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## Criticism as a Form of Cognition (journal article)

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Curtis L. Carter\*

## Criticism as a Form of Cognition

### I. *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis* and Art Criticism

*Erlebnis*, here refers to as knowledge by acquaintance, is knowledge attained in the presence of an object or event, for our purposes here a work of art. *Erlebnis* is not a vague or content less gesture toward the ineffable. Rather, *Erlebnis* consists of an ordered, intelligible, symbolic process through which the producer artist sends out as information consisting of feeling, form, or ideas that comprise the work of art, which is then received by an observer such as the art critic. *Erkenntnis* is knowledge about something and consists of a description and interpretation of an object or event. It is based on internalizing perceptual observation and reasoning processes such as analysis, association, comparison, appeal to prior knowledge, as well as judgment which may include assessment. In the case of art, however, a critic's description, interpretation, or evaluation based solely on *Erkenntnis* seldom, if ever amounts to an exhaustive characterization of the work. It is necessary to supplement *Erkenntnis* with *Erlebnis* which is supplied by seeing, hearing, or undergoing, in the actual presence of the visual or performative artwork. Hence both *Erkenntnis* and *Erlebnis* have a major place in the creation of art criticism.

My intent is not, therefore, to propose that *Erkenntnis* and *Erlebnis* constitute a dualism of knowledge with respect to art criticism. There are in fact elements of both at work in the responses to a work of art whether a painting, a musical composition, theater performance or a dance. A critic responding to a work of art receives initial impressions of the work as *Erlebnis*, but criticism itself also benefits from various forms of *Erkenntnis*, including a mixture of initial information drawn from the critic's prior knowledge of art history, art practices, and also, in some instances, contributions from philosophical aesthetic theories, as in the case of Monroe Beardsley, Arthur Danto and Noël Carroll.

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In view of the fact that John Hospers once appealed to the very same distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis* to deny that art works can provide knowledge of any sort, a brief explanation of our differences is required. Following Moritz Schlick, Hospers argues that *Erkenntnis*, but not *Erlebnis*, is a form of knowledge. Hence, on this view works of art provide only immediate expressive experiences lacking in cognitive significance. By implication it follows that art criticism would suffer a similar fate, as art criticism derives the core of its cognitive significance from the art that it serves. Since no substantial reasons are given for excluding *Erlebnis* from knowledge, other than to argue that knowledge is about things, while acquaintance is immediate, Hospers' conclusion seems arbitrary and without justification. On the other hand, it is entirely within the historic and philosophic meanings of the terms "knowledge" and "cognition" to include both *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis* as forms of knowledge or cognition. For this reason, and because the recognition of both forms of knowledge will constitute an important step toward ending the banishment of the arts from the realm of cognition as well as marginalizing art criticism, both *Erkenntnis* and *Erlebnis* are represented here as forms of knowledge.

Before proceeding to the discussion of Beardsley, Danto, and Carroll's views it is useful to take note of some of the differences between the artist's and the critic's approaches to cognitive aspects of the arts. While a visual artist, actor or dancer's knowledge may include what has been discovered during the creative process itself, as well as from the resulting artistic outcome, there are apparent differences between the knowledge experienced directly by the artist producer and knowledge as it appears in criticism. The critic's knowledge, for example, does not depend entirely upon the immediate presence of the work. Criticism can be written and read without one's being simultaneously attending to the actual art-making process, whereas the knowledge acquired by the visual artist or performer is available only in the actual doing or undergoing taking place during the act of creating art. It is thus necessary to elaborate further upon the characteristics of cognition as it appears in criticism.

First, the critic shares with other viewers the opportunity to experience first-hand the work of art or performance under review. The spectator's first-hand experience is initially imbued with *Erlebnis*, and may also be informed by *Erkenntnis* depending on the prior experiences of viewing and the level of acquaintance with art practices and theories, as well as previously formed beliefs concerning

art. The critic's experience, too, begins with *Erlebnis* qualities from direct experience with the art work under consideration. However, the critic's task relies on additional conceptual tools supplied by art history, art theories such as representation, expression, modernism, and postmodernism. Presumably, the critic draws upon perceptual skills acquired from in-depth expert experience while considering a particular art work in relation to its historic and cultural contexts. On a more abstract level some critics such as Monroe Beardsley, Arthur Danto and Noël Carroll also draw upon their respective aesthetic theories which offer a philosophical framework for their discussing the art.

