

## Experience, Knowledge and Art

John Ryder  
State University of New York

### INTRODUCTION

For many people, myself included, one comes away from an artistic experience with a sense that something intellectually significant has occurred. I am thinking here of experience with art as a spectator rather than as an artist. I would not want to speak for all those who make or perform something, but speaking only for myself, when I play a piece of music I do not have the sense that I have accomplished something intellectual. When I listen to a performance, especially a live performance, I often do have just such a sense, as I do during a visit to an exhibition. I do not here want to make anything of the distinction between making or performing and observing or listening because I am not sure how far to generalize my own experience. I mean to point out simply that there is an intellectual dimension to the experience of art. And I would not want to say that aesthetic experience in this general sense must have an intellectual dimension, only that it may.

To be a bit more precise, this intellectual experience through art is, for me, the sense that I have learned something, or that I now know something I did not previously. It is not always a simple matter to specify what it is I think I have learned, or what I now know, though in that respect the same can sometimes be said for the intellectual experience of listening to a lecture or reading a non-fiction book. Despite the complexity of specifying what one has learned, it is clear to me that knowledge is derived in and through aesthetic experience, or more modestly that knowledge can be derived in and through aesthetic experience. To the extent that this claim is true, it is then fair to say that art has a cognitive dimension. Again, this is not to say that all art is cognitive, or that all art must lead to enhanced or increased knowledge, merely that it may. I am not offering a theory of art or an aesthetic theory in which it is a defining characteristic of art that it is cognitive, or that the many other things that art is and does may be subsumed under or reducible to the cognitive. I also do not intend to take a position on the question whether the cognitive dimension of art is among its aesthetic characteristics. The point is simply that a cognitive dimension is at least a contingent feature of art.

I have so far equivocated between art and the experience of art in the sense that I have attributed an intellectual or cognitive dimension to both. Art and the experience of it, or aesthetic experience in a general sense, are not the same thing, and it is quite possible that one might attribute a cognitive dimension to one, for example to the experience of art, and not to the other. Though this distinction is genuine, I will continue to talk about art and aesthetic experience interchangeably. One reason to do so is that because I am not here attempting to develop a theory of art it does not seem to me to be a critical question whether it is among the defining traits of art that it be or can be cognitive, as I have pointed out above. That question may remain open as far as this discussion is concerned. What is relevant is whether in our engagement with art we may have a cognitive experience. Whether that experience is properly to be attributed to a cognitive dimension of art or to a cognitive dimension of aesthetic experience is a question that can wait for another occasion, and the answer to it does not have any critical bearing on the question if and in what senses we may enhance our understanding and insight through our engagement with art. So for ease of formulation I will refer to art and aesthetic experience interchangeably.

Dewey briefly addresses the question of art and knowledge in *Art as Experience* in the chapter titled The Challenge to Philosophy.<sup>1</sup> His concern there, and he is right to have it, is that among the numerous attempts to develop a philosophy of art some have tended to reduce art to a cognitive exercise. He ascribes this view, or at least the danger of this view, to the romantic impulse to understand art as a uniquely powerful entre into the nature of things. The problem with this approach, he points out, is twofold: 1) there is a tendency to ignore the many other characteristics of art by overemphasizing the cognitive; and 2) without a more careful analysis of knowledge, to say that art is primarily cognitive is to make it more or less equivalent in function to science and other disciplines, but in that case art does not fare well.

Dewey is clear in this short section that he has no problem with acknowledging a cognitive dimension of art, as long as we are careful about what we take that to mean. He also clearly indicates that even this modest assertion does a disservice to art unless there is a more general understanding of art in which its potential cognitive dimension can be situated and understood. The aesthetic theory he develops in *Art as Experience* is an effort to develop an adequate theory of art. Whether his general theory of knowledge is sufficient to the task is a question to which we will return.

That art has a cognitive dimension suggests three general problems: 1) In what sense or senses do art and aesthetic experience generate knowledge; 2) What is the relation of art as a cognitive activity to other cognitive activities such as science, mathematics or philosophy; and 3) What might be the implications for our understanding of knowledge of the fact that art has a cognitive dimension?

