

Artistic Conversations: Artworks and Personhood

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This essay explores claims made frequently by artists, critics, and philosophers that artworks bear personifying traits. Rejecting the notion that artists possess the Pygmalion-like power to bring works of art to life, the article looks seriously at how parallels may exist between the ontological structures of the artwork and human personhood. The discussion focuses on Arthur Danto's claim that the "artworld" itself manifests properties that are an imprint of the historical representation of the "world." These "world" representations are implicitly embodied in the artist's style. The "world" that is stamped on the people of a historical period entails a point of view that influences how they might act, something like the logic that guides a conversation. This "conversational" logic is also extant in the artworks that artists of a given period create. This analysis of Danto's account of how people are connected to their world clarifies Danto's assertions that a parallel structure of personification in the artwork and the human exists. It also explains his claims that artworks themselves appear to be in a kind of dialogue.

Keywords: Arthur Danto, personification of art, artistic dialogue, artistic agency.

In this essay, I discuss Danto's account of the human person and how it is essential to understanding the notion of embodied meaning he employs in his definition of the artwork. The essay begins with the question of what Danto means when he suggests that artworks have some sort of personification. Brian Soucek raises the question in his essay "Personifying art," which examines the question of personification in art, juxtaposing the positions of those who are sympathetic to those who are not. He suggests that by examining who we are as humans such that we personify art, we find a third way to look at the dilemma. This essay follows Soucek's lead but goes beyond the solution he points to, focusing on what Danto wrote on the human person and its relation to art. Scattered throughout what can seem to be obscure offhand com-

ments, Danto's account of the person is not fully articulated. Nonetheless, Danto's references to the human as a being in a "sentential state"¹ and the account of *ens representans* he gives in *The Body/Body Problem* and *Connections to the World* together provide a consistent account of the person. My conclusion is that in Danto's view, it is not the person that bestows a kind of personification on the artwork. Rather, the ontological structure he refers to as our *world*,² which gives us a point of view, is also at play in the creation of the artwork. Through "transitivity," the activity of the artist imparts perspective, as "an ontological category," to the artwork, thereby giving it some of the same properties of personhood that we as humans also possess.

Discussing the essays he wrote in *The Body/Body Problem*, Danto notes "how frequently I drew upon analogies between human beings and artworks, preeminently paintings and photographs, to clarify issues in the metaphysics of embodiment and of truth" (Danto 1999a: ix). Indeed, the metaphoric references made throughout his work are too frequent to mention here. The intensional relationship of the metaphoric reference of artworks to people brings to light a parallel in the common way that humans are related to art and to other persons. "There is something like a parallel between what one might call the metaphysics of persons and the metaphysics of artworks" (Danto 2012: 294). Soucek (2008) notes Danto's use of the analogy of the personification of art when discussing forgeries. In "Moving pictures," Danto asks if it would matter if a recently widowed woman, whose husband had died unexpectedly, were promised a clone of her husband, an exact replacement, in, let's suppose, three weeks. Should she love the clone as the original? Danto argues that it would matter, and the relationship of the artwork to a mere object and the artwork to the forgery are parallel. Something like the soul of the work would be missing (Danto 1999b: 212–214). "An artwork is then a physical object with whatever in the philosophy of art corresponds to the soul in the philosophy of the person" (Danto 2012: 294).

In his essay, Soucek (2008) examines two positions, one, like Danto's, attributing something to the artwork that is also in the person, and the other, representing those who argue that though personification is understandable, any attribution of "sentience, or self-reflection, or agency" to the artwork is something akin to a category mistake, and

¹ "Let me recklessly speak now of men as being in certain *sentential states*...I shall think of sentential states as *internal* to men ...in predicating 'believes-that-*s*' of [a man], we are asserting that [a man] is in a sentential state" (Danto 1968: 89). What "we essentially are is a certain representation of the world: a person in a deep sense is the way he represents the world" (Danto 1973: 22 n26 on 201).

² Danto does not necessarily use world in the same manner across all of his texts. Here, I will italicize *world* when it means a representation of the actual world. I will refer to the actual world as the world. Italicized, *world* will be a representation of world. A *world* representation, as I use it, will also refer to the representation of the (actual) world.

hence false (230). Ultimately, Soucek rejects both positions, opting for a third path that examines what kind of persons we are such that we personify art. He concludes that “personification of art is not ultimately about art at all. It is rather about us—about persons” (238). Soucek poses a challenge to Danto’s notion of personhood in art, raising the question as to where art’s power—to speak to us, to transform us, even to evoke change in us—comes from, suggesting we look inward, not to art itself. This approach addresses the problem of how or whether art can be ‘transformed’ by the artist. If we were to use Hume’s law, which we might formulate as ‘there is nothing in the conclusion that is not in the premise’, it is hard to see how something could be added to the artwork which was not transferred from the artist, and if that is the case, do we have the Pygmalion-like power to produce a thing that entails personifying attributes through artistic means? Kant’s response to Hume’s laws was to recognize the active role the human mind plays in constructing the world we experience. In many senses, I’m very sympathetic to this approach. But this is not how Danto formulates the relation of the person to the artwork; also, he does not look to the inner self as the source of art’s ‘personification’. Thus, to dismiss his approach as a category error would be a mistake.

