

An Interpretation of Danto's the End-of-Art Thesis from the Perspective of Gadamerian Hermeneutics*

LUO Qiao-juan

Dalian University of Technology, Liaoning, China

Dalian University of Foreign Languages, Liaoning, China

QIN Ming-li

Dalian University of Technology, Liaoning, China

Ontology of art, philosophy of art history, and aesthetics make up Danto's integrated philosophy of art. The end-of-art thesis is the essence of Danto's philosophy of art history. As an analytical philosopher, Danto's philosophy resembles Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in the viewpoints concerning art and history in some ways but differs in others. Danto's concepts of history show different tendencies in analytical philosophy of history and philosophy of art history. On the one hand, his philosophy of history conforms to Gadamer's history of effect for the denial of the objectivity and certainty of historical truth. On the other hand, his philosophy of art history fundamentally differs from Gadamer's relativism by asserting "the end of art" therefore generating a Hegelian law in art history. By using the strategy of "historical narrative" in his philosophy of art history, which is also in accordance with Gadamerian tradition, Danto aims to reconcile his self-contradictory historical views and to justify his philosophical position both as an "essentialist" and a "historicist".

Keywords: Danto, Gadamer, hermeneutics, the end of art, historical narrative

Introduction

As an analytical philosopher and art philosopher, Arthur C. Danto's major contributions consist of his definition of art, the end-of-art thesis, and aesthetic arguments. Ontology of art, philosophy of art history, and aesthetics constitute his integrated system of philosophy of art. In Danto's the end-of-art thesis, what ends are not artistic practice but the traditional and modernist narrative mode of art history, as well as the disenfranchised history of art by philosophy. According to Danto, the "end-of-art" signifies the freedom of art, and thereafter, art will no longer be restricted to any master narrative and philosophical definition. As Danto's philosophy of art history is closely related to his ontology of art, it is also inseparably connected with his philosophy of history.

As for the relationship between Danto's philosophy of art history and ontology of art, the nature of the

* **Acknowledgement:** This article is supported by the "Key Project of National Social Science Foundation" entitled "A Study on Contemporary Western Radical Left Literary Theory" (18AZW002) and the "Project of Humanity and Social Science Youth Foundation of Ministry of Education of China" entitled "Danto's Philosophy of Art from the Perspective of Philosophical Hermeneutics".

LUO Qiao-juan, Ph.D. candidate, School of Foreign Languages, Dalian University of Technology, Liaoning, China; associate professor, School of English Studies, Dalian University of Foreign Languages, Liaoning, China.

QIN Ming-li, Ph.D., professor, School of Foreign Languages, Dalian University of Technology, Liaoning, China.

end-of-art thesis is to discover the laws in art history, the strategy being historical narrative, result being the end of two types of master narratives, and the ultimate being an essential definition of art which is beyond history. Danto (1997) pointed out:

As an essentialist in philosophy, I am committed to the view that art is eternally the same—that there are conditions necessary and sufficient for something to be an artwork, regardless of time and place. But as a historicist I am also committed to the view that what is a work of art at one time cannot be one at another, and in particular that there is a history, enacted through the history of art, in which the essence of art—the necessary and sufficient conditions—are painfully brought to consciousness. (p. 95)

Thus, Danto's philosophy of art history enables his ontology of art, and in turn, his essential definition of art verifies the validity of the end-of-art assertion. As for the connection between his concept of art history and philosophy of history, on the one hand, Danto believes that art history has its inevitable law, but on the other hand, he denies the objectivity of history in general, which makes his views on art history and general history contradictory. However, he tries to reconcile the conflict with historical narrative, whose subjectivity and objectivity seem to coexist. Danto (1986) remarked:

Art history must have an internal structure and even a kind of necessity. This was the conviction that motivated my essay "The End-of-Art" and the other writings which undertake to articulate a philosophy of the history of art in exactly the grand manner I had learned from Hegel, and which it astonished me that I was accepting, since my first book, the *Analytical Philosophy of History* of 1965, had pretty much taken a stand against its possibility in principle. (p. xxviii)

Both Danto's ontology of art and philosophy of art history show his tendency to combine essentialism and historicism, scientism and humanism, and rationalism and empiricism.