#### WHAT KNOWLEDGE DOES ART INSPIRE?

The first point to be made in considering this question is that art gives rise to knowledge in many different ways, or that there are many different senses in which art is cognitive. Dewey indicates one of the ways in which art is cognitive when he says that “Tangled scenes of life are made more intelligible in esthetic experience; not, however, as reflection and science render things more intelligible by reduction to conceptual form, but by presenting their meanings as the matter of a clarified, coherent, and intensified or ‘impassioned’ experience.”<sup>2</sup> To put the point another way, one sense in which we may derive knowledge from art is through the capacity of art to arrange its subject matter in such a way as to bring to the fore or highlight elements of the subject that are otherwise less clear or less pointed. This is the basis of the cliché that a picture is worth a thousand words. Descriptions of the effect of war on people can be moving and profound, of course, but the arrangement of the elements of village life that Picasso presents in *Guernica* focuses the point in a unique way. The cliché has it wrong, though, because finally wrought words, especially in fiction, can do much the same. Remarque’s account of the impact of the Great War is a good example. Through these and similar works of art we better understand war in its lived dimension; they present “their meanings as the matter of a clarified, coherent, and intensified or ‘impassioned’ experience.”

We derive knowledge from and through art in other ways as well. It has served to express ideals, as in classical Greek sculpture, in which case we come away understanding ideal forms, and the civilization that thought in terms of ideal forms, better than we had before. In other cases it serves to teach something, whether the moral lessons of medieval Christian painting or the ideological lessons of the more crass forms of socialist realism. It can suggest a critical analysis, as does some modernist art in its assessment of industrial society, for example in Leger’s use of tubular forms to depict people, or it can describe social status, as frequently did privately

commissioned painting in early modern Europe. It can be highly politically charged, as in a Diego Rivera mural, or it can puncture political pretensions, as do Shostakovich's parodic ballets and operas.

Literature can have similar properties. We know more about people and their psychology after reading Dostoevsky than we did before, and we better comprehend the frustration of delusional but firmly believed ideals through Cervantes, so much so that to "tilt at windmills" has entered the lexicon. Volumes have been written about what we learn and know from Hamlet, Macbeth and Lear, and surely we have a deeper understanding of the potential passion and tragedy of love after Romeo and Juliet, not to mention the disastrous consequences of tribal feuds.

Expressionist and abstract art too has a cognitive dimension. In a most direct sense, we know more about colors and their relations to one another after Albers and Rothko, not to mention the Fauve, Blaue Reiter and Brücke schools. John Cage and other experimental composers stretched our understanding of sound and by implication music itself. The greatest of the Baroque and Classical composers described what was possible within certain clearly delineated formal constraints more thoroughly than anyone could have imagined. This is part of the reason their music continues to fascinate us. Conversely, we can admire Wagner and Schönberg in their capacity to break through traditional structure to reveal what is possible beyond it. In this sense, the knowledge we derive from abstract art can concern the generation of possibilities. Kazimir Malevich may appear to have done something extremely simple with his *Black Square*, but not only did that image become an iconic expression of the Russian *avant garde*, it also engendered an explosion of possibilities, as is made clear by a recent exhibition in the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg called *The Adventures of the Black Square*.<sup>3</sup> To this day sculptors, painters and installation artists continue to generate new possibilities, and thus expand our experience and insight.

Dewey is right to be skeptical of the Romantic and generally mystical inclination to think that art penetrates to some "higher" knowledge of reality, but one can understand how the Romantics and mystics come to that point of view. Some works of art do seem to transport us, so to speak, or at least they seem to point to something deeper. The Adagio movement of Schubert's C Major Quintet is a breathtaking piece of music, and when I hear it I cannot help but think that Schubert knew something the rest of us do not. Whether he did in fact "know something" none

of us can say. Perhaps it was simply that he was a genius as a composer. But I think it is fair to say that *our* knowledge is enriched as we listen to Schubert. For one thing, we have a better understanding of the capacity of human creativity; we understand ourselves better through having the sort of experience Schubert and other great artists make possible; and our understanding of the possibilities of creativity, experience, and life itself is immeasurably enhanced.

