research on art. Furthermore, as we shall see later, this American

² However, there are some exceptions, especially Andina (2010), Carroll (1999), Parselis (2009) and Tozzi (2007).

philosopher not only applied his knowledge of the philosophy of history to the philosophy of art, but also definitively included in his philosophy the historical dimension as part of his analysis of art.

Before delving into detailed analysis of what Danto meant by the “end of art,” in the third chapter, I will outline his philosophy of art. For this reason, I will begin by analyzing his first article, “The Artworld,” and demonstrate the role that the historical configuration of art played in his subsequent thought. Thereafter, I will analyze the timeless definition of art that he presents in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981). In addition to highlighting the role that history plays regarding the conditions of the possibility of art, I highlight the interdependence between the possibility of enunciating an essentialist definition of art and the proclamation of the “end of art.”

I dedicate the last chapter to presenting a detailed analysis of the “end of art” thesis, which Danto formulated for the first time in 1984. The biggest problem found in seriously analyzing this thesis is that Danto never developed it extensively in a single work, but rather reformulated it several times over the years. Scholars have sometimes interpreted this reformulation and extension of the “end of art” thesis as a change of opinion or as a contradiction. However, a systematic explanation of Danto’s various works dispels charges of contradiction and reveals instead that his theory expanded and further developed the meaning of the end.

In the first place, a temporal distinction can be established, namely the ideas presented in his texts published in the 1980s are different from those published in the 1990s. This division does not suppose a clear delimitation of his ideas since his different ways of understanding the end of art are intermingled throughout his entire work.

Danto’s first texts³ always justify the “end of art” thesis in a Hegelian key. For this reason, the first sense of the “end of art” is associated with Hegelian philosophy, i.e., a progressive conception of history (and of the history of art) and art’s submission to philosophy starting from Plato’s mimetic definition.

³ This first stage includes the following works: “The End of Art,” published in *The Death of Art* in 1984 and republished in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* in 1986; “Approaching the End of Art,” a conference Danto gave in 1985 at the Whitney Museum of American Art and included in *The State of the Art* in 1987; and “Narratives of the End of Art,” a “Lionel Trilling” lecture he gave at Columbia University and published in *Grand Street* in 1989 and republished in 1991 in *Encounters and Reflections: Art in the Historical Present*.

Danto's later texts⁴ confidently proclaim that the end of art has already taken place and point to other narratives that also subjected art over time. Two narratives or stories regarding art especially stand out. On the one hand, the mimetic story that, although original to Plato, spread following Vasari's work. On the other hand, Greenberg's modernist story, which, although it did not entirely break with the former, is based on a purist conception of art in which art tries to detach itself from anything not strictly essential to it. This narrative, Danto noted, ends with the appearance of cinematography, Duchamp's *ready-mades* and Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*.

In addition to these two narratives, there is a third meaning to the end of art related to the appearance of a new era of art, namely the post-historic era. In declaring the beginning of a new era, Danto did not intend to argue that another art narrative was coming to a close, another stage overcome, but rather argued that art had developed an awareness of and about itself that could hardly be retracted. With art no longer submitted to philosophy, an irreversible clarification about the concept of art emerged, allowing for a timeless definition of art.

Thus, Danto, starting from historical facts proper to his era, looked back and narrated a story with a clear ending. At the same time, he wondered how art should be understood in a post-historic era. Post-historical art is, for him, art no longer confined to the style of an era, but rather is characterized by freedom and plurality, by the peaceful coexistence of all currents absent any hierarchy. This expansion does not corner him into aesthetic relativism; rather, he endeavored to show how art could be understood in an age no longer marked by what art history says art has to be, in spite of the intrinsic historical dimension of all art. His analysis clearly demonstrates that historical consideration continues to be an essential element both in the creation and interpretation of artworks, and in the study of the philosophy of art.

Although Danto fervently defended the historical character of art, he did not merely subordinate it to history. He also did not fall prey to the temptation of arguing that, since art is linked to its historical realization, we are incapable of judging past works. The art criticism he developed for more than twenty years, on the contrary, provides us with insights into

⁴ This second stage includes: *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-historical Perspective* (1992); *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, 1997 (a publication of lectures given at the National Gallery of Art in Washington in 1995) and *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art* (2003).

how he believed concrete works of art should be judged in a post-historical era.⁵

From this perspective, his philosophy of history and philosophy of art are complementary rather than contradictory. At the same time, Danto's philosophy of art and the rest of his philosophy overlap, which brings us back to this introduction's argument, namely to understand Danto, we would do well to understand the breadth of his work and life. This text does not offer a complete picture, but does aim to provide sufficient brushstrokes so as to contribute to its completion.