In contrast to art practices in the visual arts, music, or dance, art criticism occurs in the medium of a written verbal language within the limits of its own more or less individualized and institutionalized practices including the conventions of linguistic syntax and semantics. Even where verbal or written language is a part of an art form, as in literary arts, texts of musical compositions, and drama, the language of criticism serves a different function, contributing to *Erkenntnis* more than to *Erlebnis*. Works of art function as stimulus patterns consisting of complex visual or sound images and meaning available for the critic's responses, while criticism itself consists primarily of description, interpretation, and evaluation. Criticism is thus contributory more to *Erkenntnis* than to *Erlebnis*.

Of what does the critic's description of a work of art consist? It is based on the impressions received as the work of art presents itself to the senses, how it looks and feels. Some, but not all, of the properties that appear in a critic's description of a work of art are available to direct observation. For example, the colors, shapes and lines in a visual art composition, or the shapes and the movement of a physical body in motion, including the properties of speed, duration, and intensity, are readily observable to an experienced critic. In a theatre performance, the text is enhanced by costumes, lighting, set design, and the music, as well as the patterns of voice and visually observable movements.

Other features important to experiencing art are registered in the mind and body of the critic without being susceptible to direct observation in the usual sense of visual or auditory confirmation. These qualities are nonetheless essential to the critic's description of a work of art. Kinesthetic and expressive qualities, as well as form, and ideas embedded in the work, all contribute to artistic significance and meaning. Other more complex qualities emerge from the simultaneous

presence of the kinesthetic, expressive, and formal properties interacting to create an overall sense of style in a work. A critic's account of a work, thus records the holistic, emergent properties that define the work as a whole, as well as the qualities of its separate parts. Sensitive observation skills and creative uses of language are required to present these more intangible aspects of a work.

Interpretation and evaluation, unlike description, call upon the critic to develop her own thoughts in response to the work informed by the experiences of *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis*. Interpretation allows the critic to say, in general, what the piece was about and to give suggestion as to its overall meaning. Frequently, interpretation will relate the features of a particular work to a framework of ideas or beliefs existing outside the piece. In the case of a critic's response to Picasso's "Guernica," 1937, she might relate this work to the artistic revolutions of European modern art and to the particular cubist stylistic contributions of Picasso, as well as to the social-political happenings of the Spanish Civil war during the 1930s. Taking another example, a critic might, for instance, refer the viewers of choreographer Doris Humphries', "The Shakers," to the beliefs and practices of the nineteenth century Biblical religious group known as Shakers. Interpretations of a new work within an established art form call for analysis of the work in the light of its artistic innovations. Significant changes, such as the development of digital arts call for art criticism to explore developments beyond established art practices, by referencing both unique features and the work's relation to existing art.

Evaluation require the critics' judgment or assessment to be exercised against a background of presumed expertise and knowledge. Placing a value on a work of art as is called for in evaluation, for instance, must address many factors. Among these are the originality of the particular work under review, the importance of the concept exhibited, the skill of the performers, and the liveliness or dullness of the experience offered by the art work, and its place in the history or development of its medium. Other factors include, originality of performance style, social relevance, the critic's taste, and her perceptual and interpretive skills. Critical evaluations, in the best sense, arise out of, and are supported by, the presence or absence, the strengths and weaknesses, of a selection of such considerations.

Critics may also write about more general issues including characteristics of a visual artist's, writer's, a performer's style or about the general features of a par-

ticular art medium. These auxiliary items contribute to the overall aims of criticism: to improve our understanding or knowledge of visual, literary, and performance arts. With the emergence of mass media/digital art forms, criticism now extends to these new art forms as well as its applications to more traditional arts.

## II. Criticism and Aesthetic Theory

The three approaches to criticism under consideration here hold somewhat differing views on aesthetic theory. Aesthetic theory differs from criticism in its origin. It is not ordinarily a direct response to particular art works or to particular art practices. Rather, aesthetic theory is typically formulated in abstract philosophical language (*Erkenntnis*) and is lacking in the sensuous immediacy included in the direct experiences of works of art. Similarly, aesthetic theory lacks the immediacy and concreteness of artistic experiences which are more directly conveyed in the writings of a perceptive critic.

Each of their respective approaches to criticism under consideration here is closely linked to the critic's views on aesthetics. Aesthetic theories as employed by the three critics consist of rational concepts and critical arguments representing a form of *Erkenntnis*. Aesthetic theories provide the concepts and principles necessary for identifying art works and for distinguishing art works from non-art. An aesthetic theory, for example, thus helps to establish the conceptual framework for identifying and appreciating works of art. In this respect, aesthetic theory also contributes to the development of the conceptual structure of art criticism. Similarly, changes in aesthetics theories invite an openness to change both in the theories themselves and in the approaches to criticism to which they may apply.