To defend Danto’s notion that a parallel between “the metaphysics of persons and the metaphysics of artworks” exists, I bring attention to the following facets of Danto’s philosophy: (a) Humans are representational beings, and the representations of our world that we receive are historically situated; (b) Danto sees little difference between inner and outer consciousness, except that individuals do not have the advantage of privileged access to their own inner states (since one can discern them about as well from an external perspective); (c) the representations that are our essence are, in some cases, akin to texts, vehicles of understanding, and can be embodied in mediums besides the flesh; (d) the mind may be like a text, and along these lines, Danto (1999a) speculates “if we are, so to speak, a text made flesh then a beginning might be made in addressing certain problems concerning the identity and unity of a person against the model of the unity and identity of a text” (220).³

To better understand Danto’s position, it is helpful to examine how Danto may have been influenced by Nietzsche, who Lydia Goehr (2008) holds was his most significant predecessor (84, 152). I contend that the influence of Hegel in Danto’s work is often overstated, and that of Nietzsche or Sartre is as often overlooked. Looking at Danto’s philosophy of art within the context of his non-aesthetic writings shows it is a mistake to read him as holding that humans give art agency or personification, that this is something *we* do and that *we are aware* that we do it. Artists do have skill and certain intangible attributes that are manifest through their style, but what gives the artwork personification, or

³ For an in-depth discussion of these points see (Snyder 2018: 147–167).

perhaps even agency, are the sentential structures that give us agency. These are fundamentally the same structures. Danto's interpretation of Nietzsche cannot and should not be understood as his own system. Nonetheless, Danto tells us that he has "quarried" the works of thinkers on whom he has written, incorporating their thoughts into his own philosophy (Danto 1975: 12; LLP reply to Rush 480),⁴ and I think this holds true here.

One reason that Danto is often miscategorized as a Hegelian, outside of his frequent praise of Hegel's aesthetic theory and his apparent adoption of Hegel's end-of-art theory, is that in his effort to overcome the mind/body problem, he shares Hegel's aim of overcoming transcendent metaphysics, a task Hegel has in common with Kant. Though his approach is more ontological than Kant's epistemological project, Danto strives to 'eliminate' Cartesian dualism by reducing, in some manner, the significance of the inner-subjective state that Descartes uses to ground his own existence as one separate from the external, material world. In the end, Danto recognizes that the dualism cannot be completely eliminated, and he posits a sort of Spinozistic-materialism in response to Descartes, arguing that there are two aspects of material existence: there is material that represents and material that does not (Danto 1999a: 192, LLP 60–61). He refers to this as "representational materialism."⁵

I once encountered the argument that one need not know anything about the human subject in Danto's philosophy of art. I could not disagree more. Though Danto clearly eschews the Cartesian notion of inner subject often employed by Continental philosophers, in order to support his own answer to the mind/body problem, he replaces the Cartesian subject with a 'thinner' subject that in my estimation is outside the mainstream of philosophical thought.⁶ The thinner notion of the person, that Danto refers to as *res* or *ens representans*,⁷ is, I hope to show, the key to understanding Danto's philosophy at a deeper level.⁸ In fact, in my assessment, his philosophy of art cannot be fully under-

⁴ The following abbreviation is used in this essay: LLP for Auxier, R. E. and Lewis E. H. (eds.) 2013. This volume contains essays by multiple authors with responses from or an essay by Danto. When cited, if the authorial context is not clear, the author's name will be inserted after the abbreviation. Otherwise, assume that the reference is to Danto.

⁵ Danto was a student of Susan Langer, who was an anti-reductionist materialist. Danto's representational materialism is likely a continuation of Langer's ontology.

⁶ Danto's entry on the "Person" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* might foreshadow his position, especially in his suggestion that, "Persons may indeed, then, be ontologically primitive as "wavicles" (not waves and not particles, but both together) are perhaps physically primitive."

⁷ Danto appears to use these terms interchangeably.

⁸ Danto's notion of the person seems to be influenced more by Eastern philosophy, perhaps drawing on Nietzsche, and according to Randall Auxier, Danto's early interest in Zen.

stood without understanding his account of the human as a representational being. In *The Body/Body Problem* Danto (1999a) writes:

There is a general problem of how our representations are embodied, presumably in our central nervous system, but I have been struck, in reading through the essays that compose this volume, by how frequently I drew upon analogies between human beings and artworks, preeminently paintings and photographs, to clarify issues in the metaphysics of embodiment and of truth. In the past some years I have written extensively on the concept of art, but what these essays make vivid is the degree to which that concept has dominated the way I have thought philosophically about any topic, and this has set my writing apart from much of the philosophical mainstream. But that can be explained, I think, through the fact that art is typically thought to be marginal to philosophy, a kind of ontological frill, whereas it is in my view absolutely central to thinking about subjects—especially subjects having to do with our own philosophical nature, to which the pertinence of the concept of art seems initially remote ... [These essays] project a single, evolving conception of human beings, considered as beings who represent as *ens representans* with works of art simultaneously being understood as materially embodied representations. (ix–x)

As does Hegel, Danto holds that art and philosophy are intertwined in human experience, and they both strive, in their philosophies, to overcome the subject-object dualism defining the mind/body problem. This, given Danto's claim that art has ended, leads readers to the conclusion that there must be a Hegelian reading of Danto. But even if influenced early on by Hegel, as many have noted, Danto takes a fundamentally different position, and his solution to the mind/body problem in many ways moves closer to Nietzsche's thought as a "body/body" problem. Danto speculates that the representational subject lives in a "sentential state," in which "belief is a relationship between a person and a sentence" (LLP 32). But humans are not the only material that represents; hence, examining this connection more closely will yield a better understanding of his notion of art's 'personification'.

