

The Resurrection of the Author Daniel Trainor-McKinnon

The Resurrection of the Author

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**Abstract**

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Abstract: In *The Resurrection of the Author*, Daniel Trainor-McKinnon supports a form of intentionalism by arguing that intentions and meaning are metaphysically separate from artworks. This form of intentionalism is what he calls *externalist intentionalism*, which is the theory of art interpretation that holds that intentions are often relevant (though not always necessary) to understanding artworks. Because it holds this, externalist intentionalism is an adequate response to both the anti-intentionalist objection that artists' intentions are inadmissible in critical examinations of artworks because they are external to those artworks, and the neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalist claim that intentions are internal properties of artworks. A consequent study of allusion shows that some features of art are dependent on intentions for their existence and correct interpretation, while a concluding section examines externalist intentionalism's compatibility with evaluative criticism.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **SECTION 1: Introduction**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

In this Master's thesis, I will argue that the intentions of artists are relevant to understanding what their artworks mean.<sup>1</sup> This thesis is aimed at unifying the practice of art criticism, and since the primary focus of the aesthetic criticism of literature is to inform audiences “what a literary work means,” I believe it is uncontroversial and apt that criticism of other art forms should require the same focus.<sup>2</sup> This thesis is relevant to the study of aesthetics, but also has ramifications for the studies of English literature, metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. While I do not argue that artists' intentions are the sole or necessarily primary focus of criticism, I do argue that in most cases artists' intentions and our appeals to them in criticism inform our understanding and enjoyment of those works, and that for the sake of understanding artworks, intentions belong in discussions of what artworks (specifically and in general) mean.

Over the course of my argument, I aim to bring clarity to some of the more confusing foundational aspects of aesthetics. I hope to reconcile inconsistencies in the literature, and make definitions of certain concepts and positions less ambiguous. I aim

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1 Some time before I titled this thesis, William Irwin anticipated the play on Roland Barthes's title “The Death of the Author” with the title of his book *The Death and Resurrection of the Author?*, ed. William Irwin, (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2002).

2 Monroe C. Beardsley, “The Authority of the Text,” in *Intention and Interpretation*, ed. Gary Iseminger (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), pp. 24-25. Though I will not argue that the aim of criticism of all forms of art ought to be just defining what works mean, since all forms of criticism focus on meaning in works to some degree, this thesis is relevant to both evaluative and informational criticism. On p. 34 of “The Authority of the Text,” Beardsley argues that critics show us what a work means and what its textual limits are, in order for us to enjoy the work, and discern whether it is an aesthetically worthwhile work. This is a two-step focus, first on what a work means, then on informed enjoyment, where it is understood that the latter depends upon understanding the former.

for a theory that “provides both the security of the possibility of achieving objective truth and convergence in literary interpretation.”<sup>3</sup> The version of intentionalism I argue for hinges on the claim that works of art are metaphysically distinct from intentions and meaning. It is my contention that no works of art can *contain* meaning; rather, they are physical collections of symbols that users of aesthetic languages will perceive as representations of meaning. Art conveys meaning through the use of its symbols – alone and in combination with other symbols – and we all share similar enough concepts of what certain symbols mean, given the broader contexts in which they appear, to decode meaning from artworks' physical features. I will show that this parsimonious conception of art's metaphysics is compatible with intentionalism, even though some of intentionalism's detractors use this conception against intentionalism.<sup>4</sup> One should note that I will use *work*, *work of art*, *art object*, and *artwork* interchangeably throughout.

## 1.2 Intentionalism

*Intentionalism* is the view “that reference to intention is relevant and legitimate” in the interpretation and critical understanding of works of art.<sup>5</sup> This term best describes the view I propose to defend. While intentionalism could be formulated in different ways, so

3 Richard Shusterman, “Interpretation, Intention, and Truth,” in *Intention and Interpretation*, p. 67.

4 Noël Carroll, “Art, Intention, and Conversation,” in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 170 and throughout. Carroll objects to arguments that deny intentionalism based on art's operating differently from other forms of language, in such a way that art cannot mean or provide a definite meaning. His argument for understanding art as we do language has influenced my concept of art considerably, though he does not support a non-meaning concept of art like I do. I describe my argument as parsimonious because it does not allow for unnecessary metaphysical properties of art. The principle of parsimony is also known as Ockham's Razor, though the attribution to William of Ockham might be mistaken. See Stuart Brock and Edwin Mares, *Realism and Anti-Realism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), p. 222.

5 Noël Carroll, “Anglo-American Aesthetics and Contemporary Criticism: Intention and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” in *Beyond Aesthetics*, p. 184. I will refer to this paper as “Hermeneutics of Suspicion” from now on.

as to value intentions only incidentally or to make intentions the primary focus of the critical understanding of works, neither implies the view Noël Carroll calls “authorism,” according to which works of art can *only* be understood by reference to their creators’ intentions.<sup>6</sup> Authorism entails either that a work means what its author intended it to mean, or that the only goal of criticism is to understand what the artist intended the work to mean, or both. What Carroll calls *authorism* has been called “intentionalism” by some philosophers, which can make reconciling arguments in the literature difficult.<sup>7</sup>

Neither intentionalists nor authorists value the life, experiences, and motivations of a given artist more than the artist's works. Such a view would be defended by a biographical critic, which is precisely the sort of view that helped inspire anti-intentionalism.<sup>8</sup> While an authorist would see an artwork as meaning exactly what its artist intended, a biographical critic would see the artwork merely as a means of appreciating the life of its author better.

### 1.3 Anti-Intentionalism

Anti-intentionalism has sometimes been called “internalist” and “non-intentionalist” criticism.<sup>9</sup> Largely a reaction against both biographical criticism and versions of

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6 Carroll, “Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” p. 188.

7 Jason Holt, “The Marginal Life of the Author,” in *Meanings of Art: Essays in Aesthetics* (Montreal: Minkowski Institute Press, 2015), p. 46: “According to intentionalism, the meaning of a text is just what the author intended it to mean....” Göran Hermeren, “Allusions and Intentions,” in *Intention and Interpretation*. Hermeren says what we call authorism is “an intentionalist approach” (p. 209). Daniel O. Nathan, “Irony, Metaphor, and the Problem of Intention,” in *Intention and Interpretation*. Nathan describes E. D. Hirsch’s authorism as “intentionalistic” (p. 198).

8 Noël Carroll, “Art, Intention, and Conversation,” in *Beyond Aesthetics*, p. 158.

9 Stephanie Ross, “Art and Allusion,” in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Autumn 1981). Ross calls anti-intentionalist views “internalist” and “non-intentionalist” (pp. 62-63). The former term is also used by Hermeren in “Allusions and Intentions,” p.210.

intentionalism that incline toward authorism, anti-intentionalism emerged as a prominent position in criticism following the publication of Wimsatt and Beardsley's seminal paper, "The Intentional Fallacy," and later formulations such as that defended by Roland Barthes in "The Death of the Author."<sup>10</sup> The authors of both papers argue that since works of art are metaphysically separate from their authors' intentions, those intentions are irrelevant to criticism. Barthes's view is that understanding what a work of art means does not require understanding its author's intentions at all, whereas Wimsatt and Beardsley's considered view is that judging the aesthetic worth of artworks should not have anything to do with their artists' intentions or whether those intentions have been realized in the artworks.<sup>11</sup> I believe this concept of the separation between intention and art can be carried further, by separating artworks from the meanings we ascribe to them. This further separation will show that anti-intentionalists are wrong to claim that intentions, being *separate* from artworks, are not *relevant* to artworks.

#### 1.4 What is an Artwork? The Metaphysics of Art

While Beardsley maintains that intentions are irrelevant to the worth of artworks, he argues that whether an object is an artwork at all actually depends upon intentions. He

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10 Carroll, "Art, Intention, and Conversation," p. 158; Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure & Human Evolution*, (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010) pp. 167-168; Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 14. W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," in *Philosophy Looks at the Arts: Contemporary Readings in Aesthetics*, 3rd edn., ed. Joseph Margolis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), pp. 367-380. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern*, eds. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1995), pp. 386-390. Of influence comparable to Barthes's work is Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, Trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 113.

11 Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," p. 369.

says “an artwork is something produced with the intention of giving it the capacity to satisfy the aesthetic interest.”<sup>12</sup> His definition is convincing, because it denies that objects like rocks are artworks, while affirming that even marginal intentions to satisfy aesthetic interest are sufficient to classify the resulting object as an artwork. If his account were to allow for non-intentional processes (like volcanic eruptions) to produce art, we would have to accept every object in existence as an artwork, which would be absurd. Yet if the only objects that count as artworks were limited to those which were produced primarily as a result of aesthetic intentions, Dadism, politically charged art, many forms of modern art, some abstract art, art produced with the primary intention to make money or gain fame, and art generated randomly by human-designed computer programs would not count as art. With this in mind, I take it that the term *artwork* applies to most objects created by people.<sup>13</sup> Though it is unlikely that Beardsley intends this term to apply to common household objects, even the choice whether to engrave a knife's handle is (in most cases) based upon aesthetic preference, and so most artifacts (human-made objects), having been created with some aesthetic intention, are able to be appreciated aesthetically.<sup>14</sup>

I will not attempt to define the exact limits of what an artwork can be, though we could delineate between *high* art – art created by an artist with the primary intention of creating something aesthetically pleasing – and *low* art – art that is produced as a result of

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12 Monroe Beardsley, “An Aesthetic Definition of Art,” in *What is Art?*, ed. Hugh Curtler (New York: Haven Publications, 1983), p. 21.

13 The idea that most human-made objects count as art is not new. “In the middle ages, an art was merely the correct way of making or doing whatever one happened to be making or doing.” Noël Carroll, *On Criticism* (New York: Routledge - Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), p. 11. See also Larry Shiner's *The Invention of Art: a Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

14 Beardsley, “An Aesthetic Definition of Art,” pp. 25, 27.

some other primary intention, like persuading others politically, or earning money. It is even remotely possible that *any* human-created object must contain some aesthetically appreciable feature, and so count as *art*, but such a broad extension could pose problems for any account of art. If objects are not determined to be works of art based on artists' intentions to create aesthetically appreciable features, there would be no reason to deny that natural objects (like trees and the sky) are works of art. This being so, the determination that something is an artwork must be based on the intentions that its creator had while creating it, not on what its physical features are.<sup>15</sup> Though I will not argue for any specific system like this, my reason for thinking as I do about artifacts and artworks will become clearer upon further analysis of the metaphysical structure of artworks in this subsection and the next.<sup>16</sup>

To say that a work of art has a metaphysical property or component is to say that there is something it contains that is not perceivable by one's physical senses. Defining what, if any, metaphysical properties a work of art can have helps to determine what theory of criticism (e.g., intentionalism, anti-intentionalism, authorism) is most useful for understanding what individual works of art mean. Since I aim for a parsimonious theory of art, I will focus on redefining what artworks are without invoking unnecessary metaphysical properties.<sup>17</sup> I believe we can limit the properties we regard as existing

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15 Some randomly generated works, such as images made by computers, would still count as art, because someone intended to create the program that generated them.

16 In the cases of ballets and other live performances, the performance itself is treated as an object for the sake of interpretation and appreciation, though it is actually a sequence of actions, usually based on a shared plan. It is not the plan that audiences see, but the performance of actions in an attempt to satisfy the plan's goals and constraints. A ballet is not a metaphysical object, but can exist as a mental object in the minds of audience members, which requires the use of memory and interpretation in order to adequately appreciate.

17 I aim for a parsimonious theory of art because many theories (artistic and otherwise) fail due to unnecessary claims. Most arguments for the existence of god(s) fall into this category, where time and

within (as part of) artworks only to those that are visible to the naked eye, audible to the ear, or otherwise available to the remaining senses. I call these properties *physical features*, and I propose that they are the only internal properties of works of art. Anything that can be distinguished from the physical features of a work of art is not part of that work of art. The titles of artworks are, at times, inseparable from the works to which they refer – as in the printed words of poems, books, and (usually) movies' opening or closing titles – but in the case of songs, sculptures, paintings, and dance, while titles can help to guide our interpretation and appreciation of them, they are not necessary components of our appreciation. *Starry Night* is beautiful, and would remain so even if it were called *Blue and Yellow Paint*, *Painting for an Ear Given to a Prostitute*, or even left untitled, in spite of the fact that we might frame the work differently in our minds in light of such alternatives. The title “Guernica” helps one to understand what the painting *Guernica* is about, but the physical features of the painting would remain unchanged if the title were missing. Cubist figures with expressions of pain remain on the canvass, and though the title helps to contextualize what was in Picasso's mind when he created it, and accordingly what the figures and their expressions are supposed to represent, we could accurately describe the severity and anguish we attribute to the painting even if it were left untitled. If it were a bland painting, the title *Guernica* could not make it powerful. Likewise, if the title were somehow lost, it is possible that modern audiences wouldn't understand its political significance. Even the determination that a painting is beautiful, powerful, bland, or about an ear is separate from the physical features of the painting

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matter seem to depend on something creating them, but the details advocates attribute to the god(s) in question are extravagant enough to be almost certainly false.

itself.<sup>18</sup> We may find a certain work delicate, pleasant, or ugly, but if the properties of delicacy, pleasantness or ugliness exist in works, they must be self-evident, or able to be discovered through examination. That is, unless *delicate*, *pleasant*, *ugly* and so on are just terms we use to categorize certain combinations of physical features (artworks or their components), we must be able to find those qualities within artworks.

Frank Sibley says that aesthetic qualities like these are perceivable *in* works of art, as emergent from the physical “non-aesthetic” features of artworks.<sup>19</sup> To Sibley, the application of aesthetic terms to works, or parts of works, is not “in accordance with a set of necessary and sufficient conditions,” because aesthetic qualities do not require specific physical features (or groups of features) to make them apparent.<sup>20</sup> For example, a graceful painting doesn't need to have the same colours or line shapes as other graceful paintings, just as energetic music doesn't have to be fast. Despite this, Sibley maintains that there are some physical features which ensure that certain aesthetic qualities cannot be present in a work, and so aesthetic qualities can be *negatively* governed by conditions.<sup>21</sup> He contends that aesthetic qualities are tertiary properties of artworks that we can perceive, and that critics can help others to perceive these qualities by drawing attention to the physical

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18 Likewise, liner notes of musical albums, lyric sheets, blueprints of houses, sketches of paintings, and sequels of novels are all separate from what we can conceptually tie together. Our conception of them as being related is not the same as their actually being metaphysically inseparable, since the latter would entail that fictional characters in books exist separately from the pages they're written on, that songs contain non-sonic information (verbal language in songs is still sonic), and that photographs actually contain specific people and not just shades of light that represent people, which would be absurd.

