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Abstract

This dissertation proposes a theory of art founded on sociocultural accounts of creativity, with conceptual art as its explanatory model. This proposal is a direct response to Dom Lopes's thesis in *Beyond Art*, which argues that a theory of art is not viable and that such theorizing should be passed to individual arts. Requirements for a viable theory of art emerge via a sustained critique of Lopes's arguments. These requirements can be met by turning Lopes's account of marginal "hard cases" on their head, centralizing the model of conceptual art as explanatory paradigm. Additionally, I introduce the "even harder cases", cases that function as art without any recognition as 'art'; the treatment of these cases, along with work in the area of sociocultural creativity and social justice theory helps to build an Aristotelean account of how art is a fundamental function of all human societies. This proposal then carries with it the implications of revising what we think counts as artworks and not.

THE EVEN HARDER CASES:
HOW CONCEPTUAL ART AS A PARADIGM AFFIRMS THE VIABILITY OF A THEORY OF ART

by

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Dissertation

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Thank you to Luvell, Kim, Ken, Fred, Alex, and Sam. And to Hille and Ben. Above all, to Annie.

This is completely name-dropping, but I once asked the epistemologist Keith Lehrer (we'd met driving around town going to art galleries together) where to study the philosophy of art. "Dom is the lion" was the reply.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Overview of Chapter

In this first chapter I will establish Lopes's core arguments for abandoning a general philosophic theory of art, a brief overview of terms and the shape of the debate, as well as a preliminary sketch of the positive view that emerges. This overview will introduce Lopes's "hard cases", works of conceptual art that have baffled traditional aesthetic theories and intuitions.¹ As conceptual art plays a central role in both the critique and the positive view on offer, it will be explained historically and theoretically, with key examples of conceptual art provided. I will also introduce new conceptually creative non-art cases, what I'm calling the "even harder cases", works that are not considered 'art' yet perform the same function as works that are. These even harder cases will serve as key tests for multiple theories—Lopes's, my own, key figures in the philosophy of art and the philosophy of creativity, as well as in psychological accounts of creativity. I will also introduce the main structure of the project, along with a brief overview of relevant debates in the philosophy of art.

¹ Note that the 'concept' in conceptual art does not indicate the philosophical study of concepts that one would associate with say Fodor and Pylyshyn. In the usage here, 'conceptual' picks out the ideas. Conceptual art has been known by different names, one being 'idea art' which perhaps is closer to the spirit of what the artists, theorists, and critics have in mind. As will be explained at different points throughout his work, the understanding of conceptual art I have in mind is a broad understanding of ideas motivating artworks. Philosophers of art have a looser understanding of this term than the art historian.

1.1 Introduction: buck-passing, the hard cases, aesthetics, and conceptual art

I think Dominic Lopes is mistaken about a fundamental aspect of the philosophy of art. Lopes claims that we cannot successfully establish a general theory of art, and that instead we should divide the task up along the lines of individual arts. The question ‘what is art?’ he says is “the wrong question.”² In this dissertation, I will argue that Lopes gives up too easily on the possibility of a general theory of art. The examples he takes to force us to abandon a general theory, the hard cases, are outliers to the traditionalist aesthetic approach to explaining art. I argue instead that these outliers ought to serve as fundamental paradigmatic examples of art, thus making a general theory of art well within the grasp of the art theorist and the philosophy of art. Key to this earth-goes-round-the-sun (and not the other way round) maneuver is that conceptual art is a meta-aesthetic enterprise that is central to the very possibility of art, its theorizing of art as art. Defending an approach inspired by, but importantly distinct from, Arthur Danto’s theory of the artworld while recasting Lopes’s outlier examples as central paradigms of artmaking will form the core of this project.

My project takes roughly three main parts: an analysis of Lopes’s view and arguments, connecting it to a well-established lineage in the philosophy of art; a look at Margaret Boden’s approach to explaining the arts as an example of why I think Lopes is correct in thinking general aesthetic theories fail—plus her specific treatment of the creativity involved in the making an appreciation of conceptual art makes for a jumping-off place to establish how exactly ideas can be art, and how those ideas-as-art are creative in a fundamentally social sense; and then finally,

² Lopes 2014, Pg. 1.

the proposal that in order to avoid what I take to be Lopes's mistakes, we should embrace conceptual art as the explanatory paradigm for all of the arts. This may not quite be a Copernican revolution, but taking Lopes's and others' treatment of conceptual art as outlier and suggesting instead that conceptual art is itself the primary explanatory model is a beneficial shift in perspective. Such a reversal offers the real possibility of solving many traditional philosophy of art *aporiae*: explaining how, what, and why artworks are, what is essential to them, how they appear in such diversity, as well as providing a foundation for a value theory for art and destabilizing the Eurocentric and classist bias that has historically characterized the philosophy of art.

In *Beyond Art* Lopes argues that we should abandon the search for a general theory of art for two primary reasons. For one, the art historical activities of the avant-garde provide too difficult a challenge for a traditional aesthetic theory of art. Lopes additionally argues that while non-traditional theories like George Dickie's institutional theory can accommodate the hard cases, they have been offered solely on account of the appearance of those hard cases, resulting in *ad hoc* theories that neglect certain intuitions about artworks and medium-specificity. Such general theories are he says locked in a dialectical impasse between the traditionalist and the "genetic" theorist (the latter being an approach that allegedly focuses on a work's origin, its genesis within an established art context). The impasse is a result of conflicting intuitions on how to accommodate or not the hard cases. A traditional aesthetic approach understandably falters when faced with works that do not offer relevant aesthetic experience. The intuitions arrayed amongst traditionalists view something like *Fountain* or *3'44"* as not being art as they offer little in the way of aesthetic interest. The geneticist

meanwhile can accommodate these harder cases, but does so in a way that neglects traditional aesthetic content as foundational to art. The impasse is a result of neither camp budging. The success of a general theory of art is presumably similar to the success of any other general theory. Whether it is a theory of knowledge or gravity, economics or populations, the theory at minimum ought to explain whatever it is that it is a theory about. It strikes me as plausible then that if a general theory of art cannot account for significant outliers, what Lopes calls in *Beyond Art* the “hard cases”, then that theory needs amending or jettisoning. If a theory isn’t testable, falsifiable, doesn’t make accurate predictions, is needlessly complicated, or as particularly is the case here, fails to explain the kind to which it is oriented in its explanations, then yes it seems like such a theory should go. Challenging outlier cases are just such tests to theories, and Lopes does good to direct our attentions to the historical avant-garde challenges to a general theory of art. The dialectical impasse analysis seems compelling if those are indeed the only two options.

Lopes’s first example of a “hard case” is Robert Barry’s *Inert Gas Series*, in which the artist released various chemical gases at different California locations. These sorts of avant-garde, conceptually-driven cases tempt us to deny the work’s status as art, says Lopes: “Count as a hard case any work whose status as art is controversial from a theoretical perspective.”³ These hard cases are thus theoretically controversial, and the standoff between the two existing general theory types irresolvable. Lopes therefore advocates we give up on the

³ Lopes 2014, Pg. 6.

seemingly impossible task of a general theory of art. In place of a general theory, he recommends instead a “buck-passing” approach:

The overall strategy is to replace theorizing about art in general with a framework for philosophical theorizing at a more specific level. In a metaphor that will recur in the pages to follow, the idea is to pass the buck from one level of theorizing to the other.⁴

The idea of buck-passing is that acceptable theoretic explanations can be found at the sub-level of the individual arts rather than the general, and as long as a work belongs to a sub-class of art kinds, it is therefore classified as an artwork. This strategy then bypasses the threat of the hard cases. Hard cases are to be considered neutral in that they could either be controversial for being included or excluded as ‘art’. They are in this sense liminal from Lopes’s perspective, misfit toys. In order to provide the hard cases a home, Lopes ultimately argues that these conceptual works should be siloed in a medium of their own kind, thereby giving them art kind status while avoiding issues faced by general theories.

But I think Lopes gives up the explanatory avenue of a general theory far too easily. I believe he does this for a very understandable reason, wanting to honor a general commitment to the aesthetic while also accommodating the realities of contemporary art. Despite some claims to the contrary, I think Lopes makes a key (if understandable) error, assuming that the aesthetic is a necessary component of art. Sensory pleasures and the beautiful have often been associated with art throughout the history of the concept of ‘art’ (a period from roughly the 1600s). However, aesthetic experience is not necessary to art. There is an equivocation too with the term that has happened within the philosophy of art. Understanding how the use of

⁴ Lopes 2014, Pg. 7.

'aesthetic' shifts within changing contexts helps explain this error. Aesthetic experience is of course a category that extends far beyond art. Kant's favorite aesthetic subject (and the Romantics after him), the experience of nature, provides a classical example. That sort of use of 'aesthetic' is a core aspect of experiencing the world's phenomena, including our encounters with many, perhaps even most, works of art. But on the other hand, philosophy of art as a discipline is often loosely spoken of as 'aesthetics'. The philosophy of art is not exhausted by the topic of aesthetics in the first sense, such that we can intelligibly say that when one does aesthetics they need not engage in any talk of aesthetic experience, as aesthetics is not necessarily concerned with the aesthetic. Confusing, and understandably so. Something like such a confusion has led here in part I think to Lopes's error. Although he acknowledges that the aesthetic is not limited to art, and that all things have at least some trivial aesthetic content (pattern, shape, proportion, sensory content, etc.), his impressive research record has focused on aesthetic experience as art, and I think that guides his hand here.⁵

We could get lost in a morass describing aesthetic: pleasure from the beautiful, sensory experience of formal relationships, sensory interest. We cannot say that art simply equals aesthetic, on account of the many counterexamples, such as natural beauty. It is either *ex cathedra* or circular to simply insist that all art is aesthetic by virtue of its being art. I am going to proceed with the explicit assumption that any understanding of aesthetics as essential to art is vestigial to tradition, and not defining or descriptive. Much art historically correlates with aesthetic experience; but this need not entail a necessary or even causal relationship. Similarly,

⁵ Lopes articulates his aesthetic commitments clearly in works like *Understanding Pictures, Sight and Sensibility, Aesthetics on the Edge*, and *Being for Beauty*.

the history of metaphysics is littered with theological approaches that are no longer taken up as essential to metaphysics, although they were once understood in the European tradition as essential. An accumulated intellectual history can obstruct options and prevent flexibility. In this case, an assumption that aesthetic content or experience is necessary to art constrains Lopes's options for explaining art to three: art, aesthetic, and a "grab bag".⁶ This obstructs the view of a promising fourth option, art as a specialized feature of human culture, one that is fundamentally conceptual in nature, focused on the relevant creative ideas in the work. What an artwork is, is what it is about; and this I will argue, is how it performs its cultural function of meaningful experience.

Art cannot only be aesthetic experience for several reasons. For one, aesthetic experience can be vapid, meaningless at no loss of the experience of the beauty involved. You might wonder, isn't aesthetic experience alone meaningful for its own sake? It can be, but not all aesthetic experience is, as every sensory experience has some level of aesthetic content. The meaningfulness in meaningful aesthetic experience comes from what the work says, how it speaks to us. The artist imaginatively uses a medium or multiple media to craft an experience in the audience. As Collingwood explains, the audience then imaginatively recreates the work in the experience. Following Danto and others we can say that the core of the work is metaphorical. What this work is saying can be, I think, modelled on the idea of *subtext* in comedy—what we "get" when we "get" a joke, something that cannot be explained decidedly with a proposition without undermining the joke. The subtext cannot be overtly stated, or it

⁶ Lopes 2014, Pg. 4.

becomes a propositional statement or possibly a command instead of a humorous invitation for consideration. In such a case there is no joke, no oblique invitation to imaginative completion. A similar type of subtext invitation occurs in all works of art, an invitation to consider what the work is about—but this can only be experienced, interpreted, not definitively stated.

It should be unsurprising to discover then that a general aesthetic theory of art fails because it founders on non-aesthetic cases. A rearguard reactionary move might be to insist that art is indeed necessarily aesthetic while denying these hard cases the status of art at all, and some philosophers have taken this extreme position. But this is tilting at so many windmills. Lopes's hard cases examples are all instances of conceptual art, broadly construed beyond the specific movement of that name. Conceptual art is the pre-eminent artform of the contemporary artworld, and arguably the past 100 years as well.⁷ The international contemporary artworld, its auctions, sales, and fairs, its numerous galleries and start-up museums along with its varied collectors and public, trades primarily in conceptual artworks of one stripe or another. A trip to the art museum or galleries shows that conceptual artworks range from consisting of ideas alone as art to text to performed actions to realization in numerous media, both traditional and the everyday; the Tate Modern and PS1, MoMA are hives of international gallery-goers taking in the various presentations of video, installations, appropriations, performances. Individual works trade for millions. These alleged outlier cases

⁷ A conceptual approach to art is a key feature of the contemporary artworld and the fine arts for at least the past 100 years. Recently the New York Times convened a retrospective on the most important art of our new century. Most of the panelists were either experts in or practitioners of conceptual art, or both. Conceptual art, a form of art where the ideas involved play a necessary explanatory role in its function as an artwork, is clearly a centrally important part of, and arguably the singularly most important fact about the contemporary global artworld. The list of twenty-five works stretches back to the last decades of the 20th Century, but is taken as a whole to be a snapshot of what is canonical now. (uncredited) *The 25 Works of Art that Define the Contemporary Age*. New York Times "T Magazine". July 15, 2019.

and their descendants aren't going anywhere anytime soon, and the fact that a century or more worth of artmaking has been explicitly conceptual in orientation. If conceptual art in its various guises were denied the status of being art, then there would be owed a massive error theory, an explanation of why so many experts and practitioners are radically mistaken, and over a period of generations, as though somehow duped by so many Emperor's New Clothes tailors. It seems clear that any claim that the experts are in radical error is little more than an *ad ignorantiam* conspiracy theory that I think we can dismiss out of hand due to lack of evidence or plausibility.

So, as said, I am explicitly assuming, along with Danto and others (and contra the traditionalist and the moderate Lopes) that not all art depends on aesthetic properties for its status as art. Fully legislating this position could take its own book-length project, so I will offer only the basics of what I take to be principled, sound reasoning for the position. 'Aesthetic' derives from the Attic Greek word *aisthesis*, emphasizing aspects of our sensory experience. Baumgarten was the first to use the term in early modern philosophy, but it was Kant who established its use in relation to our faculty of experience the beautiful via formal properties available through our sense experience, such as the natural beauty found in a sunset or garden. For Kant, the experience was not merely agreeable, as are matters of taste, but led to an aesthetic judgment, the disinterested free play of the imagination of aesthetic experience connecting us to the experience of other rational beings who share our capacity for sensory experience of the beautiful. This is the established meaning of 'aesthetic' in the philosophy of the arts, such that when Jerome Stolnitz and George Dickie debate the 'aesthetic attitude', the intentional deployment of disinterested attention toward aesthetic ends, they have in mind the

aesthetic experience discussed by Kant.⁸ This is different than the ‘aesthete’ who works at a beauty salon, although one suspects only by degrees of cultural value, as human appearance can lead to aesthetic judgment in the same philosophical sense. Kant assumed with others, and others have assumed since, that a philosophical study of art just is a study of the aesthetic. This though is tricky as Lopes points out, for nearly anything has some aesthetic properties.⁹ One thing that appears clear is that one cannot simply define art as aesthetic, or else one includes non-art experiences that are trivially aesthetic as art, such as a flower garden, a muffin, or a mathematical equation. Another is that simply insisting that any art experience is necessarily aesthetic by virtue of its being art is unhelpful, having the character of *ex cathedra* fiat about it—further explanation how and why is required.¹⁰

Art undoubtedly involves the presentation of sophisticated aesthetic experience, though this is not wholly what qualifies them as artworks. I think this is true for two reasons. Firstly, it is clear that art serves a function that is distinguishable from aesthetic experience, such that our meaningful experience of opera or poetry as art is importantly distinguished from that of beholding a lovely peony, face, or waterfall. Kant himself struggled with explaining the need for art, given the abundance of natural opportunity for aesthetic experience. Secondly,

⁸ See Stolnitz 1960 and Dickie 1964.

⁹ Lopes 2014, Pg. 51.

¹⁰ There is ambiguity too in the term ‘art’ just as in the term ‘aesthetic’. Use of the terms ‘art’ and ‘arts’ generally refers to the traditional fine arts, those with a more clearly established pedigree connecting them to the refined tastes of the renaissance and enlightenment, such as painting, sculpture, music, literature, and architecture, sometimes including dance, photography, and film as well. The phrase ‘the art of’ is often affixed to any activity that involves some technical prowess, say the ‘art of’ heading the ball in soccer, or the ‘art of’ laying tile. ‘Art of’ usage typically applies to activities widely understood to not be arts themselves. ‘Art’ also is sometimes used generally to refer to any kind of representation or visual layout in advertising or marketing, typically involving trained skills in the ‘graphic arts’ (which are left out of lists of the ‘fine arts’; similarly, ‘martial arts’, ‘industrial arts’, etc.

and relatedly, Kant insisted that the aesthetic experience cannot involve the presentation of ideas under a concept, while I myself hold that it is that conceptual content that distinguishes artworks from mere aesthetic experience. Arthur Danto helpfully points out that artworks are always about something.¹¹ I suggest the content of this aboutness is itself conceptual, and that Danto's concept of modes of presentation allows us to see how conceptual content and aesthetic content can, contra Kant, work together to constitute an artwork that is distinct from aesthetic experience.

1.2 Critiquing Lopes

Here are some quick considerations that will inform my critique of Lopes. The buck-passing solution to the hard cases is to silo each medium into separate kinds, adding a conceptual category for the hard cases while abandoning a general theory of art. But this sort of siloing of different art approaches requires theoretic guidance—without a general theory of art to rely upon, there is no clear way to coordinate across different siloed categories, a problem because of the shared identity as art and the shared problems any art engenders. (Detailing these issues will be a primary focus in Chapter Two.) A related issue that arises is a plausible skepticism about the existence of art kinds as stable, identifiable entities. What makes individual art kinds 'art kinds' exactly, and not some other sort of kind? For example, oil painting is a technology. Its invention as a form of easel painting allowed for greater verisimilitude in mimetic applications (in addition to its expressive dimensions developed later, beginning with J.M.W. Turner). Why

¹¹ See Chapter Five of Danto 1981 and Danto 2003, Pg. 139.

should we think that oil painting is an art kind? Telegraphy, another important communications medium invention, is not typically seen as an art medium. Art kinds typically bottom out in terms of the medium being used. But the medium itself is incapable of establishing that a work is a work of art. Two problems arise then: grounding our identification of individual art kinds, and doing this without some guiding theory that helps in advance of the claim of the art kind as an art kind. (We cannot, on risk of incompleteness or circularity, claim that an art kind is one without having a prior sense of what constitutes an art kind.) Lopes appears to think that having the concept of art coupled with a theory of aesthetics can do some of the work here. But this only gets us to identifying aesthetic kinds that may have objects and activities that match the concept of art. It doesn't yet give us reason to understand the kind as an art kind. If having the concept could do that work, then it would imply it has an explanatory apparatus that connects the concept to the world, namely a theory of art. So, the concept of 'art' alone doesn't give us a procedure for identifying art kinds. The laundry list of traditional theories of art cannot help us here either—aesthetic experience is ubiquitous, emotion is expressed in many ways, pleasure is afforded in numerous experiences. All we have, as far as I can see, is a traditional assumption of established kinds. Lopes does not provide a clear argument for art kinds. The onus is on him to explain their essential nature if they are to ground an explanation of human artmaking. Moreover, why is art itself in its full breadth of activities not considered a kind? If the kinds align with the stuff they are made of, how is the distinction between two works composed of the same approximate proportions of stuff—carbon molecules, electrons, and what have you—made? The same stuff can be used in various applications, art or not.

A major impetus for Lopes's project—one I applaud—is to accommodate core contemporary artworks and modes of artmaking without sacrificing the traditionalist aesthetic approach to explaining art. "What is needed to clear the dialectical impasse is a way to cope effectively with the hard cases without slighting the intuitions that so divide opinion on them."¹² The divide between traditionalist and contemporary camps seems unbridgeable on Lopes's analysis. His buck passing plan promises to resolve this standoff. This would be a very favorable result, as it would allow us to square general intuitions about Mozart's Clarinet Concerto alongside La Monte Young's minimalistic drone compositions, Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake with Gillian Wearing's *Dancing in Peckham*, Ming vases with Jeff Koons's appropriated vacuum cleaners in vitrines (*New Hoover Convertibles, Green, Blue*).

Not all members of art kind media are themselves art objects or actions. Photography is an obvious example, but this also extends to other media as well, all other media. Even when the medium is essential to the artwork (a painting say that is about the inherent possibilities of monochromatic painting), it is not alone sufficient to the status of being an artwork. While the medium and its presentation might be necessary to the work itself, as some intended object or action or other artifact, it is not significant to the work having the further status as an artwork. That status depends on the work's relationship conceptually to the cultural ideals of its context of meaningful appreciation. The conceptual content and relationships determine the work is an artwork, not the medium itself (although the creative use of the medium is significant to any

¹² Lopes 2014, Pg. 58.

consideration of its art status, as all art is creative, and not merely an exercise or practical application within a medium).

A further question here is how we get from general levels of creativity in human culture to specific divisions of art kinds. The arts are of course paradigmatically creative, along with scientific research and technological innovation. These are the gold standard examples for creativity research. Creativity is part of our everyday lives as well, as it exists as a general feature of humanity. In these general considerations of creativity, how do we arrive at the neat subdivisions proposed by a theory of art kinds? They appear to be arbitrary. Try as one might to find it, there is no necessary connection between the world and art kinds. It is not required that one adopt a complete skepticism about the existence of art kinds to see that nailing down exactly what we mean by the convention is problematic. A robust account of kinds is needed, and I'm not certain it is possible. It seems reasonable to doubt the success of a proposal that requires them as givens. I'll leave that as it is then, as there are bigger fish to fry.

In this work then I will argue that Lopes's buck-passing theory needs a way to coordinate across the individual arts. The only candidates appear to be the concept [ART] or aesthetic theory. Neither of these can do the heavy-lifting of coordinating art questions across the various art kinds (e.g., why call them 'art' kinds?). A concept alone is insufficient, it needs some sort of theoretic guidance. Lopes appears to assume then that aesthetic theory is sufficient to address cross-kind art questions, and assumes too that art kinds are some sort of given, either via said aesthetic theory or in some undeclared self-evident way. The need to deploy some sort of theory across art kinds suggests aesthetic theory must then do the trick for Lopes here, but as not all art is aesthetic, this is of limited utility. The twin assumptions about

art kinds and aesthetic theory also suggest that Lopes's theory is at heart a traditionalist theory; this is all fine, except for a traditionalist's limited ability to handle the hard cases, the very problem Lopes seeks to avoid. Lopes's own solution really amounts to creating a separate catch-all for conceptual work, but this sort of categorical othering returns us to the question of how to address general art questions in that domain as well as others. The concept alone won't help without some theoretic guidance, and the aesthetic theory is not suited to the task when artworks lack aesthetically-relevant properties.

1.3 Something like Danto, meta-aesthetics

Arthur Danto provides a framework for how it is that conceptual art—at its bare minimum an artform of ideas, and its physical works are sometimes indistinguishable from everyday non-art objects—is even possible. In doing so, Danto provides a path for understanding how conceptual artmaking forms an explanatory thread. The 'something like Danto's approach' recognizes that there is an inalienable social component to art, and that the art exists by virtue of the community sustaining its possibility as art. According to Danto, anything in the universe is potentially an artwork. What is required is that the artworld, the loose association of art experts (artists, dealers, historians, journalists, collectors, gallery-goers and so forth) sustain a background theory that supports the understanding of the work as a work of art. I think *something like Danto's approach* is the correct approach for a successful general theory of art. Danto also makes a key observation, noting that 20th Century avant-garde artists were themselves the pre-eminent philosophers of art in the 20th Century while philosophers

themselves neglected the subject.¹³ These artists were creatively exploring the concepts and possibilities of art itself. This creative conceptual exploring of art is also at times known as ‘conceptual art’. The many non-aesthetic artworks that were created in this process, explorations that laid the foundation for the last half-century of contemporary art, are then fundamental to what constitutes the possibility of art, its theoretic foundations.⁸ Danto also provides a classic argument for the distinction between art and aesthetic, the aesthetically indiscernible twinning of an art object like Warhol’s *Brillo Box* with its non-art stockroom counterpart, which we will return to later.

I think Danto can be understood as having an account that is both genetic and traditional. His early work clearly favors the genesis of identifying a work as art via the artworld approval. But his later work adds to this (and does not supplant as some might think) by articulating how artworks are instances of embodied meaning that we experience via a variety of possible modes of presentation. Those modes include traditionally established practices and accounts for artmaking. Danto can therefore be understood as bridging the gap between the two, or at minimum pointing to that possibility. This might suggest an inherent contradiction, but only if Lopes is correct about an inherent dichotomy in theorizing about art. But I think this is not the case, as there are other options. Consider the example of conceptual art. On a Danto-like view, the possibility of ideas being art is established as plausible by virtue of the understanding within the social structure of (something akin to) the artworld. The basic structure here is sound—an idea, or any type of artifact for that matter, attains status as an

¹³ See for example Danto 2003, Pgs. xv, 19.

artwork by virtue of the contextual possibility of it being an artwork. Aesthetic content alone cannot do the work here. However, we also need to be able to drop the 'art' talk altogether, if only momentarily, in order to accommodate the even harder cases I will introduce below, and to make better sense of the retroactive cases of art attribution. Understanding what constitutes art prior to it being recognized as art has important applications in the anthropological record, making sense of the distinction between art and entertainment, parsing out the history of art and craft, and relatedly gender distinctions on genius, and professional art versus domestic creative occupations.

My task here then is a project in what might be termed 'meta-aesthetics', as long as we steer clear of the implication of aesthetic experience and understand aesthetic in the disciplinary usage of that term. Conceptual art in its purest form, what Sol LeWitt explains as ideas that "need not be made", is also very much a meta-aesthetic activity in this sense. We can connect then Danto's two observations like so: the conceptual artist (as philosopher of art, or art theorist) creatively engages with the very background theory (or philosophic underpinnings) that determines whether art is art at all. Conceptual artworks, which are aesthetic outliers and thus form Lopes's "hard cases", turn out to be instead paradigmatic cases of artmaking. Conceptual art on the whole then becomes a prime candidate for the explanatory paradigm for the arts, unifying the various forms under one general theory. All artworks are meaningful for the culture in which they emerge through their creative processes. The aboutness, meaningfulness, and creativity of all artworks is most clearly seen in the extremely minimal presentation of conceptual art, which consists of a pair of components: an idea and the cultural function that provides for the possibility of any work being an artwork.

I think giving up on a general theory of art risks leaving unexplained a core dimension of the human experience. I'm of the opinion that explaining art, a defining part of human culture, is the cultural equivalent of answering the Attic injunction to "know thyself". That alone of course isn't enough to say that Lopes is mistaken. But it does suggest the gravity of the situation. I should say though that I do think Lopes is correct about why aesthetic general theories fail to account for art as a whole, a very valuable contribution. For centuries, many philosophers and art theorists have taken painting as the primary model of the fine arts, a bias emphasized by Clement Greenberg's Kantian aesthetics and work done on significant form and the aesthetic attitude for example. I believe this arbitrary prioritization has distorted the lens by which we view art generally, and made problematic the goal of explaining humanity's creative arts, again to emphasize, a defining characteristic of our branch of mammalia. A deflationary approach like Lopes's risks saying very little about a central feature of human cultural history. A list of individual activities with accompanying explanations can tell us much about technical approaches and appreciation of the relevant details. But it doesn't help us understand how these relativistic rivulets fit within a broader watershed of human identity, which I take to be a great feature of art. I favor an approach that features consilience, drawing on individual expertise, working in mosaic form toward some larger image, a human self-portrait of sorts, pictured in relation to our ideals, contexts, accumulated knowledge, and accumulated mystery.

1.4 Dialectic: relevant historical approaches in the philosophy of art

As a preliminary, I think it useful to consider how some traditional approaches fail in explaining what makes some action or object art. A *mimetic theory* of art such as is usually attributed to Plato holds that the representational nature of artworks explain their status as art. A painting of a landscape on this approach would be explained as an artwork on account of its successful representation of its subject; it looks like the thing it is a picture of. But it cannot be true that mimesis on its own can explain a work's status as art. Photography in its first half-century was not awarded the status of an art medium. It was seen as a scientific device for recording visual data. It was an apparatus that enhanced our investigation of the world, achieving some level of objectivity and verisimilitude previously unavailable. Likewise, the invention of motion pictures was seen as a technological recording device in service of scientific enquiry, "an invention without a future" as it was called by Lumiere. When in the 1920s photography achieved recognition as an artform, not all photographs became art. Something distinguished photographs that were artworks from those that were not. Without this distinction, any photo taken by anyone, or automatically by a machine, would be considered artworks. Notice though that any typical photograph meets the requirements of mimesis, but that representational fact alone is insufficient to qualify it as an artwork.

Other traditional approaches in the philosophy of art also face trouble. We might think like Kant did that aesthetic experience via formal features of objects in the world can explain the status of artworks as art. But while Kant does well to explain our experience of nature as beautiful, he struggles to explain why human artworks are important or why they are made at all. This is a particular issue because human-made artworks are paradigmatically what we think of as art. This *aesthetic formalism* then is also insufficient to the task. Theories that prioritize

like Tolstoy did the emotional or spiritual content in artworks also run into issues. Any emotional experience, such as being frightened by a loud noise or snarling dog, being envious of a colleague, or being amused by a frolicking fawn is also clearly insufficient to make an experience an artwork. In the classic presentation of *expressionist theories* like Tolstoy's there is a claim that the audience must receive a transfer of emotion that corresponds to the artist's own emotional state. But the way in which individuals emotionally experience artworks need not correspond to the artist's own states, and it is possible too that the artist has created something that has no relation to her own emotional state. Moreover, plenty of artworks of high regard appear to be devoid of emotion. Many of Bach's keyboard works for example border on the emotionless while being core works of the classical tradition.

