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#### ABSTRACT

Arthur C. Danto's *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* is one of the most influential recent books on philosophy of art. It is noteworthy for both his method, which emphasizes indiscernible pairs and sets of objects, and his conclusion, which is that artworks are distinguished from non-artwork counterparts by a semantic and aesthetic transfiguration that depends on their relationship to art history. In numerous contexts, Danto has confirmed that the relevant concept of art is the concept of fine art. Examples of music that are not fine art demonstrate that semantic and aesthetic transfiguration does not require a relationship to art history or art theory. Appropriate interpretation and individuation of a great deal of music can be achieved by listeners who do not grasp art theory and who do not guide their interpretation by reference to the concept of art.

#### KEYWORDS

Danto, music, indiscernible counterparts, defining art, interpretation

# Music, Indiscernible Counterparts, and Danto on Transfiguration

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The method of indiscernible counterparts is intended to serve as a kind of philosophical prism, separating out the various components of experience, even if these are indissolubly mingled in the act of experience.

• Arthur C. Danto<sup>1</sup>

If we are asked whether ... the pop song *Rock Around the Clock* is art, we are most likely to respond that we neither are sure nor care.

• Anita Silvers, 1975<sup>2</sup>

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# 1.

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**A**rthur C. Danto's *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* is one of the most influential recent books on philosophy of art. Its argument proceeds, as Danto summarizes it, from the question, "Given two things which resemble one another to any chosen degree, but one of which is a work of art and the other an ordinary object, what accounts for this difference in status?"<sup>3</sup> Pairs and groups of indiscernible objects play a pivotal role in generating his argument that artworks are individuated by their relationship to art history and, thus, that every work of art is the work that it is by reference to historically situated art theory, and hence any artwork is art only by virtue of some surrounding art theory.<sup>4</sup> Although Danto succeeds in demonstrating that indiscernibles can only be individuated by reference to their historical contexts, I am not persuaded that he offers us any reason to conclude that distinct but indiscernible *musical* works are only individuated by their place in art history.<sup>5</sup> History and theory? Yes. *Art* history and theory? Not necessarily. The essential difference in Danto's pairs of indiscernibles is that one carries meanings that the second one lacks. In some cases, the former is a semantic "transfiguration" of the latter, where the difference requires knowledge of the historical provenance of each item. In the following, I argue that Danto fails to establish that semantic and aesthetic transfiguration requires an art-historical context or that it requires the concept of art. Over the years, Danto has repeatedly emphasized the concept of fine art, a concept underlying the modern unification of visual art, music, literature, and several other cultural practices.<sup>6</sup>

In response, I contend that the appropriate interpretation and individuation of a great deal of music can be achieved by listeners who do not grasp art theory and who do not guide their interpretation by reference to the concept of art. Musical works can be successfully individuated by their place in a relatively localized *music* history, without connecting music to other kinds of art, as is required to arrive at a concept of fine art.<sup>7</sup> In short, transfiguration does not require a concept of art that brings music, visual art, and literature together as species of a common genus. Although I grant that Danto's pairs of indiscernibles give us reason to agree that an individuating "transfiguration" of sound requires a historically sensitive interpretation, they do not demonstrate that either art theory or artworld

concepts are necessary elements of the requisite historical setting for interpreting and thus identifying musical works.

Danto notes that the concepts of music and art are only contingently related. Not all music is art, and not all art is music.<sup>8</sup> If this position seems in any way odd, remember that Immanuel Kant offers theoretical reasons why instrumental music is fine art, and then reasons why it is not fine art.<sup>9</sup> In the end, Kant does not decide the question. So it is not far-fetched to say that a piece of Baroque *Tafelmusik* is music but not art, perhaps for the very same reasons that a child's song is music but not art. Corresponding to what Danto says about a child who produces something indiscernible from a visual artwork, the object may *appear* to be just the same, but the child's achievement lacks properties that belong to the indiscernible artwork.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, the child doesn't know enough about art history to embody the same statements that an adult artist would convey by making an indiscernible thing.<sup>11</sup> My argument is that the lack of art-historical knowledge in musicians and listeners does not generate a corresponding incapacity with respect to sounds transfigured into meaningful musical gestures.

Although there is increasing willingness to treat popular music — or at least very good popular music — as art, not all popular music is so easily moved into the artworld. There are many borderline cases. Furthermore, Anita Silvers is right to remind us that most of the popular audience has no reason to wonder if pop songs are art. If a piece of popular music does the job of transfiguring sonic properties without requiring any reference to the concept of art, then why is a reference to the concept of art required to bring about a text's differentiation as a literary work, a bodily movement's differentiation as choreographed dance, or a three-dimensional object's differentiation as a piece of sculpture?<sup>12</sup> Isn't the historically contextualized creative act sufficient?

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## 2.

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Specifically, I contend that the method of indiscernible counterparts does not support Danto's position that there is "a special aesthetics for works of art and indeed a special language of appreciation, and ... both seem to be involved with the concept of art."<sup>13</sup> Here, and elsewhere, Danto claims that an appropriate response to artworks is not available to those who lack the concept of art.<sup>14</sup> I am especially concerned about the implication that responding to semantically-rich popular music requires some degree of involvement with this concept. Although Danto says next to nothing about music in *Transfiguration*, he elsewhere claims that "[t]he distinction between music and noise" is precisely parallel to the distinction between one of Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes and its model, a commercial Brillo box. As in *Transfiguration*, he asserts that the concept of fine art is part of the difference.<sup>15</sup> In order to challenge him on this point, I will provide four examples of popular music that display semantic and aesthetic transfiguration. In each case, the transfiguration of sound into music can be accounted for by appeal to appropriate facts about local music traditions that play an essential role in arriving at plausible interpretations of that music and, thereby, recognition of its relevant rhetorical and aesthetic properties. But if audience comprehension and appreciation of sophisticated work-differentiation can succeed in popular music culture in the absence of reference to the concept of art, then we have little reason to think that that concept plays an essential role in musical culture.

