

## How *Transfiguration* Saved the Style Matrix

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### Introduction

Although Arthur Danto introduced the idea of the style matrix over three decades ago, it has received little attention since that time. Moreover, what attention it has received has been primarily critical in spirit. Noël Carroll and Jerrold Levinson have both criticized the style matrix on the grounds that it is overly historicist: Carroll worries that it entails backward causation, while Levinson complains that it licenses changes in an artwork's content or meaning over time. Danto himself has even accepted Carroll's charge in print;<sup>1</sup> so one would think that if Danto were to give up his style matrix, it would be because he too found it overly historicist. Surprisingly, however, Danto himself has rejected the style matrix for just the opposite reason! He objects to the style matrix because he thinks it is too *ahistoricist*. This is very puzzling. How can the style matrix be simultaneously too historicist and too ahistoricist?

I defend the style matrix against charges from both camps. If we take seriously the lessons from *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* about the nature of art and about how artworks gain their properties, neither attacks against the style matrix is legitimate. After spelling out what the style matrix is and how it functions, I explain why Danto's original formulation of it need not be ahistoricist in the way that Danto later worries. On the contrary, it is perfectly compatible with the historical sensitivity Danto advocates in *Transfiguration* and in his later works. I then defend even our historically sensitive understanding of the style matrix from Carroll and Levinson's charges of being overly historicist. I argue that many of the attacks against the style matrix rest on a confusion about the forms of historicism to which Danto is

committed. But if we take seriously the morals of *Transfiguration*, it is clear that Danto's position need not be problematic in the way that many have suggested.

### **The Lessons from *Transfiguration* and Their Articulation in the Style Matrix**

In theory, the style matrix is intended to articulate visually Danto's general views about the nature of artworks and their properties. In "The Artworld" and then later on in more detail, in *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Danto provides the initial formulation of his oft-cited claim that what transforms an object into an artwork, and what differentiates two indiscernible artworks, is the art historical context and art theory in which it exists.<sup>ii</sup> The style matrix is introduced in this context as a graphic mechanism designed to place artworks in their suitable context. It is supposed to enable us to trace a work's history and to explain why and how an object is an artwork in virtue of having emerged out of a particular art-historical context. In doing so, the style matrix is intended to graphically and visually trace the way that earlier artworks can be characterized retroactively in terms of new predicates that arise as a result new artworks being created.

In practice, the style matrix reflects Danto's early views about art by representing the predicates that an artwork may possess at a given moment in time graphically. The matrix is, literally, a grid in which artworks are placed, given the style predicates that are operative at that point in time. Artworks appear on different rows, and the columns of the matrix indicate the different possible style predicates that might apply to a given artwork. On any given row, either the predicate in some column will or will not apply to the artwork in question. If the predicate does apply to the artwork in question, we may place a '+' on the row under the appropriate column to indicate that the artwork possesses that predicate. If it does not, a '-' indicates the

artwork does not possess that predicate. Since Danto construes these stylistic predicates as opposites, for any predicate P, either an artwork possesses P or not-P.<sup>iii</sup>

As new artworks are developed, we come to think about artworks in terms of new properties. As a result, new properties become artistically relevant (what Danto sometimes calls ‘being marked’) to thinking and understanding not only new art, but also earlier art as well. Suddenly, the new properties enable us to realize that earlier artworks lacked those properties:

let F and non-F be an opposite pair of such predicates. Now it might happen that, throughout an entire period of time, every artwork is non-F. But since nothing thus far is both an artwork and F, it might never occur to anyone that non-F is an artistically relevant predicate. The non-F-ness of artworks goes unmarked. By contrast, all works up to a given time might be G, it never occurring to anyone until that time that something might both be an artwork and non-G...<sup>iv</sup>

Consider an example. Suppose we attempt to construct a style matrix to represent the styles of Monet’s *Waterlilies*, Duchamp’s *Fountain* and Picasso’s *Guernica* in 1950. We may imagine constructing a matrix whose columns have the following possible predicates: *impressionist*, *conceptual*, and *cubist*. The Monet may possess the first, but not the other two; Duchamp, however, possesses only the second predicate, while Picasso’s work possesses only the last. Thus, in 1950, our matrix would be:

	impressionist	cubist	conceptual
<i>Waterlilies</i>	+	-	-
<i>Fountain</i>	-	-	+
<i>Guernica</i>	-	+	-

As new artworks are created, new predicates may be added to the style matrix. If the new artwork contains features that previous artworks did not, then those new predicates may be added to the style matrix. From that point forward, all previous and future artworks will be characterized in terms of those new predicates.