Danto says he's an essentialist about art, by virtue of art having a definition, dependent upon what the artworld understands it to be within its historically established atmosphere of theory.¹⁴ But we should doubt the plausibility of this structure. The artworld would seem to become arbitrarily empowered in this explanation, if art is only art by what the members of the artworld provisionally understand of art's possibility. That's an unsatisfying claim, as human beings have contingencies, foibles, blind spots—even experts; they can be faddish, biased, mistaken—and we need to account for those possibilities (even if skepticism of radical error is unfounded). If the artworld is all that determines what art is, then it suggests a potential infallibility, getting it right in all cases, even when intuitively or historically it does not. A parallel worry also arises: conflicting artworld claims would appear unresolvable if the claims are by

¹⁴ Danto 1997, Pgs. 195, 196.

default infallible. Danto does build in theory-revision to his account, but there is no accounting for works that are included or excluded by epistemic limitation. The theory-revision dimension also suggests fallibility, which seems at odds with the infallibility built into the structure of art status pronouncement. Danto does attempt to distance himself from George Dickie's elaboration of the artworld, saying that Dickie's version of the artworld as institution should be faulted for infallibility--but on my view Dickie is merely making evident what is latent in Danto's artworld theory. We can avoid these problematic results by 1a) abandoning, or 1b) adjusting Danto's artworld claim (say, by watering it down and tempering its infallible authority, although this would render it toothless), and 2) relocate the essentialist claim to a level prior to the artworld, prior to its epistemic access or self-aware existence as arbiters of art. I aim to do the latter, while respecting two primary aspects of Danto's artworld theory: the social function of a community sustaining the possibility of art, and the structure of theory revision as a model for a counterfactual test for artworks. To these two points I will add the aforementioned claims derived from Danto's work: artworks are instances of embodied meaning, that they philosophize through various modes of presentation; and that avant-garde artists are *de facto* philosophers of art, that their contributions artistically should be understood as philosophical contributions as well.¹⁵

Jerrold Levinson and Noël Carroll provide nontraditional alternatives to Danto's artworld and Dickie's institutional theory. Both are grounded in the precedence of western art history,

¹⁵ Danto did suggest that any culture can have an artworld, but this is to add on an unnecessary dimension. The proclamation of an artworld isn't needed, although it can be helpful. As Bob Dylan quipped (politically), you don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows. Having expert guidance is valuable, but the content is only framed by that expertise, not essentially determined.

and thus in keeping with the spirit of Danto's artworld, but each distances himself from Dickie's explicit institutionalism. Levinson's proposal is explicitly definitional and focuses on the individual creator (as opposed to the "cultural performance" for the artworld): art is the result of an artist offering up a work for a certain type of 'regard' associated with previous works in the history of art.¹⁶ Carroll concentrates on how we identify artworks by way of the ongoing art historical development as a beginning-middle-end narrative each work of art participates in. The historical tradition (as beginning) informs the artist's challenge (as middle) and ultimate contribution (as end), and understanding the historical relevance allows us to properly identify artworks.¹⁷ My own proposal incorporates the importance of narrative, as a culture understanding itself is key to my view, but avoids pitfalls of Levinson and Carroll's approaches. The counterfactual sociocultural account of art I suggest is in keeping with the art historical model, but also explains works left out of Levinson and Carroll's theories (non-western, unwitting works, yet to be recognized works, etc.), and accounts for Levinson's mysterious notion of 'correct' intent by the artist (Levinson in a sense relocates the problems of the institution to the individual). And lastly, my suggestion of conceptual art as the paradigm is a completely different perspective.

I do not fully endorse Danto's explanations. Instead, I offer a solution to problems Danto's approach engenders while building on the insights of his approach. Aristotle's discussion of *katharsis*, the means by which a society is calibrated through its arts experience,

¹⁶ Levinson, Pgs. 232-233.

¹⁷ Carroll 1993.

will guide that work. The general plan is to shore up Danto's conception of an art world in an attempt to show that the socially-mediated concepts of art, which is what makes conceptual art a possibility at all, as an explanatory paradigm for all of the arts. The bold claim then is that while not all art is aesthetic and not all aesthetic experience is art, all art is inescapably conceptual and inescapably social. This is by virtue of it being art at all, which is a conceptual phenomenon sustained by groups of humans in healthy social communion, first described by Aristotle, but echoed in Schiller, Collingwood, and Danto himself. Conceptual art in its purest sense is about the possibility of artworks at all, and any artwork that is actually a work of art (which should be all of them) fulfills the conceptual possibility of being an artwork by the ideas that communally sustain the work and experience. A secondary point that falls from this is that conceptual art, like all art, is inescapably social. In terms of the big picture, I expect to conclude that art consists of (typically non-pragmatic, or non-obviously practical) creative actions and objects created within a social-conceptual experience that is about the flourishing and values of the conceptual community that sustains it. In short, art is creative, social, and conceptual—it has value for its community and is about something—and this is why we should embrace the “hard cases” (and the *even harder* cases) and recognize that we need not give up on a general theory of art, but rather its model of painting and accompanying aesthetic assumptions, both of which are arbitrary and inessential.

A dimension of the proposal here is that instead of thinking of interpretive descriptions being about paintings, say, conceive of paintings being in a certain sense about what those descriptions capture or allude to, their conceptual content, however that may be parsed in its specifics. In other words, if we ask what the *Mona Lisa* means, what the work is *about*, I suggest

that it is about all of the theoretic elements that make it a work of art, known or unknown: mimeticism, class, history, form, beauty, perspective, sentiment, and any other properties that may be determined to give its qualities as an art object capable of providing art experience, what Danto calls “modes of presentation”. However it is that that art object is *understood* to be an art object at all is what it *means* to those who experience it and analyze it, and that is what determines its status as the Mona Lisa qua meaningful art. Sure it provides aesthetic experience, and sure it has its own existence as a panel with particles of Italian earth and other minerals suspended in layers of dried oil. It is in fact an object, just as dog collars and galaxies are. But its status as an *art* object depends on its meaning, and that meaning depends on the conceptual understanding within a relevant community. This is a proposal that I will suggest lends itself support via an unlikely ally in the German Romanticist tradition, specifically in the influence of Schiller as arch proto-Romantic. The flourishing of a community includes in its fundamentals the arts as a means of its conceptual wellbeing. Michele Moody-Adams argues for a similar point in *Making Space for Justice* about the essential role of art in the collective imagination of a community.¹⁸ I believe the structure of her description of ideological narrative is consistent with my project here, and I think a better understanding of conceptual art-making only supports a vision of creative social problem-solving and self-aware societal flourishing. (Note: The model of *metafiction* serves to underline this connection: philosophy as self-aware literature, conceptual art as meta-aesthetics, loosely speaking, or philosophy of art applied within artmaking.)

¹⁸ Moody-Adams 2022.

Now, I say 'something like' Danto's theory because Danto's view faces fair criticism (to which he responds for example in *After The End of Art*).¹⁹ Art is whatever the artworld says it is by virtue of historically established reasons in the form of artistic theory, he says. Even if the definition of art is essential as Danto suggests, what prevents the picture from becoming hopelessly relativistic and thus arbitrary? He seeks to avoid the contingency of features of medium, an admirable strategy to avoid mistakes of other approaches; yet Danto's later approach to grounding the theory that sustains art within a specific history and within multiple artworlds highlights the potential of the contingencies of history blinding one to art activity outside the epistemic pale of that contingent perspective, namely art that occurs *without* possession of the relevant theory. Tolstoy in *What is Art?* criticizes the faddishness of the international art scene of his day, and I think this concern applies to Danto as well.²⁰ I think a promising way to defend Danto on this charge is to draw a parallel with basic moral facts that appear in every human civilization, such as prohibitions on unjustified murder, theft, or lying. The fact of these prohibitions arising spontaneously by the nature of social interaction and long-term survivability of the society suggests to me that their reality ontologically emerges with any successful social grouping. The anthropologist Richard Anderson posited in *Calliope's Sisters* a universal human definition of art centered on meaningfulness, and based on studies of tribes around the globe (meaningful encoding in a sensuous medium—what's more sensuous than mental content?).²¹ I suggest that Anderson has identified the social facts of art in the same way that we might suggest a moral compact results automatically from successful social

¹⁹ Danto 1997.

²⁰ Tolstoy 1898/1962.

²¹ Anderson 1990.

groupings. If the society is going to flourish, it needs prohibitions; likewise it will use human creativity to explore the conceptual wellbeing of that society, what we call 'art', exploring beauty, meaning, emotion, sentiment, while expressing and exploring the identity of the society. So, the idea is to take the basic shape of Danto's artworld, but remove the artworld itself, leaving only the socially reflexive cultural function of an essential relationship of a culture to its artworks, whether consciously understood as art or not. Aristotle's description of a society coming to a self-aware understanding of its relationship to its own ideals, calibrating itself in the process, art as cultural self-examination. This deeper cultural function of art will be examined through primordial artforms I will refer to as 'Ur-works', works that are art in function if not in name, such as the most significant works we have received from antiquity, for example.²²

1.5 Hard cases, and the even harder cases as counterfactual artworks

Lopes cites hard cases like Duchamp's *Fountain* or Cage's *4'33"* as problem cases that either speak against a general theory of art or make such a theory otherwise questionable. These are the motivating cases of Lopes's project. This seems on the face of it a reasonable claim, that if a theory cannot make sense of a phenomenon that is supposed to be explained by that theory then something needs to give. These cases of appropriation from the everyday as artworks (such as *Fountain* and *4'33"* both) and actions that are not traditional to aesthetic approaches

²² Interestingly, Levinson also uses Ur-terminology, but does so to reference the earliest artworks—that seems to me a fool's errand, as understanding of artworks as art only occurs in the 1600s; my own use of 'Ur-works' gestures toward the deeper essential nature undergirding all art at any period. Levinson, Pg. 243.

to art activity (like Barry's release of gases) don't fit the general aesthetic theory and have prompted untenable genetic theories, so Lopes argues that the catch-all theory of art should be abandoned. To see why this is unwarranted, a helpful parallel can be drawn with the tripartite theory of knowledge and problematic Gettier cases. A traditional epistemic approach of justified, true belief faces a problem with cases of accidental knowledge. One could then say the tripartite theory doesn't work, it should be abandoned, and then split up its explanatory roles somehow. However, another move that seems quite reasonable is to adjust the tripartite theory in the face of these fringe cases. One can adopt a non-accidental clause, for example, in order to try and patch things up. So, I don't think hard cases necessitate abandoning a general theory. Moreover, there are *even harder cases*. These even harder cases point to a conceptual art paradigm that handles Lopes's hard cases, and will provide important test cases throughout the project.

What I envision as even harder cases is somewhat in the spirit of epistemic Gettier cases, such as cases of creativity that bears a strong similarity to examples that are considered art yet are not recognized as such. Think of these as cases of accidental art, to continue the analogy with Gettier cases. The even harder cases include instances of unwitting artmaking, epistemically blind instances of creativity that receive retroactive attribution as instances of 'art', or cases that plausibly could receive retroactive attribution as art under counterfactual conditions. The conscious social construction of their explicit status as 'art' objects is ontologically missing. Danto furnishes a useful case: One of the results of post-impressionist painting and its non-verisimilitude in representation and non-local use of color aligned it with the tribal artefacts of Oceanic and African carving; Danto whimsically points out the result:

overnight some of the contents of the anthropological museum were “moved” into the fine arts museum. This is what I have in mind as a retroactive art attribution.²³ The same basic idea can be extended to include unknown creative activities that under different circumstances would plausibly count within the artworld theoretic, although they remain unknown—*counterfactual instances of art*.

One of the somewhat unsatisfactory results of Danto’s theory of the artworld is that if the artworld is unaware of creative activities that plausibly could be considered art (such as through a strong family resemblance with canonical art practices), then it follows that something that would obviously be a work of art under appropriate conditions would not count as an artwork in Danto’s theory. Consider a Tarzan feral child scenario where an individual grows up in isolation and develops a habit of carving wood into the shape of animals via the imitative faculties natural to humans. Now, we know it can’t be the case that when the artworld theorizes that something counts as art this then makes all instances of the practice art. Photographs can be art under certain conditions, but not all photographs are art. This is straightforward. Tarzan’s carvings of his jungle animal friends could reasonably be said to not be art, as it is in extreme isolation of the artworld, but merely creative physical imitations, attributes insufficient to designate a work or action as art. That seems a bit tone-deaf though, thus I suggest unsatisfactory. We can however meet the challenge here by extending the retroactive attribution model to counterfactual cases, such as is the case with Tarzan’s carvings. The even harder cases can help as test cases to do just that.

²³ Danto 1964.

Here are the specific real-world examples of even harder cases. These are cases that are similar in spirit to Lopes's own cases. However, unlike Lopes's cases, which are instances not only recognized by the artworld but central to the artworld's understanding of contemporary art (which alone should give us some initial pause), these even harder cases are examples of actions and presentation of, or use of, objects that strongly resemble contemporary art, yet are not seen as art by the people who created the works, and except in the case of the "Jungle" genre described below, are not seen as art at all (and Jungle only retroactively). Yet, these are sophisticated and meaningful instances of creativity are similar on many levels to established modes of contemporary artmaking, even moreso in some ways than Lopes's hard cases examples. Very few contemporary artists present plumbing items from the hardware store to art show judges, for example.

Bright Young Things. A generation of privileged British aristocrats and writers was termed the Bright Young Things. These playful roaring twenties creatives staged elaborate and inventive events involving pageantry and costuming around a theme, whether through events or complex scavenger hunts or absurdist games.²⁴ The behavior is strikingly similar to the 1960s *happenings* of Claes Oldenberg, Jim Dine, George Maciunas and Fluxus, yet no one to my knowledge has characterized the Bright Young Things as performing collective art actions. The same behaviors within a context supported by the background theorizing of the artworld would result in a different attribution as performance art. Not only could this be considered art, it has

²⁴ Taylor 2007.

the structural similarities to collective works that characterize contemporary works. How do we distinguish creative cultural activities with such strong family resemblance?

Soen Nakagawa. Soen Nakagawa was a Zen Buddhist monk, an ordained *roshi*, and abbot, as well as a renowned haiku poet. While I take haiku poetry to be noncontroversial as an artform, it is other activities of Soen Roshi that are of interest here. Here are two examples of his highly conceptual actions that would fit right at home in a contemporary Whitney biennial exhibition. First, an anecdote of Soen Roshi after being ordained as abbot at quite a young age, hosting leading figures of the Zen establishment.

They were shocked to see that despite the heat, a hibachi (used to warm the hands in cold weather) was set out. Soen Roshi gestured toward the hibachi, and when they looked inside, swimming in a bowl of water was a beautiful goldfish. It was Soen Roshi's completely original way of providing his guests with a refreshing moment of coolness on a summer day.²⁵

This is an excellent work of conceptual art installation and performance, yet it is not art at all in its original context. The second Nakagawa example is a riff off of a devotional aesthetic and ascetic exercise. A monk, Sekiren, vowed to create one million images of Jizo Bodhisattva. After she completed this vow, 30,000 of her images, described alternately as drawings and paintings, were brought by Soen Roshi on a transpacific ocean voyage in October of 1958. Nakagawa himself writes in an October 13th journal:

I have been sending these bodhisattvas out over the water as the ship speeds toward the West. Meanwhile three American Zen friends who left Los Angeles on October 7 on the boat after mine are now floating somewhere on the Pacific Ocean. Coming and going, we are all It in the Dharma ocean of thusness. Now I make a bowl of tea.²⁶

²⁵ Nakagawa/Shimano, Pg. 23.

²⁶ Nakagawa/Shimano, Pg. 104; Pg. 112.

Someone on a ship in the middle of the ocean sends out hand-made images of devotional beauty on rice paper, only to dissolve in the vast ocean, while thematically connecting the action to a Heraclitean sense of flux and the ritual of the tea ceremony, itself a reminder of presence, ephemerality, and our interbeing with nature and others. This action of releasing cared-for, crafted, meaningful images into an abyss, and in the tens of thousands, is consistent with numerous works of contemporary artists, such as Janine Antoni. Antoni uses devotion to repetitive action as a focus of her conceptual artworks. The ritual sacrificial elements likewise align with Antoni's performance pieces, where she extends herself in actions that challenge her while also accepting loss and recognizing the ritual of repetition as meaningfully human.

These actions of a Zen monk might be said to be eccentric. Sure. Devotional and ritualistic. Yes. But they strongly resemble work of contemporary conceptual artists, except they are not judged to be artworks or art performances. What's going on here? All that's missing is the attribution of being artworks. I suggest then that these works are counterfactual instances of conceptual art, unrecognized by the artworld as art; thus the details and implications of such cases require explanation.

Jungle. 'Jungle' is a genre of what is known as breakbeat techno, a form of electronic dance music. Music is of course one of the major accepted art forms, one of the purest according to the adage that "all arts aspire to the condition of music". Jungle's origins, however, as a Black street music influenced by New York hip-hop and Jamaican Dub (itself the primary influence for hip-hop and rap), shares with those street forms a parallel with graffiti art in its initial "outsider" status. And like graffiti and other "outsider" forms, sample-based music (essentially someone playing a recording by another artist) was not considered art or even music in its initial stages of

development. Moreover, electronic music was to some extent legislated against in the UK during the Thatcher years via the *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act*, calling it “sounds wholly or predominantly characterized by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats”²⁷. Jungle’s radical experimental nature, with sped-up sampling and pitch-shifted noises added to the repetitions and bleeps characteristic of electronic music, qualified it as technological audio research, aligning it more with avant-garde sound art than with traditional dance musics, like say the quadrille. Making sense of “outsider” art is a case in itself (and its close exclusionary companions, the objects of racism, xenophobia and classism), but I include the particular example of Jungle because of a claim about its originators, *that they were neither musicians nor artists*.

Richard D. James, who under his guise as ‘Aphex Twin’ is now something of a household name amongst contemporary musicians (not least jazz drummers, who routinely cite his breakbeat and ambient techno electronic works as influences), offers this analysis of Jungle’s origins:

*I used to love jungle. I still think it’s the ultimate genre, really, because the people making it weren’t musicians. The best artists are people who don’t consider themselves artists, and the people who do are usually the most pretentious and annoying. [laughs] They’ve got their priorities wrong. They’re just doing it to be artists rather than because they want to do it. And a lot of the jungle people were actually car mechanics and painter-and-decorator types, like, pretty hardcore blokes. [...] But it didn’t exist in jungle for long. There was only a couple of years where people didn’t know what they were doing, and you got all these samples that are just totally not related in pitch... They’ve got this ridiculous mishmash of things that totally don’t go with each other at all. Obviously, after they’ve done it for a couple of years they learn how to make chords and stuff, and it’s not so interesting now.*²⁸

²⁷ Quoted in Rietveld, Pg. 5.

²⁸ See Sherburne 2014 interview “Strange Visitor”.

Jungle is certainly recognized as music now, and its influences, such as techno and dub, hip-hop and reggae, are as well. But following the Aphex Twin quote above there is a sense that some electronic music is self-consciously made as art by artists, and some not. So when are human-made sounds music, and when are those music sounds art? Not all experiments with technology that result in noise-making are considered electronic music, some of it is just noise. The inventors of Jungle were experimenting with noise and tech, but assuming James is correct, were doing so far beyond the ken of the art world or any reasonable extension or analog of an artworld. Not to denigrate the actions, but like the origins of rap and hip-hop musics stemming from a *misuse* of technology to non-pragmatic creative ends within a context outside of the understanding of the artworld, there is an important way that graffiti as creative expression of urban identity while not being considered art, matches with James's description of Jungle's origins.

I take these three cases, the happenings of the Bright Young Things, the installations and performances of Soen Nakagawa, and the origins of Jungle as non-art experimentation, to all pose tougher challenges than Lopes's hard cases. The hard cases involve an artist self-consciously making art, knowingly doing so as an artist. Someone like Duchamp and *Fountain* does present something non-traditional as art, but the doing so involves a deep understanding of art, its history, and its theoretic dimensions. In the hard cases, the artist is experimenting, but the experimentation is informed by the background theorizing at work. An established practitioner developing new practices. The even harder cases by contrast are missing the critical dimension of an artist who is aware of making art, while the works themselves resemble paradigmatic works of contemporary art. These cases are not considered art in any relevant

sense, yet they bear striking, nearly indiscernible resemblance to sophisticated works of contemporary conceptual art—a very different situation from the everyday object appropriated by the conceptual artist, but they are as Collingwood discusses, creatively laboring in an imaginative way on behalf of the community.

An interesting dimension to the distinction I am making between harder and even harder cases is found in Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel*. This I take to be an even harder case than Lopes's hard case example of *Fountain*. The work consists of a bicycle wheel bolted to a stool. Duchamp assembled this piece on a whim, and then for several years in his New York apartment he would absently spin the wheel like a worry stone, thinking about art—*spin spin spin*—and its practical and theoretic dimensions. Suddenly, retroactively, Duchamp realized the *Bicycle Wheel* was a work of art all along, an *assisted readymade*. I find this retroactive attribution of the unwitting practitioner fascinating. Gordon Graham argues that avant-garde art is incoherent, because it relies on the artworld it seeks to undermine for its very identity; I think Graham is incorrect here, but I do think his worry captures a problem. When the actions of the non-artist, or at least not intended as such as in the case of *Bicycle Wheel*, becomes art after-the-fact, what has happened? Kant claimed genius gives the rule to art, the specially-endowed creator introducing the new. There is undoubtedly some puzzle in how creative actions that are not art become art. I think we can answer this without deference to myths of the heroic genius or by denying avant-garde art its status. The even harder cases and counterfactual instances of art strongly suggest the existence of artworks that meet a primordial function of art, yet go unrecognized as such: the previously mentioned *Ur-works*, works that are candidates for retroactive or counterfactual attribution as artworks on account

of their performing the essential function and possessing the characteristic properties of creative, meaningful artworks.²⁹

1.6 Features of conceptual art and the explanatory role of creativity

A quick look at the previous 100 years of artmaking and the current global art market shows that conceptual artworks take on a diverse form of presentation. Again, as Danto pointed out, anything in the universe can be an artwork. This includes what we might think of as *legacy genres* of artmaking, such as painting, drawing, photography, poetry, dance, music, sculpture, and architecture. But Sol LeWitt and Lawrence Weiner helpfully pointed out that a conceptual artwork need not be made at all, the idea by itself is sufficient to constitute the artwork.³⁰ Now, the idea could be put into action in some way, whether in traditional media or appropriation of non-art objects or actions in the service of the conceptual artmaking. But externalization in this physical sense is not required.

This need-not-be-made proviso is central to a conceptual artwork, and suggests some puzzles. If an idea, say about putting a glass of water on a shelf and calling it an oak tree (as

²⁹ Ancient Athens was awash with Ur-works. Danto says that the ancient Greeks deployed the concept of art without the term. This is puzzling. It points to John Dewey's discussion of the ancient Greeks as a culture that expressed its civic ideals in many modes, modes that we today recognize as art. I'm not sure Danto is correct in saying that the Greeks understood the concept, even though he is correct in saying that the western canon has recognized as paradigms numerous works of the Athenian golden age. It may not matter much, but I think whether we say they do or do not have the concept of art, the culture in question will nonetheless creatively make meaningful conceptually-rich works. It's unclear what kind of evidence can sway us one way or the other in terms of determining possession of the concept in the sense we have it today ourselves. The Greeks did not have hushed museums of pedestals; rather theirs was a dazzling embodiment of cultural identity, a carnival of forms of expression. Danto 2003, Pg. xiii.

³⁰ LeWitt in "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" published in Artforum discusses the execution as a perfunctory affair, and Weiner in "Statements of Intent", also published in Artforum, says that the piece "need not be built". The shared sentiment is that the idea is sufficient for the artwork. See Alberro and Stimson.

Michael Craig-Martin has done), can be an artwork, then what distinguishes that artwork from any other ideas? This would appear to be a question best answered via a narrow focus on mental content. But as I will argue below, the better path to an acceptable explanation is one that prioritizes the social content and social mediation of these ideas-as-artworks because the community is the grounds of possibility for any artwork. For without the socially-mediated concept of artworks at all, conceptual art would be impossible, and ideas-as-artworks would be indistinguishable from any run-of-the-mill ideas. However, ideas are of course “in the head”, so there must be an acceptable explanation at the level of mental content, one that acknowledges the inherent relation of mental content to society such as in Margaret Boden’s discussion of *creative value*.³¹

There are two key features of conceptual art: *conceptual content*, which is mental content about something; and the *status of being an artwork*, which allows us to distinguish ideas-as-art from non-art ideas. The conceptual content both constitutes the primary form of the artwork and is also what the artwork is about. As for the status of being an artwork, if we imagine a set of all artworks, then the ideas conceptual artworks are members of that set while ideas that are not conceptual artworks are not members. That second condition, the status of ideas as artworks, requires an additional conceptual content that functions to ‘tag’ the relevant ideas, and only those ideas, as artworks. This ‘tagging’ occurs within the socially determined context of understanding the ideas as artworks. While it seems on the surface that these ideas might require some metaphysical property to make them artworks, there is a straightforward

³¹ Boden 2003.

social explanation available via something like Danto's conception of the artworld, where the background theory that supports the cultural possibility of art is sustained by the cumulative membership of the artworld, its artists, critics, journalists, salespeople, collectors, and philosophers. However the details might work out in the end, it is plausible that an artwork could just as easily not be considered an artwork had things been different, thus the counterfactual cases. But where Danto's approach faltered, we can bolster the general approach with work in sociocultural creativity research. Following R. Keith Sawyer we can see how the model of "group flow" helps to flesh out the picture of how a sociocultural account of the possibility of conceptual art, and this all art, can be attained.³²

Part of the explanatory story of conceptual art is its connection with the avant-garde artists of the twentieth century, and their status as *de facto* philosophers of art. Danto has argued that the artists involved with Dada and other groups were philosophizing about art and its essence and framework via their experiments and investigations while analytic philosophers themselves were busy with other tasks. I take this proposal very seriously, as I think it captures something very important about what conceptual art is up to in its "meta" character of self-consciously making art about the possibility of art. This meta-aesthetic character of conceptual art resonates with metafiction, fictional literature said to philosophize in a self-aware manner. This in turn points to an essential aspect of all art, that it philosophizes at its core utilizing

³² Sawyer 2015.

metaphor, becoming an invitation for cultural self-awareness within the appropriate context of experience.³³

1.7 Anticipating questions and objections

In this next, penultimate section of this first chapter, I will try to anticipate some reasonable concerns that might occur or possibly have occurred to the reader already. The intersection of philosophy and the contingent world of creative artmaking is a multidisciplinary intersection. The philosopher, the art historian, the critic, the artist, the theorist, the social scientist—each has significant interests here. (I suspect too, for that matter, that any non-expert who thoughtfully consumes arts media in whatever form it may take does as well.) Questions might well arise then about my philosophical exegesis, the treatment of historical cases, the representation of intuitions, how we apply the proposed theory to evaluative contexts, and so forth. I will therefore try to head off any confusions or worries.

Lopes says that there is a dialectical impasse between the two types of buck stopping theories, the traditional and the genetic. The impasse occurs because the traditionalist's commitment to exhibited features as constituting art conflicts with the geneticist's commitment to how an artwork has that status by virtue of how it originates.³⁴ One might think that the view I present aligns with the geneticist as I do indeed deny the traditionalist's view.

³³ In parallel with meta-ethics, conceptual art can be said to be meta-aesthetic, as long as we don't allow that term to force us into thinking that aesthetic experience exhausts art experience, objects, and performances. As a somewhat sloppy term of art then, conceptual art as meta-aesthetics allows us to see the theoretic grounding that connects the conceptual artist centrally to the artworld, thus pride of place in terms of a paradigm of art.

³⁴ Lopes 2014, Pgs. 46-49.

The geneticist accounts for art by virtue of its origin within an art context, whether institutional, historical precedent, or via theoretic or narrative understanding. What I am proposing is a third way, that art is art by virtue of its special social function, what I am calling its invitation to cultural self-awareness. This differs from the traditionalist because it denies the sole importance of exhibited properties. These properties can be utilized to great importance, but they are not what constitutes a work as art. My view differs from the genetic approach because it denies the claim that there are any epistemic conditions of understanding art as art, a feature of these theories. True, I am claiming there is an originating site of art, within the sociocultural creative activity that gives rise to this opportunity for cultural self-awareness. But the traditionalist would also recognize that artworks have origins in cultural activity, so this is not a determining feature of a genetic view.

Therefore, I do not consider my view a geneticist view, but a third path. Rather, I think the impasse is a false dichotomy: a theory of art can be aesthetic, yes, but that is too narrow; and it could be genetic, but those views are concerned with an understanding of art based on arbitrary factors—an object is an art object if and only if is understood as art based on tradition or authority; but there is a third way that Lopes hastily dismisses, the cultural approach, which explains the work of art on cultural terms irrespective of whether it is understood as art. A traditionalist aesthetic approach, roughly speaking, can survive tests in the wild, outside of contexts where an object is understood as art, as it attributes the importance to the object's inherent properties. The aesthetic properties of any beautiful human artifact (one that does something recognizable as the same sort of thing as what similar objects that are standardly taken as artworks do) can be explained aesthetically, just as instances of nature can as well. The

geneticist stumbles here somewhat, as works can exist outside of the traditions (such as in Carroll and Levinson), beyond the pale of institutions self-aware as art, but these works are not artworks if they remain unknown to those aware of art and its defined traditions. Danto does try to address this issue by saying there are multiple art worlds for multiple cultures, but this is unlikely, given the use of that concept in western understanding versus say tribal cultures, or even the ancient Greeks. (On the first, the religious nature of an idol might fully explain something while on the second, the Greeks were richly expressing their civic ideals, through their brightly painted marble statues and their Olympic games and so forth.) The third stream here, the cultural explanation, avoids these concerns. Art occurs as a social function in all healthy cultures, and it need not be aesthetic nor recognized as art.

If conceptual art is taken as the model for art, then does this not limit artworks to only the recent avant-garde activity of the past two centuries? The worry here is that I am proposing too restrictive a view. But this is not the case. The model of conceptual art allows us to see what is core to an artwork, this invitation to cultural self-awareness within creative cultural activity. Contrary to the concern, my view is more inclusive than the geneticist and more discriminating than the traditionalist. The approach is able to rescue activities that have been dismissed as non-art, say as craft historically has, such that as any cultural activity can be the basis of art, the origin within a certain context is not the determining factor. Conceptual art demonstrates that any materials or actions whatsoever might be utilized for art, without concern for any property except that of the reflexive experience it affords. This allows too for the flexibility of explaining art that occurs outside of “art” traditions. This then also supports Allan Kaprow’s observation that one of the lessons of Jackson Pollock was that an artist is not

bound to a medium.³⁵ But then does then the inclusiveness of my view entail that all cultural activity is art? One might think this is the case due to my commitment to sociocultural creative activity, an activity which is general and widespread. But the key condition that there is an invitation to cultural self-awareness on the models of katharsis and metafiction distinguishes art from what would otherwise be mere exercises in media.

One might balk at my characterization of Danto's artworld as being arbitrary, perspectival, and possibly infallible. This would be understandable, for as mentioned Danto himself distinguishes and distances his own view from that of George Dickie, who fleshed out the art world theory into the institutional theory, and later the new institutional theory. I will say a bit more here to hopefully satisfy any lingering doubts about my dismissal of that dimension of Danto's view.