My hope is not so much to urge more philosophers to become aestheticians, much less philosophers of history, but to make plain what we sacrifice in our ultimate self-understanding if we think of art and of history as anything but fundamental to how we are made, and how our bodies must therefore be in order for this to be true. (Danto 1999a: x)

Danto (1999a) had planned to write a book on *ens representans* (15), but confessed he never had the energy. Still, he sees representations as the unifying theme of his five major works⁹ (LLP 29–30), and pushing the implications of his thinner, perhaps Zen-like, notion of the person leads to a far richer understanding of his theory of art. It also reveals a stream of thought that points to what I see as a radically different

⁹ Danto (1999a) writes that he was inspired by Santayana's five-volume *Life of Reason* to write a system of philosophy in five volumes; *Analytical Philosophy of History*, *Analytical Philosophy of Knowledge*, *Analytical Philosophy of Action*, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, and *The Body/Body Problem*, are the results of this endeavor (14–15).

account of humans and their art, and though it goes well beyond the scope of this essay, it could open the way to new theological insights.

1. *Style is the man*: The body/body problem

In the sections that follow, I briefly discuss how the basic action may have been used as an anti-dualistic tool; Danto's account of the person as representation and text, to understand the relation of the human to the artworld¹⁰ and how it emerges without the 'dialogue' of an institutional theory of art; and his account of inner and outer consciousness in representation, communication, and language, which spells out how art can transfigure an audience without the artist's self-reflection or a dialogue among artist and audience.¹¹

Danto tells us that the basic action, in its early manifestations, was an attempt to overcome the mind/body problem. Statements like 'I am my hand, I am my body' went with the idea that the basic action could bridge the gap Descartes opened between the mind and body. Sartre (1992) wrote "The point of view of pure knowledge is contradictory; there is only the point of view of engaged knowledge. [Thus,] knowledge and action are only two abstract aspects of an original, concrete relation" (407). Sartre's anti-Cartesian claim was part of a broader movement that led thinkers to believe the body must hold properties common to the mind that evoked action in it. It was hoped that if the causal gap between the mind and the body could be filled, perhaps the "cognitive gap" would follow too. The basic action was one of the key threads of this search for unity of knowledge and action (Danto 1999a: 66–67): "knowledge- and action-ascriptions bridge the space between representations and objects" (Danto 1973: 22). But the basic action could not fulfill this promise, and Danto (1999a) lost interest in it, considering it a failure (51, 80). The problem, as the locus of the mind/body problem shifted, did not go away. "By closing the gap between our minds and our bodies, we open a gap between our bodies, on the one side, and mere bodies on the other" (64). Danto's solution was to rearticulate the mind/body problem as the body/body problem (LLP Auxier xxvii), not necessarily solving the problem, but doing away with philosophical is-

¹⁰ The "artworld" is a term Danto coined in 1964: "to see something as art requires something the eye cannot de[s]cry—an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld" (580). It should not be confused with the common usage of the 'art world' referring simply to artists, art historians, curators, etcetera who are involved with or make a profession in the 'world of art'. Danto does not always use a single word to refer to the "artworld," but in this essay, when I use a single word, it refers to Danto's conceptual structure; when I use two words, "art world," I refer to the people involved in the arts.

¹¹ The dialogue among artists, curators and audience (the art world) might be appropriate to what George Dickie referred to as the institutional theory of art. Nonetheless, Danto considered the institutional theory of art incapable of providing a rule that differentiates visible from non-visible attributes of art.

sues bound to dual substances. This returns us to Danto's account of representational realism:

there are two kinds of matter in the universe, matter that is representational and matter that is not. It endorses a metaphysics that holds the world to be such that parts of it rise to represent itself, including, of course, the further fact that those parts not only represent the world but represent that they do so. Representational beings—ourselves and animals—are like openings in the darkness, like lights going on, illuminating the world and themselves at once. (1989: 244)

Danto's approach, as I understand it, is unique. Danto always maintained that he remained within the fold of analytical philosophy. Working broadly within the analytical framework of the philosophy of language, he recognized, with Nietzsche, that it is an illusion that language corresponds directly to the world.

I saw [Nietzsche's] work as anticipating Russell and Wittgenstein...Most of what appealed to me in Nietzsche was his essential insight that philosophers had tended to think that if language is to fit the world, it had to do so like a tight garment, matching the articulation of the human body. To every subject in a sentence, there must be a substance in the world to which it corresponds as if, he says in more [than] one place, the lightning is something separate from the flashing. This is grammatical superstition. (LLP reply to Andina 512)

Though Danto did not agree with Nietzsche that there is no world to which language could correspond, his choice of representation as the basic orientation of his philosophy reflected the recognition of this "grammatical superstition." In broad strokes, the argument Danto lays out in *Analytical Philosophy of Knowledge* for the representation having an advantage over descriptively oriented linguistic philosophy goes something like this. An example of a representation is 'x believes p'. A truth value cannot be ascribed to this if one does not know whether or not p corresponds to some state in the world. Danto circumvents the problem of knowing whether p is true or not by viewing the state of belief as itself true, the representation is true, insofar as 'x believes p is true', independent of p corresponding to anything in the world. Thus, the belief, as a representation, is intensional. Its truth as a belief does not rely on there being any extensional objects, or objects in the world that refer to it. For Danto, our entire *world*, as we understand it, is a representation, and its correspondence to something in the world is not guaranteed; because we believe our representation of the world, our *world*, to be true, we never question it. It still holds, nonetheless, that our survival chances are increased as our representation of the world approaches the 'actual' world.