My method, then, is as follows. What happens if we construct a series of indiscernibles by locating musical counterparts for Danto's visual and literary counterparts? We can then compare the parallel series. One series will involve artworks (Danto's own various sets of indiscernibles) and the other series will involve musical works. However, pairs of indiscernible sound sequences – where one is an identifiable musical work and the other is not – do not require us to bring art theory or art history to bear in constructing the differentiating interpretation. Comparing Danto's examples with parallel examples of music, we can see whether they reflect important differences beyond the bare fact that Danto's involve works of fine art while mine involve music that is not necessarily art.<sup>16</sup> For many musical examples, reference to their location in a particular music culture will be sufficient to support a "transfiguring" interpretation.

A likely objection to my argument will be the rejoinder that Danto's references to art-historical context are simply references to cultural provenance. On this reading of Danto, I am merely endorsing his view when I contend that the phenomenon of transfiguration supports a historicity requirement, which may include a background of historically situated theory.<sup>17</sup> However, Danto clearly holds that the historicity condition is meant to capture the insight that the eternally unchanging concept of art is historically revealed, so that a thing "accorded the status of artwork in 1965 could not have been accorded that status in 1865 or 1765."<sup>18</sup> He invokes this thesis in order to explain why certain artifacts achieve the status of an artwork when others do not. He does not offer it to explain how artifacts embody meanings or why they fall into other sorts of categories that may be relevant to their interpretation.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, if Danto is offering a weaker historicity requirement (that is, one that does not include reference to the concept of art), then he is mistaken to contend that there is "a special aesthetics for works of art."<sup>20</sup> According to his theory, an artwork's semantic dimension provides an objective ground for its possession of aesthetic properties that do not belong to the uninterpreted perceptual façade of the object created (or, in some cases, appropriated) as the embodiment of an artistic gesture.<sup>21</sup> To take an obvious example, Duchamp's *Fountain* has an ironic humor that is utterly lacking in an indiscernible "real" urinal. I endorse the thesis that perception alone will not yield up all of an artifact's aesthetic properties, a variant of which is independently defended by Kendall Walton:

certain facts about the origins of works of art have an essential role in criticism [because] aesthetic judgments rest on them in an absolutely fundamental way. For this reason ... the view that works of art should be judged simply by what can be perceived in them is seriously misleading.<sup>22</sup>

In Danto's version of the same point, "the aesthetic qualities of the work are a function of their own historical identity."<sup>23</sup> Consequently, "aesthetic appreciation of artworks" is "a function of interpretation."<sup>24</sup>

Against Danto, I propose that the "special aesthetics" to which he refers is not actually "special for works of art." It is a consequence of the semantic transfiguration in light of a cultural context, even if the transfigured phenomena under consideration are not necessarily works of art.<sup>25</sup> The method of indiscernible counterparts yields a historicity

condition that is only contingently related to the history of the extension of the term “art.”

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### 3.

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Here is an initial set of musical indiscernibles. I do not see why their interpretation requires any reference to art theory, art history, or the concept of art.

The compact disc player in my living room holds multiple discs. Selecting some music to accompany my Saturday household chores, I load it with four discs and go about my business. The music drifts in and out of my hearing as I move around the house. Taking laundry to the basement, I can only hear the dull thud of the bass and drums. Taking some kitchen scraps to the compost pile at the far end of the yard, I can no longer hear the music at all. After a while I lose track of time. I lose track of which disc is playing. Walking back through the living room on my way to answer the telephone, the music draws my attention with a soaring, searing burst of electric guitar. A languid sequence of notes suspends time. I recognize the opening phrase of the first of two extended guitar solos of Pink Floyd’s “Comfortably Numb.” The song is a highlight of the group’s harrowing concept album, *The Wall* (1979). When I’m talking on the telephone in the kitchen, the music fades into an indistinct wash of background sound. The music proceeds through another sung verse and chorus. When I hang up, I notice that the song’s second guitar solo is just beginning.

What is this music, and what does it convey? When I loaded the disc player, I put in the two discs of Pink Floyd’s *Is There Anybody Out There?*, a live recording of the group’s staging of “The Wall Show” (as they called its theatrical performance). I also put in a recording of a live performance by David Gilmour, recorded in Manchester, England, during his 2006 summer tour. Finally, I put in a recording of a live performance by Roger Waters, recorded in Italy during his 2006 summer tour. For those not familiar with these musicians, Waters and Gilmour were Pink Floyd’s bass player and guitarist, respectively, when the group was at the height of its fame and commercial fortunes. They are the co-composers of

"Comfortably Numb." Waters quit the band in 1984. He subsequently sued the remaining band members in a vain attempt to prevent them from continuing the band in his absence. He lost the lawsuit and Pink Floyd carried on. Gilmour now led the band, which continued to perform Waters' songs during several financially lucrative tours. Twenty-two years after Waters' departure, Gilmour and Waters simultaneously launched solo tours. Both performed many of the same Pink Floyd songs each night. More to the point, both performed meticulously faithful recreations of the musical arrangements on *The Wall* and other Pink Floyd albums. Pink Floyd fans dominated the audiences, and they came to the concerts expecting to hear what they heard on the records. Waters and Gilmour obliged. In terms of the manifest sonic properties of the performances, there are no discernible differences between the musical performances during the guitar solos of "Comfortably Numb" during Pink Floyd's live 1970s performances, Roger Waters' 2006 performances, or David Gilmour's 2006 performances.

Returning to my three discs with their three recorded performances of "Comfortably Numb," the extended instrumental passages are sonically indiscernible. (If there are differences, they are as trivial as the differences between Warhol's Brillo boxes and actual Brillo cartons.) Despite their striking similarity, very different interpretations of the music are appropriate, depending on which disc is playing.

First, consider the Pink Floyd performance. As I enter the room at the beginning of the first distinctive, melodic guitar solo that Gilmour wrote for "Comfortably Numb," Pink Floyd's performance expresses the narrator's detachment. The second solo expresses his free-floating disassociation as an injection of drugs takes effect.

The second case is Gilmour's solo performance in Manchester. The first guitar solo expresses the narrator's detachment. The second solo expresses the narrator's free-floating disassociation as an injection of drugs takes effect. But the two solos call for an additional layer of interpretation. Knowledgeable fans understand that these passages eloquently express the guitarist's pride in having composed the musical highlight of *The Wall*. Waters may have regarded Pink Floyd as his band, but Gilmour's nightly solos remind the nostalgic fans that the group's distinctive electric guitar work had nothing to do with Waters.