Danto dismisses Dickie's articulation for similar reasons I am raising against Danto's own view. Dickie presents the artworld understanding as embodied within the institutions that pronounce that understanding, such as the museums and critics, artists and collectors. Danto sees that Dickie's elaboration of the artworld theory made clear the problem of arbitrary fiat of the artworld—it appears to be a mere exercise of authority, which by itself is insufficient reason to think something is art. This then unintentionally provides something of a *reductio* argument of the art world theory, so it is no wonder in my opinion that Danto wanted to distance himself from it. To do so, Danto insists that the indiscernible art/non-art pairs like the Brillo Box he

³⁵ Kaprow argues that Pollock's significance is beyond painting, it is in his reengaging with ritual. The implications and of Pollock are found then then in the legacy of artists using the materials of the everyday, no longer defined by an art medium. Pollock's Zen-like simplicity and straightforwardness is also celebrated here. Kaprow 1993.

considered in “The Artworld” reveal that the possibility of art is not via a pronouncement by the art world institution, but “reasons” steeped in theory and history.³⁶ In later works, Danto additionally identifies the important features of works as embodied meanings that philosophize at their core utilizing metaphor, works that exist in a realm of interpretation, creating what he calls “waking dreams” in one who experiences the artwork.³⁷ But this gesture to “reasons” (which Danto likens to scientific observation of the stars, and not decrees) along with the idea of an evolved historical understanding helps little here. If the artworld (and Danto later clarifies that there are many of these artworlds, overlapping, depending on the knowledge and perspective of each³⁸) has an understanding based on historically conditioned reasons, how is this different in practice from what substantiates Dickie’s alleged institutional pronouncement? Claims about the shifting cultural landscape of the multiple artworld are perhaps, charitably, ways of worldmaking in the Goodman sense, but ultimately as these objects do not have the property of being art outside of their proper theoretical context, then the comparison of the artworld with astronomy describing stars breaks down. The artwork not existing without theory being understood by an artworld is in stark contrast to theory being developed via a method to explain the natural world—the direction of fit is reversed. In both Danto and Dickie, reasons are available, and explainable via the history that generated the epistemic grounds of understandings that lead to pronouncement; and Danto’s conception of the artworld is not mute abstraction—he points to the understanding by the members of the artworld that sustain this background theory in practice. The actions that result from this understanding then is itself

³⁶ Danto 1997, Pg. 195. Danto 2013, Pg. 145. Danto 1981, Pgs. 45, 135.

³⁷ Danto 1981, Pg. 135; Danto 2013, Pg. 48.

³⁸ Danto 2003, Pg. 24.

a decree. Both approaches involve reasons, theory, and understanding—why else would the artworld experts make claims about the world that we are expected to take seriously? For example, one could ask ‘why?’ at any point, and would expect in return of course, reasons. When Danto says that “the artworld is logically dependent on theory” he seems to be suggesting that Dickie somehow is neglecting logic, theory, or understanding in his own work, but this I believe is not the case.³⁹ Rather it seems to me that the fingers of the two are pointing to slightly different things, but the entailments involved (reasons go both directions between theoretic understanding and action in the world) suggest this to be a distinction without real difference. Danto’s claim that his own enquiry is about ontology for example, does little to help, as Dickie likewise is trying to explain what art is in what Danto recognizes as a likewise essentialist account.⁴⁰ But at any rate, none of this matters much in terms of my overall critique and proposal. Even if Danto’s insistence of reasons or ontology is sufficiently different from Dickie’s approach such that it can shield him from the claim of arbitrariness, his twin claims of multiple artworlds and the historicity of art’s possibility within an artworld’s theoretic understanding still leave him vulnerable. As the epistemic history of a social group is contingent, and this to some extent arbitrary, then the possibility of error remains. Danto never recanted his artworld explanation, only shifted emphasis to embodied meaning within an atmosphere of theory. But that atmosphere of artworld theory is in the end arbitrarily established and perspectively limited, thus vulnerable to the critique of arbitrariness and infallibility. Danto does say the artworld can introduce new theoretical understandings,

³⁹ Danto 1981, Pg. 135.

⁴⁰ Danto 1981, Pg. 99.

properties in the matrix of artistic possibility, but ultimately all authority rests on this contingent sequence of history, as understood by the artworld—something he never recanted. The reasons are held by people, the theory understood by people, the people who populate the artworld.⁴¹

What I am presenting, in contrast to Danto, removes any epistemic requirement of an understanding as art, pointing rather to the epistemic social function involved in art. More specifically, I am pointing to the Ur-work (rather than an artwork) as a way to signal the lack of importance of the theoretic understanding as art. The addition of the status as art can plausibly enhance the experience, but it is not required to experience the work as art. Instead I suggest there is a cultural understanding at work that works atheoretically in that those experiencing the art appropriately need not have the requisite art theory to successfully do so. One might wonder how it is that some works of art being better than others is accounted for on this approach. Some works we have assumed are artworks in the past, I argue are actually not works of art at all. For example, paintings that serve an obviously practical function and offer no invitation to cultural self-awareness, such as portraits or images of items for sale, are not in fact works of art, despite being executed in a medium that has indeed historically been a means for making artworks. Of those works that are indeed art, creative works that invite us into cultural self-awareness and reflection, the question becomes telling apart the good from the bad. The easy answer is that there are degrees of cultural self-awareness that works can provide through experiencing them. The degree to which an artwork is creative, the level of craftsmanship and

⁴¹ Notice too that the claim to an atmosphere of “historically-indexed” theory to sustain the possibility of art then becomes open to the critiques levied at Levinson and Carroll, the historical arbitrariness mentioned earlier. Danto 1997, Pg. 196.

imagination involved, the relevance of the meaningful content and that content's availability via experience of the work in the mode in which the work is to be experienced—all of these dimensions factor into evaluating a work. And as such, a work can succeed or fail more or less in each of these areas. The art critic or historian then can evaluate a work on these axes in order to determine the quality of the work on the whole. The harder answer is that there is an elusive dimension to works, such as in the social, metaphorical, and philosophical content involved. The social sciences should be consulted in establishing just how it is that individuals and groups experience art in the ways relevant to the view I am presenting.

One might wonder from an historical perspective about the distinction between Conceptual Art as a self-aware movement in the 1960s, one oriented toward the use of text and the explicit use of philosophical ideas, and the more general notion that art is conceptual. This is a distinction that an art historian might uphold more strictly than the philosopher of art, as conceptual art as what we might think of as a school of sorts in a specific period is readily distinguished from what are seen as its precursors, such as Duchamp. clarify that I am construing it broadly, as does Lopes other philosophers of art. It is the broader construal, what Goldie and Schellekens refer to as “lower-case conceptual art”. (Incidentally, Goldie and Schellekens also identify the self-reflexiveness character of this broader notion of conceptual art, which supports my own connecting of conceptual art practices with metafiction.) Clearly Duchamp was not using the term “conceptual art” for his readymades and actions. I am not saying that Duchamp is a conceptual artist, let alone Baudelaire, in that restricted art historical sense. Instead, I am saying that Conceptual Art, as realized and articulated in the self-aware sense of the 1960s, is a model by which to understand what Duchamp, and Baudelaire, were up

to. I agree then with Goldie and Schellekens's observation that Duchamp practiced "conceptual art before conceptualism", setting the "agenda" for the '60s conceptual artists.⁴² Then, with the utility of the model demonstrated, we can see how it helps explain all art as being conceptual at its core. This retroactive attribution of artistic properties is familiar to Danto, who in "The Art World" discusses how the introduction of a new theoretical understanding retroactively identifies properties in artworks made previously, as all artworks either have the newly-identified properties or do not. So one does not need to refer to Duchamp or anyone else as a conceptual artist in order to use the model of conceptual art to understand the relevant features that constitutes the works as art.

An art historian might also object that conceptual art is not as prevalent in the marketplace as I suggest. I of course acknowledge that artists are making works in physical media, paintings, sculptures, and installations, and that these populate the marketplace. However, I agree with the art critic Roberta Smith who recognizes that conceptual art is the foundation of relevant contemporary art, its influence everywhere.⁴³ Art & Language helpfully point out a distinction between pure conceptual art and an applied "lite" version. I am arguing that the alleged purer historical version is the streamlined model by which we can identify the same functionality in other works, most readily in the applied versions that depend on traditional presentation moreso than the approach characteristic of the '60s. Similarly, one might think that the Avant-Garde is a preferable explanation, rather than conceptual art. My

⁴² See pages 10-12, 25 in Goldie, Schellekens 2010. Goldie, Pater; Schellekens, Elisabeth. *Who's Afraid of Conceptual Art?* New York: Routledge, 2010. The authors also support the linking of conceptual art with philosophical thought experiments. Danto likewise identifies Brillo Box as, "though the term did not exist in 1964, a piece of Conceptual art." Danto 2013, Pg. 148.

⁴³ Goldie, Schellekens 2010, Pg. 10.

clarifying point is that what we call the avant-garde historically has been a process of increased philosophical awareness, that following Danto gives us the reading of those experimental as philosophers of art, and thus part of the broader “lower-case” conceptual art definition. As I seek to present the model of conceptual art as the paradigm for all art, it makes much more sense to me to identify the conceptual art practices in the historical avant-garde, rather than vice versa.

This brings us to two final clarifications. While I discuss visual art and the contemporary art traditions associated with the legacy of visual art, I intend my work here to apply to all art forms, whether literary, visual, aural, physical, and so forth. In short, I argue that conceptual art, broadly construed, serves as a model for all art making. And, second, while I will not explicitly argue that not all art is aesthetic, such as Timothy Binkley does.⁴⁴ I will note a speculative thought that I find promising though. The thought is that while it is trivially true that all art is aesthetic in how it is experienced (because it utilizes sensory content), but that this does not necessitate that the aesthetic in what constitutes it as art. The how-what distinction I have in mind (how an artwork is experienced distinguished from what the artwork is) then helps to further explain the error of attributing aesthetic as a necessary property in art. The suggestion is that people make the aesthetic mistake because they are looking at how the work functions, and since all sensory experience has some aesthetic content, the way in which we learn about a work of art is necessarily aesthetic, which then colors are experience of the work. This then forms a response to Goldie and Schellekens’s proposal of an aesthetic account of

⁴⁴ Binkley 1977.

conceptual art via an aesthetic of “idealism”. Echoing Lopes’s dialectical impasse between traditional art theories and institutional ones, those authors see a divide between the traditional aesthetic and anti-aesthetic camps. Outlier conceptual works, works that do not forefront aesthetic content in a traditional manner such as through sight or sound, do not fit the traditional aesthetic conception, and so suggest to the traditionalist that these are not artworks (or if they are, not any good), and to the anti-aesthetic camp that not all art is aesthetic. Goldie and Schellekens then propose a way to rescue aesthetic theory via a third path, an aesthetics of ideas.⁴⁵ The problem I see with this approach is that mental content is chock full of ideas, all of which are trivially aesthetic in some way, but most of which are rightfully not classified as art. So that approach seems to me to have dubious utility. My own suggestion that art involves a sociocultural invitation to reflection avoids this trivializing approach while also affirming that the aesthetic content is but one means of making art.

Hopefully these comments have anticipated any concerns. I will address further concerns in Chapter Five. Now, a quick overview of the contents of the rest of the work.

1.8 Project organizational plan

The conceptual art paradigm I describe displaces painting as the dominant paradigm of art, thus making Lopes’s hard cases central to the explanation, becoming paradigmatic cases. In essence we flip Lopes’s approach on its head, and take its outlier problem as foundational to constructing an acceptable explanation. Consider a parallel move in physics courtesy of Ted

⁴⁵ Goldie, Schellekens 2010, Pgs. 99-100.

Sider. Rather than say that there are 10^{83} particles in the universe, one can solve counterintuitive problems at the subatomic level by adopting a theory that says instead that there is only one particle, but 10^{83} dimensions by which to experience it. Rather than allowing conceptual content to disrupt a theory of the arts, something we should aspire to have given the central role of the meaningful art in human civilizations, we should embrace conceptual art as the paradigm. In order to accomplish this flip, the approach will be as so: Following this first chapter, the introductory overview, we turn first to an evaluation of Lopes's buck passing aesthetic approach (Chapter Two); next, a look at Margaret Boden's creativity-based general theory of art, including her in-depth treatment of conceptual art (Chapter Three), while also establishing the outlines of a sociocultural theory of creativity; then (in Chapter Four) I will argue that problems raised thus far can be addressed by a sociocultural creativity account of art, a view that is shored up with the understanding of aesthetic theory pitfalls (from chapters two and three), a proper understanding of the sociocultural creativity involved in conceptual art (out of chapter three), along with Aristotle's account of *katharsis*, which will form a sort of bedrock; Lastly, a conclusion (Chapter Five) will be offered, incorporating responses to reasonable objections to my analysis and proposal, structured particularly around a discussion of the art and entertainment distinction, as well as a brief summary of the project's upshot, implications, and thoughts on future work. One surprising upshot to the even harder cases is that they demonstrate that at least some non-artworks are more successful as artworks than works that are already admired as artworks. The surprising upshot of the establishment of a theoretical account of Ur-works is the implication that many works that are thought artworks

are not artworks at all, merely executions in a medium associated with the creation of artworks. This is something for people across many fields and institutions to take interest in.

Here is the dissertation in its specific detail, beyond this opening chapter. Chapter Two focuses in-depth on Lopes's arguments presented in *Beyond Art*. I lay out Lopes's arguments and provide refutations. Key questions that arise out of this critique are identified. These questions will resurface in Chapter Four to guide the presentation of the positive view. Chapter Three focuses on creativity and conceptual art by critiquing an aesthetic theory in the form of Margaret Boden's philosophic work on the creativity in art. The examination of Boden's theory of art helps accomplish three main tasks. Task one is to show that Lopes is right about a general account failing, but for the wrong reasons (again identifying criteria for a positive theory). Task two is to get an in-depth look at conceptual art via Boden's thorough treatment of it and my critique of that treatment—conceptual art will become the model for the positive view in Chapter Four. And task three is to establish the sociocultural approach to explaining creativity, amounting to posing R. Keith Sawyer against Boden's psychological theory, where the former solves problems the latter cannot itself cope with. Chapter Four features a presentation of the positive view, art as conceptual cultural self-awareness. The questions and criteria that have arisen in earlier chapters are presented as a guide to a general theory of art. The positive view features conceptual art as the model, and sociocultural creativity theory and Aristotelian cultural self-awareness (via katharsis) as the basis of explanation. Explanation is given for how this positive view answers questions, meets criteria, and solves the "hard cases" identified by Lopes as well as the even harder cases I've introduced in this project myself. Chapter Five is comprised of a defense of reasonable concerns and a conclusion. Defending the positive view

includes dialectical responses on behalf of Lopes (viability of a cultural theory is something he denies; I defend citing Bourdieu and Frankfurt school which he dismisses for inaccurate reasons) as well as answering whether the cultural conceptual view is too inclusive, along with other questions and responses. Finally, a concluding section recaps the dissertation and makes suggestions for future work. Now, a close look at *Beyond Art*, the critique of which will structure the positive view I will argue for and defend.

Chapter Two: A Critique of *Beyond Art*

2.0 Overview of chapter

The chapter is a sustained critique of *Beyond Art*, which leads in relief to a clear suggestion of what is required of a successful theory of art. Lopes argues that we need to attend to individual arts rather than a general theory, advocating that we should “pass the buck” of explanation to the array of art kinds, each to its own. This is plausible on the face of it, constructing satisfactory theories of individual arts, but Lopes’s approach, as we shall soon see, has problems. I also find it counterintuitive to say a general theory of art couldn’t handle difference in particulars, as disparate aesthetic appearances do not necessarily entail insufficient similarity to count as part of the same type of thing. In addition, Lopes only mentions conceptual art in passing, and I take this to be a significant oversight, and key to a central error in his program. Conceptual art is simply an ugly duckling among the beautiful in the aesthetic approach, but with an understanding of why Lopes’s approach fails, we’ll see how it is recommended in relief that conceptual art be taken as a paradigm of art in general. This then gives us the upshot that the reasons to reject Lopes’s view also suggest ways to develop a successful view, a theory of art in general.

The chapter proceeds as follows. A look at Lopes’s buck passing theory, its use of the hard cases, and Lopes’s claim of a dialectical impasse prompts a series of objections and concerns about Lopes’s claims, arguments, and overall theory. In this process an important question emerges, namely asking why it is that artists make “hard cases” works in the first

place. Here Charles Baudelaire's theoretic contributions to what would amount to the hard cases provide a philosophic bulwark against Lopes. After looking at a series of questions and problems with Lopes's assumptions about art kinds (regress, arbitrariness, needless complexity, vagueness, the emergence of new kinds), I will examine a response on behalf of Lopes, his own "coffee mug objection" response. I offer a different way of viewing this objection, one more damning for the would-be buck passer. In the end I offer a way between the horns of the alleged dialectical impasse, suggesting a key role for conceptual art and the hard cases.

Here are a few preliminary thoughts on the sort of problems the idea of passing the buck to art kinds as defined by medium generates: It would be a genetic fallacy to assume that conventions of material and technique in a medium always or never produced artworks. The originating process, its genesis, is not enough to guarantee the results one way or the other. Not all buildings are architecture, not all movies art; and not all buildings are not architecture, not all movies are not art. A second level explanatory guide is needed to distinguish between the two. In addition, meeting the criteria of various art theoretical approaches—mimetic, expressive, formalist-aesthetic—does little to guarantee the result: works can be imitative, emotive, and beautiful, but yet fail to qualify as art. I will present a more detailed critique after providing a clearer picture of Lopes's approach.

2.1 The "art question" and *Beyond Art*

Lopes says that *the art question* ('What is art?') is the wrong question for philosophy, and following Noël Carroll, attributes the hard cases as the provocation for theories that take the

question seriously.⁴⁶ Monroe Beardsley provides Lopes with the rough framework for *Beyond Art* via a series of proposed tasks for the philosophy of art: clarifying the topic (determining ‘x’ in a ‘philosophy of x’); providing practical guidance to legislators and administrators; establishing the conceptual foundations for studying art; and setting criteria for critical evaluation of the arts. Lopes implies that determining the ‘x’ makes for a fool’s errand, as the vast array of artworks—whether taking the form of objects, performances, narratives, recordings, etc. —appear to have no clear commonalities. The “x is up for grabs.” It can be one of three things according to Lopes—x=art, x=aesthetic, or x=a grab bag of dissimilar objects—but with each option he argues the theory is uninformative because it does not establish a unity.⁴⁷ Lopes then argues that to address the first of Beardsley’s points requires first addressing the remaining three. According to Lopes, the buck passing theory is keenly fit for the tasks of establishing foundations for practical evaluation of art in the world, empirical art studies and evaluation, and according to Lopes far outstrips any competitors in accomplishing this.

At the core of Lopes’s project is the idea of the so-called “hard cases”, artworks that do not clearly fit into a traditionalist aesthetic scheme of the arts. The usual suspects are mentioned. Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*, the urinal he submitted under a false name and at least in part as a joke to an exhibit that promised to include any works as long as the submission fee was paid; Duchamp had paid the fee, but when the review board (of which he was a member) rejected the submission, Duchamp resigned from the board. John Cage’s *4’33”*, the

⁴⁶ Lopes 2014, Pg. 35; Carroll, Pg. 313.

⁴⁷ Lopes 2014, Pg. 3.

piece where David Tudor did not play for the duration of the piece, and instead the audience is immersed in the ambient sounds of the concert hall, the engaging sounds of “silence” that fascinated Cage in his Zen-inspired conceptual works. Other similar works are included, all of which involve conceptual use of non-traditional materials familiar to us as everyday non-art objects and activities.

Lopes’s argument for the buck passing approach therefore centers on the claim that it can deal with the hard cases better than any competing theory. How it handles these cases effectively, more effectively than its rivals, takes three parts. First, Lopes says that the buck passing theory takes the hard cases seriously, while also providing an error theory for why theorists present general theories of art. These general approaches provide a unifying explanation of art, what Lopes calls buck stopping, seeking he says to answer the questions posed by the hard cases. Lopes says he not only takes the hard cases seriously, but has a theoretical response to them as well. Traditional aesthetic buck stopping theories by contrast struggle with these cases, cases made “hard” on account of their appearing to flaunt both tradition and its aesthetic values. The second reason Lopes offers for his buck passing treatment of hard cases is the claim that a theory of art in general cannot accomplish anything his own pass the buck approach can. On his view, the individual traditional divisions of art kinds, such as sculpture and painting and Japanese flower arranging, can accomplish all and anything a general theory of art can. Therefore he says that a general theory cannot be preferred on those grounds. Lopes concludes then that a buck passing theory is preferable

because of its overall greater usefulness while not simply sweeping the hard cases under the carpet or dismissing them outright.⁴⁸

Lopes says that these classics of the conceptual tradition, these hard cases, are “tremendously controversial”.⁴⁹ Looking at the past century of art history, activities within the art market, and the art criticism found in professional journals, it is hard to make sense of this claim. The international art stars of the recent past are direct conceptual descendants of Duchamp and *Fountain*. Over the last century of art activity there is a straight conceptual line that connects Duchamp to Damien Hirst and Ai Weiwei via Dada, Pop, Fluxus, Concept Art, ABC art, etc. Lopes correctly says that none of the individual terms of these movements unify all conceptual art activity, but this overlooks the conceptual commonality they all share, even if they do not share the same historic context or membership cards. The robust contemporary art market includes Damien Hirst selling replicas of his works in a 2008 two-day Sotheby’s sale totaling \$200.7 million USD (\$286.2 adjusted): vitrines of formaldehyde animals, butterflies adhered to canvases, and other conceptual works. In art criticism, Danto, a leading art critic of his era and the first professional philosopher who took conceptual appropriation seriously with Warhol’s *Brillo Box*, is just one voice among many who were non-plussed by the array of contemporary creative fine art activity, much if not most of which was conceptual in a deeply relevant way.⁵⁰ So, in short, I don’t think there is evidence to support Lopes’s claim to controversy. In the context of a Sunday Morning Mimetic Kitten-Painting League I suppose this

⁴⁸ Lopes 2014, Pgs. 58-59.

⁴⁹ Lopes 2014, Pg. 5.

⁵⁰ Beyond the art gallery context, Ornette Coleman provides a nice example of someone regarded as controversial in general conception, yet whose innovations are now part of the basic jazz vocabulary; sometimes apparent controversy is prelude to assimilation.

claim to intense controversy is likely true, and perhaps too in secondary education art classrooms where an unjustified emphasis is placed on mimetic representations. Lopes cites far-right legislators and tax collectors as examples, but these examples are not very relevant—it is akin to citing science-deniers as evidence of a real controversy in the sciences. But for the experts and practitioners of the arts, the hard cases are well-established foundations of worldwide cultural activity at its most significant import. Of course, this theoretically could be an error, the past century of creative arts activity and discourse and the state of international arts culture today; but that seems highly unlikely given the decades of solid scholarship by art historians, the runaway art market that has consistently rewarded investment, the popularity of contemporary art centers like the Tate Modern and the Whitney, and the influence of contemporary works on popular culture entertainments (such as '70s conceptual performance artist Marina Abramović's work serving as the focus of a recent Jay Z music video).

Be that as it may, Lopes claims that these so-called hard cases historically gave rise to theories of art, and that theories of art did not appear prior to the hard cases. The result he says is two types of “buck stopping” (BS) theories of art, the traditional approach that emphasizes “exhibited” aesthetic features, and the genetic, so named for the genesis of the artworks via some established art pedigree, path, or sanction. These two types of BS theories contrast with his own “buck passing” (BP) theory, which he takes to offer us the best path to taking the hard cases seriously while meeting the relevant intuitions of the two other theory types. The traditionalist's intuition that the hard cases are not art as those works lack the needed aesthetic features that constitute artworks, and the genetic theorist's intuition that

they are art works despite not having those features, conflict, and lead to what Lopes terms an irresolvable “dialectical impasse”.⁵¹

Lopes says that his BP theory can handle the hard cases. The key idea behind the BP theory is to pass the buck by kicking any questions about art to individual art kinds for consideration at these lower levels. The BS cases stopped the buck at the level of a theory of art in general, which Lopes takes to be a mistake, and which leads to the dialectical impasse. To avoid the impasse then, Lopes kicks any questions about art down to the relevant art kinds, and to deal with the hard cases, he suggests that they open up a new art kind themselves. The BP theory takes the hard cases seriously in this way, while also avoiding the impasse by avoiding the question of art altogether. Lopes suggests instead that aesthetic theory and theories of individual art kinds are all that is needed to account for all art activity. If a work is an artwork, then it is of some art kind according to BP; and if a work is not a member of an art kind, it is not a work of art. (14-15) Simple. The traditionalist intuitions are met by referring to the guiding principles of aesthetic theory combined with the particular kind in which the artwork belongs (or the interloper that does not, as the case may be). *Fountain* on this approach is not a sculpture, and *3'44"* not music, if that is what the theorists of the kinds determine, but the hard cases can find a home in their own art kind theory as long as one can be sustained.

2.2 Tolstoy objection

⁵¹ Lopes 2014, Pg. 46.

As referenced above, Lopes claims, following Carroll, that the 20th Century development of the hard cases prompted theorizing about art on the whole, and that prior to the hard cases there had not been a general theory of art answering the ‘What is Art?’ question: “Interest in the theory of art was occasioned by the hard cases.” Lopes claims that early modern philosophers were not focused on a theory of art on the whole (“it was a side issue”⁵²) but on a theory of the arts, plural. He established this to argue that the hard cases of the 20th century are responsible for prompting the development of theories of art—“provocations to theories of art.”⁵³

The hard cases are difficult to pin down. Is it the fact that they don’t fit preconceived notions? Depending on whose preconceived notions it is we are discussing, the history of art is littered with works that were ruled out of bounds under the then-current assumptions. The Salon des Refusés of 1863 was composed of works explicitly rejected by the official academy. Visitors ridiculed the ‘shocking’ works of Manet and Whistler, remarkably tame paintings that would fit within the most conservative of settings today. Both Manet and Whistler however had created works that featured an analysis of art and art’s role. Manet’s famed *Déjeuner sur l’herbes* is an explicit critique of the then-dominant conventions of eroticized nudes in classical settings done in an idealist academic style. Manet’s realism, placing a nude among men clad in contemporary business clothes, is consistent with his other works of the time, with the nude not playing an erotic role, but making direct, challenging contact with the viewer’s (by default, male) gaze.⁵⁴ While these works still do have obvious aesthetic properties and properties of

⁵² Lopes 2014, Pg. 33.

⁵³ Lopes 2014, Pg. 35.

⁵⁴ Laura Mulvey provides the classic description of the male gaze, albeit in cinema, in “Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema”. The effect of the presentation for the enjoyment of the male creates a default conditioned mental state for any viewer to objectify sexually and dominate the female. Manet’s *Dejeuner* is less obviously

their medium, they were yet hard cases for the period, widely derided and difficult to fit into preconceptions.

But even if we stipulate the hard cases as limited to 20th century conceptual cases, as does Lopes, there remains one significant counterexample to Lopes's claim, Leo Tolstoy's late 19th century work, *What is Art?*, a principled enquiry into the nature of art in general. With this, Lopes's story turns out to be historically inaccurate. Tolstoy wrote *What is Art?* at the end of the 19th Century, explicitly responding to Humean and Kantian theories of art, as well as to his perceived immorality of Nietzsche's thoughts on art. In the opening of that work, Tolstoy explicitly says that previous attempts at an overall theory of art either focused on the pleasures works of art might occasion (courtesy of Hume), or on the aesthetic experience of the beautiful (courtesy of Kant, although Kant offered a more general theory of aesthetics and not a focused account of human creations), and to Nietzsche (to which he attributes a decadent aestheticism he also associates with Baudelaire).⁵⁵ Considering the theories of art that preceded him, theories that attempted to explain the arts as a unified whole (Hume and Kant freely range over examples from many different art kinds), Tolstoy offers up a clear theory of art answering the titular question. The problem here is of course that Lopes claims that no theories of art preceded the hard cases, saying any previous theories that had the appearance of a theory of art were mere side effects. He also claims that the hard cases provoked the type of theorizing involved in general theories of art, but this 1897 work that advances the claims that art is the

confrontational than the gaze of the nude in the oft-analyzed *Olympia*, but as Pointon argues, the nude in *Déjeuner* plays the lead role by articulating the narcissistic and voyeuristic male gazes of the clothed figures. "Guess Who's Coming to Lunch? Allegory and the Body in Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*" (Chapter Six) in Pointon 1990.

⁵⁵ Tolstoy 1962.

expression of a universalizing spiritual feeling is well in advance of the types of mainstay conceptual works Lopes has in mind. If anything, Tolstoy could be characterized as reacting to a perceived decadence, which strikes a similar chord, but is not the same as responding to the hard cases; Tolstoy's idea of decadence is in the form of Oscar Wilde, not Marcel Duchamp or Fluxus.

As a quick aside, one might think that I misrepresent Lopes's point here about the hard cases occasioning theories of art when I offer up Tolstoy in reply, and think it better instead to say that the '60s theories were inspired by hard cases, with avant-garde artists aware of earlier experiments, but not the philosophers. But I don't think this is warranted. Lopes is very specific about the hard cases causing theories of art, and he takes great pains in Chapter Two of *Beyond Art* to try to make a historical case that there were no theories of art in general until the 1960s. But even if we did interpret Lopes as saying that it was the work of the 20th Century avant-garde that occasioned the theories of the '60s, which may well be true, this doesn't preclude the helpfulness of looking at the history of meaningful conceptual artmaking and the blurring of art and life via the investigation of Baudelaire later in this chapter.

If we ask the question why the artists were making hard-cases types of works at all, that is how they came about to be made by serious professional artists, then we see that Lopes has things the wrong way round—the hard cases came out of theorizing about art. To establish that conclusion we can briefly look at how Picasso and Braque's invention of collage, combined with the general Parisian arts and intellectual atmosphere initiated by Charles Baudelaire and Théophile Gautier, explain Duchamp's activities quite clearly. The hard cases didn't come out of

nowhere and understanding how they came about sheds light on the relevant theorizing about art that underlie their creation.⁵⁶

2.3 Beyond the Tolstoy objection: Baudelaire, and answering why artists made hard cases

We can supplement the Tolstoy objection with a look at two pivotal cultural figures of the 19th century, both of whom have had lasting impact on the arts, Charles Baudelaire and Theophile Gautier. Gautier and Baudelaire were two pan-arts critical and creative figures who dissolve the distinction between art forms in both their creative and critical works. While the Tolstoy objection also shows Lopes's claim that the move to "theories of art was occasioned by the hard cases"⁵⁷ to be false, as religious zeal and disagreement with Hume and Kant's own theories prompted Tolstoy's, there is also a more philosophically interesting point regarding the origins of hard cases: the origin of modernism and charge of the avant-garde. The legacy of Baudelaire, in addition to his poetic contributions, is firmly fixed as the figure that urged artists to create works of and about their times in modes and styles that embodied the feeling of living in the new urban twenty-four-hour world of mechanization, light, and increasing speed. This is in stark contrast to using traditional modes to merely illustrate the current times. The 'now' of 19th century Paris was itself a stark contrast to the 'then' of aristocratic and peasant agrarian European traditional modes that reached back through the centuries. Baudelaire sought an art

⁵⁶ In this sense of their being an origin for art activity, I think Levinson and Carroll are quite right here in recognizing historical narrative providing contexts for challenging works to emerge.