For example, Beardsley holds that works of art are perceptual objects best characterized by aesthetic properties, which are a function of formal unity and regional qualities of the art work. According to Beardsley, aesthetic properties are objectively present in the work and available to a spectator by means of perceptual discrimination. Danto would argue that to know a work of art requires something more than the eye alone can supply. It requires a theory of art that informs the viewer of the conditions under which an object or activity may be considered a work of art. Carroll's narrative aesthetic theory holds that determining what constitutes a work of art requires constructing an explanation con-

sisting of an historical narrative that connects the artist's intentions to existing art world precedents and practices.

What then is the relation of aesthetic theory to the cognitive significance of art? Aesthetic theory contributes to the conceptual foundation for abstracting the cognitive significance of art as it is reflected in criticism. Taking dance as an example, before a choreographer sets out to create a dance, she must have some idea of what a dance would be. Similarly, a dancer does not perform the dance apart from some prior understanding of the nature of performing. Without such knowledge, the dancer would not know where to begin or end, and would have no idea when she had succeeded or failed. Correspondingly, the spectators would not know when a performance is taking place, and when it is successful, without some implicit or explicit understanding of the underlying concepts and principles that establish the nature and objectives of performing. The theory may be implicit or explicit, but it must exist in some form if the activity of performance is to be recognized as a significant artistic activity, that is, one with purpose and meaning in relation to an art practice such as dance. Of course the norms and practices in the arts are open to constant innovation and change, sometimes posing a challenge for both performers and spectators to keep up with the changes.

### III. Art Criticism of Monroe Beardsley, Arthur Danto, Noël Carroll

Although the topic of art criticism has drawn the interest of numerous American aestheticians of recent vintage, three names (Monroe Beardsley, Arthur Danto, and Noël Carroll) stand out for their contributions to examining the relation of art criticism to aesthetic theory. Their knowledge of art practices as well as of philosophical aesthetics is extensive: (Beardsley literary and other arts viewed from the perspective of New Criticism, Danto for visual arts, and Carroll on film, *Avant garde* theater and dance). Each of these writers, known for important contributions to aesthetic theory, has also functioned as an arts critic: Beardsley on literary arts, Danto as visual arts critic for *The Nation*, and Carroll in *Art Forum*, *Drama Review*, *Soho Weekly Art News*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The evidence is abundant that both Danto and Carroll produced art criticism. Michael Wreen, editor of Monroe Beardsley, *The Aesthetic Point of View*, with Donald M. Callen,

## Monroe Beardsley

Beardsley's thoughts on criticism occupy a substantial body of his writings beginning with "International Fallacy" with W. K. Wimsatt in 1946, and followed by numerous publications devoted to art criticism, including his books *Aesthetic Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (1958), *Aesthetic Inquiry: Essays on Art Criticism and the Philosophy of Art*, edited with H. Schueller (1967), *The Possibility of Criticism* (1970), and a steady stream of journal articles and book chapters into the 1980s.<sup>2</sup>

Approaching the question of the relevance of the artist's intentions (a series of psychological states or events in the artist's mind concerning the imagined work and its creation) to interpretation or evaluation of a work of art, Beardsley and Wimsat rejected any relevance of authors' interpretations for the interpretation or evaluation of a work of art.<sup>3</sup> This initial essay has been widely reproduced in journals and debated among literary theorists, thus marking a place for Beardsley in arts criticism. In his subsequent essay, "Intentions and Interpretations: A Fallacy Revisited," Beardsley reflects on his earlier claims and the responses, with clarifications aimed at shoring up his objections to artist's intentions. Here, he does not abandon his earlier rejection of author's intentions, but offers further clarification. In doing so he offers an account of author as "anyone who intentionally produces a text: that is a syntactically ordered sequence of words, spoken or written in a natural language."<sup>4</sup> The essence of his sustained argument opposing the quest for artist's intentions is his view of the art work as symbol, functioning as an illocutionary<sup>5</sup> act or as a representation. Or as Beardsley, in keeping with "New Criticism" practice puts it, the focus is

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in a personal interview January, 2016, stated that Beardsley wrote criticism as well as aesthetic theory.

<sup>2</sup> Beardsley's writings on criticism are nicely ordered in "Bibliography of Writings in Aesthetics by Monroe Beardsley" accompanying Monroe Beardsley, *The Aesthetic Point of View: selected Essays*, M. J. Wreen and D. M. Callen (Eds.), Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 1982, pp. 371–378.

<sup>3</sup> Monroe Beardsley and W. K. Wimsatt, "The Intentional Fallacy", *Sewanee Review*, (Summer 1946), pp. 468–488.

<sup>4</sup> Monroe Beardsley, "Intentions and Interpretations: A Fallacy revived", *The Aesthetic Point of View*, p. 189.