The style matrix has an interesting consequence for the number of aesthetic properties that can apply to artworks. Contrary to what you might expect, when a new aesthetic feature is discovered, the artworld does not simply gain a single new way of describing art. Rather, *two* new features are added to the style matrix, viz., the property in question and its negation<sup>v</sup>:

Plainly, as we add art-relevant predicates, we increase the number of available styles at the rate of  $2n$ . It is, of course, not easy to see in advance which predicates are going to be added or replaced by their opposites, but suppose an artist determines that H shall henceforth be artistically relevant for his paintings. Then, in fact, both H and non-H become artistically relevant for *all* painting, and if his is the first and only painting that is H, every other painting in existence becomes non-H, and the entire community of paintings is enriched, together with a doubling of the available style opportunities. It is this retroactive enrichment of the entities in the artworld that makes it possible to discuss Raphael and De Kooning together, or Lichtenstein and Michelangelo.<sup>vi</sup>

Whatever is the artistically relevant predicate in virtue of which they gain their entry, the rest of the Artworld becomes that much the richer in having the opposite predicate available to its members.<sup>vii</sup>

Once a new feature P is revealed in a new artwork, the artworld “gains” two new predicates that can apply to all artworks - both P and not-P. All artworks prior to the work in which P exists become characterized as not-P and all future artworks will possess either P or not-P.<sup>viii</sup>

Returning to our example: in 1965, if we were to reconsider our style matrix from 1950 in light of the Pop art movement, there will be new predicates with which to characterize earlier artworks.<sup>ix</sup> For example, Warhol’s artworks require new predicates with which to characterize his art. On at least one interpretation of his work, his art celebrates the consumer society, and this element of celebrating consumerism is a feature that has been previously absent from earlier art. Hence, in light of the new developments in the artworld brought about by Pop art, we come to see previous artworks as not-consumerist, as insulated from their environment in a way that Pop art was not.<sup>x</sup> So, a style matrix highlighting the relationships among our same three artworks will be different, if it were created in 1950 or in 1965. In 1965, there would be an additional predicate with which to describe these three artworks: celebration of consumer society. All three of these

artworks would lack such a feature, while the Pop art would possess it. So, as new predicates are revealed, the number of stylistic characteristics with which to describe earlier artworks increases.

If successful, the style matrix would enable Danto to explain graphically some of the key ideas first developed in the *Transfiguration*, and then further defended in later works – why, for example, a given work could not have been art just at any point in time (because the relevant properties were not artistically available); why two indiscernible objects might have fundamentally different interpretations (because they arose in different art historical contexts which endowed the works with different properties); why the way we see art seems to change over time (because the predicates available to us are slowly expanded and enriched over time).

Indeed, later on, Danto laments that he had hoped for the style matrix to provide such explanations:<sup>xi</sup>

The *vision* the style matrix underwrites - or which underwrites it - is the way works of art form a kind of organic community, and release latencies in one another merely by virtue of their existence. I was thinking of the world of artworks as a kind of community of internally related objects...To be a work of art was to be a member of the art world, and to stand in different kinds of relationship to works of art than to any other kind of thing. I even had a kind of political vision that all works of art were equal, in the sense that each artwork had the same number of stylistic qualities as any other. When a new style row was added to the matrix, everyone got richer by one property.<sup>xii</sup>

So-called latent features were supposed to be revealed when an artist creates an artwork whose description requires making use of a new artistically relevant predicate, say, Q. Q would then be applied to the new artwork in question. But, Q would have an effect on all previous art: not-Q would become artistically relevant in describing all previous art, too.<sup>xiii</sup> When this happens, not-Q would then be a latent feature of earlier artworks which would be released by the artwork that possesses Q. Not-Q would be a latent feature of previous artworks because it could not have been seen at the time of their creation, but only once an artwork where Q is an artistically relevant property was created. So, as we discover new artistically relevant predicates, it was

supposed to be possible to attribute to earlier artworks certain predicates that could not have been attributed to those artworks at the time of their creation.

Although it is clear that Danto hoped that the style matrix would help represent visually his general views about art, it is equally clear that he seems to think he did not succeed. What could have gone wrong? Let us begin with some technical problems with the matrix.

### **Technicalities with the Style Matrix**

The overall goal of the style matrix is to provide us with a way of comparing stylistic features from one period to the next and seeing how latent features from earlier periods come to be revealed by later art with the discovery of artistically relevant predicates. But comparisons are possible only if more than one style matrix is examined – an earlier one and a later one. So although we may speak informally of learning about art through a single style matrix, strictly speaking, we actually need at least *two* different matrices in order to make comparisons that help us track the changes and evolution of art history.