The centrality of possibilities in the cognitive dimension of art is not to be underestimated. We have so far pointed to various works of art and artists to suggest ways in which art is cognitive, but we could also point to philosophers for whom the aesthetic dimension of experience has been central to their philosophical work and hence to the understanding and wisdom their work expresses. One of the clearest examples of such a philosopher is John McDermott, for whom experience as aesthetic and the aesthetic in experience permeates his thinking no matter what philosophical theme he is exploring. In McDermott's hands art and the aesthetic is the very environment in which reflective individuals both live their lives and render them meaningful, surely processes that involve understanding and insight in some ways and to some degrees. There is no better example of the centrality of possibility in the cognitive dimension of art.<sup>4</sup>

A very young Susan Sontag wrote in her diary that reading Romain Rolland gave her a "knowledge of aliveness." In a similar vein, Orhan Pamuk has recently said that though he regrets the "utilitarian" nature of the idea, he cannot help but think that "books exist to prepare one for life."<sup>5</sup> Pamuk has in mind books of all kinds, but certainly including prose and poetry. Both writers are expressing an important sense in which art, in their cases literature, contributes knowledge, which is to say that it has an import for one's life, how it is understood and how it is lived. They have in mind, I imagine, the fact that literature offers one not so much information about the world, or something to which to aspire, as it exposes one to the range of experience and the possibilities inherent in it. Stories that occur in a setting with which one is familiar, one's own time and place for example, and that include characters one can recognize, thereby expand one's own experience. They often involve events in which one can place oneself and imagine one's own reactions and behavior. But literature that places the reader beyond his own time and place can be, and probably usually is, even more expansive. Perhaps there are sufficient commonalities among people across cultures and through history that we are able to expand the possibilities of our own lives by engaging with them.

We can feel, which is to say we can understand, both the romanticism and the hopelessness of Don Quixote's efforts, and we know what it means to "tilt at windmills," though none of us have ever lived or will ever live in early modern Spain. We can feel the internal struggle and trauma of Sensei in Natsume Soseki's *Kokoro*, though none of us have experienced the individual and cultural confusion of Meiji Japan's struggle to confront the modern West. In such cases one learns not so much about early modern Spain or about Meiji Japan, but about the possibilities of experience; one's own experience and its possibilities expand accordingly. Something like this, I take it, is the "knowledge of aliveness," and the sense in which literature can "prepare one for life."

Even this short and hurried list of art's cognitive capacities suggests that when we speak about knowledge as enabled by art we are speaking about more or something other than "knowledge that," whether by knowledge and truth we mean justified true belief, or assertions that accord either with an independent reality or with a prior stock of beliefs, or warranted assertability. This observation leads us to the question of the relation of art as a cognitive activity to other, more commonly acknowledged forms of cognition such as science and mathematics, or for that matter philosophy.

## KNOWLEDGE IN GENERAL

If the cognitive dimension of art deals not so much with "knowledge that" in any standard sense, and little with "knowledge how," but more importantly, as Justus Buchler called it, "knowledge through," then when dealing with knowledge we are faced with a complex situation that we need some way to sort out systematically.<sup>6</sup> Fortunately we are not left to our own devices in this matter because there is wise guidance available to us. Several philosophers in the American tradition have addressed the question of the nature of knowledge in a way broad enough to encompass knowledge in and through art. Dewey is a rich source of insights and possibilities in this respect, as is Susanne Langer. Langer more than Dewey dealt directly with the issue of the cognitive capacity of art and the ways in which knowledge through art differs from propositional knowledge. The other valuable source for us is Justus Buchler in his theory of judgment and his concept of query.<sup>7</sup> We will return to a consideration of Dewey and Langer below. At this point, though, I would like to focus on Buchler's theory of judgment because it provides particularly useful concepts and distinctions.

To avoid unnecessary confusion let us stipulate from the start that in his use of the term “judgment” Buchler has enabled potential misunderstanding because the meaning of the term in his theory is somewhat idiosyncratic. It is worth keeping in mind that the theory of judgment as we will briefly describe it is a theory of a person’s interaction with the complexes of his environment that cumulatively define his life. In this respect the theory of judgment is a component of a broader theory of human being. In order to understand what Buchler means by “judgment,” and why he would use that term and not another, one has to have the patience to follow his explication and rationale. Toward this end it may be worthwhile to keep in mind the fact that when he developed the theory in the early 1950s he was explicitly attempting to improve on Dewey’s conception of experience and interaction.

The term “judgment” here is to be understood not as a mental act but as any sort of manipulation of complexes toward some end. The manipulation can be mental, but it can also be physical, emotional, repetitive or creative. It can produce an idea, a book, a poem, a painting, a piece of music, an apple pie or a home run. There are three forms of judgment – assertive, exhibitivite and active – though any product of judgment may participate in more than one of them.

