JEROME STOLNITZ, Lehman College, City Univ. of New York (1976)

VICE PRESIDENT

RUDOLF ARNHEIM, Univ. of Michigan (1978)

SECRETARY-TREASURER

JAMES R. JOHNSON, Univ. of Connecticut (1978)

TRUSTEES

MELVIN RADER, Univ. of Washington (1977)

MARIA M. EATON, Univ. of Minnesota (1978)

PETER KIVY, Rutgers Univ., Newark (1978)

ANITA SILVEK, California State Univ., San Francisco (1978)

FRANCIS E. SPARSHOTT, Victoria College, Univ. of Toronto (1978)

ALAN TORMEY, Univ. of Maryland, Baltimore County (1978)

ARNOLD BERLEANT, C. W. Post Center of Long Island Univ. (1979)

HERBERT M. SCHUELLER, Wayne State Univ. (1979)

JOHN FISHER, Temple Univ. (ex officio)

All terms end December 31 of year after name.

The Society is affiliated with the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the International Federation of Philosophical Societies, and El Congreso Inter-American de Filosofia.

The purpose of the Society is to promote study, research, discussion, and publication in aesthetics. The term "aesthetics" in this connection, is understood to include all studies of the arts and related types of experience from a philosophic, scientific, or other theoretical standpoint, including those of psychology, sociology, anthropology, cultural history, art criticism, and education. "The arts" include the visual arts, literature, music, and theater arts.

MEMBERSHIPS

Membership is open to persons interested in furthering this purpose. Membership includes a subscription to the Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, and payments are allocated $1.00 for dues and the balance for the Journal subscription. The ordinary annual dues (in U.S.A. and Canada) are $15.00; other foreign memberships are $20.00 a year, and student memberships are $5.00. U.S.A. and Canada only.

The Society is organized under the laws of Ohio as a corporation not for profit. It is financially dependent upon memberships and contributions.

Individuals who desire to aid in the Society’s work may become Contributing Members on payment of $25.00 annually (includes a one year journal subscription); Sustaining Members on payment of $75.00 annually (includes a one year journal subscription); or Life Members for single payment of $300.00 (includes a life journal subscription).

For memberships, apply to The American Society for Aesthetics, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio 44106.

REGIONAL DIVISIONS

Consult secretaries for dates of local meetings.

Cleveland Society for Aesthetics: Secretary, Ursula Koneitouch, The Cleveland Museum of Art.

Pacific Division: President, Julius Moravcsik, Stanford University; Vice President, Robert Howell, Stanford University; Program Chairman, Guy Sircello, Univ. of California at Irvine.

Eastern Division: Secretary, Peter Friend, Art Department, Pace College, New York New York 10038.

WAYS OF AIDING THE SOCIETY AND JOURNAL

The American Society for Aesthetics has been ruled as exempt from Federal income tax by the United States Treasury Department as an organization operated exclusively for educational purposes. Contributions, gifts, and bequests to the Society are deductible from Federal income tax returns.

TIMOTHY BINKLEY

Piece: Contra Aesthetics

1. What Is This Piece?

The term “aesthetics” has a general meaning in which it refers to the philosophy of art. In this sense, any theoretical writing about art falls within the realm of aesthetics. There is also a more specific and important sense of the term in which it refers to a particular type of theoretical inquiry which emerged in the eighteenth century when the “Faculty of Taste” was invented. In this latter sense, “aesthetics” is the study of a specific human activity involving the perception of aesthetic qualities such as beauty, repose, expressiveness, unity, liveliness. Although frequently purporting to be (or even the) philosophy of art, aesthetics so understood is not exclusively about art; it investigates a type of human experience (aesthetic experience) which is elicited by artworks, but also by nature and by non-artistic artifacts. The discrepancy is generally thought to be unimportant and is brushed aside with the assumption that if aesthetics is not exclusively about art, at least art is primarily about the aesthetic. This assumption, however, also proves to be false, and it is the purpose of this piece to show why. Falling within the subject matter of aesthetics (in the second sense) is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for being art.

2. Robert Rauschenberg erases a De Kooning drawing and exhibits it as his own work, “Erased De Kooning Drawing.” The aesthetic properties of the original work are wiped away, and the result is not a non-work, but another work. No important information about Rauschenberg’s piece is presented in the way it looks, except perhaps this fact, that looking at it is artistically inconsequential. It would be a mistake to search for aesthetically interesting smudges on the paper. The object may be bought and sold like an aesthetically lush Rubens, but unlike the Rubens it is only a souvenir or relic of its artistic meaning. The owner of the Rauschenberg has no privileged access to its artistic content in the way the owner of the Rubens does who hides the painting away in a private study. Yet the Rauschenberg piece is a work of art. Art in the twentieth century has emerged as a strongly self-critical discipline. It has freed itself of aesthetic parameters and sometimes creates directly with ideas unmotivated by aesthetic qualities. An artwork is a piece; and a piece need not be an aesthetic object, or even an object at all.

3. This piece is occasioned by two works of art by Marcel Duchamp, L.H.O.O.Q. and L.H. O. O.Q. Shaved. How do I know they are works of art? For one thing, they are listed in catalogues. So I assume they are works of art. If you deny that they are, it is up to you to explain why the listings in a Renoir catalogue are artworks, but the listings in a Duchamp catalogue are not. And why the Renoir show is an exhibition of artworks, while the Duchamp show is not, and so forth. Anyway, whether the Duchamp pieces are works of art is ultimately inconsequential, as we shall see.