The representation is not descriptive. Danto chose the representation as the focus of his philosophical system because it was prior to description, description being too closely tied to an inclination for truth (Danto 1968; LLP 29–30). The truth itself was not so much of a problem, but philosophical systems that strive for a strong correspondence the-

ory of truth often become trapped in their inflexibility. Danto's choice allows for a more pliable antifoundationalist approach better suited to creating definitions, which in many cases are prior to truth statements. Without determining which parts of language refer to which parts of the world, we can have no truth. Representations need not be true, insofar as they correspond to something in the world. This works well for art. But this does not mean representations are against truth; historical narratives are representations, which, unlike art, strive to convince us of their veracity (LLP Ankersmit 395–397, 415).

The sentential state is one in which someone believes something. Representations are sentential states of sorts; hence, if we are representational beings, we are also sentential beings (Danto 1999a: 27, 87–88; Danto 1968: ix, 86–97). Danto, recognizing that there is no knowledge outside of our frame of reference, inserts the subject, a sentential being, into the frame of his philosophical system. He must draw a line, though, between material that represents and material that does not represent—humans and animals being those that do.¹² “As far as the mind-body problem goes, the view I am advancing is that the body is itself sententially structured. Perhaps, even probably, what is sententially structured is nervous tissue, which is perhaps all that neurophilosophy requires to vindicate its chief insight” (Danto 1989: 243). He also makes clear that the sentential structure, which forms the representations that are our “essence” (Danto 1999a: 203), is not found simply in flesh. “It is the same proposition whether written or spoken or believed, whether it is made up of sound waves, layers of ink, or nervous tissue” (Danto 1989: 243; see Danto 1968: 95). Representations, as Danto refers to them, encompass a broad array of communicative devices. “Propositions, pictures, names, signs, ideas, appearances—for to be an appearance is to be an appearance of something, leaving it always open if the thing itself really appears or not—not to mention impressions, concepts, and images, are all vehicles of understanding as I mean for that expression to be used” (Danto 1989: 50–51; see Danto 1968: 160–161). Danto considers these vehicles to be representations and the “central components of philosophical thought,” irrespective of where they are “housed” (Danto 1989: 51). So, the line between *ens representans* and things that represent is blurred at this point, since he sees no fundamental difference in regard to a representation's content and how it is embodied (Danto 1999a: 91–92). Still, not all representations are as we are. A gas gauge represents some truth about the world if functioning properly, but “the representation must modify the *ens representans* in some way other than that which consists simply in having the representation” (Danto 1989: 251).

¹² Danto mentions with some frequency the idea that animals, like us, are representing beings. In other texts, he makes frequent references to the representational capacities of dogs. That said, humans are creatures that live in history, and animals do not (Danto 1989: 273).

According to Danto's account of representational materialism, the human body exists in two aspects: the basic biological mechanism and the part that lives in history and represents. "We are within the world under the laws of causation and outside the world under the laws of representation" (1999a: 93). The human that is the body is the human that is the person (I am my body), but the one cannot be reduced to the other. As sentential beings, we are, to use a metaphor he often employs, words made flesh (143, 222). One consequence of the move away from Cartesian mind/body dualism—which posited an inner subjectivity such that the thinking subject had a special advantage when it came to knowing her own interiority—is that in its material orientation, the inner realm of *ens representans* loses much, if not all, of its significance. It is not so much that there is no interior; rather, we manifest our interiority externally because we are not aware of it as such. Because *ens representans* has no privileged access to its own inner states, more can be discerned from the outer perspective, for "we do not occupy our *own* interiors" (Danto 2007: 339).

This leveling of inner and outer plays a role in Danto's theory (1) in that if one were to gain access to another's interior, one would gain little and (2) given (1) when the historian forms a narrative statement¹³ referring to a past era, 'understanding' other minds from an external perspective is not a problem. (1) Regarding the dualism of mind and body, Danto speculates that if we could actually monitor the neurochemical activity of our brains as we laugh, tell secrets, or philosophize, we would get little from this that we didn't get otherwise (Danto 1999a: 28). More than once, he discusses an example used by Leibniz, who asks, what if we created a machine that could "think, feel and have perception." If the machine were large enough, we could step into it, witnessing thought, feeling, and perception as it happens. But, he supposes, it would likely just resemble the inner workings of a mill. Would this tell us more about the inner human side of what it is to think, feel, and perceive? We may learn more about how the mind functions, but little more about what it actually is to feel. If we could enter into another person, as Leibniz's mill, Danto doesn't really think we'd get much more than we would from talking to people, knowing them, reading their letters, or even perhaps following them on Facebook or Twitter (Danto 1989: 255–256; Danto 2013: 93–94).

¹³ According to Danto, when narrative-historical models are employed, the narrative structure is useful only when looking back in time. Thus, any attempt to project on the future a historical model that assumes a specific account of history as a whole is not prediction but "prophecy" (Danto 2007: 9). Danto's narrative philosophy of history focuses on what he calls narrative sentences. Danto uses the following example to explain the narrative sentence. In 1618, it could not have been stated that 'The Thirty Years' War has begun today.' Only from the perspective of future historians, after the war's completion in 1648, could one make reference to The Thirty Years' War (Danto 2007: 152).