An assertive judgment is a stating or saying of some kind; it is generally a proposition. The results of scientific inquiry for the most part consist of assertive judgments, as do mathematical propositions and the products of philosophical thinking. Assertive judgments tend to be the sort to which truth-value can be attributed; they make claims about their subject matter that can be said to be true or false, or at least they admit such evaluative attempts. As a practical matter we may not be able to say whether a particular assertion is true or false, but for the most part they can be so evaluated. Though the standard sort of assertive judgment is linguistic, it is not the case that all linguistic judgments are assertive. A poem is not, for example, and neither is an ordinary speech act such as “I now pronounce you husband and wife.” A poem is an exhibitivite judgment, in ways we shall soon see, and a speech act of this kind is an active judgment.

A judgment is exhibitivite when it shows rather than states something; it does not consist of propositions, but of exhibitions or demonstrations. Works of art are paradigmatic cases of exhibitivite judgments. They do not as a rule assert anything, and they are generally not susceptible to attributions of truth or falsity, at least not in the standard senses. Rather than assert

a proposition, exhibitiv judgments consist of complexes purposefully ordered in such a way as to bring to light aspects or traits of the complexes ordered or of the product as a whole that were not available to us previously. Think of Monet's series of paintings along the Thames or of the façade of the cathedral at Rouen. Nothing is asserted, but traits of the Parliament Building and of the Rouen Cathedral are available to us as they had not been before. Or perhaps it is meanings that are so rendered, as in *Guernica*. Exhibition in this sense applies more broadly than merely to pictorial expressions. Musical meaning is enriched through the Wagnerian *leitmotiv*, for example, as is the expanded capacity of words in *Finnegan's Wake* or in any good poem. Furthermore, even assertive judgments can have an exhibitiv character, as through their extraordinary structure does Spinoza's *Ethics* or Hegel's grand intellectual architectonic. And there is beauty, an exhibitiv characteristic, in an elegant proof, as all mathematicians know.

Active judgments are those that do something, as in a carpenter's product or a footballer's goal or a baseball pitcher's curveball. They too can function in other modes. The well coordinated skating and passing of a hockey team's forward line as it moves down the ice can be a thing of beauty and function exhibitively, and when two men are arguing and one spits at the other, the assertive point is usually clear. All of these are examples of instances in which complexes of nature are manipulated to produce an action of some kind, and to that extent are active judgments.

Some judgments, though not all, are attempts systematically to investigate a subject, and such judgments are instances of query. There are, however, importantly different kinds of query in that there are importantly different kinds of investigative judgments. Some investigations are made by putting questions to a subject either experimentally or rationally. Such investigations are cases of inquiry, and the sciences, mathematics and philosophy in their standard forms consist of judgments of inquiry. But not all systematic investigation is experimental or rational. Monet was investigating light, color, and his pond at Giverny, just as Schönberg was investigating the possibilities of twelve-tone rows in composition. These are instances of query no less than are science and mathematics, and as we have seen their results can be cognitive just as the results of inquiry can be.

When knowledge is understood as arising from judgments that query nature, and if various forms of query produce knowledge, then it becomes much less odd or threatening to



either science or art to speak of art's cognitive dimension. It also suggests, however, that traditional approaches to epistemology need to be revised.

#### THE IMPLICATION FOR EPISTEMOLOGY OF ART'S COGNITIVE DIMENSION

I use the term "epistemology" to mean any systematic attempt to understand knowledge and truth, so that it is intended to include the various forms of analytic epistemology, pragmatist approaches to knowledge, and other creative approaches such as Buchler's and Susanne Langer's. In the English-speaking world the most pervasive forms of epistemology in this broad sense have been the analytic and pragmatist approaches, so I will turn first to the implications of the cognitive dimension of art for epistemology in these senses.