⁵⁷ Lopes 2014, Pg. 45.

that embraced the new, an art that was modern (of the times), and followed the experiments of an advanced-guard (avant-garde) to open new means of creative artmaking.

The appropriate question to ask in order to clear up Lopes's misconception is why the artists who introduced the hard cases did so. A causal explanation is available for these allegedly outlandish cases, as they happened for some reason, and providing explanation there will pay dividends in both a critique of the buck passing theory and pointing toward a positive view. We'll see that answering these questions suggests a reversal of Lopes's explanations: the hard cases did not cause philosophizing about art; philosophizing about art caused the "hard" cases.

Danto suggests that the avant-garde artists of the 20th century were engaged in philosophy of art while philosophers themselves did little in the area. To put this idea into focus, here's a revealing example of John Baldessari's. Baldessari created a work in the early '70s, *The Pencil Story*, an anecdote attached to two images of the same pencil. In the first the pencil is unsharpened, battered, neglected; and then in the second image sharpened. The accompanying anecdote goes as such:

I had this old pencil on the dashboard of my car for a long time. Every time I saw it, I felt uncomfortable since its point was so dull and dirty. I always intended to sharpen it and finally couldn't bear it any longer and did sharpen it. I'm not sure, but I think that this has something to do with art.

That's the piece. I think it gives brilliant insight into the function of the artist-as-philosopher that Danto identified as driving the development of art over the course of the 20th Century. I also think this helps focus the way to understand the origins of Modernism, as a meta-aesthetic conceptual movement initiated by Baudelaire's call for art to be made that embodied the times

by taking new forms, not by using old techniques to merely illustrate the times. The idea of the artist-philosopher also suggests a useful exercise, tracing the origins of that philosophical lineage. Duchamp is the unquestioned wellspring of what is acknowledged as the conceptual stream of 20th century art. But Duchamp was neither born nor lived in a vacuum. He was deeply influenced by the core cubists Picasso, Braque, and Gris in his early years.⁵⁸ Duchamp's earliest works were as a cubist painter, such as his noted *Nude Descending a Staircase* from the Armory Show. But he soon broke from "optical" painting and began his experimentations in gender performance, chance operations, appropriation, delegation, found objects, installations, film, mechanical works, assemblage, and assisted readymades, among others. All of these experiments can be seen as taking Picasso and Braque's invention of collage steps further, breaking down the distinction between art and life. Moreover, many, perhaps most, of Duchamp's works featured puns, jokes, wordplay, and so forth. Duchamp was influenced in this respect by the literary experiments of Raymond Roussel and others, but also importantly by Picasso and Braque's penchant for wordplay and visual jokes within their cubist collages and other cubist works, themselves influenced by Mallarmé, Appollinaire, etc. The legacy of 20th century avant-garde conceptual and philosophical explorations can be traced back to the cafes of Paris, a scene where revolutionaries in the arts and politics rubbed shoulders. In the background of this scene hover Baudelaire and Gautier.

A sketch of a historical explanation of why the artists introduced the hard cases in the first place will be helpful. A full historical investigation is beyond the scope available here, but a

⁵⁸ These artists are to be distinguished from the illustration-minded popular cubists who received great commercial attention in the era, but are understood as minor footnotes now.

reasonable hypothesis of the motivations for the hard cases, one that can at first glance be supported by the historical record: Baudelaire. Baudelaire kickstarts the agenda of experimentation in Paris. But just as Socrates may be called the first philosopher, although there were those philosophizing before him (if without an explicitly rational method), there are predecessors in the background of Baudelaire's innovations, namely Theophile Gautier and the earlier Romantic movement.⁵⁹ In addition to his call for the self-awareness of modernism, an art of that embodies its time, incorporating the spirit of its changes and new modes of being, Baudelaire also incorporated this self-awareness as creative living within one's milieu, in the spirit of Nietzsche's call to be the author of one's own life, to make one's life a creative meaningful work. To this end Baudelaire embraced a performative dandyism, dyed his hair green and took up the role of flaneur, and championed a transposition between arts traditions as activities of artistic "thought"—all activities that foretell the avant-garde activities of the following century. Duchamp, of course, with his female alter ego Rose Selavy and the accompanying works grounded in gender performance, plus use of non-traditional art materials such as in the case of *The Large Glass*. But also the Situationists International, Guy Debord's art group that embrace the flaneur spirit of walking the streets as art, creating art out of everyday actions and non-traditional approaches to documenting urban life, and led directly to the London punk movement, whose characteristic boundary-pushing appearances owe much to the threads that trace back to Baudelaire.

⁵⁹ While Gautier was a significant influence, Baudelaire and Gautier receive and advance the Romantic tradition in different ways. Baudelaire relayed that Gautier's art criticism "educated a whole generation" quoted in Jeffreys 2015, Pg. 60. Baudelaire and French nineteenth century art's "syncretic" approach across poetry, music, and painting is inspired by "Romantic aspirations towards a new synthesis of the arts" Scott 1988, Pg. 5.

The issues with art kinds and the related siloing Lopes assumes as given is something of a rehearsal of a cultural critique levied by the Romantics against the enlightenment era. Baudelaire lived and worked in the center of nineteenth-century arts culture that was Paris. He can be seen as resolving some of these tensions while developing what would become the agenda for the avant-garde over the next century and beyond via his explicit legacy of modernism. David Scott observes that “neo classical European theory and practice had established the ‘bounds of the arts’” during the enlightenment.⁶⁰ The Baudelaire-led development of dissolving the boundaries between arts, the artist’s imagination utilizing the commonalities and equivalents in different modes of creating, is premised on artmaking not being bound by arbitrary distinctions into individuated media. “The implications,” says Scott, “of this this phenomenon for formal or generical classification are, of course, problematic.”⁶¹ By looking at the thought of Baudelaire and his mentor Theophile Gautier, we can accomplish two tasks: bolster the critique of Lopes’s buck-passing theory, and add further to an outline of what an acceptable theory of art must address.

Key among the characteristics of Baudelairean modernism are a self-awareness within one’s cultural context and time, the imaginative autonomy of the work of art, an embrace of *transposition d’art*, the recognition that thought guides artistic production, and a development of a theory of *dandyism*.⁶² Baudelaire suggests that an authentic art is one that recognizes that

⁶⁰ Scott 1994, Pg. 74.

⁶¹ Scott 1994, Pg. 74.

⁶² Gautier and Baudelaire’s basic conception of the autonomy of art is a similar vision to Friedrich Schiller’s conception of the autonomy of beauty. Schiller’s notion was that humans first came to understand their own freedom by experiencing the self-contained auto-nomos of natural beauty. Gautier’s highly influential formulation *l’art pour l’art* picks up on a general attitude of the Romantic milieu of art not serving a practical function or

its own time is as mysterious, meaningful as any, and that the manner in which one creates art in that time must be about that time in both its subjects and its means of creating art. This is accomplished by balancing the contingent details of one's time with the necessary, the human condition and mental experience.⁶³ Baudelaire's commitment to painting in poetry, his 'cult of images' combines with his focus on the artist's perspective and sense experience, with the transformation of the world with moral impressions, what Proust would later refer to as "metaphor". Beauty was not abstract form, but was the result of the inner feeling of the artist engaged with the here and now.⁶⁴ The modern artwork is charged with "evocative magic", consisting of both subject (the artist's imaginative thought, self-knowledge, sincere expression) and object (extracting the mysterious meaning of the time via the physical work).⁶⁵ This is not the Romantic fantasies of emotional outpouring or abstract pursuit of Platonic form.

Baudelaire's advocacy of transpositional across the arts media, and functionally into his own daily life, is a recognition that thought guides artmaking and that techniques can be freely

making any necessary reference to the world. A work of art's only responsibility was to itself; this abstract connection to Platonic formalism would set the theoretic stage for the development of pure abstraction in the following century, but Baudelaire critiqued its detachedness from emotion and the times. Baudelaire observed that mimetic painting necessarily "fictionalized" reality by transposing the world into pictures, thus creating a "new autonomy" for the artwork. Jeffries, Pg. 62. As Baudelaire also prioritized the of-the-times nature of creativity, so his modernist conception of autonomy is one that is simultaneously free, yet engaged in the particular social milieu in which the creator operates. In addition, Bourdieu comments that Baudelaire represents "*moral indignation* against all forms of submission to the forces of power or to the market...the daily resistance which led to a progressive affirmation of the autonomy of writers" Bourdieu 1995, Pg. 60. The avant-garde as critique of status quo socially, and not merely in any arts medium, descends from this point. Revolution and resistance characterize avant-garde art activity as much as experiments within a given medium.

⁶³ Hiddleston, Pg. 137.

⁶⁴ Brix, Pgs. 9-10.

⁶⁵ Hiddleston, Pg. 130-137.

borrowed whatever the medium of execution.⁶⁶ Baudelaire writes that the “spiritual condition” of the times requires the arts to either contribute to one another “new powers”, if not “to take one another’s place”.⁶⁷ For transposition to be possible, there must be central facts of artmaking that each participates in, such as the “poetic thoughts” Baudelaire finds in Eugène Delacroix’s paintings.⁶⁸ Baudelaire characterized the abstract commonalities in the paintings of Delacroix and within his own poetics, such as the use of color, harmony, or space, as “a way of thinking”.⁶⁹ Similar outlooks can be found in the Romantic-influenced philosophic climate of the period. The nineteenth century French philosopher Victor Cousin describes the greatest paintings as “de la pure poésie”, saying that poetry can sculpt, paint, build, and craft melodies.⁷⁰ Baudelaire echoes this with his description of Delacroix as having “the exactitude of a subtle writer, with the eloquence of an impassioned musician.”⁷¹ I suggest then what is obvious, that the poetic thoughts are the conceptual artistic content expressed in the works, signaling the initial outlines of an account of what has now become known as ‘conceptual art’.

Rosemary Lloyd identifies two principle threads in Baudelaire’s thinking, Delacroix as the imaginative model for all of the arts, which is Baudelaire’s ‘cult of images’ as discussed above,

⁶⁶ Gautier himself coined the term ‘transposition d’art’, singled out Baudelaire’s pan-arts activity, the poet-flaneur “taking colours from every palette and notes from every keyboard”. Gautier 1909, Pg. 39-41, quoted in Jeffreys, Pg. 60. The visual arts, says Gautier, were incorporated within literature at this point in French literature. Jeffreys, Pg. 61. The result was “frequent transpositions” between the arts, setting the stage for the trans-arts Symbolist movement. (In addition to French poets and critics, the novelist Henry James identified similar syncretism within the novel, saying the “analogy between the art of painting and the art of the novel is...complete.” Quoted in Jeffreys, Pg. 215.

⁶⁷ Baudelaire 1995, Pg. 44.

⁶⁸ Baudelaire 1995, Pg. 44-45.

⁶⁹ Scott 1994, Pg. 69-72.

⁷⁰ Scott 1994, Pg. 62.

⁷¹ Baudelaire, Pg. 44.

and the dandy as a heroic intellectual and spiritual figure immersed in the art of life.⁷² The dandy's artform was the self, "self as work of art", immersed in the life of the current time and place.⁷³ The spirit of the cult of images then becomes the basis of the self as art for the dandy, imaginatively engaged with the mystery of the here and now. This combines with Baudelaire's famed commitment to the flaneur, the stroller of the Hausmann boulevards and observer of life in the gaslight. The legacy of Baudelaire is the avant-garde collapsing of the life-art distinction, where creative thought in one's time is the indispensable component to artmaking. Baudelaire's contribution of modernism "has proved incalculably important to subsequent thinkers and artists."⁷⁴ This autonomy from enlightenment divisions into art kinds would have its fulfillment in Mallarmé, a direct influence on the conceptual practices of both the Cubists and Duchamp.⁷⁵

I think it's fairly clear that Baudelaire initiates the general experimentalism that characterizes the hard cases, but determining causation is tricky. At minimum, there is relevant precedent. And Baudelaire was doubtlessly instrumental in increasing the experimental and self-conscious character of the arts, which is sufficient to explain how Paris became the ground zero for experimental modernism. To answer the question why the artists make the hard cases then now becomes fairly straightforward. These artist-philosophers were wondering about the nature of art, what it was and what it was for. So, after examining the claim that theories of art were prompted by the hard cases, and seeing the deeper lineage of these creative activities, we

⁷² Lloyd 2002, Pgs. 188-189.

⁷³ Lloyd 2002, Pgs. 188-189.

⁷⁴ Snell, Pg. 219.

⁷⁵ See both Rousseau and Stark.

can say contra Lopes, the conclusion suggested is that the hard cases came out of, rather than inspired, philosophers thinking about the nature of art. In other words, the artists creating the hard cases (artists as philosophers, following Danto's keen observation), were offering theoretical proposals about art in their creative projects. Philosophical theories of art don't come about in the 20th century because of the hard cases. No, the hard cases come about on account of philosophical theorizing about art. This reversal of Lopes offers up another reason for rejecting the historical claim about the origin of general theories of art. The "art question" as Lopes puts it, was alive and well in the creation of the hard cases themselves.

2.4 Upshot of cross-media conceptual artmaking

Baudelaire's modernism then is a model for understanding Duchamp and other early 20th Century avant-gardists, a model where boundaries between life, literature, and painting are eased or erased under the guiding influence of self-aware creative thought within a specific milieu. The artistic activity of artists generally occurs across media.⁷⁶

Cross-media creative explorations demonstrate the conceptual-structural similarity between the arts. The abstract conceptual content can be realized in separate media because the stuff art is made of is secondary to the meaning embodied within it, the reason for its being made as an artwork and not merely as a practical artifact. The materials of a work do influence

⁷⁶ Famously Miles Davis made visual art, Jerry Garcia designed ties. Bob Thompson painted in the spirit of jazz. Michelangelo and Leonardo were of course active across a variety of media, and Picasso wrote literary works as well making visual art, inventing new media in the process of simply being a creative artist exploring creative ideas, or in the phrase of Baudelaire, "poetic thoughts".

and contribute to the possibility of that meaning, how a work can say what it says in the way that it does. The work's meaning necessarily includes how the conceptual content is embodied—the realization within the medium is itself conceptual content, expressing the artist's thoughts on how to use the medium to effectively embody the content. The painterliness of a Cecily Brown painting is embodied thought as much as is the pornographic content she realizes in a canvas. But an artwork's uniqueness in its particular expression need not entail that the conceptual content could not have been made in another way. The cross-arts expression regularly pursued by artists demonstrates the primacy of the conceptual content, a work's meaning a theory of art in general needs to be in place to account for the qualities in these different expressions in a way that is not limited by the perspective of one medium.⁷⁷

2.5 Art kind technical issues, questions and answers for Lopes

So far we have looked at the big picture of Lopes's treatment of the hard cases, and seen in the model of Baudelaire as godfather to the avant-garde, the conceptual-minded artist who works across media while breaking down the distinctions between life and art. Now we will attend to a series of technical issues that arise with Lopes's buck-passing scheme.

⁷⁷ There is a tempting parallel to draw here between Nietzsche's characterization of Apollinian individuation and the enlightenment categorizing of art forms in contrast to the Dionysian impulses of Baudelaire and those who continued in his wake, what we can characterize as postromantic. This would suggest then that there is a balance that might be appropriately attained between separation and unity. A plausible speculative proposal here would be that the embodying of abstract conceptual content requires particular skills in articulating within a given material. Without that skill of medium expertise, the expression becomes unintelligible, and thus fails as an artwork; without the content prior to its embodiment, there would be mere works in a medium.

Lopes claims his buck passing theory has two key commitments that fall out of it being viable and informative. An artwork is an item that is a member of some art kind, such as ballet; and there are no works that do not belong to some kind. The hard cases put pressure on this requirement of categorization, as works like Cage's *4'33"* are not obviously music and Duchamp's *Fountain* not obviously sculpture. Lopes says that to consider whether hard cases like these are artworks the item in question should be paraded around the different art kinds to see if we can find a dance partner for it. If there's a good fit with a potential suitor, then we've identified how and why the work is a work of art—it is a member of the individual art kind, and therefore an artwork. If a match is not made however, then we continue on checking out the potential fit with other kinds, until at last if there is no match possible, we conclude that the hard case in question is not an artwork at all—otherwise it would be a member of an art kind, which given our hypothesized scenario and the buck passing scheme, it is not.

Interdisciplinary instances of more than one medium being used in one work create an interesting case to introduce these technical issues with buck passing. Lopes says that multimedia works have membership in different art kinds, sort of a dual- or multiple-citizenship scenario. In his example of an illuminated manuscript by Blake, Lopes says this poetic and visual work received simultaneous membership in literature and painting. The work therefore needs to travel to each kind to receive its evaluation.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ It is unclear why the category illuminated manuscript is not itself a kind, given Lopes's claim about the tea ceremony. It is also unclear whether a graphic novel like *Maus* is a kind in itself or in a situation of possessing dual citizenship. The concepts multiply rapidly.

Parading a multimedia work to various potential dance partners carries with it some complications beyond locating the correct experts. A visually spectacular ballet work like *Parade* or *Rite of Spring* suffers by being seen in its reductionist perspectives. Only noting the properties of dance not only leaves out the visual and sonic dimensions, but even after making the trips to each expert, there is left out two important features of the work: what it is as a whole, as a *gesamtkunstwerk*, and how the various media interact with one another to create something dependent of both but irreducible when in isolation. The interactions between set, costume, music, and movement come together to form a whole beyond its individual component perspectives.⁷⁹

This line of enquiry also raises the question of what constitutes an art kind. When Lopes says that an art kind is “a product of an activity outputting works of that kind”,⁸⁰ This is less helpful than it may seem at first. There is a tautological feel to a claim that an effect X is the product of the cause of that X effect-producing cause. If a work has the status of being an artwork by being a member of an art kind, then we need ask what constitutes that membership. Lopes says that an art kind is of a certain kind because it produces artworks of that kind. This borderline tautological formulation is not very helpful. If I ask how to identify a snipe, being told that a snipe is what is output by successful snipe-type reproductive couplings hasn't gotten me very far. What's a snipe? This has the familiar ring to it in the classic philosophical example of the dormitive principle. Q: What produces the sleep effect? A: The

⁷⁹ The Buddha's analogy of the elephant seen by blind men, which I reference again in Chapter Five, is pertinent here. Isolating dimensions fails to give us a picture of the complete animal. Reducing a functional object to its components and dimensions of use is extremely limiting of the holistic effect it produces as a unity. Moreover, as seen by way of the Baudelaire discussion, creative thought often leads the artist to disregard medium-specificity.

⁸⁰ Lopes 2014, Pg. 14.

dormitive principle. This type of circularity ('dormitive' meaning sleep-producing) doesn't get us very far in understanding where exactly the buck is supposed to be passed. Continual buck-passing isn't an acceptable option, either as a circular passing of responsibility or as a regress. The buck has to stop somewhere, or Lopes's scheme is neither informative nor viable. We should ask then what is entailed, and what is at stake, when the job of determining art from non-art is delegated to the individual artforms.⁸¹

The buck passing approach of delegating responsibility—or shirking, depending on one's view of things here—creates a series of technical issues more fundamental than finding a home for complex or innovative works. Passing the buck down to individual art kinds suggests questions about kind identification, the number of kinds, accommodating new kinds and so forth. Looking carefully at Lopes's proposal, there appear to be a number of knotty problems that arise: a problem of plenitude, a population explosion of art kinds, and a granularity problem—how fine-grained must we go? There is also identified a serious regress issue and needless complexity. But wait there's more: a paradox of new kinds lies in wait as well. None of these speaks well of the buck passing theory.

First, the identification of an art kind is not as obvious as we might think. Art kinds are not an historically stable taxonomy. If an art kind is like pornography and Jesse Helms, that one knows it when ones sees it, then this is very unsatisfactory. Our individual biases, histories,

⁸¹ Could Lopes mean something other than an art medium by art kind? Elsewhere he defines a medium as centering a mode of creating and experiencing an artwork. Lopes 2014, Pg. 144. The art kind appears to be a level of abstraction, a way of creating and experiencing, a slight remove from the particular medium, the stuff of creating and experiencing. This interpretation is consistent with different kinds of art using the same medium—say, ballet versus body art are two art kinds using the same medium, the human body—but this is a bit unclear. It doesn't seem to affect the analysis, but worth noting.

preferences—all of these make problematic the reliance on our individual intuitions to identify art kinds. We are not ideal epistemic agents, so if there are actually art kinds in the world, we quite possibly might be mistaken when attempting to identify them. As Lopes acknowledges, our intuitions are often “baked in” to our individual attempts at making sense of art. If we are to avoid the problem of identifying art kinds by pointing to established kinds, this then becomes a form of institutional theory. For the traditionalist, this opens up their approach to face the same charges of arbitrariness as would any genetic institutional theory.

One example where Lopes references art kinds is in particular troublesome, that of the Zen tea ceremony. He says “if *Fountain* is a work of art, then we may ask what kind of art work it is. Plainly not a poem or a performance of the tea ceremony.”⁸² I do not object to saying the tea ceremony being art at all. Far from it. Rather, it’s the fine-grained specificity this comment suggests about kinds. If the tea ceremony, one very specific activity within Zen arts (alongside raking the Zen garden and flower arranging, which are also meditation activities, a point we’ll return to), is an individual art kind like Lopes says, then this suggests a very fine-grained granularity indeed. Coarser-grained designations might have included ‘meditative performance’ or ‘appropriated everyday action’. But Lopes’s very narrow account of a kind suggests that there are very many, perhaps countless many, art kinds to be determined. This creates then what we should think of as a *problem of plenitude*. The result of so many fine-grained kinds is a vast panoply, unwieldy in its potential breadth and depth. Presumably, roughly equivalent art kind categories to the tea ceremony would include 17th Century Dutch still life painting, Maori

⁸² Lopes 2014, Pg. 59.

kayak carvings, and 1950s Hollywood Westerns, '70s ECM fusion, square dancing, Instagram posts, and so forth, on and on. This list could generate the appearance of potentially endless art kinds, given the unfolding of different contexts and potential variations in art history and practice. The positive of this fine-grained approach is its immense flexibility in accounting for detailed kinds. But because of this plenitude, expert theorists are needed for each in order to accomplish individual tasks for each kind, as per the buck passing requirement of siloing theorizing about arts. Thus the problem of plenitude creates a staffing issue. Countless theorists must determine boundaries, distinctions between art and non, and how to handle the hard cases, for each kind. The buck passing approach has generated a vast amount of work, as each kind is on its own.

But notice too this also opens up a *problem of proliferation* via a potential ever-increasing fineness of grain, each level a sieve passing the buck in turn to finer divisions, and so on. A reasonable response here might be that there is a coarser hierarchy in place to give structure to art in general and stop the successive buck passing, but how is that 30,000-foot view established given the other issues raised here, and particularly without a general theory of art as a guide? So now with this proliferation, there is a *regress* problem—there is no clear way to determine where the buck stops. If governing the borders and internal workings of art is up to each individual art kind, nothing necessarily stops the buck-passing from continuing. So, related to this problem of runaway art kinds (what we might think of as horizontally being the plenitude and vertically the regress of proliferation) is a problem of how fine-grained the kinds must be in order to account for distinct artmaking approaches, each with their own identity and idiosyncrasies. This then becomes a *granularity problem*. If there is a need for ever finer-

grained art kinds, then what is the limit of how finely-grained the kinds must be? We can add this to the list of tasks for the kind theorist, but theoretically they too could pass the buck down even further, forever passing the buck as new kinds are distinguished from one another within kinds. That is if a theorist can be found with the appropriate specialization.

This may sound unreasonably alarmist at first, but the proliferation of music genres is amazingly fecund, for example, and unpredictable. Rock and roll has morphed into thousands if not tens of thousands of distinct genre types, with no end in sight. The New York school of mid-'70s punk rock is not the same as London punk of the same era, let alone the very many punk revival offshoots appearing over the subsequent decades. But these could be further and further distinguished into types. There appears to be nothing reigning in ever-further distinctions into finer kinds.

The problem of plenitude and the granularity regress both suggest that a buck passing theory is a proposal of needless complexity. A general theory of art can provide general counsel, so to speak, to the interrogation and analysis of any works, no matter what medium or presentation. The buck passing theory by contrast sticks each kind theorist on an island amidst an enormous archipelago of similarly isolated islands. Each shipwrecked theorist must figure out survival on her own. Lopes could reply that the various theorists can work together (say call across the water, to extend the analogy), but this is not what Lopes says. Each kind theorist is on its own according to the buck passing theory, each kind's little island a realm unto itself, each theorist ready to pass the buck when the theorizing gets dicey.

Ultimately the same problems faced by a general theory of art are immediately replicated at the level of the art kind and any additional subdivisions of sub-kinds. Wherever the buck is passed, it can then be passed multiply in turn. Lopes suggests as much when he talks about the multiple theory options jettisoned from a general theory now being available to each kind—but this has delegated the same responsibilities across all potential siloed kinds that might ever arise in plenitude, proliferation, regress, and granularity. Moreover, this in turn generates the *question of authority*, of who it is who gets to arbitrate the divisions and theory-use, and without a general theory the evaluation of whether the determination is correct or warranted has no compass. The implied each-to-its-own relativism is likely benign, but simply seems out of step with the commonsense world of how people experience art and how experts evaluate it.⁸³

So in sum, the responsibility for theorizing about artworks has been delegated to the individual art kinds by the proposed BP theory. Lopes says that there is nothing that a theory of art can do that a theory of an individual art kind can't do. But how feasible is it to require that an individual art determine what is art or not within that medium without deploying a theory of art to guide her? How can a critic determine her proper object of study within the medium without that distinction made via a theory of art.⁸⁴ Adding the hard cases complicates things

⁸³ If each art kind, whatever those might be, end up determining their own answers to these sorts of questions, there is an interesting relativism that results. There's nothing particularly damning about relativism in culture, but the value theory relativism Lopes's BP scheme suggests should give us pause. Painting may well decide there are no dual citizenship cases; Tea Ceremony may decide that only certain teas count on certain days; Film may agree with Scruton and decide that it is not an art. These absurdities cover up a more practical concern that arises with value relativism: an art judge or committee will be unable to make a principled assessment between works that are of different kinds. Each kind is infallible, which creates a relativistic value landscape, thus handicapping any interdisciplinary comparisons.

⁸⁴ One imagines several military squads all radioing headquarters--"What do we do?"--and the general responding "Up to you." For example, consider whether all light-recording media count as photographic arts. Do we need to

further. Lopes says he does not sweep the hard cases under the rug. This might be right in the sense that he does address them, but it appears that he has as a result swept the hard cases under multiple rugs—very, very many. Even though Lopes suggests the hard cases ought generate a new form to accommodate them, he has also simultaneously delegated hard case problems to each individual kind and medium. In order to determine hard cases particular to the relevant medium (those that arise in crime literature or computer games, say, or computer game crime literature for that matter) or cluster of media (where works that appear to be “free agents” might need to audition in multiple art forms), the theorists of each relevant kind in the panoply must address the hard case. On Lopes’s system, they can only appeal to their own determinations. Perhaps for each kind in the panoply there then must be a ghost kind accompanying it, a hard case category per subdivided kind. We have reproduced the problem for as many kinds as end up being established, and those might be countless many.

Lopes would presumably respond that aesthetic theory, along with concept of art, can do the work here. But this only tells us about the aesthetic properties of obviously known or knowable art works. It is unable to be useful in judging hard cases, as it can only detect and explain aesthetic attributes. It would beg the question to insist that was sufficient to determine the fate of non-aesthetic hard cases. In these cases, Danto’s mode of presentation explanation helps us see that the way in which the relevant art content is presented need not make use of

divide these photographic arts, and if so, how so? Our eyes and brains comprise a light-receiving recording device, as does a sun-faded piece of fabric; it would seem surveillance footage ought to be excluded, but an artist can certainly use such to construct a video work; are photosensitive chemicals a separate medium from digital arrays?

aesthetic content as its mode of functioning as an artwork, even if it contains trivial aesthetic features such that any object might.

2.6 Art forms come and go

Art is not static. In the history of artmaking, there is a panoply of change. The only constant appears to be human creativity engaged in non-practical endeavors: symbolic expression, beautification, play and ritual, exploring potential in new technologies. This change has accelerated at a regular rate. With the development of new technologies, advances in knowledge and understanding in its various forms, and changing means of social organization, art has evolved at an apparent ever-quickenning pace. Our understanding of art kinds has evolved as well, and continues to do so. Lopes does well to acknowledge the recently-emerged art media of video and digital communications. Ai Wei Wei makes works using Twitter. But in the twists and turns of art history, there are two problems that arise in thinking art kinds have a stable existence in the Clement Greenberg sense of medium “purity”, the defining ideal of a medium (such that painting for example has an absolute form, an all-over formal composition emphasizing flatness, with works like Helen Frankenthaler’s large stained canvases said to approach this absolute). For one, depending on the era some recognizable modes of artmaking are considered crafts and not art, or vice versa. This means that a time slice taken at one era would result in a different set of kinds than in another. Additionally, when there are archaeopteryx type mutations, such as with reliefs works that are both two-dimensional and three-dimensional in their construction and appearance, this illustrates a problem of

vagueness. Where are the boundaries to be drawn between painting and sculpture given the existence of reliefs? If reliefs constitute their own kind, then how do we determine exactly the boundaries between reliefs and paintings? Particularly thick paintings, like Anselm Kiefer's great works embedded with lead and encrusted with straw, are paintings; similarly Julian Schnabel's neo-expressionist works featuring broken plates. Meanwhile ancient Assyrian reliefs are often shallower than the Kiefer. At any point where we choose to draw a line separating kinds, it appears arbitrary, as counters can be found or easily developed. If we try to establish kinds in-between painting and sculpture, then we run into a quick proliferation of relief kinds in an attempt to bridge the blurry divide. The categorizational schema again seems untenable in any exacting sense; and without principled reason to think the art kinds exist as such, what does it mean to pass the buck?

Perhaps though the Greenbergian enlightenment-era type of art kind absolutism is accurate, and there has been first a history of uncovering these kinds, with a high-water mark in the heyday of European cultural dominance, and then second a decline-and-fall over the last century and a half, beginning with the shock of Manet, Monet, and Debussy. The now dismissed view of the Avant-Garde as a teleological undertaking to discover the purity of art kinds, such as advanced by Greenberg and Peter Bürger, saw the art kinds as a sort of periodic table, to be heroically discovered in the spirit of geographic exploration and scientific research. But this relies on the assumption of medium purity. It is not implausible that two-dimensional, three-dimensional, and four-dimensional characters could constrain art kinds into say painting, sculpture, and dance. But why think that matches up with an ideal art form orthodoxy? Paintings are flat for mimetic purposes, otherwise trompe l'oeil wouldn't work. But

coordinating visual experience, what a painting really excels at, need not require any constraints of dimensionality. Nor does coordinating visual experience require any constraints of medium. A nod is as good as a wink here.