TIMOTHY BINKLEY is chairman of Humanities at The School of Visual Arts, New York.
This piece is also, shall we say, about the philosophical significance of Duchamp’s art. This piece is primarily about the concept of “piece” in art; and its purpose is to reformulate our understanding of what a “work of art” is.

II. What is L.H.O.O.Q.?

These are Duchamp’s words:

This Mona Lisa with a moustache and a goatee is a combination readymade and iconoclastic. Dadaism. The original, I mean the original readymade is a cheap chromo etched which was inscribed at the bottom four letters which pronounced like initials in French, made a very risque joke on the Gioconda.

Imagine a similar description of the Mona Lisa itself. Leonardo took a canvas and some paint and put the paint on the canvas in such-and-such a way so that — presto — we have the renowned face and its environs. There is a big difference between this description and Duchamp’s description. The difference is marked by the unspecified “such-and-such” left hanging in the description of Leonardo’s painting. I could, of course, go on indefinitely describing the look of the Mona Lisa, and the fidelity with which your imagination reproduces this look would depend upon things as how good my description is, how well your imagination is, and chance. Yet regardless of how precise and vivid my description is, one thing it will never do is acquaint you with the painting. You cannot claim to know that work of art on the basis of reading the most exquisite description of it, even though you may learn many interesting things about it. The way you come to know the Mona Lisa is by looking at it or by looking at a decent reproduction of it. The reason reproductions count is not that they faithfully reproduce the work of art, but rather because what the work of art is depends fundamentally on how it looks. And reproductions can do a more or less acceptable job of duplicating (or replicating) the salient features of the appearance of a painting. This does not mean that a person is entitled to limit his or her aesthetic judgments to reproductions. What it means is that you can’t say much about a painting until you know how it looks.

Now look at Duchamp’s piece: L.H.O.O.Q. is a reproduction of the Mona Lisa with a moustache, goatee, and letters added. There is no amorphous “such-and-such” standing for the most important thing. The description tells you what the work of art is; you now know the piece without actually having seen it (or a reproduction of it). When you see the artwork there are no surprises. Yes, there is the reproduction of the Mona Lisa; there is the moustache, the goatee, there are the five letters. When you look at the artwork you learn nothing of artistic consequence which you don’t already know from the description. Duchamp gives, and for this reason it would be pointless to spend time attending to the piece as a connoisseur would savor a Rembrandt. Just the opposite is true of the Mona Lisa. If I tell you it is a painting of a woman with an enigmatic smile, I have told you little about the work of art: the important thing is how it looks; and that I can only show you, I cannot tell you.

This difference can be elucidated by contrasting ideas and appearances. Some art (a great deal of what is considered traditional art) creates primarily with appearances, that is to say, it is to know the look of it; and to know that is to experience the look, to perceive the appearance. On the other hand, some art creates primarily with ideas. To know the art is to know the idea; and to know an idea is not necessarily to experience a particular sensation, or even to have some particular experience. This is why you’re explaining L.H.O.O.Q. either by looking at it or by having it described to you. (In fact, the piece might be better or more easily known by description than by perception.) The critical analysis of appearance, which is so useful in helping you to come to know the Mona Lisa, bears little value in explaining L.H.O.O.Q. Exactly the same thing happens into the beauty with which the moustache was drawn or the delicacy with which the goatee was made to fit the contours of the face are fatuous attempts to say something meaningful about the work of art. If we do not look at the piece, what is important to notice is that there is a reproduction of the Mona Lisa, that a moustache has been added, etc. It hardly matters exactly how this was done, how it looks. One views the Mona Lisa to see what it looks like, but one approaches Duchamp’s piece to obtain information, to gain access to the thought being expressed.

III. What is L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved?

Duchamp sent out invitations to preview the show called “Not Seen and/or Less Seen” by Marcel Duchamp/Krone Selavy 1964: Mary Sibbett: "I am writing this from the front of the invitation he pasted a playing card which bears a reproduction of the Mona Lisa. Below the card is inscribed, in French, "L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved.” This piece looks like the Mona Lisa and the Mona Lisa looks like it: since one is a reproduction of the other, their aesthetic qualities are basically identical. Differences in how they look have little, if any, artistic relevance. We do not establish the identity of one by pointing out where it looks different from the other. This is due to the fact that Duchamp’s piece does not articulate its artistic statement in the language of aesthetic properties. Hence, its aesthetic proprieties are as much a part of L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved as a picture of a mathematician in an algebra book is part of the mathematics. Appropriations are insufficient for establishing the identity of a work of art if the point is not in the appearance. And if the appearance is in the appearance, how do we establish that? What is to keep a Duchamp from stealing the look for ulterior purposes? Here occurs the limit of the ability of aesthetics to cope with art, since aesthetics seeks out appearances. To see why and how, we need to examine the nature of aesthetics.

IV. What Is Aesthetics?

1. The Word. The term “aesthetics” has come to denote that branch of philosophy which deals with art. The word originated in the eighteenth century when Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten adopted a Greek word for perception to name what he defined to be “the science of perception.”

