CO-PRODUCING ART'S COGNITIVE VALUE

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Abstract: *After viewing a painting, reading a novel, or seeing a film, audiences often feel that they improve their cognitive standing on the world beyond the canvas, page, or screen. To learn from art in this way, I argue audiences must employ high degrees of epistemic autonomy and creativity, engaging in a process I call 'insight through art.' Some have worried that insight through art uses audience achievements to explain an artwork's cognitive and artistic value, thereby failing to properly appreciate the cognitive and artistic achievements of artists. I move against this worry by arguing that in order to learn via insight through art audiences must collaborate with artists, sharing the labour and credit for the cognitive achievements they co-produce. I claim this co-productive outlook reveals that our appreciation of art's cognitive and artistic value involves far more audience participation than has hitherto been realised.*

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Artworks are regularly praised for inviting their audiences to see the world around them in new and improved ways. For instance, after viewing Monet's paintings of his garden at Giverny, an audience may laud the artwork for helping them to better perceive the aesthetic details of their own garden. After reading Elena Ferrante's *My Brilliant Friend*, an audience may recommend it to others due to the powerful ways it moved them to better understand their own friendships. After watching Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*, an audience may feel compelled to reflect upon details of Welles' performance in order to better grasp the ambitions and flaws of contemporary media moguls.

Let us assume that in each of these cases the audience arrives at some genuine insights about the wider world through their engagement with the artwork.[1] What is striking about these cases is that, for most audiences, the features of Monet's gardens are not identical to those of their own gardens, Ferrante's novels do not show them the exact histories of their friendships, and the contemporary media landscape looks very different to that of the 1940s. There is a gap between what the artwork presents, and the specific insights audiences arrive at. To

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[1] For an account of painting's ability to improve our perceptual capacities, see Lopes, 2005: 130-160. For an account of the way an artwork can improve our interpersonal understanding that illuminates both the Ferrante and Welles cases, see Green, 2008.

traverse this gap, audiences must figure out for themselves how to extend, translate, or otherwise creatively transform what the artist offers them in order to arrive at insights into the world beyond the canvas, page, or screen.

In this article, I aim to better characterise this way of discerning an artwork's cognitive value. Restricting my focus to work within analytic aesthetics, I will attempt to show that philosophers within this tradition have produced many interesting explanations of how this kind of learning takes place, but they have not addressed the difficulties it creates for our understanding of art appreciation.[2] I begin, in §1, by contextualising this phenomenon within the research project known as cognitivism. I propose that each of the examples above involves a form of learning that I call 'insight through art', which can be distinguished from a close relative I call 'insight in art.' I argue that the crux of this distinction is that the former involves high degrees of intellectual autonomy and creativity from audiences and grants them a share of the credit for any insights achieved, whereas the latter does not. In §2, I present the worry, raised forcefully by John Gibson, that insight through art makes the epistemic achievements of the audience central to explaining why an artwork deserves praise or criticism, and thereby loses focus of what makes the artwork itself worthy of appreciation. In §3, I offer my counter to this worry. I claim that many cognitive achievements are co-produced, with multiple parties pooling their epistemic labour to contribute to a shared project of inquiry and dividing the credit for arriving at insights between themselves. I argue that insights arrived at through art can also be conceived as co-productions, and, in §4, I show how this motivates measured opposition to Gibson's objections. In doing so, I advance the proposal that cognitivists should understand our appreciation of art's cognitive value as often involving far more audience participation than they have hitherto acknowledged.

1. Insight in Art and Insight through Art

Within analytic aesthetics, 'cognitivism' names a research project that attempts to answer two questions:

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[2] Though I will only focus on analytic aesthetics in this article, I acknowledge that philosophers in other traditions have pursued some similar lines of argument to the one I will lay out. See, for instance, the hermeneuticist Hans Georg Gadamer, 2013, who proposes that artworks communicate truths, but that audiences take a participatory role in the realisation of these truths. Unfortunately, comparison between my approach and those developed in other philosophical traditions falls outside the scope of this paper.

1) *The Epistemic Question*: How do artworks improve our epistemic standing?

2) *The Value Question*: Does an artwork's cognitive value contribute to its value *qua* art?

These two questions are closely linked. If we feel convinced that an artwork is valuable to us because we have improved our cognitive standing, answering the epistemic question will be of great importance in order to characterise exactly what this improvement consists in. However, if we only have an answer to the epistemic question then we cannot understand what role learning from art plays in our art appreciative practices.[3] In this article I will not offer any novel response to the epistemic question, and I will place to one side sceptical objections to the very idea that art can be a source of insight. I will assume that we can gain insights from artworks, with 'insight' referring to any point that a process of inquiry can be considered to be brought to a close, and at which one can appreciate that one's epistemic standing has improved in a non-trivial way (leaving open the exact epistemic concept that best characterises this improvement, be it higher degrees of belief, knowledge, understanding, wisdom, etc.). Rather, my aim is to introduce a novel distinction between two different ways existing cognitivist answers to the epistemic question understand the distribution of credit for insight, which I will call 'insight in art' and 'insight through art' respectively. By distinguishing these two ways of learning from art, we can better appreciate the overlooked impacts they have on how cognitivists can answer the value question.

When concentrating on insight in art, cognitivists focus on how an artist has managed to realise some insights, and how they have conveyed these to their audience through their artwork.[4] On this view, audiences learn from art by attempting to grasp what insights the artist is conveying. Naturally, this is rarely a straightforward task, involving much difficult interpretive and appreciative labour on the part of the audience. But, once the audience does grasp the insights, they credit whatever they have learnt to the artist, seeing the insights as cognitive achievements the artist has realised and conveyed to them, rather than insights the

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[3] Some important studies – for instance, Elgin, 2002 – aim to *only* answer the epistemic question, and do not approach the value question. However, this approach is rare within analytic cognitivism.