<sup>5</sup> Illocutionary acts as discussed in the writings of philosophers J. L. Austin and John R. Searle are linguistic acts such as declarations, directives, or expressives.



on the work of art instead of upon imagined action of the artist in creating the work of art.<sup>6</sup>

Despite his admonitions against the use of artists' intentions in criticism, Beardsley nevertheless acknowledges a role for artists' intentions in his aesthetics. In the essay "An Aesthetic Definition of Art" which appeared in 1983, toward the end of his career, artist's intention has a key role. "An art work is something produced with the intention of giving it the capacity to satisfy the aesthetic interest."<sup>7</sup> Here the intention is shifted to the aesthetic interest of those who approach an artist's production (work of art) with the intention of obtaining aesthetic experience. On this view it would be sufficient that the artist's work has the capacity to produce aesthetic interest on behalf of others for whom it might generate interest. How this apparent shift in the use of intention would play out in Beardsley's approach to art criticism is not entirely clear. It would seem to shift the focus of criticism to the recipients' interests leaving the place of the artist's role in uncertain territory. On such a view, the critic's task would involve not only focus on the particular features of an art work, but also require in depth knowledge of the interests of the culture and the capacity of the population attending to the art for aesthetic interest. Notably, Beardsley's position here would further complicate what might constitute a work of art.

A central theme in Beardsley's aesthetics is the relation of art criticism to aesthetics. In the introduction to *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* he states "neither aesthetics nor criticism can be carried on independently of the other though each has its own tasks."<sup>8</sup> Here a work of art is also understood to be an aesthetic object which is essentially a perceptual object, and can be subject to multiple presentations. Continuing his argument concerning the relation of criticism and aesthetics, Beardsley states, "To be a good critic, it is not enough to accumulate a vast amount of information about and a rich experience of, the art..."<sup>9</sup> you must be able to present the experience of art and link it to

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<sup>6</sup> Beardsley, "Intentions and Interpretations: A Fallacy revived", p. 194.

<sup>7</sup> Monroe C. Beardsley, "An Aesthetic Definition of Art", in: H. Curtler (Ed.), *What is Art?*, Haven Publications, New Yorke 1983, pp. 15–29, and Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, Malden, Massachusetts 2005, p. 58.

<sup>8</sup> Beardsley, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Criticism*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

other aspects of experiences of the world as well as to the concepts employed in aesthetics as a philosophical discipline.

The latter view of course leads to questions central to criticism. For example, the question, “What do critics actually assume about the relation between aesthetic objects and their presentations?”<sup>10</sup> Details of Beardsley’s noteworthy analysis of the relation of criticism and aesthetics in *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* and his other writings on the subject would take us beyond the limits of the current project. However, it is of interest to note that he reaffirms his conviction that aesthetics has a very intimate connection with criticism, while acknowledging that his suggestion of some twenty years earlier proposing to identify aesthetics with meta-criticism may have been carried to excess. Still, he persists in claiming that what critics have to say remains a principal source for problems of interest to philosophical aesthetics. Similarly, the general practices of the critics “offer important evidence for testing the truth of proposed aesthetic theories.”<sup>11</sup> For additional information on Monroe Beardsley’s contribution to criticism and aesthetics, see “Monroe Remembered: Aesthetic: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism on its Fiftieth Anniversary.”<sup>12</sup>

### Arthur Danto

Like Beardsley’s, Arthur Danto’s life work embraces both art criticism and philosophical aesthetics. After an initial focus on a career as a visual artist, Danto elected to study philosophy at Columbia and subsequently developed original contributions in aesthetics and other areas of philosophy. Initially, his work focused on Anglo-American analytic philosophy, but later he embraced aspects of Hegel’s philosophy of art. His interest in Hegel’s discussion of the so called “end of art” became a pivotal element in Danto’s projection of the end of art history as it had been understood up through modernism, and the beginnings of major shifts in western art such as the works of Andy Warhol and other Pop artists of the 1960s.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Monroe Beardsley, “Critical Evaluation”, *The Aesthetic Point of View*, p. 317.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Kivy, “Monroe Remembered: Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism on Its Fiftieth Anniversary”, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 44 (1/2010).