19 Frank Sibley, “Aesthetic Concepts,” in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (Oct. 1959), pp. 421, 424, 440. For further elaboration of Sibley's argument, see his “Aesthetic Concepts: A Rejoinder,” in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 72, No. 1 (Jan. 1963), pp. 79-83; and the entry “Sibley, Frank” by John MacKinnon in the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), ed. Michael Kelly (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). For more on the metaphysics of aesthetic qualities, see Nick Zangwill, *The Metaphysics of Beauty* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 82-87.

20 Sibley, “Aesthetic Concepts,” p. 424.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 430.

features of works upon which these qualities depend.<sup>22</sup> This attention, he continues, must be directed at the artworks in question, and not just at critics' descriptions of their physical features, however detailed. In some cases, this could encourage us to doubt critics' attributions of aesthetic qualities to works we haven't seen.<sup>23</sup> The ability to perceive a work's aesthetic qualities – a capacity Sibley calls *taste* – is akin to the ordinary perception of physical features, though *taste* enables us to perceive the aesthetic qualities that emerge from purely physical properties.<sup>24</sup> But this emergence seems to imply that aesthetic qualities are metaphysical properties of artworks, and not just terms we assign to groups of physical features in artworks. If a work's properties include aesthetic qualities, these qualities must not change over the course of time or in different contexts, if we can claim to know anything about artworks. Aesthetic qualities seem linked to the meaning of artworks. We certainly describe artworks as if aesthetic qualities belong to them, and these descriptions can help to inform others about what artworks mean. But since, along with the terms we use, our perceptions of the aesthetic qualities of artworks can change through time and in different contexts, it is likely either that we cannot know what artworks mean because aesthetic qualities only exist within artworks metaphysically (non-physically), or we can know what artworks mean because aesthetic qualities are

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22 Ibid., p. 440, where Sibley says that often the critic's task “is simply to help us appreciate qualities which other critics have regularly found *in the work*” being discussed (my emphasis).

23 Ibid.

24 Frank Sibley, “Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic,” in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (Apr. 1965), p. 143. This usage of *taste* is found throughout “Aesthetic Concepts” as well.

only terms we use to categorize particular groups of physical features.<sup>25</sup> For various reasons, I opt for the latter.

It is more credible that aesthetic terms like *grace* and *beauty* are linguistic categories, since cultures over time or across borders can defend different and even contradictory views about what counts as graceful or beautiful. Just as the majority of Van Gogh's works went largely unappreciated in his lifetime, few would consider any of his paintings unfit for any gallery's wall now.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, a dance that appears graceful at the beginning of a competition could, after more graceful dances have been performed, appear less accomplished than it had previously, perhaps even to the extent that it appears distinctly ungraceful. One could object that grace and beauty admit of degrees. But if such a term can be applied to two works with opposite features at two different times or in two different social contexts, this objection is refuted. And the term *beautiful*, in the context of describing feminine forms, has been applied in precisely such a way. Over the course of Western history, in mainstream art and culture, the term *feminine beauty* has been associated with slight obesity, near-anorexia, and (as of 2018's current pop-culture) neither. Unless paintings of anorexic and obese female figures are, paradoxically, both ideal examples of the aesthetic quality of feminine beauty, the quality of feminine beauty does not exist outside of cultural values and group opinions. Since people in different

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25 This position does not deny the claim that in many cases certain aesthetic terms are apt descriptions of artworks. We perceive physical features of an artwork through our senses, and the combinations of those features can often be categorized easily and without argument. I'm just proposing that what don't exist are the metaphysical qualities that *correspond* to these terms.

26 The view that Van Gogh was completely unappreciated in his own time has recently been disputed. See Martin Bailey, *Starry Night: Van Gogh at the Asylum*, (London: White Lion Publishing, 2018); Hannah Furness, "A Neglected Genius? Van Gogh Was on the Brink of Success, New Research Suggests," in *The National Post* (published online, August 28, 2018; retrieved September 22, 2018: [nationalpost.com/news/world/a-neglected-genius-van-gogh-was-on-the-brink-of-success-new-research-suggests](http://nationalpost.com/news/world/a-neglected-genius-van-gogh-was-on-the-brink-of-success-new-research-suggests)).

generations claim that the same aesthetic quality is present in artworks that have radically different physical features, the aesthetic qualities they perceive must only exist as concepts external to works, which are prone to changes of opinion, and are not based on refinements of judgment.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, if aesthetic qualities do not exist in any more substantial sense, disagreements over what aesthetic qualities belong to particular works of art could be construed as problems of definition. If I say some artwork is beautiful, but you disagree, we might just be operating with different definitions of the term *beautiful*, or perhaps a different conception of what genre or tradition the work is best categorized in, and therefore what guidelines are most appropriate for determining whether it is beautiful.

Finally, if aesthetic qualities do not exist within artworks, the number of non-physical qualities a work of art can have is reduced, which could help guide interpretive practices away from unnecessary categorization and untenable attributions of intentions to artists.<sup>28</sup> If I am right, the claim that aesthetic qualities are external to artworks could help resolve conflicting critical accounts of works that share the same basic analysis of their respective works' physical features. But there is a further claim about the metaphysics of art that is important to make, namely, that meaning itself is external to artworks.

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27 The same could be said of one generation attributing a quality to an artwork, and another attributing the opposite quality to it.

28 One might still say that a work of art has the metaphysical property of being a work of art, which is of course determined by intentions rather than its features.

### 1.5 The Problem of Meaning

The concept of the metaphysics of art I am defending could lead comfortably into the anti-intentionalist position. While I hold that intentions often matter in discussions of what artworks mean, I find myself led to the paradoxical conclusion that objective meaning does not exist at all. To avoid succumbing to an aesthetic version of one of Zeno's paradoxes – that the more closely we examine art, the more objective meaning appears to elude us – I propose three potential solutions, two of which are incompatible but plausible, one of which is implausible but unifying. Either meaning is external to works, a mixed property existing between works and intentions, or an internal property of works. Each view presents problems.

First, if meaning is external, finding out what a work of art means depends upon what we would normally term *external* information. While it is likely insufficient to find external information to support a claim about a work of art, external information is nonetheless necessary, though how we define external information is important here. The meanings of words, phrases, represented actions, and so on, are all kinds of information external to any given work of art. Internal information that cannot mean is still important. For instance, physical qualities can be arranged in a certain way, such that, with our understanding of external meaning, we can see how these internal properties limit the meaning we consider a work of art to have. External information is necessary, but internal properties are what make us go looking for meaning in the first place. Perhaps each work of art is like a map, with which we, the explorers of meaning, guide ourselves in an effort to find those meanings to which the work's physical features correspond. In keeping with

this idea, both internal and external information are necessary for us to understand artworks, but only together are they sufficient. This external view of meaning has the potential to diminish the importance of focusing on the artworks at hand.

Second, if meaning is a mixed property, it somehow exists *between*, but not *in*, either works or their artist's intentions. In such a case, intentions are part of the metaphysical structure of artworks, such that we ought to conceptualize artworks as special entities involving connections between objects we can perceive and artists' intentions that we cannot. While this could be a correct view of art's metaphysics, it is both counter-intuitive and unparsimonious. If meaning is a property that exists only partially inside a work of art, we wouldn't be able to understand what a work of art means, even in light of rigorous physical examination. And the requirement that we consult an external meaning object when the object at hand already has meaning seems, frankly, absurd. This would mean that a work of art has properties that it cannot physically display, rendering them vaguely occult.<sup>29</sup> As such, the burden of proof rests with the defender of such a view. So, for our purposes, we will assume that meaning does not exist or operate in this way.

Third, if meaning is internal, all works of art must contain some metaphysical property of meaning. Yet, it remains to be seen how that property is created by physical

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<sup>29</sup> It could also be the case that many concepts like ownership and parenthood are of metaphysical properties. While I believe my attitudes toward people and things, whether governed by instinct or intellect, are *only* attitudes, it could be the case that they are grounded in metaphysical properties that exist within or between objects. But, if this is so, it is unclear how I can make an object *mine* as opposed to an object that I and others have certain attitudes and manifest certain behaviours toward. Likewise, it is only true that I am my parents' child in that my genes are made of my parents' genetic material, and they have certain attitudes and manifest certain behaviours toward me. This apparent link, however strong, could be forged by using an imposter who looked, sounded, and acted just like me, as evidenced by our ability to associate images, voices from phones, and videos, with the actual people represented by the coding and electrical impulses being transmitted through wires and the air.

actions. Furthermore, it is unclear on this view how any work of art's meaning can remain uncertain after extensive examination. Perhaps certain meanings of words and qualities are transferred to an artwork during the process of creating it, but this seems metaphysically dubious. If meaning is not transferred from an artist to a work, it is unclear how works get meaning. But if a metaphysical property (meaning) can be transferred from an artist to a work, we could understand a work's meaning without looking at it. Compatible with this is what Carroll calls the neo-Wittgensteinian view, according to which "an intention is thought to be a purpose, *manifest in the artwork*, that regulates the way the artwork is. Authorial intention, then, is *discoverable by the inspection and contemplation of the work itself*."<sup>30</sup> While Carroll regards this view as providing support for intentionalism, it could also lend credence to the anti-intentionalist view that we don't need external information in order to understand works of art. Even if intentions are discoverable in works, this does not mean that the external information of authors' reports of their intentions add anything to strictly work-focused criticism. An advocate of this view would say that since artworks contain intentions, artists' explanations of their works are external to those works, so any recourse to such explanations is irrelevant to work-focused criticism. This problem is among the main reasons I argue that works of art are separate from meaning and their creators' intentions.

Further, while the examination of certain works of art (and their components) could provide audiences and critics with insights into what their artists intended them to mean, in practice these examinations can also support views diametrically opposed to their artists' intentions. Jean-Xavier de Lestrade's grisly true-crime documentary series

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<sup>30</sup> Carroll, "Art, Intention, and Conversation," p.160, my emphasis.

*The Staircase* tells the story of a man convicted of murder in his wife's death on a staircase, but its nearly exclusive focus on his side of the story, his legal team, their trial preparation, and their grounds for maintaining his innocence actually serve to encourage an assumption of guilt.<sup>31</sup> Lestrade's decision to show the legal team's lengthy brainstorming sessions makes it look like he intends to demonstrate the lengths a legal team will go to in order to provide shaky alternative narratives, just as the editing of the series makes it apparent that the many surprises that accompany the preparation of the case and trial – including the discovery that another person the man once lived with died on a staircase – support a guilty verdict. It shocked me when, in later interviews, Lestrade said the documentary was intended to prove the man's innocence. Even under scrutiny, the physical features of the series appear gradually to move one toward what seems the inevitable conclusion: motive, action, and guilt. This example confirms that artists can make works for purposes that are not discoverable by inspection and contemplation of their works alone, and that the physical features of works can even suggest interpretations directly opposed to the meaning their artists intend.<sup>32</sup> Unless meaning is created independently of artists' intentions – in which case we have no good explanation of how meaning is created at all – it looks like meaning is not discoverable in all works of art, even with intense scrutiny. If purposes can fail, if the meanings of some works of art

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31 Jean-Xavier de Lestrade, *The Staircase* (Maha Productions: Docurama, 2011, DVD). This verdict has since been downgraded from murder to voluntary manslaughter, following an Alford plea in a retrial (see [Wikipedia.org: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Staircase](http://Wikipedia.org: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Staircase)). My further opinions about the case and verdict are impressions based on the documentary series as of 2011, not accusations or extra-judicial determinations of guilt.

32 If one wonders whether a documentary can count as art, one must consider that documentary filmmakers make choices on how they frame shots, what scenes to include, where in a scene to edit, and how to bring disparate locations and time frames together in order to tell a story. That being so, it's unclear whether a well-made documentary convinces one of what the filmmakers think, or even displays any obvious signs of intention at all, and I won't attempt to argue for this.

continue to elude us, and if even artists have no extra insight into what their works mean, we are left wondering whether internal meaning exists. If it is true that works of art contain their own internal meanings, we might have to concede that we cannot discover those meanings.

This brings us back to the first potential solution to the problem of meaning, that it is external to works of art, and that external information is therefore necessary for interpreting works of art. I call this externalist intentionalism, because on this view, meaning is external to works, such that intentions are relevant to discerning the meanings we consider works of art to have. The externalist intentionalist maintains that works of art are constituted by physical qualities (appearance, sound, etc.) as a result of artists' intentions (which can also fail to be realized in works), and that meanings and intentions are metaphysically distinct from their successful physical representations in artworks. This explains why people often understand artworks in different ways, without their being wrong in their judgments about these works.<sup>33</sup> This does not necessarily mean that works of art cannot contain features that we count as having meaning: a poet writes words, and we can examine what the poet means by her use of those words, what a dictionary at a certain time defines those words to mean, what average people think those words mean, what a well-informed critic of that poet's work thinks those words mean, and so on.

Someone might object that this focus on external information undermines the sensible view that criticism and determinations of meaning in works ought to focus on the artworks in question. One could respond, however, that in the same way that we need to

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<sup>33</sup> A couple of examples of common misinterpretations include critics' attributions of features or qualities to works that do not exist as part of these works, and misunderstanding certain symbols in works.

consult dictionaries and experienced speakers of foreign languages in order to understand those languages, we need to consult aesthetic dictionaries (of a sort) – which could include relevant criticism – and experienced creators of artworks, in order to understand what certain physical features mean in works with whose form or genre we are unfamiliar. This seems a compelling view of how we pursue knowledge of what specific works mean. Since, in these pursuits, our focus remains on determining what works' physical features and aesthetic qualities mean, given the context in which the works are situated, instead of pushing the study of works to the side, we are actually trying to gain knowledge of the work before us.<sup>34</sup> But this is not to say that the definite meaning of a work of art exists *between* the external meanings of its physical features and the artwork taken as a whole. The meaning we ascribe to the physical features of an artwork is limited by those features, whereas any additional framing, contextualization, or linguistic insight, though grounded in the work's features and aesthetic qualities, only helps to define what we consider the artwork's aesthetic qualities to be, and what the work taken as a whole means.<sup>35</sup> If meaning is internal, we don't need any dictionaries; if meaning is mixed,

34 Many aesthetic qualities would be obvious to any observer. A photorealistic painting of a smiling person is actually just a collection of paint drops, but the smiling person is something observers derive immediately from it, which means the smiling person is a kind of aesthetic quality. While it is not true to say that the painting contains a smiling person, it is true to say that the drops of paint, so organized, represent a smiling person, so that the painting is either *of* a smiling person, or contains a *representation* of a smiling person. Many shapes and concepts (e.g., human beings and happiness) can be symbolized in such a way that our own concepts or intuitions immediately recognize them, without us having to spend time contemplating what they mean. With more complex, obscure, or allusive representations, further analysis of the physical features of such a work (and likely further external information) would be necessary in order to determine what they mean. In many cases, it might be impossible to determine such meaning. *The splotches of paint look like a person* is a true statement. *The splotches of paint represent a person* is a statement that is more or less likely to be true based on the physical features of a work. In the case of photorealistic art, it is overwhelmingly likely that certain forms represent what they look like. Only in the case of a photorealistic sketch of a photorealistic sketch could one misunderstand what the sketch's features represent.