Moreover, two further, related problems threaten the style matrix. To appreciate both, consider the following kind of case. Suppose I am interested in comparing the stylistic features in place in Chinese art in the second century with the features that characterize contemporary German art today. Although strictly speaking, we could construct such a style matrix, intuitively it would not be particularly informative or useful. The mere establishment of two style matrices will not allow us to make meaningful comparisons, because it is unlikely that any features of contemporary German art could have existed latently in second century Chinese art; hence it is unlikely that these two periods share much, if anything, in common. This highlights two problems with the style matrix, as Danto has currently formulated it. The first problem is that, intuitively, these two time periods are too far apart *temporally* to allow us to learn anything about

how our conception of art has changed. Second, they are also too far apart *culturally* speaking as well. Both problems seem to indicate that some kind of causal relationship among artworks - temporal or cultural - is required.

Although these problems seem minor and technical, they are indicative of a more serious problem – one that Danto himself worries about. So, let us turn next to Danto’s own concern.

### **Style Matrix Is Too Ahistorical**

Danto himself worries that the style matrix is too ahistorical because it connects artworks solely on the basis of visual affinities, i.e., on the basis of visual similarities:

for all the historical sensitivity of the style matrix, it implies an ahistorical vision of art...<sup>xiv</sup>

In any case, we can imagine two red squares, one executed in the spirit of Kierkegaardian jokes and one in the spirit of Suprematism, which look enough alike that the temptation would be to place them in the same position on the style matrix, but which actually have very different stylistic attributes, not to speak of different interpretations and meanings.<sup>xv</sup> In these passages, Danto suggests that the style matrix must classify artworks on the basis of visual features. So, if two artworks share similar visual features, then we must place them in the same place on the style matrix. But, if we have learned anything from the lessons in *Transfiguration*, we know that artworks may well have similar visual properties, but be stylistically different. Unfortunately, Danto worries that the style matrix does not seem to capture his most basic and fundamental ideas about art:

Thus a tall thin effigy from Africa doubtless has some ‘affinity’ with a characteristic Giacometti, but affinity overlooks the reasons why either of them is tall and thin, and that must do great damage to our perception of either. But that is one of the problems with affinities, and it is, I am afraid, one of the problems, perhaps one of the main problems, with the style matrix itself.<sup>xvi</sup>

Claiming an affinity is the very opposite of inferential art criticism, for it entails no historical explanations at all...it suffices that the one work ‘recalls’ the other in the mind of the art historian. In the bitterly criticized exhibition *Primitivism and Modern Art*, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1985, the principle of affinity was much the principle of the show: there were ‘affinities’ between Giacometti and Ibo sculptures,

meaning that they resembled one another at the level of abstract form, though it was unclear that Giacometti had ever seen the alleged affines of his work... Now there may be an explanation subtended by the claim of an affinity, but it would be mostly transhistorical, viz., that there is some explanans common and peculiar to all members of an affinity class. Usually, these stand to the explanans as a set of instances do to some platonic form, and affinitistic art criticism is essentially platonist in spirit. But I say only that until some legitimate explanation is forthcoming, the response to the claim of affinities is really “So what?” A lot of art historical ingenuity goes into these claims, as it does in the art historical lectures which move forward on affinities, and with the demonstration through juxtaposed slides of formal similarities between things that may have no *causal* relationship to one another at all.<sup>xvii</sup>

Danto is concerned that if the style matrix relates artworks on the basis of what they look like, it cannot differentiate these artworks on the basis of reasons that require reference to art history. If true, it would be a rather ironic fact about the style matrix that it fails to capture his most basic philosophical insight about the nature of art – viz., that what individuates artworks is the theory and history of art that underwrites the work in question.

While it may be true that, as formulated, Danto’s style matrix is constructed using only visual affinities, I see no reason why it *must* be so. Why not construct a style matrix inspired by the morals drawn from *Transfiguration* – viz., that the nonmanifest properties of artworks – in particular their art historical and art theoretical context - are artistically relevant to artworks. Relying on the art-historical context, we might suggest that stylistic properties be determined not by visual affinities, but rather by the causal relations among artworks. This is, indeed, how Danto himself conceived of the style matrix when writing *Transfiguration*:

the aesthetic qualities of the work are a function of their own historical identity, so that one may have to revise utterly one’s assessment of a work in the light of what one comes to know about it; it may not even be the work one thought it was in the light of wrong historical information.<sup>xviii</sup>

Modifying the style matrix to more faithfully reflect Danto’s views about the nature of art would also help solve some of the technical problems that face Danto’s original formulation of the style matrix. Recall that our initial attempt to characterize the style matrix was conceptually

confused. We noted that the style matrix was intended to capture how our conception of styles changes over time, by allowing us to see how new and different predicates become artistically relevant over time. One problem we encountered was that it does not seem that we can always meaningfully compare two different matrices. For example, comparing contemporary German art with Chinese art from 1200 does not yield any interesting insights into the evolution of artistically relevant predicates. Morals from *Transfiguration* can explain why. The style matrix is intended to reflect the causal relations among artworks, and to reveal how the evolution of artistically relevant predicates is the result of changing causal relations among artworks. It follows that only matrices referencing artworks that are causally and historically related to one another will yield any insight.