Danto and Hans-Georg Gadamer, the latter being a German philosopher of continental tradition known for his philosophical hermeneutics, both show concerns for art, history, and language in human sciences. They both hold that the methodology for human science is different from that of natural science. Just as they both agree on the fact that the interpretation of artwork should involve the participation of the viewers but with distinctive focuses on the interpretive intentions, they also resembled each other in their concepts of general history, but varied in many details. A study on Danto's analytical philosophy of history and philosophy of art history from the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics, not only helps us to understand the strengths and weaknesses of his theories on history and art, but also helps to clarify the relationship among his ontology of art, philosophy of art history, and aesthetics. Meanwhile, this study also aims at giving enlightenment on Danto's philosophical position both as an "essentialist" and a "historicist".

Consistency of Danto's Analytical Philosophy of History with "History of Effect"

Danto shows different attitudes in analytical philosophy of history and philosophy of art history. In the former, he rejects the objectivity and absolutism in historical truth, thus takes the same position with Gadamer as a historicist. In the latter, Danto concludes that art history has come to an end therefore he actually generates an absolute and permanent law beyond art history as Hegel did, which diverts from relativism and compatibility in Gadamer's tradition. In order to balance the conflicts in his two theories, Danto uses the strategy of historical narrative. In terms of historical understanding, they both hold that historical knowledge does have absolute truth and validity as in natural sciences, and historical understanding is inevitably prejudiced and limited. In his study of history, Danto applies the strategy of "historical narrative", a story-like structure which has beginning, development, and end. Likewise, Gadamer puts forward the principle of "history of effect" in his critique of

historical consciousness, which emphasizes a historical process of continuous interaction of the past, present, and future.

History is often regarded either as historical facts or historical records, both being the objects of philosophical research of history. The former is referred to as substantive philosophy of history and the latter analytical philosophy of history. The former is ontological study of history, the object being the overall process of history, aiming at discovering the nature and law of history in general, represented by philosophers, such as Hegel and Marx. Analytical philosophy of history is epistemological, which studies historical records and relics, aiming at analyzing the method and nature of historical descriptions. Danto's methodology and propositions for philosophy of history are mainly seen in his two books, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (1965) and *Narration and Knowledge* (1985), in which he adopts the method of analytical philosophy of history and rejects the validity of substantive philosophy of history. "Logically there is no need that there be any historical reality which corresponds *en soi* to a given historical *pour autrui* in any given representation of the past" (Danto, 2007, p. 328). He believes that both types of history are recorded and analyzed by humans under certain historical circumstances inevitably branded by subjectivity and time, therefore there is no such truth of historical knowledge in so-called substantive philosophy of history as in natural sciences.

Danto insists that methodology for human sciences including history be different from that of natural sciences as Gadamer does in *Truth and Method*. However, in 1960s, the prevailing idea in analytical philosophy held that scientific method applies to both human science and natural science for providing a universal, reliable, and empirical basis. For example, Carl G. Hempel pointed out that universal law plays the same role in both history and natural science and the structure of historical interpretation and scientific interpretation being similar, therefore can be the common tool for all studies of social science. Danto (1965) held a different view from this, arguing that history and science differ in a substantial way that criterion and methodology of research cannot be shared. First, the object and language of history and science are different, so positiveness cannot be valid criteria to judge historical sentences (Danto, 1965, p. 60). Second, the nature of historical knowledge and scientific knowledge is different in the fact that the former cannot be predicted for its specific context and concrete description while the latter can be foreseen for its concerns for universal law and objective truth (Danto, 1965, p. 178). Third, the structure of historical explanation differs from that of science, the former in narrative language with timeliness but the latter in a logic frame beyond time (Danto, 1965, p. 111). In this way, Danto denies the truthfulness and scientific methodology of historical knowledge, and changes the focus of analytical philosophy of history from logical positivism to historical narrative. Gadamer also rejects the dominance of scientism and rationalism on humanism, and his overall philosophy is to study human act of understanding. He holds that the truth and method in human sciences and natural sciences are fundamentally separate from each other. Moreover, he opposes any kind of methodology in the study of the former. He openly states this opinion in the *Truth and Method* which powerfully echoes Danto's protection of humanistic tradition of human sciences:

Hence the methods of the human sciences are not at issue here. My starting point is that the historical human sciences, as they emerged from German romanticism and were imbued with the spirit of modern sciences, maintained a humanistic heritage that distinguishes them from all other kinds of modern research and brings them close to other, quite different, extrascientific experiences, especially those peculiar to art. (Gadamer, 2013, p. xxvi)