35 I say “consider” here because there doesn't seem to be any way in any theory to accurately claim knowledge of what a work means, in its totality. It is likely that a painting of a smiling person represents a specific person who was, at the time the painting was made, happy. We can have knowledge about

dictionaries are incomplete; and if externalist intentionalism is accurate, we might eventually be able to compile a dictionary that can guide interpretations of artworks and their features toward the determination of objective truths of works' meanings.

Perhaps meaning is created when an artist makes use of shapes, chords, or words and phrases with accepted meanings (or special personal meanings) to create physical features we regard as having meaning in works.<sup>36</sup> This could explain why certain works of art are hard to understand: either the hypothetical aesthetic dictionaries relied on by their artists are complex, or these artists attach special meaning to certain features or qualities that ordinary observers do not. Perhaps the artists are not playing the same language game the audience is, which could explain why some artists like their own works while few others do, and why different people like different artworks.<sup>37</sup> We all share at least one general language in order to represent ideas to each other. Yet what we perceive as the meanings of words can vary from and conflict with the meanings others perceive, so our conversations are prone to misunderstandings. As in art, conversation relies on material

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physical features of artworks, and the more obvious qualities, such as the those described in the footnote above, but further knowledge requires certainty, and like our knowledge of other peoples' minds, there is no way to attain certain knowledge about them. Most intelligently made statements about works are *likely* true, but the likelihood of truth does not ensure perfect accuracy. This being so, we have two objects: the essentially meaningless work in front of us, and the idea of the meaning it has, which we ascribe to the work as if it could contain it, based on conclusions (which are sometimes aesthetic qualities) reached by unconscious or conscious arguments we derive from its features and other external information. It is this more accurate view of works' meanings that I refer to when I say a work of art (or a feature of it) means x. We can only use our mental concepts to confirm or deny the truth of any statement, and, as such, cannot perceive the world perfectly objectively. However, it is possible that we can define the features, aesthetic qualities, and other properties of a work to such a degree that the most accurate idea of meaning we attribute to such a work is almost perfectly objectively accurate.

36 In "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes seems to argue that the idea of reusing words and phrases supports anti-intentionalism by denying unique aesthetic intentions, which seems absurd.

37 This recalls Carroll's argument for understanding art as we understand language, in "Art, Intention, and Conversation."

features (text, speech, facial expressions, body-language, etc.) that enable us to share, but also to confuse, ideas.

Sometimes, however, what we are trying to understand is not what a speaker means by certain words, but what those words mean independent of a speaker's will. In these cases, we are asking what the *expression* of a speaker's intention means – which can be misused, and indeed be at odds with, what the speaker means – not what the speaker's intention is. The expression itself (a word or sentence) may appear to contain all the information we need to determine its meaning, but it only contains properties that are understandable with reference to external information, such as what certain usages of letters and words mean. Audience members can only use their own private mental dictionaries (perhaps based on public dictionaries), which contain general and special context-dependent rules and definitions that could differ from the rules and definitions in other members' dictionaries.

If we are naturally equipped with certain concepts in our minds, the idea of aesthetic meaning as a kind of language may not be credible. That is, if we share certain concepts innately, it could be the case that we do not need specialized knowledge in order to determine what certain works of art mean. But an objection of this kind could only apply to the most elementary works of art. Even though it is accurate to say that we have ingrained in us certain concepts that we can't help but ascribe to certain physical features – such as *grisly* to describe skin damage and blood in a movie, without us needing to examine the basis upon which we conclude it to be so – it seems reasonable to conclude that these ascriptions of aesthetic qualities reflect a kind of subliminal or unconscious

reasoning process. In such cases, we only see the physical evidence for a determination (in this case blood and skin damage) and the determination itself (the quality; in this case, grisliness), usually without any conscious awareness of the evidence that supports such an inference. And our sharing of certain mental concepts in response to certain stimuli does not entail that all languages are shared. Even if twelve people in a room try to converse about the concept *dog*, if each person speaks in a language unknown to the other eleven, the conversation will inevitably end in failure.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche identifies music as the most emotionally immediate art, claiming that it can communicate in such a way that it is more universal than language. As he says, “*language*, as organ and symbol of phenomena, can never reveal the innermost depths of music.”<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche is right to insist on the universality of music, since we seem innately to associate concepts with certain chords and melodies. In this case, some objective aesthetic truth is possible.

In summary, I have argued in this section that the meaning we ascribe to artworks is external to them, that aesthetic qualities are really just aesthetic terms or mental inferences, and that these claims are not incompatible with the view that intentions can be important to determining what works of art mean.

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38 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), notably pp. 41-42, quotation p. 42.

## **SECTION 2: Anti-Intentionalism Examined**

### **2.1 Anti-Intentionalism**

In this chapter, I will explain the influential anti-intentionalist arguments advanced by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, and Roland Barthes. Carroll points out that many proponents of anti-intentionalism defend one of two theses. The first is “the ontological argument,” according to which “artworks are ontologically different from ordinary words and deeds, [such that] different interpretive practices are appropriate to them,” and so “authorial intent is irrelevant to interpretation.”<sup>39</sup> The second is “the aesthetic argument,” which concludes that we best criticize works without reference to their artists' intentions.<sup>40</sup> According to Carroll, while ontological arguments “maintain that intentionalism is, strictly speaking, impossible, aesthetic arguments admit that intentionalist criticism is possible, but *recommend* that it not be embraced for what might be called aesthetic policy reasons.”<sup>41</sup> While a form of the ontological argument can depend upon the idea that intentions are separate from artworks, the aesthetic argument does not.<sup>42</sup> Generally, neither argument denies that artists have the ability to intend. In a kind of extreme anti-intentionalism, Socrates appears, by contrast, to have argued against artistic intention itself.

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39 Carroll, “Art, Intention and Conversation,” p. 161, all quotations.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., p. 170.

42 Monroe C. Beardsley, “The Authority of the Text.” Beardsley supports the ontological argument on the grounds that intentions are separate from artworks.

## 2.2 Plato's *Ion*

Plato's *Ion* is likely the earliest philosophical work that expresses an anti-intentionalist view of art. In the dialogue, Socrates argues with Ion about whether performers achieve mastery in acting, or if their performances are simply channelled through them from the gods.<sup>43</sup> In fact, Ion and Socrates appear to rely on different meanings of *mastery*, with Ion's use referring to mastery of imitation, and Socrates's referring to mastery of the actual skills being imitated by Ion. And so, Socrates concludes that Ion does not have a skill, but that the gods provide Ion with the ability to act well. Socrates appears to endorse anti-intentionalism, since, although one needs intention in order to act skillfully, one need not have intention to be animated by gods. If we ignore the confusion over *mastery*, Socrates's argument could be arranged for our purposes as follows: inspiration causes artists to produce or perform art. Inspiration does not come from oneself. If something else causes one's action, the action cannot be said to be one's own. Thus, art is produced by inspiration, not artists.

The problem with this argument is that inspiration can also produce non-artistic actions, such as those that are aimed at inventing mechanical objects, solving engineering problems, and amending laws. Aside from the fact that agents can choose which inspirations to act on, inspirations seem to amount to *thoughts that occur to one*, without which no voluntary actions could be performed. Unless we agree with the unparsimonious claim that inspiration comes from the gods (i.e., outside the mind), we need mental events to explain the concept of inspiration. Even if mental events constitute a broad category

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43 Plato, *Ion*, in *Two Comic Dialogues: Ion and Hippias Major*; trans. Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983).

that includes thought, inspiration, and emotion, it is difficult to determine how inspiration differs from other ideas, and so how inspiration affects artists' intentions. Emotions, urges, intuitions, experiences of physical sensations, and subsequent ideas are all unintentional mental events, which inspire further ideas and actions. But while whatever inspires an idea or sensation may be unknown, this does not preclude the possibility of intentional action, since none of these unintentional mental events force one to act in any way. Even instinct only encourages behaviour. Recoiling in fear from a bee or a charging dog is a choice, to a certain degree, and determined by one's values – for instance, a concern for one's safety – and what one thinks will align with one's values. A beekeeper will not recoil when bees fly nearby, whereas someone who does not like walnuts might recoil in displeasure at biting into a walnut dessert. An aggressive-looking dog once charged at me from across a street. I turned to run, but instead of acting in accordance with my instinct to flee, I turned back at the dog and held out my hand as a stop signal, and the dog skidded away, running back across the street. That move accomplished one of my values (avoiding harm), but my action was in direct contradiction to my instinct. Regardless of whether instinct or intuition inspired the winning alternative in that situation, I was the one who chose what I would do. Even if I choose an option that my instinct encourages, I have the option of ignoring that motivation. This reinforces my assumption that inspiration by itself is a kind of mental event that has no power to force any action, including representational actions such as those involved in art-making. Art requires thought, and some measure of inspiration, but there is no support for the idea that artistic inspiration works in the way our modified Socratic argument proposes.

### 2.3 Anti-Intentionalism in Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author"

Since inspiration, divine or otherwise, does not remove the intentional agency of artists, the next avenue of argument for anti-intentionalists is to show that artistic actions are essentially meaningless. As an advocate of this view, Roland Barthes argues that "[a]s soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, ... the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death," so that writing becomes only the "practice of the symbol itself."<sup>44</sup> Barthes, then, distinguishes between ordinary speech-acts and non-speech art-acts, the former of which admit of intentionalist interpretation, while the latter do not, because they don't *act on reality*.<sup>45</sup> This line of argument has been foundational to anti-intentionalism, though the notion of *acting on reality* is subject to a variety of interpretations.

One interpretation is that a work's maker does not intend the work to mean anything to anyone, or to be *about* anything. Barthes's discussion of automatic poetry could support this interpretation.<sup>46</sup> If a work is not intended to mean anything, as opposed to being intended to mean nothing, the most important way to understand it would be to evaluate the meaning of its physical features (e.g., words, phrases, and overall structure), in which case Barthes would be correct. There might be some room in interpretation for historical investigation, if certain phrases or words meant different things at the time the work was produced than they do now, or if there were compelling reasons to look into the artist's background to understand special regional uses of such words and phrases, but no

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44 Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," p. 386.

45 Ibid., p. 386. For useful discussions of speech-act theory, see Ross, "Art and Allusion," p. 60; and Shusterman, "Interpretation, Intention, and Truth," *passim*.

46 Ibid., *passim*.

hidden meanings would be relevant to such criticism. Indeed, with the exception of psychological studies of the unconscious drives of the author, intention-based criticism of such works would be inappropriate.<sup>47</sup> This would mean that Barthes's argument is merely suggesting how best to interpret works of this non-intentional kind. While this insight is valuable, however, it does not reflect a full understanding of Barthes's account.

Another interpretation of *not acting on reality* is that what we regard as properties of works of art – e.g., a figure on the left of a canvas, an act of kindness that a character in a novel performs, etc. – are either not the same as their real-world counterparts, or are not based on external objects. The argument would go like this: since all intentions are about real things, and no fiction-acts are about real things, no fiction-acts are intentional. Since fiction-acts produce works of fiction, no works of fiction are intentional, and thus intentions are irrelevant to understanding fictional works. But this argument is open to a strong objection, namely, that an artist's intentions to make certain qualities appear in a work are about real things. An author writes words (real things) to create a story (a real thing) on a page (a real thing), and intends to make that story available to the public (real people). If we were to subscribe to this view, while it would be impossible to intend anything about fictional objects, writers' intentions to make certain words appear and, more generally, to write stories could still be relevant to evaluating their works. If we were to subscribe to this interpretation, *did you mean the ring to be a metaphor for power?* would be an inappropriate question for a critic to ask a writer, but *did you mean to organize the words on the page so that audiences would think words about the ring*

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<sup>47</sup> Ross, "Art and Allusion," p. 60, where she argues for the value of considering unconscious intentions in criticism.

*were metaphorically hinting at the public concept of power?* would be appropriate. Since the only important difference between the two questions is that the latter includes the notions *words* and *story*, this interpretation does not damage the credibility of intentionalism. While this is not likely what Barthes intended to argue, it requires explanation in order to avoid confusing it with what I think Barthes's considered view is.

A final interpretation of *not acting on reality* is that works are not produced to communicate with specific individuals.<sup>48</sup> According to this interpretation, when one person speaks to another, that speech is directed at the other, and thus is acting on a real person. As such, the speech is *acting on reality*. Since an artist does not speak to a specific individual through a book, the artist is not *acting on reality*. Thus, books are not instances of ordinary speech, and the idea of judging books as we judge speech is, in turn, inadequate. While Barthes seems to conclude that intention is useless to understanding and judging literature, there is a fundamental problem with his argument, for there is no requirement that all intentions to communicate be aimed at people. When stated formally, the flaw in Barthes's argument is perhaps more apparent:

1. All speech-acts are actions aimed at actual specific people.
2. All speech-acts are produced by intentions to communicate.

Thus, 3. All things produced by intentions to communicate are actions aimed at actual specific people.

4. No literature-acts are aimed at actual specific people.

Thus, 5. No literature-acts are things produced by intentions to communicate.

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48 See Carroll, "Art, Intention, and Conversation," p. 162, where a similar interpretation of Barthes's argument is explored.

6. All things produced by intentions to communicate are things of which we can chart the intentions.

Thus, 7. No literature-acts are things of which we can chart the intentions.

The main problem lies with statement 3, because there is nothing in Barthes's argument that shows us why *all* things produced by intentions to communicate are actions aimed at actual specific people. Since this first conclusion is unsupported, even if we agree that literature-acts or art-acts are different from speech-acts, art-acts could still be produced by intentions to communicate, and so finding out what an artist intends would be permissible in criticism regardless of whether we could identify other analogues between art and speech. Further analysis of Barthes's argument reveals no adequate support for the first premise, so we can regard his argument, at least on this interpretation, as posing an insufficient challenge to intentionalism. What is clear is that either Barthes is in error when he subscribes to this interpretation, or his goal of liberating the reader is only meant to apply to readers of non-intentional or automatic works.<sup>49</sup>

#### 2.4 Beardsley's View

Carroll claims that a line of argument similar to our final interpretation of Barthes's argument is taken up by Beardsley.<sup>50</sup> According to Beardsley, literary interpretation is different from ordinary conversation, because the dramatic speaker in a poem or work of literature is different from the author of that work.<sup>51</sup> For example, when I tell someone my

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49 See "The Marginal Life of the Author," p. 37, where Holt says that "the central purpose of ["The Death of the Author"] is reader liberation in interpreting texts."