In the third case, suppose I enter the room at the beginning of "Comfortably Numb" from the Waters solo performance in Verona. Again,



it expresses the narrator's detachment and the second solo expresses free-floating disassociation. But, again, the two solos call for an additional layer of interpretation. Knowledgeable fans understand that the music defiantly expresses Waters' belief that *he* was the genius of Pink Floyd. Hiring an unknown guitarist to replicate Gilmour's solo work demonstrates that Gilmour, who was not a founding member of Pink Floyd, was brought in as a replacement musician and so he was always dispensable.

Those who know the arguments of Danto's *Transfiguration* should be reminded of three indiscernible paintings, "Kierkegaard's Mood," "Red Square," and "Nirvana."<sup>26</sup> Each is a square of red paint, but each has a distinctive interpretation that accounts for why it looks as it does. By understanding how various non-manifest properties explain the look of each painted canvas, a viewer gains access to their very different metaphorical, expressive, and stylistic properties. Although *Transfiguration* says almost nothing about music, it has had considerable influence on the philosophy of music. Danto's method of comparing indiscernibles has become a staple in debates about the essence of music and the identity conditions for musical works.<sup>27</sup> In this respect, I am not saying anything original when I suggest that we should view the three performances of "Comfortably Numb" through the prism of Danto's three red paintings. My auditory examples are like his visual examples in that listeners and viewers who are aware of unexhibited properties are able to consult differences in their circumstances of production in order to grasp that in the embedded metaphors: "the structure of [each] metaphor has to do with some features of the representation other than content."<sup>28</sup> This insight is particularly welcome for suggesting how instrumental music becomes rich in meaning despite its seeming lack of content.

A disanalogy might be brought forward as an objection. Danto's red paintings are works of art. The same is not so obviously true about guitar solos performed at rock concerts in huge stadiums. That, of course, is the very disanalogy that interests me. In a passage that I quote as an epigraph, Silvers points out that interpretation and enjoyment of the 1950s rock and roll hit "Rock Around the Clock" is independent of its status as art. (If anything, the original audience for rock and roll viewed the music as antithetical to art.) But if unexhibited properties have the same transformative effect on non-art as they do on art, then art-historical contexts are not necessarily the contexts that matter for the generation of metaphorical meanings.

Another objection is that another disanalogy undercuts my proposal to align three indistinguishable paintings with these three musical performances. According to standard ontologies of art, the three paintings are three distinct works of art, but the three performances are merely three embodiments of a single work, the song “Comfortably Numb.” Furthermore, it might be noted that something is lacking. What is missing is the fourth case, the “mere real thing” with which any of the three works might be confused. It is extremely difficult to imagine a set of non-musical sounds that would sound just like a performance of “Comfortably Numb” without being an instantiation of “Comfortably Numb.” It is then tempting to reply that standard ontologies of music deny that recorded music is anything other than a mere real thing, a representation of a performance of the music. In the same way that a representation of a work of art is not itself a work of art (e.g., a forgery of it represents it closely and thus allows the forger to pass the non-artwork off as the artwork), a recording of “Comfortably Numb” might already count as a representation of music without being music – just as Erle Loran’s diagrams of the formal structures of Paul Cézanne’s paintings are mere representations and not artworks.<sup>29</sup> Although that is an overly-simplified position concerning the relationship of recordings to the musical works featured on those recordings, I will not pursue that issue here. Instead, we can take the sting out of the objection by introducing cases of ordinary sounds that are indiscernible from an aural sequence that is intentionally produced while performing a particular musical work. This sort of example provides the same theoretical leverage that Danto obtains from Robert Rauschenberg’s painted bed and the piece of chain on the statue of a cat at Columbia University.<sup>30</sup> The chain might be part of the statue, entering into its interpretation, or it might be a chain securing the statue, in which it does not enter into the interpretation. The fact of the matter makes an ontological difference even if we are never in a position to know which of those two relationships is historically accurate.

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In order to complete my argument that the concept of art and references to art history are not generally required to distinguish between a particular

musical work and an indistinguishable counterpart, we need a case of music where the music might be confused with a "mere real thing." The most obvious candidate is John Cage's *4'33"* (1952), which notoriously instructs the performing musician to refrain from playing. Attending a concert of twentieth-century music, one might neglect to study the concert program and, wondering why the pianist is waiting so long to begin the next piece, might confuse the sonic richness of the performance with ordinary whispering, squeaking chairs, and rustling programs. But is *4'33"* even music? Stephen Davies argues that it is not. I am inclined to accept his argument, which hinges on the premise that a musical composition necessarily organizes sound. However, one does not really organize sound unless one prescriptively excludes "some sonic possibilities" from correct performances of the music.<sup>31</sup> Since Cage's instructions for *4'33"* fail to provide for any distinction between performance sounds and ambient noise, no sonic possibilities are excluded. So it cannot be a musical work.<sup>32</sup>

Based on Cage's music philosophy and various interviews, many critics have claimed that *4'33"* is music that is composed entirely of silence.<sup>33</sup> On this reading, it is the musical analogue of a primed but otherwise unpainted canvas that is displayed as an artistic comment on the art of painting. But Davies offers evidence about the piece's history and Cage's philosophy of music that together point in a different direction. *4'33"* is a work for performance, with a fixed duration, during which the audience is to attend to any and all sounds that occur. Ordinary sounds become the object of interpretive focus. However, the audience is not to regard the sounds as "aspiring to the conditions of music (traditionally conceived)."<sup>34</sup> Cage is calling attention to art-historically informed sonic properties. On this reading, the piece is more like exhibiting an empty picture frame than a primed but unfinished canvas or a uniformly white painting.

Danto's fingerprints are all over Davies' analysis. *4'33"* is certainly an artwork, argues Davies, for it has the requisite "aboutness" and point of view. Rather than a musical composition, it is a piece of conceptual art about music.<sup>35</sup> It transfigures whatever sound is heard during a performance of it on this reading of *4'33"*. Cage's transfiguration of ordinary sound requires reference to the concept of art, for it requires an understanding of conceptual art. It also requires an understanding of, and contrast with, music as music is traditionally conceived. However, on this reading of Cage, it is an artwork but not a musical work. As such, it does not advance my argument.