Relying upon a distinction familiar to “the Greek philosophers and the Church fathers,” he contrasted things perceived (aesthetic entities) with things known (noetic entities), degrading to “aesthetics” the investigation of the former. Baumgarten then gathered the study of the arts under the aegis of aesthetics. The two were quickly identified and “aesthetics” became “the philosophy of art” in much the way “ethics” is the philosophy of morality.

2. Aesthetics and Perception. From the outset aesthetics has been devoted to the study of things perceived, regarding these as coming from the “aesthetic attitude” which defines a unique way of perceiving, or from the “aesthetic object” of perception. The commitment to perceptual experience was deepened with the invention of the Faculty of Taste by eighteenth-century philosophers anxious to account for the human response to beauty and to other aesthetic qualities. The Faculty of Taste exercises powers of discrimination in aesthetic experiences. A refined person with highly developed taste is enabled to perceive and recognize sophisticated and subtle artistic expressions which are closed to the uncultured person, who is thus encumbered with aesthetic qualities. This now faceted art was characterized by its operation in the context of a special “disinterested” perception, a perception severed from self interest and dissociated from so-called “practical concerns.” The development of the concept of disinterestedness reinforced the perception that the aesthetic experience was unique and disinterested, and that “interest” from experience divests it of utility and invests it in immediate awareness. An aesthetic experience is something pursued “for its own sake.” Eventually aesthetics came to treat the object of aesthetic perception as a kind of illusion since its “reality” — i.e., the reality of disinterested perception — stands disconnected from the reality of practical interest. The two realities are incommensurable: The cows in Turner’s paintings can be seen, but not milked or heard.

It is important to note that aesthetics is an anachronism of the ancient tradition of the philosophy of the Beautiful. Beauty is a property found in both art and nature.
A man beautiful; so is his house and the tapestries hung inside. Aesthetics has continued the tradition of investigating a type of experience which can be had in the presence of both natural and created objects. As a result, aesthetics has never been strictly a study of artistic phenomena. The scope of its inquiry is broader than art since aesthetic experience is not an experience unique to art. This fact has not always been sufficiently emphasized, and as a result, aesthetics frequently appears in the guise of philosophy of art in general.

As aesthetics and the philosophy of art have become more clearly identified, a much more serious confusion has arisen. The work of art has come to be construed as an aesthetic object, an object of perception. Hence the meaning and essence of all art is thought to inhere in appearances, in the looks and sounds of direct (though not necessarily reflective) awareness. The first principle of philosophy of art has become: all art possesses aesthetic qualities, and the core of a work is its nest of aesthetic qualities. This is why "aesthetics" has become just another name for the philosophy of art. Although it is sometimes recognized that aesthetics is not identical to the philosophy of art, but rather a complementary study, it is still commonly assumed that all art is aesthetic in the sense that falling within the subject matter of aesthetics is at least a necessary (if not a sufficient) condition for being art. Yet as we shall see, being aesthetic is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for being art.

Devoe of modern aesthetics may believe that Baumgarten's "science of perception" is a moribund enterprise befitting only pre-Modern aesthetics rapt in pursuit of ideal Beauty. Yet a survey of contemporary aesthetic theory will prove that this part of philosophy still corrupts its raison d'etre to be a perceptual entity—an appearance—and fails to recognize sufficiently the distinction between "aesthetics" in the narrow sense and the philosophy of art. In his essay "Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic," Frank Sibley has articulated this commitment to perception:

"It is of importance to note first that, broadly speaking, aesthetics deals with a kind of experience. People have to see the grace of a work, hear the pleasantness of the music, notice the goodness of a color scheme, feel the power of a novel, its mood, or its uncertainty of tone . . . the crucial thing is to see, hear, or feel, suppose indeed that we can make aesthetic judgements without aesthetic perception ... is to misunderstand aesthetic judgement."  

Despite the many new directions taken by the philosophy of art in the twentieth century, it is still practised under the guidance of aesthetic inquiry, which assumes that the work of art is a thing perceived.

The aesthetic qualities must be perceived in order to be judged; that is to inhere in what Monroe Beardsley has called the "perceptual object": "A perceptual object is an object some of whose qualities least, are open to direct sensory awareness." This he contrasts with the "physical basis" of aesthetic qualities, which "consists of things and events describable in the cabulary of physics." Hence the work of art turns out to be an entity possessing two radically different aspects, one aesthetic and the other physical.

When a critic says that Titian's later paintings have a strong atmospheric and vividness of color, he is talking about aesthetic objects. But when he says that Titian used a reddish underpainting over the whole canvas and added transparent glazes to the painting after he laid down the pigment, he is talking about physical objects.

This "aesthetic object" is taken by the philosophy of art to be its subject of study. Appearances are paramount, from expressionist theories which assume the object as an "imaginary object" through which the artist has articulated his or her "intuition," to formalist theories which venerate perceptual form. Clive Bell's "significant form" is clearly a perceptual form since it must be perceived and aroused the "aesthetic emotion" before it functions. Susanne Langer has christened aesthetic appearances "semblances," and has undertaken what is probably the most extensive investigation of artistic semblance in her book Feeling and Form. Aesthetics perceives all the arts to be engaged in the creation of some kind of semblance or artistic illusion which presents itself to us for the sake of its beauty.