[4] Throughout this article, I will talk of 'artists' rather than 'artworks' as pursuing and achieving insights. Where I use the term 'artwork' on its own, this should be understood as referring to the product and record of the intentional investigative activity of the artist rather than to the artwork as an independent agent. I remain neutral on the question of whether the relevant intentions need be those of an actual or hypothetical artist (for an overview of these alternatives, see Carroll, 2016a). Though I do not offer any extended defence of intentionalism here, my focus on artists is motivated by the fact that if we wish to focus critical attention on cognitive *achievements* then cognitivists have good reason to focus on artists and their intentions (a point I develop in §3). To identify achievements, we need to refer to what agents intend to do. Since most artworks are not best conceived as literally being agents or having goals independent of those of their makers, I think it is best to focus on artists.

audience have realised on their own.

Many cognitivists conceive of learning from art in this way. For instance, Stacie Friend has argued that even if literature contains many statements that are only true in the world of the fiction, literary artists often also directly convey various worldly facts to their reader, the epistemic status of which are not diminished by being asserted alongside things the reader is asked to only imagine (Friend, 2006). When audiences apprehend these facts, artworks can straightforwardly be said to convey knowledge to their audiences. Alternatively, John Gibson argues that artists can take knowledge that we already hold and help us better understand the world by enlivening it and giving it comprehensible shape (Gibson, 2007). For example, when engaging with Shakespeare's complex, humane depictions of jealousy in *Othello*, the many diffuse or abstract commitments concerning the nature of this emotion the audience may already hold are suddenly connected and clarified. In other words, Shakespeare's play provides its audience a full understanding of jealousy.

In both cases, the cognitivist tries to identify insights that the audience can credit to the artist. However, insight in art does not describe how learning takes place in the kinds of cases I am interested in. Take for instance the following phenomenon. One way in which generations of audiences across the world have appreciated Shakespeare's *oeuvre* is by exploring the ways it gives them insight into their own contemporary social and political context. For instance, Shakespeare scholar James Shapiro (2021) traces a long history of Americans of different race, class, gender, and ideological persuasion turning to Shakespeare to try to understand their contemporary domestic and international political crises. Key examples include Jane Addams' 1894 deployment of *King Lear* to better understand the dynamics of the Pullman strike, Orson Welles' innovative 1937 modern-dress production of *Julius Ceaser*, using the play to alert its audience to dangers of Italian and German fascism and contemporary liberal responses to it, and Mary McCarthy's 1962 analysis of *Macbeth* which brought to light the follies of the Cold War military-industrial complex. A recent contributor to this tradition is the Renaissance scholar and literary critic Stephen Greenblatt, who penned an op-ed for the *New York Times* proposing that *Richard III* can help readers better understand the 2016 US election (Greenblatt, 2016; significantly expanded in Greenblatt, 2018). Greenblatt proposes that Shakespeare's play shows us how tyrants require the help of others to aid their rise to power. Through the actions of the play's various supporting characters, both allies and enemies, Shakespeare lays out a taxonomy of the different motivations for enabling Richard's

political advancement. Some characters support him because they hope the status quo will be maintained, some do so because they overlook Richard's flaws, and others because they erroneously think they can take advantage of him.

By reflecting on all the ways Shakespeare's characters aid and abet Richard, Greenblatt, like many commentators, directors, and audiences before him, proposes that we can better understand events taking place centuries after the playwright's death in countries and political systems that did not even exist in the artist's own time. But how might we arrive at these latter insights? It is impossible for Shakespeare to have any specific insights to convey about the details of the 2016 US election. Though he may provide interesting reflections upon the general themes of power and politics, in order to arrive at specific insights about the vanities, complicities, and ignorance of Trump's enablers, and understand how they are shaped by the specific political context of early twenty-first century America, an audience has to translate, extend, or otherwise creatively appropriate what they find in Shakespeare to fit the details of the world beyond the text.

I call this kind of learning process 'insight through art.' Here, audiences take artists to not just provide them with fully formed insights, but with open-ended prompts that motivate and guide their further inquiry into the world around them. In doing so, artists invite audiences to deploy their own background knowledge and intellectual skills in order to bring inquiry to a close. Instead of attempting to apprehend what insights the artist has realised, audiences who engage in insight through art are invited to have a hand in originating insights. In doing so, audiences who engage in insight through art can also offer themselves a degree of credit for achieving insight.

To be clear, the point of distinction between these two forms of learning is not that insight through art necessarily involves more cognitive labour from the audience than insight in art. As suggested above, working out what insights are in art is often a cognitively demanding task for an audience, requiring much careful analysis of the details of the artwork and judicious consideration of the background knowledge they must use to support this analysis. Rather, the central point of distinction between these two ways of learning from art is that in insight in art audiences labour to ascertain what insights the artist has realised, whereas in insight through art they work to originate novel insights with the help of the artwork. Consequently, in insight in art, credit for producing the insight goes to the artist rather than the audience,

whereas in insight through art it can be shared between artist and audience.

However, insight in art and insight through art should not always be thought of as exclusive ways of learning from art. To fully compass the cognitive value of art cognitivists often have to make use of both frameworks. In one and the same artwork we often find artists putting forward fully formed insights in one part of the work, and open-ended prompts in another.[5] There may even sometimes be interesting interpretative debates to be had about whether some aspect of an artwork should properly be understood as a fully formed insight that the artist is attempting to convey, or if it may actually be more cognitively open-ended than it first appears. Moreover, in some cases, insight in and through art may overlap. An audience may first need to grasp some information that an artist is trying to convey before they can turn to reflect on how it influences their exploration of the wider world: Greenblatt has to show us Shakespeare's insights into the politics of Medieval England before we can work out how they might lead to a better understanding of twenty-first century America.