Of course, Davies' reading is not the standard line on Cage. Many well-informed music theorists regard *4'33"* as music that expands the sonic resources of music. As such, its performance is not analogous to hanging an empty picture frame on a museum wall. It is not a silent piece, but rather a response to the impossibility of silence.<sup>36</sup> On this reading, Cage was priming listeners to recognize that he was transfiguring "natural" sounds into music. On this account, a successful performance would be one that encouraged some listeners to become aware of their own capacity to control the transfiguration process by deciding what merits listening, and so to control which sounds enter the music. Although this reading of Cage and his achievement has the advantage of underscoring the degree to which audience reception is central to successful transfiguration, it does not support my argument against Danto. For it does not establish that Cage's intended sonic transfiguration in performances of *4'33"* are independent of a surrounding artworld (in Danto's sense of 'art' as bound up with the historical unfolding of fine art). Many readings of the transfiguring principle behind *4'33"* cite Cage's reliance on conceptual connections to developments in the visual arts, especially Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* (1951).<sup>37</sup> If a properly informed response to Cage's achievement requires grasping its relationship to Rauschenberg and other parallel developments in a proto-minimalist art movement, then it is embedded in an art-historical moment, in Danto's preferred sense of "art."<sup>38</sup>

So, again, the Cage example establishes nothing about the degree to which listening to and interpreting a musical work requires reference to the concept of art. *4'33"* leaves us without direction on the issue of whether all music must be related to the concept of fine art in order to semantically transfigure sounds into meaningful music.

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"Comfortably Numb" is a musical work. But it does not follow that it is art in Danto's sense of the term. There is no consensus that rock music is art, and some philosophers of music argue vigorously against their linkage.<sup>39</sup> To move this argument forward, we need a case of indiscernible, non-artwork counterparts involving the boundary between organized sound and

ambient sound. Here is a plausible case. In the spring of 1965, a British rhythm and blues quartet enters a London recording studio and records a pop song written by the group's guitarist. When the producer of the recording session sends the tape to the record company for pressing as a single, the engineers at the record label hear that the recording has been spoiled by feedback leakage onto the tape. The high-pitched, wailing sounds are the result of the electric guitarist holding his instrument at the same level as the speaker through which the volume is amplified; when the sound waves are captured by the guitar's electric pickup, it "feeds" information back into the amplification process, producing feedback. In short, a mere real thing – a sonic malfunction – has intruded on the aural properties of the musical performance. It is as if someone searching for the lavatories in the theater has mistakenly walked onstage during the performance of a play. The engineers at Decca Records return the master tape to the record producer, requesting a new recording session.

In this example, real life collides with the musical performance. Tellingly, a three-minute rhythm and blues song recorded in 1965 is no more a work of art than would be a tie painted blue by Cézanne's repeatedly wiping his brush on it.<sup>40</sup>

Now imagine that it is the spring of 1965, and a British rhythm and blues quartet enters a London recording studio and records a pop song written by the group's guitarist. During recent live performances, the guitarist has been experimenting with the "found" sound of feedback after accidentally unleashing it one evening by raising his guitar's pickup to just the right level to record the sound of its own amplification. (Although the Beatles have recently used a short burst of feedback at the start of their recording of "I Feel Fine," there are to date no recordings of feedback used as integral embellishment of a musical composition.) The quartet plays the song in standard fashion, after which the guitarist overdubs extensive feedback over the music. When the engineers at Decca Records hear the finished tapes, they return the tapes to the record's producer because the session has been ruined by a sonic malfunction. Bursts of guitar feedback saturate portions of the tape. However, the producer returns the tape to the engineers, explaining that the feedback is intended because it is one of the hallmarks of the young guitarist's performance style.

In this second case, the quartet is The Who, the recording is "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere," and the story is true.<sup>41</sup> The music "has all the subtlety of a mackerel thrown in one's face."<sup>42</sup>

Unlike Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, there is no plausible story according to which "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere" counted as an artwork (i.e., as fine art) when it was recorded and released.

Decca released The Who's record, feedback intact, once they understood that the feedback was an integral part of its musical fabric. The feedback is part of the musical gesture. Originally mistaken for a mere real thing (an accidental intrusion of an equipment malfunction), we have a genuine example of the indiscernibility of musical sounds and non-musical sounds. The concept of fine art plays no role in accounting for the difference that explains why one recording features music plus non-musical intrusion, while the other features only music, where the two recordings are indiscernible with respect to their manifest properties. To explain this difference, we need something that the ear cannot hear. However, we merely need a theory of music as a historically evolving "language" of rhetorical communication.<sup>43</sup> We do not need a theory of art, and we do not need the context of art history. We do not need to know why music is one of the fine arts, nor why this particular piece is a case of fine art.

Perhaps this pair of indiscernibles is unconvincing. Someone might object that in Danto's examples something that is not at all a work of art is transfigured into a work of art, whereas in the "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere" example a piece of music plus something that is partially not music is then transformed into a piece of music *simpliciter*. But Danto's example of the painted ties provides a parallel case to "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere." When Danto denies that the tie painted by Cézanne is an artwork, it is because Cézanne is a historical juncture where the tie is the problem, not the paint. Had that very same patch of paint been applied by Cézanne to a stretched canvas instead of a tie, it would have been a monochromatic work of art. After all, Danto is intent on denying that the act of painting is sufficient to transform a tie into an artwork.<sup>44</sup> At this historical juncture, the stumbling block is the incorporation of the ordinary object. Likewise, when the Decca engineers rejected The Who's recording, they responded to the gulf between what was acceptable (the rhythm and blues performance) and what made no sense (the feedback, which constituted the intrusion of non-musical sound). As luck would have it, the Decca engineers were presented with "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere" at the moment in the history of popular music where the two could be brought together into a single thing, a musical performance of a work designed to include feedback.

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Although “Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere” parallels the case of the painted ties, I have not yet offered a case where the totality of a musical work could be mistaken for ordinary non-musical sounds. The argument might be advanced by fabricating examples. However, as Danto suggests by choosing to emphasize Warhol’s Brillo boxes, stipulated “facts” in thought experiments do not confirm the necessity of an appropriate confluence of historical events. Psychologically, if not logically, real cases are needed to demonstrate the importance of the “atmosphere” of history and culture. So here are two examples of actual acts of interpreting sound that allow us to postulate and contrast a fabricated indiscernible.

