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The Methodological Absence of "Sensibility" in the Art Definition Debate: Weitz, Danto, and Dickie

Li Yi*. Sarantsatsral Tserenchimed
CITI University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar 14201, Mongolia
Email: yiliresearch2025@gmail.com

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Abstract

The mid-to-late twentieth-century Anglo-American analytic aesthetics debate over whether art can be defined is typically narrated as a paradigm shift from anti-essentialism (Weitz) to neo-essentialism (Danto, Dickie). This paper argues that this standard narrative obscures a deeper structure shared by all three parties: an unthematized methodological presupposition of systematically excluding sensible experience from the theoretical framework of art definition. Weitz's conceptual analysis method operationally suspends sensible experience; Danto, despite taking "perceptual indiscernibility" as his starting point, surreptitiously narrows sensibility to perceptible appearance properties, thereby excluding the temporal, bodily, and atmospheric dimensions of perception; Dickie openly replaces sensible experience with institutional relations. These three modes of exclusion—suspension, narrowing, and substitution—form a progressively deepening trajectory. Tracing this trajectory reveals a boundary effect inherent to analytic methodology: what a method illuminates and what it necessarily obscures are two sides of the same coin.

Keywords

Art Definition; Sensible Experience; Methodological Absence; Weitz; Danto; Dickie

Introduction

The Anglo-American analytic aesthetics debate over "whether art can be defined" is typically narrated as a paradigm shift from anti-essentialism to neo-essentialism. In 1956, Morris Weitz, drawing on Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblance," argued that art has no essence and therefore cannot be defined by necessary and sufficient conditions. In 1964, Arthur Danto introduced the "artworld," inaugurating a new path for defining art through non-exhibited features: what distinguishes an artwork from a non-artwork lies not at the perceptual level but in "an atmosphere of artistic theory" and "a knowledge of the history of art." George Dickie subsequently developed a full institutional theory, transferring the foundation of art definition entirely from the perceptual to the socio-institutional level. These three nodes—Weitz (1956), Danto (1964), and Dickie (1974/1984)—constitute the

standard framework for narrating the art definition debate.

This standard narrative is accurate in scholarly-historical terms: it clearly marks the key junctures and the logical direction of the debate's evolution. Yet this paper argues that, precisely beneath this narrative's effectiveness, a deeper structure common to all three positions has been persistently overlooked. Despite their fierce disagreements over whether art has an essence, all three parties share an unthematized methodological presupposition: the systematic exclusion of sensible experience from the theoretical framework of art definition. Weitz's conceptual analysis method reduces art recognition to judgments of similarity between concepts—an operation that, in its very procedure, does not require recourse to sensible experience. Danto, though taking "perceptual indiscernibility" as his argument's point of departure, surreptitiously narrows sensibility to an object's manifest appearance properties, thereby excluding the temporal, bodily, and atmospheric dimensions of perception. Dickie openly places sensibility outside his theoretical purview, substituting institutional relations for perceptual experience in a principled and explicit manner. The specific modes of exclusion differ—suspension, narrowing, substitution—yet their shared consequence is that, in the debate widely regarded as having shaped the fundamental direction of contemporary philosophy of art, those dimensions of artistic experience irreducible to conceptual identification or institutional negotiation have never been treated as independent theoretical variables. They were not refuted. They were simply not asked about.

This paper does not aim to deny the scholarly contributions of analytic aesthetics. Weitz's logical exposure of the fragility of traditional essentialist definitions, Danto's revelation of the irreducible constitutive role of art-historical knowledge, and Dickie's establishment of art's social dimension as a core concern of philosophical inquiry—these are irreversible insights that analytic aesthetics has contributed to the philosophy of art. The aim here is rather to delineate the boundary of analytic methodology: to identify what conceptual analysis illuminates, and what it may simultaneously, and necessarily, obscure. A clear recognition of this boundary is the first condition for any attempt to move beyond it.