It has been difficult, however, to maintain a strictly perceptual interpretation of the aesthetic "appearance." Literature is one major art form which does not easily accommodate the perceptual model of the work of art. Although we perceive the printed words in a book, we do not actually perceive the linguistic work which is composed of intangible linguistic elements. Yet as Sibley points out, the reader will feel the power of a novel, its mood, or its uncertainty of tone, so that its aesthetic qualities are at least experienced through reading if not actually perceived by one of senses. There are various things we experience without perceiving them. Like an emotion, the power of a novel is "felt" without its being touched or heard or seen. Thus, although it will not be quite correct to say that one cannot know the aesthetic qualities of a novel without "direct perceptual access," it is true that one cannot know them without directly experiencing the novel by reading it. This rules out the possibility of coming to know a literary work by having it described to you (as one may very well come to know L.H.O.O.Q.).

As just as you must look at the particular object constituting a painting, you must read the particular words comprising a novel in order to judge it aesthetically. Hence, although perception is the paradigm of aesthetic experience, an accurate aesthetic theory will locate aesthetic qualities more generally in a particular type of experience (aesthetic experience) so that literature can be beautiful.

3. The Theory of Media. What does it mean to have the requisite "direct experience" of an aesthetic object? How do you specify what it is that one must experience in order to know a particular artwork? Here we encounter a problem. Aesthetic qualities cannot be communicated except through direct experience of them. So there is no way of saying just what the aesthetic qualities of a work are independently of experiencing them. As Isabel Hungerland puts it, there are no intersubjective criteria for testing the presence of aesthetic qualities. This is why we cannot communicate the Mona Lisa by describing it. It is impossible to establish criteria for identifying artworks which are based on their aesthetic qualities. And this is the point where aesthetics needs the concept of a medium. Media are the basic categories of art in aesthetics, and each work is identified through its medium. Let's see how this is done.

In recent aesthetics, the problem of the relationship between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic properties of an object has been much discussed. Whatever the particular analysis given, it is generally conceded that aesthetic qualities depend in some way upon non-aesthetic qualities.

There is no guarantee that a slight change in color or shape will leave the aesthetic qualities of a painting unaffected, and this is why reproductions often have aesthetic qualities different from those of the original. This is why what Beardsley calls the "physical" properties, however slightly, can alter those features of a work of art which are experienced in the "aesthetic experience" of the object. Aesthetic objects are vulnerable and fragile, and this is another reason why it is important to have identity criteria for aesthetic objects.

Since aesthetic qualities depend on non-aesthetic qualities, the identity of an aesthetic artwork can be located through conventions governing its non-aesthetic qualities. These conventions determine the non-aesthetic parameters which must remain invariant in order to preserve the identity of the artwork. A medium is not simply a physical material, but rather a network of such conventions which delimits a realm over which physical materials and aesthetic qualities are mediated. For example, in the medium of painting there is a convention which says that the paint stick is the original of the particular artwork. In order to preserve the identity of the artwork, on the other hand, paint is not a conventional invariant in the art of architecture but is applied to buildings (at least on the inside) according to another art.
interior decorating. The same architectural work could have white walls or pink walls, but a painting could not have its white clouds changed to pink and still remain the same painting. Similarly, the medium of painting is invariant through modifications of the frame holding a painting, while a building is not invariant through modifications in, say, the woodwork. Moving a Rubens from an elaborate Baroque frame into a modern Bauhaus frame will not change the work of art, but making a similar change in the woodwork of a building will change, however slightly, the architecture.

In its network of conventions, each artistic medium establishes non-aesthetic criteria for identifying works of art. By being told which medium a work is in, we are given the parameters within which to search for and experience its aesthetic qualities. As we watch a dance, we heed how the dancers move their bodies. As we watch a play on the same stage, we concentrate instead on what is being acted out. Treating a piece of writing as a poem will make us focus on different non-aesthetic features than if we approach it as a short story: when the type is set for a poem the individual lines are more important than they are in a short story. Thus Susanne Langer's characterization of media in terms of the particular type of semblance they create is pointed in the wrong direction. She holds that painting creates the illusion of space, music the illusion of the passage of time, etc. Yet it is not the "content" of an aesthetic illusion which determines the medium, but what we can tell whether something presents a semblance of space, we have to know where to look for the semblance; and this we know by understanding the conventions, i.e., the medium, within which the thing is proffered for aesthetic experience. Anything that can be seen aesthetically, i.e., it can be viewed for its sake as aesthetic qualities. The reason we know to look at the aesthetic qualities on the front of a painting is not because the back lacks aesthetic qualities, but rather because the conventions of painting tell us to look there. Even if the back of a painting looks more interesting than the front, the symmetrical director is nevertheless required to hang the painting in the conventional way with the front out. The medium tells us what to experience in order to know aesthetic artwork.

In the twentieth century we have witnessed a proliferation of new media, a medium seems to emerge when new conventions are instituted for isolating aesthetic qualities differently from those of new materials or machines. Film became an artistic medium when its unique physical structure was utilized to identify aesthetic qualities in a new way. The filmmaker became an artist when he or she stopped recording the creation of the playwright and discovered that film has resources for creation which theater lacks. The aesthetic qualities that can be presented by a film photographed from the orchestra and obedient to the temporal structure of the play are, basically, aesthetic properties of the play itself. But when the director photographs two different actions in two different settings at two different times, and the images end up being seen at the same time and place, aesthetic properties can be realized which are inaccessible to theater. A new convention for specifying aesthetic properties has emerged.