As Danto's historical narrative is applied against substantive philosophy of history, Gadamer's principle of

history of effect is proposed on the reflections of traditional historical consciousness, both in opposition to historical objectivism. Danto systematically criticizes substantive philosophy of history and analyzes Hegel and Marx's historical concepts in detail. According to him, substantive philosophy of history tries to reveal the rules and principles of all historical events developing towards an ultimate, and give overall explanations of human history accordingly. Therefore, philosophers of substantive history resemble "God" standing at the end of history and generating the totality of history. They refer to the future in the same as they do to the past, but as limited rational existence, human beings can never have a full and definite mastery of the whole history. Danto (1965) denied the validity of substantive philosophy of history, stating that "it is a mistake, I shall argue, to suppose that we can write the history of events before the events themselves have happened" (p. 14). Contrastingly, though historians also aim at explaining historical events, they stand on a limited point to study the past while stay open to the future. Meanwhile, the historians afterwards will reinterpret the historical events based on later information. As time goes by, historical events obtain new meanings and historical knowledge is constantly updated. In this way, Danto believes historical knowledge is reflective and limited rather than absolute and certain. As he noted in his work: "I shall be certain that our knowledge of the past is significantly limited by our ignorance of the future" (Danto, 1965, p. 16), and "if the future is open, the past cannot be utterly closed" (p. 196). Danto argues that the historians apply "historical narrative" to interpret an event from its beginning to its end in a larger historical context and a story-like frame. Due to its narrative nature, study of history is not to reconstruct historical facts but to place it in a whole time context and explore its meaning according to what happens later. When people say "World War I", it is based on the fact that "World War II" took place. Therefore, historical description is always reflective rather than absolute from a historical whole. While comparing Danto and Gadamer in their concepts of historicism, Georgia Warnke remarks that Danto's historical meaning must be "retroactive realignment of the Past" (Warnke, 1987, p. 19)—production from the point after the event in a narrative frame. Thus, the shared views of Danto and Gadamer are apparently shown in their opposition to historical objectivism.

Danto's position against historical objectivism and reductionism is best echoed in Gadamer's criticism of traditional historical consciousness. Traditional historical views advocate that historical knowledge be traced back to its very origin, avoiding the individual subjectivity and historical limitations to the largest extent. Under the influence of scientism and rationalism, and the concept of objective truth being the priority, German school of history represented by Ranke and Droysen argued that historical study aims at reconstruction of historical facts regardless of subjective and temporal factors. However, such proposition only led to "intentionalism" based on authors' intentions and "reductionism" based on the past for the lack of relation to the present and the future. Gadamer points out the errors of such historical consciousness in several ways. First, prejudice can never be avoided in historical research. Our historical knowledge is inevitably based on pre-judgment. Second, history cannot be viewed as something past and isolated, but a unity of the past, present, and future. Lastly, historical knowledge is not objective and closed but always open to the future. There is no perfect but different historical understanding. As Gadamer (2013) noted: "The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding" (p. 310). Based on this, Gadamer (2013) put forward his concept—"history of effect": "A hermeneutics adequate to the subject matter would have to demonstrate the reality and efficacy of history within understanding itself. I shall refer to this as 'history of effect'. Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event" (p. 310).