An obvious problem arises when we consider what is called naturalist epistemology, which derives its name from the fact that it is a series of developments from Quine's initial call to naturalize epistemology. The problem is in part a consequence of the fact that in this tradition the natural sciences hold a privileged position with respect to the understanding of knowledge. We should distinguish two ways this occurs. One of them is that naturalists of this stripe argue for turning to the results of the sciences, primarily to psychology and other cognitive disciplines, in our efforts to understand the nature of knowledge and its acquisition. This move amounts to an abandonment of more traditional *a priori* analysis in the attempt to understand knowledge. The second way the emphasis on science appears in naturalist epistemology is in its tendency to privilege the results of the natural sciences as the paradigmatic instances of knowledge. This is significant because the naturalist needs to have something in mind as what counts as knowledge if he is to inquire into its nature, and his inclination is to point to the propositions that result from natural scientific inquiry and say "that's what we mean by knowledge." This move can have a weak and a strong form. The weak version will say that the propositions of the sciences are the clearest instances of knowledge, though other sorts of activities may also generate knowledge in less clear and perhaps less reliable forms. The strong version is to say that the propositions of the natural sciences are the only instances of knowledge, which is to say the only way we can have knowledge of nature is through the sciences. Everything else may have some value, but it is not cognitive.<sup>8</sup>

Another observation worth making at this point is that naturalist epistemologists share with their non-naturalist opponents an assumption about knowledge, which is that it is always to be understood as a belief. Thus the question becomes “what kinds of belief count as knowledge, and why.” Naturalists will say that empirically derived beliefs either modeled on or rooted in the sciences are the only ones that count as knowledge, and non-naturalists will allow for other, non-empirical or rationally derived beliefs to count. Either way, the analysis of knowledge is about which beliefs are cognitively acceptable.

Naturalist epistemology in any of its forms cannot handle the fact that art has a cognitive dimension. Nor, we should add, can any form of epistemology that understands knowledge entirely or paradigmatically in terms of propositions and/or beliefs. We must keep in mind the senses in which we have ascribed a cognitive dimension to art. The observation that art has a cognitive capacity has been made before, though usually by aestheticians rather than epistemologists. Even there, though, the tendency has been to ascribe to art the capacity to generate knowledge that is similar to the knowledge enabled by the sciences. So, for example, the cognitive capacity of literature has been debated in terms of the truth-claims that can be found in it or derived from it. Even those who are inclined to defend art’s cognitive dimension in these terms are reluctant to extend the point beyond literature to more abstract arts such as music or dance because these do not issue in propositions or truth-claims.<sup>9</sup> In our ascription of a cognitive dimension of art we have been careful, it should be remembered, not to limit knowledge in art to propositions or to truth-claims of the traditional sorts. In fact we have not limited knowledge in the arts to beliefs that can be propositionally expressed at all. This is the point of the distinction between query and inquiry.

If we are right in attributing to art the possibility of knowledge that is not propositional and not a matter of beliefs with truth-value, then any epistemological approach that understands knowledge as justified belief is inadequate to the cognitive capacity of art, and therefore will result in an inadequate understanding of knowledge. Naturalist epistemology suffers from the further disability of limiting from the outset its conception of knowledge to the propositions of the natural sciences, in either its weak or strong versions. With that point of departure naturalist epistemology can never generate an adequate understanding of knowledge. One might ask at this point whether it might be possible to recast naturalist epistemological approaches, or other, non-naturalist forms of analytic epistemology, by taking knowledge in art, perhaps alongside

knowledge in science, as paradigmatic. The answer is that it is certainly possible, though we may find in doing so that the analytic tools characteristically used in this tradition are not up to the task. If not everything is a nail then one needs more than a hammer. But we do not know the results of such an experiment until it is tried, and it would likely be an interesting project to do so.

Another approach at this point is to say that there are alternatives with rich histories to which we might turn. The most obvious of them for those of us who are inclined to do philosophy in the American traditions is the broadly pragmatist or a more precisely Deweyan approach. A weak version of this can be found in Rorty's interest in literature as no less interesting and valuable than science, and in his overall rejection of the need for a theory of knowledge. The problem with Rorty, at least for our purposes, is that he nowhere discussed the arts in general in the context of our ongoing dialogue. In fact he himself said that he has little feel for the arts, and therefore did not consider them in this light.<sup>10</sup> We may find greater possibilities, then, in turning to Dewey. Is there in Dewey's understanding of knowledge and truth a way to accommodate the cognitive dimension of art?