We say "See this film" instead of "See this play." In each case, what you look for is determined by the conventions of the medium.

The aesthetic theory of media has given rise to an analogy which seems to be gaining acceptance: a work of art is like a person. The dependence of aesthetic qualities on non-aesthetic ones is similar to the dependence of character traits on the bodily dispositions of persons. As Joseph Margolis has put it, works of art are embodied in a physical object (or physical event) in much the way a person is embodied in a human body.

To say that a work of art is embodied in a physical object is to say that its identity is necessarily linked to the identity of the physical object in which it is embodied, though to identify the one is not to identify the other; it is also to say that, qua embodied, a work of art must possess properties other than those ascribed to the physical object in which it is embodied, though it may be said to possess (where relevant) the properties that a work of art possesses will include properties of kind that cannot appropriately be ascribed to the object in which it is embodied.

The "emergent" entities of aesthetic art are aesthetic qualities which are accessible only through direct experience. The aesthetic and physical properties of the artwork fuse into a person-like whole, the former constituting the "mind," the latter the "body" of the work. When we want to know a person we look for his "body"—likewise, when we want to locate an artwork we look for its "body," namely the physical material in which it is embodied, as delimited by the conventions of media.

Although not universally accepted, this person analogy appears frequently in aesthetic theory because it provides a suitable model for understanding the artwork as a single entity appealing to two markedly different types of interest. It explains, for example, the basis of the connection between Beauty and Money.

The analogy has recently been carried to the extent of claiming that works of art, like persons, have rights. To deface a canvas by Picasso or a sculpture by Michelangelo is not only to violate the rights of its owner, but also to violate certain rights of the world itself. The work is a person: to mar the canvas or marble is to harm this person. So we see that aesthetic properties are also mortal properties; they age and are vulnerable to physical deterioration.

4. Art and Works. Aesthetics has used the conventions of media to classify and identify artworks, but its vision of the nature of art does not adequately recognize the thoroughly conventional structure within which artworks appear. This is because it tends to view a medium as a kind of substance (paint, wood, stone, sound, etc.) instead of as a network of conventions.

Its preoccupation with perceptual entities leads aesthetics to extol and examine the "work of art," while averting its attention almost entirely from the myriad other aspects of that complex cultural activity we call "art." In other words, art for aesthetics is fundamentally a class of things called works of art which are the sources of aesthetic experience. To talk about art is to talk about a set of objects. To define art is to explain membership in this class. Thus we frequently find aesthetic discussions of the question "What is art?" immediately turning to the question "What is a work of art?" as though the two questions are unquestionably identical. Yet they are not the same thing.

What counts as a work of art must be discovered by examining the practice of art. Art, like philosophy, is a cultural phenomenon, and any particular work of art must rely heavily upon its artistic and cultural context in communicating its meaning. L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved looks as much like the Mona Lisa as any reproduction of it does, but their artistic meanings could hardly be more different. Just as I cannot tell you what the word "rot" means unless you say whether it is English or German, I cannot explain the meaning of a painting without viewing it immersed in an artistic milieu. The show value of Titian's Ophelia, for example, is largely lost on modern audiences, although it can be recovered by studying the society in which the painting emerged.

Even so simple a question as what a painting represents cannot be answered without some reference to the conventions of depiction which have been created. Whether a smaller patch of paint on the canvas is a smaller person or a person farther away—or something else—is determined by conventions of representation. The moribund prejudice against much of the "unrealistic" art of the past comes from misjudging it according to standards which are part of the alien culture of the past.

Thus trying to define "art" by defining "work of art" is a bit like trying to define philosophy by saying what constitutes a philosophy book. A work of art cannot stand alone as a member of a set. Set membership is not the structure of that human activity called art. To suppose we can
examine the problem of defining art by trying to explain membership in a class of entities is simply a prejudice of aesthetics, which underplays the cultural structure of art for the sake of pursuing individual objects. Yet even as paradigmatic an aesthetic work as the *Mona Lisa* is a thoroughly cultural entity whose artistic and aesthetic meanings adhere to the painting by cultural forces, not by the chemical forces which keep the paint intact for a period of time.

As media proliferated, the aesthetic imperative implied in their conventions weakened. Art has become increasingly non-aesthetic in the twentieth century, straining the conventions of media to the point where lines between them blur. Some works of art are presented in "multi-media," others (such as Duchamp's) cannot be placed within a medium at all. The concept of a medium was invented by aesthetics in order to explain the identity of artworks which articulate with aesthetic qualities. As art questions the dictates of aesthetics, it abandons the conventions of media. Let us see why.