⁵ A large part of the criticism he published in *The Nation* can be found in a variety of his texts, including *The State of the Art* (1987); *Encounters and Reflections: Art in the Historical Present* (1990); *Philosophizing Art: Selected Essays* (1999. Berkeley: University of California Press); *The Madonna of the Future: Essays in a Pluralistic Art World* (2001. New York: Straus and Giroux).

CHAPTER ONE

BEHIND THE “END OF ART” THEORY

Modernity was founded on the desire to start from scratch by laying a rational and sure foundation for the edifice of knowledge. For this reason, some consider that its identity was constituted, at least in part, as a break with everything that came before it. Although other authors, such as Karl Löwith, conceive of modernity as a secularization of Christian theology or eschatology (2004), what is certain is that the Century of Philosophy, the eighteenth century, was a time of upheaval. From then on, a perception emerged that reason will progressively illuminate human history, from which emerged, in turn, an awareness of rupture, novelty and confidence in reason and progress—all essential elements for understanding modernity.

This conviction of novelty would not have been possible without a historical awareness that is separate from the past and projects into the future. This new way of perceiving history is accompanied by confidence in reason, which acts as a guide to history and guarantees progress, a conviction that was justified and symbolized in a whirlwind of scientific discovery at the time. For this reason, it is not surprising that the most important research thereafter became historical and scientific-experimental in nature.

In the first part of this chapter, we will see how this scientific zeal favored the emergence of aesthetics, and how confidence in history shaped a predominantly historical study of art. Romanticism was born in this context as a cultural current that elevated art like never before—practically making it a religion. In this same environment, idealism developed, which in turn contributed to the mystification of aesthetics. This is the world with which Hegel dialogued; he is among the thinkers that most influenced the modern conception of art and the configuration of studies in art history. Precisely his conception of history and art led him to speak of art as a thing of the past, giving rise to the problem of the end of art. As Eva Geulen explains, this conception influenced contemporary aesthetics in authors such as Nietzsche, Adorno and Heidegger (2006). Attending to their theories goes beyond the scope of this text, which will focus on Danto’s theoretical work; explaining the development of the conception of

art and Hegel's principal theses surrounding it helps us understand why Hegelian philosophy had such a decisive influence on Danto.

Historical Awareness as the Basis of Modern Aesthetics

In order to understand the autonomy that art acquired starting in eighteenth-century Europe, we must take a look at the vicissitudes of history. This process is based on the fact that, in previous centuries, the artisan production model began to be viewed with progressive contempt. Artists then began to demand new treatment of their work, at first without clearly distinguishing between art and craft. Little by little, their demands were met through the development of three parallel phenomena, including the creation of salons and the criticism that emerged therefrom, the autonomy of aesthetics as a discipline, and the progressive alliance of art and the study of history.

The creation of salons and art criticism allowed for a democratization effect in displaying works of art, producing, at the same time, a public prepared to judge them. Royal collections were turned into museum exhibits at the same time that exhibitions by living artists became more and more common. In addition to proposing innovative ideas, these artists opened the doors of art to the private market. Reporters began to announce exhibitions and assess artistic initiatives; in fact, press reports, which were regularly published starting in 1759, became so specialized that they form the basis of art criticism.

Secondly, the autonomy that aesthetics acquired as a philosophical discipline is of great importance in the context of this study. Immanuel Kant went beyond previous approaches from Joseph Addison, Alexander G. Baumgarten, or David Hume and elevated art from the field of sensibility to that of rationality.¹ In his third critique, the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant tried to identify the connection between necessity and freedom in the aesthetic field and presented imagination as the faculty in which these opposites could be reconciled (2007, §49). Beyond the concrete discussions that these theories inspired, a more profound understanding imbued aesthetics, as a kind of philosophical knowledge,

¹ The fourth of Hume's *Four Dissertations* (1757) focuses on taste, "Of the Standard of Taste." In this dissertation, Hume states that beauty is not a quality of things themselves, but rather only exists in the mind that contemplates them. Taste emerges in conformity between the object and the mind's faculties. In this sense, Hume discards a metaphysics of the beautiful, but does not negate an empirical science related to aesthetic phenomenon.

with importance. Thus, aesthetics managed to establish itself as an autonomous science within the field of philosophy during this period.