Perhaps the most central philosophical work of Danto for our topic of art criticism is his book, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981), where he sets forth his views on the relation of art and philosophy. In this philosophical work, which he attributes to his becoming a critic, Danto advances a philosophical theory of art including the conditions necessary for something to be considered a work of art. A central problem in his approach to aesthetics, initiated in part by Danto's puzzlement over Warhol's, *Brillo Box* (1964), concerns the identity of art works, culminating in the question of how aesthetics might distinguish art works from non-art works, even those that might entertain the same, or closely resembling, perceptual qualities.<sup>13</sup>

This extension of his philosophical interests to art criticism is not difficult to imagine given Danto's engagement as a practicing artist, even more so from his reflections on a wide range of artists of his time from Warhol to Abstract Expressionist Marc Rothko to environmental artist Robert Irwin's works featuring luminosity. His dialogues with art critic Clement Greenberg and other art critics again point to Danto's growing interest in art criticism. In contrast to Danto's merging of criticism and aesthetic theory, Greenberg preferred an approach to art criticism based mainly on visual response without reference to theory or other knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

Danto again revisits this theme promoted by Warhol's Brillo Box in his essay, "Aesthetics and Art Criticism" (1994). He argues that the differences between Warhol's, *Brillo Box*, as an art work and the advertising Brillo Box of designer, Steve Harvey, come down to a difference in the kind of art criticism appropriate to the two objects. "Steve Harvey's boxes are about Brillo and about the values of speed, cleanliness... Warhol's iconography is more complex and has little to do with those values at all. In a way it is philosophical, being about art..."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *Andy Warhol*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2009, p. 61. Danto elaborates upon the ontology of art as it relates to Warhol's 1964 *Brillo Box* in the essay, "Aesthetics and Art Criticism", in Arthur C. Danto, *Embodied Meanings: Critical Essays and Aesthetic Meditations*, Farrar Straus Giroux, New York 1994, pp. 382–384.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur Danto, "Clement Greenberg", *The Nation*, 1994. See also: Arthur Danto, "After the End of Art", p. 125, pp. 135–137, 148–150.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur C. Danto, "Aesthetics and Criticism", p. 386.

Although in *Transfigurations of the Commonplace*, Danto offers conditions for what can be considered art, he insists that, as far as his practice of criticism is concerned, he is open to art that conveys the philosophical essence of art.<sup>16</sup> As a critic, Danto is receptive to any variations of art such as might appear in a pluralistic art world. On this point, Danto's range of art works of critical interest differs from Beardsley who finds no place in his view of art for the likes of Duchamp's ready mades or Warhol's Brillo Boxes. He disavows interest in artists whose works purport to represent historical breakthroughs, by presuming that such developments in art history have ended. Neither a fixed agenda nor aesthetic qualities as such are necessary to the practice of art criticism. What is central to the critic's practice, as Danto views it, are the ways in which aesthetic qualities or other elements of the art contribute to the best explanations of the art work. For Danto, and in keeping with the spirit of Hegel's aesthetics, the development of art "is a whole under constantly revised development... and no criticism which fails to see this can have much value."<sup>17</sup>

## Noël Carroll

In contrast with Beardsley and Danto, Noël Carroll's approach to art criticism has evolved from its early beginnings as a form of advocacy for emerging arts of the 1970s and 1980s, to its current advancement of criticism as evaluation. His writings on evaluative criticism are in part an effort to refute the central claims, advanced by Beardsley, in support the priority of artist's intentions. Similarly, while showing the highest regard for Danto as the leading art critic of his time, Carroll argues that Danto's commitment to interpretation calls for a greater recognition of evaluation than is accorded in his approach to art criticism.

Carroll's early experience as an art critic took place mainly in the downtown New York art world of theater, dance, film, and performance during the 1970s and 1980s. His criticism focuses on down town artists in contrast with the up-

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<sup>16</sup> Danto's latest thoughts on the question of what constitutes art appear in his book, *What Art Is*, New Haven and London, 2013. In this work Danto argues that philosophy of art, "is an attempt to distinguish art from other things in the world" and "an attempt to answer the question, what makes art?" Cited in Joseph Tanke, "The Artness of Art: Arthur Danto's 'What Art Is'", *Art in America*, August 30, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Arthur C. Danto, "The end of Art and Its Critics", *L&B (Lier en Boog): Series of Philosophy and Art Theory*, Vol. 13, 1998, p. 54.

town New York art world featured in Danto's art criticism.<sup>18</sup> Carroll's criticism documents the "rich and lively" new developments of the *Avant Garde* arts in a particular locale. He and other young critics of the time became in fact a living part of the art scene. In this scene, he saw the unfolding of innovative developments where choreographers of postmodern dance interacted with painters and sculptors whose work often evolved into performance art. As a philosopher-aesthetician observing these developments, Carroll did not miss the theoretical implications of such developments for the often reciprocal connections to artistic movements such as minimalism in the fine arts, and on to the re-entry of theatrical narrative and expression in the arts of the 1980s and beyond. Or, to what others might prefer to label postmodernism.<sup>19</sup>