(2) In terms of other minds, and other minds of other times, the issue is somewhat more complex since it involves presuppositions concerning the structure of narrative sentences. Because our representation manifests how we understand and causally interact with the world, we live in it unaware. We can be aware of another's representation of the world, especially if it differs from our own, but of our own, we cannot know it as we use it. We would have to become a new self, perhaps looking back at the self of another time, to apprehend it. So the outer perspective, again, is in some way superior to the inner. Danto wrote, in response to Lydia Goehr, that he did not rely as much as she thought on the artistic intention, though it is indeed important. He conceded that artistic intention was important for *Kunstwissenschaft* insofar as establishing the general aim of the artist is important because, though there is no limit to how many interpretations there can be for an artwork, not all interpretations are possible. Regarding narrative sentences, Danto's answer was couched in terms of the way he prioritizes the inner and the outer. Intention,

has little bearing in the philosophy of history when the apparatus of narrative sentences is introduced—Petrarch could not have intended to open *the* Renaissance, Erasmus did not aim to be the best pre-Kantian moral theorist in all of Europe. But neither does it arise in the interpretive redescriptions we give of artworks when we talk about them hermeneutically. (LLP 388)

The significance of an action, whether an artistic creation or one that causes an event, and what there is to 'know' about it, will not be known until later; thus, the immediate intention may not be congruent with its significance. The contours of an individual's *world* cannot be known to that individual, but only to those who observe the person. In terms of historical context, an individual's *world* is only graspable by a historian when that *world* is no longer lived.

It is important to understand what bearing a materialist *ens representans* with flattened inner and outer realms (at a minimum an inner realm of lessened significance) has on Danto's account of embodied meaning, especially in terms of how the artwork comes to be manifest with artistic intention. There are several important issues that I hope to clarify here: (1) to provide a fuller explanation for how embodied meaning, what in Hegelian terms is a universal particular, is possible; (2) how Danto's frequent reference to the personhood of art can make sense within his system; and (3) given (1–3), I would like to make sense of Danto's suggestion that artworks are in a dialogue with each other.

Works of art, as *ens representans*, are "materially embodied representations" (Danto 1999a: x). By choosing the medium of representation as the basis of his philosophical system, Danto saw a pre-descriptive way to handle epistemological issues in a more flexible manner. It also better reflects how we live in the world. Because one of the richest repositories of representations is found in the realm of art, Danto takes a special interest in it. To my surprise, the reasoning behind Danto's assertion that art and philosophy are interconnected is not due to art's

expressive qualities or some unique property art has in manifesting the human condition. Rather, it is because we share properties with representations, insofar as we occupy the same space between language and the world (Danto 1968: ix, 63). Frank Ankersmit contends that for Danto, “aesthetics is not merely an interesting offshoot of philosophy in general, to be addressed after a few more fundamental philosophical issues have been settled; on the contrary, aesthetics, because of its preoccupation with representation, is where all meaningful philosophy *originates*” (LLP 395). As a creature bound to representations, *ens representans* shares a common philosophical origin with works of art, which points to a common form of embodiment. Danto has made much of his somewhat tenuous belief that the mind is like a text, that it can be read as a text and that we are texts embodied (Danto 1989: 248, 267; Danto 1999a: 144, 204, 222). “Why should we not suppose that some day sentences might serve to individuate neural states, so that we might read a man’s beliefs off the surfaces of his brain?” (Danto 1968: 96). A sentence ‘*x* believes *p*’ can exist in print, on ink and paper, be spoken or inscribed on our being. The content or meaning is fundamentally the same. A belief may be that ‘*x* is *p*’, when in fact ‘*x* is not *p*’. Like a picture, it need not be true, and at the pre-linguistic level, one can have such a state. Even a dog can have a belief, which is intensional, thereby being in a sentential state, perhaps believing it is taking a ride to the park, when in fact the veterinarian is the destination. The medium of “vehicles of understanding,” representations, or sentential states are broad. The chart below is an attempt to show the relation of representing and non-representing to organic and inorganic things.

Type of ‘object’	Organic	Inorganic
Capacity of ‘object’		
Representing/ sentential	Animalia	Art, texts, some machines
Non-representing	Human body, protozoa	Stones and bones
Personhood	Human person, animals?	Art, texts
Agency	Human person	Art and texts?

Table 4.1 Type and capacity of objects

What should be noted is that not all things that represent, or that are sentential, are organic. Pictures, texts, some machines, to mention a few, are inorganic.¹⁴ As Danto stated, what he wrote in *The Body/Body Problem* was never fully integrated into a systematic text, but the references to the word enflashed and the mind as a text are found throughout his works. Thus, I believe the answer to the question of embodied meaning is found in the properties shared among living and non-living material that represents. There are at least some attributes of the representations making us human—that are part of our essence—which can exist in non-organic mediums: art, as the embodiment of matter and form, is one of those mediums.

The representation is intensional, a state of belief about something that may or may not exist. It is what manifests our human meanings: our representations are our *world* inscribed upon us, and the representation that we more or less inherit from our place and time in history determines to a large extent the choices we will make, a point of view being something that “representational causes” take into consideration (Danto 1989: 272–273; Danto 1973: 188–189). The significance of Danto’s shift away from subjective interiority becomes clearer here. If the representations that make us ‘who we are’ are external, then they can be externalized in other mediums, such as art.

The mind, construed as embodied—as *enflashed*—might perhaps stand to the body as a statue does to the bronze that is its material cause, or as a picture stands to the pigment it gives form to—or as signified stands to signifier, in the idiom of Saussure. And to the degree that “inside” and “outside” have application at all, it is the mind that is outside, in the sense that it is what is presented to the world. (Danto 1999a: 197)

Though Danto suggests that the metaphors we use to describe the connection of mind and body are not always helpful, we can perhaps understand here how the mind that is presented to others is embodied in the artwork, making it, as us, a representational ‘being’, much like the woodblock leaves the imprint on the paper.