In addition, a more thoroughly historicist account is in line with his larger ideas about art, conveyed in *Transfiguration*:

I have inveighed against the isolation of artworks from the historical and generally causal matrices from which they derive their identities and structures. The ‘work itself’ thus presupposes so many causal connections with its artistic environment that an ahistorical theory of art can have no philosophical defense.<sup>xix</sup>

Part of the interest of the style matrix lies in the status it lends to what one might term *latent properties* in paintings, properties of a kind to which viewers contemporary with the painting would have been blind, just because these become visible only retrospectively, in the light of later artistic developments. Correggio is again a good case: the Carracci, a century later, saw him as a predecessor, and hence as early baroque. Indeed, he became keenly appreciated in the eighteenth century, when his reputation was perhaps at its height, for such works as his *Loves of Jupiter*, seen as anticipating the rococo. The features that made Correggio hard to grasp as an artist by his contemporaries suddenly become clarified when the baroque style is invented, and further clarified from the perspective of the rococo. Mannerists prized grace at whatever cost to naturalness, and the disregard of the latter helps explain the term’s synonymy today with a kind of extreme artifice such as we find in Correggio’s contemporary Parmigianino. But Correggio, though what was later called a Mannerist, also reacted against what his contemporaries regarded as *maniera* in the direction of something more naturalistic. So Correggio gets reinvented when Mannerism is stabilized as a concept in the twentieth century, just as he was reinvented in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and on each occasion latent features became released and made available to appreciation. In a similar way, the late Monet gets to be an early New York type painter. André Breton

classed Uccello and Seurat as anticipatory surrealists, but there are any number of others - Archimboldo and Hans Baldung Grien come instantly to mind - who were waiting for surrealism to be invented in order to be adequately appreciated.<sup>xx</sup>

So far, we have seen both how Danto's original formulation of the style matrix is perhaps too ahistorical, and considered how the style matrix, when bolstered by his more considered views about the nature of art, can become a more historically sensitive tool. But, does it render the style matrix too historicist? Let us turn now to Carroll and Levinson's charges on this topic.

### **Style Matrix Is Too Historicist**

Carroll and Levinson both criticize the style matrix for being too historicist: Carroll worries that it entails backward causation, a position that he finds dubious. Levinson argues that the style matrix entails the implausible view that an artwork's properties may depend on what *succeeds* it.<sup>xxi</sup> Let us evaluate Carroll's worries first.

Carroll objects to the style matrix because it encourages anachronisms and what he more generally refers to as '*backward causation*':

The style matrix, on the other hand, can impute properties to artworks that are completely anachronistic and beyond the ken of the artist. For the style matrix warrants stylistic attributions that have no basis in the historical past. The style matrix allows imputations of properties to works of the past on the basis of conceptions of art available only in the recent present. Danto's idea of a style matrix, like Eliot's view of perpetually readjusting artistic traditions, is dubious insofar as *it suggests the possibility of backward causation. Both views have artworks acquiring essential properties after they have been loosed upon the world and after their makers are long dead.*<sup>xxii</sup>

What does Carroll mean by 'backward causation,' and what's wrong with it? In the above passage, Carroll begins with the plausible interpretation of the style matrix, according to which the style matrix justifies attributing to an artwork created at an earlier time T1 properties that were only discovered at a later time T2. That is, the style matrix allows us to attribute a property P to an earlier artwork from T1, even though P was only discovered at a later time T2 (and hence

was unknown to the artist at T1). This is correct. However, Carroll then goes on to infer from this that later events at T2 must literally cause an artwork created at T1 to acquire p.

But notice that this does *not* imply that later events literally cause an artwork to acquire new properties, as Carroll suggests when he claims that the style matrix has “artworks acquiring essential properties long after they have been loosed upon the world and after their makers are long dead.” There are two reasons why this subsequent charge is illegitimate.