The archaeopteryx-type category mutation, such as collage or relief, or the introduction of video art in the early '70s, challenges categorization and the presumed connection between medium and kind. This sort of evolutionary drift is non-threatening. It is essential to the wellbeing of the arts as vibrant creative explorations. Hip-hop came to be as an immigrant street culture based around the Jamaican "sound system" tradition. When DJ Kool Herc developed the "break" technique, using two copies of the same record on two turntables, alternating to keep the same part of the song in repetition, no one considered this art. Hip-hop music has gone on to become a dominant art form. But in its early archaeopteryx moment, it was an aberration of disc-jockeying, in a sense a failure at disc-jockeying. From the perspective of the DJ tradition, clear and seamless presentation of the recorded material was the mark of success. This was akin to Picasso and Braque developing collage some years before. The creative finding of new ways to expression characterizes the avant-garde, but is part of any healthy cultural exploration.⁸⁵

When works become cliché, stale, and predictable as rote platitudes, they then become artistically meaningless, passing into entertainment, practical goods-for-sale, like decorative wallpaper. In such there is no challenge, no awareness, with nothing happening. Creativity

⁸⁵ Amira Baraka, then writing as LeRoi Jones, characterizes the dialectic between Black musical innovators and the white profiteers is relevant here as well. Marcuse discussing the resistance of the dominant ideology, Adorno and resisting the superstructure. This social function is a key part of what is missing in Lopes, and will help explain my view as it emerges from this critique.

theory helps us see why this is: there is nothing new, surprising, or valuable in the work. There is then at least one shared attribute in all art—it is creative. Lopes says that “[a]ny item is a work of art or it is not.”⁸⁶ This reinforces the issue faced by the individual kind theorist, weighing out various discipline-specific hard cases on one side of the art ledger or the other. It also seems to capture something in a commonsense way, that something has a property, in this case being an artwork, or it does not. Determining such is important in ruling out some photography and some charcoal drawings as non-art, for example. However, I’m not sure that this binary is true. Reasons to doubt this include grey area cases such as works coming into being (determining the threshold for being a work), unfinished works (are these partial artworks?), works that are context-sensitive (when does the work fully enter or exit the relevant context?), retroactive attribution of artworks (when exactly do they become art—is there a fixed threshold?). At minimum these sorts of grey area cases suggest a trivalent account, works are either art or not—or are maybe somewhere in between. This grey area of status also suggests to me that there is a distinct and important vagueness about artworks and art in general that echoes the fuzzy boundaries at the borders of art kinds and the distinction between art and non within a medium, or in general.

As we’ve seen, there is a multidimensional space of criteria that determines some work art or not within a kind. And it may be that this cannot ever be successfully pinned down for art on the whole, and this also for individual kinds. The reason for this as I see it is that art is by necessity a vague predicate. The problem of vagueness, best known in its guise as the sorites

⁸⁶ Lopes 2014, Pg. 51.

paradox, affects art in at least two ways. It creates a problem for how we determine kind boundaries, and thus kind membership, but it also affects art on the whole. I take this vague dimension of art to be partially implied by Weitz's discussion of openness: instead of agreeing with Weitz that openness implies the impossibility of a theory, we can acknowledge as part of the explanation of art that there is a vagueness inherent to art, that it is a continuously emerging phenomenon in its particulars, but not in its general conceptual and cultural function. Additionally, I find no threat in the possibility that reasonable criteria for evaluating artworks are presumably, and likely unknown to us. But again this need not mean that it threatens a theory of art. The unfolding relevance to a particular cultural situation may well dictate new evaluative criteria, but this too can be accounted for in a theory. Weitz may well be right that art will evolve beyond the particulars of a theory, but his suggestion of that is itself in my opinion a theory of the nature of art.

There are many reasons art should be understood to be a vague subject or predicate: metaphysical, epistemic, linguistic. The fact of the matter may be undeterminable, there may well be a determinant fact but we are unable to know it, or there may be issues with our lexical reference attempts such that we lack the right words or language structure to connect with the world in the right way. I think any or all of these could be the case, but this is not threatening. If whatever Ur-art ends up being, this Jane Doe of our enquiry here, is a vague phenomenon, this is no threat to its social importance or to our describing the phenomenon. We can still describe a heap of grain in pragmatic ways, despite the sorites paradox.

An additional trouble is a blind spot to change that emerges when one examines the logic of a buck passing approach, a paradox of new art kinds. If a new art form develops, it

cannot possibly be art without a theory of art that is independent of the existing kinds. For the art form to properly be considered a kind, it must be evaluated as such. But the other kinds are only exclusionary of cases that do not fit the in-house kind theory of the existing kind. This means that a new kind is a not-kind in the eyes of other kind theorists—they only legislate their own, and exclude any others that do not fit, saying nothing beyond the isolation of their own siloed kind. But then this means, if the buck passing theory is correct, that no new art kinds ever could have come into being, as there is no theory to evaluate them as such, i.e. there is no theory without kinds in the buck passing schema. The paradox is therefore formulated like so: all artworks are members of kinds according to the buck passing theory; art theory is only intra-kind, saying nothing positive about non-kind members; a new art kind requires a kind theory to exist. Assuming the buck passing theory is correct, each of these claims is equally plausible, yet taken together it suggests that art kinds never could have come into being, and therefore no works of art could come into being; ergo, if one adopts a buck passing theory one must deny the existence of artworks. If Lopes were to deny one of these claims, then the third is the most reasonable for him to deny. But then we need some explanation of how art kinds came into being that doesn't assume that they are natural, given kinds, part of the fixture of the universe.⁸⁷

When sorting through the problem cases in each medium, there is a need to return to a general theory for guidance, even tacitly. When the buck gets passed down, the medium-specific theorist has to in a sense try to pass it back up again, only to have it passed right back

⁸⁷ Lopes's solution for the hard cases is to put them into a new category, underscoring the paradox of recognizing new art forms. This ignores that there are no meta-resources available to do the work to recognize a new art form as a form of art.

down. As the Beatles have it, “When I get to the bottom I go back to the top of the slide.” Call this the Helter Skelter objection, courtesy Sir Paul. The art kind theorist requires a general theory to guide intra-kind theorizing, some sort of framework to go on, but this request keeps returning down. To escape the Helter Skelter worry Lopes can double down and cease any talk of art, and only speak of individual media. Abandoning a distinction between art and non within a medium would have this advantage, but this has unsavory consequences. It appears to embrace a nihilism about art, which I cannot imagine Lopes would accept, nor should he; but it also leaves open the question of how one carves the art kinds when there are no obvious joints to the bird. Without a general theory of art, there is no easy and apparent way to organize the babble of different tongues. There is no clear organizational strategy available to unify these as art.

Lopes would certainly respond here that aesthetic theory can serve the role to defend against the Helter Skelter objection and other concerns. He might also suggest the concept of ‘art’ can be useful as well. But aesthetic theory can only get us so far without question-begging. Assuming all art can be explained aesthetically assumes that all art is relevantly aesthetic. But as discussed in Chapter One, all artworks are trivially aesthetic, just as everything is. Lopes himself acknowledges this. Plus, assuming all art is relevantly aesthetic assumes aesthetic properties are necessary to something being evaluated as art, an assumption we should not grant. The concept won’t do either, even with the help of siloed medium-specific theorists. How does one identify a new art kind without at minimum a tacit theory for identifying new art kinds? The concept [ART] cannot do it, nor can the concept [ART KIND], not without some

accompanying directions for determining the theoretic value of art kinds generally. A theory is needed.

Lopes says that a buck stopping theory constrains individual arts.⁸⁸ It's unclear why this relationship couldn't be characterized as 'guiding' and 'informing' instead. Having a general theory does not rule out an individual theory having its own components unique to that particular kind. Some things simply apply to a conversation about good art photography that has no relevance to a conversation about drag queens, and vice versa. This simply reflects the contingent medium at hand. Moreover, the applied theoretic activities of artists help guide and inform the general theory. The experimental creative nature of artmaking unearths new territory for the general theorist to take into account, such as with the so-called hard cases. If there is not an overall theory of art on offer, then a specialist critic and theorist within a particular medium who needs such to make distinctions within the medium of what is art and what is not runs into a problem. For example, distinguishing between snapshots and photography as art.⁸⁹

If the medium-specific specialist has no general theory of art to deploy, then she is forced into a question-begging stance: in order to determine what the distinction between art and non is within the medium, she only has recourse to theory within the confines of that medium, but if there is an established distinction, then the debate at this level will reinvolve the impasses of the higher-level theorizing. Now we have a new cluster of hard cases. Lopes says

⁸⁸ Lopes 2014, Pg. 62.

⁸⁹ Surprisingly, some traditionalists truly double down on tradition and argue that film and photography are not forms for making art. Scruton ref

that any art kind can use theories that were formerly offered up as general theories of art, freely mixing and matching ideas and approaches.⁹⁰ This may look like a fair response, but notice that the theory is confirmed as a general theory of art in its being deployed to sort through the issues at the lower level. Notice then this result: The buck passing approach actually ends up generating hard cases by virtue of its delegating responsibility. In order to evaluate these, the need for a general theory of art is confirmed, but the appeal to general theory speaks against the buck passing theory. However, the individual kind theorists can make use of discarded attempts at general theory of art even with a buck stopping approach in place. A general theory can have local applications that differ due to the specific requirements of that context.⁹¹

2.8 Lopes responds: the coffee mug objection and response

Before getting to the more promising coffee mug response on behalf of Lopes, there is a digging one's heels in response we should address. Appealing to traditionally received structures of categorization of the arts seems a plausible candidate for establishing art kinds, but for two issues. For one, an appeal to tradition without additional substantiating argument as an

⁹⁰ Lopes 2014, Pg. 62.

⁹¹ A helpful comparison can be found in applied ethics. When evaluating a real-world solution, such as in a business environment, a combination of ethical theories can be deployed in useful ways. Kantian deontology appeals to certain intuitions compared with those of a consequentialist utilitarian approach, but the utilitarian insight on consequences might be useful in a real-world case that has a decidedly Kantian flavor. Imagine an art gallery employee that has been up to no good, stealing from the gallery. Kantian evaluation of dignity and respect might well factor in to the gallery director's initial deliberations how to address the issue. But faced with a conflict of moral rules (the employee has been up to no good, but only in order to avoid lying to an administrator), a utilitarian approach might be synthesized with the rule-hardy Kantian explanation to tell us something more useful. A hybrid approach that utilizes multiple approaches in conjunction then possibly has merit.

authority is arbitrary. The way things have been previously done culturally are largely, if not entirely, contingent, and arbitrariness need not reflect anything other than local power dynamics, bias, and 'taste'. Compare the supremacy of tradition in a reactionary aesthetics position to Edmund Burke's social-political theory. According to Burke, over the centuries the social order has accumulated a sort of ingrained institutional wisdom about the way of things. The social order reflects this wisdom in its institutions, infrastructure, and ways. Burke, a *de facto* apologist for the institution of slavery, leaves no room in his account for *progress*, for identifying social wrongs and taking measures to address any injustices, oppressions, and inequities. Structurally this position parallels the traditionalist position in the philosophy of art in that in both cases the appeal to tradition as authority rests on the contingent historical fact of its authority. But as Morris Weitz shows, creativity and new developments in materials, forms, and practices characterize the history of the arts. As the saying goes about music, what is old was once new. A strictly traditionalist account risks being resistant to a characteristic feature of the creative arts, its surprising newness.

The other issue with citing history as precedent is that the historical record of art kinds is itself inconsistent. What was considered an art kind in one era was not necessarily considered so in another. Temporarily setting aside the anachronistic use of a term ('art' as we know it does not begin to emerge until the 1600s, inaugurating what Danto calls the 'age of art'), consider the Medieval arts of stained glass and needlepoint. These are both categorized as crafts today. Categorization of the arts reflects deeply entrenched cultural beliefs, such that many of these reclassifications or snubs correlate with ideas about gender roles, genius, or reflect the behaviors and preferences of class. In one sense, the art kinds in the European

tradition are what professional males created for the church, royals, and members of the aristocratic and upper classes. That is how the economy of the European art market functioned in the half dozen or more centuries previous to the 20th. Add into this consideration the skewing effects of Eurocentrism, and it becomes clear that the historical model is not a stable or conclusive model. It is not a bedrock foundation for claiming the obviousness of art kinds. The world's first art museum, the Louvre, became such under the circumstances of revolution. The palace fortress was seized by the new republic and under the banner of liberty, equality, and fraternity made into a public resource. The result then is a time slice of European art understanding. The museum has since evolved and acquired new works. But as is widely acknowledged, the culture of a place persists, much like a regional accent persists through the children of its immigrant newcomers. The world's first art museum set the tone and royal French accent of the arts: paintings and sculptures that would befit a king and queen. Of course, it may well be true that the enlightenment era aristocracy and Royalty had simply accurately deduced the essential nature of art and its kinds. It's possible. This seems highly implausible though, given the rest of art history, both previous and following.

Here is a potentially promising path for defense, a focus on the materials used by an individual art kind Lopes calls the *coffee mug objection*. A particular art kind typically correlates to a medium. A medium (plural media) is the middle stuff used in the making of works of any type, including works of art. A communications medium such as sound recording is the encoding into a specific medium, the particular stuff being used, of content intended to be decoded by the listener. The material used, in this case either oxide tape, wax, metal, shellac,

or vinyl—or now more frequently digital memory storage—is where the work is physically located in space time, and is at least partially constitutive of the work.⁹²

But is consideration of the medium and its material nature enough to qualify an object as an art object? Consider the various ways that sound recordings generally fail to qualify as art objects. The voicemail left to remind you of your cat’s impending vet appointment, the official sound recording of congressional testimony, the automated “Wait!” of the crosswalk warning or the “Goodbye” at the end of the number-punching phone menu used to refill a prescription. These are not artworks, and no one would confuse them as such, at least not in their normal contexts. More narrowly, vinyl records face the same. Consider an instructional album. One can learn to fox trot or to practice Japanese phrases using such records, but these practical benefits tell us nothing about its relation to art. The medium itself, both as sound recording generally and vinyl album in particular, guarantees nothing about the record’s status as an artwork. This seems to entail that if an art kind consists of a medium, then we have an issue: art kinds contain counterexamples in their various media; if we kick the explanation of art to kinds then it appears we include far too many objects than if we stayed at the level of theorizing about art.

⁹² For example, Miles Davis’s sextets made records by generating soundwaves in a room. The vibrations were “captured” onto a reel of analogue tape by a process where the microphones first transformed the sound into electrical impulses. The electrical impulses from the microphones then dictated the specific arrangement of the metallic particles via magnetic reorganization, thus encoding those electrical sequences onto the tape via the mixing desk and tape machine. That magnetically altered tape was then used via playback to generate electrical impulses that then guided the literal cutting with a lathe a master of correlative grooves onto a vinyl “record” from which the subsequent commercial LP copies were pressed. When a needle drops on a turntable, the receiver takes the electrical impulses generated by the vibrations from the needle in the grooves, and then transforms—decodes—the medium into a listening experience. The material, or medium, of *Kind of Blue* can be considered the vinyl record, or more generally sound reproduction to reflect the more complicated picture of the various transformations, encoding, and decoding taking place.

Lopes addresses a counter to these sorts of concerns in the form of the coffee mug objection first attributed to Stephen Davis. A typical coffee mug is ceramic, made from clay and fired. Ceramics is a widely-acknowledged art kind, with a professional marketplace, museum exhibits, and school of art programs. Imagine you've bought a souvenir coffee mug from the Walden Pond gift shop, one that has Thoreau's "Simplify" printed on it in fact. It is a very nice mug, but is it an artwork by virtue of being made of ceramics? There may be other interesting features that make it a meaningful (and perhaps ironic) object, say its provenance, symbolism, and appearance, but it is clear that there is widespread agreement that the mug is not a work of art by virtue of its being made of ceramic materials.

The coffee mug objection highlights an important feature of Lopes's buck passing theory. Lopes has it that the responsibility of explaining and settling issues in art is passed to the individual arts, and so kind theorists acquire the responsibility of determining which uses of the kind's medium "count" as art, and which that do not. The relationship of artworks of an art kind to the materials or medium used by that art kind is not a clear identity relation. The celebrated ceramic work in a museum exhibit is a ceramic work by virtue of the medium used, but it is a work of the art kind ceramics for reasons beyond that fact. Imagine we place the Simplify mug discussed above in the museum alongside the exhibited work. The ceramic artwork is importantly different from the mug by virtue of its being a work of the art kind ceramics, and not a mere ceramic item. According to Lopes, the determining factor of the artwork and mug's relative status is a result of how the art kind, in this case ceramics, sets and polices its own boundaries via a theory of ceramics as an art kind. The buck has been passed.

I acknowledge that the spirit of the coffee mug objection is spot on. Lopes is examining the intuition that if an art kind is a kind of art made with certain stuff, then why isn't anything composed of that kind of stuff considered a member of that class of objects. This is indeed an important question, but in my opinion only begins to explore the relevant issues of the relationship between an art kind's medium to works that are works of art in that medium. An art medium does consist of a use of some sort of stuff, typically a type of tangible material. And as any material in the universe is not by mere virtue of consisting of that material necessarily art, there is an important task in the buck passing schema. Each kind will require its theorists and experts to explain when a work of the material associated with that medium is an artwork, and when not.

One issue is that the coffee mug is not a particularly appropriate example. To see why, here's a parallel case. Consider the example of an art supply store. Go to the painting section, and you will find the tools and materials needed to make a painting: tubes of pigment in carrier adhesives (paint), tools to manipulate those pigments (brushes), and a surface to do so (canvas). Artists buy these sorts of tools and materials, and sometimes they make artwork with these tools and materials. But when the paint, brushes, and canvas are rung up by the cashier and placed in a bag, it would be a clear mistake to identify this collection of objects as a painting, let alone an artwork. There is plausible potential for artworks given the right conditions, but the materials themselves as a practically organized entity are clearly insufficient to warrant any confusion. Take a couple of the tubes of paint out of the bag of art materials we just purchased, raw sienna and raw umber, two common earth shades. These paints give the paintings done prior to modern chemistry their characteristic brown appearance: from the

renaissance on, the underpaintings done in a traditional painting were typically done with these materials. Both sienna and umber are so called because of the respective places in Italy where the pigments are sourced. They are both called earth tones because they are just that, earth dug up from the regions of Sienna and Umbria and combined with carrier adhesives to make them stick.

So, clearly one can make a painting with earth one digs up. Leonardo DaVinci and others have made great artworks, masterpieces of the fine arts, with some such mud. But we can also dig up earth to make, utilizing other methods and proportions, clay objects such as a ceramic artwork, or a souvenir coffee mug. The material itself is clearly insufficient. The coffee mug objection then needs refinement in order to get at the relevant issues. A more compelling example can be found in uses of a medium where the use is more likely to be confused with an artwork than a coffee mug might. Confusing a non-art object for an artwork without any contextual hints one way or the other is most likely when there is great resemblance between the work of art and the work of non-art. The greater the resemblance, the trickier the task. This is also what motivates Lopes's use of Danto's twins argument and his character Testadura, in particular when Lopes combines these with the warehouse case: Testadura is sent into a storage facility with *Fountain*-like appropriated objects as art amidst mere everyday objects; his seemingly impossible task is to select only those that are artworks.

The level of resemblance between a non-artwork and a work of art is increased when there is a high level of similarity in *how* the material of the medium is used, not just what the material *is*. The coffee mug is highly dissimilar to artworks in general, although interestingly it is more so similar to ceramic artworks, and not just for the materials, but rather in this

consideration of 'how'. Ceramic artworks typically, perhaps mostly, include an aspect of utility in their make-up. Ancient Etruscan vessels and Greek black-figure amphora, fine Chinese porcelain, contemporary fine art exhibitions of tea sets and bowls—these incorporate practical utility in a clear way. This practicality is one reason why ceramics has not historically always been considered an art, but rather a craft. Artisans have historically made (and do now in Brooklyn and related hip retro enclaves) things of utility: blacksmiths, soap makers, cheesemakers, jewelers, and carpenters make and sell to market practical things, typically handcrafted in the 'art of' sense. The 'art of' the jeweler for example is to accomplish tasks like setting precious stones to metals in a way that appeals to customers' tastes. The piece of jewelry, a highly-skilled work of artisanship, is not itself necessarily an artwork, no more than the brie or horseshoes offered by the cheesemaker or blacksmith, and neither are the 'art of' works of other artisans generally considered artworks. Works of jewelry can at times be considered artworks. Contrast this with Damien Hirst's *For the Love of God* (2007), a cast of a skull beset with diamonds and adorned with human teeth (incidentally, created at a cost of twelve million pounds and put up for sale at fifty million). This work is considered by many experts a masterpiece of fine art. The practical dimension of artisanal crafts, and likely its function within the marketplace of goods and sales, prevents the ceramic mug, even when crafted as a unique ware by a celebrated artisan's workshop, from usually being considered art, let alone the mass-produced souvenir Thoreau mug.

The coffee mug then is a useful example, if not for the reasons Lopes intends. The 'how' dimension opens up the important dimension of use, function, and the relationship of art to utility. Considerations of practicality in relation to art have long been in issue in the philosophy

of art. This also relates to a Manichean conception of the spiritual over the material, and the value of purity and grace over corporeal sin and physical imperfection in the Christian tradition. Bias against fashion as an artform has been traced to a Platonic privileging of spirit over body. The association with the physical body makes the 'art of' fashion and clothes-making in general traditionally an artisanal craft and not an art. Likewise dance, ballet in particular, was not considered an art form until the 19th Century, given the association of dance with the physical body, as well as due to its coarse and common iterations. Hegel himself, the initiator of art history as a general study, suggested there is a hierarchy of the arts, ranging in degree from the extreme poles of the purely material at the bottom, and the pole of the purely free immaterial spirit, Geist, at the top. Heavy, bulky sculpture was therefore a lesser art in this scheme than the less material (and therefore higher and closer to pure Geist) art form of music. Poetry was accordingly slotted as the preeminent art given its immaterial nature. Architecture meanwhile languished basely at the bottom (while dance didn't even make the list). Architecture, as opposed to mere buildings, has continued to struggle to receive respect as an art form given its requisite practical functionality. Paintings and music can be used practically, such as in calming a dentist's waiting room or to fill a space in an interior design scheme, but this makes no contribution to their status as artworks. Setting aside any claims to material or immaterial, buildings are, to paraphrase Le Corbusier, practical, functional machines for living, working, producing, and administering. This practical usefulness is essential to a building's status as architecture, else it becomes as Scruton points out, a sculpture.

We will return to these considerations about practicality, instrumentalism, and utility in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, as they figure importantly in understanding what art is and how

we can construct a successful theory accounting for it. For now, let us note the shortcomings of the coffee mug objection, particularly its avoidance of the 'how' dimension, and offer up a more suitable replacement.

2.9 Concluding thoughts on dialectic, plus a to-do list

So, as we've seen, a theory of art can do things a collection of individual kind theories cannot do, namely provide evaluative criteria across kinds and of individual kinds. The general theory of art is not despotic, as it exists as an interchange of ideas, facts, and observations with the individual areas of art activity. Lopes seems to think that the concept of art along with aesthetic theory can serve this function, but we've seen how that falls short. The concept needs supporting theoretic help to be deployed effectively in an explanatory way in the world. An aesthetic theory is incapable of determining what is art or not, as nearly everything potentially has aesthetic content (thus the plausibility of an aesthetic attitude theory), the natural world bountifully so.

But Lopes says that general buck stopping theories are locked in a stalemate of intuitions. Lopes says that the dialectical impasse is due to deeply entrenched intuitions of the traditionalist and geneticist.⁹³ I think Lopes is probably right about the intuitions being "baked in", but realistically intuitions are probably unavoidable on almost any topic we attempt to explain. I think it's important to ask what is going on with these intuitions exactly, asking how they contribute to this stalemate, and whether it is unavoidable for a buck stopping theory of

⁹³ Lopes 2014, Pg. 57.

art. Lopes's dialectical impasse then offers the options of an appeal to traditional aesthetics or in opposition by an appeal to a relatively contemporary authority (one that itself has origins in tradition). Plus there's the broader appeal to an inherent superiority of fine art versus mere entertainment, which we will address in Chapter Five.

There appears to be a disconnect between the philosopher of art and the actual art world. Barnett Newman famously quipped that "Aesthetics is to artists what ornithology is to birds." The tradition a philosopher has in mind, one suspects, is not the same tradition envisioned by the expert art historian, artist, or critic. (Danto says as much when quipping that his philosophy of art courses hadn't prepared him to experience art.) Reactionary claims that the conceptually-motivated works of the hard cases are marginal dalliances that flaunt mainstream aesthetics-oriented artmaking are simply overstated. Conceptually motivated artworks that explicitly engage with the boundaries between art and life while examining the larger culture itself are quite simply the norm. That is the case now, and as I am arguing, we should understand that it has always been that way. All artworks are conceptually motivated, in that they are communicating thought to be valued as artworks and not mere executions of a technical medium.

Painting has in the west long been the model that traditionalist philosophers of art have had in mind. Its mimetic characteristics, appeal to optical experience, and association with a cult of the individual "genius" and the individually hand-made "priceless" object have all informed an understanding of art over the last few centuries. In secondary schools, emphasis

has accordingly been placed on mimetic representation in “art” classes at the expense of valuing creativity more generally; and the marketplace has generally followed suit.⁹⁴

Conceptual art broadly construed as an approach to artmaking (and not only as a brief aberrant historical period) unsurprisingly has its own traditions, and its own traditionalism. What appears radical from an oblique angle appears quite tame, even derivative from a vantage point within the tradition itself. Consider the consistency in artworks separated by more than half a century. In John Baldessari’s piece *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* from 1971, the artist provided minimal direction from afar to art students to write the title of the piece as though executing schoolroom blackboard punishment. The students covered the walls of the gallery and made lithographs. The art was not the lithograph, the process, the writing, but rather the concept. No other explanation rivals the simple one here. Note that this has clear echoes of Duchamp’s *Bottle Rack* (circa 1914). In that work, Duchamp wrote a letter to his sister, requesting she purchase a bottle drying rack and sign his signature for him. That’s the piece. Again, the clearest explanation is the conceptual content being the most significant aspect of the work, the result of the comparison being that the works demonstrate an artmaking tradition at work. In the case of these pieces we see that the artists are exploring the

⁹⁴ During the deregulated Regan and Thatcher years, newly enriched stockbrokers and financiers caused a surge in mimetic expressionist art sales, most notably in the form of Neo-expressionism in New York City, featuring the works of painters like Julian Schnabel and Francesco Clemente. This is widely understood by art historians as a backlash to the momentum the conceptual tradition had gained over the previous century. (Danto points out in the *Abuse of Beauty* that the ‘90s featured a similar return to beauty in the face of its avant-garde “abuses” of the previous century; this investigation led Danto to conclude that beauty, which has internal and external characteristics in an artwork, is but one mode of presentation an artwork can take.

boundaries of art and life (everyday objects, schoolroom punishments) while also investigating the very role of the artist as author of the work.⁹⁵

There may be a principled debate to be had between aesthetic traditionalists and genetic contemporarians, but it's worth pointing out that this might be a limited view of the relevant positions. I think it is. The dichotomy Lopes presents is object-oriented. Either the emphasis on exhibited features or how the object came to be. But what sensible properties an object has, and how it came to be or not are not exhaustive category options for art. Another category opens up if we ask not just about features or history, but about its relations of use, function, appreciation, and value. Art is a creative cultural affair, and the objects cannot be analyzed in isolation without severing their ties to significance. Artworks emerge from within a cultural context and depend on that context for its meaning. I take that to be Danto's chief contribution with his 1964 artworld conception—background conditions generate the possibility. I disagree with Danto's claim that the background theorizing of the artworld *constitutes* the artwork. This is far too limited, no matter what the expertise of the artworld denizens. (It is also open to Tolstoy's concerns about 'fashionable' art—i.e. trendy art.) The even harder cases presented in Chapter One can help break the impasse and point the way to an overall solution. Lopes says that the traditionalist and genetic theorist face a very serious situation: they are "trapped" in a dialectical impasse, "powerless", facing an "impossible" choice.⁹⁶ He also writes that "what is needed to clear the dialectical impasse is a way to cope

⁹⁵ A traditionalist might balk here at the delegation of the execution of the work, but this in keeping both with Sol LeWitt's observation that the actual making of a work is a "perfunctory affair", and with the medieval guild and renaissance workshop model where the "master" of the workshop directs others in the making of the work, delegating the process, a very normal part of the artmaking tradition.

⁹⁶ Lopes 2014, Pgs. 53-55.

effectively with the hard cases without slighting the intuitions that so divide opinion on them.”

(58) Earlier I demonstrated several reasons to reject Lopes’s buck passing theory. Neither the traditionalist nor the geneticist approach succeed either, for the reasons discussed in the dialectical overview in Chapter One and here above—the limit of the aesthetic approach tied arbitrarily to tradition and the arbitrary investing of ex cathedra powers in the genetic.

Moreover, the even harder cases pose a problem for both the BS theories and Lopes’s BP approach. These creative conceptual cases from everyday life do not fit the traditionalist mode, nor do they have the origin story or sanction required by a genetic theory. The even harder cases then are even more troubling for both of those theory types than the hard cases alone. Moreover the BP theory struggles here as well. Whereas Lopes opens up a sort of grab bag category to accommodate the hard cases, the even harder cases are not so simple, as they do not have any pretensions to belong to any established sense of art at all. When Lopes sends the even harder cases around to individual art kinds seeking a dance partner, they go home alone.

Take for example the Zen hibachi goldfish bowl to cool guests in the summer heat. This is more difficult than the hard cases because while no one considers it art, it checks all of the boxes except for that approval while also escaping the traditionalist’s and buck passer’s nets as well. It thus fits well the counterfactual account of art, that there are works in the world that under different conditions would be considered art. These are cases of Ur-art, a primeval so to speak form of artwork that fulfills the cultural function of art without being recognized as an artwork. The traditionalist sees no art tradition, the geneticist sees no institutional blessing, and Lopes has nowhere to pass, and so fumbles. We can pick up the ball with the positive view that is beginning to emerge.

What Lopes has overlooked, in addition to the multitude of problems that have arisen while considering his proposal, I think can be solved by my approach. The solution is to forefront the hard cases in a sociocultural account of creativity, where art is a cultural function inherent to the self-awareness of any healthy human society. If my approach is successful, then I think I can avoid the buck passing theory's problems, the problems Lopes identifies with the BS theories along with the supposed stalemate, and then too those that have been revealed or have arisen in the discussion of the BP approach. Lopes deserves kudos though for outlining how specialists can develop theoretical tools within their areas. But this does not rule out a theory of art in general. Here are some good (what, how, and why) questions that point to a satisfactory theory of art:

What is the cultural function of an artwork?

What social relations are involved in art experience?

What distinguishes art from entertainment?

What is an artist?

How do art experiences relate to self-understanding?

How does art say something that leads to rich interpretation?

How does art reward repeated experience?

Why is an artist an artist?