In August 1971, former Beatle George Harrison organizes two benefit concerts to aid famine victims in Bangla Desh. The concerts open with a sitar and sarod duet featuring improvisation by Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan. As can be heard on the album assembled from the shows, *The Concert for Bangla Desh* (1971), Shankar is introduced and he asks the crowd to refrain from smoking and to listen respectfully. His words are followed by about thirty seconds of sound from the four instruments on stage. The audience applauds with enthusiasm. Shankar tells them that he hopes they enjoy the music as much as they've enjoyed the tuning. Contrast this event with a second (fabricated) case. Amused by the ignorance and arrogance displayed by Americans as they appropriate “world” music, a pop musician scores a work for sitar, sarod, tabla, and tamboura. She calls it “The Complete History of the Music of India.” The piece lasts about thirty seconds and it reproduces, note for note, the sounds made by Shankar and the other three musicians as they tuned up in front of the audience at Madison Square Garden that day in 1971.

At the benefit concert, the sequence of sounds produced by Shankar and his accompanists was not music, yet many members of the audience believed that music had been performed. “The Complete History of the Music of India” is sonically indiscernible, but it is music. Shankar’s tuning has no subject and the sounds are not about the world in any way, and it adopts no attitude or point of view by means of rhetorical ellipsis.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, “The Complete History of the Music of India” transfigures those sounds into a complex musical allusion that elliptically conveys the naivety with which Americans have enthusiastically treated music as a

universal language, as mere sonic wallpaper that can be consumed for enjoyment without concern for its originating cultural location. Popular culture is sufficiently rife with parody and complex allusion that this musical work need not be a case of *artistic* allusion in order to succeed as a musical allusion.<sup>46</sup>

My fourth and final example goes in the opposite direction, from an actual piece of music, copyrighted in 1969, to imagining a set of identical sounds that are not music. At the end of 1969, the Grateful Dead released the double album *Live Dead*. (The two vinyl discs now fill one compact disc.) As the title suggests, the album presents concert performances of their music. Presenting several extended improvisations selected from three different 1969 concert performances, *Live Dead* is regarded as one of the best live rock albums ever assembled. One of the seven pieces is a free improvisation, and all seven performing musicians receive equal composing credit. The title, "Feedback," gives a good description of the piece. Where The Who's "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere" embellished a song with electronic feedback, the Grateful Dead developed the practice of using feedback as the basis for group improvisation. As bass player Phil Lesh makes clear in his autobiography, the Dead's interest in sounds that were traditionally excluded as unmusical did not arise from their theoretical awareness of similar trends in art music. Lesh points out that they only "later learned that this approach was a fundamental tenet" of the work of John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen.<sup>47</sup> Although some of this art music was known to Tom Constanten, one of the Dead's two keyboardists at the time, Constanten seems to have played no special role in their improvisational practices, which were already well developed before his brief time with the group. However, with their roots in blues and jazz performance practices, the Dead were aware of the British rock musicians who had begun incorporating feedback into rock performance. The *Live Dead* performance of nearly eight minutes of feedback seems to have been a natural outgrowth of the Grateful Dead's collective interest in improvisation, electronic instrumentation, and democratic musical processes.

Interpreted as music, "Feedback" progresses from spiky dissonances that recall the music of Béla Bartók to a gentler ebb and flow that recalls the pastoral charm of Ralph Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*.<sup>48</sup> This progression of feeling is probably the organizing principle understood in advance by the participating musicians, for the Dead had established a practice of ending the evening by transitioning from feedback into an a cappella rendition of "And We Bid You



Goodnight," a traditional song they found on an album of "folk" field recordings, *The Real Bahamas* (1965).

Contrast the Grateful Dead's "Feedback" with a second, indiscernible sequence of sounds. Some rock musicians are testing the sound levels of their instruments during the sound check before a concert. The drummer determines whether his trap set meets his needs. He hits the snare drum a few times and then taps each of his cymbals. He makes a few adjustments and then does the same thing again. Meanwhile, the guitarist loosens up with some bluesy single-string note runs. The bass guitarist plucks a few isolated notes. The pianist is not heard because the piano is being tuned. The organist eventually tests his sound volume with a handful of sustained chords. As this is taking place, the sound technicians bring a series of electric guitars and bass guitars to the stage. They connect each one and make sure that it has a live feed into the amplifier. All the while, one of the unused vocal microphones has been left on and it produces "extremely loud distorted tones wrenched from the speakers by electromagnetic interaction between the musical notes perceived by the pickups and the magnetic fields of the pickup, speaker, and amplifier."<sup>49</sup> These tones vary as the sound technicians test the guitar feeds to the amplifiers.

Recorded, these sounds would be indiscernible sonic counterparts of the Grateful Dead's "Feedback." However, they are not music. In contrast, "Feedback" is a musical gesture that can be interpreted as addressing a subject: collective processes. The unplanned, uncoordinated feedback lacks the narrative structure built into "Feedback," lacks its overarching tension and release, and lacks its anarchistic critique of the repressive forces that undermine the American experiment of democracy. At any rate, that's how I hear the contrast, listening as someone for whom it is the "local" music of my own youth. All the same, my interpretation could be thoroughly misguided. Music listening has an element of subjectivity that cannot be eliminated, and that we have no reason to *want* to eliminate. At best, the Grateful Dead's placement of "Feedback" between "Death Don't Have No Mercy" and "And We Bid You Goodnight" is a clear indication that they are asking me to treat it as music, inviting me to seek an interpretation, however speculative that may be. Because there is a display of human intention, my interest in what the music "says" should not be dismissed as *merely* subjective.

Normally, feedback is not music, yet "Feedback" is music. It transfigures various sonic properties by virtue of its musical-historical

context. In the late 1960s, Grateful Dead fans did not need to think about Cage and Stockhausen in order to “get” what the Dead were doing. Nothing I have come across about the band and their processes suggests that they had a collective intention to make art in any but the most catholic sense of the term. (Their collective intention to make rock music that parallels jazz seems to have been unrelated to any interest in art history or the nature of art.) In contrast, the feedback made during the sound check is not music. Similarly, Shankar’s tuning process does not instantiate a musical work. Yet a piece of pop music that sounds exactly like it might be a musical work. What it is about, and how, will require interpretation relative to a musical–historical context.