Carroll's later views on criticism are consolidated in his book, *On Criticism* (2009) and elaborated in his more recent essays, especially those responding to Beardsley's and Danto's accounts of art criticism. The core notion in Carroll's account of criticism is evaluation. Evaluation is intended as a rigorous, reasoned process in which artistic judgment is supported by factual evidence. The role of the critic in Carroll's normative view is to show what in a work of art is of value and give supporting reasons. Such reasons draw upon on the artists' intentions, classification of the work into the relevant artistic category, and historical context, and examination of the particular features of the work taking note of its similarities and differences from other related candidates. Evaluation in Carroll's view is supported by an examination of the particular features of the art work, taking note of its similarities to, and differences from other related candidates. While he acknowledges important roles for description and interpretation in criticism, their worth is primarily in support of evaluation.

<sup>18</sup> For a picture of this New York art world as it emerged in the 1960s and unfolds in the 1970s and 1980s see the works of Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body 1963*, Duke University Press, Durham and London 1993 and Sally Banes, *Subversive expectations: performance Art and Parathheater in New York: 1976–85*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1998.

<sup>19</sup> The work of Noël Carroll's formative developments in art criticism are documented in part in the collection of essays, Noël Carroll, *Living in an Art World: Reviews and Essays on Dance, Performance, Theater, and the Fine Arts in the 1970s and 1980s*, Chicago Spectrum Press, Louisville 2012. Terms such as postmodern dance and postmodern painting he characterizes as style markers which eventually became assembled in the more inclusive notion of Postmodernism. See pp. 338–351 for Carroll's critical assessment of Postmodernism.

For Carroll, the central goal of art criticism is to provide a rational basis for art appreciation. What does this mean? First is to identify the art's purpose or purposes, second is to identify the means for achieving the purpose, and then assess whether the artist's chosen means are adequate to realize this purpose. In a related essay, "Art Appreciation" (2016), though not on criticism as such, Carroll focuses on this central aim of art criticism which is to enrich art appreciation. In this essay, he distinguishes two forms of appreciation: "as liking" and as "sizing up." So far as criticism is concerned, he sees little or no value in appreciation as liking. On the other hand, he finds a close connection between "sizing up" and the task of criticism. In some respects, the process of art criticism as Carroll views it follows parallel to the process of logical analysis that a philosopher might undertake in addressing a problem in other fields of inquiry, especially those related to issues related to questions of value.

#### IV. Challenges to Criticism as Description, Interpretation, and Evaluation

All three aspects of criticism: description, interpretation, and evaluation have been challenged at one time or another, for example, when judged by criteria of cognitive significance established for knowledge in the sciences. Normally, as Joseph Margolis has pointed out, description implies a stable, well defined object available for inspection, when there is a need to check the facts of any description of the work.<sup>20</sup> Margolis argues that works of art are intentional, culturally emergent objects embedded in a physical medium. According to his theory, a work of art can be known only in relation to the artistic and appreciative traditions of a particular culture.

The ability to satisfy the conditions necessary for establishing a stable work of art depends upon the medium. For example, the physical medium in virtually all art practices including paintings, film, and digital art works is subject to deterioration in the particular works, or changes resulting from obsolete media processing technology. Maintaining the identity of a stable artifact accessible for criticism is especially problematic in the performing arts. Even where there is a literary text for a theater performance, a score as in musical compositions, a

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<sup>20</sup> Joseph Margolis, *Art and Philosophy: Conceptual Issues in Aesthetics*, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey 1989, p. 111.

notational system for certain forms of dance, the actual performative rendering of the drama, score, or the dance, as it comes to the critic responding to a particular artistic event, may vary with each performer's rendering and according to the context in which it appears. Improvisational arts pose even more problems for determining the identity of a particular work.

Descriptive criticism works best with stable visual works such as literature, paintings and sculptures or film, but is problematic with theater, music, or dance. Works in these media do not easily satisfy the requirements of object stability, because a performance exists in the full sense only as it is actually happening. It is sometimes possible to check on disputed parts of a particular performance by researching existing texts or documentations of prior performances as well as by consulting performers, directors, choreographers or others who may have witnessed a particular performance. The existence of notation for the performed works as in theater, music or dance offers important information useful for securing the identity of a work. Still none of these means can likely capture all of the nuances that contribute to the identity of a work of performance. Hence the call for a stable object as a necessary requirement of description remains problematic for criticism of the performing arts.

Criticism as interpretation is perhaps the least problematic of the three options discussed here with respect to questions concerning stable identity for works of art. It demands a wide range of knowledge both of historic and contemporary developments in the arts as well as keen talents for observation and analysis and their relation to particular cultural environments and audiences. Yet it would allow for a wider range of flexible conditions concerning the identity of a work.