A theory of art needs to be able to accommodate further the transpositional nature of the arts and the fact that artists work across media while maintaining the artistic content while shifting materials in which it becomes embodied. We will pick these pertinent questions up in Chapter Four after adding to them in Chapter Three. Next, we will look at a general theory of art that fails, but not for the reason Lopes has in mind. In doing so we will see what is required of a

successful theory of art—and of creativity—in order to explain the conceptual and cultural function of art.

Chapter Three: Creativity & Conceptual Art

3.0 Overview of chapter

This chapter consists of a critique of Margaret Boden's creativity theory of art, a critique that in turn points to a positive direction for a theory of art based on creativity. Boden's approach falls short of the mark, but not for the reasons Lopes would suggest for a general theory of art. She takes the hard cases seriously and does so in a way that suggests a way to avoid the dialectical impasse Lopes sees as threatening such an endeavor. Her theory falters though on deep-seated aesthetic assumptions about the arts and a historical error about the nature of conceptual art, in addition to a limited (individualistic) conception of creativity, one in conflict with key tenets of her own view. Boden offers an analysis of conceptual art that demonstrates her general theory of art. Boden's theory is focused on explaining the creativity involved in creating and appreciating artworks. This is a promising line of research. A theory of creativity ought to be able to explain art, as art is paradigmatically creative along with the sciences and technical innovations in various applications. Boden's approach is traditionalist in its commitment to the aesthetic, just as is Lopes's. And it takes the hard cases seriously just as Lopes and the genetic theorists do. It therefore also suggests a promising option to resolve the dialectical impasse that Lopes identifies in those two camps. Creativity as a basis of explaining art suggests a middle way beyond the dilemma suggested by the dialectical impasse, a way between the horns, avoiding the rocks and whirlpool.

A theory of creativity also offers the benefit of not facing Lopes's challenge that theories of art were prompted exclusively by the hard cases, as theories of creativity have their origin in much broader concerns. Lopes's claim is dubious anyway, so this would not pose much concern. But it does avoid any contention about historical issues in developing theories of art in the narrow sense. It also suggests an important point: artworks are cultural creative objects and activities before they are 'art' in any meaningful sense (reference in a sentence, successful procedures for identification, etc.). The important question then becomes to my mind, what meaningfully distinguishes and explains art actions from generally creative ones?

Boden's approach does a decent job of explaining the hard cases while bypassing Lopes's concerns but has its own issues. Lopes ultimately determines that the hard cases typically can be sequestered in the art kind category of conceptual art. Boden provides an in-depth treatment of conceptual art, applying her theory of creativity in art as a basis of explanation. However, where Lopes acknowledges that precursors to the use of the term 'conceptual art', like Duchamp's *Fountain* and Cage's *4'33"*, are also properly cases of conceptual art, Boden makes an historical error by limiting her target to the 1960s. This is fairly easily (and trivially) cleared up, but in doing so it reveals that Boden's explanation faces a range of clear counterexamples. However, if we adjust her approach, moving away from an *individualistic* conception of creativity and embracing instead a *sociocultural* approach, then we can get the right results about conceptual art. Moreover, Boden's own theory suggests such an approach, so we can make a charitable recommendation once we clear up the historical issues with her conception of conceptual art. The sociocultural approach that then emerges suggests a clear path to explaining art generally, providing a template for a general theory of art that

avoids Lopes's concerns—as well as the many historical pitfalls of also-ran theories of art—while taking the hard cases seriously. I will use this as the basis for developing the positive view presented in Chapter Four.

So here's the chapter gameplan for how to present and argue for these points. First we'll get a clear view on Boden's creativity-based theory of art, looking at the general theory of creativity and then its particular application to artworks, most notably works of conceptual art. Next we'll look at Boden's treatment of conceptual art in greater detail. The critique that follows sketches in relief the sociocultural view of creativity in art (such as in the work of R. Keith Sawyer) that if developed would get the right results about conceptual art, and as I will argue therefore all of the arts. The sociocultural approach to creativity in the arts avoids the issues we've encountered and suggests a clear path for a successful general theory of art.

3.1 Boden, creativity, and conceptual art

This chapter comprises a look at a general theory of art, Margaret Boden's, focusing on its treatment of conceptual art which pays out important dividends on how to flip the model to conceptual art, and how the inability to account for conceptual art has revealed issues for traditionalist aesthetic theories generally. Nihilism about a general theory of art is then somewhat warranted, given an aesthetics-based approach. The minimum conception of a general theory of art should explain the phenomena presented to it without neglecting important activity central to the phenomena. An aesthetics-based approach does not explain the central activity, conceptual creativity at the core of conceptual artmaking, and is thus hampered in its general approach. A theory of gravity needs to explain instances of

gravitational pull, predict future gravitational events with a high level of accuracy, cover the full breadth of gravitational interaction, every last instance, and solve any ambiguities—the theory should only cover its set of target events. The minimum conception of a theory of art should likewise have explanatory and predictive power. It should be inclusive, unambiguous, and testable. Conceptual art, in the fact that it is art at its sleekest and most minimal, serves as a litmus test, and thus as an opportunity for confirmation—or for indicating a theory’s falseness. Boden, in *Creativity & Art*, outlines a theory of the arts as an example of the sort of thing that Lopes thinks fails. I think that this sort of approach to a global theory of the arts does indeed fail, but not for the reasons Lopes has in mind. Boden’s view also offers an account of conceptual art. This view has issues in its accounting of conceptual art, but addressing these opens up the path for a Danto-inspired view, a socially-moderated account of creativity in conceptual art. This will then show us the way to a successful general theory of the arts. The upshot then is that we now have an account of creativity on the table (Boden’s plus tweaking results in a social artworld-like account), one that can get then get the right results with conceptual art: Creativity in conceptual art can do the work as an explanatory model (instead of painting, the *de facto* model) in developing what Lopes denies, a viable theory of art.

Creativity is a process of problem-identification and problem-solving that results in something that Boden says is new, surprising, and valuable.⁹⁷ Throughout the creativity

⁹⁷ Boden consistently utilizes this definition across her many works. Boden acknowledges that “over 60 definitions [of creativity] appear in the psychological literature.” Boden 1994, Pg. 520. In this paper I will understand creativity as Boden does, as something that is new, surprising, and valuable. Boden, Margaret A. Précis of *The Creative Mind: Myths and mechanisms*. Behavioral and Brain Sciences. (1994) 17, 519-570. Boden’s definition of creativity appears throughout the current literature in the philosophy of creativity, but this is a common way of approaching a definition of creativity in the social sciences. Sternberg, citing multiple authors,

literature the creative process is described as having multiple steps, such as problem-identification, idea-generation, incubation, externalization, selection, sharing, and testing. The details vary with views of course, but the main idea is consistent: identifiable steps of finding a solution to special problems, resulting in a contribution that is notable for its novelty, unexpectedness, and its particular usefulness to some end. That useful end may perhaps primarily involve some psychological benefit to the creator, such as projects in a children's art class, or may be of some significance to a larger cultural entity, such as projects at the Venice Biennale. Usefulness is part of its creative value, the culturally determined worth that Boden says governs the extent to which something is considered creative at all.⁹⁸

There are four specialized terms Boden uses we should particularly attend to: a creative idea, a style, conceptual space, and conceptual base. A creative idea is a thought or way of doing something that is, according to Boden, new, surprising, and valuable (NSV). A creative idea for Boden includes both thought and any action that might result. This creative idea can be an 'idea' or 'concept' "in the normal sense" of thoughts in the head. But it can also be a concept for, and a way of, performing some creative action within some established conceptual space/style.⁹⁹ A conceptual space is the delimited area of available creative ideas, what she calls the chessboard of previously established possible moves in a creative area. Established ways of thinking and acting in a creative tradition form the set of available elements to use and principles for their use. One's personal store of knowledge is referred to as the conceptual

defines creativity similarly as "novel" and "appropriate". Sternberg, Robert J. *Handbook of Creativity*. Cambridge University Press, 1999/2008.

⁹⁸ Boden 2003, Pg. 10.

⁹⁹ Boden 2009, Pgs. 216-7.

base. Boden's chessboard analogy suggests that pioneering creative activity in an area alters or sets up rules that govern that type of creative activity for those who follow. When Picasso and Braque invented collage, with its appropriated everyday elements (objects, text, etc.) and clever use of puns, jokes, and other symbolic content, new principles were introduced into the conceptual space of then-contemporary artmaking, such that subsequent artists could afterwards make free use of these creative ideas of appropriation and wit within their own artworks. Both the possibility of creating and the evaluation of creations as creative then depend upon this set of possible ideas and actions. (A conceptual 'space' is also alternately known in Boden's terminology as a 'style of thinking', a 'cultural style', or often as just a 'style'. To avoid confusion and to mark the synonymous uses I will combine these into one term here, the conceptual space/style.)

3.2 Boden's View of Creativity

Creativity for Boden occurs when some idea has the aforementioned NSV characteristics of being new, surprising, and valuable. Notice that something may well be new and surprising, such as strings of words generated by accident, a 'randomizing' program, or by someone who is impaired in some way. But that is insufficient to count as creative, as it doesn't meet the third (and arguably the most important) criterion of creative value.

Boden says creativity can be understood to occur in two ways: at the personal level, such as a child making a collage for the first time, which is new, surprising, and valuable to her (a psychological instance of what Boden calls "P-creativity"); or it can occur within the historical

context, where the instance is new, surprising, and valuable in a domain-specific way to a relevant culture, such as when Braque and Picasso unwittingly invented collage, making a significant contribution to the history of the fine arts (an historically-important instance of what Boden calls “H-creativity”).¹⁰⁰ Boden also reasons sensibly enough that since creative ideas occur in minds, then all instances of H-creativity must also be instances of P-creativity. Or, in shorthand, Boden argues All H is P, a hallmark of her view: all instances of creativity must ultimately be explained in terms of personal or psychological creativity as modelled by an isolated individual mind.¹⁰¹

Boden holds that the surprise condition of NSV indicates the three possible types of creativity, aligned with three corresponding types of surprise: instances that are statistically unusual or commonsense-thwarting, where possibilities are explored within a space/style; seemingly miraculous instances, such that the space/style is radically transformed in a way not thought possible (her example is new technology making possible what had been thought impossible—think of the first appearance of electronic communications media); instances where the combinational possibility within the space/style hadn’t been realized previously. There are according to Boden thus three types of creativity, each corresponding to the three types of surprise—exploratory, transformational, and combinational (ETC). Exploratory creativity, the most common, occurs within an established space/style. Transformational creativity is rare, as it involves fundamental revision to an established space/style structure, but according to Boden is the most highly valued—and the most shocking. Combinational creativity

¹⁰⁰ Boden 2009, Pg. 217.

¹⁰¹ Boden 2003, Pg. 2.

involves familiar components connected in unexpected ways, such as in collage or poetry. This utilizes the conceptual base (concepts and knowledge limited only by personal access, so that any idea can be combined with any other), occurring within a culturally determined conceptual space/style.

3.3 Boden's Analysis of the Creativity in Conceptual Art

In this second section of the chapter we will first get clear on the details of Boden's view of creativity in the arts generally. We will then see how she applies it to an analysis of conceptual art, concluding that conceptual artworks exhibit combinational creativity. Boden's general theory of art falls straightforwardly from her theory of creativity. Art creation is a subset of all creative activity. If a theory of creativity is intended to explain creative activity generally, then its application includes art by default. Boden's explicit approach to explaining art then is a systematic application of her theory of creativity in general to art in particular.¹⁰² Boden applies this approach across a variety of areas, including computer art, interactive art, and central to my project here, conceptual art. So, if we grant that Boden is correct about the ETC model of creativity, then conceptual art as an instance of creativity in the arts must be one of these three types, or some combination thereof.¹⁰³ This will occupy the central part of this chapter.

¹⁰² Boden 2010, Pgs. 29-40.

¹⁰³ Although certain approaches to artmaking exemplify certain types of creativity, such as with poetry and combinational creativity, Boden says overlap is possible, so that a poet's work might be predominately combinational, but to a lesser extent exploratory.

Conceptual artworks are philosophically interesting and centrally important to the international world of the fine arts.¹ As such, conceptual art deserves explanation, for example asking as Margaret Boden does about the creative processes involved in the making and appreciation of conceptual artworks.² Explaining the creativity in conceptual art is an intriguing task, particularly given conceptual art's appearance, or lack thereof. It is an art form of ideas that often uses the mere stuff of everyday life in its works. The fine arts are paradigmatically creative, and conceptual art is arguably the most significant fine art of the contemporary era. Determining how conceptual art is creative is therefore an important task for a general theory of the arts. By evaluating Boden's treatment of conceptual art we will then see how well her general theory of creativity in the arts fares in the process.

In "Creativity and Conceptual Art" Boden applies her model of creativity to example works from the late 1960s, something of a golden age for conceptual art.³ Two of her core examples are Claes Oldenberg's 1967 *Placid Civic Monument* and Robert Barry's 1969 *All of the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking—1:36 P.M., 15 June 1969*. The Oldenberg is a performance, or action work, involving gravediggers contracted to dig a site-specific hole in Central Park near an obelisk. This work explores themes of negative space, impermanence, and war while engaging a phallic monument, the nearby obelisk, with a womb-like grave. The Barry piece is a descriptive phrase, presented in the gallery as a piece of word art typed, printed, or at times (it's been shown multiple times since its inception) written by hand.

ALL THE THINGS I KNOW
 BUT OF WHICH I AM NOT
 AT THE MOMENT THINKING—
 1:36PM. JUNE 15, 1969

Of the three candidate types of creativity (exploratory, transformational, and combinational) Boden concludes that the creativity involved in the Barry and Oldenberg works, as with all other conceptual artworks, is a form of combinational creativity, the sort of creativity paradigmatically found in poetry. Boden says that conceptual artworks combine art “as such” with an additional “X”, namely non-art ideas. The interesting combination of art with the non-art “X” offers intellectual interest, also a hallmark of combinational creativity. The other types of creativity do not apply to conceptual art, she argues, because conceptual art is not as radically transformative as it might appear to someone unfamiliar with the art world, and is not exploratory in nature because conceptual art has no historically-established space of creativity prior to the 1960s. I think Boden’s account fails in a twofold, interconnected way: in its explanation of creativity in conceptual art, and as an explanation of creativity in the arts generally.

The middle part of this chapter is conceived as having a minor component—what I call here the *humble conclusion*—and a major component that falls out of the minor, the *bold conclusion*. The initial goal of this section is to convince the reader that Boden’s analysis of the creativity involved with the making and appreciation of conceptual art as combinational is mistaken, but can be corrected. That proposed correction comprises the humble conclusion.

However, in justifying the recommended corrections we see that there are deeper, surprising issues with Boden's account of creativity in the arts in general. While the humble intermediary conclusion is in part a matter of light housekeeping, I suggest the bolder conclusion that results is distinctly non-trivial. I take it that a theory ought to be able to explain a paradigmatic phenomenon within its domain, such as a theory of gravity ought to explain an instance of gravity in the wild, as it were. When it fails to do so, I take it this suggests the need for revision to that theory. I will first establish the (humble, perhaps trivial) intermediary conclusion in order to argue for the (bolder, what I take to be non-trivial) main conclusion, what amounts to a simple *modus tollens* structure. At each step there is a negative component, a critique, and a positive component, a recommendation. In the end I suggest ways for Boden to revise both her account of the creativity involved with conceptual art, and her account of creativity in the arts more generally. However, if Boden accepts the minor, and with it the major, conclusion, and accepts along with them the accompanying recommendations, she will need to walk back some key claims in her philosophy of creativity in the arts, most notably the emphasis her theory places on the isolated individual mind as explanatory site for all of creativity.

Boden discusses several particular conceptual art examples while applying her theory to the general kind, concluding that conceptual artmaking is an instance of combinational creativity. She terms this combination "Art plus X", where the 'art' is art "as such".¹⁰⁴ That is to say, conceptual art takes first a recognizable and definitive art form, such as sculpture, and then

¹⁰⁴ Boden 2009, Pg. 233.

adds 'X', some non-art conceptual addition, comprising the interesting combination that appeals to the intellect.

Boden's conclusion that conceptual art involves combinational creativity rests on two separate main arguments, one negative and one positive. In the first (negative) argument she argues that conceptual art is neither exploratory nor transformational, thereby completely ruling out two of the possible three, and concludes it is therefore combinational. If there are indeed only three options, and if the arguments against two of the three are good, then this would follow. Boden's main thrust here is that conceptual art is not exploratory because, according to Boden, there was no relevant history of conceptual artmaking prior to the '60s, therefore there was no relevant space/style for the artists to explore. Exploratory is thereby dismissed. The creativity involved might seem to be transformational, as it appears shocking to some, a mark of T-style creativity. However, Boden says conceptual art does not actually transform a conceptual space/style in the relevant sense. Boden explains that within the then-contemporary art scene the work was following a familiar continuum of earlier work, and so was not the shock of transformation, as the work had clear precedence. The shock she says your neighbor might experience faced with a work of conceptual art, shock that is normally taken to indicate transformational creativity, was not actually shock simpliciter--only shock in a certain context. Boden concludes then by process of elimination that the creativity in conceptual art is combinational. This is clearly valid reasoning, as all but one option are eliminated from the disjunct.

A different, positive argument that conceptual art is combinational is also on offer from Boden. Conceptual art appeals to the intellect, as it involves intellectual concepts both in its

creation and in its appreciation, and these concepts are known by intellection. Combinational creativity is the type of creativity that appeals to the intellect, so conceptual art must therefore be combinational.¹⁰⁵ This is on the face of it a bit less solid. It seems clear that transformational and exploratory creativity could also have intellectual interest. But as they've been ruled out already, and as Boden stipulates that combinational creativity is the preferred explanation for intellectual interest, we can charitably see this as a bonus recommendation for the combinational conclusion. To further bolster the case, Boden explains that the shocking characteristics that might have suggested an instance of transformational creativity are actually a highlight of its conceptual and combinational nature. Boden thinks that the challenging aspects are a key aspect of a work of conceptual art. The challenging, intellectually provocative content is, she says, the result of interesting combinations:

*In each case, the challenge consisted in juxtaposing the familiar notion of art, sculpture, music etc., with other familiar notions that are normally regarded as irrelevant, or even antithetical to it.*¹⁰⁶

So, all signs for Boden point to combinational. Boden says in the end about conceptual art that “[I]n short, what we have here are some cases of combinational creativity.”¹⁰⁷ The relevant combination she says is something “art” plus some other thing X that resists expectations. She calls this formulation “‘art’ plus X” (where X is some unexpected ‘antithetical’ attribute that generates intellectual interest, the ‘concepts’ of conceptual art).

¹⁰⁵ Boden 2009, Pg. 236.

¹⁰⁶ Boden 2009, Pg. 232.

¹⁰⁷ Boden 2009, Pg. 232.

Boden also provides a list of nineteen conceptual art approaches, saying that they exemplify the challenges, alterations to the conventions, and juxtapositions involved in conceptual art's combinational creative practice. The nineteen combinations and strategies are described using the form "instead of..." to capture the conceptual combinations at play. The interesting idea is typically the absence or alteration of expected attributes. There's a fair amount of overlap between the nineteen, so I've created a simplified table to capture Boden's relevant categories. Three characteristics are presented alongside several of her exemplar works: the creative combinations involved, the conceptual techniques, and the key negation (to capture the instead of P, not-P element of Boden's list, as it is dominated by absences, lack, erasures, and negations).

Table 1: Boden's Analysis of Conceptual Art: Combinational Creativity

Exemplar Works	Combinational Creativity Involved	Techniques Used	Key Negation (Instead of P, not-P)
John Cage <i>4'33"</i> Robert Barry <i>All of the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking—1:36 P.M., 15 June 1969</i>	Artwork without traditional content of sound, image, etc.	"conceptual interestingness" replacing familiar sensory-aesthetic or expressive-aesthetic;	lack of sensory-aesthetic content (optic, aural, etc.)
Cage and Barry	Attention without content, Importance with unimportance	the use of paradox, chance, valueless	lack of coherence (logical, intentional, or aesthetic)
Michael Heizer <i>Double Negative</i> ; Claes Oldenberg <i>Placid Civic Monument</i>	Execution by industrial machinery Artist not person making the work	(delegating the execution of the work; using non-traditional machinery or mass-production; appropriation, found objects and sounds; lack of sophistication, skill	lack of the artist as artisanal/"by-hand" maker
Sol LeWitt <i>Box in the Hole 1968</i> <i>Above works of Cage, Oldenberg, Heizer</i>	Having a custom-made item buried, obscured	Removing, hiding, obscuring	Lack of positive subject (absences, omissions as subjects)
Vito Acconci <i>Following Piece</i>	Performance in everyday context, art in-the-world	site-specificity, environments; the performative	lack of art object's autonomy
Oldenberg; Acconci; LeWitt; Barry	Impersonal, non-aesthetic documentation in place of aesthetic object	Documentation as mediated technical experience: the use of text, audio-visual recording, diagrams	Lack of immediate experience of art object or aesthetic experience

Boden interprets these exemplar works as combinations of 'art' ("Forms, not styles") plus the 'antithetical' non-art 'X' of ideas. These components form an *Art+X* that is intellectually engaging by virtue of the additional content and its combinations, and by what has not been (that typically *is*) done in creating artworks, $\sim P$ instead of P. For example, the Barry piece is an artwork (such as a drawing is an artwork), but it is a strange drawing in that it lacks traditional aesthetic content (such as sensuous pleasure in its form, expressiveness, or mimeticism) while being intellectually engaging. It also combines something important (an artwork) with

something seemingly unimportant (the description of the artist's mental state in negation). The 'art' therefore is recognizable, and part of an established tradition, a conceptual space/style artists can explore; however the 'X' (the ideas, including the 'instead of' techniques, combinations, and negations) has neither.

Boden concludes that conceptual art is combinational on three lines of reasoning: the cited examples are composed of combinations; there is a dimension of ideas and negations that appeals to intellection; and of the three ETC possibilities, conceptual art by process of elimination is combinational. So, granting that Boden's tripartite ETC account of creativity is correct, and granting too the argument against transformational—which I am happy to do as the shock does seem only apparent and undue, there indeed being immediate precursors to the works that the artists were reacting to—then a lot is riding on the argument against conceptual art being an instance of exploratory creativity. Although I will not pursue this line here, one might well take issue with Boden's process of elimination approach, as it assumes the coherence of the three ETC types. It is unclear how any kind of artmaking could fail to involve combinations of some sort as exploration within a space/style. Exploratory creativity seems likely analytically prior and possibly foundational to other types, as it seems reasonable to say that combinations and transformations in art can occur only within explorable space/styles. If that were the case, then Boden's process of elimination approach is less tidy than appears, possibly incoherent, if these types of creativity are not neatly separable. But, as said, we are taking the ETC model as granted here, and there is plenty of work to do even setting that line of critique aside.

So there you have Boden's argument. You may find it convincing. I do not. For starters there is a crucial misunderstanding about the history and nature of conceptual art. There is a well-documented history that comprises a conceptual space/style these '60s artists were exploring, a realm of ideas and conceptual approaches concerning the nature and possibility of art. Below then is a quick refresher on the artistic, theoretic, and philosophic history of conceptual art. That then will set us up to critique Boden's analysis and make some specific recommendations.

3.4 Critiquing Boden's account of conceptual art

That the creativity involved in conceptual art's creation and appreciation can be explained by its interesting psychological combinations alone sounds plausible. A glass of water on a shelf in a gallery with the title "An Oak Tree" does indeed involve interesting combinations, and the artist who created the piece, Michael Craig-Martin, certainly used mental processes during its creation, so a psychological approach seems apt. However, ruling out the other two types of creativity relies on questionable claims, and determining what in the combinations constitutes the art is problematic. Among other issues, Boden claims (mistakenly) that conceptual art appeared without precedent in the 1960s. Conceptual artmaking has a rich history in the form of the 20th Century avant-garde, therefore Boden's view should conclude by its own lights that the creativity in conceptual art is primarily exploratory (exploring an established way of creating) and not combinational.

Boden demonstrates keen knowledge concerning the New York art scene of the 1960s, as well as some aspects of the previous decade. Yet she makes a curious error about conceptual art arriving fully-formed and without a history.

Well [conceptual art is] not grounded in exploratory creativity, either, for that's defined as the exploration of an accepted artistic space. Conceptual artists reject previously accepted styles. Indeed, that's what lies behind the common feeling that this endeavour simply is not art: in other words, that fundamentally something different is going on from what went on before...¹⁰⁸

When Boden claims that conceptual art has no precedent, and arrived spontaneously in the 1960s, she is ignoring the clear lineage of conceptual art practice, a clear path back through at least cubism in the early decades of the 20th Century. The name may not be the same through the 20th Century (and even within the 1960s of Boden's focus, there were several names in circulation, so "conceptual art" is not a canonical title), but the approach to creatively exploring ideas as a mode of thinking about art's possibility and limits has a clear lineage in the various avant-garde movements that preceded '60s concept art in terms of time, technique, and content: Dada, Constructivism, Surrealism; Nouveau Realisme, Pop, Minimalism, Fluxus, Situationist International. Each of these groups explored some aspect of Godfrey's four modes of conceptual art. There are various practices that we can appropriately capture under the umbrella term "conceptual art", and these approaches and concerns constitute the background wellspring of '60s conceptual art activities.

Boden uses Claes Oldenberg's *Placid Civic Monument*, the gravediggers piece discussed above, as a key example in arguing that the creativity in conceptual art is combinational.

¹⁰⁸ Boden 2009, Pg. 230.

Boden's argument requires that the conceptual aspect of the piece had no relevant historic precedence. But consider that Oldenburg is famous first and foremost in the public mind as a Pop artist alongside Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. Now consider that Pop is a continuation of Dada. And then finally consider that Oldenburg's early work includes the Store, a work that both utilized a commercial storefront as a Dadaistic pop artwork, dissolving boundaries between art and commerce, artworks and everyday items and actions. When Duchamp's Pasadena retrospective was held in 1963 it set the stage for a new generation revisiting his specific meta-art conceptual practices, in addition to those investigations already underway as a continuation of pre-war avant-garde experiments into art's fundamentals. The New York scene of the '60s that Boden has in mind then has multiple threads tracing back to the beginning of the 20th Century, establishing a communal space/style of enquiries into the fundamental and possibilities of art.

If Boden is correct about the ETC model of creativity, and if exploratory creativity requires an established conceptual space/style, then our look above at the art historical record suggests exploratory is a distinctly viable candidate. Next we look at how Danto recommends this legacy of avant-garde conceptual artmaking be seen as creative philosophy of art, further establishing the conceptual space/style the artists were exploring. Even with a clear history the question may naturally arise, as Boden noted, is this art? Perhaps avant-garde artists thinking about art was not art at all, but philosophy. I endorse Danto's view that it was both. And I am sympathetic too to Art & Language's claim that it was neither. The practitioners in '60s concept art, highly educated in both art history and thought, were very well aware of their

predecessors. Their work, whether we characterize it as art, philosophy, both, or neither, good or bad, is nonetheless a creative continuation within a defined creative space/style.

Danto also provides us with a way of thinking about how exactly such a space/style is to be sustained by its cultural context. What he calls the “artworld” provides a matrix of background theory that sustains works as art. Understanding conceptual art as a continuous tradition of communal sharing of ideas about the nature and possibility of art, particularly in how and whether or not art is distinguishable from the content of everyday life, is key to understanding how conceptual artists are creative within that tradition. There is a cultural context that is necessary in order for conceptual art to occur and to have value, lest the thoughts and actions involved be mere thoughts and actions, and not art at all. The tradition of conceptual art then is an instance of what Boden calls a conceptual space/style of available moves, occurring within something like Danto’s artworld. The process of thinking through these possibilities through creative ideas and actions within the artworld is the conceptual/space style of conceptual art.

We can now add a further category to the analysis table examined earlier, the Historical-philosophical Context relation. The earlier table noted characteristics Boden cited in support of her combinational conclusion. By adding the new column, we can place this taxonomy of exemplar moves within the space of art history and philosophy of art. We see that the conceptual artists are reacting against and interrogating a history of conceptions of art.

Table 2: Boden's Analysis Corrected: Exploratory Creativity

Combinational Creativity Involved	Conceptual Techniques Involved	Key Negation (Instead of P, not-P)	Historical-Philosophical Context Relation
Artwork without traditional content of sound, image, etc.	"conceptual interestingness" replacing familiar sensory-aesthetic or expressive-aesthetic	lack of sensory-aesthetic content (optic, aural, etc.)	connects historically to Dada, neo-Dada
Attention without content, Importance with unimportance	the use of paradox, chance, valueless	lack of coherence (logical, intentional, or aesthetic)	connects to anti-logic of Dada (and Zen Koans); logical contradiction as interrogating the rational status quo (avant-garde)
Execution by industrial machinery Artist not person making the work	(delegating the execution of the work; using non-traditional machinery or mass-production; appropriation, found objects and sounds; lack of sophistication, skill	lack of the artist as artisanal/"by-hand" maker	connects to Soviet Constructivism (historical Avant-Garde)
Having a custom-made item buried, obscured	Removing, hiding, obscuring	Lack of positive subject (absences, omissions as subjects)	connects to Dada, rejects positive formal-aesthetic experience by viewer
Performance in everyday context, art in-the-world	site-specificity, environments; the performative	lack of art object's autonomy	negates art/life value distinction, connecting to historical avant-gardes and postwar continuations of AG
Impersonal, non-aesthetic documentation in place of aesthetic object	Documentation as mediated technical experience: the use of text, audio-visual recording, diagrams	Lack of immediate experience of art object or aesthetic experience	modern surveillance, media, and scientific technology has precursors in Constructivism, neo-Dada

3.5 Rejecting the Analysis for Combinational Creativity: arguments against exploratory

In advancing her arguments Boden holds contradictory positions. The careful reader will have noticed that Boden denies the existence of a conceptual art history to make one argument (against exploratory) while also affirming it to make another (against transformational). I take it this alone is sufficient to dismiss her negative argument as unsound. A premise of the negative argument requires transformational and exploratory to not be viable candidates for explaining the creativity in conceptual art, but Boden's cake-and-eat-it-too move undermines its success. We can therefore reject that claim as well. Now that we have had our art history refresher, and

connected that lineage of conceptual/space style as a form of conceptual art exploration via Danto's observations about what avant-garde artists were up to (creative conceptual philosophizing of some sort), we can agree with Boden that conceptual art is not transformational, for the same reasons she cites, now bolstered by what we've considered. Boden says that conceptual art is not exploratory because there is no existing space/style to explore. Again, with our refresher and Danto's help, we see that this is clearly false.

Conceptual artmaking is clearly exploring an established space/style and is thus an instance of exploratory creativity. Boden concluded that the interesting combination was Art+X, where art was a form of art and X was some intellectually engaging concept affixed to the art. Now it's clear that Boden's X should not be conceived as some addition to a given art form; it is rather the primary medium of the artmaking—the X is the art form itself, the ideas within the artworld context; the X is within the conceptual space/style that subsequent conceptual artists are exploring. Looking in detail at how Boden denies the exploratory conclusion while examining the problems this entails will pay dividends in the recommendations we can make to Boden.