Danto (1992) wrote that one task of philosophy is “to draw the boundary lines which divide the universe into the most fundamental kinds of things that exist. There may of course be no differences so fundamental as all that, in which case a task still remains for philosophy: namely, to show how lines believed to divide the universe in fundamental ways can be erased” (6). As Danto sought to erase and redraw the boundary between mind and body, inner and outer consciousness, I see in his writing moves toward redrawing the boundaries of agency. Before proceeding, I should try to better define what I mean by agency in this context. Certainly, Danto ascribes to humans a metaphysical

¹⁴ It is not unequivocally clear that the set of representational beings is congruent with the set of sentential beings, but I think they are close enough to conclude that what he writes about sentential beings applies to *ens representans*. Tiziana Andina (2011) discusses “representations that human beings incorporate in a physical structure different from their body” (54–55, see 46–55).

agency, or freedom, that is not present in inorganic objects. But when he refers to representational causality, he implies that above our metaphysical freedom, we are directed by forces, sententially embodied, of which we are unaware. Of course, these inorganic structures have no activity in and of themselves, but if we step into them or, in the case of our own *worlds*, are born into them, knowingly or not, we activate their agency insofar as our choices are constrained to the possibilities inherent within the representation's narrative, if it has a narrative form. "Representations, in the form of intentions and reasons, themselves cause action" (Danto 1973: 189–190). By agency, I mean no more than this, but it is nonetheless significant for my reading of Danto.

Returning to Nietzsche, let us examine the following passage in which Danto explains how, for Nietzsche, inner and outer consciousness are not really different.

In part he was endeavoring to break the grip of a prejudice we are almost unaware that we are dominated by; namely, that we know what we are better than we know anything in the world. Each of us is convinced that however others may be mistaken about our feelings and sincerity, we ourselves cannot be in error, and that we exercise, in at least this one domain, an unimpeachable authority. This prejudice is underwritten by the common philosophical teaching that we have immediate access to the workings of our own minds. (Danto 2005: 98)

Nietzsche proposes that we do not have privileged access to our own minds. In 1965, Danto (2005) writes that Nietzsche presents "a remarkable and, to my knowledge, utterly original theory of consciousness" (98). It is safe to say that Danto incorporated this idea into what was to become his own theory of consciousness, which reflects the parallel stance on other minds that he developed in *Analytical Philosophy of History*, written at the same time.¹⁵ Nietzsche's analysis of inner and outer consciousness, laid out in *The Gay Science* §354, posits that there is nothing in the inner consciousness that is unique to us because our inwardness is still constructed by a language used for external communication. Danto's flattening of the difference between inner and outer consciousness is not far from this, even extending to the dream world (1999a: 142–143; WA 46–49). There is another, less explicit, thread of Danto's thought that I believe can be attributed to him via Nietzsche, which is his account of agency. Nietzsche, especially in his later writings, sees the idea of the self as a fiction. It is not so much that there is no persistent locus of our experience. Rather, it is the idea that humans do not possess anything like the transcendental self or a soul, something which in itself structures our being. Our self, and to some extent our agency, if not issuing from some a priori internal structure, comes from the formative power of language, implying that language is itself a form of thought (Nietzsche 1968: III §5; Danto 2005: 88). This

¹⁵ The chapters in *Narration and Knowledge* where other minds are discussed explicitly were written in 1966 and 1967, but the concept is present in the original publication of *Analytical Philosophy of History*.

somewhat Averroean account of thought and language implies that there is an agency attributing process that does not correspond to an individual entity. I cannot say that Danto explicitly holds this view. Danto attributed this idea to Nietzsche, but a number of passages in Danto's published texts indicate it may be part of his own thought. Irrespective of whether the idea came from Nietzsche, I don't see how Danto's philosophical system can come together without holding a view something like this. Consider the following passage in which he recalls an experience with a friend who is so adamant regarding the truth of her perspective that Danto realizes she is in fact *defined by her perspective*, in this case, that the aesthetic is essential to art. This pushes Danto (1999a) to consider the point of view as an ontological category:

perspectivism in Nietzsche's metaphysics requires points of view as centers of power, each seeking to impose itself on blank passive reality. But in general, I think, points of view are crucial in the explanation of behavior, especially when understood as action, and indeed I am not sure what behavior could be considered as an action that did not refer back to the horizon within which the decision of what to do arose for the agent, and with it the issues of relevance. (176–177)

In his assessment of Nietzsche, Danto (2005) attributes this extra-individual agency to the will-to-power (88–91). But Danto writes elsewhere that the perspective of one's *world* does more to define our actions than the internal 'power' of what one might call our 'will'. We may be in some sense metaphysically free, but our actions are caused through representations. "There is, to begin with, the epistemic fact that in order to explain human conduct, we have to take into consideration the way humans represent the world, themselves included, so that what we are is very often inseparable from what we believe we are" (Danto 1989: 272). As with his friend, the critic, our perspectives of our *world* inscribe on us our possible causal reactions. Along these lines, Danto defines four sets of different causal relations, which I do not discuss here, that differentiate representational causality from the causality we associate with the objective sciences. Our actions, then, are for the most part 'determined' by our representations. Thus, our agency is inscribed upon us through the representation of the world we inherit, placing us within a specific geographical and historical slot.