V. Art Outside Aesthetics

Art need not be aesthetic. *L.H.O.O.Q.* *Shaved* makes the point graphically by depicting the appearance of the *Mona Lisa* while denying its aesthetic import. The two works are completely different. As the risque joke is compounded by *L.H.O.O.Q.* *Shaved*, the *Mona Lisa* is humiliated. Though restored to its original appearance, it is not restored to its original state. Duchamp added only the moustache and goatee, but when he removed them the sacred aura of aesthetic qualities vanished as well—it had been a conventional artistic covering which adhered to the moustache and goatee when they were removed, like paint stuck to a table. The original image is intact but literaled; its function in Duchamp's piece is just to denote the Mona Lisa. *L.H.O.O.Q.* looked naughty, graffiti on a masterpiece. It relies upon our seeing both the aesthetic aura and its impudent violation. But as its successor reinstates the appearance, the masterpiece is ironically ridiculed a second time with the disappearance of the dignity which made *L.H.O.O.Q.* a transgression. The first piece makes fun of the Gioconda, the second piece destroys it in the process of "restoring" it. *L.H.O.O.Q.* Leonardo's artwork as a derivative of *L.H.O.O.Q.*, reverses the temporal sequence while literalizing the image, i.e., discharging its aesthetic delights. Seen as "*L.H.O.O.Q. shaved,*" the image is sapped of its artistic/aesthetic strength—it seems almost vulgar as it appears bare and defiled. This is because it is placed in a context where its aesthetic properties have no meaning and its artistic "person" is reduced to just another piece of painted canvas.

It has already been pointed out that one can know the work *L.H.O.O.Q.* without having any direct experience of it, and instead by having it described. This is shared with a great deal of recent art which eschews media. When Mel Bochner puts lines on a gallery wall to measure off the degrees of an arch, their purpose is to convey information, not to proffer aesthetic delights. The piece destroys it in the process of "restoring" it. It is true of "*I got up*" postcards, which simply note his time of arising each day.17 What you need to see, to experience, in order to know this art is subject to intersubjective tests—unlike aesthetic art—and this is why description will sometimes be adequate in communicating the artwork.

When Duchamp wrote "*L.H.O.O.Q.*" beneath the image of the *Mona Lisa*, he was not demonstrating his penmanship. The beauty of a script depends upon aesthetic properties of its line. The meaning of a sentence written in the script, however, is a function of how the lines fit into the structure or order of the text. *L.H.O.O.Q.* artistic meaning must be construed according to the first type of relation between meaning and line, but not the second. It mistakes the experience of aesthetic qualities for the substance of art. Yet the remarkable thing about even aesthetic art is not its beauty (or any other aesthetic qualities), but the fact that it is human-created beauty articulated in a medium.

The flaw in aesthetics is this: how some-thing looks is partly a function of what we bring to it, and art is too culturally dependent to survive in the mere look of things. The importance of Duchamp's titles is that they call attention to the cultural environment which can either sustain or suffocate the aesthetic dimension of an object. Duchamp's titles do not name objects; they put handles on things. They call attention to the artistic framework within which works of art are indexed by their titles and by other means. The culture infects the work.

A great deal of art has chosen to articulate in the most daring way in the most daring space, where its aesthetic properties have no meaning, and its "person" is reduced to just another piece of painted canvas. Duchamp has chosen this by creating non-aesthetic art, i.e., art whose meaning is not borne by the appearance of an object. In particular, the role of line in *L.H.O.O.Q.* is more like its role in a sentence than in a drawing or painting.18 This is why the appearance of the moustache and goatee are insignificant in the art. *L.H.O.O.Q.* was executed not by Duchamp, but by Picabia on Duchamp's instructions, and the goatee was left off. It would be an idle curiosity to speculate about whose version is better or more interesting on the basis of how each looks. The point of the artwork is not to be derived from its appearance. It is not a person-like union of physical and perceptual qualities. Its salient artistic features do not depend upon non-aesthetic qualities in the sense of being embodied in them. The aesthetic qualities of *L.H.O.O.Q.*, like the aesthetic qualities of Rauschenberg's erased De Kooning, are not offered up by the aura for aesthetic deletion, but rather are incidental features of the work like its weight or its age. Line is perceived in Duchamp's piece just as it is in a sentence in a book, and in both cases we can describe the presence of aesthetic qualities. But the point of rupture can be read off its physiognomy. The lines are used to convey information, not to conjure up appearances; consequently the relationship of meaning to material is similar to what it is in a drawing of a triangle in a geometry book.

If an artwork is a person, Duchamp has shown that there are ways to expose the bare of aesthetic aura. *L.H.O.O.Q.* treats a person as an object by means of the joke produced by reading the letters in French. It also treats an artwork as a "mere thing." The presence of the moustache violates the *Mona Lisa* 's aesthetic rights and hence violates the artwork personified in it. In short, persons, Duchamp's piece denies its own personhood.

Aesthetics is limited by reading the artwork on the model of a person. Some person-like entities are works of art, but not all artworks are persons. If not a person, what is an artwork?

VI. What Is An Artwork?

An artwork is a piece. The concept "work of art" does not isolate a class of peculiar aesthetic personages. The concept marks an indecipherable function in the artwork. To be a piece of art, an item need only be indexed as an artwork by an artist. So an indexical function is all that is required for indexing an entity will suffice. Thus "Is it art?" is a question of little interest. The question is "What if it is?" Art is an epiphenomenon over the class of its works.19

The conventions of titling works of art and publishing catalogues facilitate the practice of indexing art. However, it is important to distinguish between the artist's act of indexing by creating and the curator's act of indexing by publishing the catalogue. It is the former act which makes art; the latter act usually indexes what is already art under more specific headings, such as works by a certain artist, works in a particular show, works owned by a person or a museum, etc. To make art is basically, to isolate something (an object, an idea, . . .) and say of it, "This is a work of art," thereby cataloguing it under "Artworks." This may seem to devolve responsibility for arthood upon the artist's label, and the question of determining arthood turns into a question of determining who the artist is. But this
wrongly places emphasis upon entities again, overshadowing the practice of art.