However, many cognitivists have argued that not all insight through art needs to begin with first grasping the insights conveyed in the artwork. One group of cognitivists have claimed that artists give us epistemic access to parts of the world not by making assertions, but by getting us to better see the epistemic significance of our existing commitments. One way in which this happens is through exemplification, where an artwork refers to some property or set of properties that it itself instantiates (Goodman, 1976; Caldarola, 2021; Vernazzani, 2023). For example, Catherine Elgin sees this at work in Yvonne Rainer's experimental dance works, which are often solely constituted by everyday movements like walking, sitting, standing, and moving objects (Elgin, 2017: 205-220). Whereas prior dance traditions used bodily gestures to convey narratives or emotional states, Rainer's movements are not used to refer to anything beyond themselves. By isolating these everyday gestures, these works draw their audience's attention to aesthetic features of bodily movement that they may usually overlook. Elgin claims that Rainer give us better 'epistemic access' to the subtle properties of movement they exemplify, helping us better notice and investigate their extension in the world beyond the artwork.

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[5] See, for instance, Peels, 2019. Though he doesn't stress the distinction I am aiming at, he finds that one and the same novel can both straightforwardly convey certain kinds of knowledge to audiences at some points, and at others also educate audiences in epistemic virtues and present hypotheses which they can deploy in other projects of inquiry beyond the artwork.

Another set of cognitivists have suggested that artists, especially authors of literary fictions, provide audiences with live hypotheses. David Novitz and Peter Kivy propose that literary artists present audiences with scenarios that represent the world being a certain way but fall short of offering confirmation that the world is indeed this way. As Novitz proposes

> Critical readers … assess the [literary] hypothesis either in terms of the extent to which it coheres with their established beliefs, or by tentatively projecting it on to the actual world. If, in the latter case, it is supported by the readers' experiences – that is, if it enables them to negotiate the world more successfully and to make sense of objects and events in their environment – they will adopt it, believe it, and in the light of corroborating experience, will gradually come to regard it as knowledge. (Novitz, 1987: 132)

On Novitz and Kivy's understanding, the hypotheses artists offer are epistemically unresolved, since artists refrain from offering the supporting evidence necessary for confirming that the hypothesis is correct. The artist offers hypotheses in order to invite the audience to participate in what Kivy calls the 'laboratory of fictional truth', setting *them* the task of acquiring and assessing the relevant evidence to support or reject the hypothesis it offers (Kivy, 1998).

A third group of cognitivists have argued that artists improve our cognitive standing by posing questions or presenting us with ambiguities (John, 1998; Mikkonen, 2021: 59-88). This may seem like an unusual claim, since questions and ambiguities seem to indicate confusion rather than insight. However, these cognitivists have argued that confronting ourselves with confusion can actually serve to help us to grasp our current epistemic commitments. If we find a question compelling or an ambiguity troubling, it indicates that our epistemic standing is not as firm as we may have previously thought, and that we have reason to revise our current commitments. In doing so, an artist can prompt us onto new paths of inquiry that were previously obscure.

Diverse as these approaches are, I submit that they all characterise art's cognitive value as arising from what I am calling insight through art. Emphases, hypotheses, questions, and ambiguities fall short of fully formed insights since, on their own, they do not bring inquiry to

a close.[6] To actually achieve insight, audiences need to engage in some further cognitive labour, seeing how their cognitive standing can be improved by employing these prompts in their own projects of inquiry. To find out whether noticing a particular property emphasised by an artwork is actually epistemically illuminating, an audience has to see for themselves what it helps them notice in the wider world; in order to work out how insightful a literary hypothesis is, an audience has to work out for themselves how to test it and consider how best to judge the evidence they acquire; to feel the cognitive force of a question or ambiguity posed by an artwork, an audience has to try to resolve it for themselves. In short, the cognitivist positions I have just briefly sketched all follow Eileen John's assessment that, in the case of insight through art, we need to credit "the reader [or, more generally, audience] as generating the interesting conceptual results" (John, 1998: 333).

2. Cognitivism's Textual Constraint

Though contemporary cognitivists use both insight in art and insight through art to answer cognitivism's epistemic question, the cognitivist John Gibson has signalled caution when using these to motivate responses to the value question. Whilst he allows that both ways of engaging with art can help audiences improve their cognitive standing, he argues that we have reason to doubt that insight through art plays any serious role in appreciating an artwork's artistic value.[7]

To motivate this, we must better understand what art appreciation involves. According to a recent view, we appreciate art by asking 1) what an artist is trying to do with their artwork, 2) whether the artist manages to non-accidentally make an artwork that succeeds in doing this via the particular artistic means they deploy, and, when they succeed, 3) whether what the artwork does is indeed valuable in any way (c.f. Gilmore, 2011; Carroll, 2016b, 2022; Dyck and Jonson, 2017).[8] By answering 1) and 2) we can work out if an artwork is a candidate for

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[6] This is just a sample of three ways analytic cognitivists have articulated insight through art. For further approaches that I have not considered here, see Walden, 2015 on the way art creates revolutions in our moral frameworks, Camp, 2018 on the way artworks can present us with open-ended perspectives to see the world through, or Peacocke, 2021, on art's ability to expand our phenomenal imagination.

[7] This is similar to the canonical anti-cognitivist argument offered by Lamarque and Olsen, 1994. However, Gibson is a cognitivist, concerned only with critiquing insight through art, rather than the appreciative relevance of any attempt to learn from art whatsoever. I have chosen to focus on Gibson because his arguments have received considerably less attention.

[8] Carroll takes the function of artworks to be fixed by the artist's actual intentions, whilst Gilmore (2020: 214-15) takes a looser stance, allowing that intentions may also be fixed by historical context or genre convention. I will remain neutral on which approach is favourable.

evaluation *as* art, and by answering 3) we can come to a further verdict on whether it is good or bad art. On this view, the cognitivist art appreciator is thus interested in trying to understand 1) what cognitive goals an artist might be striving towards, 2) whether they have actually managed to achieve these goals in non-fortuitous ways using their chosen artistic means, and 3) whether the cognitive ends they have brought about are any good, epistemically speaking.