First, the style matrix does not impute a causal chain whose direction takes us from a *later* artwork to an *earlier* artwork. Rather, the chain links together (a) a later artwork that possesses some newly discovered property P as artistically relevant and (b) the attribution of that property to an earlier artwork. But, notice that these two events most frequently occur at about the same time: the creation of the new work with P as artistically relevant and the attribution of P to earlier art occurs about the same time. So, this chain need not involve a shift in *time* at all.

But, this just highlights the second reason why Carroll’s conclusion is illegitimate. The style matrix does not suggest that later *artworks* literally cause an earlier *artwork* to acquire new artistically relevant properties, for the simple reason that it is not intended to establish a causal relation between *artworks*. Rather, the causal relation is between a later artwork, and a *claim* about or *attribution* of the artistically relevant properties that an artwork possesses. So, it is misleading to characterize the style matrix as a mechanism in which artworks literally cause other *artworks* to acquire new artistically relevant properties. At most, we can say that the style matrix enables artworks to cause people to make *claims* about or *attributions* of an artwork’s artistically relevant properties. But there is nothing wrong with this.

Carroll supports his criticisms of Danto by suggesting that Levinson also interprets Danto in the same way. But, Levinson denies that Danto believes that artworks literally cause other

artworks to acquire new artistically relevant properties – the view that Carroll attributes to Danto.

In contrast, Levinson interprets Danto as endorsing only the weaker view according to which later artworks cause us to see earlier artworks differently:

First, it should be noted that Danto does *not* claim that it is only when F-ness is first exemplified that all earlier works become non-F; he admits that earlier work was non-F *all along*, just that this went unremarked.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Levinson notes that the changes brought about by later art are *epistemic* in nature: they concern how we *see* earlier artworks. So, Levinson interprets Danto to accept that new art does not change the actual properties of earlier art, just those to which we have access. On Levinson's view, Danto endorses a form of historicism according to which we understand earlier art in light of later artworks. This view – which he calls 'backward retroactivism'<sup>xxiv</sup> – is a form of *epistemic historicism*, for the claims involved are purely epistemic - later developments provide access to features of earlier artworks that were previously inaccessible.

However, it is not epistemic historicism that Levinson is interested in criticizing. He takes epistemic historicism to be legitimate. Levinson, though, accuses Danto of being a "revisionist" (p. 187), allied with the likes of other strongly historicist philosophers like Graham McFee – both of whom Levinson thinks accept a much stronger historicism – what he calls "forward retroactivism", the view according to which the actual content of an artwork changes over time:

The root error involved in Danto's analysis is plausibly the equating of what may be labeled *backward* and *forward* retroactivism. The former is, perhaps, legitimate, but it does not legitimate the latter.<sup>xxv</sup>

Levinson here accuses Danto of slipping into a form of historicism according to which an artwork's actual content, and not just our access to it, is determined by later artworks. Because

this form of historicism (what Levinson calls ‘forward retroactivism’) involves a metaphysical change in the nature of the artwork, let us call this *metaphysical* (as opposed to epistemic) *historicism*. Levinson thinks the shift from the epistemic claim to the metaphysical one is easy to make, but misguided, because:

[N]ew work may restructure the artistic past in making us view that past with refocused eyes, so as to grasp such new work aright, but it does not therefore make the artistic future of earlier work a necessary part of understanding such of such earlier work. The artistic lines of the past may well be redrawn with every new development, *but only from the appreciative point of view of each new phase*. The artistic past is not left alone, it is true, with respect to understanding what is future to it, but the future, I suggest, is rightly left aside in understanding the artistic past.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Setting aside the question of whether Levinson is correct in objecting to metaphysical historicism, I would like to consider whether this charge against the style matrix is fair.

Levinson’s criticism of the style matrix is two-fold: first, it illicitly moves from the innocuous epistemic historicism to the dangerous metaphysical historicism, and second, it endorses metaphysical historicism (when it should not).

First, notice that there is a tension in Levinson’s accusations. On the one hand, Levinson seems very careful to emphasize that the style matrix itself only endorses epistemic historicism, not metaphysical historicism, when he notes: “First, it should be noted that Danto does *not* claim that it is only when F-ness is first exemplified that all earlier works become non-F; he admits that earlier work was non-F *all along*, just that this went unremarked.”<sup>xxvii</sup> On the other hand, Levinson (along with Carroll) criticizes the style matrix for endorsing metaphysical historicism. If Levinson’s first claim is right – that Danto merely endorses epistemic historicism – then his later criticisms fail – Danto couldn’t then be slipping into metaphysical historicism. If, however, Levinson’s second claim is right, and Danto does in fact slide into metaphysical historicism, then Danto has a problem.