Anyone can be an artist. To be an artist is to utilize (or perhaps invent) artistic conventions to index a piece. These might be the conventions of a medium which provide for the indexing of an aesthetic piece by means of non-aesthetic materials. But even the aesthetic act is to stand back from the painting or play at a certain point and say "That's it. It's done." This is the point where the artist relies upon the basic indexing conventions of art. The fundamental art-making (piece-making) act is the specification of a piece: "The piece is -.-.-." Painting on canvas — or making any kind of product — is just one way of specifying what the work of art is. When Duchamp wrote "L.H.O.O.Q." below the reproduction, or when Rauschenberg erased the De Kooning, it was not the work (the labor) they did which made the art. A work of art is not necessarily something worked on; it is something conceived to be. An artist is not always making something, but rather engaging in a cultural enterprise in which artistic pieces are proffered for consideration. Robert Barry once had an exhibition in which nothing was exhibited:

My exhibition at the Art & Project Gallery in Amstel in December, 89, will last two weeks. I asked them to lock the doors and announce to it, reading: "For the exhibition the gallery will be closed."**

The fact that someone could be an artist by just christening his or her radio or anxiety to be an artwork may seem preposterous. However, the case of the Sunday Painter who rarely shows his or her paintings to anyone is not substantially different. We need to beware of confusing issues about art with issues about good or recognized arthood. The amateur indexor may index trivially, and the effortlessness of the task will seem to compound the artistic incoherence. But things are not so different when the Sunday Painter produces a few terrible watercolors which are artistically uninteresting. Despite their artistic failures, both the casual indexor and the casual painter are still artists, and the products they produce are works of art, just as the economics student's term paper is a piece of economics, however naive or poorly done. Simply by making a piece, a person makes an art piece, even if he isn't distinguished by the interest or significance of what it says. Of course, interesting art, like interesting economics, is usually produced by people who, in some sense, are considered "professionals." Thus there are three art "artistic" and "economistic" which refer to people who make art in a discipline with special dedication. But works of art "professionals" do not differ from what the amateurs do; it is just a difference in whether the activity is selected as a vocation. This shows that the question "Is that person an artist?" like the question "Is that thing an artwork?" is not a question with great artistic import.

A useful analogy is suggested. Art is a practiced discipline of thought and action, like mathematics, economics, philosophy or history. The major difference between art and the others is that doing art is simple. It is a practiced discipline with conventions defined by the practice. The remainder of the chapter will be devoted to the general focus of art is creation and conception for the sake of creation and conception, and consequently the discipline of art has devised a piece-making the conventions which place no limits on the content of what is created. In other words, art, unlike economics, has no general subject matter. The artworld develops and evolves through a complex network of interrelated interests, so it does have the general structure of a "discipline." But part of the recent history of art includes the loosening of conventions on what can be art until they are purely "formal." The wider use of the term "piece" instead of "work" reflects this liberalization, as does the decreasing importance of media. "Work of art" suggests an object. "Piece" suggests an item indexed within a practice. There are many kinds of "pieces," differing according to the practices they are indexed within. A "piece" could be a piece of mathematics or economics or art; and some pieces may be addressed to several disciplines. An artwork is just a piece of (art), an entity specified by conventions of the practice of art.

Piece: Contra Aesthetics

This view of art has one very important point of difference with aesthetics. Media are set up to identify works extensionally. Joseph Margolis relies on this idea when he argues that the identity of an artwork depends upon the identity of the physical object in which it is embodied.

So works of art are said to be the particular objects they are, in intensional contexts, although they may be identified by the linkage of embodiment, through the identity of what may be identified with a work. The art is, work of art, art is identified extensionally, in the sense that their identity (whatever they are) is controlled by the identity of what they are embodied in...

Some difficulties for this view are already suggested by Duchamp's "double painting," a single stretcher with Paradise painted on one side and The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes on the other. The decisive cases, however, are found among artworks which are produced merely by indexing, such as Duchamp's readymades. Indexes index their items intensionally: from the fact that "the morning star" occurs in a poem, the referent that "the evening star" occurs there also, even though the two expressions denote the same object. L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved could, for the sake of argument, be construed as residing in the same physical object as the Mona Lisa itself. Then there is one extensionally specific art, but two intensionally specific artworks. Rauschenberg has suggested this possibility since the only things of substance he changed by erasing the De Kooning drawing were aesthetic qualities. To complete the cycle in the way Duchamp did, Rauschenberg should buy a De Kooning painting and shave this next show: Unerasable De Kooning. The point is that artworks are identified intensionally, not extensionally. The reason L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved and the Mona Lisa are different artworks is not that they are different objects, but rather that they are different ideas. They are specified as different pieces in the art practice.