This is the basic account of cognitivist art appreciation I will depend upon in this article, and I will return to its finer details throughout.[9] For now, it is enough to note that if an artist aims and succeeds at realising insights, these can be regarded as "cognitive achievements" (Gibson 2009: 467).[10] Moreover, if these insights have been brought about through their deployment of distinctly artistic means, these will also, at the same time, be distinctly artistic achievements.[11] As such, on this view, art appreciation centrally focuses on discerning what cognitive and artistic achievements can and cannot be credited to the artist.[12]

With these assumptions in hand, we can motivate Gibson's objections against insight through art's relevance to art appreciation. First, Gibson advances what I will call the 'Wrong Achievement' objection. Paradigm epistemically valuable achievements such as knowledge and understanding are usually taken to be realised once inquiry is brought to a close.[13] The advocate of insight through art focuses on inquiries that are ended not by artists, but by audiences. If appreciative activity is meant to focus on the cognitive and artistic achievements of artists, then a cognitivist appreciator who focuses on insight through art puts their attention in completely the wrong place: "I point in the wrong direction if I gesture toward myself instead of artworks when specifying the site of cognitive insight and discovery." (Gibson,

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[9] A consequence of this approach is that I will not be defending '*aesthetic* cognitivism', which is a position that usually takes artistic value to be identical to aesthetic value and thus tries to answer the value question by showing that learning from art has some significant aesthetic component. On the approach I am relying on, artistic value cannot be reduced down to one *kind* of value (c.f. Hanson, 2013), but is rather a particular way of realising an open-ended set of values, be they aesthetic, cognitive, ethical, etc. This does not deny that there may be many interesting connections between an artwork's cognitive and aesthetic value, but it does away with the idea that artistic value is simply aesthetic value.

[10] See Bradford, 2016, who stresses that an achievement is the realisation of a goal that an agent intentionally aims to realise and manages to realise in a non-fortuitous way through the deployment of their own skills. On epistemic achievement, see Pritchard, 2009; Greco, 2010.

[11] It is too large a task for this article to delineate what makes a particular set of means 'distinctly artistic'. For examples of how this can be done, see John, 1998: 340-346; Lopes, 2014.

[12] For further defences of the connection between artistic value and achievement, see Dutton, 1979; Currie, 1989; Huddleston, 2012; Levinson 2016: 47-60. For criticism, see Grant, 2020.

[13] C.f. Kelp, 2021.

2008: 575). The advocate of insight through art counterintuitively tries to explain what makes the artwork valuable by focussing on the audiences' cognitive achievements. In doing so, the cognitivist risks ignoring the artist's achievements. Gibson proposes that an audience who engages in insight through art may be like a philosophy student who, being asked by their professor what they have learned after reading Plato, reports that they have learned 'a considerable amount of Attic Greek and some fine metaphors for drunkenness.' Though the student is showing that they have learned *something* from Plato's work, what they have learned is irrelevant to appreciating "the *cognitive labour* of Plato's dialogue, to the lesson *it* wishes to impart, to the insight *it* struggles to articulate" (Gibson, 2007: 25).

Following this, Gibson advances his second worry, which I will call the 'No Achievement' objection. Focussing again on literature, Gibson argues that:

> If literary texts offer suggestions, if they whisper possibilities and hint at new ways of approaching reality, on this indirect model [insight through art] it will always be the world that answers and never the literary work; it will always be reality (or our consideration of it) that determines whether the conceptions and perspective we find in literature can be turned into cognitively adequate, world-directed stances. (23)

By 'answer', I take it that Gibson means arriving at the fully formed insights that are the conclusion of a course of inquiry. If this is the paradigm epistemic achievement cognitivists attempt to track, then Gibson's further worry is that providing prompts is no real cognitive achievement in and of itself. On their own, open-ended emphases, hypotheses, questions, and ambiguities have indeterminate cognitive value until used, proved, or answered. If this can only be done when audiences investigate the wider world rather than the artwork, then it looks like an artist's own epistemic achievements are slight when regarded in isolation from the audiences' contributions.

To avoid these objections, Gibson suggests cognitivists adopt 'The Textual Constraint': "if a certain point or insight is not *in* the work … we cannot claim to have learned that point *from the work.*" (Gibson, 2009: 473, emphasis added) Though it is possible to learn things by engaging in insight through art, it ultimately leads to an audience appreciating their own cognitive achievements rather than the artwork's cognitive and artistic value. Should they wish to answer both the epistemic *and* value questions, cognitivists should place their attention *only* on insight in art.

3. Co-Producing Insights

Since audiences and leading art critics regularly praise artworks for their capacity to engage them in insight through art, and since many contemporary cognitivists use it to characterise art's cognitive value, Gibson's objections should be extremely worrying. However, they have received little discernible push-back from the many cognitivists who have argued for different forms of insight through art. As such, my task in the rest of this article is to provide a response on behalf of cognitivists attracted to insight through art. I propose that Gibson's objections can be overcome once we grasp that insights can be co-produced.

This proposal is motivated by the increased attention social epistemologists have placed on the fact that many significant insights are achieved through the work of groups of inquirers rather than individuals. Consider here the natural sciences where it has long been common to pursue insight as part of a research team rather than as an isolated individual.[14] Here, researchers with different skill sets join together to pursue a single, shared epistemic goal, dividing the required intellectual labour between themselves. Individual members of research teams become epistemically dependent upon their fellow researchers, perhaps relying upon others' hypotheses to guide their inquiry, or others' specific expertise to help them mount a line of experimentation, or relying on the results of others' experiments to formulate their own conclusions. The great epistemic benefit of working in this way is that individual researchers can offset their own cognitive limitations with the labour and expertise of the rest of the group. In this way, research teams can achieve epistemic goals that would be difficult or impossible to achieve as isolated individuals.