As for Danto, historical narrative can both be subjective and objective. First, the narrative frame or story-like structure contains personal explanation therefore is essentially subjective. The narrative structure of historical language consists of the beginning, development, and end, an integrated whole characterized by timeline. As in story-telling, historians must also present the facts with descriptions and explanations; therefore such a "plain narrative" as to present sheer facts or explanations does not exist. "Since a narrative itself is a way of organizing things, and so 'goes beyond' what is given, involved something one might call 'giving an interpretation'" (Danto, 1965, p. 140). As can be seen, historians always organize the facts in a narrative way based on his inclinations and attitudes, selecting some historical facts but avoiding the others. Danto (1965) noted: "For I have said that historical significance is dependent upon non-historical significance and that the latter is very much a matter of the local attitudes and interests of the historian" (p. 33). The historians always handle the historical relics with pre-supposition and prejudice, which are conditions rather than obstacles for understanding. Danto illustrates some master narratives by historians of art to prove their subjective organization of art history. For traditional history, Vasari addresses it as "history of mimetic art" which values the visual reality of the artworks, and Gombrich narrates it as "history of matching and making" which stresses the progress of techniques, both based on their cultural context. Likewise, Danto's history of art is presupposed by "the end-of-art" hypothesis to justify its progressiveness, for he chooses Vasari's classical narrative characterized by imitation, Greenberg's modernist narrative referred to as formalism, and Hegelian progressive narrative featured by the transformation of "Absolute Spirit". This is in consistence with Heidegger's and Gadamer's concept of "prejudice"—the real understanding does not exclude prejudice, which is actually the pre-condition that enables understanding. He notes: "Thus prejudice certainly does not necessarily mean false judgment, but part of the idea is that it can have either a positive or a negative value" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 283). Second, Danto believes in the objectivity of historical narrative, which is different from Hayden White's view that historical narrative is fictional and relative in nature. Though the latter does not deny the reality of history, he emphasizes the fictionality of historical narrative which leads to relativism. He believes that the historians ruin the truthfulness of history for their imagination and creativity, saying the way historical narrative strengthens the meaning that only signifies in a story actually fictionalizes historical facts (White, 1973, pp. xii). Danto, as an essentialist, will not accept this relativism and tries to defend narrative realism. Different from Hayden White who takes a rhetorical perspective, Danto points out the similarity between history and science for objective laws from a logical perspective. Though historical understanding is subjective construction, but human represents historical reality to its best based on facts. Moreover, human activity is an indispensable part of the objective world and historical reality, being a driving force of historical development. Danto (1992) said: "It will be clear that, for me, a narrative is something actually lived, something realized in and as history, rather than, as it is sometimes fashionable to argue, merely the way historians organize events" (p. 11). Similarly, Gadamer (2013) also held that "The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding" (p. 424). Here, "reality of history" is narrative realism in Danto's sense.

To sum up, Danto's historical narrative in analytical philosophy of history and Gadamer's principles of history of effect in philosophical hermeneutics are in common at least in the following aspects. First, the method in historical study distinguishes itself from that in scientific study: the former requires positivism and the latter human act of explanation. Second, our historical knowledge is acquired from the past events in their interaction with the present and future events; therefore, it is reflective and finite. Warnke remarks that Danto

and Gadamer both believe historical knowledge is acquired from two perspectives: One is from the standpoint where our horizon is beyond that of the precursors'; the other is from the standpoint where our view is narrower than our successors' (Warnke, 1987, p. 19). Third, though historical knowledge is finite, the truth of it cannot be denied for the interplay of the past, present, and future. However, the two philosophers also differ from each other in some points. On the one hand, Danto, as an analytical philosopher, emphasizes the methodology of historical understanding, taking history as an object and addressing "historical narrative" as the best method under the impact of scientism; contrastingly, Gadamer rejects methodology for human sciences and focuses merely on human activities of explanation as well as the conditions that enable them.

The task of philosophical hermeneutics, therefore, is ontological rather than methodological. It seeks to throw light on the fundamental conditions that underlie the phenomenon of understanding in all its modes, scientific or nonscientific alike, and that constitute understanding as an event over which the interpreting subject does not ultimately preside. (Gadamer, 2008, p. xi)

On the other hand, due to the narrative structure, Danto's historical narrative is bound to have an end, hence the end-of-art thesis. However, such an assertion is apparently averted from Gadamerian "history of effect", which insists that the truth be permanently open to the future and in a process of unceasing comprehension.

Tendency of Historical Objectivism in the End-of-Art Thesis

The end-of-art thesis is the essence of Danto's philosophy of art history. According to historical narrative, art history is divided into three stages: namely, Vasari-Gombrich narrative mode, Greenberg narrative mode, and post-historical narrative mode, respectively referring to traditional art, modernist art, and post-modernist art. By this assertion, Danto has at least three implications. First, when post-modernist artworks, like *Fountain* and *The Brillo Boxes* raise philosophical questions of art, art itself has become philosophy, so the art history that has been disenfranchised by philosophy has come to an end.