50 Carroll, "Art, Intention, and Conversation," p. 162.

51 Beardsley, "The Authority of the Text," p. 25; Carroll, "Art, Intention, and Conversation," p. 162.

life story, I am performing the action of actually telling that person my life story. When I write a fictional work in which it looks like I'm telling the reader my life story, I am actually writing a *representation* of myself telling someone my life story. Since the one speaking is not me, but the fictional subject, and since the subject does not have actual intentions, only the meaning of words and phrases on the page are relevant to understanding the work.<sup>52</sup> Since the dramatic speaker is speaking, the author is not; and since only the author has intentions, intention can be ignored in interpretations of the work's meaning.

An objection to this view is that even if no real subject speaks the words or is capable of taking the reader as its direct object, the author has performed the actions of writing, that is, of forming the words in a particular way, which were most likely aimed at a particular result.<sup>53</sup> The dramatic speaker was created by the author, and, as such, is a representation or reflection of the author's intentions to present the character in that way.<sup>54</sup> Even though the dramatic speaker does not speak to the reader, the reader receives information all the same, from the words on the page that reflect the author's intentions. A writer of literature might then be regarded as taking the document being written as a direct object, just as one can speak to a tape-recorder, computer, phone, watch, wax cylinder, or other device. Audiences will demonstrate whether artists' intentions have been realized by their understanding of the works at hand. Since works are the product of artists' intentions, it makes sense to look for evidence as to what a work means if it is hard

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52 See Carroll, "Art, Intention, and Conversation," p. 167, which influences much of my explanation here.

53 This is admittedly similar to the objection I offer to the second interpretation of Barthes's argument.

54 With the possible exceptions of automatic writing and works resulting from serious mental illness. And yet, excepting either could be contentious if we view unconscious intentions as valid in criticism. One might look at such works as being produced by the unconscious drives of their artists.

to understand. Artists' reports of their intentions, while external to works, can help to make clear what certain uses of features (words, figures, etc.) mean, and so can resolve problems of misinterpretation. For example, an artist's claim that the red colour dripping from a dog's mouth in a painting is supposed to be from the strawberries in the painting, rather than the blood of its forlorn owner, could help audiences look for other evidence in the painting that confirms a non-morbid interpretation. Information about artists' intentions will not help a poorly executed work appear better, nor will it make such a work's features mean what its artist wants them to mean, but this information can help elucidate uses of features in complex, well-executed works. This information could also help audiences to understand what counts as well-executed in a given genre.

In "The Authority of the Text," Beardsley asks, "what is the primary purpose of literary interpretation? It is, I would say, to help readers approach literary works from the aesthetic point of view, that is, with an interest in actualizing their (artistic) goodness."<sup>55</sup> This is his considered view of literary interpretation. And a literary interpreter (critic) does this, in part, by revealing what a work means.<sup>56</sup> We must then ask where the critic should look for meaning. Beardsley maintains that, while charting intention could have something to do with historical examinations of works, all works are bound by the "Principle of Autonomy," according to which "literary works are self-sufficient entities, whose properties are decisive in checking interpretations and judgments."<sup>57</sup> On this view, intentions have no place in criticism because intentions and works are separate. But an externalist intentionalist can pose a strong objection to Beardsley's view.

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55 Beardsley, "The Authority of the Text," p. 34, his ellipses.

56 Ibid., p. 25.

57 Ibid., pp. 35, 24.

The meanings of words are external to works, just as intentions are. We understand words based on their personal, local, historical, and grammatical contexts. Only our usage of words and grammar determines what the words in our public lexicons mean. Yet if in ten years the word *fish* were to mean cat, our *fish* would not cease to mean fish. It would just be used in a different way than it is now. Such a change would not make my current sentence *I'm going to buy a fish to eat*, mean *I'm going to buy a cat to eat*, because I do not currently mean cat by *fish*. Yet if I were the first to use *fish* for cat, or were I a speaker of a dialect that did so, this sentence would be an example of such usage, and the meaning of my words would be to express my intention to buy a cat for the purpose of eating it.<sup>58</sup> Since works are separate from the meanings of their words, they require external information in order to make those words understandable. Since works by themselves are not capable of providing us with meaning, they cannot provide standards upon which to judge which interpretations of symbols are correct. And because works are the products of intentional acts, it makes more sense to utilize information about their artists' use of words than to interpret works' features as symbolizing concepts that language users in particular locations or belonging to particular generations could not have meant by them.

Beardsley argues that “texts acquire determinate meaning through the interactions of [their] words without the intervention of an authorial will,”<sup>59</sup> but also that confusions of words' meanings can be resolved “by supplying further information” about such uses, which I gather would be determining what uses seem appropriate given what a text's genre or language is.<sup>60</sup> But if texts acquire determinate meaning, we shouldn't need any

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58 Catfish are excepted from this discussion.

59 Beardsley, “The Authority of the Text,” p. 31-32.

60 Ibid., p. 32.

further information, and if the information we rely on to resolve confusions of what certain features mean does not come from the work itself, it is external. If Beardsley allows one kind of external information in art interpretation or criticism, it is inconsistent to exclude other kinds of external information, since it is clear that works are not self-sufficient.

Carroll says that since understanding the intentions of people is important to understanding what their expressions mean, and since some works of philosophy and non-fiction can be considered aesthetic works, there is no clear difference between works of art and other forms of expression.<sup>61</sup> Among the examples he cites are Lucretius's *Concerning the Nature of Things* and *The Mahabharata*, which “both appear to be illocutionary acts of assertion, even if what they assert turns out to be false. It does not seem correct to attribute to Lucretius the intention of representing the illocutionary acts of an Epicurean philosopher – he was an Epicurean philosopher philosophizing.”<sup>62</sup> Because Beardsley does not define clearly how to distinguish between literature and those cases where, in his view, intention matters, and since any such rule might arbitrarily call the worth of some works into question, we can consider this problem, for our current purposes, dealt with.

## **2.5 Wimsatt and Beardsley's Intentional Fallacy**

Finally, we come to the argument that Wimsatt and Beardsley pose in their seminal anti-intentionalist paper, “The Intentional Fallacy.” Borrowing from Ananda K.

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<sup>61</sup> Carroll, “Art, Intention, and Conversation,” p. 165.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

Coomaraswamy's discussion of artistic success, they argue that the critic's focus should be on the worth of the artwork, "whether the work of art 'ought ever to have been undertaken at all.'"<sup>63</sup> Though Coomaraswamy aims to show that this position is wrong, and that art criticism ought to be dedicated to determining whether an artist's intentions have been realized in the work, Wimsatt and Beardsley say that the former view of evaluative criticism is the kind that could "distinguish between a skillful murder and a skillful poem."<sup>64</sup> What they appear to mean is that a murder is always successful, but an artwork can be the successful realization of its artist's intentions without any observer recognizing it as skillful.<sup>65</sup> It is their aim, then, to establish anti-intentionalism as the best way to judge the worth of works, rather than their meaning. We might say that a work has more worth if we conclude that it must have been hard for its artist to create it, or that its creation was nearly effortless, or perhaps that it was innovative for its time. But Wimsatt and Beardsley object that any such attempt focuses on the author and not the work.<sup>66</sup> To them, intentions of artists are irrelevant to criticism of their works.<sup>67</sup> However, irony in art poses a particularly important challenge to this view.

It can be difficult in some cases to determine what works (or components of works) are ironic without reference to artists' intentions. If understanding artists' intentions is indeed unnecessary for judging the aesthetic worth of works, it should be

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63 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, as quoted by Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," p. 369. Wimsatt and Beardsley build on Coomaraswamy's view about the moral evaluation of actions and apply it to the aesthetic worth of works of art.

64 Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," p. 369.

65 Wimsatt and Beardsley could be arguing that skillful murder is always bad, but skillful poems are good. Despite calling their criticism "moral," this is not likely their meaning (Ibid.). The worthiness of some art might never adhere to a moral standard, since some works we call beautiful or artistically successful depict morally reprehensible things, such as Goya's *The Shootings of May 3, 1808, in Madrid*.

66 Ibid., p. 373.

67 Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *passim*.

impossible to be confused about whether certain works are ironic, which clearly is not the case. I need only recall a friend of mine, who believed that the science-fiction parody *Galaxy Quest* was in fact just a bad and unenjoyable attempt at a science-fiction movie, to remind me of the importance of understanding artists' intentions to judging the worth of works. An ironic work that gives no hint of its irony might only be rendered worthwhile or enjoyable by investigating its artist's intentions, and then appreciating it as it is intended to be enjoyed. Perhaps there are some cases in which an extensive examination of the features of such a work provides further evidence of its being badly executed, or perhaps even worthless, such that only knowledge of its artist's intentions could help establish it as a well-executed ironic work.<sup>68</sup>

If Wimsatt and Beardsley mean only that worth should be determined by something other than whether artists' intentions have been successfully represented in works, they provide no adequate alternative for us to determine worth. Although they do not explicitly conclude that worth can only be determined by personal preference, in the absence of such an adequate alternative, this seems likely. By this, I do not mean that works are completely open to any kind of interpretation. Rather, even in cases where interpretations are limited, there is no way to determine whether works are worthwhile, or better than other works. I maintain that there is no incorrect way of enjoying a work, even

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68 The opposite can happen as well. See Carroll, "Art, Intention, and Conversation," pp. 175-177, in which he discusses *Village Voice* film critic J. Hoberman's interpretation of Ed Wood's *Plan 9 from Outer Space*. Hoberman claims that the movie is unintentionally modernist, because it transgresses normal film conventions like narrative coherence. This attribution of irony (transgression) is unconvincing, given that Wood has never claimed to have made the film as a rebuke to the prevailing trends of filmmaking at the time. Indeed, the film's failings are more likely due to the financial constraints under which Wood created films. The discovery that the film was not intended to be taken ironically detracts from the view that it is well executed.

though there are incorrect ways of interpreting the meanings of works.<sup>69</sup> A Van Gogh painting, the canvass stretched in its frame, might be pleasing to the ear as a drum, just as the text of *War and Peace* might be appreciated as an interesting abstract painting. Both of these acts of *appreciation*, however peculiar, are admissible if, in responding to works, our only goal is to maximize the pleasure we take from them. But the maximization of pleasure is not *interpretation*. Carroll objects to the kind of “aesthetic hedonism” that “presuppose[s] that aesthetic pleasure or satisfaction is our only legitimate interest” in art.<sup>70</sup> If one were to criticize the *meaning* of works in this way, one will have stepped outside the bounds of personal preference and into the realm of public truth. That is, if one fails to understand a work as the *kind* of work it is, one is incapable of making true claims about what it means, and discussions of a work based on personal enjoyment fail when the work's qualities are assessed using standards that do not apply to the work's kind. If worth is a metaphysical property of works, people who enjoy worthless works would be wrong to do so, despite their own positive reactions. Since it is irrational to conclude that the works they enjoy do not contain properties that inspire their enjoyment, it seems that, short of endorsing either the view that enjoyment of the successful realization of intentions determines the worth of works, or that enjoyment of the work itself determines worth, there is no good standard for judging whether a work is good or bad.

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69 I first encountered the concept of correct and incorrect ways of appreciating works in Roger Scruton's *Beauty* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2011), pp. 6-7. It could also be the case that enjoyment depends upon or is diminished by understanding what a given work means.

70 Carroll, “Art, Intention, and Conversation,” quotations on p. 178, and discussion on pp.174-180.

If worth is an internal property of works, and not just a status we attribute to them solely for the purpose of communicating information about them to others, it is odd that some people like worthless art. Unless such people just misunderstand features of artworks, this encourages the view that artistic worth is simply a matter of personal preference. While this view does not support the claim that the *meaning* of artworks is dependent on personal preference, it seems likely that since no one work is universally hailed as a good or bad work of art, worth is not an internal property.<sup>71</sup> Wimsatt and Beardsley's argument against Coomaraswamy's intention-based definition of success seems to leave us with no other option than the view that artistic success is determined by personal or group preference.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, though their argument against intention's relevance to works relies on the sensible claim that to explain a work is fundamentally different than explaining who created it, there are many objects that we can only understand and appreciate adequately by knowing what their makers intended them to be.<sup>73</sup> Most electronic devices now come with user manuals to explain what they can be used for, and these manuals, while external to the objects they refer to, are statements of their creators' intentions. Though creators might fail to make something useful, or at least useful in the ways they intend, it is obvious that, in some cases, describing an object involves describing its use.

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71 While I don't have empirical evidence that supports the claim that no work is universally hailed or condemned, I can't think of a single work that has not been praised by someone. For example, although most people agree upon which movies are the worst ever made, those who make such movies are unlikely to agree.

72 Of course, even the determination that one finds a work enjoyable ought to be based upon the actual facts of the work, not a misinterpretation of them. I will return to this preference-based concept of aesthetic value in section 5.3 of this thesis.

73 See Mothersill, *Beauty Restored*, p. 16, where she describes the view that intentions explain works as "a special case of the 'genetic fallacy.'"

Furthermore, artworks can be made in such a way that our appreciation of them depends upon obscure external information. If a poem were put into code, an external key would be required to interpret it properly. That poem would then seem to be a special case, such that describing its features without the key would fail to convey what it means.

One might object that such a poem could not be counted as *just* a poem, but also an interactive performance piece. Even if this were so, the method a critic relies on to understand and evaluate it would have to involve taking part in the decryption in the way the artist intended, just as a description of the work would have to include an acknowledgement of the artist's intentions as a means of best interpreting the poem's features. As in the case of *Galaxy Quest*, it could be necessary to consult intentions, rather than trying to figure out, solely on the basis of works' qualities, whether they are encoded or ironic, and so on.

In summary, I have argued against anti-intentionalism on the grounds that artistic actions are intentional, that artistic actions need not be addressed to a particular agent, that we can fail to understand irony without knowledge of artists' intentions, and that information external to objects can help us understand them. In the next two sections, I will discuss neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism, which is based on a different metaphysics than externalist intentionalism, and, later, the problem that allusion poses for both anti-intentionalism and neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **SECTION 3: Neo-Wittgensteinian Intentionalism**

#### **3.1 Neo-Wittgensteinian Intentionalism**

Neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism is thought by Carroll and Mothersill to constitute a strong response to anti-intentionalist views.<sup>74</sup> If “intention is identified as the purposive structure of the work,” intentions are metaphysically inseparable from artworks, and so criticism of the intentions artists have while creating art is focused on the internal properties of artworks.<sup>75</sup> While to neo-Wittgensteinians the intentions that are of prime importance to criticism are the purposes for which artworks are created – e.g., a movie created for the purpose of telling a parable of the dangers of imposing morality on others – purposive intentions are not the only kinds of intentions for which their view of the metaphysical structure of works has ramifications. Each feature or quality is present in an artwork because an artist performed certain actions, and we can understand the intentions behind each action by examining or otherwise experiencing them. Though Wittgenstein's views about mental events and perception influence this approach, aesthetic philosophers point to the “*locus classicus* of this view of intention,” G. E. M. Anscombe's *Intention*, as constituting its main foundation.<sup>76</sup> In this section, I will attempt to disentangle the various views associated with neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism. While Carroll and Mothersill regard Anscombe's view as neo-Wittgensteinian, Anscombe only argues for the view that we can infer agents' intentions (seen as goals) from their actions. While Anscombe cites

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74 Carroll, “Art, Intention, and Conversation,” p. 161; Mothersill, *Beauty Restored*, p. 20.