The third aspect, mentioned above and on which I will dwell a bit more, corresponds to the changes that occurred in the historical conception of art, leading some to want to impose a scientifically oriented, diachronic path on the development of art. Just as treatises on beauty already existed in antiquity and in the Middle Ages, so too were there “histories of art,” but, as Frances Haskell has shown, they in no way intended to scientifically chronicle the artistic past (1995). Nothing would be more alien to ancient and medieval scholars than the concept of art as something with a sense of immanence and autonomous development. This historiographical consideration is instead typical of modernity.

In addition, Vasari is usually seen as the founder of historiography, but, although his artistic biographies—such as those of Bellori or Burke—are valuable for uncovering the lives of some artists, they do not possess any scientific intention. In fact, as Germain Bazin points out, Vasari did not create a new science, but rather a new literary genre. Despite this, it is worth mentioning, and returning to later, the relevance that Vasari had in the progressive conception of art, which is essential for understanding how the stages of art history were configured. In addition, Vasari’s theory is important to Danto because he believed that Vasari originated a progressive model of art history in force until C. Greenberg and E. H. Gombrich.

The imposition of scientific methodology did not arrive until the Enlightenment, but, from then on, neither philosophy, nor history, nor art history could escape it. One of the best examples of this scientific, systematic and hierarchical spirit is *L’Encyclopédie* (1751-1772). There, we find art referred to as “Beaux Arts,”² a term that, thanks to its prestige, spread throughout Europe in the following decades. The term “fine arts” helped forge a conception of art as autonomous and valuable, and a genre that deserves scientific stature, which on the whole found expression in art history.

The long *Querelle des anciens et des modernes* (the quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns) in force at the time forms part of this same context. This debate (and later the one between the classics and the romantics) arises from a historical conception of art, allowing modernists to argue that, if art is historical, judgment criteria for one era is not valid

² As Shiner shows in his book, *L’Encyclopédie* includes poetry, painting, sculpture, engraving and music in the fine arts category and groups them “under the faculty of imagination, as one of three main divisions of knowledge, splendidly isolated from all other arts, disciplines, and sciences” (2001, 82-83).

for any other. Thus, modernists' awareness regarding art was closely related to their study of antiquity. Johann J. Winckelmann (1717-1768) is especially significant in this respect and is widely considered to have offered the first attempt to produce a history of art worthy of the name (Fernández Arenas 1990, 23; Shiner 2001, 139; Hazan 1999, 48), or at least the first to publish a text that was presented as art history, namely *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764). Therein, he poses an order of beauty according to which a series of cause and effect relationships can be established that allow for comparison of different styles and epochs. Interestingly, Winckelmann speaks of the past not as a model of unattainable greatness, but rather as a project that, in fact, is meant to be emulated. In this way, he encourages projecting the past in the form of future construction rather than passively analyzing it.

The historicization of art that is highlighted within the *Querelle* and in Winckelmann's work reveals that, almost from the moment that aesthetics was constituted as a science, a progressive orientation towards the philosophy of art and the history of art emerged. This orientation is not just a product of the cultural context in which this process takes place. We cannot forget that works of art contain history since their configuration is undoubtedly historical. For this reason, when we contemplate works of art, we are transported to ancient times and bygone worlds. At the same time, art's value lies not only in being historical, but rather, in some way, in transcending space and time, which is why, as Pérez Carreño affirms, historicity shapes art in a very peculiar way that is unlike any other field:

Possessing a story does not mean perceiving what comes before it as mere preparatory stages to reach the present, but rather as inescapable moments in the understanding of the present. We do not think about and enjoy ancient works of art on their own in a historical sense alone, but rather as something present, as instances of our tradition: something past in the present. In this sense, exactly because art is historical, something from the past, it is also timeless. (Pérez Carreño 2003, 380)

In any case, while it is true that this union has always been and will always be in force, it is also true that the historical relevance of art, understood as distance, as the generation of a temporal perspective, was especially developed by the romantic aesthetic, which emphasized history and historical consciousness. I will briefly analyze the development of art in Romanticism, as well as show how Hegel influenced the emergence of art history, as we understand it today.