When art internalizes its own history, when it becomes its own history, when it becomes self-conscious of its history as it has come to be in our time, so that its consciousness of its history forms part of its nature, it is perhaps unavoidable that it should turn into philosophy. (Danto, 1986, p. 16)

Second, master narratives of art history including the first two narrative modes have come to an end. Danto (1997) remarked:

I had come to understand this doubtless incendiary expression to mean, in effect, the end of the master narratives of art—not just of the traditional narrative of representing visual appearance, which Ernest Gombrich had taken as the theme of his Mellon Lectures, nor of the succeeding narrative of modernism, but the end of master narratives altogether. (p. xvi)

Finally, art history has entered "post-historical" stage characterized by liberation and pluralism. According to Danto, post-historical art is no longer restricted to any master narrative, therefore loses historical direction and originality:

I really meant to proclaim that a certain kind of closure had occurred in the historical development of art, an era of creativity lasting perhaps six centuries in the West had come to an end, and whatever art was to be made from then on would be marked by what I would call a post-historical character. (Danto, 1997, p. 21)

In order to reveal the law of art history, Danto actually applies a progressive historical narrative—Hegelian narrative of Absolute Spirit, which legitimates the end-of-art thesis. However, it contradicts his argument

against substantive philosophy of history and historical objectivism, therefore diverts itself from hermeneutical "history of effect", and receives much criticism.

Calling himself a Hegelianist, Danto gives credit to Hegel for the influence on his philosophy, though he openly targets against substantive philosophy of history. Danto's the end-of-art thesis is almost duplication of Hegelian historical concept in predicting the future and generalizing an objective law of history in a limited and temporal standpoint. Just as Carroll (2013) pointed out: "Perhaps the most embarrassing charge of all is that Danto's philosophy of art history is inconsistent with—in fact, flatly contradicted by—Danto's own analytical philosophy of history" (p. 433), and "Ironically, this devastating criticism of those substantive philosophers of history who have pronounced the end of history applies not only to the likes of Hegel and Marx, but to Danto, the philosopher of art history, as well" (p. 433). Hegel (1998) believed that human history is the development of self-consciousness of Absolute Spirit, and when it accomplishes its self-consciousness, it comes to a historical end. Such is Hegel's philosophical view of "the end of history". When Absolute Spirit develops to the stage of Spirit, it takes three forms—art, religion, and philosophy: art being perceptual manifestation of "idea" in its initial phase and philosophy being its ultimate and highest form of "idea", therefore art is doomed to be replaced by philosophy. For Hegel, art at first is a "way of bringing our minds and expressing our Divine..." (p. 7), but "the spirit of our world today...and religion and the development of reason, as appeared beyond the stage at which art is the supreme mode of the Absolute" (p. 10). Such is Hegel's the end-of-art assertion. In his organization of historical narrative, Danto apparently applies Hegelian *Bildungsroman* mode, the first stage of art history being Vasari-Gombrich's mode of traditional art highlighting visual appearance and the second stage being Greenberg's mode of modernist art discovering the nature of art. When Warhol's artwork *The Brillo Boxes* presents an ontological question of art with "the indiscernible", the philosophical stage of art has come, so art has come to an end. From then on, art is free from its historical mission of finding its nature, and steps into post-historical era.

It seemed to me now that the philosophical problem of art had been clarified from within history of art that history had come to an end.... The history of the art's quest for philosophical identity was over. And now that it was over, artists were liberated to do whatever they wanted to do. (Danto, 1997, pp. 124-125)

Here, we can see how Danto inherits the tradition of Hegel's philosophy of history. Firstly, Danto seems to admit the objective law of art history. He simply replaces Hegelian concept of "Absolute Spirit" with the word "art", arguing there is an internal law in art history beyond human will—self-consciousness of art. Secondly, Danto ignores the subjective factors of human in art history. Since art history is a history of self-discovery and self-knowledge of art's own identity, it only ends up as a metaphysical philosophy without human factors. Thirdly, Danto's philosophy of art history is teleological in nature. As the aim of Absolute Spirit is to seek freedom, art also develops towards liberation. Danto (1997) noted this similarity vividly:

It is quite striking that this tripartite periodization corresponds, almost uncannily, to Hegel's stupendous political narrative in which, first only one was free, then only some were free, and then, finally, in his own era, everyone was free. In our narrative, at first only mimesis was art, then several things were art but each tried to extinguish stylistic or philosophical constraints. There is no special way works of art have to be. And that is the present and, I should say, the final moment in the master narrative. (p. 47)