75 Carroll, “Art, Intention, and Conversation,” p. 161

76 Carroll, “Art, Intention, and Conversation” endnotes, in *Beyond Aesthetics*, p. 413. See also Mothersill, *Beauty Restored*, p. 16; Carroll, “Art, Intention, and Conversation,” p. 161; and Colin Lyas, “Wittgensteinian Intentions,” in *Intention and Interpretation*, p. 140.

Wittgenstein's work to support this, Wittgenstein seems to endorse the view that intentions reside within actions. To confuse matters further, neo-Wittgensteinians use Wittgenstein's view to support their claim that intentions reside within works, and thus that artists' intentions can be determined through the close scrutiny of works, which are themselves the products of artists' actions. As I will show, it is a mistake to attribute the views of Wittgenstein or the neo-Wittgensteinians to Anscombe.

### 3.2 Anscombe's View

Anscombe's view of intention, inspired by Wittgenstein's philosophy, is a reaction against the view that “a man's intended action is only described by describing his *objective*.”<sup>77</sup> She argues that since, “roughly speaking, a man intends to do what he does,” we can describe intentional actions as the series of actions that (in a cascading means-to-end way) support the achievement or failure of the intention (i.e., the objective) for acting.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, by observing agents' actions, we can infer the intentions agents have while acting.<sup>79</sup> Though we ought not to attribute to her the view that we *actually* see agents' intentions by watching their actions – for she admits there are cases in which “only the man himself can say whether he had a certain intention or not” – she argues convincingly that our descriptions “are further limited by this: he cannot profess not to have had the intention of doing the thing that was a means to an end.”<sup>80</sup> For example, if one intends to get a hole-in-one in golf, one must also intend to swing the club.

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77 G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), p. 45. Original emphasis.

78 Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 45 (quotation), p. 86.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid., p. 44.

Anscombe discusses an example of a cat stalking a bird to illustrate how describing events intentionally is just a different way of describing events: “the cat is stalking a bird *in* crouching and slinking along with its eye fixed on the bird and its whiskers twitching....Why is the cat crouching and slinking like that?....It's stalking that bird.”<sup>81</sup> This example displays her use of intention in the purposive sense: the intention *of* the action is to catch the bird, while the intentions engaged *in* the service of achieving that action are to crouch, slink, and so on. The performance of these intentions *in* lead to achieving the intention *of* catching the bird.<sup>82</sup>

This way of describing actions does not necessarily imply that intentions are a part of actions. Nothing in Anscombe's example shows that we are *actually* observing an intention. We infer what the intention of the cat is by perceiving the action, even if the evidence supporting that inference is formed by our minds into a kind of unconscious argument, of which we are consciously aware only of the conclusion that *the cat wants to catch the bird*.<sup>83</sup> If people who never saw any cats or stalking actions before came upon a cat stalking its prey, it is likely that they wouldn't see the action the same way that we do. Or, if the cat were trained to stalk birds and then halt just when it looks like it will catch them – for a movie or something similar – our inferences about the cat's actions would lead us to the wrong conclusion if we didn't know about this training. While Anscombe's concept of describing actions as intentional is accurate insofar as we generally reason this way in everyday life, it does not damage the credibility of the distinction between intentions and actions. She does not affirm that we can accurately assume from

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81 Ibid., p. 86.

82 Ibid., pp. 45-47.

83 Lyas, “Wittgensteinian Intentions,” p. 146.

observation what private intentions are in all cases, which has ramifications for the neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism inspired by her work. Intentional descriptions of events are even less likely to be true in the case of art-actions, since what we often find enjoyable about artworks are those features that subvert conventions or are ambiguous. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* would be rendered far less enjoyable if Hamlet's intentions were obvious in every word he speaks and action he performs.

Anscombe poses what seems to be a problem when she suggests, “if there are two knowledges – one by observation, the other in intention – then it looks as if there must be two objects of knowledge; but if one says the objects are the same, one looks hopelessly for the different *mode of contemplative knowledge* in acting, as if there were a very queer and special sort of seeing eye in the middle of acting.”<sup>84</sup> But this is less problematic than she appears to believe. There are, of course, two objects of knowledge, namely, intentions and actions. Even non-purposive effective intentions cannot be the same as the actions produced by them, for it would be absurd to say that a dancer's action of twirling around in a counter-clockwise fashion is an intention. We see it, it is there, it is an action, but the intention, however obvious, is a private mental event, which is either an electrical signal in the brain, a thought in the mind of the dancer, or some combination of the two.<sup>85</sup>

Linguistically, *she raised her hand* is a kind of shorthand for *she had the effective intention to raise her hand, and her hand rose as a result of her brain sending an electrical signal that made her arm muscles move*.<sup>86</sup> But the former does not imply that

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84 Anscombe, *Intention*, p.57.

85 Lyas, “Wittgensteinian Intentions,” p. 133, quoting Wimsatt. Lyas’s discussion of effective intentions is helpful to my view. To refine my example further, if the dancer does not perform the twirl to achieve a goal, it is not a purposive action.

86 See *Ibid.*, p. 146, where Lyas explores a similar idea.

the intention and action are the same. We can describe *why* she raised her hand in the latter way, but the effective intention is just what we mean by an intention that caused something we see. Since we can be unaware of how our movements appear to others, since these movements can be involuntary, and since effective intentions are not necessarily one and the same with intentions *in* acting, effective intentions are different from the perceivable movements of the body.

A critic of this line of reasoning might respond that if by intentions *in* Anscombe means effective intentions, and if the only intentions that count as effective are those that are executed *in* the service of achieving a goal (not in the purposive sense), we do in fact see what agents intend when they act toward something, just not necessarily in the purposive sense. But if this is so, we will have problems identifying which actions are intended in the effective sense, because we can misinterpret involuntary actions as voluntary, for instance, accidental taps on a shoulder that result from a cold person's shivering as fervent attention-seeking, stutters as inventive speech patterns, and so on. If we go so far as to say that these are non-intentional, but effective, the distinction between effective actions and the movements of corpses becomes moot. Accordingly, this hypothetical critic would not understand Anscombe's argument adequately.

*She raised her hand* is not shorthand for *she raised (intended to raise) her hand*. The intention and action are separate, as implied by the “and” in the longer version of the sentence on the previous page. Intentions can fail to be achieved, whether due to a brain aneurysm or a sudden change of heart, though *she raised her hand unconsciously* would imply that it was an unintentional body movement.

### 3.3 Lyas's View

In his paper “Wittgensteinian Intentions,” Colin Lyas argues that knowledge of agents' intentions is relevant to understanding their actions, and that when an action or its result is determinate, it is because an agent intended it to be so.<sup>87</sup> While some of his objections to anti-intentionalism align with my own, his claim that an intention can “manifest itself in actions and words, and...can determine at least part of the proper description of those actions and words” poses problems for externalist intentionalism.<sup>88</sup> If intentions are parts of works of art, even if they only exist in non-ambiguous parts of works, this entails that efforts to consult artists' reports of intentions to determine what their artworks mean focus on the wrong object.<sup>89</sup> Lyas's view that intention and action (including any resulting artwork) are not linked in a cause-and-effect way is inspired by Wittgenstein's idea that minds are viewable “directly in bodies,” which I take to be the central claim of neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalists.<sup>90</sup> If, following from Lyas's argument, artworks can be descriptively self-sufficient – that is, if we cannot rely on external information to gain knowledge about artworks – and if, as he suggests, only those intentions that have been realized in works are part of works, there is no reason to describe properties of artworks as intentional, and so intentionalism is unnecessary.<sup>91</sup> Accordingly, since the focus of criticism is the particular work in question, when it is obvious what the work or its features mean, critics will not need to consult artists' intentions, even if those intentions reside in the work. And because only successful unambiguous intentions are parts of

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 149, *passim*

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 139, p. 138.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

artworks, critics need not make use of authors' external reports of their intentions in order to resolve ambiguities about a work. Essentially, Lyas's neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism reduces the role of intention to a redundant informational property. Let us consider some objections to this oddly anti-intentionalist intentionalism.

If, as Lyas argues, intention and action are not always or entirely independently knowable, this does not entail that there is no separation between them.<sup>92</sup> We might only be able to make sense of some actions by examining the intentions their agents had while performing them, but it is not accurate to say that we need knowledge of actions to make sense of intentions. I can intend to bring about private mental events, such as thinking about a lamp, or imagining the successful performance of an action, yet these intentions do not have publicly available counterparts. In addition, I can intend to achieve many goals and perform many actions, while failing to realize or perform them. These intentions, Lyas would concede, are not always apparent in actions, but that concession undermines the supposed link between actions and intentions.<sup>93</sup> If actions require intentions in order to explain them, and if we can confirm those intentions by the examination of the actions themselves, it is unclear why we need to explain intentions as parts of actions at all. And if the only way we know that actions display intentions is that the actions are determinate, insofar as they result in a certain outcome – because intentions and actions are not independently knowable – it is entirely possible that

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92 Ibid., p. 141.

93 Lyas, "Wittgensteinian Intentions," p. 147.

intentions are not parts of actions, but rather just a redundant way of referring to determinate actions.<sup>94</sup>

Further, if *unsuccessful* intentions can be perceived within artworks, as Lyas seems to suggest, this means that actual intentions can be parts of artworks even though they inspire the actions that create the artworks that contain them.<sup>95</sup> It is unclear whether intentions split into two or three, or move from a mind to an action to an object, which, given the non-physical nature of intentions, sounds absurd. If intentions are perceivable in artworks, the question remains whether they are to be found in physical form, or as a non-physical quality of a work that, once examined closely, makes an impression on one's mind. Since this theory, however interesting, is extraordinarily unlikely, it remains to be seen how intentions can be perceived in actions, unless in a way that does not involve direct perception. If, contrary to this interpretation, Lyas and Wittgenstein do not view intentions as “directly” viewable in actions, and mean to say instead that our assumptions of intent based on the physical qualities of actions and artworks *can often* be correct, a more charitable definition of the neo-Wittgensteinian view is warranted.<sup>96</sup>

94 While I am merging Lyas's discussions of actions and intentions with *utterances and intentions* here, it is clear that uttering something is an action.

95 Lyas, “Wittgensteinian Intentions,” p. 134.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 138. In spite of the interpretation I offer above of Lyas's view, he does cite Anscombe's *Intention* when he says that an animal “can, in its behaviour, give us evidence only on the basis of which to ascribe intentions to it” (*Ibid.*, p. 140). This might suggest a different interpretation of his paper. For a vastly different argument reaching the same conclusion as my interpretation of Lyas's view, see G. L. Hagberg, *Art as Language: Wittgenstein, Meaning, and Aesthetic Theory* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995). In chapters four and five of his book, Hagberg argues that intentions are not mental images that correspond exactly to the works that result from them, so that the idea that mental images cause works is wrong, which means that intentions exist within works as “embedded customs” (p. 98). His argument is unpersuasive because he conflates *exact* mental images with *vague* mental images. It is of course absurd to claim that all works exist as exact mental images in the minds of their artists before they are created, but this doesn't prove that intentions (as mental images) are unnecessary for creating art. Even improvisational musicians have vague ideas as to which notes to play next during a song, and the creation of each new note necessitates some memory of what came before (chords, note patterns, etc.), as well as the sonic mental image of which note will come next. What notes one plays next can depend upon limitations of the medium and the tools one uses, but it is the artist's role to deal

### 3.4 Neo-Wittgensteinian Intentionalism: An Interpretation, and Objections

To give neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism its full due, perhaps what proponents of this view have in mind is that, since we describe certain events as intentional actions, and since we can often see evidence of what intentions people have by observing intentional actions, describing intentional actions when we are essentially certain of their intentions is the same as describing the intentions the agents performing those actions have when they act. This being so, since we can see the physical features of artworks, and since those features are present because of intentional actions, describing artworks when we are essentially certain of their meaning is the same as describing the intentions of the agents who created the artworks.<sup>97</sup>

There are reasons to believe this is a correct view of the metaphysical structure of artworks, which we might be better equipped to understand by considering the analogy of the act of murder.<sup>98</sup> Of course, we can describe an act of murder by saying *the agent murdered the man*, but we could also say, *the agent struck the man, and the injury caused by the strike killed the man*. These are two kinds of description that actually provide

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with these limitations in order to express an emotion or idea through art. Since mental images (intentions) do not need to resemble exactly the works they anticipate, and can be vague and incomplete during the creative process, Hagberg's objections are unpersuasive, and his argument does not prove that intentions must then exist within works, as customs or otherwise.

97 This hybrid view is inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974); Anscombe's *Intention*; Carroll's "Art, Intention, and Conversation"; Christoph Lumer, "How to Interpret Human Actions," in *Interpretation: Ways of Thinking about the Sciences and the Arts*, eds. Peter K. Machamer, Gereon Wolters (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2010), p. 136; P. R. Bhat, "Intention in Wittgenstein," in *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XX, No. 3 (July, 1993), online source: unipune.ac.in; Alberto Arruda, "Intention in Aesthetics," in *Papers of the 33rd International Wittgenstein Symposia*, eds. E. Nemeth, R. Heinrich, W. Pichler, online source: wittgensteinrepository.org, 2010; P. M. S. Hacker, *Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, revised edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Lyas, "Wittgensteinian Intentions."

98 Anscombe, *Intention (passim.)*, and Lyas, "Wittgensteinian Intentions," p. 141, where both cite murder as examples to explain how they conceive of intention.

different information. Describing an action as an act of murder implies the intention to kill, whereas describing the act of striking someone does not. Since determining whether an action is murder depends upon establishing that the agent intended to kill, there could be other actions that depend upon such determinations. But since intentions are private, and even agents' descriptions of actions are not always accurate, we often infer intention from the actions performed by agents.<sup>99</sup> This is not circular: we see the actions or results of actions, determine for ourselves the evidence for or against an agent's having a certain intention, and decide how to characterize the action based upon that determination. In fact, this is how we can gain a proper picture of an action, because without this kind of inference, intentional acts could only be understood by consulting those performing them, unless the boundaries between others' minds and our own were to collapse. So then, this version of neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism supports the idea that an artwork is the result of an action (or actions), and that since that creative act is understood best by reference to its agent's intentions, the resulting artwork is also understood best in light of the same information.