1. Weitz: The Suspension of Sensible Experience in Conceptual Analysis

1.1. Family Resemblance and the Verbalization of "Art"

In "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" (1956), Weitz pushed the question of art's definability to the center of contemporary aesthetics with a negative thesis of striking concision. His core argument was that art has no essence and therefore cannot be defined by necessary and sufficient conditions. The theoretical foundation lay in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, specifically the concept of "family resemblance"—the idea that objects falling under a single term need not share a

common feature, being unified merely by overlapping and crisscrossing similarities. Wittgenstein illustrated this in the Philosophical Investigations with the metaphor of a thread: "the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres." Weitz transposed this logic fully into the domain of art. In his account, identifying something as an artwork depends not on its satisfying essential conditions but on its bearing similarities to objects already recognized as art—what he termed "criteria of recognition."

This seemingly moderate claim carried a revolutionary consequence. If art recognition operates through family resemblance rather than shared essence, then all existing art theories—formalist, expressionist, intuitionist—are not merely incomplete but fundamentally misdirected. They seek a common property where none exists. More fundamentally still, art's inherently innovative character reveals and requires its conceptual openness: the continual emergence of new art forms and movements constitutes a historical fact that stands in logical contradiction to any closed definition. As Weitz put it, "the very expansive, adventurous character of art, its constant changes and novel creations, makes it logically impossible to ensure any set of defining properties."

Stephen Davies, reflecting on this debate decades later, noted that Weitz's conception "dramatically turned theorists' attention away from searching for inherent, manifest, defining features of art toward elaborating complex, non-manifest relational properties." The depth of this turn surpasses ordinary scholarly recognition. The very mode of asking "What is art?" was reset. Weitz declared in a programmatic passage: "The primary question is not 'What is art?' but 'What kind of concept is "art"?'" Before analyzing what art is, one must first clarify how the word "art" is used—its grammatical logic, its conditions of application, its mode of operation in ordinary language. The logical type of the concept takes precedence over its substantive content.

It is at precisely this step that analytic philosophy's methodological presupposition entered aesthetics in a silent but resolute manner. When Weitz applied Wittgenstein's method of conceptual analysis to "art," he effectively performed an ontological substitution: transforming "art" from a term pointing to a specific domain of human activity and lived experience into a word amenable to linguistic analysis. This substitution was methodologically legitimate—analytic philosophy is precisely in the business of clarifying concepts by examining their use—but it carried an unthematized consequence that has never been squarely confronted. When "art" is understood primarily as a word, a concept, a category deployed in linguistic practice, artistic experience—that which initially made people feel the need to speak of "art" at all—is relegated to a secondary, derivative position. The conceptual analyst asks: under what conditions is the word "art" correctly applied? She does not ask: what happens to us, in our embodied and temporal existence,

when we encounter an artwork?

Weitz's own language confirms this orientation. "To know what art is," he wrote, "is not to apprehend some manifest or latent essence, but to be able to recognize, describe, and explain those things we call 'art' in virtue of these similarities." The three activities he names—recognize, describe, explain—are all cognitive operations. They presuppose a judging cognitive subject, one who classifies and articulates, not a sensing subject who is touched at the sensory level, engaged at the bodily level, or gradually unfolded in time. The latter phenomena—bodily presence before a painting, the slow ripening of emotional response through sustained attention, the way a sculpture reorganizes one's sense of spatial orientation—do not appear as independent variables in the conceptual-analytic framework. They are treated, at most, as contingent psychological accompaniments to the real business of classification. Weitz never declared "sensibility is unimportant." He simply selected a set of analytic tools inherently incapable of processing sensibility, and the operational procedures of these tools naturally, silently bypassed it. This is suspension in its purest methodological form: not a refutation, not a denial, but a systematic non-engagement built into the choice of method itself.