This kind of collaborative inquiry does not just take place within the sciences. Though scholars in the humanities tend to convey their insights through single-authored works, they often rely upon conversation with many other inquirers working on the same topic in order to help them direct themselves towards insight. Likewise, Emma C. Gordon (2017) has argued that counselling often has the structure of collaborative inquiry, counsellor and patient arriving at insights by engaging in dialogue with each other. Though there are many important differences between these domains of inquiry, the following account of co-

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[14] C.f. Cetina, 1999; Wagenknecht, 2016.

production aims to capture important commonalities between them.

In what follows, I will understand co-productions to be groups of inquirers who jointly intend to pursue the same project of inquiry together and do so by entering into relationships of epistemic dependence with each other. These projects of inquiry can aim at quite specific insights – such as attempting to work out how to produce a vaccine for a particular disease – or broader goals – such as attempting to gain a holistic understanding of a topic like free will or the long-term global economic impacts of World War Two. Parties enter into co-production by inquiring in ways that express a willingness to pursue the same project of inquiry as others, to pursue that project in collaboration with others, and to act in ways that will be conducive to the group's success.[15] In keeping with many theorists of shared intention, I propose that these shared activities can arise without any initial explicit agreement amongst parties to inquire together and without any specific plans being put in place to specify exactly how parties should move towards their goal (though one or both may sometimes be present).[16]

One key way to express that one is willingly pursuing a shared project of inquiry with others is by assenting to divide the epistemic labour necessary to pursue insight, and thereby assenting to depend upon the epistemic labour of others in order to achieve the group's shared goal. Again, this can be done through explicit agreements and plans, but it can also be done simply by making contributions that clearly rely upon and respond to the epistemic labour of those pursuing the same project. Importantly, one can become part of a co-production even if one doesn't actually come to realise the insight that the group is striving towards. One can contribute to a co-production by making the difference to another inquirer's ability to progress a shared project of inquiry by providing considerations that decisively move them towards insight.[17] This latter contribution could be achieved by creating a useful cognitive

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[15] Some have argued that a further condition for shared agency is a shared obligation that binds a group to act in a certain way and affects how they can collectively alter their shared intentions (Gilbert, 2014). If it is correct to say that co-productions in the arts credit or blame others on the basis of not just how they act as individuals, but on how they help or hinder the group pursue their shared projects of inquiry, then such obligations are likely to be at play in this domain as well. However, when it comes to the arts, I think much care needs to be taken when specifying the exact nature of these obligations, given unique normative flexibility we find in the arts (c.f. Earley, 2023). This goes beyond the scope of my current project, so here I will leave it open as to when and how co-productions in the arts do or do not meet the conditions thought necessary for shared obligations to form.

[16] See Gilbert, 2014: 26-28, who uses walking together and quarrelling as paradigm cases of shared agency, both of which regularly occur without much explicit agreement between parties, or any pre-planning, or any executive authority figure coordinating the activity.

[17] By 'make the difference' and 'decisively move' I mean that a contribution to inquiry will appear to be significant to an inquirer, to the extent that they feel they cannot reconstruct the main moves that have got them

artifact, cross-checking another party's findings, or reframing how inquirers view some part of the project by drawing attention to overlooked features, asking a novel question, or finding a new set of problems.

Just as members of co-productions distribute cognitive labour, they also often distribute the credit for the insights they achieve. This is most obvious in the sciences, where co-authoring research articles has become standard practice. But it is also visible in more subtle ways in the acknowledgements and patterns of citation in the single-authored outputs more common to the humanities. One reason credit is often distributed is that even if one party manages to actually bring inquiry to a close, focussing only on what they have done cannot explain how the achievement has actually been brought about. Since they have been dependent on the labour of others, to fully explain how they have arrived at insight they will need to cite the contributions of their co-producers. In fact, on the co-production view, bringing inquiry to a close is just one part of a larger achievement that can only be explained by understanding how all parties' contributions have led to this result.[18]

One will notice that the account of co-produced epistemic achievement I am offering is much less demanding than others available within social epistemology. One popular idea is that scientific research teams are not just co-productions, but 'epistemic groups' who collectively hold knowledge, beliefs, or justification (Lackey, 2021; Bird, 2021). My conception of co-production is far more minimal. Research on group knowledge or belief attempts to make sense of phrases like 'NASA knows that p' or 'the WHO is justified in their assessment of the situation.' Though this may sometimes be a way we wish to capture the achievements of co-productions, I think we often capture these achievements without invoking the idea that the whole co-production holds the same justification, knowledge, or belief. In many cases, we simply extend credit for achievements to another inquirer because their cognitive labour has made the difference to our ability to arrive at knowledge or belief. We can do this even if we don't take our co-producer to hold the knowledge or beliefs that we have realised. If this is right and if the distribution of credit should guide how we understand who is and is not part of a co-production, then the explanation of co-produced cognitive achievements does not necessarily require any additional claim that members of the co-production collectively know or believe the resulting insights.

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to their conclusions without reference to these contributions.
[18] C.f. Rescher, 2005.

I also allow that teams of co-producers can be both geographically and historically distant from each other. This is not unusual. Many co-produced research projects involve collaborators that are distributed all over the world, and may even be conducted over many different generations.[19] Yet even though you may never meet geographically or historically distant parties, if you have engaged in a shared project of inquiry and have been dependent upon each other for the project to progress towards insight, it seems right for you to share credit for the ways you have both contributed as co-producers to the success of your shared project.