Where does this leave us? Whether Levinson and Carroll have genuine criticisms of the style matrix turn on whether there is any reason to interpret Danto as endorsing the stronger of these forms of historicism, viz., metaphysical historicism. So, let us turn next to determining how best to interpret Danto.

### **Interpreting Danto: Epistemic or Metaphysical Historicism**

In defense of Carroll and Levinson's claim that Danto is a metaphysical historicist, there are some passages that might suggest that Danto endorses this stronger, metaphysical, position about how artworks affect other artworks:

When a new style row was added to the matrix, everyone *got richer by one property*.<sup>xxviii</sup>  
Whatever is the artistically relevant predicate in virtue of which they gain their entry, the rest of the *Artworld becomes that much the richer* in having the opposite predicate available to its members.<sup>xxix</sup>

Here, Danto could be interpreted as implying that when new artworks are created, they actually enrich the artworld with new artistic properties. Of course, this would in turn suggest that these properties did not exist prior to that artwork's creation.

However, there is an equally plausible alternative interpretation of the style matrix that does not force Danto to endorse metaphysical historicism. On this alternative, Danto does not take new artworks to actually cause new properties to come into existence; rather, new artworks render certain properties artistically relevant that were not relevant before. Such properties existed all along, but went undetected until the creation of the new artworks. On this view, new artworks simply cause certain properties to become highlighted. This means that the properties were simply latent: they were there, but beyond the ken of the artist and could not have been justifiably attributed to those earlier artworks until the creation of certain later artworks.<sup>xxx</sup> But this means that these properties *always existed* in the earlier artworks. It is incorrect to say that these artworks acquire essential properties long after their makers are dead; they *always* had

these properties. On this interpretation, which highlights that new artworks make properties artistically relevant (rather than simply making new properties), Danto is merely endorsing a form of epistemic historicism – a position that both Carroll and Levinson find innocuous.

There is strong textual support for this interpretation:

The *vision* the style matrix underwrites - or which underwrites it - is the way works of art form a kind of organic community, and **release latencies** in one another merely by virtue of their existence...I even had a kind of political vision that all works of art were equal, in the sense that each artwork had the same number of stylistic qualities as any other.<sup>xxxii</sup> It is, of course, not easy to see in advance which **predicates** are going to be added or replaced by their opposites, but suppose an artist determines that H shall henceforth be **artistically relevant** for his paintings. Then, in fact, both H and non-H become **artistically relevant** for *all* painting.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Part of the interest of the style matrix lies in the status it lends to what one might term *latent properties* in paintings, properties of a kind to which viewers contemporary with the painting would have been blind, just because these become visible only retrospectively, in the light of later artistic developments. Correggio is again a good case: the Carracci, a century later, saw him as a predecessor, and hence as early baroque. Indeed, he became keenly appreciated in the eighteenth century, when his reputation was perhaps at its height, for such works as his *Loves of Jupiter*, seen as anticipating the rococo. The features that made Correggio hard to grasp as an artist by his contemporaries suddenly become clarified when the baroque style is invented, and further clarified from the perspective of the rococo. Mannerists prized grace at whatever cost to naturalness, and the disregard of the latter helps explain the term's synonymy today with a kind of extreme artifice such as we find in Correggio's contemporary Parmigianino. But Correggio, though what was later called a Mannerist, also reacted against what his contemporaries regarded as *maniera* in the direction of something more naturalistic. So Correggio gets reinvented when Mannerism is stabilized as a concept in the twentieth century, just as he was reinvented in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and on each occasion latent features became released and made available to appreciation. In a similar way, the late Monet gets to be an early New York type painter. André Breton classed Uccello and Seurat as anticipatory surrealists, but there are any number of others - Archimboldo and Hans Baldung Grien come instantly to mind - who were waiting for surrealism to be invented in order to be adequately appreciated.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

...the moment Mannerism is established as a style in its own right, one can begin in a positive way to characterize any number of works as Mannerist which were made outside the specific period art historically designated Mannerist that begins with Correggio and extends through Rosso Fiorentino, Bronzino, Pontormo, and Giulio Romano himself. Thus one might unhesitatingly identify as Mannerist certain roman stuccos, El Greco, but also Brancusi and Modigliani. But second, part of what helped firm Mannerism up as a stylistic category comes from modernist art, specifically Picasso, who sheds a certain retrospective light over the seicento. So the style matrix is historically fluid along its

forward edge, in terms both of adding stylistic predicates - "New York type painting," for example - or changing older ones in such a way that what had appeared to be a phase of the late Renaissance becomes a style of its own. And who can say in advance whether the category of Mannerism itself is not too crude, that some division in the light of the future of style might not have to be effected somewhere between Correggio and Rosso Fiorentino?<sup>xxxiv</sup>