1.2. Kennick's Warehouse Experiment and Its Methodological Implications

This methodological structure receives a particularly revealing illustration—and more than a mere illustration—in William Kennick's celebrated "warehouse experiment." In 1958, Kennick asked his readers to imagine a vast warehouse filled with every conceivable object: pictures, symphonic scores, machines, tools, boats, statues, vases, anthologies of poetry, furniture, clothing, newspapers, flowers, trees, stones, and musical instruments. Now send someone into this warehouse and ask them to retrieve all the artworks. Though entirely ignorant of any definition of art, the person would accomplish the task without difficulty. Yet if asked to retrieve all objects possessing "significant form" or "expression," they would be utterly at a loss. Kennick's intended conclusion was clear: one needs no definition of art to identify artworks, and traditional aesthetic concepts are useless in the practical business of classification.

What has rarely been noticed is the extent to which the experiment's conclusion is guaranteed in advance by its design. The subject performs a purely classificatory task, relying on nothing more than familiarity with the concept's extension—knowing, from ordinary cultural exposure, what sorts of things are customarily called "artworks." This task can be completed without any sensory attention, emotional response, or bodily engagement whatsoever. It is cool, cognitive, and entirely distant from the texture of lived experience. Imagine, by contrast, if the instruction were changed to "pick out the objects that move you," or "bring me those before which you would willingly spend an hour in silence." The nature of the task would change entirely—from conceptual classification to sensible

judgment—and the resources required for its completion would be precisely those that Kennick's design does not demand: sensibility, attentiveness, emotional openness, the willingness to be affected.

There is also a layer of historical irony worth noting. Kennick proposed the warehouse experiment in 1958, precisely the period during which Duchamp's Fountain was undergoing the critical reassessment that would culminate in the 1960s, eventually establishing it as one of the most influential artworks of the twentieth century. Had readymades like Fountain—or Warhol's Brillo Box, which would appear in 1964—been placed in Kennick's warehouse, the experiment would collapse. Readymades force recourse to concepts precisely because their appearance is indistinguishable from everyday objects. The experiment works, in other words, only because it has preemptively excluded those cases that might render sensibility—or theory—a necessary condition of recognition. The list of objects in the warehouse contains only items whose status as art was, by 1958, culturally settled. No borderline cases. No provocations. The experimental materials silently guarantee the experimental conclusion.

This is not a contingent flaw in an otherwise sound illustration. The warehouse experiment is the methodological presupposition of anti-essentialism made vividly concrete. Anti-essentialism's operative premise is that art recognition is a conceptual classification operation, relying on similarity judgments rather than essential-feature detection. The experiment casts this premise into an intuitive scene, and in doing so, it reveals the premise's hidden cost. In this scene, the structural absence of sensible experience is not a finding to be argued for; it is the unspoken condition of the experiment's intelligibility. The subject succeeds not because sensibility is genuinely irrelevant to art recognition, but because the experimental setup has already rendered it irrelevant by design. Weitz and Kennick thus share a deep methodological structure: the question of "what art is" is shifted from the experiential to the conceptual plane. This shift is logically self-consistent, but it carries an unthematized cost—the sensible encounter with artworks, that temporally and bodily unfolding event irreducible to conceptual identification, was never permitted entry into the analytic framework. It was simply silently bypassed. And it was precisely this silent bypassing that laid down the track along which Danto and Dickie would continue the same exclusion in their own, progressively more sophisticated ways.

2. Danto: Sensibility Narrowed to "Perceptible Appearance Properties"

2.1. The Logical Gap in the "Perceptual Indiscernibility" Argument

Danto's exclusion of sensibility is more concealed and, for this very reason, philosophically more beguiling than Weitz's. Far from avoiding sensibility, Danto pushed it to the very forefront of his argument: his entire philosophy of art proceeds

from the arresting intuition that two perceptually indistinguishable things—Warhol's Brillo Box and a supermarket Brillo carton—can occupy different ontological categories, one art and the other not. This intuition seems to give sensibility the place of honor: it is the starting condition of the entire inquiry. No one in the analytic tradition, it would appear, took sensibility more seriously than Danto did.