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## 7.

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Why, exactly, does Danto build the requirement of an art–historical context into his analysis? Again and again, he proposes that statements that would be false as statements about a non–art object become true when said about the same object as a work of art. Therefore the ability to recognize that any otherwise false statement about the ordinary object is a true statement about a work of art requires awareness that we “make different statements depending upon a variety of contextual factors.”<sup>50</sup> In some cases, an apt interpretation requires awareness that an artist is making a statement that is informed by the artist’s knowledge of “artistic themes and the history of art.” This “atmosphere” or context of interpretation allows the artist to make a statement about “art objects.” In short, knowledge of art theories and art history is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for an artwork to make a statement or express an attitude about art. Therefore, “to see something as art at all demands nothing less than this, an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art.”<sup>51</sup>

My four examples demonstrate that the transfiguration of the commonplace (when that involves something over and above mere representation) does not require reference to art theory, to art history, or to the concept of art. Statements that would be false as statements about a non–musical sound become true when said about them as music. Yet music need not be art, nor understood as such, for the transfiguration to

occur. Said of a recording of feedback generated accidentally at a sound check, "Those sounds are a collective process coming to terms with dissonance" means something very different from the same sentence said about the feedback improvisation on *Live Dead*. "That's feedback" said by the Decca sound engineers rejecting the tape of "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere" has very different implications than the same sentence said by a Who fan. For knowledgeable listeners, The Who's feedback and the Dead's feedback invite interpretation. But there is no need for the musicians, record producer, and sound engineers to share a theory of art. Some agreement about music will be sufficient.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the method of indiscernible counterparts does not establish any direct linkage between a musician's ability to "make different statements depending upon a variety of contextual factors" and the music's status as art.

If recontextualization transfigures sounds and yet the appropriate interpretation can be grasped by thinking about music without reference to any theory of art, then reference to a theory of art or to art history is only relevant when the work in question is making a statement about the art status of works of art.<sup>53</sup> So the atmosphere of art history and theory is not a necessary condition for accomplishing what Danto finds non-aesthetically remarkable about art, namely that false statements are true when said about the artifact in its historically contextualized, rhetorical use. As Noël Carroll observed some years ago, we may need a historicity requirement, but the version presented in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* is far too exclusive.<sup>54</sup> But where Carroll offers a counter-example in order to show that Danto's formulation is too exclusive for conferring the status of art, I have offered examples that do not presume that we are attempting to confer the status of art. I have argued that Danto fails to establish that semantic and aesthetic transfiguration requires either an art-historical context or the concept of art. In contrast, Carroll argues that the conditions that an object must satisfy in order to be considered an artwork are mistakenly identified in Danto's account.

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## 8.

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My examples of popular music demonstrate that the work of transfiguring the ordinary into meaningful and thereby different things can be independent of awareness of art theory and art history. I will conclude with some brief reflections on the contingent relationship between music and fine art.

The relevant historical context for most art involves a wide range of concepts. There are concepts about media and their appropriate uses, and then there are concepts and themes that furnish content for artistic embodiment. A great deal of art challenges or subverts both sets of concepts. As Danto observes, many works of art raise questions about the philosophy of art.<sup>55</sup> Presumably, most of them interrogate the concept of art by responding to specific philosophies of art (e.g., some to mimetic theory, others to expression theory) rather than by addressing the very general concept of philosophy. Yet Danto says that it was only in the latter half of the twentieth century that the interpretation of fine art “had to turn to philosophy.” The purpose for doing so was “to find out what art was.”<sup>56</sup> Given post-Kantian philosophical interest in the concept of art, this development is not unexpected. What was unexpected was the identity of the artist who instigated this philosophical turn, and his selection of media. Warhol’s turn from painting to *sculptural replication* in order to explore the concept of art in the late twentieth century is not an historical or conceptual inevitability any more than was the appearance, in the fourteenth century, of epic poems to explore the concepts of love and salvation – in Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*, most notably. But, given Dante’s historical context, it is not unexpected, either.

Setting aside the identities of those two artists and their selection of particular media, are we tempted to say that vernacular writing *had* to become philosophical about prevailing religious doctrines in the same sense that Danto says that the sculptural interpretation of art *had* to turn to philosophy? Despite the prevalence of philosophical content in art, Danto never promotes the parallel thesis that the interpretation of every artwork must refer to a philosophical theory of some kind. This result is not surprising, for it would be a hasty generalization: only some works of art require such reference in order to be correctly understood. Furthermore, it would not differentiate fine art from other kinds of things

in the many cases where it does occur, for philosophical references and allusions are found in popular culture, too.<sup>57</sup> Despite these many references to philosophy, no one is tempted to conclude that reference to philosophical context is a necessary condition for being fine art, popular art, or “small-a” art. We can derive the important result – that only one of a pair of indiscernible objects embodies a particular reference to philosophical content – by introducing a historicity requirement: the identity conditions of any interpretable artifact include conventions established by its originating cultural-historical context. In some cases that will include reference to a particular development in the history of philosophy. In other cases, it will not. Why, then, does the self-referential nature of Warhol’s Brillo boxes lead Danto to conclude that a thing cannot be an artwork unless it can be interpreted in light of an *art*-historical context?<sup>58</sup> It can only be because of the particular question embodied in Warhol’s boxes. Yet that question, in turn, arose only because Warhol happened to be in a time and place where art was routinely opposed to craft and commerce, and his success as a painter and sculptor required him to distance himself from his past as a commercial artist.<sup>59</sup>

Far from being “eternal,” as Danto claims, the unification of the arts under the concept of fine art is a modernist project.<sup>60</sup> It appears to be an interesting accident rather than a historical progression or a revelation of an unchanging essence of art. I grant that it would be disingenuous to deny that a great deal of recent popular music has been caught up in this modernist project.<sup>61</sup> Pink Floyd may have been caught up in it, too. But I’ll wager that many of the millions who love *The Wall* have understood, and some have had their perspective on life altered by, “Comfortably Numb,” without the slightest concern for its status as art. Before that, The Who and then the Grateful Dead transfigured feedback without concern for Cézanne, Warhol, or Cage.

