BOOK REVIEWS

Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1981, 212 Pages.

Arthur Danto's ideas have exerted considerable influence in aesthetics over the last two decades; indeed, he is one of the philosophers who has helped to define the field in its eurrent form. *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* comments upon two of the central issues now framing philosophy of art: the analysis of representation and definition of art. Danto re-opened the question of the definability of art some years ago in the wake of widespread post-Wittgensteinian opinion that art is an indefinable concept, and this early work inspired most notably George Dickie's "institutional" analysis of art. Because Danto's concept of the "artworld" is a progenitor of the now-famous institutional theory, it is likely that the definitional question will stand out as the major topic of this book. However, Danto develops his argument in a way that reveals the close relation between the concept of art and the problems of representation and imitation, and it is in this connection that the distinctive and subtle aspects of his thinking are brought into focus.

The theme unifying the many subjects covered in the book is the problem of "indiscernibility," which Danto casts as an aspect of an issue he considers at the very root of philosophical thinking: the distinction between appearance and reality. When one has two or more objects that "look" the same but that possess different aesthetic qualities, then one is confronted with an ontological difference that cannot be discerned by mere perception. It is this difference that must be investigated to analize the relationship of representation and subject and to understand the essential difference between art and reality, or--to use Danto's terms--"artworks" and "real things."

That indiscernibility is the problem leading to a theory of art indicates the kind of art that acts as a model for that theory. The current debate over the definability of art typically pits proposed definitions against the most recalcitrant examples of artworks, that appear to have least in common with the traditions and established genres of art. Thus Dada, conceptualism, Pop Art, and the like are schools of art that repeatedly test and shape a theory. Danto believes that it is such examples as Andy Warhol's "Brillo Box" that stimulate philosophical thinking about art—not because they look like paradigm cases of artworks, but precisely because they do not ! Artworks indiscernible from real things make it obvious that we cannot found a definition of art on whatever qualities an object presents to the senses.

Real and hypothetical examples liberally illustrate this point. Several manageable instances of the former are

provided by the Dadaist movement of the early twentieth century, when iconoclasts like Marcel Duchamp submitted for exhibition such mundane objects as urinals and snowshovel. The snowshovel-artwork is indiscernible from an ordinary showshovel used to clear the side-walk, but the critical discourse appropriate to each reveals their difference. While the ordinary showshovel has no artistically relevant aesthetic qualities, the artwork is aptly described as "witty" and "irreverent," interpretive predicates suggested by another distinctive feature--its possession of a title ("In Advance of the Broken Arm").

What artworks have that other things lack is an "artworld," an atmosphere of theory and history that guides the viewer to perceive the work as something more than its mere "material counterpart." One hesitates to paraphrase too briefly Danto's elusive and provocative ideas about the concept of art, for they are presented gradually and persuasively throughout many chapters and are as much evoked as formulated. Two points must serve here to suggest Danto's full theory: one has to do with analysis of imitation and representation, in which discussion he takes issue with current analysis of representation, notably Nelson Goodman's. Danto argues that no matter what the genre, medium, or style, art is always *about* some subject. This is not to say that he reduces all artistic forms to imitations, for "about" is a generous word designed to capture the commonality of all the varieties of relationships art bears to reality. (It is what Duchamp's snowshovel is about, for example, that endows it with qualities distinct from those of its indiscernible counterpart in the real world.) Secondly, the perception of a work of art *as* art requires that it be constituted as such by a viewer sufficiently versed in artistic tradition and theory to interpret it. "To interpret a work is to offer a theory as to what the work is about, what its subject is." (p.119) Unless one is able to see a work of art as art and not merely as a material object, one is unable to discern its artistic qualities.

There are numerous other thought-provoking aspects of this book. It profoundly challenges accepted ways of analyzing the nature of aesthetic qualities, and what Danto claims to be ontological distinctions between indiscernible objects will doubtless engender debate and consternation. Perhaps of most general interest are his speculations about the origins of philosophy, which he hazards originated in the ancient civilizations of Greece and India in connection with the development of imitative art and a consequent obsession with the difference between appearance and reality. Like all daring and original works, this one is full of controversial points, making it lively and stimulating reading as well as the locus of important theory.

Carolyn Korsmeyer

F. David, Martin, *Sculpture and Enlivened Space* The University Press of Kentucky (1981)

This book makes a strong case for the autonomy of sculpture as an art from

independent especially of painting and of the visual and conceptual constraints of that art. The author is relentless in his repetition that sculpture, unlike painting. exists in and enlivens real space, which it shares with the observer. Painting, by contrast, produces an imaginary space into which the observer may enter.