That an artwork is a piece and not a person was established by the Readymade. Duchamp selected several common objects and converted them into art simply by indexing them as artworks. Sometimes this was accomplished in conjunction with explicit indexing ceremonies, such as signing and dating a work, giving it a title, entering it in a show. But always what separates the readymade artwork from the "readymade object" it was ready-made from is a simple act of indexing. Duchamp says, "A point I want very much to establish is that the choice of these Readymades was never dictated by authentic selection. This choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference with a total absence of good or bad taste." The Readymade demonstrates the indexical nature of the concept "work of art" by showing that whether something is an artwork is not determined by its appearance but by how it is regarded in the artworld. The same shoe can be a very important hardware item at one time and an artwork at another depending upon how the artworld stands in relation to it. Even an old work of art can be converted into a new one without changing the appearance of the old work, but only "creating a new idea for it," this new idea is a new readymade called Fountain. The significance of the title of this piece has not been fully appreciated. A urinal is a fountain; that is, it is an object designed for discharging a stream of water. The reason most urinals are not fountains, despite their designs, is that their locations and use differ. Similar devices we do consider fountains. The objects are structurally similar, but their cultural roles are very different. Putting a urinal in a gallery makes it visible as a "fountain" and as a work of art because the context has been changed. Cultural conventions set different meanings and they determine arthood.

It has been pointed out that Fountain was accepted as a work of art only because Duchamp had already established his status as an artist by producing works in traditional forms. This is probably true: not just anyone could have carried it off. You cannot revolutionize the accepted conventions for indexing unless you have some recognition in the artworld already. However, this does not mean that Duchamp's
piece is only marginal art and that anyone desiring to follow his act of indexing has to become a painter first. When Duchamp made his first non-aesthetic work, the conventions for indexing artworks were more or less the media of aesthetics: to make an artwork was to articulate in a medium. Duchamp did not simply make an exception to these conventions, he instituted a new convention, the indexing convention which maintained art, though perhaps it should be said rather that Duchamp uncovered the convention, since it lies behind even the use of media, which are specialized ways of indexing aesthetic qualities. In any event, once the new convention is instituted anyone can follow it as easily as he can follow the indexing conventions of aesthetics. The Sunday Indexer can have just as good a time as the Sunday Painter.

VII. Duchamp’s Legacy

Because of Duchamp’s wit and humor, it was easy for his art to be missed or just to be confused by it. Yet it is not trivial because it is funny. With the art of Duchamp, art emerged openly as a practice. His Large Glass, whose meaning is inaccessible to anyone who merely examines the physical object, stands as the first monograph of a new kind of art. This kind of art developed historically: it is not an anomaly. Probably it originates in what Clement Greenberg calls "Modernism," whose characteristic feature is self-criticism. Like philosophy, art developed to the point where a critical act about the discipline (or part of it) could be part of the discipline itself. Once self-scrutiny, art came to realize that its scope could include much more than making aesthetic objects. It is a practice, which is why jokes about art can be art in the way jokes about philosophy can be philosophy. Art is a practice which can be characterized about as well and as usefully as philosophy can. Defining art is not likely to be a very interesting pursuit. An artwork is a piece indexed within conventions of this practice, and its being an artwork is determined not by its properties, but by its location in the artworld. Its properties are used to say what the particular work is.

If art must be aesthetic, the tools of art-indexing must relate to media, whether mixed or pure. To make a work of art is to use medium to join together literal physical qualities and created aesthetic qualities. An aesthetic person is born in the interconnection. Aesthetics treats aesthetic experience, not art. Anything, from music to mathematics, can be seen aesthetically. This is the basis for the tradition of the so-called "media," whether mixed or pure. Aesthetics deals with art and other things under the heading of aesthetic experience. Conversely, not all art is aesthetic/Seeing its marriage to aesthetics as a forced union, art reaches out to find meaning beyond skin-deep looks. The indexers create with ideas. The tools of indexing are the languages of ideas, even when the ideas are aesthetic.

1 Quoted from Marcel Duchamp, catalogue for the show organized by the Museum of Modern Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art (New York, 1929), and by R. G. Collingwood, The Principles of Art (New York, 1938). In the expression theory developed by Croce and Collingwood, it is not the concept of expression itself which is aesthetic, but rather the concept of intuition.

2 See Olave Bell, Art (New York, 1929). Formalist criteria are essential to commitment to aesthetics. See for example, Clement Greenberg, Art and Culture (Boston, 1961), and "Modernist Painting," Art and Literature, 4 (1965).

3 See Alfred North Whitehead, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge (New York, 1919).


6 E. H. Gombrich, in Art and Illusion (New York, 1960), demonstrates how a simple change in contrast in a photograph can change its aesthetic properties.


10 It is interesting that Duchamp says there are four letters in the title "L.H.O.O.Q." There are five letter tokens, each with its own particular appearance. But there are only four letter types, and a letter type does not have any particular appearance.

11 George Dickie develops a related notion in his "Institutional Theory of Art." See especially Art and the Aesthetic. His basic idea is that something is art which has been christened art. One difficulty with this view is that it does not provide for the intentional specification of a work of art. This point is discussed later on. The notion of indexing introduced here is discussed further in "Deciding About Art," (see above).

12 In Meyer, Conceptual Art, p. 41.

13 Margolis, "Works of Art As Physically Embodied and Culturally Emergent Entities," p. 151. An extensional concept is one in which expressions occur without replacing another without altering the truth of what is said.

14 George Dickie holds that making art involves a kind of status-conferral. This theory has insights to offer, but it does have the shortcoming that status-conferral is basically extensional. If it is true that Cicero has had the status of statesman conferred on him, the same is true of Tully, since the two names belong to the same person.

15 Marcel Duchamp, p. 92.


I am grateful to Lars Aagaard-Mogensen, Linda Ashley, and Monroe Beardsley for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.