Evaluation, which refers to assessment or assigning value judgments concerning the significance of a work of art, has had a role in art criticism through much of the history of the arts. Evaluation would appear to be a natural outcome of the processes of description and interpretation. Yet it is in some respects the most problematic. The role of artist's intentions in art criticism, for example has prompted extensive debates over their place in assessing works of art, particularly among American critics and aestheticians. Notably, as we have seen, Beardsley eschewed artist's intentions both in his early writings and subsequent works. Arguing in the opposite direction, Carroll contends that a careful

scrutiny of a work of art together with external sources yields sufficient access to artists' intentions to support their role in a reasoned evaluation.

## V. Dance as seen From the Perspective of Criticism

The remaining section of our discussion here focuses on applications of criticism to understanding and appreciation of the art of dance. The problem of identifying stable identity for a work of art is especially of interest for criticism of performing arts such as dance. I will use dance criticism to illustrate this point. Dance is an appropriate choice here, as two of our critics, Beardsley and Carroll, both have written essays on dance, and Carroll has written extensively as a dance critic.<sup>21</sup>

Knowing a dance in the sense of *Erlebnis* is akin to knowing directly through the bodily senses, as opposed to knowing the dance through the words that label or describe it. While *Erlebnis* relies on the inner experiences of the dancer or viewer, it may also be informed by *Erkenntnis*, since a performer's and a spectator's knowledge may include prior knowledge about dancing. For the performer, this includes knowledge gained through prior training and experience of dancing as well as historical knowledge. For the spectator it includes previous experiences of doing, observing, or reading about dance.

Recently critics and philosophers of dance have worried over possible discrepancies in the identity of a dance work from performance to performance, and about how discrepancies might affect the problem of establishing the identity of, or knowing a dance. Such discrepancies are indeed a problem for those who would insist on treating dance works and their performances in the manner of logically discrete symbols or culturally emergent symbols (Margolis).

Critics and philosophers of dance alike would acknowledge discrepancies in characterizing the identity of a dance work from performance to performance. The question is, how such discrepancies might affect the problem of character-

<sup>21</sup> See Noël Carroll, *Living in an Artworld: Reviews and Essays on Dance, Performance Theater and the Fine Arts in the 1970s and 1980s*, Chicago Spectrum Press, Chicago 2012, pp. 70, 85, 91, 108. Monroe Beardsley, "What is Going on in a Dance?" *Dance Research Journal*, 15 (1/1982), pp. 31–36.



izing the identity of a dance work? Such discrepancies are indeed a problem for those who would insist on treating dance works and their performances as logically discrete symbols whose identity is violated by differences among their various instantiations in different performances. This is especially so in the case of works such as “Swan Lake” with long performance histories from the nineteenth century extending to the present with changes in the performer’s bodies, costumes, staging and various director’s and dancers’ interpretations of the choreography.

The reality of changes from one performance to another, in dance as well as other performing arts, must be accepted as a given for criticism. It follows that such changes must be taken into account by critics in comparing descriptions and interpretations of performances, whether in dance or performances or dramatic and musical works. It is not always feasible for a critic to check the details of one performance against another, so a particular critic’s response will always be less than a scientist’s empirical characterization. But the critic’s view offers the benefit of nuances of feeling and form as well as a humanizing characterization of the work that adds to the meaning, together with the benefits of *Erkenntnis* which brings additional richness by locating the work in the context of current and historical forms of dance.

How might such limitations affect our understanding of the cognitive significance of critical descriptions? It simply points up the fact that art works, including performances, are particulars, rather than universal entities, which are appreciated for their uniqueness as well as for any shared common elements.

Interpretations and evaluations of performances also do not fit well the cognitive models of empirical science. Interpretations may vary depending on which aspects of the work are given priority. Evaluations are subject to similar limitations. They are “subjective” judgments based on the critic’s own experiences of *Erlebnis* informed by a selection among the particular features of the work *Erkenntnis* based on related external knowledge from art history or cultural practices that the critic might choose to support her evaluations. Improvisational arts pose even more problems for determining the identity of a work of art, for there are bound to be variations in the rendering of an improvisational performance.

Hence, performances of art works in theater, music or dance do not entirely satisfy the requirements of object stability called for by descriptive criticism, because the performance exists in the full sense only as it is actually happening. It is sometimes possible to check on disputed parts of a description, by researching existing texts, documentation of prior performances as well as by consulting performers, directors, choreographers or others who witnessed a particular performance. The existence of notation for a performed work of music or dance, for example, offers additional information toward securing the identity of a performance work. But there is no assurance that the notation contains all of the essential parts of a performance. Video and film recording of prior performances offers additional means of confirming a critical description of a work, but none of these means can capture all of the nuances that contribute to the identity of a performance viewed as a stable object. The call for a stable object as a necessary condition of description remains problematic.