Martin explains the historic neglect of sculpture in terms of two related traditions that have pervaded mainstream western thinking. The first affirms the superiority of vision over the other senses as that faculty which controls most while maintaining the greatest distance from its object. Only audition is of comparable merit, and the tactile sense, which entails contact, is the least meritorious. The second doctrine represents cognitive, including perceptual experience as a subject-object relationship in which a datum is "given to" and interpreted by an active subject. On this view not merely the identification of things, but also judgments of their distance, depth and volume are made inferentially on the basis of visual clues.

Martin defends a phenomenological theory of experience associated with Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. He argues that "primary perception" is a pre-abstractive experience by an embodied being which perceives its body as a "center of action", which emerges as co-present with experienced "poles of action". Things emerge or "show forth" in the world, bringing space with them, in an active and reciprocal encounter. "Secondary perception" is the "thinking at" an object which identifies and places it in a largely utilitarian context. In aesthetic experience, subject and object remain merged. There is a primary sense of "withness" as the thing manifests itself fully, bodying forth, while self-consciousness as subject is anaesthetized. The perceiver and perceived lose their separate identity and emerge as polarities within the process of perception.

The ultimate goal of sculpture is, according to Martin, to reveal our unity with things, a truth often, forgotten in the press of modern living. Sculpture achieves that goal by adhering to two imperatives: "Attend to the impacting between", the enlivined space which enhances the physicality of both observer ond work; and "Bring out spetial withness !" which reinforces the sense of priomorcial unity.

Martin is at his best when describing concrete works of art, especially those which do not meet with his approval either because of sculpture imperfection (e.g., Canova's *Perseue Holding the Head of Medusa* or because of there inappropriate location (e.g., Donatello's *Mary Magdalence*). He is a remarkably acute perceiver and has the ability to evoke a kinaesthetic consciousness even through the written word. Regrettably most of the photographs in the book are not of sufficient quality to serve as more than mnemonic devices, and therefore Martin's extensive descriptions carry a heavy translational borden.

The book is not strong on theory, but it makes an implicit historic claim that sculpture has undergone a progression from primarily planner to radial organization,

best exemplified in the "democratic all-roundedness" of Giovanni da Bologna's *Rape of the Sabines* (1579—83). This work, Martin says, achieves a kind of "Copernican Revolution", a complete centeredness from an inner core, radiating outward in all directions such that the observer is forced to orbit around it as the earth around the sun. Painting, by contrast, requires that the observer find and maintain the specific privileged position to which the painting addresses itself.

Sculpture and Enlivened Space is to be recommended as a good introducton to the art of sculpture. Its sensitive descriptions merit attention regardless of the author's more tendentious speculations. It may contribute to the further exploration of an area of aesthetic inquiry which, as Professor Martin rightly notes, has been unwarrantably neglected.

Hilde Hein
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Jeffrey H. Tigay. The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic University of Pennsylvania Press (Philadelphia), 1982.

Ancient Near Eastern literature is rather beyond the bounds of both comparative literature and philosophy, forming as it dose the basis for a separate scholarly discipline with its own methodology and exotic language study. Nevertheless, literary scholars and philosophers sometimes find themselves drawn to these very early written workes which are situated at the interface of the prehistoric and the historic, between what has not yet been articulated and what has been given expression. These earliest poetic products such as the "Gilgamesh Epic" seem to hold a secret about the birth of literary imagination and rational thought. Jeffrey Tigay's *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* can assist the nonspecialist who is drawn to this sometimes forbidding field and who wishes to study "the most important literary creation of the whole of ancient Mesopotamia."

The work is a highly detailed analysis of the epic and of its stages of development from the separate Sumerian tales told about King Gilgamesh late in the third millenium B.C.E. to the Akkadian Late Version of the epic discovered at several first millenium sites. Archaeological discoveries of tablets which represent several historical stages of the story allow the unusual opportunity to compare versions of an epic with one another and to investigate the changing cultural milieu as it is reflected in each of the stages, Tigay traces the changes from one stage of the story to another for over two thousand years, looking at small scale variations in words and phrases and formulas, as well as larger scale alterations in the roles of characters and in the episodes and themes that are emphasized. An aspect of this study which is perhaps not so surprising is that in documenting the history of the "Gilgamesh Epic" Tigay is simultaneously documenting the history of scholarship about the epic. This feature of the work is interesting in itself and it makes this a helpful book for beginning a serious examination of the

"Gilgamesh Epic"; one will determine quite readily from the text and the extensive footnotes what the leading names and works are in this field.