The Development of Art in Romanticism

Romanticism developed in various philosophical and literary centers, such as *Sturm und Drang*. In terms of philosophy, the most important movement was founded around the Schlegel brothers and their magazine *Athenäum* (1798-1800), also called the Circle of Jena or the *Frühromantik* of Jena.

The ideas therein did not just affect literature and Germany, where it emerged, but they also expanded throughout Europe and managed to define an entire era. In turn, the movement had such a defined character that “romanticism” became a common term. As Safranski notes, “Romanticism is an era. That which is romantic is an attitude of the spirit and is not limited to an era” (2014, 14).

Since this study seeks to contextualize the time at which Hegel outlined his aesthetics, I will only focus on German romanticism, which gathers the main representatives of idealism and romanticism in the generation from 1770 to 1840.

Confronted with the Enlightenment spirit, the romantics considered the idea of beauty the missing link that accounts for human freedom. In this framework, the aesthetic act is considered the culmination of reason in which the need for understanding and the freedom of the imagination are integrated towards an end. By exalting art as the domain of freedom *par excellence*, the romantic spirit led to a quasi-sacred or spiritual exaltation of art—a new religion capable of uniting spirits both individually and socially (Cascales 2017, 189-198).

Johann G. Herder (1744-1803) also uniquely contributed to the development of the feeling of nation in Germany through his outstanding work as a linguist. His interest in language came from Johann G. Hamann, for whom art is an encrypted language in which the invisible—God—speaks through the visible, namely beauty and art. Herder took this a step further by emphasizing that God also speaks through history.

The relevance that Herder granted to history influenced, in turn, a new conception of historical knowledge that takes into account the very course of history. This Herderian conception was based on individual events in the lives of cities that culminate to offer a general history of human civilization, a proposal that far exceeded Winckelmann’s ambitions.

Romantic authors’ remarkable emphasis on history in their works is essentially related to the historical weight of the events that they lived through and the transcendental interpretation that they gave them. For example, during the French Revolution’s emblematic popular uprising, at first everyone idealized revolutionary France. However, after initial

exaltation, the ideals that fueled the Revolution were soon abandoned. What is more, Germans went from enthusiasm to outright rejection when Napoleon tried to invade Germany. In addition, resistance to the French was both a political question as well as a fully spiritual one since France became a representative of secularism with the new proposals it was enacting, which some saw as corrosive to Europe. Hence, Germans felt an urgent need to counter the French both intellectually and artistically.

In turn, these events strengthened an idea of painting that fueled the sentiment of resistance against French occupation and its culture, giving rise to contempt for French-style training previously offered in German painting academies. In this context, a group of artists called “the Nazarenes” formed; they defended patriotic and Christian painting, even going so far as to adopt a cultural vision of art according to which art should abandon the search for formal splendor and should instead speak directly to the heart.

The most important Nazarene group corresponds to an artistic cooperative formed in 1809 in Vienna by six students at the Vienna Academy and called the Brotherhood of St. Luke or *Lukasbund*.³ In 1810, four of them—Johann Friedrich Overbeck, Franz Pforr, Ludwig Vogel and Johann Konrad Hottinger—moved to Rome, where they occupied the abandoned monastery of Saint Isidore. Philipp Veit, Peter von Cornelius, Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, Friedrich Wilhelm Schadow and a loose group of other German artists later joined them. The hairstyles and beards they donned earned them the nickname the Nazarenes.

In Rome, the group lived a semi-monastic existence as a way of recreating the medieval artist’s workshop. Religious subjects dominated their output, and two major commissions allowed them to attempt a revival of the medieval art form called fresco painting. Medieval influence was important because they were very focused on recovering national referents and Germanic splendor. On this point, it is important to consider the French occupation, which once again points to how artistic and political interests mix.

The Nazarenes were principally motivated by a reaction against neoclassicism and the routine art education in the academy system. The Nazarenes were theorists as well as artists and rejected the direction in

³ Johann Friedrich Overbeck and Franz Pforr were the first members of this group; later, Hottinger, Wintergest, Vogel and Sutter joined. Overbeck designed an emblem with Saint Luke inside an arch and included each of their initials (HWPOVS). The emblem was meant to appear on the back of all their paintings. Painters such as Peter von Cornelius, Philipp Veit, Johann Heinrich Ferdinand von Olivier, and Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld also later joined them (Honour 1984).

which painting had evolved since Raphael. Brothers August (1767-1845) and Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) were the brains behind the group; they conceived of the return to medieval forms not just as an aesthetical proposal, but also as a political revolution, hoping that the Christian spirit would change society.