Returning to my main theme, I propose that insights through art can also be understood as being achieved via co-production. Artists make artworks that attempt to pursue certain projects of inquiry, but they pursue their projects not by trying to bring inquiry to a close themselves, but by intentionally creating open-ended prompts which might be useful to others inquiring into the same topic. Audiences enter into co-production with the artist when they use these prompts to try to achieve insights into the same projects of inquiry that they take the artist to be pursuing.[20] When audiences respond to the prompts offered by an artist, they pool their own cognitive resources (e.g., their particular skills, their particular background knowledge) with the cognitive resources offered by the prompts in the artwork (e.g., exemplified properties, hypotheses, questions).[21] In order to explain how they have achieved the insights they realise, audiences must acknowledge that they have depended upon the artist's contributions to help them progress inquiry in ways that would be hard or even impossible without these contributions. Even if the audience still has to do more work responding to prompts to actually achieve insight, prompts offered by the artist still make significant and decisive contributions to the success of inquiry. Likewise, we can also take artists that encourage insight through art to be epistemically dependent. When artists intentionally offer open-ended prompts rather than fully formed insights, they are dependent upon further contributions from their audiences in order for the cognitively valuable insights they are striving towards to become fully realised. In insight through art, exclusively crediting

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[19] C.f. Cetina, 1999: 159-166

[20] As I will discuss in §4, this can be difficult interpretative project for audiences, given the fact that artists rarely state what their projects of inquiry might be and may actively create interpretative indeterminacy.

[21] I note that a more complete account would acknowledge the further parties involved in this process, such as all manner of mediators who facilitate interactions between artists and audiences like curators, editors, performers, technicians, art critics, etc.

artists or audiences would therefore fail to correctly explain the co-produced way in which insights have been achieved. When the artist makes the difference to the audience's epistemic success, and when the audience manages to make productive use of the prompts the artwork offers to fully realise the project of inquiry they are both pursuing, credit for that epistemic achievement must be *shared* between the artist and the audience. These co-productions can form even when the artist and audience are geographically and historically distant from each other and can form without any artist and audience having to make any explicit agreement to inquire together or forming any detailed plan for dividing the epistemic labour between themselves.

To better grasp how providing an open-ended prompt might make a credit-worthy difference to another party's ability to bring inquiry to a close, consider the example of questions. John Dewey characterised inquiry as beginning with confusion that halts us in our tracks. Our usual conceptual schemes don't get purchase on what we are confronted by, and we need to find a way forward or risk cognitive paralysis and, often, psychological distress. According to Dewey, formulating a question is the first step of taming confusions and getting inquiry up and running. An inquirer has to figure out exactly which features of a confusing situation are conflicting with their conceptual schemes and causing their usual patterns of thinking to falter. They must also work out which factors are most salient to the confusion, and which are merely peripheral. Though an inquirer who manages to formulate a question might not yet have an answer, beginning to clarify the exact nature of one's confusion is clearly a big step forward for the progress towards insight. As Dewey emphasised, a question sets the course for the rest of inquiry: "The way in which the problem is conceived decides what specific suggestions are entertained and which are dismissed; what data are selected, and which rejected; is the criterion for relevancy and irrelevancy of hypotheses and conceptual structures." (Dewey, 1938: 108) A good question thus delimits the criteria for an answer, even if the answer is not immediately apparent. For Dewey, there is much truth in the old saw that, with a well-framed question, inquiry is often brought close to its end.

Formulating a question thus often involves much serious cognitive labour and has a huge impact on the future course of investigation. However, though we regularly pose questions, not all questions automatically move inquiry forwards. It is possible to pose questions that wrongly frame the factors that contribute to our confusion, or to pose questions that too tightly constrain the space of possible answers or leave it so open that any answer will do.

Posing *good* questions is something that is a skill that many of us try to cultivate (Watson, 2018). When it is done well, we praise good questioners. Indeed, in fields like philosophy it is not uncommon to think that the greatest intellectual contributions can be made not just by giving answers, but by providing fruitful, ground-clearing questions.

Moving to a more social outlook, questioning is not just something we do on our own. In some cases, our skills might not be up to the task, and we need to turn to expert questioners to cut through our confusion. Members of a research team might show their work to trusted colleagues who they think can pose particularly precise questions that will help improve the cognitive standing of their projects. Academics do this informally but have also developed more formal ways of soliciting questions, such as giving papers at conferences and colloquia, or even submitting their work for interrogation via peer-review. In some disciplines, it has even become a convention to credit these expert questioners for both productively motivating and shaping their own capacity to arrive at insights.

This brief consideration of questioning provides a sample argument for how a well-formed open-ended prompt can take significant epistemic labour to produce and can make a decisive difference to another inquirer's capacity to bring inquiry to a close. When an artist poses a good question via the distinctly artistic means they employ, they both supply audiences with the motivation to push their inquiry in a certain direction, and productively constrain their future inquiry, allowing them to make further moves that were previously obscure to them. For example, Eileen John argues that Grace Paley's short story *Wants* pushes its audience to pose unusual, deeply philosophical questions such as what "the meaning of desire in relation to action" might be, or how a person's not wanting something might "count towards the evaluation of a person" (John, 1995: 339). Whilst she acknowledges that these may be questions moral philosophers are used to asking, Paley's achievement consists in vividly motivating her reader to inquire into these topics by showing how these questions are not just for the seminar room, but can be pressing in even the most quotidian moments of our lives. Moreover, John stresses that it is the distinctly literary means the artist uses that makes these questions compelling in a way that a work of philosophy might not be able to: its close attention to the subtle and conflicting changes of meaning a word can undergo in different contexts, presenting them through a compelling narrative filled with lyrical imagery. In doing so, the artist may help eliminate potentially paralysing confusion that stands in the way of an audience who are uncertain how to inquire into their own moral psychology. Indeed, an

audience may feel motivated to engage with the artwork precisely because it poses its questions in a more compelling, sensitive, or subtle way than they themselves can currently muster.