While an interesting line of defence for intentionalism, however, this view is not adequate, because it either requires a metaphysically dubious concept of intention in order to work, or it confuses actions with the results of actions. I will deal with the former possibility first. Carroll says that, for neo-Wittgensteinians, "intention is identified as the purposive structure of the work."<sup>100</sup> On this view, something that displays the purpose for which an artwork is made belongs to that artwork's metaphysical structure. If such a

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<sup>99</sup> Lyas, "Wittgensteinian Intentions," p. 141. Lyas demonstrates this by discussing an example of questioning murderers about their intentions, and the likelihood that they would lie in order to avoid jail.

<sup>100</sup> Carroll, "Art, Intention, and Conversation," p. 161.

structure exists, it is unclear how anyone who examines an artwork closely could ever be confused about what it means, since this structure “regulates the way the artwork is.”<sup>101</sup> If this structure exists but is only noticeable when it is obvious to any observer that a given intention has been realized in a work, the structure seems to have no function, and so we ought to remove it from metaphysical accounts of art.<sup>102</sup> If it exists and is noticeable, even when intentions are not successfully represented in a given work, then, paradoxically, we can perceive, by inspection of the work's physical features, metaphysical qualities that are not dependent on the physical features we inspect.

The deeper problem for neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism concerns the way we describe actions and their results. Just as neo-Wittgensteinians argue for describing *actions* intentionally, they argue for describing *artworks* intentionally, despite the fact that artworks are the *results* of actions and not *actions* themselves. While one could create something intended to be an artwork, if that artwork consists only of dents on a wall, it is unlikely that anyone without foreknowledge of one's actions will know that the dents are actually the result of intentional aesthetic actions, let alone that they constitute an artwork. The dents themselves cannot confirm their status of being features of an artwork. Likewise, we might say that an agent's killing a person results in that person being dead. Even if the intention does not cause the action, the intention is only relevant to the *action* and not the dead body. Finding out why a person died by another's hand concerns the action; the person's status as dead is only the result of the action. Perhaps the reason

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101 Ibid.

102 If the structural content of art is not as sparse as my view suggests, it would not mean that my entire point is lost, but it would require that defences of intentionalism rely on information that seems impossible to attain.

behind some conflicting descriptions of events is that there are two entirely separate objects of description, namely, actions and results.

A neo-Wittgensteinian might object that, even in the case of murder, we can understand the definition of the result, *a dead man*, as incomplete without reference to what kind of *dead* we mean: murdered, died of natural causes, etc. But the result of an action is not that the metaphysical state of someone's body or mind switches from *not murdered* to *murdered*, but simply that it causes someone's state to switch from *alive* to *dead*.<sup>103</sup> The result is not that murder has occurred, but that, since murder occurred, a man is dead. *What caused his death?* The action. *What is the result of the action?* A man's being dead. Despite our common use of the term *murder* without reference to agents who cause murder (e.g., *a murder has happened*), it is the actions of those agents that we criticize, and in turn the agents and their intentions, not their results.<sup>104</sup> A practical example of this is that we consider murder to be worse than manslaughter even though both actions result in a person's being dead. This being so, it is not accurate to say that we *actually* criticize an artwork for failing in some way; our criticism is really of the artist who created the artwork, for failing to create a better result.<sup>105</sup> This is supported by the fact that we do not get mad at computers for creating bad poetry, nor do we feel

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103 Anscombe, *Intention*, pp. 28-29. If bodies or minds were able to switch from *not murdered* to *murdered*, it would require some extra feature that attaches to results of actions, which Anscombe here shows does not exist.

104 Noël Carroll, *On Criticism*, p. 49. To elaborate further, we criticize someone for taking a life away, not the dead body for being dead. It's not that the body itself contains something bad. Rather, the action was bad because it caused the person to no longer exist. We may say that the result is bad, but what we mean by this is that the result is unpleasant to us, and the action that brought about the result was either performed for a bad reason, or was part of a series of unfortunate or unlucky actions. While morality concerns actions, the results of actions cannot be evaluated in this way.

105 Lyas, "Wittgensteinian Intentions," p. 134, where a similar idea is discussed.

disappointed by art created by young children.<sup>106</sup> The artist, and in some cases background information about the artist, is important to our critical evaluations of artworks, but anger or disappointment about artworks are reactions to the wrong objects.

### 3.5 Neo-Wittgensteinian Anti-Intentionalism and the Aim of Explanatory Questions

Ultimately, while neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalists aim to support intentionalism, they actually defend a kind of anti-intentionalism, since they focus on the examination of works themselves as the way to understand the purposes for which works were created. But the question *why was this work created?* cannot receive an answer from a work. Such a question concerns its artist's motivations, not what the work's features are. Stanley Cavell identifies artists as the proper focus of questions regarding purposive intentions, but does not deny that these intentions are relevant to understanding works, noting that “intending to do something is internally related to wanting something to happen, and discovering an intention is a way of discovering an explanation.”<sup>107</sup> In many cases, this information could help us understand how best to understand or appreciate works, but as Cavell suggests, a question about *why* a work has certain features is artist-focused, and different than a work-focused question about *what* it means that some quality of a work is a certain way.<sup>108</sup> A purposive intention to create a work of art is not an intention *that* a

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106 Scott Weems, *Ha!: The Science of When We Laugh and Why* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2014), p. 122. Weems discusses a computer program that generates poems, and provides an example of one: “Holy cow. A carton of milk. Seeking a church.”

107 Stanley Cavell, “A Matter of Meaning It,” in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969). On p. 235, Cavell cites Anscombe for this idea.

108 Cavell, “Music Discomposed,” in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, where Cavell says that “Nothing could be commoner among critics of art than to ask *why* the thing is as it is, and characteristically to put this question, for example, in the form ‘Why does Shakespeare follow the murder of Duncan with a scene which begins with the sound of knocking?’, or ‘Why does Beethoven put in a bar of rest in the last line of the fourth Bagatelle (Op. 126)?’ The best critic is the one who knows best where to ask this

work of art exists, but an intention about *why* a work is the way it is. Through the features of a work, which act as symbols for users of aesthetic languages of certain kinds or genres, that work can suggest or reflect the reason for which it was created, but cannot actually contain it. This problem prevents neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism from adequately supporting anti-intentionalism, despite seeming to argue in favour of a form of it.

In summary, I have shown that Anscombe's view of intention as something we can often infer from action is actually closer to externalist intentionalism than neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism; I have argued against the neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalist idea that intentions are directly viewable within works, on the grounds that intentions are unnecessary if only those that are successfully realized are perceivable in works, and that it is unclear how unsuccessful intentions could transfer to or be created in works that don't display corresponding features; I have discussed a more nuanced view of neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism, which I believe confuses the intentions on the basis of which agents act with the works that result from those actions; and I have argued that were the neo-Wittgensteinian concept of intentions as internal properties of works correct, it would actually support anti-intentionalism.

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question, and how to get an answer..." (p. 182). Cavell's questions here are author-focused, even if the impetus to find the answers is due to enjoyment or understanding of the work. They are not questions about the meaning of the works of art, but about the artist's motivation for making the work appear so. A simple answer *why is this feature x* could be answered with *the artist wanted it to be so*, but this would not concern what the feature means.

## **SECTION 4: ALLUSION**

### **4.1 Allusion, Framing, and Intention**

Our perception of works frames them. We can set about framing a work by putting it in a gallery, focusing light on it, or physically installing a frame to surround it, yet we also use what we know of its author's intentions and history to contextualize what we perceive. It is impossible to see a work for exactly what it is, since the nature of our perception is influenced by our concepts and constrained by our abilities to perceive, our brains' compression of sensory information, and our limited ability to retain information. Our senses require us either to perceive the context in which a work appears or to block it out intentionally. Even an unconscious focus on a specific feature of a work is a form of framing. For example, my focusing on the yellowed parts of a Goya painting doesn't make the rest of the painting actually disappear, but nonetheless emphasizes certain elements while de-emphasizing others. The use of allusion in art is one way artists can attempt to influence our framing of their works, by recalling and invoking other works, or implying an adherence to, or subversion of, cultural rules or genre constraints.

In this section, through discussion of what allusion is and how it functions, I will show that the concept of allusion is compatible with externalist intentionalism, and even seems to support it against potential objections. I will start with a dictionary-derived definition of allusion which will provide the basis upon which I will attempt to refine the concept further, largely through an examination of other contributions to the subject. I will discuss Göran Hermeren's and Stephanie Ross's separate accounts of allusion, and, arriving at a working definition informed by their work, will consider implications that an

interpretation of Beardsley's view has for intentionalism. I will work toward the view that allusions require an agent to perform the act of alluding.

#### 4.2 What is Allusion? A Definition, and Examples

*The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* defines “allusion” as “a reference, esp. a covert, passing, or indirect one,” and “reference,” in turn, as “a direction of attention to a book or passage of a book.”<sup>109</sup> If we modify the end of the latter of these definitions to “an object or some property of an object,” we approach a useful definition of allusion that will prove relevant to our discussion. The working definition we can derive from these dictionary entries is that an allusion is *an indirect direction of attention to an object or some feature of an object*. Here, the term “object” includes anything that can be an object in speech, and so is not limited to purely physical objects. Shifting the focus away from text, book, or artwork is useful, because one can allude to world events, which are not artworks created by humans. On the off-chance that there are problems introduced by alluding to non-art objects, we can amend this definition to read, *an indirect direction of attention to an artwork or some feature of an artwork*. It is important to note that this definition does not imply that agency is needed for allusion, nor does it imply that allusions are best discovered or understood by looking for artists' intentions.<sup>110</sup>

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109 *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, ed. Katherine Barber (Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). The definition of *reference* I give is 2a, because 1a “an allusion” would be circular, and 1b “a relation or correspondence” could entail that “reference” means any kind of relation or correspondence, including those relations and correspondences which are not created by the act of referring. Milk is white, but is not a reference to white wallpaper, and neither is Esi Edugyan's *Half-Blood Blues* a reference to J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. References must refer, which is in most cases to, first, “describe,” second, “represent,” or third, “direct (someone) to a person or thing for help, information, advice, etc.”

110 Just as we can perceive natural features of the world as signs that direct our attention to other such features, we can perceive features of works as signs that direct us to other features or works. See Section

A literary example of allusion is the use of phrasing and imagery similar to Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* in T. S. Eliot's poem "The Hollow Men."<sup>111</sup> Oliver Tearle argues convincingly that in Eliot's poem, "'The eyes [that] are not here' (line 91), 'Sightless' men (91), 'a dead man's hand' (90), and 'Eyes I dare not meet in dreams' (89)" are allusions to Hamlet's line "Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight, / Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all" in Shakespeare's play.<sup>112</sup> Tearle provides further evidence that the poem in part alludes to *Hamlet*, noting that "Shape without form, shade without colour, / Paralysed force, gesture without motion; (11-12)" bears an unmistakable similarity to the former Shakespearean lines.<sup>113</sup> These similarities in tone, rhythm, subject matter, alliteration, and the actual words used all lend credence to the view that they are allusions to *Hamlet*, and this implies that the poem, in part or in whole, is an allusion to *Hamlet* or its title character.<sup>114</sup> That Eliot wrote an analysis of *Hamlet* with specific focus on scenes involving Gertrude (such as the quotation above) further suggests that Eliot was aware enough of Hamlet's words and subject matter to intend "The Hollow Men" to allude to *Hamlet*.<sup>115</sup>

In film, Hal Ashby's *Being There* contains a striking allusion to Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.<sup>116</sup> In Kubrick's film, Richard Strauss's song "Also Sprach Zarathustra" is used audibly as a kind of indicator of evolution or significant change,

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4.4 of this thesis for further discussion of the former implication.

111 Oliver Tearle, "Hamlet and T. S. Eliot's The Hollow Men" in *The Explicator*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (Routledge / Taylor & Francis Group, online source: [www.tandfonline.com/loi/vexp20](http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vexp20), 2012), pp. 92-95.

112 T. S. Eliot and William Shakespeare, as quoted by Tearle, "Hamlet and T. S. Eliot's The Hollow Men," p. 92. All quotations.

113 T. S. Eliot, as quoted by Tearle, "Hamlet and T. S. Eliot's The Hollow Men," p. 92.

114 Tearle, "Hamlet and T. S. Eliot's The Hollow Men," *passim*.

115 *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

116 Hal Ashby (dir.), *Being There* (Lorimar Productions: United Artists, 1979, *film*); Stanley Kubrick (dir.), *2001: a Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick Productions: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1968, *film*).

appearing in key moments, like an ape's realization that a bone can be used as a weapon.<sup>117</sup> In *Being There*, Chance the gardener emerges for the first time into the world outside his former home's walls, and during his initial exploration of these surroundings, Eumir Deodato's funk arrangement of "Also Sprach Zarathustra" plays. Through this use, Ashby's film alludes to the momentous nature of the changes *2001*'s characters experience, in order to emphasize just how significant Chance's change of scenery is. It is a tongue-in-cheek allusion as well, because while the song indicates Chance's subjective evolutionary moment, its new arrangement simultaneously emphasizes the mundane impoverished urban environment surrounding Chance's experience, and ordinary people oblivious to his momentous change.

Finally, Jared Baxter argues that Van Gogh's *Café Terrace at Night* contains allusions to Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, or similar paintings of that Biblical event.<sup>118</sup> With regard to the painting's features, Baxter argues that because there are a dozen central figures, a window that resembles a cross behind a server dressed in white, a lamp glowing near the server's head, what appears to be a small cross on the server's clothes, a shadowy Judas-like figure in a doorway, and a small cross of orange light in the distance, the painting is likely an allusion to *The Last Supper*.<sup>119</sup> But this analysis ignores some key compositional features of Van Gogh's painting. While there are twelve central figures, one of them is the server, who is the supposed Christ figure; if we expand our interpretation of

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117 Strauss's song is listed in the film as "Thus Spoke Zarathustra."

118 Todd Van Luling, "Vincent Van Gogh May Have Hidden 'The Last Supper' Within One of His Most Famous Paintings," in *The Huffington Post*, (published online, June 3, 2015, updated June 12, 2017, retrieved December 8 2018: [www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/van-gogh-last-supper\\_n\\_6753294](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/van-gogh-last-supper_n_6753294)). Van Luling credits Baxter with this theory throughout the article.