Interpretations offer additional challenges. Interpretations, to a degree, can be checked against the descriptive facts of a performance, and both critics and their readers are in a position to do this within the limits noted above. It is sometimes possible, moreover, to entertain more than one acceptable interpretation of a work of art without requiring agreement between the interpretations. Interpretations need not be judged true or false in order to have cognitive significance. They can be interesting, plausible, likely and still retain their cognitive significance. This is particularly the case when criticism is made against a background of expertise consisting of knowledge in the history and practice of the art, and by a trained observer whose perceptive skills are highly developed by regular practice as a critic. While critical evaluations cannot be said to be true or false in any simplistic sense, they nevertheless do advance our knowledge by inviting us to look more closely and to reflect for ourselves on the significance of a work. Frequently, the critic's suggestions lead us to explore on a deeper level our own initial reactions, thereby adding to the factual and interpretive content, or inviting a reappraisal of an initial response. The process of searching and inspection necessary to arrive at such judgments is itself, the essence of cognitive activity.

Evaluation, which refers to assessment or assigning value judgments concerning the significance a work of art, has had a role in art criticism though much of art history. Evaluation is in part a natural outcome of the processes of description and interpretation. Yet it is in some respects the most problematic.

The role of artist's intentions in art criticism, as noted previously, has prompted a debate over their role in assessing works of art particularly among American aestheticians. Recall, for example, that Beardsley eschewed artist's intentions both in his early writings and subsequent works. In his essay, "the Intentional Fallacy" (1946) written with W. K. Wimsatt, Beardsley argues that "the intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art."<sup>22</sup> In his "Intentions and Interpretations: A Fallacy Revived," published in 1984, Beardsley again addresses the relevance of artists' intentions to criticism. While acknowledging that subsequent writings on this topic had become "more complicated and subtle," Beardsley continues to support the anti-intentionalist view which dismisses artist's intentions as a viable resource for art criticism.<sup>23</sup> Against Beardsley's view of artists' intentions, Carroll argues that careful scrutiny of the artwork, together with external sources such as artists' diary or biographical information itself, yields sufficient access to artist's intentions to support their role in a reasoned evaluation of art works.

Missing from all three accounts of criticism offered here is a decisive commonly agreed upon account of what constitutes the object of the critics' attention. For Beardsley the focus is on the particular "aesthetic" qualities of the art work itself. For Danto the critic's attention is on interpreting the meaning attributable to the art, often in the context of an exhibition setting with references to its broader artistic and cultural locale. For Carroll, the focus of criticism seems to be a particular work, or body of work together with the rational justification of the critic's assessment that constitutes the object of criticism. Left open is the identity of the work itself.

## Conclusion

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From the distinction drawn here between *Erlebnis* and *Erkenntnis*, it follows that human potential for learning through the arts encompasses at least two important aspects. *Erlebnis* points to knowledge accessible directly through participation in the artistic activities such as dancing, and to directly perceivable infor-

<sup>22</sup> Monroe Beardsley and W. K. Wimsatt, "The Intentional Fallacy", *Sewanee Review*, (Summer 1946), pp. 468–488.

<sup>23</sup> Monroe Beardsley, "Intentions and Interpretations: A Fallacy Revived", *The Aesthetic Point of View*, pp. 188–287.

mation that is communicated in the presence of art works such as a dance performance. Knowledge in such instances is transmitted in the formally ordered patterns of a system of dance movements that includes kinesthetic and expressive features as well as abstract time and space configurations. Responses to art, including criticism, art histories, and aesthetic theory, are represented here as essentially a form of *Erkenntnis*. They provide a broader context of understanding the particular art work that is the focus in the discussion of *Erlebnis*. These responses help us to see more clearly the structural and stylistic aspects of art works and bring forth their larger significance.

Responses in the form of criticism help to link the process of making and appreciating art works to other aspects of knowledge including the sciences and the humanities. A critic might point out, for example, the theories of physical and optical space that are assumed in the presentation of ballet on a proscenium stage. Or she might suggest a relation of dance to the humanities with a discussion of a particular type of dancing in reference to a theme in literature or philosophy.

When functioning in relation to criticism, aesthetic theory thus contributes to the conceptual foundation for abstracting the cognitive significance or meaning of art. Working together, criticism and aesthetic theory help us to see more clearly the structural and stylistic aspects of art works and bring forth their larger significance. Responses to art in the form of criticism also assist in the processes of linking the making and appreciating art works to other aspects of knowledge in the sciences and the humanities.