Being a follower of Hegel, Danto stands on the limited historical point, trying to generalize the objective law of art history and predict the end-of-art which is beyond human ability. Obviously, Danto holds different

criterion for analytical philosophy of art and philosophy of art history. He himself admits this change of attitudes in historical views:

But in my first serious philosophical work, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, I argued that it was certain claims about the future which render what I there termed substantive philosophies of history illegitimate.... Well, I must say that I am likely today to take a more charitable view of substantive philosophies of history than I would have done in 1965. (Danto, 1997, p. 43)

Moreover, Danto's tendency of historical objectivism in the end-of-art thesis goes astray from Gadamer's principle of "history of effect" which openly opposes scientific objectivism in human sciences. For Gadamer, it is unacceptable for history to be regarded as an object without considering the intervention of historians. Interpreters of history always try to understand history with their prejudices, therefore there is no such an objective law in history. Meanwhile, when we interpret history, we participate in it, therefore there is no such a purely objective "object" called history. In fact, history is not objective at all for being part of human activities, so we cannot try to understand history "beyond" it but rather within the range of history. Historians can never make prophecies of history without being part of it, treating history as a mere object. Danto's philosophy of art history is therefore against the principle of "history of effect" for revealing objective laws of art history without counting human subjective factors in. From the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics, Danto's error is simply to view art history as an object, separating the subject and the object in historical understanding, and ignoring the subjectivity of human beings. According to Gadamer, historical understanding does not aim at finding objective laws but to explore the relationship between human and historical events in the former's act of explanation, as in his most cited remarks: "The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 310).

Concept of Anti-tradition in the End-of-Art Thesis

Danto's philosophy of art history emphasizes the distinctions and discomparability of three historical stages of art, ignoring the succession and continuity among them, therefore lacks the fusion of horizons and conversation of one another. Danto divides art history into three stages: pre-modernist art characterized by "mimesis", modernist art characterized by "self-reflection", and post-modernist art characterized by "compatibility and pluralism". The last phase is post-historical, therefore is separate and forms a kind of discontinuity from the first two stages. In his classification of art history, Danto applies two strategies: the first being progressive historical narrative highlighted by two master narratives and the second being the disenfranchised art history in which art is oppressed by and restricted to philosophy. In either strategy, the aim of art is freedom, which is always achieved from the rejection of the previous stage by the latter stage. When development of art history enters the third stage, namely post-historical stage, it achieves complete freedom so that it stops moving forward and loses its historical direction.

According to Danto, the traditions of the first two stages of art history are outdated, rigid, and abandoned. Moreover, the new paradigm and criticism of art is unexceptionally in contradiction to the old. Firstly, in the progressive historical narrative, the end-of-art in the sense of Vasari-Gombrich's mode means art sets itself free from the tradition of representation of visual appearance. Danto (1997) once noted in his work:

The great traditional paradigm of the visual arts had been, in fact, that of mimesis, which served the theoretical purposes of art admirably for several centuries. And it defined, as well, a critical practice quite different from that entailed by modernism, which had to find a new paradigm and to extirpate competing paradigms. The new paradigm, it was supposed, would serve future art as adequately as the paradigm of mimesis had served past art. (p. 29)

Secondly, the end of Greenberg's narrative gives freedom to post-historical art which bids a farewell to modernist self-consciousness of art's identity.

Modernism came to an end when the dilemma recognized by Greenberg between works of art and mere real objects could no longer be articulated in visual terms, and it became imperative to quit a materialist aesthetic in favor of an aesthetic of meaning. (Danto, 1997, p. 77)

Here, though there seems to be a connection between two progressive narratives, Danto would rather view the rejection of tradition as the driving force of art history. Lastly, post-historical art is completely different from the previous two types of art: Post-historical art is no longer mimetic, nor is it aesthetic or self-reflective, but one that is brand-new without any paradigm, style, and law. Similarly, in the art history that is disenfranchised by philosophy, art needs to be liberated from Platonic diagnosis of "art being useless and dangerous" as well as Heglian argument of "art being rational but inferior to philosophy". Danto (1986) called the "ephemeralization" and "rationalization" of art two Platonic attacks (pp. xvi-xix), which can be simply viewed as "mimetic history of art" and "reflective history of art". For Danto, the freedom of art can be divided into two types: limited and complete. In the first stage, only mimetic art is free; in the second stage, only reflective art is free, both being limited freedom. Only when these two stages come to an end and art enters the post-historical stage, can complete freedom be fulfilled, in other words, the complete freedom of art is at the cost of discontinuity and separation of the traditions from the first two historical stages of art. As for this point, Zhang Bing (2014) noticed the differences of the opinions on art's liberation between Hegel and Danto and pointed out Danto's concept of anti-tradition:

For Hegel, the three stages of liberation are successive, but for Danto, two kinds of liberation are discontinued in terms of time, the first within the range of history, while the second out of the pale of history, and the separating point is the very moment when "art comes to an end". (pp. 38-39)

Apart from Danto's arguments against traditions, Gadamer holds that human sciences should be based on reasonable understanding and acceptance of the traditions. The two philosophers disagree with each other on the concepts of tradition in the following ways. In the first place, Gadamer does not think freedom is contradicted by tradition, while Danto believes that freedom excludes tradition. For Gadamer, the nature of tradition is preservation considered to be a positive activity; therefore, it goes hand in hand with freedom. He states:

The fact is that in tradition there is always an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, and cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change...At any rate, preservation is as much a freely chosen action as are revolution and renewal. (Gadamer, 2013, p. 293)

For Danto, however, it seems to be the contrary, and only by the destruction of traditional art and modernist art can post-historical art achieve its freedom. Next, Gadamer believes in the value of tradition to the present, while Danto denies such significance to the modern time. The former regards the essence of tradition to be preservation, therefore the past customs and concepts are given new meaning and value absorbing new stuff

during the process of revolution. "Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 293). As he points out, it is traditional art that gives rise to modern art: "For although modern art is opposed to traditional art, it is also true that it has been simulated and nourished by it. We must presuppose that both are forms of art and that they do belong together" (Gadamer, 2002, p. 9). Danto constantly targets against "mimesis" of traditional art and "formalism" of modernist art, pointing out the limitations of the traditions in art history in order to remove obstacles for post-historical art. But in fact, post-impressionist art still reflects characteristics of visual reality of traditional art; and post-historical art also contains a lot of mimetic and reflective artworks except for the main-stream philosophical art. Obviously, the old forms of art never lose their values but are rather endowed with new meaning and fused by the new form of art. Thirdly, Gadamer argues for the characteristics of *Dasein* and inevitability in tradition, while Danto objectifies and rigidifies tradition. The former argues that human beings as an existence of *Dasein* is inevitably a part of tradition, therefore traditions cannot be excluded in the first place. He points out:

Research in the human sciences cannot regard itself as in an absolute antithesis to the way in which, as historical beings, relate to the past. At any rate, our usual relationship to the past is not characterized by distancing and freeing ourselves from tradition. Rather, we are always situated with traditions, and this is no objectifying process. (Gadamer, 2013, pp. 293-294)

Danto's farewell to traditional art and modernist art seems to be a kind of separation from tradition, but actually as an existing *Dasein* he is standing in the temporal point, using his prejudices of the past to interpret the future, and so the end-of-art thesis is indeed a product of artistic traditions and present conditions. Though Danto treats art history as an object and "other", he unconsciously uses tradition as the premise for his philosophical assertion, which is exactly the result of fusion of horizons. Finally, Gadamer believes that human activities and tradition are always in a dialectic state, while Danto thinks this dialogue has come to an end since art history has terminated. Any hermeneutical problem contains a dialectic structure of question and answer characterized by openness. Gadamer (2013) said: "In any case, understanding in the human sciences shares one fundamental condition with the life of tradition: it lets itself be addressed by tradition" (p. 294) and "Understanding the word of tradition requires that the reconstructed question to set within the openness of its questionableness" (p. 382). According to him, tradition in human sciences such as history is three-dimensional: It comes from the past, being preserved at present and planning towards the future. In other words, tradition is always in a frame of dialogue characterized by the openness of questions and answers, which will never cease. Contrastingly, Danto emphasizes the fact that traditional art and modernist art have given way to post-historical art, that is to say, the dialogue between post-historical art and those traditions in art history has come to an end. There will not be either art history or tradition in the future. Though he does not deny the conversational structure of history, he emphasizes the break-off of such conversations. Danto once clarified this attitude of anti-tradition in his reply to Carroll's criticism:

But I felt if the structure of history were like the structure of conversations, then, just as conversations can end or break off, a historical structure could end or break off...I don't know what the future practice of art will bring forth. But I do feel the conversation is irreparably broken. (Danto, 2013, p. 457)

As we can see, Danto thinks traditions of art have been past, no longer dialectic, and it does not belong to the present and future, losing its historical direction for ever.