119 Jared Baxter, as summarized by Todd Van Luling, "Vincent Van Gogh May Have Hidden 'The Last Supper' Within One of His Most Famous Paintings."

the central figures to include two additional somewhat catlike golden-hued figures sitting at a table, this leaves us with thirteen figures, including the supposed Judas in the doorway; a window with four panes is not something so unusual as to warrant a reference to Christianity; the lamp is not placed directly above the server, but is instead positioned above a couple at a table next to her; and the server is a woman, which would seem to be at odds with the Christian and Papal doctrine that Jesus was a man.<sup>120</sup> With regard to the artist's intentions, Baxter cites a letter Vincent Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo Van Gogh, about a "tremendous need ... for religion," written about two weeks after the painting's completion.<sup>121</sup> But the supposed implications of this letter seem at odds with one Vincent wrote to his sister Wilhelmina Van Gogh about the painting, in which he describes "enormously enjoy[ing] painting on the spot at night," and says "the beginning of [Guy de Maupassant's] *Bel-ami* is precisely the description of a starry night in Paris, with the lighted cafés of the boulevard ... something like the same subject that I've painted just now".<sup>122</sup> From this evidence, it does not appear that Van Gogh intended to allude to *The Last Supper*. However, we have yet to determine what relevance artists' intentions have to allusions.

#### 4.3 What is Allusion? Göran Hermeren's View

In his "Allusions and Intentions," Göran Hermeren argues that any relation of allusion between artworks must be bound by three constraints:

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120 Vincent Van Gogh, *Café Terrace at Night*, 1888 (*painting*). Wikipedia.org, "Café Terrace at Night," online source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Café\_Terrace\_at\_Night.

121 Van Gogh, as quoted in Todd Van Luling's "Vincent Van Gogh May Have Hidden 'The Last Supper' Within One of His Most Famous Paintings;" Wikipedia.org, "Café Terrace at Night."

122 Van Gogh, as quoted by Wikipedia.org, "Café Terrace at Night." Both quotations.

1. It is possible that an author intended to allude to something but failed.
2. It is possible that a work can contain an allusion even if nobody discovered the allusion.
3. It is possible that a work can contain an allusion even if nobody read that text.<sup>123</sup>

These are reasonable guidelines for any definition of allusion. Especially critical to this discussion is the first constraint: one can fail to make apparent what a feature of a work is an allusion to, and so while that property can be apparent in a work of art, it need not constitute an allusion, even if there were an intent to make the property apparent.<sup>124</sup> Hermeren's definition of the act of allusion, in what he calls "*the weak sense*," requires that the work being alluded to exists (the existence requirement), and that the artist intends to ensure that the work contains properties that the artist "believes will make those familiar with the genre and tradition" think of the work being referred to (the selected-features requirement).<sup>125</sup> Hermeren's weak definition of allusion is closer to our working definition than his *stronger* ones, which I will not discuss, except to say that they constrain the concept of allusion unnecessarily. While the existence requirement is obvious, we have to modify the selected-features requirement in order to proceed with a view of allusion that is more compatible with our dictionary-derived working definition, which will prompt, in turn, the first modification to our working definition.

For allusions ever to be successful, they require an intended audience that knows both the object being referred to and the way the formal features of the referring work

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123 Göran Hermeren, "Allusions and Intentions," p. 208.

124 Ibid., p. 209, where Hermeren says as much while discussing authorism (which he calls "an intentionalist approach").

125 Ibid., p. 214.

allude to that object. But successful allusion does not necessarily depend upon people being familiar with any genre or tradition. Allusion can be very specific, such as an allusion to a song that few people have heard, or to a word that would only be significant to members of some highly-exclusive field of work. Given our definition, which does not necessarily refer to peoples' actions at all, an allusion need not involve anyone but the artist who intends to allude. But this exposes a flaw in our working definition. If allusions were like secret codes only known to one person, there would be no truly accurate way of distinguishing successful from unsuccessful allusions. Artists would have the final say about whether their allusions are successful, which would render criticism of allusions difficult at best. One could allude to anything in one's memory and conform to one's own standards of success, even if no one else were capable of understanding which memory is supposed to be referred to by the allusion. Perhaps an additional term, such as *private allusion*, should be used in such cases. For example, a painting containing a blue blotch reminds its artist of a small hat she had when she was young, and she did in fact intend the blotch to be an allusion to the hat while painting it, but she is the only one for whom the features bring the hat to mind. Our concept of allusion cannot work this way, since criticism requires shareable knowledge about artworks. Allusion, then, must be aimed at informing at least one person or group of people other than the alluding artist, though it need not refer to a genre, tradition, and so on. As Stephanie Ross observes, "allusion cannot proceed through private atypical methods of association."<sup>126</sup> A successful allusion must be understandable by the public, even if only a few members of the public can

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126 Ross, "Art and Allusion," p. 64. Ross refers here to an idea about subliminally introducing a relationship between basic colours and shapes, and more complex paintings.

understand. Accordingly, we can modify our working definition to *an indirect direction of attention to an object or some property of an object, not created by the person being directed*. With all of this in mind, Hermeren's selected-features requirement can be modified to convey the idea that *the artist intends to make the work contain features that will make audiences familiar with another work, genre, tradition, or reference think of the work being referred to*.<sup>127</sup> This view is intentionalist, but does not imply that the artist needs to have a specific or existing audience as the target of an allusive act.

#### 4.4 What is Allusion? Stephanie Ross's View

Not only is Ross's conception of allusion also intentionalist, but she appears to endorse a view similar to externalist intentionalism. She says that “one artwork, A, alludes to another artwork, B, only if the artist of A (1) intended to refer to B, and (2) incorporated into A an indirect reference to B,” but that “artworks allude, represent, express, depict, etc., only as part of a larger symbol system.”<sup>128</sup> This view marks the distinction between an artwork alluding or expressing, and an artwork *containing* an allusion or expression. While alluding is an action, which therefore requires some level of agency, a work does not itself need the capacity to act in order to contain a symbol that we understand as a reference to something. What makes this view compatible with our working definition is that a *direction of attention* is not necessarily an *action* of directing. A direction in a work is a symbol, and although the symbol is created by the work's artist, the symbol, not the

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127 See Hermeren, “Allusions and Intentions,” pp. 214-215, where he discusses a similar idea that he calls the “effect requirement,” though that requirement focuses on audiences understanding what artists intend, rather than artists' intentions to make audiences understand.

128 Ross, “Art and Allusion,” p. 63 and pp. 69-70, endnote 2; respectively.

action, is interpreted by audiences. The artist aims to use symbols that, if successfully realized and properly interpreted, will cause audiences, in turn, to direct their attention in a certain way. This does not entail that anything can be an allusion simply if an artist intends it, for what an allusion refers to is not only “determined by the speaker's intent but also by the content of his speech.”<sup>129</sup> While Ross argues that “allusion is a speech-act,” it is unclear whether she means the *action* of allusion or the allusive *property* of a work.<sup>130</sup> If allusion were just a speech-act, the only relevant feature of it would be its artist's intention, which would make art an unnecessary encumbrance to understanding what its artist means. But if there is a separate term we use for the group of features that constitute an allusion, and if those features belong to the work as a kind of symbol that is understandable only to those who know something about what its artist intended to refer to, we can regard the speech-act as an act of creating an allusion, and the allusion as an unchangeable feature (or collection of features) of a work that can be interpreted using a symbol system.

Of course, an artwork containing a symbol (a feature or collection of features) that *is* an allusion and an artwork containing a symbol *of* an allusion are two different things. Examples of the latter could include features that inspire audiences to regard them as allusions, which do not actually refer to anything, like a painting of an artist's studio with many framed paintings on a wall, some of which do not even exist, or a fictitious quotation attributed to a non-existent author. While an allusion refers to something that has existed at some point in time, a symbol *of* an allusion need not.

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129 Ibid., p. 65.

130 Ibid.

One might object that this view of allusion depends too heavily on what an artist intends, in order to determine what a work or feature alludes to. On Ross's view, an allusion can only refer to what its artist intends to refer to, and if it is an unsuccessful allusion, it cannot allude at all. One might object that this view, as it applies to successful allusion, approaches a kind of authorism. But for an allusion to exist, it must be the product of an action. Since it is a symbol and lacks the agency to refer its audience to an external object, it must be intended by an agent to be some way rather than another. A successful allusion is really just a feature (or group of features) that can be interpreted by audiences as referring to another work. It would be absurd to deny that works are created by people, since, as Beardsley has shown, their status as works depends upon artists intending, to some degree, that the works will take on certain aesthetic features.<sup>131</sup> What we call allusion is, like art, an idea that depends upon intentions, which, like units of speech, can symbolize specific ideas or objects. This is not to say that the features that constitute what we call an allusion actually have a specific meaning independent of what we can understand of them by using aesthetic (symbolic) language. They do not contain meaning, nor do they carry an intention. But as we interpret symbols in art, some as allusions, we can understand which works are referents of allusions made by artists, in the same way that we can infer some intentions artists have by examining their works.

Since artists determine what objects or properties allusions within works refer to, consulting an artist about whether or what she intended to allude to would be relevant to determining what an allusion's referent is, at least in cases where, first, information from examinations of a work is difficult to obtain, and, second, she successfully intended an

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<sup>131</sup> Beardsley, "An Aesthetic Definition of Art," p. 21. I discuss this above in section 1.4 of this thesis.

allusion. That is, intentions, though external to works, are relevant to determining which features count as allusions, and what works an allusion refers to. In the case of unsuccessful attempts to allude, artists' reports of intention could still be useful, as they could limit possible attributions of allusion in certain circumstances. Like shadows constrained by the shapes that cast them, allusions in works are constrained by the intentions of the artists who create them: they are as lacking in intention as people's shadows, are further constrained by external rules as shadows are by light, and often remain ill-defined without our knowing something of their sources. With the preceding discussions in mind, we can amend our working definition one final time to *a feature (or group of features) that is intended to act as an indirect direction of attention to an object or some property of an object, not created by the person being directed.*

#### **4.5 Allusion and Beardsley's View**

According to Beardsley's considered view, since our aim is to understand the worthiness of works, to consult artists about what their works mean is to admit that some quality or meaning remains unclear in those works, and that this lack of clarity negatively affects our correct understanding of the worth of the work. That is, the work of art or a portion of it does not *work*, in the sense of its being enjoyable or accomplished as an instance of its genre or style.<sup>132</sup> This is a weaker position than Wimsatt and Beardsley's considered view, and Barthes's view, but it challenges the critical requirement of referring to artists' reports of intention with regard to allusion.

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<sup>132</sup> Beardsley, "The Authority of the Text," pp.24-25.

An objection to Beardsley's considered view is that critics can fail to detect certain features of artworks, like references, allusions, and irony. While the ability of an audience to detect these increases the likelihood of their enjoyment and understanding of a work, if critics are ignorant of them, artists' reports of intention can provide the necessary information, since they tend to know what external information is necessary for adequate appreciation of these features. Though it may be unnecessary to identify an artist's intentions in many cases, if prominent critics do not have enough information to deepen their interpretations of a certain work, and its artist does, there is no reason that references to reports of intention should be taken as evidence that a work is lacking or fails to *work* in some sense. While Beardsley sees it as the role of the critic to find information relevant to appreciating works properly, it is unclear why this search should be limited to critics.<sup>133</sup>

If critics don't know that the sound-sample in "Jerry Was a Race Car Driver" by the musical group Primus is not a car's engine and a driver speaking, but actually the sound of a chainsaw humming and the voice of the villain Leatherface from the horror movie *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, their interpretation of the song will lack full understanding of the dark tone the song's other sonic qualities suggest, and they might interpret it as lightly comic.<sup>134</sup> Likewise, the enjoyment of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* hinges on understanding the meaning of its many repetitive puns and composite words, like the 100-character "bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronntonnerronntuonnthun

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p.34.

<sup>134</sup> Primus, "Jerry Was a Race Car Driver," from *Sailing the Seas of Cheese* (Interscope Records, 1991, CD). Hooper, Tobe (dir.), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Vortex: Bryanston Distributing Company, 1974, film). In this case, Primus is referring to the themes of the movie (gore and horror caused by people), rather than its villain directly. Jerry dies in an extreme car crash near the end of the song, and this is evidence that Primus is equating careless speeding or stunting with the gore and horror of murder.

ntrovarrhounawnskawntoohooorderenthurnuk!” used to signify and perhaps imitate the sound of thunder, though a proper understanding of the book would require knowledge of a multiplicity of references, spanning more than a dozen languages, the Bible, Irish geography and history, linguistics, and the history of human civilization, among others.<sup>135</sup>

Of course, there are cases in which further information could negatively affect interpretations, or not serve to change much at all about whether a work succeeds aesthetically. In the case of the former, one could imagine a situation in which knowing that a feature of a work refers to something derogatory or offensive would sour one's opinion of the work. In the latter case, my opinion of Swedish electroacoustic artist Rune Lindblad's opus “Till Zakyntos” (“To Zakyntos”) was originally quite positive. It is pensive and darkly beautiful, with an undeniable longing melancholy and deep emotional and sonic complexity. After I spent a decade wondering what the spoken words in the middle of the song were, a friend (with a lot of effort) discovered that they were a recitation of Ugo Foscolo's 1803 poem “A Zacinto” (“To Zakyntos”), written in Italian, about his own exile from his island homeland. While knowledge of what the poem's words mean, in translation, has compelled me to amend my initial interpretation that the song's noises and tones evoke 1960s squalor and extraterrestrial fantasy, and to associate

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135 James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2012), p. 3. According to the *Finnegans Wake* fan website, [finwake.com](http://finwake.com), the 100-character word contains fragments and phonetic combinations of Hindustani, Finnish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Swedish, Danish, and Gael words for thunder, among others. Without the knowledge that there is an intention behind the novel and words like this in it, one would likely think that something had gone horribly wrong at the printing press. A laconic description of *Finnegans Wake* is that it is a “vast story of a symbolic Irishman's cosmic dream [which] develops by enormous reverberating puns a continuous expansion of meaning, the elements in the puns deriving from every conceivable source in history, literature, mythology, and Joyce's personal experience.... *Finnegans Wake* aims to embrace all of human history.” *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Eighth Edition, *The Major Authors*, Volume B, gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt, founding ed. emeritus M.H. Abrams (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), p. 2502.

them, instead, with oceanic scenes and the lapping and crashing of waves, the poem displays qualities that the song has, being darkly beautiful, longingly melancholic, and complex. By alluding to the poem, the song can be recognized as referring both to Foscolo's exile specifically and the concept of exile generally from an emotional standpoint. Because the song and the poem display similar qualities, the further knowledge of the poem's meaning hasn't changed for me the fact that the song "Till Zakynthos" *works*, even though it provides a new layer of meaning for listeners to appreciate.<sup>136</sup>

One could say that in increasingly obscure cases of allusion, reference, and so on, such a work will only appear worthwhile to a small group of people, but this is true of works in many different genres and styles of art. A proper reading of a poem, song, movie, etc. might reflect understanding of the allusion, reference, or irony that is intended without consulting the work's artist. But references to obscure external objects do not have to be accessible to large groups of people. Perhaps an allusion is successful if one *can* understand it, provided one knows anything the artist knows that isn't just a private memory. Intentions, then, can be relevant to understanding allusions, and can even be relevant to assessing the aesthetic worth of a work, but the intention to allude neither entails successful allusion, nor a change in a work's perceived worth.