Yet it is precisely at this starting point, where sensibility is seemingly given its fullest due, that Danto performs an almost imperceptible conceptual operation. He narrows "sensibility" to "perceptible appearance properties"—the shape, color, size, and material texture that can be visually scanned and compared. Once this narrowing is accomplished, sensibility is stripped of all theoretical capacities beyond appearance identification, and smoothly exits the core territory of art's ontology. The exclusion is accomplished not by ignoring sensibility but by redefining it.

Danto's reasoning can be distilled into three tightly linked steps. Step one is an empirical observation: Warhol's Brillo Box and a supermarket carton are visually indistinguishable, yet one is art and the other is not. Step two is a conceptual inference: since the two objects are indistinguishable in perceptual appearance, they are indistinguishable at the perceptual level—perception itself is powerless to discriminate between artworks and non-artworks. Step three is the theoretical destination: the basis for distinguishing art from non-art must therefore lie entirely beyond perception, in what Danto famously called "an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld."

The argument's formidable persuasiveness—it has held the field for over half a century—depends entirely on the transition from step one to step two. Step one speaks of "perceptible appearance properties": the manifest visual attributes of objects. But in step two, Danto deploys the unqualified, global concept of "the perceptual level." He has, without announcement, equated "perception" with "the visual identification of an object's appearance properties." Under this equation, the inference runs smoothly: if appearance properties cannot discriminate, perception as a whole cannot discriminate. Perception is thereby discharged from any further role in the argument. But the equation itself—perception = visual identification of appearance properties—is a substantive philosophical decision, not a self-evident fact, and Danto never argues for it. Within the analytic tradition, "perception" is indeed tacitly used in this restricted sense—a default inherited from sense-datum theory, systematized by A. J. Ayer, and persisting even after Wittgenstein and Austin's devastating critiques of the sense-datum framework—and this default is so deeply entrenched that it no longer registers as a presupposition at all. It appears simply as what the word "perception" means.

2.2. Three Forms of Perceptual Experience Excluded by the Narrowing

The consequences of this silent equation are far-reaching. Once perception is reduced to instantaneous visual identification of appearance properties, entire dimensions of our actual perceptual encounter with artworks are operationally excluded from the argument's scope—not because they have been examined and found irrelevant, but because the word "perception," as Danto inherits it, does not reach them.

Consider the experience of standing before a Rothko color-field painting. Perception here is not a single, instantaneous scan. The viewer initially registers large, dark, vaguely bounded areas of ochre, deep purple, and dark red. But over time—through the first ten seconds, the first minute, the half hour—chromatic layers begin to emerge that were not visible at first glance; boundaries between adjacent color blocks grow unstable and seem to breathe; hidden tones seep through from beneath the surface; the entire visual field slowly reconfigures itself. In Rothko's own formulation, he wanted the viewer to be "enveloped in color," to feel immersed within a chromatic atmosphere rather than standing outside as a detached inspector of pigment distribution. This gradually unfolding process is not a matter of "seeing new appearance properties." The chemical composition of the paint on the canvas has not changed. What has changed is what the same appearance releases into perception under conditions of sustained, patient attention. The appearance is constant; perception is not. In Danto's analytical framework, this temporal experience has no theoretical location. His model of perception is instantaneous and punctual—it asks what the eye registers at a single moment, and equates that moment's visual intake with the object's measurable properties. Once perception is so reduced, anything that can only arrive gradually, anything whose very mode of givenness is temporal, falls outside the concept of "perception" altogether. It is not refuted. It is rendered invisible to the analytic lens.

