

An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art

An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art is a clear and compact survey of philosophical theories of the nature and value of art, including in its scope literature, painting, sculpture, music, dance, architecture, movies, conceptual art, and performance art. This second edition incorporates significant new research on topics including pictorial depiction, musical expression, conceptual art, Hegel, and art and society. Drawing on classical and contemporary philosophy, literary theory, and art criticism, Richard Eldridge explores the representational, formal, and expressive dimensions of art. He argues that the aesthetic and semantic density of the work, in inviting imaginative exploration, makes works of art cognitively, morally, and socially important. This importance is further elaborated in discussions of artistic beauty, originality, imagination, and criticism. His accessible study will be invaluable to students of philosophy of art and aesthetics.

RICHARD ELDRIDGE is Charles and Harriett Cox McDowell Professor of Philosophy at Swarthmore College. He is the author of five books, including most recently *Literature, Life, and Modernity* (2008), and the editor of four volumes, including *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Literature* (2009) and (with Bernard Rhie) *Stanley Cavell and Literary Studies: Consequences of Skepticism* (2011).

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RICHARD ELDRIDGE

Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania



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Acknowledgments

Hilary Gaskin suggested this book project to me. She secured insightful readers for my first proposal, and their comments and her suggestions helped me to find what is, I hope, a useful scheme of topics.

I have been fortunate to have had gifted teachers of philosophy in general and of the philosophy of art in particular. First among the philosophers of art who were my teachers, I thank Ted Cohen. I am grateful to have had his influence on the substance of my thinking about art and on my philosophical sensibility and style. This influence was evident to me continuously as I wrote, including but well beyond the direct discussions of his work in these pages.

Over the last twenty years I have had detailed conversations on every topic in this book with members of the American Society for Aesthetics. I am pleased to count its members as my colleagues and friends. It is a wonderful society, with members ready both to argue and to listen, always with genuine enthusiasm for both the practices of art and for philosophical understanding. The talks I have heard, the essays I have read, and the conversations I have enjoyed are far too numerous to detail, even if I could recall all the dates and names, as I cannot. Together with particular thanks to Stanley Bates (also once my teacher), who has heard and discussed so many ASA talks with me, I must let an expression of gratitude to the Society cover my manifold debts to all its members.

Alex Neill read a late draft of Chapter 8 and provided detailed and acute comments that led to improvements; any errors that remain are mine, not his.

The philosophers who have through their writing especially influenced my thinking are discussed in the text and listed in its footnotes. Among them, however, I especially note here Monroe Beardsley, my predecessor as a teacher of the philosophy of art at Swarthmore College. Though I have sometimes disagreed with him, I found much more agreement than disagreement between my thoughts and his as I worked through the topics of this book.

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I am pleased to think of myself as connected with him not only by philosophical interests, but also in sharing a common extended audience in the students of Swarthmore College. I have worked out many of my thoughts in this book in the course of teaching the philosophy of art to them and in the conversations that have accompanied that teaching. I am grateful to the college that Beardsley helped to shape and to the students who have graced my classes within it.

Joan Vandegrift read every sentence of this manuscript as it came into being chapter by chapter. She served as a patient scrutinizer of both the accessibility of the prose and the plausibility of the thought, as well as acting as a constant source of encouragement and support. I also thank Hannah Eldridge, Sarah Eldridge, and Jonathan Eldridge, who are now to my delight old enough to ask at the dinner table what I have been writing all day, to take an interest in the answers, and to offer thoughts of their own. Together Joan, Hannah, Sarah, and Jonathan have been this book's daily and first audience, and I thank them for encouraging me in their responses to think that it might find a wider audience as well.

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Preface to the second edition

Once again I am grateful to Hilary Gaskin, this time for proposing this revised and expanded edition and for seeing it through production.

The past ten years or so have seen a wide variety of important new work in aesthetics that is of very high quality. While the overall structure and argument of this book are unaltered in this new, expanded edition, I am pleased to have been able now to take substantial notice of the following significant (mostly) recent work: on the theory of pictorial depiction (Robert Hopkins, John Hyman, Dominic Lopes, Michael Newell), on demonstrative attention (John Spackman), on artistic form (Robert Kaufman, Martin Seel), on expression (Stephen Davies, Mitchell Green, Jerrold Levinson, Jenefer Robinson), on Hegel (Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert, Benjamin Rutter), on imagination (Gregory Currie, Kirk Pillow, Richard Moran, Martin Seel), on interpretation (Rita Felski, Alexander Nehamas), on emotion (Gregory Currie, Deborah Knight, Ted Cohen, Jenefer Robinson), on art and morality (Ted Cohen, Berys Gaut, Alexander Nehamas), and on contemporary art (Peter Bürger, Daniel Herwitz, Gregg Horowitz, Dominic Lopes, Sianne Ngai, Peter Osborne). I am also pleased to have been able to incorporate at least brief reference, which may be useful to some readers, to Denis Dutton and Stephen Davies on art and evolution, to Frederick Beiser on Schiller, and to Carolyn Korsmeyer and Aaron Meskin and colleagues on the theory of taste, among others. I have also taken the opportunity of a new edition to improve the clarity and precision of certain wordings where I could.

For roughly the past ten years, I have regularly discussed in detail most of the new work mentioned above with the members of the Philadelphia Area Aesthetics Reading Group: almost always including Noël Carroll, Paul Guyer, Susan Feagin and either Espen Hammer or Kristin Gjesdal, plus at various times Emily Brady, John Carvalho, Liz Camp, Lara Ostaric, Kirk Pillow, Nola Senczyszyn, and Mary Wiseman. The group has been mostly organized and most regularly

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hosted by Susan Feagin; we are all indebted to her for her efficiency and extraordinary hospitality. I cannot imagine a better setting than this reading group in which to think continuously, productively, and pleurably about contemporary developments in aesthetics. Its life has been a model for me of collegiality and mutual interest coupled with sharpness of engagement, and this new edition would certainly not be what it is without it.

Finally, I am grateful to my seminar students in the philosophy of art at Swarthmore, this time for having had the patience and goodwill over the last ten years to work with the first edition of this book and to talk with me imaginatively and critically about what art is and how it matters to them.