If conceptual art is not transformational creativity, what sort of creativity is it? Well, it's not grounded in exploratory creativity, either, for that's defined as the exploration of an accepted artistic space. Conceptual artists reject previously accepted styles.¹⁰⁹

Notice the tight maneuvering between "accepted artistic space" and "previously accepted styles". Boden's arguments against exploratory make important use of the terms "style" and "orthodoxy". Boden says conceptual art offers a critique of "the accepted concept of 'art' itself"

¹⁰⁹ Boden 2009, Pg. 230.

while also maintaining that these do not count as “stylistic” challenges. But Boden uses ‘style’ in another distinct way, such as when contrasting a 20th Century sculptress with a Renaissance sculptor as evidence of different “styles”. Boden insists then that the art form of sculpture is not itself a “style”, establishing a hinge for disregarding exploratory. Boden says of the Oldenburg work for example, that it “challenged the ideas of sculpture in general, not any particular sculptural style.” This is puzzling. Sculpture in general is an established domain of creating, a space/style, as historically determined by the gatekeepers of creative value in that domain (artists, critics, theorists). Boden's adjectival use of ‘sculptural’ in this sentence clearly marks ‘style’ as a subset of sculptural approaches. Solving the puzzle is easy: Boden is using “style” in two different ways.

Boden claims conceptual artists rejected orthodoxy. I suggest instead that Boden’s own argument about apparent shock applies to this claim as well. The appearance of the unorthodox is linked to Boden’s discussion of apparent shock in the dismissal of transformational. Recall Boden argued that the shock was only apparent in conceptual art, as there were precursors. Consider too the fair presumption that typically in order to experience shock, one has to have some sort of epistemic limitation. Boden explained the misleading appearance of shock as due to the lack of familiarity with the conditions of the art world. I suggest that Boden has a similar theoretic limitation herself, one that connects to her assumptions about art, that art forms are static givens, and to creativity in the arts, that it cannot consist of ideas alone—all as demonstrated by her Art+X model. Boden herself notes that a theory of creativity can be limited by one’s theory of art. If one is a Kantian (her example), then one’s theory of creativity within the arts will be limited by a theoretic constraint

on formal properties and the beautiful.³⁸ Boden's own presumed affinities in the philosophy of art appear to have constrained her conception of the possibilities in art practice. The orthodoxies she appears to have in mind were physical traditions of medium and manner of execution. But by the definitions of conceptual space and creative value, the conceptual artists were participating in an established orthodoxy as set by the conceptual traditions of the art world; Boden's own argument against transformational establishes how the apparent shock was just that, apparent, and therefore we should take the orthodoxy claim to contradict a key plank of her own argument. Boden could possibly recant her claims about apparent shock, but this would be uncomfortably ad hoc, as she gives a convincing argument.

3.6 Denying Boden's Assumption: art is not limited to non-conceptual forms

Now we have two problems that have arisen, equivocation and contradiction. There are more. The assumption about art not consisting of ideas runs aground against another of Boden's key claims, the nature of poetry. The matter of emphasis also butts up against her own claims about creative value. Boden's denial of the 'X' itself being sufficient to count as art suggests that no art form could consist primarily of ideas, but this cannot be squared with her own general theory. This is for two reasons: Boden's own example of poetry; and the role of cultural context in determining creative value and conceptual space. Boden's key example of the sort of creativity she thinks is occurring with conceptual art, combinational creativity, is poetry, an art of ideas. Poetry is shared through various physical means, of course—on the page or orally—but in principle may stay at the level of thought only. Consider that one might destroy all of the

printed or recorded works of the poet Li Po, say. Yet the poetry itself has not been destroyed. The poem cannot be identical to any temporary instantiation in material form (nor the set of such artefacts), for these are easily duplicated or destroyed with no effect to the poem itself. If Boden accepts that poetry, which consists primarily (perhaps exclusively) of X, can be a space/style with its own subset of artistic styles (e.g., imagism), yet denies conceptual art that status, then the most plausible explanation appears to be that Boden assumes visual art forms are static givens without conceptual content. But if static forms are non-conceptual, then Boden would have to deny conceptual nature of art in general, conflicting with her own account of poetry.

Conceptual art shares with poetry this quality of existing as an idea. Barry's piece *All the things I know but...* is an example of both a restricted sense of conceptual art, the idea-as-artwork, and the less restricted hybridized sense of conceptual art, a more object-oriented approach typical of the works that change hands in today's contemporary art market. The idea of the piece found in Barry's mind—as well as in the gallery-goer's, yours, and mine—is not attached to any one instance of its being written out; the artwork as thought supersedes any particular instantiation. Destroy any of the physical tokens of the work and the conceptual work as idea itself remains untouched. Recall that Sol LeWitt described this aspect of conceptual art as *need-not-be-made*, as the piece exists as an idea independent of any of the physical instantiations, such as the ideas referenced in Barry's text. The thinking of the not-thinking, noting unstated knowledge claims, and the idea of the date-stamp as an index to the work's making are all ideas that can be physically expressed but are not limited to that expression.

Poetry and conceptual art demonstrate that art is not limited to non-conceptual forms. Art can consist of a space of shared ideas, concepts, shared between practitioners and audience.

Humble Conclusion

Boden's insistence on denying the exploratory conclusion creates problems. And it is at odds with an attractive feature of her view, that creative value ultimately comes from the culture the creator finds herself in. Boden says the individual cannot create it on her own. Boden ought to then be amenable to the suggestion that is the intermediate conclusion, at which we have now arrived—a humble suggestion how she can avoid these problems and properly track the historical record.

The Humble Conclusion: Given the history of conceptual art, and the ideas of art as conceptual art space/style, Boden ought to conclude the creativity within conceptual art is exploratory. As a corollary move, Boden should drop the mistaken Art+X picture of conceptual art, as the 'X' is itself (roughly speaking) the relevant art medium—the space/style of ideas that are the stuff of conceptual art.

The ease with which this correction practically recommends itself causes reason to pause and ask why Boden so forcefully dismisses the exploratory answer. This question gains further traction when we realize Boden has endorsed fairly transparent contradictions, as well as made curious claims about art and creativity, in order to arrive at her conclusion. In short, getting the correct results shows that Boden's view on creativity in the arts struggles with the cultural fact of the art world and its history, most pertinently in the history of ideas as art. Asking why Boden embraces these contradictions despite the ability of her view to naturally accommodate what I

have suggested point to deeper assumptions about the nature of art, discussed above, and the emphasis on the exclusive role of a reductive psychological explanation of creativity in the arts, discussed below.

3.7 Diagnosis and Recommendation: How the general account constrains exploratory

A general theory of creativity in the arts should be able to convincingly explain the creativity involved in one of its key forms. Boden's attempt comes up short. Asking why this is points to a specific tension in Boden's treatment of creative value, revealing further contradiction. All of these problems are satisfactorily resolved if Boden adopts my below 'bold' suggestion to shift emphasis from a reductive account (her 'All H is P') to one that puts at least commensurate emphasis on historical context and the social interactions that support the cultural enterprises of the arts. This is a move her view is well-suited to make.

Boden's own account of creative value is not only consistent with this recommended shift in emphasis, but practically recommends the move. However, Boden's commitment to her reductive account puts that claim in tension with her overall approach. Boden's account of creative value and the culturally-derived conceptual space/style makes good sense of how creativity functions in the arts—all of which is consistent with something like Danto's conception of the cultural background theories sustaining an art world. But then this explanation runs up against Boden's reductivist approach, ruling out historical explanation. This is the tension at the heart of the view.

Boden's view is premised on a reductive account of creativity: all instances can be explained at, and are reduced to, the solitary psychological level of the isolated mind: "P-creativity is the more important concept. For every instance of H-creativity is a special case of P-creativity."³⁹ This All-H is P approach creates trouble in Boden's discussion of creative value. Boden is no solipsist. She does recognize that the creative value component of her NSV definition of creativity is "crucial" and that it originates within the agent's culture, which involves a plurality of minds supporting a cultural phenomenon. But this then creates a tension of emphasis, a tension that leads to contradiction. Arguing against Weisman, Boden says creative value, because it is cultural, cannot be modelled, as historical contexts are too relativistic and complex. Yet elsewhere Boden admits that the individual mind is too complex to be accurately modelled itself, and that the differences between relative humans complicates this further.⁴¹ This impasse of where to place emphasis suggests to me that the All H is P claim, the claim that the psychological explanation explains all, is little more than fiat.

The tension within Boden's view leads us to the overall recommendation to shift emphasis and walk back the bold claim that all instances of creativity in the arts can be explained by the model of an isolated mind. Psychological processes are most certainly at play in conceptual art, and these of course occur in individual human minds. But, assuming something like Danto's background conditions are accurate, then the agent must be in a context where these background theories are shared among a community of minds in order to creatively participate in art at all, conceptual or otherwise.⁴²

This tension in the view, both in insufficient emphasis on creative value and the mistakes it gives rise to (mistaken analysis in conceptual art, equivocation, contradiction,

impasse, and fiat), is resolved if Boden shifts the explanatory emphasis to the historical and cultural sphere that provides the foundation of creative value and conceptual space/styles, and withdraws the claim All-H is P and its accompanying assumptions. Even a shift to equal collaborative emphasis might be enough to resolve the tension. I think that with these adjustments a restricted Boden-style account of processes nestles in well with a Danto-inspired theory of creativity in the arts. This resolves Boden's issues while getting the correct results in our test case of conceptual art. I suspect this may be the beginnings too of a robust theory of creativity in the arts generally.

The Bold Conclusion

Based on our analysis of the errors in Boden's treatment of conceptual art, Boden needs to jettison the All H is P commitment and recognize that the individual psychology does not have priority in the explanations of creativity in the arts. Boden also ought to incorporate or defer to a Danto-styled approach and recognize that each individual is necessarily connected to a larger systemic organization, the creative community whence creative value and conceptual space/styles are derived. Valuable pieces are in place with Boden, but the emphasis must be shifted. That shift should result in a clearer path to seeing that conceptual art, like other creative forms (poetry, philosophy) consists primarily in exploring ideas within a culturally-mediated space/style

This seems like quite a reasonable proposal to me. The psychological processes that Boden is highly regarded for studying are no doubt key to understanding how human creativity occurs. But without the social mediation of creative value, all that she is truly explaining is the

process of problem-solving, and she is therefore incapable of explaining creativity in the arts, most notably in conceptual art. Shifting emphasis and walking back the sweeping reductionist claims seems a small price to pay for an even more robust explanatory account. Boden shouldn't balk from this recommendation. She herself downplays the role of the autodidact in creativity, for example, suggesting then that along with the recognition of creative value being a cultural fact then suggests she could be potentially amenable to the proposal.¹¹⁰

To claim that all creativity is explicable by one isolated mind comes up short when faced with how creativity functions in the world, made evident by the particular case of conceptual art. Holding on to assumptions about the nature of art that de-emphasizes the historical context and the shared space of ideas appears to preserve Boden's analysis, but once all is laid out, we see that it comes at a price of contradiction, jeopardizing the view. The recommended take-home then is that the conceptual does not involve some extraneous addition to art; rather it is plausibly a core part of the basis of art, and the material form it takes in different contexts is primarily to be explained by the X—which takes Boden's Art+X and turns it on its head, so to speak. This is all to say that I suspect conceptual art is what we've been up to all along. And this therefore suggests a fruitful line of future thought, how one might develop a theory of creativity in the arts, featuring conceptual art as explanatory paradigm of the arts. I only have space here at end to gesture at the general lines such a project might take, but the present critique of Boden outlines the work such an account needs to and should be able to accomplish.

¹¹⁰ Boden 2010, Pgs. 41-49.

3.8 Toward a sociocultural account of creativity

One potential way to model that approach is to look at R. Keith Sawyer's group flow approach, modelled on Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's conception of group creativity.¹¹¹ An additional dimension to this approach would be to develop an epistemic-value account based on social epistemology and Hilary Putnam's work on the fact-value distinction. The anticipated outcome would be an account of creativity that would be consistent with a sociocultural network that has as more than the sum of its parts identifiable beliefs, tendencies, and values that underscore the creative actions of the individuals, in our case the artists who have made conceptual artworks for the past century, and arguably much, much longer. While there is much social science research on creativity involving groups, there is very little in philosophy, and to my knowledge none applied to the case of conceptual art, which as argued above, I take to be of pre-eminent importance in an account of human creativity in the 21st Century and the arts *tout court*.

Our close look at Boden's treatment of conceptual art then suggests a sociocultural theory of creativity can serve as a guideline toward developing a general theory of art, one that avoids Lopes's concerns. A quick examination of a model of community-based art in the form of the golden age of hip-hop can give us insight into how the sociocultural approach can be utilized in conjunction with Boden's core approach. What I am recommending is a particular emphasis, so Boden's basic contribution is to my mind entirely compatible with the sociocultural approach, under a certain interpretation. In the following chapter, I will draw from

¹¹¹ Sawyer 2015.

Michelle Moody-Adams's work on social justice to get a clearer picture on how a community comes to self-awareness around an abstract concept, one related to the wellbeing of the culture. Sawyer, Moody-Adams, and Aristotle inspire a conceptual framework for a Danto-like explanation of how the arts operate, with conceptual art as the model.

The so-called "golden age of hip-hop" is a period of artistic flourishing in the late '80s to early '90s that illustrates the sociocultural model.¹¹² This comes after hip-hop music had been established as a popular music form during the "old school" era. The golden age furnishes us with an example of cultural activity that is new, surprising, and valuable, and demonstrates how the sociocultural approach to creativity rightfully forefronts the cultural importance and communal nature of creativity. Hip-hop is creativity in service of cultural resistance and assertion of identity; it illustrates the NSV model while confirming the need for a sociocultural approach.

The golden age of hip-hop music is characterized by three key elements: unencumbered access to source material (i.e. the relative freedom of using samples of existing music); a clear connection to intellectual and cultural traditions within urban Black identity; and what is a common theme in cultural development, the intentional misuse of technology (in this case, sampling methods). The first major lawsuits filed by the copyright owners of the original recording artists pulled the rug out from under the hip-hop scene, bankrupting hip-hop record companies, and essentially shutting down the freewheeling days of sampling, the art of taking

¹¹² Note that 'hip-hop' as a term refers to a general cultural movement, not only hip-hop music. I have only the music in mind here, but the broader cultural fact of hip-hop only underscores my broader point about the sociocultural approach to creativity.

small snippets of existing records as the collage basis for new material. In this period, acts like Public Enemy and Tribe Called Quest utilized numerous samples taken primarily from pop, funk, and rock sources to create richly textured mosaics of sound, creating multicolored aural collages to rap over. The lawsuits put an end to this open practice. Rap itself has a complex legacy, tied into hip-hop's Jamaican origins (dancehall and dub “toasting”); the rhyming “jive” of mid-century radio hosts; the intellectual traditions of the African American diaspora; the poetics of jazz musicians, urban poets in Watts and NYC, Gil Scott Heron, James Brown, and even Muhammed Ali’s phrasing. The cultural legacy of hip-hop is likewise complex, and explicitly community-oriented. For example, the “native tongues” association of NYC rappers of the period is typical in their cultural stances: an explicitly-embraced African identity, the intellectual and artistic legacy of the Harlem Renaissance, and an acknowledgement of the political heritage of civil rights and the Black Panthers. This connection to a cultural inheritance within the art form was threatened by the entrance of organized crime into the business of rap and corporate entities promoting rap that would appeal to the suburban dollar (such as “rap metal”).¹¹³ The golden age of hip-hop exhibits the evolution of community expression where the community provides a feedback loop to individual DJs and MCs who each fill in a piece in the mosaic of the creation. The breakdancers in the earlier old school era gave Kool Herc immediate feedback that led to innovations with ‘breaks’ and keeping the beat going indefinitely. The community expressing itself in the *new* of the moment was a way to participate in a self-aware *now*. Moody-Adams describes a community as imaginatively

¹¹³ The west coast rap of this period featured fictionalized exploits of “gangster rap”, but these narratives largely had little to do with the artists’ actual lives—something that would change with the introduction of organized crime into the ‘90s rap world.

understanding itself in relation to social justice; ongoing invention of creative arts culture occupies a related dimension.

The musicians involved in the golden age of hip-hop illustrate the trifecta of new, surprising, and valuable, but they do in a way that illustrates the scene being the driving explanation, not the individuals from bottom up. Ishmael Butler shares that putting out a record, adding to the conversation as an expression of his influences, was the impetus, participating in the shared language, adding to the understanding.¹¹⁴ The development of complex aural collages acquired a sophistication hitherto unknown; the (mis-)use of technology was unexpected; and the creative value was clearly tied to the connection to the community and the artworks' representation of Black cultural identity—sophisticated, knowledgeable, expressive. As Boden rightfully recognizes, creative value is due to the culture in which creative activity occurs. The rich cultural climate of the golden age of hip-hop is expressed in records like *Three Feet High and Rising*, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (and on the west coast in *Straight Outta Compton* and *Original Gangster*). These records are the result of community's articulating the tragic, the comic.

The example of the golden age of hip-hop then exemplifies the sociocultural approach to explaining creativity. That approach forefronts Boden's creative value component, rightfully recognizing it as key to explaining how anything can be considered creative at all. The newness of a work depends on the relevant understanding of newness, as all things are potentially new in some trivial sense (metaphysically new in its molecular arrangement or relation to other

¹¹⁴ Coleman 2007.

entities at some particular moment of spacetime, epistemically new to someone); all things are potentially surprising given the right epistemic context. What makes something new and surprising in the relevant sense, I think it's clear, is that it is relevant to the context that is determined by the creative value at work. In other words, for something to be creative (new, surprising, and valuable) it must be creative for the cultural context. This falls right out of Boden's work, although she does not acknowledge it. The example of the golden age of hip-hop shows us that the newness of the techniques (such as the creative mis-use of sampling technology) was relevant to the community of artists working on behalf of the communities they were immersed within, including the network of audience, critics, as well as friends and family. Likewise the surprise described by Ishmael Butler and others when upon first hearing *It Takes a Nation of Millions...* —the type of surprise was nuanced and made relevant by previous knowledge possessed by virtue of being a member of a specific community, one relevant to innovations within the art. The creative value of the community supports the understanding of the NSV model, such that the importance of an art form like the golden age of hip-hop depends essentially on how that work was creatively by and for the community for which it carries meaning.¹¹⁵

As discussed, a model of sociocultural creativity can be found in R. Keith Sawyer's work. The next chapter will develop a sociocultural theory of art drawing from that work. Sawyer models creativity on the "flow" state of group improvisation, such as in the case of jazz

¹¹⁵ What the process of chopping up and re-presenting samples *means* in this cultural context is another, and very interesting, critical or art historical conversation. The attraction to making aural collages reflects the cultural moment, just as cubist collage did; the assertion of identity within a late twentieth century northeastern context of primarily Black American culture colors this approach to collage differently, the use of fragmented technological media to express identity within a technologized and mediated moment marking it of and for its time and place.

musicians. He points to jazz and group improvisation as a model of sociocultural creativity. The historical record strongly supports this idea. Miles Davis may be a name we associate with innovation in Jazz, but at each stage he had a band of innovators, each of whom contributed to the moment. Herbie Hancock recalls the sense of the self disappearing into the whole of the ensemble as they created in real time, each adding his own, but as though it were being drawn from the musician by the larger whole. This may sound mystical at first, but group attunement is a demonstrable phenomenon. People who experience meaningful transcendence via group creativity do often attribute such an experience to the divine. Ringo Starr has said that with the Beatles there were four playing to the center, and that the center was 'God'. Something larger than him was at work, although we don't need to ascribe this to the supernatural. But there is a way to understand the psychological state as a group flow state in the way Sawyer describes, and the spiritual-like experience can be given model by the experience of zazen, the meditative practice of Zen. While Buddhism is a religion, Zen is markedly secular in its claims. Mindfulness, the process and result of meditating, is said to lead to compassion, for oneself and others. Moody-Adams echoes this with her discussion of social justice involving compassion developed through imaginative cultural self-awareness. This idea of connecting with others through self-awareness.¹¹⁶ As we will see in the next chapter, the sociocultural creativity approach explains

¹¹⁶ The jazz guitarist Jim Hall discusses the meditative self-awareness that leads to a successful group improvisational jazz performance. Hall, Pg. 14. He mentions by example tennis great Billie Jean King rolling a tennis ball on the floor of her room, concentrating only on the ball, prior to a match. But then Hall also discusses "the unifying process" of the performing band coming together, attending to each musician and responding. "From there on it's a process of interacting: listening, trusting, and reacting... In all of this, awareness seems to be the key word—hearing, or seeing the music from one step outside, looking down from above." (all page 14) A transcendent moment of awareness as a group creating art together. This is the model.

the creativity in the hard cases, but also in the even harder cases. This suggests it can be a component of a general theory of art that meets all of the concerns raised by Lopes.

3.9 Upshots of Ch 3

One upshot of this chapter is that a general theory of art that acknowledges and is consistent with a robust theory of creativity helps solve some of the puzzles in Lopes's kind-specific approach. The hard cases and the even harder cases are solved by the Danto-like social dimension that sustains any art activity, the meaningfulness captured by creative value, where the conceptual artwork is sustained by that meaningfulness. A theory of creativity helps us understand for example how artists and art are not limited to specific approaches or media. The creativity in artmaking is not bound to one medium; not necessarily, and not in practice. Of course artists must be good at their craft if they are to be good at making art with that craft. But there is a "craft" of being an artist that is not tied to any particular artisan-style craft.

Artists rarely occupy only one station on the art assembly line, perfecting one narrow skill. It is true of course that not everyone is a "renaissance" person like Leonardo or Michelangelo, excelling at several arts and beyond the arts (DaVinci wrote music, kept sketchbooks, made paintings and frescoes, in addition to his work in the sciences and technology, while Michelangelo wrote poetry, practiced architecture, and made sculpture and painted). But one does not need to look very far for examples of artists who not only move freely between media, but who exist as artists beyond any divisiveness of siloed media. Picasso wrote poetry and plays, made visual artworks out of whatever was at hand, creating a new

medium as necessary in order to do so. Sure, he was a painter. More importantly he was an artist. In *Demoiselles D'Avignon* it is the sculptural, carving, and chiseled qualities of the Iberian artefacts, African masks, and Cezanne works that Picasso had studied that give the painting its status as a radical contribution to the two-dimensional easel painting tradition. Picasso wasn't simply creating mimetic representations of these influences, he was sculpting, carving, and chiseling with oil paint. Traditionalists were horrified of course, just as they had been with Turner, the Impressionists, and post-Impressionists. Graham Greene incorporated cinema as a primary aesthetic influence in his literature. Nabokov, who initially aspired to being a painter and who incorporated visual approaches extensively in his written work, also wrote poetry and chess moves that refined his novel-writing. Composers paint watercolors to work out musical ideas. This is normal artistic behavior.

The psychology of the creative artistic mind is not limited to one medium. In fact, people who make significant breakthroughs in any field quite often have arrived from a different field prior to doing so. Cases like this abound in the creativity literature, Nobel Laureates. The thinking must shift in relation to the specifics of the application, but the level of general processing is preserved. Moreover, the new technical context for a creative mind often allows for the creator to perceive combinations, opportunities, and solutions not apparent to others. A feasible explanation is that the technical specifics of a tradition constrain the seasoned technical practitioner within the narrow confines of a medium or a field. These constraints tend to encourage a myopic and habitual synaptic hardening, so to speak, resulting in craft expertise at the expense of individual creative contribution. (Interestingly, this myopia and synaptic hardening does not preclude creativity from occurring within the context of the medium or

field. Humans work together as social creatures on most any useful project. The creative value is not within the individual, but within the social context that the individual is situated: creativity crucially involves evaluation. Thus a key member of a research team, under the direction of a lead researcher, may not do anything creative while contributing essentially to the creativity that results. Similarly, individual artisans working together can in concert unknowingly create something of great creative worth; this can happen by accident, subsequently being recognized by the group, or be completely unknown to the artisans involved and only attributed by others who recognize the creative value.

The community determines the creative value, thus the possible status of art being art at all. This solves another *Beyond Art* problem: the issues of art kind medium-specificity. The thought behind the work, as understood as incorporating creative value in its expression, explains why art is not necessarily tied to any medium-specific activity (although it may take as its subject just that). Baudelaire and transposition d'art thus exemplify the grounds for the possibility of making art. It should come as no surprise that many, if not most, artists work in multiple modes and media. Artists are creative people, and creativity is a non-mysterious process with general application. Different researchers parse out the steps differently, but on the whole creative people follow a step-by-step process of problem-posing, experimentation, incubation, selection, and refinement. The creativity that occurs in oil painting or flower arranging is the same creativity that occurs in, to use Margaret Boden's example, finding a new route to the office. The value of the creative contributions differs depending on cultural context, such that *Guernica* or *8 ½* carry greater value in some contexts more than others.

Great as those works may be, they carry little value in assisting one in finding a new path to work.

Expertise requires a combination of relevant skills and knowledge to work well in whatever way the project requires. But there is only needed a baseline set of attributes, a benchmark competency, to contribute creatively to a field. One does not need “genius” IQ or have gone to the best schools in order to creatively contribute to a field at a very high level, given that the access is not limited to the latter (such as was the case with access to linked mainframe computing in the 1960s). Virtuosity is also not required. Patience, curiosity, plus a willingness to share ideas, experiment, and put in long hours, however, are very much needed for someone to make creative contributions in any field. I take all of the above to help us understand why artists are not bound by or defined by their primary medium. If Picasso and Braque were only painters, then the development of collage would seem *ipso facto* impossible, as it pushed beyond the boundaries of the medium as previously defined. Had they brought their creation to their contemporary theorists of painting, as Lopes suggests, then they surely would have been dismissed and sent to look for another medium. That they were artists and not just painters allowed them to see the potential in incorporating bits and pieces of the world in their works, as their creative net was cast widely.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ An additional line of thought is useful here: researchers acknowledge that working creatively in a separate area allows the unconscious mind to process ideas and approaches relevant to the primary project, preparing one’s return to that creative enterprise. A story is told from Sun Microsystems, that they fired a generation of employees and hired the best graduates of the best schools. Management was distressed to find that problem-solving plummeted with the newly-minted team. They realized that the older generation all worked on their own cars, and discussed those processes with one another, helped each other on weekends. The conclusion they came to was that, after firing this new batch, they would only hire people with broader portfolios, ones that featured pastimes like communal car-repair.

3.10 Summary

Boden's theory of art as an example of a general theory that doesn't work out, but not for the reasons Lopes would suggest. Instead, Boden's work suggests a fruitful path toward constructing a successful theory of art that takes seriously both the findings from creativity research and the hard cases. Correcting for Boden's errors in analysis of conceptual art suggests that a sociocultural approach to explaining art can well explain conceptual art, and as I will argue in the next chapter, explain art on the whole by using what at first appears as an outlier, conceptual art, as its paradigm. Conceptual art is conceptually minimal, and to explain it is to explain in great focus the possibility of art at all.

Everyone involved in these debates agrees that humans make or do things we have a tendency to value as art. Humans have done this sort of thing throughout our history everywhere. Kant's distinction between agreeable and socially meaningful; something socially important about art on the whole, not just the object or what it is made of. In addition, the experience of art for Kant involved the capacity for experiencing beauty and the acknowledgement by the individual that others that share that capacity would also find it of value. We need not accept Kant's limited formalist view about aesthetic experience as explaining all art in order to recognize the important point he makes about the socially embedded experience that is art.

Some works in established art forms are not art. One has to make use of a global art distinction here; the media themselves are incapable of doing so without this broader view.

Creativity is a social phenomenon that not only includes art, but does so as one of its exemplars. The case of explaining the creativity in conceptual art then suggests that something like Danto's artworld then is at work in sustaining the possibility of art generally. This all suggests that what is needed for a successful general theory of art on the whole is a social creative conception of art.

Chapter Four: The Sociocultural Creative-Conceptual Account of Art

4.0 Chapter overview

Art is paradigmatically creative. A theory of art then ought to acknowledge the explanatory options available via creativity research and make use of this valuable resource. We've seen in the previous chapter that Boden's theory of art, a theory of creativity in art, founders. This is particularly so in the case of her analysis of conceptual art. Although Boden does indeed make some errors typical of a traditionalist approach, this was not the reason her theory of art fails. Instead we saw that the errors Boden makes can be corrected for by placing emphasis on creative value, which derives (as Boden rightly recognizes) from the culture in which the creative idea or action is being evaluated. A sociocultural approach to creativity then is the appropriate theory to deploy in accounting for the creativity in the cultural production known as 'art', preeminently in the case of conceptual art as we've just seen. For an activity or artifact to be creative, it must by Boden's definition be new, surprising, and valuable (NSV). The epistemic conditions of 'new' and 'surprising' are folded into the primary condition of value. In order to determine value, the newness and surprising aspects must be considered within the context of evaluation. Creativity then is deeply context sensitive, just as is any cultural production. The evaluation is affected by the social conditions under which the alleged creative act or idea is being evaluated. Art as a creative activity then is deeply context sensitive as well. It is after all a product of a given culture, and not some other culture; and its artifacts and activities are understood as art within a given sociocultural context, real or imagined. They are

experienced creatively within the socially-mediated context as well, the audience imaginatively interpreting the works, creating them anew.

In this chapter I will lay out how a sociocultural account of art forms a response to Lopes's claims that we should abandon a theory of art in general. We've already seen in chapter two that Lopes's approach faces internal philosophical issues, as it generates problems and paradoxes due to its reductionist game plan. Addressing too Lopes's claim that artistic value over and above aesthetic and art kind value is a myth helps establish the need for a sociocultural creativity account of art. And as just discussed, we've seen how a robust sociocultural theory of creativity can show us the way to account for the cultural production that is art. The second and third chapters together have laid out in relief what a theory of art must do: account for the creative cultural production and experience of artworks, culturally valuable works that invite reflection and repeated interpretation. Arthur Danto's theory of the artworld provides a useful, yet flawed, model for approaching a solution. As discussed in Chapter One, Danto's artworld theory runs into a problem of infallibility. Setting aside some situation of divine regency, it's simply unlikely that the artworld can determine what art is by mere fiat. This would become hopelessly relativistic, and more importantly would detach it from the host culture, as the artworld is historically populated by a few elites. I do not intend to call into doubt the expertise of members of the artworld; I just don't think Danto is correct in placing absolute power in their hands. They could after all be wrong, however infrequently that may be. Moreover, looking at the anthropological record we see that there are activities that we recognize as 'art' in cultures that lack terms like art, let alone the galleries, museums, and pedestals that compose an artworld in the Eurocentric sense.