In all of these passages about Danto's philosophy of art and his style matrix, the second interpretation best explains the ideas of latent properties, predicates that get added, and later artworks helping us to see earlier art differently. The creation of new artworks allows us to re-examine earlier artworks in a new light. Later artworks can perform this function, because when they generate a new set of predicates with which to understand and describe earlier art. And when these new predicates are applied to earlier art, we come to see new properties that we did not previously see in those works (because we were lacking those predicates). Such predicates will help sharpen or clarify what we took the earlier art to be about. In cases where later artworks result in the creation of new predicates that could not have been known in earlier times, later art will help us see earlier art in ways that those contemporary to that early art could not. Such claims only make sense if we adopt the second interpretation, according to which the style matrix helps show how later artworks make certain aesthetic properties of earlier works *aesthetically relevant*, which were not relevant before.

Moreover, all the passages which might be taken to provide support for the stronger, metaphysical reading of Danto, are also consistent with the weaker, epistemic interpretation: those passages where Danto implies that the artistic community is enriched by the adding of a style predicates is simply a short-hand or elliptical way of saying that such predicates become aesthetically relevant, not that they are newly created. In these cases, the new artworks introduce predicates that those contemporary with the earlier art could have known about, but simply did not think of, perhaps because those predicates were not useful in describing the art that existed.

Finally, the epistemic interpretation is the only one that is consistent with Danto's intentionalism, which he defends in *Transfiguration*. There, Danto advances his initial argument

for why interpretations of the meaning of an artwork must be constrained by what the artist could have intended. In his view, we cannot attribute to an artwork a meaning that the artist could not have known about:

In any case, it seems to me that the same such considerations have general application to the structures of interpretation, which in part at least must be governed by what the artist believed...**This is certainly germane to what is called the intentional fallacy, inasmuch as the work-as-interpreted must be such that the artist believed to have made it *could* have intended the interpretation of it, in terms of the concepts available to him and the times in which he worked.** Not only must you know something about Newton's first law in order to interpret K's painting as you do; you must also believe that K knew something about Newton's first law; otherwise your interpretation is simply like seeing faces in clouds. The limits of *your* cloud musings are the limits of *your* knowledge, but we have the artist's limits as special constrains [sic] when interpreting works of art. Moreover, the limits of our interpretation when it was intended as Newton's first law are defined by how much K knew about the first law. Say we seek a grounded explanation for the fact that the line goes from edge to edge, but this cannot be part of our interpretation if J really knew no more about the law than that it said something about linear velocity. His ignorance sets some limit to the range and variety of identifications we are justified in making. But I have so far said too little about the structures of artworks to have anything more profitable to say on the vexed issue of artistic intention than **that it is difficult to know what could govern the concept of a correct or incorrect interpretation if not reference to what could and could not have been intended.**<sup>xxxv</sup>

This official statement about the role of intentions in interpretation is inconsistent with what a metaphysical form of historicism would require. Here's why. If the meaning of an artwork can change over time – say, as a result of new artworks, then it is possible that an artwork comes to mean something about which the artist could not have known. And this is precisely what Danto in the above passage is objecting to. So, if we take seriously Danto's commitment to intentionalism, we have further reason to interpret Danto as endorsing the weaker, epistemic form of historicism.

## Conclusion

If the weaker, epistemic interpretation is correct, then there are morals to be drawn here for everyone involved in this debate –Danto, Carroll and Levinson. In saying that the style matrix allows us to discover *new* properties, Danto is misleading his readers; new properties are not being created; rather, we are simply discovering new properties as artistically relevant (that were there all along). Strictly speaking, the style matrix allows the artworld to get richer only in the sense that it enables new predicates to become artistically relevant – even though those

predicates were there all along. Of course, this poses a problem for Carroll, who does not seem to notice this fact. For while Carroll may find the view that artworks acquire essential properties long after their makers are dead to be objectionable, Carroll cannot find the style matrix objectionable for this particular reason, since it does not apply to the style matrix. As for Levinson, we must conclude that whatever criticisms Levinson has of metaphysical historicism, by Levinson's own interpretation of Danto, they cannot apply to Danto's style matrix. Now, there may well be other problems with epistemic historicism that face the style matrix, but that's a topic for another paper. If we take seriously the morals drawn from *Transfiguration*, we can see how Danto's style matrix can be properly historicist in a way that respects his views about the nature of art, without thereby becoming overly historicist.

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<sup>i</sup> Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 162 and *Beyond the Brillo Box* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992), 229.

