



## *Methods of Analysis*

### **Artistic Analysis**

Stephen Petrina (2019)

Oh Muse, oh exalted power, help me.... Compared with my concept, how short and weak is speech. (Dante, ca. 1320/1921, *Divine Comedy*, Canto XVIII, XXXIII)

Artistic analysis refers to the analysis of art *and* an artful or arts-based analysis (ABA) of data, whether aesthetic data or otherwise. Typically, the first sense involves rendering artworks into analytical works while the second sense involves rendering or directing an analytical process into an artistic work. The first sense of artistic analysis, or aesthetic analysis, is often used interchangeably with “criticism” (e.g., art criticism, literary criticism) and “theory.” As Rink (2015) says of performance analysis, it “is generally used to refer to analysis of a particular performance either retrospectively or as it happens, but it could also apply to the type of analysis that precedes and potentially informs the performance in question” (p. 127).

Somewhat of an outcome of romanticism, artists, musicians, and various other creatives are often dismissive of critics and criticism or analysts and analysis of the first sense. “The supreme thing in life, the romanticist declares, is the creative imagination, and it can be restored to its rights only by repudiating imitation [and reason]” (Babbitt, 1919, p. 69). For example, poking fun at the way analysis handles art, Keats was fond of toasting “confusion to the memory of Newton, because he destroyed the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to a prism” (quoted in *The Art Amateur*, 1885, p. 117). Similarly, sentiment that “the work of art is born of the artist in a mysterious and secret way” became a romantic defense against analysis (Kandinsky, 1911/2008, p. 109). Given the wellsprings of imagination, there is skepticism of analytical tendencies to “externalize or rationalize the manifestations of the unconscious” (Ehrenzweig, 1961, p. 126).

Barzun (1974) outlines the problem: “Though artists say that they and the critics do not understand each other, they talk the same language.... The prevailing mode of criticism is analysis and its medium is pretentious jargon; that is, the critic undertakes to do with the work of art what the scientist does with the cosmos— exhibit its structure” (p. 118). He says he remembered “an article detailing fourteen earlier analyses of Blake’s Tyger, Tyger, burning bright,” all fourteen evidently on the wrong track.” This may reduce to the “old romantic notion that there is a ‘critical’ mind, and a ‘creative’ mind, and never the twain shall meet” (Wain, 1957, p. 372). Nevertheless, “the task of assimilating and controlling what has been done by one’s predecessors is a *critical* [or *analytical*] task” (p. 372).

The history of criticism— as analysis, commentary, critique, etc.— is part and parcel of art history and one might say that the production of artworks necessarily involves artistic analysis in this second sense. For instance, drama, whether African, Byzantine, Chinese, or Greek, traditionally involved artistic expression or representation of phenomena of life or the past. Dramatic histories, such as Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* (ca. 1597/1600), and historical fiction, such as Rowson’s *Reuben and Rachel* (1798), necessarily render historical analysis into artistic works. Do works inspired by life’s comments, events, feelings, and observations procedurally assume an analysis of these phenomena? Do works made out of ignorance assume the same?

Most observations and models of artistic creation identify analysis as central to preliminary procedures or stages. In *Applied Imagination*, Osborn (1953) emphasizes that analysis “plays a vital part in preparation, as well as in synthesis and evaluation. In fact, analysis can be quite as helpful to creative thinking as to judicial thinking” (p. 146). In this way, analysis means drawing out connections between existing and potentially new expressions. Ehrenzweig (1964) describes the stages of creative performance and production psycho-analytically: 1) first (“schizoid”) stage of projection of “fragmented parts of the self into the work”; 2) second (“manic”) stage of “unconscious scanning that integrates art’s substructure” into an ordered work; and 3) third stage of “re-introjection” of “part of the work’s hidden substructure... back into the artist’s ego” (pp. 102-103). Analysis resolves recurrent contradictions between the depth or shallowness of artworks and stereotypes of artists unable to meaningfully articulate how the artwork was made.