Danto’s analysis of indiscernible pairs presupposes rather than supports the position that there is an eternal essence of art with a historically evolving extension. Nonetheless, in *What Art Is*, Danto returns again to the example that inspired his analysis, Warhol’s Brillo box. He emphasizes the point that Warhol was exploring the concept of fine art by calling attention to its opposition to commercial art.<sup>62</sup> Both The Who and the Grateful Dead were engaged in a context of commercial entertainment rather than fine art when they transfigured noise into music. Danto would say that they fall on the wrong side of the line for their historical moment. Yet nothing interesting is lost on account of their merely being music. Generalizing more broadly, it is one thing to suppose that I cannot

aesthetically appreciate Ludwig van Beethoven's symphonies unless I understand that they are music, that they are symphonies, that they are tonal works of a particular era, perhaps even that they are all the works of the same pupil of Joseph Haydn. But if I know all of that, what more do I gain by interpreting them in light of the concept of art, or in light of the historically situated art theory of Beethoven's place and time?

To summarize, if my sonic counterparts do not rely on the modern concept of art as an element of their relevant historical context, then most of Danto's examples do not, either. I conclude that, aside from a few very special cases such as Warhol's Brillo boxes, Danto's method of aligning indiscernible counterparts does not invite reference to a grand narrative that invokes – even in nascent form – the concept of fine art.<sup>63</sup> Art theory is not the theory that must be brought to bear whenever we properly attend to the transfiguration that occurs in works of art. In the vast majority of cases, local histories of creative production will supply all of the "theory" that is required to permit audiences, viewers, and readers to attend to the transfiguration that occurs in performances, galleries, and literature. The concept of art is a modern concept for unifying these related but distinct activities, but we do not need it to transfigure sounds into music or strings of words into literature, and so there is no special aesthetics for works of art.<sup>64</sup>

## • Notes •

<sup>1</sup> Arthur C. Danto, "Replies to Essays," in Mark Rollins (ed.), *Danto and His Critics*, 2nd edition (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 289.

<sup>2</sup> Anita Silvers, "The Artwork Discarded," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34 (1976), 448.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur C. Danto, "Art and Meaning," in Noël Carroll (ed.), *Theories of Art Today* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press 2000), 131. However, Danto's summary is not quite accurate. He does not always oppose artworks and ordinary objects. Several of Danto's most important comparisons are between two visual works or two literary works that no one would confuse with an ordinary object (i.e., with non-art). For example, Danto offers the contrast of a segment of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Pierre Menard's graphically indiscernible literary text. (Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1981], 33.) Darren Hudson Hick offers an example that is not merely imagined, in "Ontology and the Challenge of Literary Appropriation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71 (2013), 155-165.

<sup>4</sup> Despite Danto's very clear language at many points in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (e.g., 135), Noël Carroll argues that Danto might not really mean art theory. He might only require "that artworks must be subtended by some artworld concepts." Noël Carroll, review of *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace; The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art, History and Theory* 29 (1990), 115.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *What Art Is* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 134.

<sup>6</sup> By appealing to both visual and literary examples, Danto demonstrates that his recurring references to "art" presuppose a sense of "art" that references a historically-recent unified system of the arts; no particular definition of art or philosophy of art is presupposed. For an account of the cultural and intellectual history that serves as the background to the assumption that literature, painting, and sculpture are arts, see Paul O. Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951): 496-527, and 13 (1952): 17-46, and Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> In addition to Danto's own arguments, provenance-relative ontologies are defended by Kendall L. Walton ("Categories of Art," *The Philosophical Review* 79 [1970] 334-367), and Gregory Currie (*An Ontology of Art* [London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989]).

<sup>8</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 78.

<sup>9</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 199-200. In Danto's most recent writings, it appears that his position on music might be closely aligned with Kant's view (Danto, *What Art Is*, 116-134).

<sup>10</sup> Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 40.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>12</sup> On the assumption that "art-making is pan-cultural and historically ancient," fine art must be distinguished from art, broadly conceived: a "small 'a' notion of art." Popular art falls more obviously into the category of "small-a art" than fine art. (Stephen Davies, *The Artful Species: Aesthetics, Art, and Evolution* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], 50-51.) Following Ted Cohen's argument that some films are simultaneously popular art and fine art, it is likely that some popular music has achieved fine art status. (Ted Cohen, "High and

Low Art, and High and Low Audiences,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 [1999]: 137–143.) However, extending Cohen’s analysis from an Alfred Hitchcock thriller to rock songs does not undercut the point that work-identity remains independent of the concept of “art.”

<sup>13</sup> Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 95.

<sup>14</sup> In his most recent book, Danto continues to maintain that it is important that Warhol’s boxes are to be classified as fine art, whereas the visual design of their model is not. Danto, *What Art Is*, 115.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 35.

<sup>16</sup> If all music is art, it is the pan-cultural, “small-a” notion that predates the modern system of the arts. See Davies, op. cit., and my *On Music* (New York: Routledge, 2013), chapter 1.

<sup>17</sup> In contrast, Danto is widely understood to hold that one necessary condition for being an artwork is that its interpretation “require[s] an art-historical context (which context is generally specified as background of historically situate theory).” Noël Carroll, “Essence, Expression, and History: Arthur Danto’s Philosophy of Art,” in Mark Rollins, *Danto and His Critics*, 119. Danto endorses Carroll’s formulation of the definition of art as articulated in *Transfiguration*, saying, “it is to Carroll’s text that I would send anyone who sought a statement of what I might have achieved.” (Danto, “Replies to Essays,” 300). Elsewhere, Danto says that engagement with theory is not required, but some engagement with art history is essential: “Art is essentially art historical” (*What Art Is*, 134). Given the opportunity to reply to Carroll’s observation that Danto’s shift in emphasis abandons his “greatest” hypothesis (Carroll, “Danto’s New Definition of Art,” 146), Danto does not respond to Carroll’s point (Danto, “Replies to Essays,” 300–302).

<sup>18</sup> Danto, *After the End of Art*, 195–196.

<sup>19</sup> Danto confirms this point when he contrasts his historicity condition with those of Heinrich Wölfflin and Ernst Gombrich (*After the End of Art*, 196).