However, to bring inquiry to a close questions require answers. To unfold the cognitive value of Paley's story, the reader must still take the further step of thinking for themselves about how they might respond to the artwork's questions. In forming answers and arriving at insights, audiences receive a share of credit for supplying the additional cognitive labour needed to bring inquiry to a close. Provided similar arguments can be produced for exemplification, hypotheses, or ambiguities, we can see that when an artist confronts us with a prompt that makes a decisive contribution to an audience's ability to achieve insight in their shared project of inquiry, they are also due a share of credit for co-producing this cognitive achievement.

4. Loosening the Textual Constraint

The view of insight through art as co-production sketched above provides resources to move against both of Gibson's objections. But, as I now aim to show, the benefit of this view is that it is compatible with the idea that in order to judge an artwork's artistic value we need to understand what an artist has achieved. If the central point of the textual constraint is to align our appreciation of artworks with an attention to their cognitive achievements, then what I am proposing is in-keeping with this goal. As such, I am not suggesting that we reject the textual constraint. Rather, I argue that Gibson has made the textual constraint on cognitivism far too tight, and that we can loosen it to accommodate many cases of insight through art.

Gibson's Wrong Achievement objection assumes that to explain insight through art, we need only refer to audience achievements. In response, we can now see that co-produced insights cannot be adequately explained by isolating the epistemic labour of just artists or audiences, for this will not give us the full story of how insight through art has actually been achieved. Rather, we need to chart how artists and audiences have divided the epistemic labour required for a shared project of inquiry, and how each party has made decisive differences to bringing inquiry to a close. Thus, we can best understand the cognitively valuable achievements of insight through art by looking at how the cognitive labour that has brought about the achievement has been *shared* between the artist and the audience.

However, some ground must be ceded to the spirit of Gibson's objection. One may worry that even though entering into co-production with an artist might mean that both parties deserve some credit, clearly it is possible for the division of labour to be distributed in different ways. Co-producers can be given greater or lesser degrees of credit depending on how great or small a difference their contributions make. For instance, when a goal is scored in football, even though many members of a team contribute to making it possible, credit is often attributed to only some players according to the magnitude of their contributions. Sometimes the actual goal scorer shares credit for a goal with a supporting player who has had to pass many defenders and angle a particularly difficult cross to the actual scorer, who, due to the effort of the supporting player, has had to then expend little effort to get the ball in the goal. By contrast, when a single player manages to manoeuvre past difficult and energetic opposition to score a goal without much input from their teammates, it seems appropriate to focus our praise solely on the goal-scorer.

This introduces some moderation into the account I am developing. If scoring a goal in a team sport is like achieving an insight as part of a co-production, credit for the relevant achievement can be distributed in different ways. The defender of insight through art should be worried about cases where the audience does so much additional work on their own to achieve insight that it feels right to give them the lion's share of the credit. When we need to focus chiefly on the contributions of audiences, we can endorse Gibson's worry that the artist's contributions begin to look slight in comparison. However, whilst the defender of insight through art can grant this worry, the co-production view suggests that this is only one way epistemic labour can be divided. In some cases, audiences will do most of the work, but we can now see that in others the contributions of artists and audiences are more evenly matched or may even split in favour of the artist.[22] The account of co-production I have developed thus does not save *all* cases of insight through art from the Wrong Achievement objection, but it does significantly limit its scope. It is possible to have instances of insight through art where the Wrong Achievement objection fails to gain purchase. The upshot is

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[22] There may even be cases where artists do so much work that audiences deserve little credit. An artwork may reveal 'unconsidered ignorance' by posing a question that is so powerful that it brings the truth to the mind of the audience with little effort on their part (c.f. Peels, 2023: 79-81). In these cases, critical discussion will be necessary to determine whether the level of audience input is sufficient to rightly be considered instances of insight through art, or if it is so negligible that it is just better understood as insight in art achieved via a powerful leading question.

that rather than rejecting insight through art outright, cognitivists simply have to be judicious in assessing whether they are dealing with cases where the audience does most of the work, or cases where epistemic labour is more equitably distributed.

Turning to the No Achievement objection, we can now see that, when looking at co-productions, we should not expect bringing inquiry to a close to necessarily be the most important contribution to achieving insight. Gibson's fault here is overlooking the fact that posing the right question or constructing a good hypothesis may sometimes constitute a far greater contribution than finding the answer. An audience can appreciate an artist's contribution to achieving insight by acknowledging how their artwork has got them into a position to properly see how the world can answer their inquiry in ways they wouldn't have been able to achieve unaided. Naturally, we must be judicious in assessing how seriously a given question or hypothesis contributes to an audience's success in inquiry. But we can now see that, in many cases, being shown how the world answers is far from a meagre contribution to the achievement of insight.

Nevertheless, one may worry that there is a deeper problem that blocks us from being able to say that artworks have actually contributed to audience achievements. I have accepted that grasping what kind of achievement an artwork constitutes is central to the assessment of artistic value. To do this, the cognitivist evaluator tries to say what cognitive goal the artist was intentionally striving towards, and whether they have non-accidentally brought this goal about using the particular artistic means they have chosen. I also proposed that, to be a member of a co-production, one must pursue the same project of inquiry that one's fellow inquirers are also intending to pursue. Even though the inventors of the laptop may help a philosopher write a research article, on my view the inventors have not also co-produced the insights the philosopher achieves since the inventors did not also intend to pursue the same particular project of inquiry as the philosopher. So too, artists and audience must pursue the same project of inquiry if they are to be considered co-producers and share the credit for their collective achievements.