This filtering extends further, into domains even more fundamental to artistic experience. Artworks are not purely visual objects—they occupy space, enter into scalar relations with the viewer's body, and activate dimensions of perception that involve the whole sensorimotor system. When one walks through Richard Serra's monumental steel curves, the work's primary sensible effect is not a set of visual properties registered by a stationary eye. The body is compelled to move—to enter, to navigate, to alter its orientation in response to looming and receding planes of iron. The felt sense of gravitational threat, the disorientation of one's habitual spatial coordinates, the muscular awareness of one's own scale relative to the work's mass—these are not "interpretations" added to perception after the fact. They are perception itself, occurring through and as the body's engaged movement. Martin Seel has described this dimension in terms of the "self-referentiality of perception": in perceiving an artwork, the subject simultaneously perceives their own state of being-in-perception, their own bodily condition as affected by what they encounter. Danto's framework reduces the body to a pair of immobile eyes,

retaining only the function of identifying visual object-properties while filtering out everything that belongs to the body's spatial and kinetic engagement with the work. A pair of eyes alone cannot distinguish between two Brillo boxes identical in appearance—this much Danto has demonstrated conclusively. But when an entire body is engaged in a work's spatial presence, reducing perception to the isolated visual organ is itself a radical abstraction. And this abstraction, crucially, is never argued for in Danto's argument; it is simply the unspoken shape of the concept he deploys.

A third dimension, philosophically the most resistant to the appearance-properties model, is the atmospheric quality of perception. In certain artistic encounters, there arises a felt quality—an affective tonality, a mood-infused presence—that cannot be assigned to any determinate property of the object, yet is equally not a merely subjective projection. Before Gerhard Richter's gray abstractions, one may experience an unlocatable "stillness within indifference," a hushed and strangely neutral emotional climate that suffuses the entire viewing situation. Before Francis Bacon's screaming popes and distorted figures, one may undergo an equally unlocatable "shudder within laceration," a quality of raw, exposed affect that pervades the perceptual field without being traceable to any single isolable feature of the canvas. Gernot Böhme's atmospheric aesthetics has provided the most sustained philosophical treatment of such phenomena, conceptualizing them as "quasi-objects" that occupy an intermediate ontological zone—they are neither objective properties of things nor subjective projections of the mind, yet they are undeniably there, genuinely experienced, spatially present in a manner that defies the subject-object dichotomy. In Danto's appearance-properties model, such atmospheric experiences have no possible point of entry. They cannot be located as "properties of the object"—Richter's canvas does not have "stillness" as a color, Bacon's figures do not have "shudder" as a contour—and the framework provides no other ontological position in which to place them. They are not assessed and found wanting. They are structurally excluded from consideration by the very grammar of the model.

2.3. Limit Reasoning and Its Methodological Presupposition

The precise mechanism of Danto's exclusion now stands revealed. He did not ignore sensibility—this is precisely what makes his argument so difficult to detect as an exclusion. He gave sensibility an explicit and prominent role. But he simultaneously gave it a definition that had already been contracted, without announcement or justification, to the visual identification of appearance properties. He then assigned this contracted sensibility a task it was guaranteed to fail—discriminating between two objects identical in those very properties—and on the basis of this failure, he declared that sensibility had exhausted its theoretical contribution. The argument works, but only within the confines of the unargued equation with which it began.

The deeper structural issue is that Danto's reasoning is a form of limit reasoning. He selects a highly artificial special case—two objects perceptually identical in appearance—in which the multidimensional richness of sensible experience has been artificially compressed into a single axis of comparison, and then infers from this special case a general conclusion about sensibility's incapacity in art's ontology. But from "sensibility does not discriminate in this particular, artificially constrained case," it does not logically follow that "sensibility does not and cannot discriminate in any case"—unless one has already, in advance, restricted "sensibility" to mean "the capacity to identify appearance properties." And this restriction, as the preceding analysis has shown, simply fails to describe what actually occurs in most artistic experience. Most encounters with art—whether traditional painting and sculpture or contemporary installation, video, and performance—do not operate under the condition of "two perceptually identical objects, one art and one not." They operate under the condition of "this singular thing, here, manifesting itself to me in this way, and I am being affected by it."