<sup>ii</sup> Arthur Danto, "The Artistic Enfranchisement of Real Objects: The Artworld" *Journal of Philosophy* 61(19): 571-584 (1964) and *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981).

<sup>iii</sup> In his description of the style matrix in "The Artworld", Danto assumes that predicates are opposites or contraries, rather than contradictories.

<sup>iv</sup> 583, "Artworld"

<sup>v</sup> Note: this passage is ambiguous between two readings. On one reading, Danto seems to be claiming that the style matrix simply renders new properties to be artistically relevant. This would imply that the properties existed all along, but that they were simply not relevant, and hence ignored. On another reading, however, Danto seems to be making the stronger, metaphysical claim that the style matrix charts how new artworks literally enrich the artworld with new properties – that is, that new properties are actually created, not simply that they become artistically relevant. Whether the epistemic reading, or the metaphysical one, is correct is a central issue to which we shall return later. For the moment, however, let us gloss over this distinction.

<sup>vi</sup> 583, "Artworld"

<sup>vii</sup> 584, "Artworld"

<sup>viii</sup> It is not clear whether Danto would accept that artworks prior to the work in which P exists would legitimately be said to have P. Whether he would depends on whether he believes that later artworks can change the content or properties of earlier works. We shall return to this question later in the paper.

<sup>ix</sup> Danto initially restricts his account to artistically relevant properties. However, later on, he seems to describe the style matrix as one interested in all aesthetic properties, relevant or otherwise. My comments at this point do not hinge on endorsing one or the other interpretation – but we shall return to this interpretive question later.

<sup>x</sup> You might find it strange, even wrong, to construe previous art as 'not-consumerist', since this feature may have been 'beyond the ken' of earlier artists. I agree, and introduce an alternative construal of the style matrix that avoids this counter-intuitive implication later.

<sup>xi</sup> Again, note the ambiguity here between the epistemic and metaphysical interpretations of this passage. According to the epistemic reading, artworks have *latent* properties, viz., properties that exist but which are unavailable to us. New developments in art simply release those latent properties. On the stronger reading, however, when a new style row is added to the matrix (that is, whenever new art is created with new properties), artworks literally gain a new property that did not previously exist. We shall return to this later.

<sup>xii</sup> Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 163-4.

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<sup>xiii</sup> Carroll, in his "Danto, Style and Intention" seems to imply that these new predicates allow us to apply that predicate (and not its lack) to earlier artworks. This would imply that such predicates did in fact exist, and we simply did not realize they did. Of course, this may be right; but if so, then it is infelicitous to call them new and constitutive of an artistic breakthrough. After all, if those predicates legitimately apply to the earlier art, the predicates themselves are not new. What is new is only our *discovery* of such predicates.

<sup>xiv</sup> Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 162.

<sup>xv</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>xvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>xvii</sup> Arthur Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992), 50-1.

<sup>xviii</sup> Arthur Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981), 111.

<sup>xix</sup> Arthur Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981), 175.

<sup>xx</sup> Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 161-2.

<sup>xxi</sup> Levinson argues for this thesis in "Artworks and the Future". However, in "Work and Oeuvre", he argues for a different claim – viz., in the case of an artist's oeuvre, the art content of earlier artworks may depend at least in part on what succeeds those works. So, while Levinson has modified his view, the criticisms against the style matrix still apply, since it allows that the content of any earlier artwork may depend at least in part on what succeeds those works, independently of who made them.

<sup>xxii</sup> Noel Carroll, "Danto, Style, and Intention," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53(3): 256 (1995), my emphasis.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Jerrold Levinson, "Artworks and the Future," in *Music, Art and Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 194.

<sup>xxiv</sup> I shall refer to what Levinson terms 'backward retroactivism' and 'forward retroactivism' as epistemic historicism and metaphysical historicism respectively.

<sup>xxv</sup> 196, "Artworks and the Future"

<sup>xxvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Jerrold Levinson, "Artworks and the Future," in *Music, Art and Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 194.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 163-4, my italics.

<sup>xxix</sup> "Artworld", 584, my italics.

<sup>xxx</sup> Recall Danto's claims: Now it might happen that, throughout an entire period of time, every artwork is non-F. But since nothing thus far is both an artwork and F, it might never occur to anyone that non-F is an artistically relevant predicate. The non-F-ness of artworks goes unmarked. By contrast, all works up to a given time might be G, it never occurring to anyone until that time that something might both be an artwork and non-G..." (p. 583 Artworld)

<sup>xxxi</sup> Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 163-4; my emphasis in bold.

<sup>xxxii</sup> 583, "Artworld"

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 161-2.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 161.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Arthur Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981), 129-130, my emphasis.