Another feature of the work which recommends it to interested non-specialists and to specialists is the lengthy and impressive bibliography which is provided, since it forms an excellent reference source on the epic. Students af ancient Near Eastern languags will be glad, too, to see that Tigay generally incorporates original language passages in the text; English translation is also offered, except in the Appendix and footnotes.

In addition to an analysis of the historical development of the poem, Tigay also undertakes an exegesis of each of the major sections of the Gilgamesh poem. These interpretive chapters (Chaps. 7—12) are not as strong as they might be. While Tigay is technical and precise in his historical and philological chapters, his interpretations of the poem's themes tend to be discontinuous and to lack zest and imagination. Thorkild Jacobsen's *The Treasures of Darkness* (Yale University Press, 1976) develops more comprehensive reading of the "Gilgamesh Epic" as a whole, especially with respect to the poem's social context.

Regarding the epic's ritual associations, however, the present work offers some valuable historical information, for example that Gilgamesh was worshipped in magical rituals as a judge of the netherworld, and that ancient tradition attributed the epic to an exorcist-priest, Sin-leqi-unninnī. Tigay also notes episodes in the text which suggest ritual activity, and phrases and formulas which point to royal inscriptions and hymns and incantations. The connections that Tigay points out between the epic and magical and/or sacred practice are possibly the most fascinating discussions in the book.

The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic is not at all for the casual reader, but it is a fine reference source for those who wish to learn about this very ancient poem.

Daryl Mcgowan

Geoffrey Strickland, *Structuralism or Criticism? Thaughts on how we read*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, paperback 1983, × -|- 209 pp.

The book is divided into three parts. The first consists of a critiqe of structuralism as applied to literary criticism, particularly to the question: 'What happens when we read ?' It shows how post-Sausurean structuralism with its commitment to a closed system of literary signs undervalues the subtilty and skill of the ordinary reader and makes claims to a 'science of literature which remains only a theoretical goal. As a result, the structuralist reading of literary works is no less fallible than the unsystematic procedures of the ordinary reader.

The second part, by far the longest, is a detailed analyis of the prusuppotihieres of

the ordinary reading. The reader makes certain assumptions, correct or otherwise, concerning the intention of the writer and that is why his reading, while being true, does not deny the possibility of being wrong. A true understanding of writing does not imply a complete sharing of the writer's experience and precisely for this, it is possible to have a true understanding of writers whose experiences differ so much from our own. Understanding a work of literature entails understanding its interest and importance for the writer which inevitably affects the interest and importance of the work for the reader. Hence, interpretation and evaluation are the same and the student of literature is also a student of history.

The difference, thus drawn between structuralism and criticism is illustrated in the third part through a discussion of the achievements of Roland Barthes and F. R. Leaves as critics. Barthes' utopian persuit of a 'science' of literature leads him to equate costume and fashion, cinema and commercial fiction with serious literary works. And in his strictly critical writings, Barthes' 'artifice of reading' is as conventional as any one's. In contrast, Leavis comes out to be a better guide to literature in spite of his unsystematicness and lack of an 'artifice'. The book is, thus, a indication of criticism, 'the common persuit of true judgement' in literature, against the challenges put forward by the all-encompassing claims of structuralism. While there is nothing new in the main thesis of the book, it is to the credit of Strickland that he ranges over a wide field of English and French thoughts on literary theory to produce an exlremely civilized and provocative work on reading.

H. Panda

S. K. Saxena, *The Winged Form: aesthetical essays on Hindustani rhythm*, Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, 1979, pp iv + 165 + iii. *Aesthetical Essays: Studies in Aesthetics, Hindustani Music and Kathak Dance*, Chanakya Publications, Delhi, 1981, pp. ix + 247.

Both the works are brilliant examples of genuine thinking, profound experience, seasoned argument and remarkable clarity in communicating the abstract speculations on arts and theories of art. The method followed is comparative and the purpose is to interpret and theorize Indian arts and art experience with particular reference to Hindustani (North Indian) music and Kathak dance in the light af contemporary western aesthetics which runs along two main lines: the linguistic-analytic and phenomenological. The author's approach in both cases is mostly phenomenological in the sense that he establishes his views not merely by offering arguments on the basis of abstract logical analysis of statements about arts but by referring to the actual facts of art contemplation.