A crucial qualification is necessary here. This paper does not claim that "because Danto narrowed sensibility, his entire theoretical edifice is wrong." Its claim is more limited but also more precise: Danto's inference from "perceptual indiscernibility" to "art's ontology does not reside in perception" depends on a restriction of the concept of "sensibility" that has never received independent justification. This restriction is nowhere announced as an explicit premise. It is embedded in the word "perception" as it circulates within the analytic tradition—embedded so deeply that its status as a presupposition rather than a lexical given has rarely, if ever, been recognized. Once this presupposition is brought to light, Danto's argument loses its appearance of deductive closure. It can no longer prevent us from acknowledging the indispensable contribution of "the artworld" while simultaneously reopening the question of what role sensible experience—in its full temporal, bodily, and atmospheric dimensionality—might play in the ontology of art. This is the theoretical space opened by the recognition of a methodological boundary.

3. Dickie: The Principled Substitution of Institutional Relations for Sensible Experience

3.1. The Logic of "Conferral": From Perception to Institution

With Weitz, sensibility was suspended—the method of conceptual analysis simply did not require its presence. With Danto, sensibility was narrowed—redefined as appearance identification and then declared, on the basis of its failure at a rigged task, to be theoretically irrelevant. With Dickie, sensibility met its most forthright and unambiguous fate: it was replaced. Dickie's institutional theory does not unconsciously overlook sensible experience, nor does it surreptitiously redefine it. It openly and systematically substitutes socio-institutional relations for any function that sensible experience might have been thought to perform in the definition of art.

In Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis (1974), Dickie mounted a systematic demolition of traditional aesthetic experience theory. His core argument is devastating in its simplicity and reach. Any attempt to locate the defining common feature of artworks in perceptible properties, or in some special quality of aesthetic experience, necessarily fails when confronted with the readymade. Duchamp's Fountain and an ordinary urinal exhibit no perceptually differentiating differences. Nor does the experience of viewing Fountain—whatever it may be—differ in kind from the experience of viewing any other pleasing or intriguing artifact. From these observations, Dickie draws a conclusion more radical than Danto's. Danto had excluded perceptual properties from art's essence while leaving open the possibility that perceptual experience might still play some role. Dickie forecloses even this residual opening. Not only are perceptual appearances insufficient; the very concept of "aesthetic experience" is bankrupt and deserves no place in the definition of art. If "art" is to have a unified definition, its foundation must be sought neither in perception nor in experience at all. It must be sought in the social fact of institutional authorization.

On this basis, Dickie developed his formal definition across three major revisions, culminating in the 1984 formulation in The Art Circle: "A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2) a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of the artworld." The logic is strikingly spare. "Artifactuality" is the sole external constraint, and even this constraint is minimal—a piece of driftwood displayed in a gallery counts as an artifact by virtue of its having been used as an artistic medium. Everything else depends on "conferral," an institutional act performed by authorized agents. The entire burden of the definition shifts from "what properties does the object possess?" to "what have the relevant social actors done with respect to it?"

"Conferral" thus becomes the theoretical keystone of Dickie's entire edifice. And it is on precisely this concept that Richard Wollheim, in Art and Its Objects, mounted a challenge that has never been fully answered. Do those who confer artistic status on artifacts have adequate reasons for doing so, Wollheim asked, or are their actions valid simply by virtue of their institutional position? This question pushes Dickie into a structural dilemma that exposes the cost of his principled exclusion of sensibility. If conferrers have adequate reasons—if an object possesses certain features or qualities that merit the status of art—then "conferral" is merely the formal acknowledgment of features that already belong to the object. The definition would then implicitly depend on those features, and Dickie would be returned, against his own intentions, to the traditional essentialist path. To specify what those "adequate reasons" might be, and whether they could be articulated without reference to sensible experience, is a task Dickie never undertook. The alternative horn is no more comfortable. If conferrers require no adequate reasons—if their

status alone suffices to confer artistic status—then the artworld's authority is definitionally constitutive of art, and the argument collapses into a flat circularity: something is an artwork because certain people, by virtue of their position in the artworld, say it is.