In summary, I have examined what allusion is, demonstrating that the success of an allusion depends upon its being able to be understood by people other than its artist. I

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136 Rune Lindblad, "Till Zakynthos (Op. 205)," from *An Anthology of Noise and Electronic Music #3* (Sub Rosa Label, 2017). Ugo Foscolo, "A Zacinto" (written in 1803), online source: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Zacinto](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Zacinto). It could be argued that a direct quotation is not a reference, but I contend that the quotation's use in "Till Zakynthos" is also used to refer to Foscolo's exile.

have argued that intentions, if successful, necessarily determine what an allusion refers to, and have shown that this is compatible with the view that artists' reports of their intentions in alluding can aid in determining the worth of works.

## **SECTION 5: The Resurrection of the Author: Implications for Criticism**

### **5.1 Externalist Intentionalism Summarized, and Further Problems**

In light of the preceding, externalist intentionalism seems to be the best theory for understanding aesthetic meaning that criticism could utilize. While it is an endorsement of intentionalism, it is supported by the definition of art's metaphysics that many anti-intentionalists use to show, often implicitly, that the neo-Wittgensteinian view of intentions as properties embodied in works is wrong. It also complements the most plausible definition of allusion, without denying that artists' intentions are necessary for the existence of allusions. For an externalist intentionalist, it is permissible, though not always necessary, to determine what a work means based in part on its artist's intentions.

At this point, there are plenty of other potential problems and objections for which adequate answers would go beyond the scope of this thesis. Group authorship of works is one such problem, because multiple authors of the same work could intend opposite meanings for some of the symbols within it. For example, the author of a play could intend a certain line to be tragic, the director could interpret the line as comedic, and an actor performing the line could deliver it in a way that subverts both their intentions. It is possible that, in such a case, there are three objects: the play on paper, the mental image of the play in the director's mind, and the actor's version of the play. Presumably, the audience's version would be the same as the actor's upon a first viewing.

A potential objection to externalist intentionalism is that there is some qualitative difference between the meanings we attribute to works and the intentions we attribute to their artists. Even if both exist in the minds of audience members, perhaps meaning is

more closely related to the sensory data of artworks than intention is. One response is that we often conceive of works of art as having some features that were intended, even if those features were produced by mistake. A large bold blotch of blue on an otherwise ornate painting seems to confirm that its artist intended the painting to be subversive, even if it was just a mistake. If there are certain features that we interpret as intentional in works, the concept of intention can be linked with our sensory data in such cases, in the same way meaning is. In order to pursue this, a wider discussion of the hierarchy of mental concepts and stimuli would be necessary.

Other potential problems include whether any experience of a work can be similar enough to any other experience of the same work for there to be objective knowledge of works, and whether what we call *works* are just our own concepts of groups of physical features, objects, or, in the case of live performances, actions. I will conclude this section by considering how externalist intentionalism fits into a broader intentionalist theory of art criticism.

## 5.2 Externalist Intentionalism and Carroll's Evaluative Criticism

In *On Criticism*, Carroll develops a comprehensive theory of art criticism. He argues that criticism is “evaluation grounded in reasons.”<sup>137</sup> The critic, he says, describes, classifies, contextualizes, elucidates, interprets, and analyzes a work in order to evaluate it.<sup>138</sup> Like other modern intentionalists, Carroll subscribes to a form of the neo-Wittgensteinian view

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<sup>137</sup> Carroll, *On Criticism*, p. 153

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 153 and *passim*. Carroll says criticism can concern “entire stylistic movements,” but this is neither his main focus nor mine. (Ibid., p. 12)

of intention. In this section, I will compare and contrast his modern intentionalist theory of criticism with the implications of externalist intentionalism.

Consistent with the views I defended in section 3.4 on the focus of evaluative statements, Carroll says that “it is not the [work] per se that we are discussing. It is what the pertinent people mean to be doing with the [work],” which means that “the object of criticism is ... human doings.”<sup>139</sup> He concludes that “the object of criticism is what the artist performs,” so that we evaluate the artist's actions in making art “in terms of [her] achievement.”<sup>140</sup> Since he believes the aim of criticism is evaluation, and since, as a neo-Wittgensteinian, he assumes that artists' intentions are discernible within works, he regards this kind of evaluation as being focused on works.<sup>141</sup> But such a focus is incompatible with externalist intentionalism.

Though it could be necessary for us to interpret a work as if it were created for some purpose, if the evaluation of works were focused primarily on artists, with works assuming a supportive but secondary role, Carroll's view rests uncomfortably close to biographical criticism.<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, if, as I have argued, works are distinct from the actions of artists, Carroll's criticism focuses on the wrong object. Even if, as he later argues, evaluation concerns whether artists have acted to fulfill the conditions requisite for what counts as achievement in the respective genres to which their works belong, his theory implies that, for example, the intention to write a sonnet can result in a poem that is a failed sonnet, rather than an otherwise beautiful non-sonnet poem. Unless we

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139 Ibid., p. 48, both quotations.

140 Ibid., p. 52, both quotations.

141 Ibid., *passim*, and quite notably pp. 52, 81, and 83.

142 Ibid., p. 51.

subscribe to neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism, the former verdict concerns the actions of creating the poem, while the latter concerns its physical features.<sup>143</sup> If we modify his view so that it shifts away from this primary focus on the success of artists' actions, we can approach a version that better supports intentionalist criticism.

Instead of evaluating whether actions can be reconciled with intentions, we could evaluate works based on whether they conform to or subvert genre rules, irrespective of whether one enjoys them.<sup>144</sup> But it is unclear, in this case, who determines which constraints or emphases each genre imposes. If we hold that individual artists determine the genre rules of their own works, we would need a theory like Carroll's in order to understand any work at all. If we hold that critics determine these rules, however, it's possible that intentional subversions of certain genres would be seen, not as revolutionary, but as failures. There are problems for either possibility, though it would be absurd to say that, in standard critical practice, we treat art as if there were no genres.

Even though no work contains a metaphysical property that determines its genre, works comprise sets of features that people categorize for easy identification. The impetus behind any aesthetic categorization may be for the sake of gaining information, or for locating something one finds useful or enjoyable, or both. If the impetus is to gain information, categorization might frame a work in a way that makes some features stand out, and thus makes the work more understandable. In this search for knowledge about a work, we seem further to understand our concepts of the genres it conforms to. However, this search could lead a critic to devalue the work itself as the primary object of criticism,

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143 Ibid., p. 167.

144 Ibid., p. 179, in which a similar claim is explored, albeit from a neo-Wittgensteinian perspective.

and instead focus on the knowledge of the genre one can infer from the work. This presents us with a kind of paradox, similar to one we face in daily life. We determine whether we use words correctly based upon shared dictionaries (mental or written), yet our usage of those words over time determines what the dictionaries' definitions of those same words are. If we plan to dissect a phrase in order to understand someone properly, we need to find out what dictionary the speaker consulted while speaking that phrase. Yet the phrase could be a new, formative usage of the words specific to it, unanticipated by any definition in the relevant dictionaries before it was spoken.<sup>145</sup> In the same way, we determine what genre a work belongs to, and what it means. We can modify existing genre rules, or create new genres based on the use of symbols in works, but these modifications need, in some sense, to be based upon actual uses of symbols in works.<sup>146</sup> Regardless of who determines the rules of a genre, if the way we evaluate a work depends upon what genre it belongs to, this seems to suggest that the work can determine, in terms of its own features, whether it succeeds in a given genre. In lesser known genres like electroacoustic music, or post-new wave, it appears that many works themselves help people determine the very genre rules that determine whether they count as successful. If the features of works determine whether they succeed aesthetically, and if evaluating success is the goal of criticism, there seems no point at all to it, other than pointing others in the direction of works that one enjoys.

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145 Though this recalls my discussion in section 2.4 of evolving word usages, my argument here is not aimed at the same conclusion.

146 It's also possible that a modification of the parameters of a genre actually creates a new genre instead of modifying an old one.

### **5.3 Evaluation as Preference**

Since evaluation, neither in Carroll's sense nor in genre-based criticism, appears adequately to determine whether a work succeeds, evaluative criticism may be just a matter of personal preference. Although I often claim that some work is better or worse than another, I base this claim primarily on my personal enjoyment of the work, not on whether its artist succeeded in realizing most of her intentions, or how its features conform to or subvert genre rules. Critics often determine whether a work conforms to a certain genre's standards of excellence, and whether it successfully realizes its artist's intentions and actions, thereby providing the very kinds of evaluative criticism that help inform audiences about what works mean. But neither success of actions nor conformity to genre rules is the primary focus of evaluation, since each is, in essence, as unimportant in determining the worth of a work as determinations about what a word means in a particular language. Worth, success, and any other form of value is external to works, which suggests that focusing on features of works in order to determine some fact about the rules we use to look at them is not work-focused criticism. While it is entirely possible that my view is too austere, and that I have failed to notice some important facet of evaluation that does in fact bring works to the fore in this kind of criticism, I am inclined to conclude that evaluation is a secondary part of criticism, which might even count as a framing device for works' features rather than a determination of them.

This is not to say that evaluation is irrelevant to criticism. In fact, most critics do evaluate works in the ways I discuss above. I believe it is the fact that we find works enjoyable that we develop and refine such concepts of genres and success for them. We

want to praise the objects that bring us the most enjoyment, and, in turn, the people who make them. As such, praise of objects and the people who make them is prompted by our enjoyment of art. Yet it is not the critics' praise that is the most important aspect of their criticism. The reasons that ground that praise, in the form of, to quote Carroll, "description, classification, contextualization, elucidation, interpretation, [and] analysis," are what help people understand the meanings we can justly ascribe to works.<sup>147</sup> This deeper understanding helps people to determine better what works mean, and to enjoy them more fully. What matters, then, is not the destination of our criticism, but how we get there.

In this section, I have examined a few potential objections to externalist intentionalism, before focusing on Carroll's concept of criticism. I argued that his evaluative criticism based upon artistic achievement draws our focus away from the work at hand. I showed that genre-based success focuses on our definitions of genres rather than the works we count as conforming to them, and that it is unclear who can determine success in any genre. Due to these problems, I concluded that evaluative criticism is based upon personal preference, and that the important component of criticism, evaluative or not, is the additional insight into works' meanings that criticism provides us.

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<sup>147</sup> Carroll, *On Criticism*, p. 84. We can ascribe meaning correctly to works given the aesthetic languages they conform to, which are determined by their artists' intentions, critical classifications, and so on.

### **Summary of Thesis**

In this Master's thesis, I have argued for the relevance of artists' intentions to their artworks. In section one, I showed that although human intentions determine which objects are artworks, meaning is not an internal property of artworks, and aesthetic qualities are just terms or mental conclusions that we use to categorize their features. Since the meaning we ascribe to artworks is external to them, other external information, including reports of artists' intentions, is not irrelevant to our understanding of artworks. I call this view externalist intentionalism.

In section two, I argued that anti-intentionalism is not a viable alternative to externalist intentionalism for a few reasons. First, I objected to a modification of Socrates's view in Plato's *Ion*, establishing that artists' actions are the result of intentions rather than unintentional inspiration. Second, I examined three interpretations of Roland Barthes's argument, showing that the difference between artistic actions and conversational actions addressed to a particular agent does not invalidate the critical practice of interpreting works linguistically. Third, I explained that Beardsley's view that works are self-sufficient entities ignores the fact that languages are external to works. Finally, I objected to Wimsatt and Beardsley's view on the grounds that we can fail to understand ironic features of works if we don't have knowledge of artists' intentions, in cases where such attributions of irony do not contradict those works' features. I concluded from these problems with anti-intentionalism that information external to works can help us understand and enjoy them more fully.

In section three, I discussed neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism, and found that Anscombe's supposedly neo-Wittgensteinian argument actually shows that we can often, though not always, infer intentions from actions. This view is compatible with externalist intentionalism, which suggests that some philosophers have misunderstood or mislabelled her work. I showed that the neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism Lyas and others support, according to which intentions are directly perceivable in artworks, is not persuasive for two reasons. First, if only successfully realized intentions are perceivable in works' features, the claim that there is an additional intentional feature of works is unnecessary. Second, if unsuccessful intentions exist as metaphysical properties of works, neo-Wittgensteinians provide no explanation for how these properties are created in works that do not display commensurate features. I finished the section with a more nuanced interpretation of neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism, which showed that adherents of the view confuse the intentions agents have while *acting* with the works that are *products* of artistic actions. This kind of intentionalism denies the importance of intentions in interpreting meaning, given that intentions are separate from artworks, yet it cannot adequately support anti-intentionalism either. In light of these problems, neo-Wittgensteinian intentionalism is not a viable alternative to externalist intentionalism.

In section four, I examined allusion, and the special problems it poses to anti-intentionalist and neo-Wittgensteinian views of art's metaphysics. I first developed a definition of allusion based on Hermeren's and Ross's views, holding that a successful allusion must be able to be understood by more people than its artist. I then proceeded to show that though intentions are separate from works, they determine what the

corresponding allusions refer to. Since allusions can be made understandable by reports of artists' intentions, and since they do not operate in a way incompatible with the metaphysics endorsed by externalist intentionalism, this view of allusion further supports my argument.

Finally, in section five, I dealt with some potential objections to my view, and then discussed evaluative criticism. I argued that Carroll's view of criticism does not focus on *works*, but rather on whether artists' *actions* count as achievements in a particular genre. Since his view seems to place too much import on intentions for work-focused criticism, leading to the conclusion that some works might count as failed attempts in a certain genre rather than otherwise aesthetically valuable works, I considered an alternative, genre-based view of evaluative criticism. I argued that if we base evaluative criticism upon conformity to genre rules, we run the risk of focusing on the conditions that constitute success in particular genres rather than on the works we see as conforming to those genres. I then explained that it is unclear who determines success within genres. If critics do, I argued, subversive or revolutionary works might not succeed, while if artists do, works might never be able to fail. In light of these problems, I suggested that critical evaluation is reducible to personal preferences, and that, despite the possible need for evaluation in criticism, the information we gather about works is the most important part.

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