In their concept of 'Rasa' the ancient Indians proposed a theory of art experience as a kind of direct perception — an act of tasting or *āsvādana* suggesting the

view that the experience and criticism or or critical awareness of a work of art are virtually the same act — a view which T. S. Eliot presented confusingly in his concept of criticism (1956) as the simultaneous acts of understanding and enjoyment of art. This appears to be the key-point in Professor Saxena's interpretation of the arts and theories of arts both the volumes.

In the *Winged Form* he establishes the independent status of Hindustani rhythm. Traditionally there are two Sanskrit terms referring to music — *gānam* (lit. song) and *Sangitam* (lit. well - sung). The latter is defined as a form of art that is an organic unity of dance and both instrumental and vocal music. In this form of music language plays no role or just an insignificant one whereas the former is the singing of a verbal composition with (or sometimes without) a musical instrument (of. the Haṁsapadikā gānam in Kālidāsa's *Śākuntalam* Act VI). *Sangitam* is held to be superior to *gānam* because of its completeness in expressing an emotion and sophistication as a form of art. But the word functioning as a synecdoche also refers to the vocal music with(or without) the accompaniment of musical instruments. It is in this sense that the term is mostly used in the treatises of music such as those of Mataṅga, Pārśvadeva, Śārṅgadeva and Śubhaṅikara. This music has two features *tāla* and *ātāpa*. *Tāla* or rhythm is the musical duration as measured by beats ālāpa is singing without words and rhythmic accompaniments (differing from *gānam*). Now, accepting of tasting' as a criterion of completeness an artwork, the author argues that if *ālāpa* because of its 'tastability' is accepted as an independent art form (even without dance) why should *tāla* for the same reason, be not accepted as an independent art form ?

The author demonstrates further that the primary creation of rhythm is automative and articulate symmetry of pure pace. Both the epithets are borrowed from the aesthetics of Susanne Langer. But at the same time Saxena observes, there are several concepts in Western aesthetics such as embodiment, symbol and expression which are irrelevant in the interpretation of Hindustani music that is neither an embodiment, nor a symbol, nor expressive in Langer's sense of the terms.

The chapters 2-7 are refreshingly new in their correlation of Crocean aesthetics with Indian musicology, phenomenological analysis of the structure and analytical studies of form and content and assymetrical rhythm of our music. Saxena argues with great cogency that the Crocean concept of expression appears insufficient when applied to explain our alapa singing. Our aesthetics approves of a correlation of the expression and communication theories. Similarly, the essay on form and content in the Hindustani rhythm is also remarkably new in the interpretation of Indian music. The author applies Langer's concept of Organic unity of form and content in artworks: "Content is what appears organized and form means *that* or *how* it is organized *in* a work of art," Out side the

the work of art content is mere material. This is illustrated by the difference that exists between a *tritāl thekā* and its sixteen *mātrās* or sound units.

The 9th chapter is devoted to the role of rhythm in dance with special reference to the Kathak variety and in the second volume *Aesthetical Essays* this variety is interpreted in the light of Langer's theory of dance as a symbolic form expressive of human feelings. The special attractions of this volume are the essays on aesthetic attitude and interpretation of Indian art in the light of aesthetics of Kant and Hegel. There is an elaborate discussion on the aesthetics of Hindustani music as well.

The current debate over the reality of a specific kind of attitude in perceiving art works among philosophers like Stolnitz Dickie, Hospes and many others is stimulating. While Stolnitz advocates an aesthetic attitude "a distnterested and Sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone" Dickie refuses to accept its existence and Hospers while accepting such an attitude in case of judgement fails to understand its function in case of perception of an artwork. But Saxena in defence of Stolnitz refutes the views of Dickie, Hospers, Coleman, Snoeyenbos and others. Here again, the arguments are based on the practical experience of artworks especially Hindustani music, and, by implication, on the concepts of *tāṭasthya* and *Sādhāraṇī karaṇa* as propounded by our ancient aestheticians. Both the concepts emphasize an unselfish, impersonal and indefierent, generalized or detached attitude of the perceiver of an artwork. Without this attitude there would be personal involvement and attachment which must hamper the 'tasting' of the artwork leading necessarily toward a failure in evaluation or critical judgement. The same methodology may be noted in the essay on Heggel where he directs our attention to the Hegelian view of art as an exemplification of 'symbolic form'.

In spite of the technical language essential for the writings of this highly advanced order the volumes are readable for their accuracy in presentation and extraordinary clarity in conceptualization.

They are significant contributions to the contemporary writings on comparative aesthetics.

A, C. Sukla