For the purposes of this paper, the decisive point is not which horn of the dilemma Dickie might ultimately choose, but the structural fact that, on either horn, sensible experience has no independent theoretical position. If adequate reasons are required, sensible features of the object might in principle be among those reasons—but Dickie never explored this possibility, and his entire argumentative momentum pushes away from the perceptual. If no adequate reasons are required, the definition is entirely a matter of social power, and the sensible encounter between perceiver and artwork carries no theoretical weight at all. Wollheim's critique was directed at the logical circularity of the institutional theory, but the structural consequence of that circularity is the complete evacuation of sensible experience from the definitional space. In a framework entirely occupied by institutional relations and acts of conferral, the encounter between a perceiving subject and an arresting artwork is, from the perspective of the theory, a contingent epiphenomenon. The definition has no need of it.

3.2. A Structural Comparison of the Three Absences

Viewed synoptically, analytic aesthetics' half-century debate over the definition of art executed a complete and internally coherent trajectory with respect to sensible experience. This trajectory is not a mere chronological sequence of three independent positions. It is a logical progression in which each stage deepens and radicalizes the exclusion established by its predecessor.

Weitz's "suspension" is the gentlest and, for this very reason, the most easily overlooked form of exclusion. His method of conceptual analysis is constitutively oriented toward the conditions of word use, logical grammar, and the structure of classificatory practices. In this framework, "art" appears first and foremost as a word whose pattern of correct application is to be mapped; that there exists a domain of lived experience to which this word points is acknowledged, but this acknowledgment generates no methodological requirement to examine that experience directly. The tools of conceptual analysis—the examination of criteria, the mapping of family resemblances, the testing of borderline cases—do not, in their own operation, demand any appeal to the texture of sensible life. Sensibility is thus placed in an invisible bracket: not denied, not argued against, simply never called upon. Its suspension is an artifact of methodological choice rather than an argued conclusion, and its invisibility is proportionate to the seamlessness with which the method operates within its own terms.

Danto's "narrowing" is more complex and, in its complexity, more instructive. Unlike Weitz, Danto appears at first to grant sensibility a position of genuine theoretical

prominence. The perceptual indiscernibility of Warhol's Brillo Box and its supermarket counterpart is not an incidental example but the very engine of the argument. Yet the "perception" Danto invokes has undergone a silent definitional contraction before it ever enters the argumentative arena. It has been restricted, without announcement, to the instantaneous visual identification of an object's manifest properties. This contracted perception is then tasked with an operation it cannot but fail—discriminating between objects identical in precisely those properties—and its failure is presented as a discovery rather than as the predictable outcome of the restriction that preceded it. The argument's rhetoric of "letting the facts speak" conceals the extent to which the relevant facts have been pre-selected by a definitional decision that was never itself subjected to scrutiny. Danto's exclusion of sensibility is for this reason the most difficult to detect: it wears the mask of an acknowledgment, and the mask fits so well that the exclusion passes for rigorous philosophical honesty.

Dickie's "substitution," by contrast, requires no unmasking because it wears no mask at all. The institutional theory openly, almost programmatically, replaces sensible experience with a mechanism of social conferral. Dickie does not argue that sensibility is irrelevant; he argues that the entire category of "aesthetic experience" is theoretically bankrupt and that the only viable path to a unified definition of art leads through the description of institutional structures. Sensibility is not suspended within invisible brackets, nor is it narrowed and then dismissed. It has an explicit, named replacement: the act of conferral performed by authorized agents within the artworld. Whatever "appreciation" might involve is a matter for the institutional framework to determine; it is not a constraint upon the definition but an output of the institutional system. The exclusion has here become so complete that it no longer requires even the appearance of engagement with what it excludes. It has become a starting point rather than a conclusion.

The progression from Weitz through Danto to Dickie thus traces a curve of deepening methodological exclusion: at each stage, the departure of sensibility from the theoretical framework becomes more thorough, more explicit, and—paradoxically—less in need of argumentative justification. By the time of Dickie, the exclusion has hardened into a methodological given, a feature of the philosophical landscape so taken for granted that its status as an exclusion is no longer visible from within the tradition that produced it.