<sup>20</sup> Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 95.

<sup>21</sup> In his most recent publication on the topic of defining art, Danto speaks of “my definition” of art (*What Art Is*, xii). Yet Danto restricts himself to offering several necessary conditions for art. He is primarily concerned with excluding certain properties (e.g., mimesis and beauty) from the list of necessary conditions. He implies that he has abandoned the search for a set of sufficient conditions (*What Art Is*, 134). However, if Danto intends to offer sufficient conditions while jettisoning the requirement for art theory (suggested, *What Art Is*, 149), his definition appears to endorse the art status of virtually any “embodied” communication, a point made by Carroll in “Danto’s New Definition of Art and the Problem of Art Theories,” in Rollins, *Danto and His Critics*, 148.

<sup>22</sup> Walton, “Categories of Art,” 337.

<sup>23</sup> Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 111.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 113. Danto has now made it explicitly clear that he rejects the thesis that two indiscernible objects must have the same aesthetic properties if they are “perceptually alike” (*What Art Is*, 146).

<sup>25</sup> For an extended example, see my discussion of Jaco Pastorius in *On Music*, 19–20.

<sup>26</sup> Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> In particular, see Jerrold Levinson (*Music, Art, and Metaphysics* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990]), and Stephen Davies (*Musical Works and Performances: A Philosophical Exploration* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001]).



- <sup>28</sup> Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 175
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13 and 102, respectively.
- <sup>31</sup> Stephen Davies, "John Cage's 4'33": Is it Music?" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1997), 458.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 460.
- <sup>33</sup> See, for example, Douglas Kahn, "John Cage: Silence and Silencing," *The Musical Quarterly* 81 (1997), 560-563.
- <sup>34</sup> Stephen Davies, "John Cage's 4'33": Is it Music?" 450.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 460.
- <sup>36</sup> Kahn, "John Cage: Silence and Silencing," 583.
- <sup>37</sup> Cage discusses Rauschenberg's influence in "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work," *Metro* (Milan) 2 (May 1961), 36-51; reprinted in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), 98-108.
- <sup>38</sup> This reading of Cage is advanced by Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4-5, and extended to other visual artists by James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 116. Another emerging interpretation locates Cage in the movement toward sonic art that is not music, but essentially aligned with the visual arts; see Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 16-21.
- <sup>39</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 157 and 502.
- <sup>40</sup> Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 46.
- <sup>41</sup> Dave Marsh, *Before I Get Old: The Story of the Who* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1983), 173.
- <sup>42</sup> Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 44.
- <sup>43</sup> Although there may be cases of music that invites no interpretation, I endorse Eduard Hanslick's view that it is difficult to see why music is an important human activity if we adopt a "pathological" theory of music, according to which it is primarily an instrument for arousing emotions. (Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, trans. Geoffrey Payzant [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986], 60.) For an extended discussion of how an occasion of performance can enrich a musical work's meaning, see my "Meanings of Songs and Meanings of Song Performances," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71 (2013), 23-33.
- <sup>44</sup> For example, Danto explicitly distinguishes between the history of visual representation and the history of art, in *After the End of Art*, 196.
- <sup>45</sup> This formulation is from Carroll, "Essence, Expression, and History," 119.
- <sup>46</sup> Theodore Gracyk "Allusions and Intentions in Popular Art," in William Irwin and Jorge J.E. Gracia (eds. ), *Philosophy and the Interpretation of Pop Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 65-87, and Gracyk "Meanings of Songs and Meanings of Song Performances. "
- <sup>47</sup> Phil Lesh, *Searching for the Sound: My Life with the Grateful Dead* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005), 71 n.4.
- <sup>48</sup> Granted, these are aesthetics properties of the music, and Danto denies that aesthetic achievement is a necessary condition for being an artwork (Danto, *What Art Is*, 144). Since I am not maintaining that the stretch of feedback is art, Danto's point makes no difference

to this argument. At the same time, the Dead's experiments with feedback might be interpreted as an anti-aesthetic gesture, in which case the feedback is embodied meaning in just the way that Marcel Duchamp's readymades inform Danto's argument (Ibid., 25).

<sup>49</sup> Lesh, *Searching for the Sound*, 71.

<sup>50</sup> Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 133.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>52</sup> Given the argument of section 8, I allow that there are cases within popular music where feedback is presented and is properly understood only if we think of it as fine art that is opposed to commercial product. Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music* (RCA, 1975) is a plausible candidate.

<sup>53</sup> This formulation derives from Carroll's explication of Danto's account of embodiment in "Essence, Expression, and History," 119.

<sup>54</sup> Carroll, "Essence, Expression, and History," 141.

<sup>55</sup> Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 56.

<sup>56</sup> Danto, *After the End of Art*, 13.

<sup>57</sup> Steely Dan's "Bodhisattva" (1973) is an obvious example. For an extended defense of this point, see Carolyn Korsmeyer, "Philosophy and the Probable Impossible," in Irwin and Gracia, *Philosophy and the Interpretation of Pop Culture*, 24.

<sup>58</sup> Reaffirmed, as I have already noted, in Danto, *What Art Is*, 134. Subsequently, he clarifies his argument by saying that he means the concept of fine art (146).

<sup>59</sup> In keeping with his general position, Danto denies that Warhol's boxes are to be understood in biographical terms; see Arthur C. Danto, *Andy Warhol* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 2-3.

<sup>60</sup> "I am committed to the view that art is eternally the same." Danto, *After the End of Art*, 95. I am using "modernism" to indicate a strain of thinking that came to fruition in the Enlightenment, as opposed to the view that it is a more recent development (e.g., Danto, "Art and Meaning," 130; Shiner, *The Invention of Art*, chap. 14)

<sup>61</sup> Bernard Gendron, *Between Monmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>62</sup> See note 62.

<sup>63</sup> Danto offers his extended reading of the emergence of the concept of art in *After the End of Art*.

<sup>64</sup> I extend my thanks to the anonymous referees of this journal, who pushed me to clarify and expand my argument, and to Brian Soucek, Jonathan Neufeld, and Michalle Gal, who encouraged me to contribute an early version to the online conference *Arthur Danto's Transfiguration of the Commonplace – 25 Years Later* (2007).

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