There are certainly *prima facie* reasons to think that Dewey's approach to knowledge has potential for us. First, he rejected the subjectivism of traditional epistemology so that knowledge is no longer to be understood in terms of beliefs held in the mind that then need to be evaluated for their reliability in relation to an external world. Knowledge is no longer a matter of beliefs, except possibly in the more extended Peircean sense. A second and related point is that knowledge is a matter not of what we think but of what we can do in relation to our lived environment. This understanding of knowledge provides much more room for the broader sense of knowledge and cognition to which the arts point. Third, as we have seen, Dewey explicitly acknowledges the possibility that art can be cognitive. The fourth and perhaps the most important reason for hopefulness with respect to Dewey's approach is that both knowledge and art are understood within the broader category of experience. There is what we might call a hermeneutic link between them that may be immensely helpful. It appears to be possible, then, to build into Dewey's sense of logic the cognitive dimension of art in ways that are impossible in contemporary analytic epistemology, naturalist or otherwise.

What, if any, are the obstacles to so doing? There do appear to be potential stumbling blocks. First, Dewey, like the naturalist epistemologists, understood science to be the

paradigmatic instance of knowledge. Of course he had a broader understanding of scientific inquiry than the Quinean naturalists have, but still his approach to epistemology, or to logic as he preferred, is undertaken in relation to inquiry. Even if inquiry in his sense is not understood to rely on representations, it is not clear that it can accommodate knowledge that results from query of the sort that characterizes the arts. This points to a second potential problem, which is that in the end for Dewey knowledge is about propositions and warranted assertability, which as we have seen is likely to be too restrictive to handle cognition in the arts simply because the arts are not for the most part about assertions, warranted or otherwise. Dewey appears to have understood this; in fact it is the very point he is making in *Art as Experience* when he warns that we do not want to construe knowledge in art in such a way that it imitates knowledge in science. This insight, however, does not appear to have been turned back on his own conception of knowledge such that knowledge can be understood more broadly than as a matter of propositions and assertions, even if their warrant is to be judged in terms of functional success.

It is instructive to note that Dewey, unlike Buchler and as we shall see Langer, was not disposed to emphasize the differences between knowledge in science and knowledge in art. On the contrary, his inclination was to emphasize their similarities. He does so, however, not by trying to argue that either is simply a form of the other, but rather that both exemplify a more general, creative process. Consider, by way of illustration, the following passages from *Experience and Nature* and “Qualitative Thought”:

...if modern tendencies are justified in putting art and creation first...It would then be seen that science is an art, that art is practice, and that the only distinction worth drawing is not between practice and theory, but between those modes of practice that are not intelligent, not inherently and immediately enjoyable, and those which are full of enjoyed meanings.<sup>11</sup>

Science is an instrumentality of and for art because it is the intelligent factor *in art*.<sup>12</sup>

Thinking is preeminently an art; knowledge and propositions which are the products of thinking, are works of art, as much so as statuary and symphonies.<sup>13</sup>

The logic of artistic construction and esthetic appreciation is peculiarly significant because they exemplify in accentuated and purified form the control of selection of detail and of mode of relation, or integration, by a qualitative whole...Artistic thought is not however unique in this respect but only shows an intensification of a characteristic of all

thought. In a looser way, it is a characteristic of all non-technical, non-“scientific” thought. Scientific thought is, in its turn, a specialized form of art, with its own qualitative control.<sup>14</sup>

...the gist of the matter is that the immediate existence of quality, and of dominant and pervasive quality, is the background, the point of departure, and the regulative principle of all thinking...”Scientific” thinking, that expressed in physical science, never gets away from qualitative existence...Construction that is artistic is as much a case of genuine thought as that expressed in scientific and philosophical matters, and so is all genuine esthetic appreciation of art, since the latter must in some way, to be vital, retrace the course of the creative process.<sup>15</sup>

There is a sense in which Dewey in these passages can be read as proposing something like Buchler’s point that science and art are both forms of query. Dewey puts it differently by emphasizing the point that both science and art exemplify a creative process in which, as he describes it, there is invariably a qualitative background in terms of which scientific and artistic products derive their meaning and import. When he says, for example, that both science and art are instances of “the control of selection of detail and of mode of relation, or integration, by a qualitative whole” it seems to be pointing to something similar to what Buchler means by judgment. Thus there is an important and valuable dimension of Dewey’s approach in that he neither radically distinguishes science from art such that neither can do anything that the other does, such as have a cognitive character, nor does he reduce either to the other and thereby limit their distinctive functions. In this respect Dewey appears to enable a more satisfactory understanding of possibility of cognition in art.