4. Conclusion

The concept of "sensibility" employed in this paper is distinguished from "sense perception" as typically discussed in analytic aesthetics; it approximates the holistic bodily experience understood within the phenomenological and atmospheric-aesthetic traditions. In terms of theoretical sources, the "temporal" dimension traces to Bergson's concept of duration as applied to aesthetic experience,

the "bodily" dimension derives from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, and the "atmospheric" dimension draws on Böhme's atmospheric aesthetics. This paper does not attempt a rigorous synthesis of these three thinkers, but employs their insights for descriptive purposes—to reveal the dimensions of experience that Danto's "perceptible appearance" model leaves unaccounted for.

In the half-century analytic debate over "whether art can be defined," sensible experience—that living, temporal, bodily, and atmospheric dimension of the encounter with artworks—underwent a persistent and systematic exclusion. Three distinct forms of this exclusion, corresponding to three major positions in the debate, have been identified. Weitz suspended it through a method whose operational procedures never required recourse to sensibility. Danto narrowed it to perceptible appearance properties and, on the basis of the narrowed concept's failure at an impossible task, argumentatively declared it irrelevant. Dickie substituted institutional relations for its entire theoretical function, rendering sensibility a dependent variable of the artworld's conferral mechanisms. The trajectory from suspension through narrowing to substitution is a trajectory of deepening exclusion: each stage more thorough than the last, each stage less in need of explicit argument, until the exclusion ceases to appear as an exclusion at all and becomes simply the way philosophy of art is done.

That this shared presupposition remained undetected for so long is attributable precisely to its silent methodological form. The core tools of analytic aesthetics—conceptual clarification, logical reconstruction, and institutional description—are not neutral observational lenses. They are precision-engineered to capture certain things: the conditions of correct concept use, the logical architecture of arguments, the distribution of roles within social systems. And their very precision, their power to illuminate what falls within their designed range, is what renders invisible that which falls outside it. The exclusion of sensibility is, in the final analysis, a demonstration of a boundary effect inherent to methodology itself: what a method can bring to light and the shadows it necessarily casts are two aspects of a single instrument.

Acknowledging this boundary does not entail denying the genuine achievements secured within it. Weitz's exposure of the logical fragility of traditional essentialist definitions permanently altered the burden of proof in the philosophy of art. Danto's "artworld" concept revealed the irreducible and non-eliminable role of art-historical knowledge and theoretical context in constituting the identity of contemporary artworks. Dickie's institutional theory, whatever unresolved difficulties attend its concept of conferral, firmly established art's social dimension—its character as collective human practice rather than isolated individual creation—as an inescapable theme for philosophical reflection. These are permanent contributions. This paper has sought to identify the methodological cost at which they were achieved: in the debate widely regarded as having set the agenda for contemporary

philosophy of art, the body's presence in perception, the unfolding of affective response in time, and the permeation of atmosphere in space—dimensions of the encounter with art that are as immediate as they are ineliminable—were never admitted into the theoretical framework as independent variables. They were not refuted; they were methodologically screened out.

This paper's own diagnostic work has proceeded at the level of conceptual analysis: its method has been to examine the logical structure of existing arguments and to identify the unthematized presuppositions on which those arguments depend. This is a deliberate methodological restraint. Retrieving sensible experience from the blind spot into which analytic methodology has deposited it, and establishing it as a theoretical dimension that can no longer be legitimately bypassed in discussions of art definition—this is the task the paper has sought to accomplish. Whether, on this cleared ground, a positive account of art definition can be constructed that gives due weight to the testimony of sensible life—drawing on resources from the phenomenological tradition, from atmospheric aesthetics, and from non-Western traditions of reflection on artistic experience—is a question that lies beyond the scope of the present inquiry. But it is a question that can now, at least, be asked. And this is the space that the recognition of a methodological boundary opens. To see the boundary clearly is the first condition of the possibility of crossing it.

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