

The Boundaries of Art

By David Novitz

The Boundaries of Art is a provocative and stimulating contribution to the philosophy of art. In it, David Novitz explores the many different relations between art and life, and does so in ways that herald an important and valuable break with traditional aesthetics. He rejects the view that an artwork should be judged in isolation from its historical and cultural contexts, pointing to many ways in which the cultural milieu affects choices made by the artist. By closely examining the notion of an art and its relation to the fine arts, he challenges the commonplace notion of art as something removed from daily life. He also examines in detail the distinction between popular and high art, arguing that it is a social construct, which received impetus from the rise of the aesthetic movement in the late nineteenth century.

Although Novitz provides a sustained and lively challenge to the traditional boundaries of art, he rejects the postmodernist claim that there are no actual distinctions to be drawn between art and life. Instead, he argues, against Richard Rorty and others, that the relations between art, life, and philosophy need to be rethought in ways that preserve the notions of truth and knowledge while recognizing the role that art and philosophy play in enabling people to negotiate the brute facts of their actual existence. At its most powerful, Novitz argues, art is a form of seduction that can destabilize our commitments and entire world view, and does so in ways that are unavailable to rational persuasion. But he argues as well that it does not follow from this, as Oscar Wilde suggests, that "Life is in fact the mirror, and Art the reality".

“ This is an unusual and enlightening book, a pleasure to read and often highly persuasive. ”

Peter Lamarque, in Philosophical Books

The Author

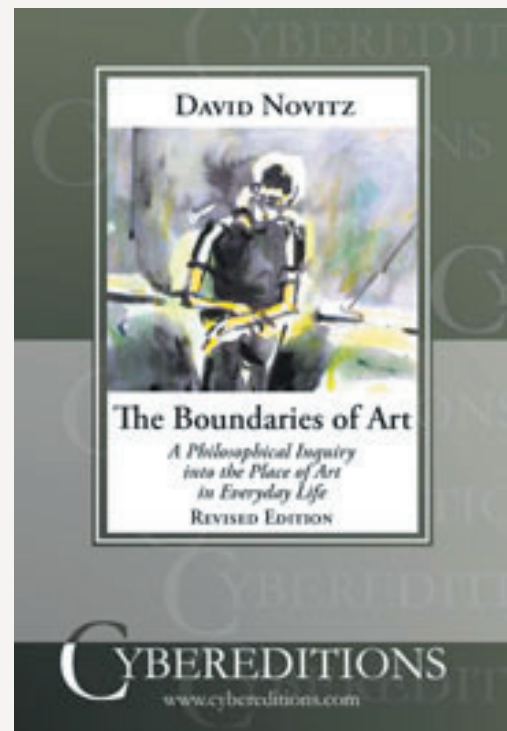
David Novitz, who died in December, 2001, was Reader in Philosophy at the University of Canterbury. He was the author of Pictures and Their Use in Communication (1977), Knowledge, Fiction & Imagination (1987), The Boundaries of Art (1992/2001), and many journal articles on the philosophy of art.

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