Certainly, artistic analysis implies artful or arts-informed research questions and problems but the emphasis tends to be on representation and research products. Hence, researchers commonly produce collages, images, poems, scripts for plays and videos, scores, and short stories as forms of artistic analysis. Less common, but well within the potential of artistic analysis, are acrobatics and gymnastics, dances, lyrics and songs, and sculptures. For instance, in the late 1990s Veda Hille wrote the music and Jennifer Mascall choreographed the dance for a theatrical biography of visual artist Emily Carr. Hille read everything she had written; every word in the lyrics is Carr’s except for a Whitman quote. “I have written and painted because I could not help it,” Carr wrote and Hille adapted or remediated as lyrics for “Exit,” the last song in the performance. One might judge the adaptation or derivative as better than the original. Perhaps easier than interpretive dancing and singing, or just different skills and techniques, artistic analysis more often takes a form of narrative analysis in the production of data-based stories and dramatic scripts. These derivative artifacts along with the production of images are common to arts-based research (ABR) and methods customized as artography and scholaristry.

Although it is possible to experience every concept and object aesthetically, transforming non-aesthetic data and phenomena into something aesthetic— aestheticization— begs pause. For instance, Benjamin (1936/1999, p. 270) is alarmed by the aestheticization of politics and instead advocates for the politicization of art (i.e., political sophistication). Just as the transformation of nature into artifact and artifice has limits, so does its aestheticization (i.e., “art is everywhere”). The dilemma here is art’s and artists’ desire to be liberated or released from things, perhaps especially from everyday politics, versus a sense that analyses and criticisms adhere to artworks, as barnacles and oysters adhere to objects (Hartley, 1921, pp. 243, 254; Williams, 1963, p. 90). Does an artwork change or transform its concept or object? Does analysis change or transform the artwork? Benjamin’s (1931/1999) answer is that artworks “were something else (in the course of their gestation) and become something else again (in the state of criticism)” (p. 547).

Artworks include images, objects, sounds, and texts, “irrespective of artistic quality” (*Copyright, Designs and Patents Act*, 1988, s. 4; Kearns, 1998). Nevertheless, choosing or creating an artwork for analysis does not dismiss one from judgment of artistic quality beyond the whims of personal preference and taste (i.e., tastes differ, *de gustibus non disputandum*). If art is simply quasi-directed expression, analysts are challenged to attend to how and why artists and audiences yield to these expressions and their signification. Among procedures for judgment are critical distance reflexivity. As one analyst writes, “my process was to read this book and to constantly stop and look at the page and think, ‘Was that really good?’” Another asks, “Is it my personal idiosyncrasy or is it that this [artwork] is not very good?” (quoted in Chong, 2013, p. 274).

1. What is analysis?
  - a. Prall (1936, p. 32): In the first place we must remind ourselves explicitly that analysis is not cutting things into pieces and destroying them. It seems gratuitous to make such an observation; for analysis is obviously a theoretical activity, an intellectual process. But it has been so dinned into our ears that analysis destroys instead of explaining, that we are likely to find ourselves believing this, though it could not conceivably be the case.
  - b. Guentchev (2018, p. 113): I use the term “analysis” broadly here, just as Langer uses the term “logic” broadly, to apply to any discernible pattern. She writes that works of art are the result of artistic analysis of feeling, presenting the logic or pattern of feeling to an audience through a sensuous medium. Just as the term “logic” is not restricted to the study of language, so I use the term “analysis” to apply to the perception of articulated patterns. When I say that the audience analyzes the pattern of a work, I mean that it becomes more sensitive to its structure. This analysis need not be a cognitive exercise of the order of art criticism.
2. What is Art(istic)?
  - a. Langer (1953, p. 82): We do not mean that we have insight into the actual flow and balance of his feelings, into that “character” which “may be taken as an index of the mind’s grasp of its object.” Language is quite inadequate to articulate such a conception. Probably we would not impart our actual, inmost feelings even if they could be spoken. We rarely speak in detail of entirely personal things. There is, however, a kind of symbolism peculiarly adapted to the explication of “unspeakable” things, though it lacks the cardinal virtue of language, which is denotation.
    - i. Guentchev (2018, p. 99): This other kind of symbolism is art. In other words, art picks up where language leaves off. It compensates for the shortcomings of language. Langer’s pursuit of a systematic philosophy or art relies on drawing sharp distinctions, so, in a philosophical system, each type of human activity, and by extension each type of symbolic activity, assumes its specific place in an overall unity. Their functions complement each other but do not overlap. The significance of each symbolic form is found precisely in its sharp demarcation from the others. Artists engage in analysis of the forms of sentience that they aim to articulate.
  - b. Sarason (1990, p. 1): Artistic activity is a unique, universal potential of the human organism, of all human organisms. I define artistic activity as an individual's choice and use of a particular medium to give ordered external expression to internal imagery, feelings, and ideas that are unique in some way for that individual. Copying is the polar opposite of artistic activity. Volumes have been written on the nature of creativity and the creative process. However much they differ in definition and emphasis, there is total agreement that the end product contains in some way the imprimatur of the maker.
  - c. Kearns (1998, p. 84): There used to be bounds to what was art; now that the boundaries are gone, and we have only the self-labelling artist rather than a standard for art, the law finds it difficult to justify imposing quality standards on what is now a culture independent of standard. This causes copyright law particular problems because it is not intended to protect the worthless. Law finds itself having to impose its own criterion of cultural worth, and it does this by more subtle means than declaration of an artistic policy outlining criteria for what is, and what is not, of sufficient quality to warrant protection. Any imposition of a legal definition of art would outrage the art world, which has no rules itself about what is art.
  - d. What is an Artwork?
    - i. Canada *Copyright Act* (C-42)
      1. artistic work includes paintings, drawings, maps, charts, plans, photographs, engravings, sculptures, works of artistic craftsmanship, architectural works, and compilations of artistic works; (*oeuvre artistique*)
        - a. compilation means