To understand a person's conduct is accordingly to identify the representations that explain the conduct, and then to interpret this against the dense background of beliefs that compose his picture of the world. Explanation in the case of human behavior may be—in fact I believe it is—just causal explanation. But the identification of the causes requires some separate operation, call it understanding if you will, which consists more or less in identifying the point of view of the agent in question. A point of view is something that causes [in the objective sense], other than representational causes, cannot be said to have. (Danto 1989: 272)

Danto (1999a) tells us that his plan to write a book on *ens representans* never came to fruition and that what was packed in the essays of *The*

Body/Body Problem would have to suffice, though he assured readers that all the essential logic was there (15). My conclusions may be an extrapolation of what Danto has left for us, but I hold that this position, which may have emerged as he wrote on Nietzsche, is present throughout his work.

This brings us back to Soucek's claims about personification and art. If our identity, and perhaps even agency, is attributed to us via the representations that are essential to *who we are*, and the representations are inscribed on us in a way that could be inscribed on another medium, then it is possible to understand how, in Danto's system, artworks and humans share certain properties. It is not that we lend to, implant with, or create in them personification. That would require a subjective power, and likely a level of self-reflection, that Danto does not account for. But what he does account for is how representations of *world* and representations in art have a way of guiding us, perhaps in a predictive or 'conversational' sense that amounts to agency, if even in a weak sense. The historically indexed representations, which leave an indelible stamp on the identities of artists, form a set of 'tools' that artists then use to create their artworks. Through the process of interpretation, artworks—imprinted with the *world* of the artist "by transitivity of identity" (Danto 1981: 204)—bestow on the interpreter at least some of the agency mediating structures, points of view, that representations of the *world* had originally implanted in the artist. This explains how, when the beholder steps into the artwork, she is transformed into something "amazing" (173).

If personhood in art is understood as something initiated not so much by the 'self' as by the same representational structures that also form the self, taking this view of 'agency' into account will provide an explanation for several other facets of Danto's philosophy that remain otherwise unexplained.¹⁶ The first, as noted above, is that Danto seems to give the artworld a point of view, perhaps even an internal perspective. In "Moving Pictures" Danto (1999b) discusses film having become self-aware.

Film becomes in a way its own subject, the consciousness that it is film is what the consciousness is of, and in this move to self-consciousness cinema marches together with the other arts of the twentieth century in the respect that art itself becomes the ultimate subject of art, a movement of thought which parallels philosophy in the respect that philosophy in the end is what philosophy is about. (230)

When Danto declares that the narrative of art has ended, the reason given is that art has become self-reflective. Certainly, without a notion of agency, this is not possible. If one assumes that it is the artists who have been self-reflective on the nature of art, a possibility it seems natural to entertain, we could encounter difficulty with Danto's claim

¹⁶ For a discussion Danto's notion of personhood in art as it relates to rhetoric, see (Snyder 2018, 182–186).

that artists cannot self-reflect on their *world*. I do not want to enter that discussion here. I have done that elsewhere (Snyder 2015), and I think it would be more fruitful to pursue the route opened through representational materialism. As living beings, “we are attached [to the world] by our sensory apparatus. The representation must modify the *ens representans* in some way other than that which consists simply in having the representation” (Danto 1989: 251). So to have the property of agency that *ens representans* has, there must be some self-reflective capacity. When Danto discusses art, it clearly has this property, and in some references art seems to act independently. The best I can do to interpret this is to reiterate one of the basic tenets of Danto’s essentialist definition of art: “it is analytical to the concept of an artwork that there has to be an interpretation” (Danto 1981: 124). If to be art, art is interpreted, then there must be a biological interpreter who ‘activates’ the work’s agency. Is self-reflection in art something that occurs through interpretation? Perhaps not in the beholders themselves, but as artists ‘engage’ with the artworld, they create other works.¹⁷ This would allow for the type of dialogue he sees happening among artworks:

Warhol’s *Brillo Box* was enfranchised as a work of art when the boxes it exactly resembled languished in the limbo of mere objects, though they resembled his boxes exactly. ... The relationship between *Brillo Box* and the other members of “the world of art works” was more complex. They were “in dialogue” with one another, as curators like to say. (LLP reply to Ankersmit 429)

What would such a dialogue entail? If the artwork represents the style of the time, and the style of the time endows a person with a somewhat narrowly defined agency, an agency that makes an individual predictable without being determined, then the artworks could conceivably be in dialogue. In a response to Noël Carroll, Danto argued that the history of art had a “historical implicature” and that the creation of artworks, throughout the era of art, had obeyed a certain logic of conversations, insofar as what comes next in a conversation is something that makes sense in terms of what came before it. Though his point was to show that when this conversational structure had been “broken” there would be no more art of this style, he clearly states that there is a conversational structure in non-biological representations such that a dialogue can take place among them (LLP 456–457, 52).¹⁸

¹⁷ In “Outsider Art,” Danto (2001) conceded that outsider art might not be art in the sense he means here, since outsider artists do not engage the artworld; they are an artworld unto themselves. Though outsider artists may have talent, they are not part of the conversation of the artworld, and, for critics, their works are impossible to explain (242–249).

¹⁸ In *The Body/Body Problem*, Danto (1999a) speculates that there are interactive processes that are mediated as sentential states, implying a kind of inter-system information processing that could be common to certain machines and biological entities. “The laws of behavior for sententially characterized beings—animals, some machines, and us—must take account of the truth-relations between the world and us, as well as within us, as part of their own truth-conditions” (90–92).

The representative structure of the artwork mirrors the structure of the person, and in some way the artwork can enter into a conversation that anticipates a certain kind of action. Goehr's (2008) essay on the musicality of violence recognizes the common organizational features of the artwork and acts of violence, each being born of historical representations. "The terrorist act and the artwork share certain structural or internal logical features because they draw on a common history of aesthetic, political, and religious assumption" (171). In her essay, she points out that even against the best of intentions a musical composition aiming at commemoration can bring back the terror, precisely because the shared structures the artwork uses are evoked in performance.