Now consider Greenblatt's use of *Richard III* to investigate the 2016 U.S. election. Given the above considerations, one may worry that this case is neither a genuine co-produced achievement, nor a genuine act of art appreciation. Since Shakespeare could have had no way of intentionally aiming to inquire into the 2016 U.S. election, he cannot be rightly

considered to have actually contributed to the achievement of these particular insights. Though the audience might have depended upon him to arrive at these insights, they have not entered into a co-production with him because no clear shared intention to inquire into the topic exists between artist and audience. In fact, the critic may claim that an audience has simply opportunistically roped the artwork into their own intellectual project, at the expense of focussing on the artist's own particular intellectual goals and achievements. Even though it might be possible for an audience to arrive at interesting insights by ignoring or even directly countering the artist's intended projects of inquiry and just investigating topics that interest them, these are not insights that can be said to be co-produced with the artist, nor to be cognitive and artistic achievements on the part of the artist. At best, they are simply cognitive benefits that the artwork accidentally elicits, insofar as these cannot be properly said to be connected to the artist's particular project of inquiry.

Accepting the intentionalist premises of the account of art appreciation and co-produced inquiry under consideration, I think it is possible to defend Greenblatt's response against these worries. Artists can devise prompts that intentionally aim to deliver insights into their particular subjects – e.g. the specific persons, objects, events, or processes it represents, such as the rise and fall of Richard III. But they can also devise prompts that intentionally aim to improve our cognitive grasp of broader, more abstract topics or concepts – what in literary theory are often called 'themes' (John, 2016: 212-214). In the case of *Richard III*, these could include 'power', 'tyranny', and 'political enablement.' On this framework, we can agree that the 2016 election is not an event that is a *subject* that Shakespeare could have intended to have any specific insight into. Nevertheless, this event still instantiates the broader themes of power, tyranny, and political enablement, and these are topics that many critics agree that Shakespeare strives to investigate in *Richard III*. If it is plausibly difficult to understand the particular details of the 2016 election without understanding the nature of these broader topics, and Shakespeare's play can prompt us to an improved understanding of these general topics, then his play can shape how we think about the many specific, subject-level contexts in which these general topics are instantiated. What this means is that even if Shakespeare couldn't intend to tell us anything specific about the 2016 election, he has tried and non-accidentally succeeded in providing us with prompts that can be applied to topics that, by their very nature, resonate widely in subjects far beyond those his plays address. In order to work out just what the magnitude of Shakespeare's cognitive achievement is with respect to these themes, we have to test just how far this resonance goes, which involves exploring

specific political subjects in the wider world. By investigating the 2016 US election, audiences can then in turn contribute to further improving our understanding of these wider themes, thereby joining Shakespeare's project of inquiry.

If this is what Greenblatt is doing, then he has not made *Richard III* a hostage to his own interests. Rather, he has appreciated how the play can make a meaningful, credit-worthy contribution to the achievement of insight into aspects of the world far broader than the subjects it explicitly aims to represent. By exploring its relevance to other subjects and how these improve our understanding of the themes that interested Shakespeare, Greenblatt in turn makes novel contributions to the same project of inquiry pursued by the artist. Where this kind of feedback loop obtains, we can say artist and audience have co-produced insight. By contrast, where an audience's projects of inquiry detach from any project of inquiry the artist can reasonably be interpreted to pursue, though the audience have certainly been inspired by the artwork, they are not entering into co-production with the artist.

However, it is important to acknowledge that there may be often much disagreement about how to adjudicate this matter. In scientific research teams or other academic co-productions the goals of inquiry that the team are striving towards are usually clearly stated and publicly available to the inquirers. By contrast, artists often do not make explicit what their intended themes of inquiry are. This means there can be interpretative disagreement over when exactly one is or is not inquiring into the same theme as the artist, especially when one is engaging with an artist who is long deceased. This is something I am happy to allow. I do not claim that it is always easy to work out if one is in a co-production with an artist, and it may involve a lot of interpretative debate to vindicate an audience's sense that they are really investigating the same thing as the artist. Co-productions within the arts are thus likely to be more informal and cautiously formed than those in other domains of inquiry. I cannot say how these interpretative debates should be resolved in all cases, but I hope to have provided a useful account of what signs might indicate that an audience has entered into a genuine co-production with an artwork.

5. Conclusion

These responses help to reveal the main fault of Gibson's objections: they emerge from seeing the cognitive achievements relevant to art criticism as being the preserve of individuals rather

than co-productions. If my suggestion that, when engaging in insight through art, audiences and artists can form such co-productions is correct, then we can see we have no reason to think that insight through art cannot be an appropriate way of learning from art whilst also appreciating the artist's epistemic and artistic contributions. Proceeding with necessary caution, we can vindicate the intuitive idea that artworks can often be rightly appreciated for yielding insight through art.

I believe that better grasping the participatory nature of appreciating art's cognitive value opens up many new lines of research for cognitivists. Let me end by pointing to one that I find particularly pressing. I have argued that, in insight through art, audiences must use their own cognitive skills and background knowledge to bring inquiry to a close. However, audiences come to artworks with different degrees of skill and different kinds of background knowledge. In many cases, it might be hard for an artist to know in advance what their audiences' capacities might be. This means that, when crafting prompts that strive to encourage insight through art, artists often take on quite some risk, gambling the cognitive value of their work on the hope that audiences will have the right capacity to meet the challenges their prompts lay down. When artists emphasise extremely subtle properties, or pose very difficult hypotheses, questions, or ambiguities they stretch the competencies of their audiences, increasing the risk that their audience might not be able to provide the necessary skills or background knowledge to progress inquiry further. It remains to be seen how cognitivists understand how these risks affect their understanding of learning from art and what the epistemic and moral responsibilities of artists and audiences should be towards their co-producers. I think this is an urgent yet wholly underdeveloped line of inquiry for cognitivism, and one that is only properly brought into view once we grasp the ways in which art's cognitive value is co-produced.[23]

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