- i. a work resulting from the selection or arrangement of literary, dramatic, musical or artistic works or of parts thereof, or
    - ii. a work resulting from the selection or arrangement of data; (compilation)
  - 2. every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work includes every original production in the literary, scientific or artistic domain, whatever may be the mode or form of its expression, such as compilations, books, pamphlets and other writings, lectures, dramatic or dramatico-musical works, musical works, translations, illustrations, sketches and plastic works relative to geography, topography, architecture or science; (*toute oeuvre littéraire, dramatique, musicale ou artistique originale*)
- 3. What is Artistic Analysis?
  - a. Jeffrey (1947, p. 208): Perhaps the most obvious example of regarding relational contexts as opposing theories of criticism is that of artistic, "internal" analysis set against an approach which orients art to the social, historical, cultural setting. There are those who hold that art means the concrete work of art, and that the only legitimate questions are those which may be answered by an analysis of materials, form, and content. Then there are those who hold that art is a term summarizing a complex process in which the pre-conditions of a given work and the enjoyment of it are not merely essential factors, but more significant than those of internal qualities and creative technique. Stated in such exclusive terms, the controversy involves suspicion of broadly "social" analysis on the one side, and of limited "artistic" analysis on the other. The opposition has increased the heat, if not the clarity, of discussions on "art and propaganda". It has had its expression in discussions of art education, and of the appropriate and effective methods for teaching aesthetic appreciation.
  - b. Muhovič (1997, p. 217): artistic perception and thinking use the results of visual perception merely as a basis for critical analysis of the appearance of reality and—in the case of artistic creativity— its constructive transformation. The purpose of critical artistic analysis is to understand the circumstances and reasons leading to the particular appearance of a space or signs and to break away from the established sign schemes of visible ordinariness, whereas the purpose of artistic creation is to construct new possibilities for the coexistence of space and sign forms. Artistic thinking loosens the ossified perception of everyday visual space and the sign representations of objects in it, transforming the space and sign forms into new forms that are more acceptable, both historically and socially. The act of this semiotic transformation is the immanent content of artistic production and, consequently, of artistically produced signs.
  - c. Aesthetic Analysis:
    - i. Prall (1936, p. 25): Aesthetic analysis is not itself aesthetic appreciation— much less is it artistic creation— any more than mechanics is riding in an automobile or inventing an airplane. But its relevance to both appreciation and to composition in the arts can be shown to be at least as obvious as that of mechanics to automobilism.
    - ii. Fenner (2003, p. 41): Aesthetic experiences, if we are to treat them as "raw data," must be explored without preconception, prejudice, or limitation. And, truly enough, the vast majority of aesthetic experiences are not focused exclusively, in terms of their contents, on formal or simple-sensory matters. Aesthetic experiences are, first, experiences. They are complex things, having to do with things as tidy as the formal qualities of the object under consideration and with things as messy as whether one had enough sleep the night before, whether one just had a fight with his roommate, whether one is carrying psychological baggage that is brought to consciousness by this particular aesthetic object.... Aesthetic analysis has to do with separating out from our aesthetic experiences one specific part.
  - d. Romanticism