Indeed, as in the case of naturalist epistemology, it may be possible to recast Dewey’s logic in such a way that it can accommodate the cognitive dimension of the arts. In fact it seems to be a much more promising project than an attempt to do so for Quinean naturalism. Whether it can be successful, however, is not obvious, and certainly not something we are entitled simply to assume.

Another source of insight into the question of the cognitive dimension of art is Susanne Langer’s treatment of the issue. As will be clear from the quotations below, Langer understands art as a symbolic form that has the function of expressing human feeling. Science and other modes of discourse, by contrast, are symbolic forms that have the function of enabling thought and discursive communication. Thus science and art are both symbolic forms, though they differ

in that one enables conceptual thought and discourse while the other enables the expression of the subjective feeling of experience. Each in its own way can generate knowledge.

Langer developed this analysis in *Feeling and Form* and in *Problems of Art*. The latter is a more summary expression of her views and provides a clear entre into her understanding of the issue. She makes the clear distinction there between discursive and artistic symbolic forms:

Language is the symbolic form of rational thought...The structure of discourse expresses the forms of rational cognition; that is why we call such thinking “discursive”...To express the forms of what we might call “unlogicized” mental life...or what is usually called the “life of feeling,” requires a different symbolic form...This form, I think, is characteristic of art and is, indeed, the essence and measure of art.<sup>16</sup>

That the expression of the “life of feeling” has or can have a cognitive dimension in Langer’s view is clear enough: “even the discursive pattern has its limits of usefulness... Yet there is a great deal of experience that is knowable...yet defies discursive formulation, and therefore verbal expression: this is what we sometimes call the *subjective aspect* of experience, the direct feeling of it...”<sup>17</sup> The function of art is the expression of this “direct feeling” of experience, and that expression, in that it brings into focus a dimension of experience “that is knowable,” is cognitive.

Thus the initially necessary ingredients for a suitable analysis of the cognitive dimension of art are to be found in Langer. First, it is clear that for her art enables us to know something, specifically the subjective aspect of experience. Second, art is distinguished from discursive, propositional knowledge in such a way that both share the critical feature of cognitive activities, i.e. both are symbolic forms, but neither is reduced to the other, which is to say that each retains its distinctive features as cognitive activities. But as for Dewey, it is not clear on the face of it whether her understanding of knowledge in general, and art in particular, is adequate to a fuller understanding of cognition in art. For one thing, it is not clear that it is appropriate to say of art that it has only one function, for example that it expresses feeling. It is one thing to understand art as a distinctive symbolic form, analogous to Buchler’s understanding of it as paradigmatic of exhibitiv judgment. But it is quite another thing to attribute one function to art. On the face of it art does many things and has many functions. To express subjective experience or “feeling” may or may not be one of them. But even if it is, there does not appear to be good reason to limit its function in that way.

Despite these potential shortcomings, Langer's analysis bears further scrutiny. We have suggested that it may be worthwhile in the case of naturalist epistemology to make an effort to recast it with the cognitive dimension of art in mind. We have also said that Dewey's understanding warrants further consideration because there is a great deal of promise there. We may comfortably say the same for Langer. It is likely to be a profitable exercise to make use of her concepts and insights to develop a more adequate understanding of art, one that answers to our experience of art's cognitive dimension and to its multi-functional character.

Buchler was almost certainly aware of Langer's work on art when it appeared in the 1950s, if for no other reason than that they both moved in the same circles in the New York philosophical community. Surprisingly, though, Buchler does not take up her analysis as he developed his theory of judgment and art's character as exhibitiv judgment. Dewey's tendency to think of knowledge in terms of inquiry, however, is a shortcoming to which Buchler has directly pointed. Indeed it is from Buchler's point of view a major shortcoming of Dewey's conception of experience in general.<sup>17</sup> If this criticism has a point, then indeed we need a more adequate understanding of the various ways nature may be questioned and investigated, and by implication of the knowledge that may result. We have suggested earlier that Buchler's theory of judgment and his concept of query provide such an improved understanding. Judgments of any kind may yield knowledge. Sometimes they are assertive and propositional, in which case we may achieve knowledge that is susceptible to the evaluative categories appropriate to assertive judgments, such as truth-value. Sometimes they are exhibitiv, in which cases we may achieve knowledge that is to be evaluated in other terms, for example by the deeper understanding and appreciation it enables or by the expanded possibilities it reveals. The former cases are knowledge of the sort that results from the sciences, mathematics and philosophy; the latter are instances of knowledge appropriate to the arts. Neither is reducible to the other, neither is defined in terms of the other, and taken together they enable a broader understanding of knowledge and they reflect the richness of our experience, aesthetic and otherwise.