For this, the Nazarenes, and the Schlegel brothers in particular, denounced the great Venetian colorists as marking the first step in a steady degradation of art in modern times. They hoped to return to art that embodies spiritual values, and sought inspiration in artists of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, rejecting what they saw as the superficial virtuosity of later art. For them, art must forget formal splendor to speak directly to the heart. In contrast to Protestantism, they searched for a particular sensibility that would recover life reflected in the Old and New Testaments.⁴

This passion for religion and for the medieval period influenced their paintings, especially in choosing their topics, as we can see in the movement's most important piece, namely Overbeck's *Triumph of Religion in the Arts* (1840). This painting is so representative because it shows art as subordinate to religion. The movement searched out and promoted spiritual sentiment through art, defending the beauty of the Christian spirit, but it was not interested in the formal splendor that other contemporary painters frequently developed.

Goethe and other intellectuals disliked and criticized this subordination of the visual to the conceptual, namely their placing of art at the service of religion, their cult dedicated to Italian “Primitives” and to German and Dutch art from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and their rejection of the direction in which painting had evolved since Raphael. In order to understand the relevance of theory and their tendency toward politics, we have to consider the philosophical environment at the time.

The increasing philosophical relevance of this current was determined by the relationship that these authors had with the aforementioned circle of romantic intellectuals associated with the *Athenäum* journal. In it, we find the Schlegel brothers, the true intellectual architects of this group. August, for his part, integrated art with painting, entering into open discussion with Winckelmann and affirming that, although ancient art is a good model for the union of art and religion, it still reflects ancient paganism. For representation of the modern faith, he favored painting because, through it,

⁴ Similar ideas can be found in authors who were not part of the Nazarene group. In this regard, Novalis's *Christianity or Europe* is of interest; there, he associated spiritual unity in Europe with the Catholic Church, which he believed the Reformation truncated (Novalis 2004, 97-120).

the Christian religion could continue to make use of art to present its stories and messages, as well as to inspire devotion among the faithful. The Schlegel brothers understood their return to medieval themes and forms as an aesthetic proposal as well as a revolution with political implications. For this reason, Friedrich, after converting to Catholicism in 1808, carried out a political campaign in defense of the Nazarenes through his work as a representative of Metternich's cultural politics to Prussia. He especially defended them on three occasions in writing, most significantly where he directly confronted Goethe's criticism of one of their exhibitions.

Thus, the most important aspect of this discussion, which may at first seem marginal, is that behind it lies a significant shift in romanticism. Until then, romanticism had focused on nostalgia (*Sehnsucht*) for the themes and values of the past, and on an attempt to recreate that past, but going forward it projected that ideal into the future. It was no longer a question of looking for the origins of identity, but rather of defining that origin and using it as an ideal to achieve as a nation.

This change, catalyzed around discussions on art and religion, would have been inconceivable without a conception of history as a dialectical development driven by the antagonism between nature and freedom, which was already present in Johann Gottlieb Fichte and in A. Schlegel's work. In this sense, the debate generated within romanticism on where to place one's gaze increased these philosophers' awareness of being historical subjects and transformed the way they understood history.⁵ The weight of history, in effect, was transferred from the past to the future, understood as a progressive path of the spirit towards freedom, a perspective of vital importance for understanding Hegel's philosophy.

On the other hand, we should also consider idealistic philosophers' mystification of art. The most important group within this movement was the philosophical group in Jena, who wrote the 1796 idealistic manifesto *Ältestes Systemprogramm des Deutschen Idealismus*. Although its authorship is not certain, it is usually thought that Holderlin, Schelling and Hegel wrote it together.⁶ Thus, it is so important because it presents the

⁵ In fact, in fragment 216 of *Athenäum*, we read the following: "The French Revolution, Fichte's philosophy, and Goethe's Meister are the greatest tendencies of the age. Whoever is offended by this juxtaposition, whoever cannot take any revolution seriously that isn't noisy and materialistic, hasn't yet achieved a lofty, broad perspective on the history of mankind" (Schlegel 1991, 46).