- i. Perhaps this is summed in belief that an artwork's "intrinsic value is an unanalysable quality" (Waterlow, 1926, p. 84).
- 4. What is ABR?
  - a. Barone & Eisner (2006, p. 95): What does it mean to say that an approach to educational research is arts-based? Two criteria apply, each elaborated on in subsequent sections of this chapter. First, arts-based research is engaged in for a purpose often associated with artistic activity: arts-based research is meant to enhance perspectives pertaining to certain human activities. For ABER, those activities are educational in character. Second, arts-based research is defined by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or *design elements* that infuse the inquiry process and the research "text." Although these elements are to some degree evident in all educational research activity, the more pronounced they are, the more the research may be characterized as arts-based. The design elements employed in arts-based educational research will, of course, vary according to the art form employed by the researcher. Most existing ABER has employed art forms that are primarily literary in character, such as short stories, educational criticism, literary essays, and (occasionally) theater and poetry. Arts-based research may, in principle, also take the form of nonlinguistic arts, including the plastic and performing arts.
- 5. Creative Process: Procedures or stages of creative performance or production
  - a. Wallas (1926, p. 93): I have inquired how far we can voluntarily improve our methods of thought at those stages— Preparation, Incubation (in its negative sense of abstention from voluntary thought on a particular problem), and Verification— over which our conscious will has comparatively full control. I shall now discuss the much more difficult question of the degree to which our will can influence the less controllable stage which I have called Illumination. Helmholtz and Poincare, in the passages which I quoted above, both speak of the appearance of a new idea as instantaneous and unexpected. If we so define the Illumination stage as to restrict it to this instantaneous "flash," it is obvious that we cannot influence it by a direct effort of will; because we can only bring our will to bear upon psychological events which last for an appreciable time.
  - b. Borgese (1939, pp. 144-145):
    - i. At the very outset of our investigation, artistic inspiration thus reveals itself to us as a frenzied internal figuration, frenzied in a dual sense, because of the artist's forceful approval of the vision which manifests itself within him, and because of the disturbance caused in him by the irresistible compulsion to bring this figuration to tangible being and to let it find its expression. The first German literary revolution, which was very competent in problems concerning the creative genesis of art, its inspirational phase, happily invented the phrase *Sturm und Drang*, "storm and stress." This phase does not define the entire artistic process, but only its first phase: *Sturm* is the tempest of enthusiastic vision; *Drang* is the creative urge, the drive towards expression.
    - ii. It is usual to define the second and decisive phase in the development of a work of art as realization, execution, expression in the empirical sense or even as technique, artistic work, or art in a limited meaning, subordinated and somehow opposed to poetry and genius, or more comprehensively as creation. This moment is extremely complex and consists of processes which are not entirely homogeneous, although they all tend towards the same end. Factors of will intervene conspicuously. Purely intellectual and rational faculties, elements of culture, scientific and mechanical knowledge, tricks of the trade, all these are now used.
  - c. Ehrenzweig (1964, pp. 102-103): The creative process can thus be divided into three stages: an initial ("schizoid") stage of projecting fragmented parts of the self into the work; unacknowledged split-off elements will then easily appear accidental, fragmented, unwanted and persecutory. The second ("manic") phase initiates unconscious scanning that integrates art's substructure, but may not necessarily heal the fragmentation of the surface gestalt.... In

the third stage of re- introjection part of the work's hidden substructure is taken back into the artist's ego on a higher mental level. Because the undifferentiated substructure necessarily appears chaotic to conscious analysis, the third stage too is beset with often severe anxiety. But if all goes well, anxiety is no longer persecutory (paranoid-schizoid) as it was in the first stage of fragmented projection. It tends to be depressive, mixed with a sober acceptance of imperfection and hope for future integration.

- d. Holub (1990, pp. 138-146):
  - i. Decision to Act... starts with a heavy burden of accumulated literature, then... this may work, this will work... an acute enthusiasm. Both poet and scientist can recognise all of these, in particular the acute enthusiasm!
  - ii. Doing It... discipline... tolerance for pitfalls... a lonely stubborn and defensive endeavour... the basic risk of losing... Again, the same phrasing applies to both.
  - iii. Finding It... The experience of the little discovery is the same when looking into the microscope and when looking at the nascent organism of the poem. It is one of the few real joys of my life. Or of anyone's life! And there is a further point of contact in the ultimate value of such exercises. Although as stated earlier... poetry and science move in... opposite directions... they do not aim... for opposite ends.