We have suggested three possible research programs or projects that are indicated by this effort to take seriously the cognitive dimension of art. The first would be a revision of analytic naturalist epistemology by regarding knowledge through art as an additional paradigm along with the knowledge that results from the sciences. The second would be a revision of Dewey's theory of inquiry such that the hermeneutic link between knowledge and art that Dewey himself

points too can be made the basis of an expanded understanding of knowledge. The third is a consideration of Langer's view that discursive reason and art are two different symbolic forms, each capable of generating knowledge. We may now suggest a fourth, which would be a more thorough development of the theory of judgment into a conception of knowledge that not only enables but also demonstrates in greater detail the cognitive dimension of art. In this effort one might also bring to bear the insights from other theories that represent similar attempts. Susanne Langer is an obvious source, as is the hermeneutic tradition from Heidegger through Gadamer to Vattimo. In the end Rorty may or may not have been right that epistemology as it is practiced in the analytic tradition is a dead end. As we have seen with respect to analytic naturalist epistemology he was almost certainly right. But he was wrong to think that there is no good reason to continue to ask after the nature and varieties of knowledge. If nothing else, doing so allows us to develop a coherent understanding of the cognitive dimension of art, and in so doing we are able to enhance our appreciation of the profound role that art and aesthetic experience play in our lives.

## NOTES

1. John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, Later Works, Volume 10, edited by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press. See Chapter XII.
2. Ibid.
3. See the catalog from this exhibition: *The Adventures of the Black Square*, The State Russian Museum, Palace Editions, St. Petersburg 2007.
4. One might look at virtually any of McDermott's writings as illustrations of the point, but a good place to begin would be "To Be Human is to Humanize: A Radically Empirical Aesthetic," in John McDermott, *The Culture of Experience*, New York: New York University Press, 1976, pp 21-62. One might also consult his most recent collection of essays, *The Drama of Possibility: Experience as Philosophy of Culture*, Douglas R. Anderson, ed., New York: Fordham University Press, 2007. For a valuable overview of the aesthetic as the seed of philosophic insight see Richard E. Hart's "Landscape and Personscape in Urban Aesthetics," in James Campbell and Richard E. Hart, eds., *Experience as Philosophy*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2006.



5. Susan Sontag, *Reborn: Journals and Notebooks, 1947-1963*, David Rieff, ed., NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008; Orhan Pamuk, "My Turkish Library," *New York Review of Books*, December 18, 2008, pp 69 – 72.
6. Buchler uses the expression "knowledge through" to refer to poetic knowledge. See Justus Buchler, *The Main of Light*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974. See pages 150 ff.
7. The theory of judgment and the concept of query are developed most thoroughly in Justus Buchler, *Nature and Judgment*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1955. See Chapters I and II.
8. For a clear exposition of these points from a proponent of naturalized epistemology see Hilary Kornblith, "In Defense of a Naturalized Epistemology," in John Greco and Ernest Sosa, eds., *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 1999, pp 158-69. Another useful overview, though in this case for the purpose of critical rejection, see Steven J. Wagner and Richard Warner, eds., *Naturalism*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993. See especially the Introduction, pp 1-21.
9. Good examples of this can be found in Matthew Kieran, ed., *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd, 2006. See specifically Chapter 7, Berys Gaut, "Art and Cognition," pp115-126, and Chapter 8, Peter Lamarque, "Cognitive Values in the Arts: Marking the Boundaries," pp 127-142.
10. Rorty makes the point about his disinclination to discuss the arts in an interview with Alexander Kremer. See Alexander Kremer and John Ryder, *Self and Society*, Rodopi Press, 2009, pp 227 - 241.
11. John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, LW Volume 1, edited by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988, pp 268 – 269.
12. Ibid., p. 276.
13. Ibid., p. 283
14. John Dewey, "Qualitative Thought," in *On Experience, Nature and Freedom*, Richard Bernstein, ed., New York, NY: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1960, pp 186-187.
15. Ibid., p. 198.
16. Susanne K. Langer, *Problems of Art*, New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957, pp 124 – 125.
17. Ibid., pp 21 – 22.

18. See *Nature and Judgment*, pp 104-05.