Though the artwork can anticipate, as in a conversation, its ability to influence the action of a beholder outside of the artistic conversation should not be overstated. It may have little or no effect. But the representations of our world, which plot the field of likely human actions, also play a guiding role in the way artists create art insofar as artists are carrying on the conversation through their art. And the conversation is carried on as long as art is following a particular style, a conversation that is predictable without being determined.

Often citing Buffon, Danto asserts that "style is the man." Style, for Danto (1981), is something immediate, like a basic action or concept; it refers directly to whatever it is that makes something *style* (200). If the content is removed from the representation, style is all that remains. Nonetheless, in the creation of the artwork, style and substance issue from the same impulse (197). Style, for Danto, encompasses the ability to apprehend directly what others see indirectly. Those not possessing their own style must imitate others. Imitators can acquire a manner by learning, but only by imitating those with style. Thus, when one has learned the manner of style, one 'knows' in a mediated fashion, whereas the one who manifests style, grasps it in an unmediated way (200–201). Danto defines style as the unconscious self-representation of the way in which the *world* at a particular place and time is imprinted on the artist (206–207, 214–215). Imperceptible to artists, this representation is nonetheless perceptible to the audience. This notion of style links the artist's work to its historical context, making it interpretable to present and future audiences.¹⁹ When one paints in the style of Rembrandt,

¹⁹ To illustrate this, Danto uses the example of the forger Han van Meegeren. Van Meegeren wanted confirmation from his contemporaries, even if his success meant it could not be acknowledged, that his paintings were as good as those of Vermeer, so he painted *Christ at Emmaus*, which was for some time accepted as a work of Vermeer's. The evidence that eventually revealed its fraudulent identity was not the modern x-ray, but rather the manner used in painting. Van Meegeren's brush strokes bore the manner of the 1930s, which could not have been used in the manner of a mid seventeenth-century painting by Vermeer (Danto 1981: 41–3). Van Meegeren is perhaps known as the most notorious forger in art history. His forgeries, made in the 1930s, were accepted by one of the most renowned art historians of the day, Abraham Bredius, who declared van Meegeren's *Christ at*

one can master the technique, the manner, but it is somehow separated from the style, because the style is bound to the person whose style it is.

So when someone paints in the style of Rembrandt, *he* has adopted a manner, and to at least that degree he is not immanent in the painting in the way Rembrandt is. The language of immanence is made licit by the identity of the man himself and his style—he is his style—and by transitivity of identity Rembrandt *is* his paintings considered in the perspective of style. (204)

Toward the end of *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Danto presents in a few pages a summation of the interconnections among the various parts of his philosophy, and how they tie his theory of art together (204–208). Danto asks, “What, really, is ‘the man himself?’” His answer is found in the way that we embody our representations: “I have argued a theory to the effect that we are systems of representations, ways of seeing the world, representations incarnate” (204).

If, according to Danto, style is the person and the person is transferred to the work through “transitivity of identity,” then we can conclude that Danto did not hold that we personify art through a conscious action. It seems more accurate to say that we are personified in our art. Given what Danto has articulated in the passages cited in this essay, if we are the incarnation of the representations of our ways of seeing the world, then this would also hold true of the artworks that we create. Soucek’s suggestions, that we look at who we are such that we personify art, is in some sense true, but a more accurate formulation would be this: whatever representations we personify are, by transitivity, also personified in our art. This ‘personification’ does not come about through artistic ‘intention’; rather, it is transferred through the artist’s style that is the artist’s original choice and the representation of her world.²⁰ Understanding Danto’s account of our own personhood,

Emmas to be a stunning find and, perhaps, the greatest Vermeer ever. Part of the reason these forgeries were not detected at the time, was due to the failure of the current artworld to recognize its own mannerisms. However, van Meegeren himself revealed his forgeries after the Second World War to avoid the charge of treason. Van Meegeren was accused of collaborating with the Nazis by aiding the enemy to acquire Dutch national treasures. His name was connected with the sale of *The Woman Taken in Adultery*, allegedly painted by Vermeer, to Nazi Field Marshal Goering, and for this he was imprisoned. The charge of treason resulted in the death penalty, so van Meegeren revealed his secret. To his defense, he claimed to be a national hero, having traded Goering two hundred original Dutch paintings for his forgery, thus saving them from Nazi confiscation. After a two-year trial, in which van Meegeren was compelled to demonstrate his forging technique, the charge was reduced to forgery, and he was sentenced to one year in prison. Van Meegeren died in prison before his term was served.

²⁰ Regarding Sartre’s notions of freedom and original choice, Danto (1975) writes that our choice is our character, insofar as it determines who we are in life; it is our being. “Our basic freedom, then, lies less in our power to choose than to choose, in the respect that the primal and original choice determines a style of choosing, and the style is the man himself” (137). For a discussion of the influence of Sartre on Danto’s notion of style see (Snyder 2018: 187–192).

as the incarnation of our world representation, also clarifies Danto's notion of embodied meaning, giving a clearer idea of how representations are endowed with the meanings and manners of a given time. For Danto, the points of view that we are born into and the attitude or style that we to some small extent adopt are who we are. This "ontological category," which perhaps, in the sense discussed above, has a kind of agency of its own, is what is transferred to and interpreted in art; thus, some of the properties of personhood that are common to us are also found in art.

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