⁶ Although the authorship of this work is not entirely clear, Madureira has shown that art is always included in religion in the writings of young Hegel because both share a sensible component and aesthetic function, such that we could very well assume what is said in the *Systemprogramm* (Madureira 2009, 47-48).

first Hegelian conception of art. A short, but very intense text, it claims that art is the most sublime realm and, for this reason, its authors also called art the “religion of art:” “For I am convinced that the supreme act of reason, because it embraces all ideas, is an aesthetic act; and that only in beauty are truth and goodness of the same flesh” (Wirth 2003, 11).

The authors, however, do present some differences. Holderlin was a poet who tried to retrieve the Greek world as an alternative to the divisions of the modern world. On the other hand, Schelling was a philosopher who developed the relationship between art and philosophy and became the philosopher of romantic artists.⁷

Holderlin turned Friedrich Schelling and the Jena circle’s interests toward art. In turn, Schelling developed the relationship between philosophy and art in such a way that he became the philosopher of the romantics, especially because of the importance he attached to intuition and fantasy. On this point, it is necessary to clarify that, although many members of this generation assumed the mystification of art, we must distinguish the group constituted around Schelling from the nucleus of philosophers and poets who developed idealism. Although both groups belonged to the same generation, drank from the same well and delved into the same themes, the former emphasized feeling and imagination, while German idealism could not rid itself of the speculative power of reason.

In 1800, Schelling published *System of Transcendental Idealism*, where he tried to overcome the philosophical problems at that time. He fashioned a system where art occupies the most important place, above religion and philosophy, because, for him, only art can unify opposites. Art raises the human experience to overcome contradictions (especially the finite and the infinite) and it is where freedom resides. Thus, art has the power to unify the human spirit and renovate society, revealing its overall superiority to philosophy.

These ideas reveal that romantic authors considered art the most important sphere. At first, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) thought the same throughout his youth and theological period. However, little by little, he changed his mind and later understood that this seemingly high consideration of art was used for other interests like

⁷ As Gabás argues, “Hölderlin and the romantic circle inspired Schelling’s aesthetic interest, and he was regarded as *the* philosopher of romanticism because of the importance he attached to intuition, to creative fantasy, to instinct and irrationality, and because of his insistence on the universe as a living whole. He also shared the romantic ideal of elaborating a poetic creation that could house the entire universe” (Gabás 2012, XVII).

religion and politics. Hegel agreed with Schelling on the value of art based on its influence in culture, but he disagreed with him on how to understand art (Pöggeler, 1956).

In Hegel's philosophical work, his consideration of art underwent many changes. At first, he saw art more as a religion of art. Nevertheless, at the end of his life, art gained complete autonomy. This transformation was not a minor change, but rather led Hegel to talk about art being a thing of the past. This assertion set up the problem of "the end of art."

The Hegelian Prophecy of the "End of Art"

Young Hegel's approach to art is intrinsically related to the interests he cultivated in his years as a resident at the Tübingen Seminary (Pinkard 2010). There, he emphasized the theological sphere, making art subordinate to religion, as seen in the writings of his youth (1793-1805) prior to "The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism." Those writings contain the idea of art as linked to a kind of new religion that saves tradition, but is based on reason.

After the theological writings of his youth, Hegel's most important work is the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 1807). Published during his Jena era where art is found within religion, there is a section entitled "Religion of art" (*Kunstsreligion*). Despite this secondary location, we can still appreciate the fundamental role that art has within the Hegelian system.

The Hegelian system is determined by the expression of the spirit in history. Historical development is an essential step in the development of the spirit since it is in it that the spirit attains complete knowledge of itself. To attend to the process of universal history is to attend to the concrete reality of human existence over time. In addition, since the spirit and the concept are realized within history, by attending to it we can achieve greater knowledge of the spirit as a whole or of a particular concept. For this reason, Hegel's works always contain extensive sections dedicated to the historic developments of the spirit.⁸

This issue can also be seen from the inverse perspective; that is, from the historical manifestations of said moments of the spirit. For religion and

⁸ This is why, from then on, historical analysis became a fundamental part of all research. His influence is especially striking in philosophical and artistic studies, which until then saw no need for this type of analysis. Up to that time, studies of art were mostly philosophical treatises on aesthetics. It was precisely starting from Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, for example, that studies of art concentrated on systematic studies of art history.