To summarize, tradition in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics means preservation and existence in change, while tradition in Danto's philosophy of art history belongs to the past rather than be open to the future. For Gadamer, tradition always plays an active role in historical changes, and its essence is preservation, being renewed and complemented over time, moving forward with history itself. In this sense, traditions of art can never end, artistic practice can never cease, nor will art history come to a halt, for the complete truth in human sciences is something we "cannot hope to achieve" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 385). Thus, Danto's the end-of-art thesis is only a "narrative about historical narratives"—a story about stories, based on combination of the present conditions of artistic practice and two master narratives of art history; therefore, it is a product of fusion of horizons, merely an understanding of art history, and it will also be renewed by historical and artistic traditions as time proceeds, so the end-of art thesis itself cannot be an absolute truth but merely an interpretation.

Conclusion

From Danto's contradictory attitudes in analytical philosophy of history and philosophy of art history, we can see Danto's eclecticism both as an "essentialist" and a "historicist". In *Analytical Philosophy of History*, he denies the legitimacy of substantive philosophy of history; but in his the end-of-art thesis, he seems to accept it and predicts the future of art from a standpoint beyond history, and goes further to give an essential definition of art. He believes in the subjective factors in historical knowledge due to its narrative structure, but he does not deny the objectivity and reality of historical knowledge. He tries to argue that art progresses within history, but he also proclaims the timelessness and transcendence of post-historical art. He reflects on tradition within tradition, but objectifies and opposes it at the same time. This eclecticism happens to be reflected also in his ontology of art, giving an essential but historicist definition of art. On the one hand, he insists on a universal definition of art: "My view is that it (art) has to be a closed concept. There must be some overarching properties that explain why art in some form is universal" (Danto, 2013, p. xii); on the other hand, he also argues that an artwork in one historical period may not be one in another. From the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics, the fusion of two horizons—analytical philosophy and Continental philosophy—gives Danto new outlooks in his philosophy of art and philosophy of history, which adopt not only logical positivism and essentialism from natural sciences but also relativism and humanism from human sciences.

In conclusion, Danto's the end-of-art thesis applies the strategy of historical narrative, therefore can be viewed as "a narrative about narratives", or "a story about stories". There are several implications we can get from his historical narrative strategy. Firstly, narrative structure encompasses a beginning, a middle, and an end, which justifies the end-of-art history. According to Danto, Western art history is divided into three stages: During the pre-modernist stage, art pursues the reality of visual appearance, constituting a progressive narrative; during the modernist stage, art explores its own essence and identity, making up another progressive narrative; when the essence of art is discovered by works of art, such as *The Brillo Boxes*, art enters the post-historical stage which is characterized by freedom and pluralism in artistic practice and no longer belongs to any progressive narrative, that is to say, art history has come to an end. For Danto, "the end-of-art" refers to the end of master historical narratives and the end of progressive narratives. Since only when art comes to an end can its definition be made, Danto's philosophy of art history actually paves the way for his ontology of art. Secondly, historical events are organized in a narrative structure, so that they are both subjective and objective,

which can reveal the internal structure of art history but can never be equivalent to historical reality as well. Through historical narrative, Danto reconciles the contradictions between analytical philosophy of history and substantive philosophy of history. Lastly, Danto's the end-of-art thesis, as a product of historical narrative, resembles Vasari's and Greenberg's in that all are narrative in structure, therefore it only represents the reality of art history to some extent, but cannot be regarded as a universal and absolute truth. The end-of-art thesis is significant epistemologically rather than metaphysically or ontologically. To sum up, from the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics, Danto's the end-of-art thesis itself is merely historical understanding, resulted from the reflections on traditional art and modernist art at a temporal standpoint of post-modernism, interactions between his limited self as *Dasein* and the past, present, and future of art history, "fusion of horizons", and "history of effect". The end-of-art thesis is only part of historical understanding exactly like other theories of art history, the truth of which is never closed but open to the future under the principle of history of effect.

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