To provide a sociocultural account of art, I will build on the very possibility of conceptual art as established in the previous chapter. The Aristotelean picture that emerges is a sociocultural approach with conceptual art as the paradigm—and notably therefore not an outlier or ‘hard case’. Key to understanding art on this view is seeing its many manifestations as serving one cultural function, namely bringing the culture to self-awareness in relation to its ideals, its autonomy, and identity. It has been said that in ancient Athens literature became self-conscious in the form of philosophy. Self-aware or self-reflexive fictional literature is known today as ‘metafiction’. Metafiction provides a model for understanding conceptual art as a form of meta-art, as well as helping us understand another of Danto’s key contributions, how it is that artworks philosophize. The approach I outline here will answer the questions that have arisen in previous chapters while also providing explanation for the even harder cases outlined in Chapter One. Problems that arise, and that will be addressed in Chapter Five, include Lopes’s objections to a cultural approach to explaining art. Following from that concern, if such an approach is viable, the additional problem arises of how do we distinguish between cultural production generally (economic, entertainment, food, sport, clothing) and what Collingwood termed ‘art proper’? I believe I have convincing responses to both. Here in Chapter Four I will concentrate on establishing the positive view that addresses problems raised thus far, after which I will respond to larger picture dialectical concerns.

4.1 Elephants and “no such beast”

Before advancing a positive theory of art, I feel I should address the largest elephants in the room. Lopes says there is no such thing as a study of art in order to establish his claim that we should not attempt to develop a theory of art. In the same vein, he also denies the existence of

‘artistic value’ and the possibility of artistic achievement. When considering the prospect of a general theory of art, Lopes says there is “no such beast” as a general empirical study of art: “art as a whole is not the object of any fixed or empirical inquiry. That is, there are no serious psychological, anthropological, sociological, or historical hypotheses about all and only works of art.”¹¹⁸ If there is no empirical study of art, which he proclaims, then Lopes reasons, then there is no evidential need for a theory to guide such a practice. To begin with, these proclamations strike me as being very tenuous. Establishing the existence of one theory of any of these types would be sufficient to show this claim to be false. And indeed we can find one readily in the form of Richard Anderson’s anthropological theory of art. Anderson sought a universal explanation of human artmaking, studying tribal artmaking behaviors throughout the world to establish a definition with broad reach.¹¹⁹ But there’s another important way to defend against Lopes’s claim. Contemporary enquiry in academe reflects a culture of deeply siloed specialization, it is true. Yet this need not entail that many people working together in a mosaic approach cannot fashion a shared theoretic picture. Similarly in museum curation, the joint work of museum experts casts a very wide theoretical and practical study of all known art objects and performances. The curators of a Whitney Museum of Art Biennial select works of current arts culture from diverse areas of the arts—musical, literary, visual, performance, conceptual—in coordinating an exhibit representative of contemporary creative arts culture. The 2014 Biennial, the last to take place at the iconic upper east side location, featured the

¹¹⁸ Lopes 2014, Pg. 65.

¹¹⁹ Martin Heidegger also developed what can best be seen as a historical understanding of art. Central to his explanation is the fundamental claim that all art is essentially “poetry”, a disclosure of poetic truth that occurs in any and all art media, whether that be architecture, painting, literature, etc. Heidegger 2002.

notebooks of David Foster Wallace alongside an amateur musicologist's DAT recordings of punk bands in addition to the more obvious conceptual artworks typical of the contemporary visual arts. This way of understanding the study of art as dispersed on account of practical utility is a clear way to see that there is such a beast after all.¹²⁰ So, when Lopes says that "there is no empirical study of art per se, but only of the several arts" 64, we are justified in rejecting this claim, this suggesting the value of a general theory of art.

As mentioned, Lopes also argues that there is no such thing as artistic value. On his view, there are legitimately only theories of individual art kinds and theories of aesthetic experience. The value that we find in a work of art is not artistic, as in theoretically relevant to art in general, but rather aesthetic and relevant to the individual kind to which the work belongs.

*There is no characteristically artistic value. There is only aesthetic value and the values that works bear as members of specific art kinds. The buck passing theory is informative because it correctly entrusts the task of grounding criticism to theories of aesthetic value in the arts.*¹²¹

Lopes shows his traditionalist aesthetic cards here, and again here:

¹²⁰ By comparison, biologists may well specialize in pollinator attractors, gene therapy and enzyme replacement, domesticated animal breeds, or cytoskeletal dynamics and membrane transport, whatever the case may be. But this does not necessarily preclude an empirical story of biological study on the whole, whether biologists in concert or some hypothetical grand view biologist. Since at least the age of the enlightenment era Encyclopédistes, there has been increased specialization such that the current academic and intellectual landscape is one of hyper-specialization. University organization for example rewards nano-focused specialization in terms of publications, grants, advancement, etc. Someone *could* theoretically do a cross-disciplinary study of the arts as a whole, but of course this would be absurd in its complexity, well beyond the capacity of a single individual. No supervising body would reasonably approve such a vast project for one person's undertaking; but again, a mosaic of shared responsibilities accomplished in concert is a reasonable picture of the state of human knowledge, and a very reasonable account of a study of the arts as a whole.

¹²¹ Lopes 2014, Pg. 83.

The intended argument is that there is no characteristically artistic value because there is no reason to believe that alleged instances of it are anything but instances of aesthetic value or art form value...[T]he burden of proof... lies with advocates of artistic value.¹²²

I accept this challenge and argue in defense that there is indeed an artistic value, and that it is part of a subset of the creative value described by Boden, the value that the relevant community places on a creative work to esteem it as creative (in conjunction with the work's novelty and surprise). We know artworks are paradigmatically creative; we know artworks are meaningful cultural objects that have some sort of cultural function. The subset of creative value intersects with the cultural function that artworks have within their communities. The artistic content of the work, its artistic meaningfulness, is deeply integrated with the cultural context in which it comes to be an artwork. This points to where we can locate artistic value, as a cultural object sustained by the meaningfulness and value within that culture.

The invitation to community self-awareness that is crucial to the fundamental structure of an artwork is a core component to how I suggest we interpret Boden's creative value. Creative value originates and resides in and for the community on the whole, sustained within its interplay and fluctuations. Within this communal context, an artwork is a creative opportunity to imaginatively engage in communal reflection, simultaneously on what the work is about and how it creatively approaches that intentional content in its technique of presentation. Its value as art value then is in its asking of us to consider what it's about and how it came to be. This consideration is an important aspect of how a culture checks in with itself, as part of its ongoing development of identity. The creative value in any creative activity is in the utility it offers for the culture; specifically in the case of artworks, what makes an artwork good

¹²² Lopes 2014, Pg. 101.

or bad, what constitutes its status as art at all, is two-part: the quality of its invitation to consideration, the opportunity it offers for cultural self-reflection, its audience making sense of the work in relation to what they know about the themes, concepts, and ideological stances within the context in which it occurs; and secondly, the work's relation to how other works accomplish this. Whether it's a good artwork depends on how the relevant community receives this invitation, how it matches with the creative value.) The cultural function of artistic value is at the intersection of cultural value and creative value. The artistic value comes from creative valued applied in a cultural context that is fertile for a work to participate in a culture's art function. The relevant value is context-sensitive value for the culture in a reflective and reflexive, non-obviously instrumental way.¹²³

Consistent with denying artistic value, Lopes also claims that there are no artistic achievements possible "because there is no description under which [artists'] activity is a thematizing activity of making art. The reason is that the artist has no inherent materials that she can make to carry meaning except the materials of some specific kind of art."¹²⁴ In other words, there are no artists because there is no art; there are only sculptors, painters, etc., as defined by the medium in which they work. We've seen the problems this medium-boundness generates (in Chapter two), so let it suffice here to simply say that there is a cultural description

¹²³ As to aesthetic value, many works of course contain significant aesthetic content. This is uncontroversial. But aesthetic value cannot be assumed to be all value in an artwork (and we've already seen that a medium on its own cannot account for the realities of artistic production). In Twins cases, and in forgery cases as well, works of identical aesthetic content are imperceptibly different. The difference can be said to arise from different historical conditions—deviant paths to the same initially apparent result. The relevant difference is in the creative valuation, and its accompanying determinations of whether something is new and surprising. This determined solely by the cultural context of the work's evaluation. This also explains why some paintings, movies, music, etc. are not in fact art at all, despite initial appearances, and despite possibly being creative. Some works that look like art can have their artistic value disrupted by the economic or propaganda functions they primarily serve.

¹²⁴ Lopes 2014, Pg. 98.

under which we can thematize the creative activity known as artmaking, and that artists use stuff in the universe to creatively make works or perform actions that serve to fulfill the art function of a culture.¹²⁵

4.2 Introducing the Positive View

Here is a summary of the basic idea I have in mind. We'll attend to details and defense in due time, but this is the basic outline of the proposal. The key is asking how conceptual art is even possible. The hard cases are all cases of conceptual art, however they are explicitly embodied in execution or presentation. We explored their history and accounted for their creativity in previous chapters; now we will see how explaining their possibility as art explains all art.

Conceptual artworks are works that functionally are as streamlined as artworks can be, often being reduced to a simple appropriated item, and given the "need not be made" proviso, these are works that can consist of the idea as the artwork alone (distinct from an idea *of* an artwork). That idea cannot be but a mere thought, but must be a thought that contains or accompanies a participation in the possibility of art. The idea that constitutes the minimal conceptual artwork

¹²⁵ In his discussion of Van Gogh painting sunflowers, we can see the patent absurdity of Lopes's claims. Lopes: "[R]emove from the room all the inert materials of painting but leave behind the inert materials of art. The room is empty." (Lopes 2014, Pg. 99.) Lopes fails to see that there is plenty of raw material for sculpture, appropriation, collage, combines etc., as there is furniture, a mattress, bed clothes, clothing, works on the walls. Lopes's proposed case is after all occurring in Van Gogh's bedroom in Arles, of which we have a view into via *The Bedroom* from October 1888. Rauschenberg might make something like *Bed*, Bruce Nauman might make something like *A cast of the space under my chair*, and any number of artists might use the art in the room to make collages. But more importantly, even if we abstract Lopes's point to an extreme and empty out the room, in the room still remains a person. Plenty of works have been made using blood, semen, feces. But consider this too: that person may well dance, sing, tell a story, or perhaps compose an artwork in their head, like a poem. Classical traditionalist examples of artmaking in addition to the more contemporary and ancient examples just listed. The medium does not define the possibility of artmaking; it only constrains it.

must be a compound thought that is creative (new, surprising, and valuable) and as such connects with the social context of creative value, what sustains the possibility of art being art. Since all artworks are creative and have meaning (in that they are about something and can be interpreted for what meaning they bear for the audience), then the streamlined structure reveals the essential content that a conceptual artwork must share with any and all artworks. A painting such as a large abstraction by Mark Rothko, while it may appear on the surface to contain only aesthetic content in its fields and shimmering lozenge shapes, is *about* that formalist aesthetic content in a meaningful way (thus philosophizing about the aesthetic mode of presentation, contributing to the philosophy of art) and communicates imaginative content from the artist (thus lending itself to the frequent philosophical interpretations of Rothkos, such as weighing in on mortality, time, solitude, or transcendence). The possibility of interpretations being better or worse depends on the content being reasonably conceived of being in the work, however that may actually occur in detail. That content can occur across the various modes of presentation, but always requires the creative thought that is the work's aboutness, its identity. As Richard Anderson has detailed in his anthropological research, it is reasonable to say that art has always been about something for as long as humans have been creating artworks. And as we've seen, this aboutness has historically developed an explicit self-awareness: the avant-garde has been up to the business of philosophizing about art via works like the hard cases since as far back as Baudelaire initiating the project of self-aware modernism; philosophical

enquiry is by its nature self-reflective, and continues to be so when in a creative cultural mode, art.¹²⁶

Metafiction, fiction that philosophizes in its structure according to the philosopher-novelist Willam H. Gass, illustrates both how an artwork contains meaning, but also how it invites awareness. Metafictional techniques such as distance from imaginative immersion, *mise en abyme*, and self-reference generate a two-fold awareness, of the immersive capacity of the imaginative use of the medium and the self-aware effect of philosophizing. Metafiction causes the reader to be overtly aware of what usually remains covert—the illusion and the philosophical content, what the work is about as an artifact, some admixture of the artist’s intent and the meaning of the cultural context in which the artifact was produced.¹²⁷

The cultural aspect of a work’s meaning, intended or not, is vital to its functioning as a work within and without its community or origin. The community-centeredness of an artwork and how the community comes to self-awareness within the experience of that work was first

¹²⁶ Hannah Arendt makes a valuable observation along these lines, recognizing that thought is the origin of the eventual “reified” artwork, whether poem, painting, or whatever form it may take. The thought is embodied in the work, available for “resurrection” once out in the world. Arendt 1998, Pg. 169. Arendt also helpfully distinguishes between *thought*, what she says is behind all artworks and philosophy, and *cognition*, the practical aim-oriented mental activity characteristic of the sciences and technology. (Intelligence is a separate concept here for Arendt, the ability to think logically.) Thought “has neither an end nor an aim outside itself” (Arendt 1998, Pg. 170), and whether it has any meaning Arendt says is an “unanswerable riddle”. Arendt 1998, Pg. 171. Arendt is recognizing here what Danto also correctly sees: artworks philosophize at their core in non-propositional metaphor. The artist philosophizes in whatever medium she chooses to realize the work. This in turn supports Baudelaire’s observation that “poetic thoughts” are behind all art production, including the transformation of everyday life.

¹²⁷ Metafiction is defined in different way by different literary theorists, typically as a literature that is self-aware *qua* literature. This literary self-awareness refers not to some consciousness in a text, a patently absurd claim, but rather the simultaneous drawing attention to a work’s ability to create illusion and meaning, what literature does naturally, while performing that very task. This tension then results in the typical “meta” effect of the reader or audience being aware of an artificial experience that is collapsing in on what sustains its effect. A sentence that announces itself as a sentence, a character that addresses the reader or audience, a work that features or obliquely suggests its own creation, and so forth. The specific definition of metafiction I endorse here is consistent with Gass’s definition, works that philosophize via their structure, where that philosophizing is understood as a self-aware literature (although Gass backs off of some aspects of self-awareness in Gass 1970).

recognized, as were so many things, by Aristotle. Aristotle describes in the *Poetics* the calibrating role of artworks, the *katharsis* they occasion in the audience. Through this experience the community comes to be aligned with its identity and ideals. A drama for example involves the story, which is connected to community identity, and the moral content of the work, what the dramatic experience means in relation to the good of the community and its ideals. Art on this Aristotelian view is then an invitation to self-awareness and understanding to the end of the community's wellbeing. In addition to echoing the sociocultural account of creativity introduced in the previous chapter, I think this captures the spirit of three structurally similar, but otherwise disparate views: Michelle Moody-Adams ideas on social justice and a community coming to imaginative self-awareness around injustice and hope Richard Anderson's anthropological conception of art; and Aristotle's own conception of a community's *katharsis* via the myth and ethic of art experience.

4.3 Sociocultural Ur-works

The medieval cathedral provides a useful case for discussing an Aristotelean conception of conceptual art. Cynthia Freeland discusses medieval architecture as an example of work from a period prior to aesthetics or 'art' that is organized around non-aesthetic conceptual content.¹²⁸

The medieval cathedral thus can be seen as a retroactive attribution of art, as in the case of Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel*. The grand medieval structures were not self-consciously intended as artworks in the way say Frank Gehry does with the *Guggenheim Bilbao*. Rather they were organized around three primary Christian principles: light, proportion, and allegory. The

¹²⁸ Freeland 2002.

Christian community could gather around these structures to experience the transcendence via their conceptual content in a specific mode of presentation. Ultimately, to reiterate Collingwood's valuable point, the artist labors imaginatively on behalf of the community. Artists, plural, are in a communal position to engage with the conceptual understanding of their period and the mindful awareness of creating appropriate techniques and modes of presentation that befit the age. The creative value of the community provides a basis for an artwork to be creative, but for it to be an artwork in must invite some sense of reflection leading to self-awareness, both individually and socially, or else be a mere technical execution in some medium, or if creative, merely practical in its creativity. The *Cathedral at Chartres* with its spires, reliefs, acoustics, and stained glass does this such that the community comes to an imaginative self-awareness in relation to its ideals imaginatively realized through architectural means and the additional creative activities of the functioning glory of a cathedral, in sound, color, mass, and story.¹²⁹

Determining what art is or is not is elusive. It might well be the case that it is metaphysically elusive, epistemically obscure, or perhaps the term itself is simply a vague predicate and the best we can hope for is a fuzzy lasso to corral objects and actions into. I don't take this to be damning to a theory of art. There are plenty of vague predicates in the world. The attractiveness of Danto's approach is that we have a clear grounding of what is art, and that is simply what the artworld says it is, as though a strange form of divine command theory. This though doesn't account for art that is unknown, mistakes about what art is or is not. Nor

¹²⁹ Non-believers can still marvel at the cathedral and experience what it says formally, thematically, conceptually, and it is an awesome multimedia display, and theoretically as it offers meaning beyond a solely Christian one.

does it venture into the question why we have an artworld at all. Digging into that question leads to the realization that there is a deeper cultural function that the Eurocentric conception of the artworld is a local, explicit—but not exclusive—manifestation of. The thesis that there exists a deeper art function implies that different cultures have equivalent works in terms of their function, if not their presentation. It is well known that artworks are contingent on the traditions, styles, and understanding of the specific social context in which they are created. The deeper essential characteristics of artworks then constitute what we may think of as a type of Ur-artwork, a primordial or originary form all artworks can be said to participate in in their specific expression that discriminates them as particular works of art. An *Ur-work* then will be understood in these pages as constituting the features any work must have in order to qualify as an artwork. An Ur-work strictly speaking then only takes one form, that which schematically underlies any artwork. More loosely, Ur-works also refers to works that may not at one time be recognized as artworks, such as the cathedral or *Bicycle Wheel*, yet have the characteristics that qualify them as counterfactually recognizable artworks at another. Here is a preliminary list of features possessed by an Ur-work: an artifact that is creative, socially relevant, and valuable in a non-obviously practical way; I will additionally argue that an inherent feature of Ur-works, and thus all artworks, is a feature that contributes to a cultural self-awareness via whatever the artwork is saying, what it is about, and its invitation to interpret this meaningfulness. This cultural self-awareness component explains how artworks serve their valuable function of cultural wellbeing, the *raison d'être* of any artwork, its meaningfulness. What an artwork is about has a philosophical component in that the work is weighing in on some query or other, whether that is about the world, individuals, knowledge, identity, or what it is to be an artwork.

On this way of understanding what artworks are, it should be clear that it doesn't matter much whether anyone calls the work 'art' or not, an important realization when considering Danto's program, predicated as it is on the artworld doing so. Art is meaningful creative activity that initiates an opportunity for cultural introspection. The word 'art' is itself a 'term of art', meaningful within a value system and an economic value system. What it captures is limited to the understanding of the linguistic community in which the term (or its equivalent) is uttered. The elusiveness of always successfully deploying the term is due to the fact that not all things are what they appear to be. Some members of a medium are not artworks: not all paintings or sculptures are necessarily art. Thus the utility and importance of a counterfactual account of artworks: without adding anything to the content of a work, we can ask if it fulfills the cultural function of an Ur-work.¹³⁰

4.4 Conceptual art as paradigm, and other models

¹³⁰ We are not asking whether whatever it is we're considering could be the basis of an artwork, as anything may well be; at any rate, that would be to add to the content of the work—the counterfactual proposal is that we approach the work as though it had arisen in a conscious art context, and ask if it has the relevant Ur-work characteristics to qualify as art in the appropriate context: the result of a socially-mediated process of culturally reflexive critique. This then also becomes a useful test for identifying an Ur-work. Positing the existence of Ur-works (or even one essential abstract originary Ur-work form) works that are functionally artworks yet are not known as such, is to suggest the possibility that artworks must exist in a healthy society and can exist without awareness of these works as 'art'. To say that they bring awareness to the community in relation to its identity and ideals is not to say that it brings as well awareness as art. The claim is not that philosophy of art is required of a healthy society—it is a luxury add-on that increases the opportunity for cultural self-awareness. It is said that the ancient Greeks did not possess the knowledge that their fruitful cultural expression were artworks, not in the sense that those in the "age of art", dated from Vasari to Danto according to Danto's chronology. The culturally revolutionary time of the ancient Athenians (development of the alphabet, invention of drama, philosophy) is a primary exhibit of a culture coming into self-awareness. The development of philosophy has been said to be an instance of literature becoming self-aware. The brightly colored marble figures of gods that adorned places like the acropolis is testament to this self-aware civic expression (without, importantly, the explicit understanding of these works as 'art' in any sense we have today.) This conscientious self-examination of a culture by a culture can be usefully symbolized by the concept of metafiction.

The conceptual artwork, as a completely stripped-down artwork, becomes a paradigm for all art. This is on account of its bare simplicity, art streamlined to its essentials: it retains aboutness while maintaining the connection to the creative value of the community, the identity of the community for and in which the work is produced, and the invitation to awareness artworks provide. However, importantly—very importantly—the thought behind the work is not something that can be reduced to a propositional statement. Even a propositional statement intended as an artwork contains more—its relation to the community as a possible artwork. A conceptual artwork, as any artwork does, communicates via its subtext, such as in getting a joke. Particularly creative and insightful forms of comedy are highly conceptual, although often denigrated as not being art proper. Great comedy utilizes subtext to communicate with its audience. But essential to subtext is it not being stated—it is left for the audience to interpret. When one “gets” the joke, say, one does not simply understand a proposition—there's a more efficient way to deliver propositions if that were the goal. Comedy relies on a conceptual presentation—in various forms and media (slapstick, bubblegum wrappers, stand-up, opera, Shakespeare, etc.)—that is incomplete yet meaningful, rewarding repeated experience of the same comic moment. An artwork's endless interpretation depends on the fact that this subtext cannot be stated. Instead, there is the possibility of better or worse interpretations, on account of the metaphorical nature of the work.

There are three interlocking theoretical approaches that lend support to a sociocultural account of art with conceptual art as its primary model. One focuses on creativity, another on the social relations Moody-Adams is concerned with in issues of justice, and the third is Richard Anderson's anthropological treatment of art. All of these lend support to an Aristotelean

approach to explaining art as a cultural function, an invitation to the community for self-awareness, and each has a corresponding model to help us understand a dimension of the cultural function of art. The first is borrowed from Sawyer, that of the small jazz ensemble engaged in group improvisation, what Sawyer says embodies any instances of creativity, something I think he is right about. Even apparently isolated individuals are deeply intertwined with their times, intellectually, emotionally, and in terms of personal identity, and this is where the value of their contribution exists. Moody-Adams describes a community coming into self-awareness, leading to actions of improving the community's situation. Humans as social creatures are embodied within a cultural sphere—imaginative awareness of their collective identity is essential to social movements. The second is the model of Zen Buddhist contemplation as a source for practical wisdom: at the core of meditative zazen is the concept of ethical wisdom arising in the form of compassion.¹³¹ Moody-Adams's—and Aristotle's—proposals become more plausible by looking at the Zen practitioner's loss of self and simultaneous connection with all. Anderson's study of the world's diverse art traditions concludes that the meaning works have for the community is at the heart of all artmaking. The third model therefore is conceptual art, capturing the idea that meaning is central to art in the most streamlined form.¹³² Aristotle grasped the basics, Baudelaire and the avant-garde developed the self-awareness in theoretical practice, Danto articulated the role of community

¹³¹ This is in part due to the recognition of ephemerality in all things and in part due to a realization of the interconnectedness of all things, what Thich Nhất Hạnh calls 'interbeing'. Nhất Hạnh 2020.

¹³² As we will see this might well as be the medieval cathedral, a metafiction, a Trevor Noah standup routine, an Oceanic carving, or any other artwork described in its relevant artistic conceptual content. The model is only good if what is modelled is actually present in all its models. I am claiming that all artworks are at minimum instances of conceptual art, variously realized in their presentation—they must be in order to qualify as artworks at all and not only mere instances of a medium.

theoretic understanding of philosophizing works. So, a look at how conceptual art is helpfully analogous to social justice movements, jazz groups, and Zen meditation will help substantiate the claim that conceptual art such as featured in the hard cases ought to be considered as the paradigm for all art, and not an oddity or outlier to be ghettoized as Lopes proposes.

These models will help us see how conceptual works, the masterpieces of our era, connect seamlessly to explanations of the arts of other eras. The works of Damien Hirst for example have a secular-religious quality, the art-goer having a similar experience as the non-Christian experiencing the *Cathedral at Chartres*. Hirst's vitrines, installations, and assemblages for example are conceptually commensurate with a British tradition of artistic enquiry into life, death, and God. The conceptual outlines of his works are consistent with British poetic and musical tradition and with medieval cathedral building. Instead of stones and glass or couplets and sounds, Hirst uses butterflies and sheep, skulls and formaldehyde, in works that are as creative and searching as those made with earlier-established modes of artmaking. Walking through a Hirst exhibit, one is transformed and brought to keen awareness, just as one is with Coleridge or Benjamin Britten, Shelly or Ralph Vaughan Williams. The arch-traditionalists "counter that the curators and historians have made a colossal mistake", Beardsley in particular going on an emphatic "tirade" against non-aesthetic avant-garde works.¹³³ At the end of the day, those arguments rest not on the potential validity of a conceptual approach to explaining art's function, but on the arbitrary traditional aesthetic assumptions Lopes identifies as

¹³³ Lopes 2014, Pgs. 55-56.

pumping the traditionalist intuitions, and as we have discussed, that bias alone does not constitute a good argument.

In *Beyond Art* Lopes endorses Berys Gaut's explanation of what a theory must do to be considered adequate. There are three criteria for such a theory, according to Gaut. It matches our intuitions, provides an error theory to explain any faulty intuitions, and fits with other theories—*heuristic utility*. (Lopes 54) Lopes's explanation for the dialectical impasse between genetic and traditionalist approaches is a conflict of intuitions about the hard cases. The theory I am proposing must meet Gaut's three criteria while avoiding the pitfalls of other theories, such as the dialectical impasse. In order to meet these criteria, the proposal will need to: meet our intuitions about meaningful creative cultural objects and activities; establish that tradition is not necessarily a solid theoretic foundation, and on the contrary can result in biased assumptions; and, finally, show a consistent and consilient fit with the relevant theories in social science (anthropology, creativity), art history, and art theory (matching the theory and practice of art experts and critics, and as well as the applied theoretical practice of creators).

Both the traditionalist and the geneticist are in positions marked by arbitrary assumptions: tradition as law or position of authority as infallible. Rather than get enmeshed in the briars of an object-oriented line of questioning, I will establish a set of questions that moves the focus to significant cultural experience and the social relations involved in such meaningful experience. Questions like "what is the cultural function of an artwork?" bypass the "is it art or not and how do we know?" type of questions, which at the end of the day misleads us into thinking there is a clear and definite answer, as though we were asking whether the element under study had the atomic number 79 and if so was therefore gold. Art need not be a periodic-

table type of thing in the world. Just as ethical value facts can be facts of reason (and not confused with object-like facts of scientific enquiry), facts about art can be facts of cultural relations, meaning, and experience. The questions I am suggesting will lead to more fruitful theorizing about art will of course lead to different intuitions, and likely to different disagreements—but I anticipate they will generate greater understanding than any other options currently on offer.¹³⁴

Earlier it was mentioned that conceptual art is helpfully analogous to a small jazz combo, social justice movements, and Zen meditation. Here I'll explain how that is and why these are fruitful comparisons. If Sawyer is correct about creativity being a sociocultural phenomenon on the model of a jazz band improvising together, and I think he is, then any creative activity (whether creating or appreciating) would have the relevant characteristics of group flow. The jazz band illustrates the way in which the creativity involved in group improvisation is an instance of the idea of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts, the dependence of the individual's role on the collective balance of skills and ideas, listening and sharing, working unconsciously and intuitively.¹³⁵ The individual who is creating, even when in perceived isolation, is still collaboratively improvising, conceptually connected to the relevant context of audience, experts, and other practitioners. The abstract outlines of the jazz band model can thus be used to helpfully capture any instance of creativity, but it also suggests how

¹³⁴ The traditionalist response to that line of questioning would presumably be “to provide aesthetic experience” and the genetic theorist “a function of the artworld”, but those responses ring hollow, as a raft of ‘why?’ questions appear in the wake (“why is aesthetic experience culturally valuable?”, “how does a culture benefit from an artworld?”).

¹³⁵ I cannot defend a complete theory of entrainment, flow, or attunement in these pages. I find the existing research on these group dynamics in the sciences, social sciences, and philosophy plausible and compelling.

it is that the audience participates. The imaginative improvisation is in turn creatively and imaginatively appreciated by the audience, bringing them into concert.¹³⁶ This analogy can be extended to an individual experiencing any artwork: a person in front of a painting is taken up into the work imaginatively (if imperfectly), a creative connection to the milieu of the artist's creative experience, like a violinist interpreting the score of Mendelssohn, or a reader reading a poem by Mary Oliver.

The entrainment of spontaneous mutual creation in the jazz band can be seen in any creative activity because as we saw in Chapter Four there is an inescapable social dimension to creative value. Creativity is always social on account of this, and features an interdependence between the individual psychologies and the socially-mediated creative activity. Improvisation is merely composing on the fly, and group improvisation makes evident the getting in rhythm, the borrowing of themes, the inspiration and commentary between instruments, and the reporting of flow state "in the zone" experience where one feels as a vessel to the creation, rather than a discrete contributor. This model also helps us see how explaining the creative approach of an era benefits from the perspective of the culture operating through individuals. Sawyer's own examples include the music of classical Vienna, better explained on the whole than by individual composers, and similarly the collective output of the golden age of Hollywood.

We saw in Chapter Three how the example of the golden age of hip-hop similarly exemplifies this approach. The important distinction with the earliest days of hip-hop, and

¹³⁶ Many useful terms for describing social groups becoming entrained around creative experience are suggested by this helpful analogy: rhythm, key, structure, in tune, resonance, consonance, groove, dynamics.

similarly with the subsequent development of jungle, was that there was an understanding that this was the production of music as an art in the case of the golden age.¹³⁷ Many of these musicians were educated in artistic traditions. Ishmael Butler, the principal creator behind Digable Planets, has discussed the east coast Black college experience of the time of the golden age, describing the artistic and cultural impact of Public Enemy's use of innovative artistic technique and an expressive approach that connected to established traditions. The expressive content relevant to the community, the invitation to self-awareness, as well as the inventiveness that led to the new and surprising content were all present in the different periods, although with an additional self-awareness of artistic value in the golden age.¹³⁸

The community nature of hip-hop as a cultural entity, of which the music is only a dimension, one dispersed in authorship to the community of creation and appreciation, then helpfully illustrates the power of a sociocultural explanation of the creativity in art.¹³⁹ In the

¹³⁷ This was to varying degrees, given the array of backgrounds, locations, education—the early party music of the Beastie Boys evolves into artistic production; the west coast is ambiguous in that the emphasis was on dance, although Ice-T's innovations with gangster rap were purposefully crafted on the model of east coast styles, and he knowingly explored fictional narratives to artistic ends.

¹³⁸ Butler attended U Mass Amherst. Butler's father was a Black Panther and a history professor, and an enthusiast of revolutionary music, such as avant-garde jazz—the records that would be sampled for the first Digable Planets record. Coleman, Pg. 161. The golden age is an example of perceptual ambiguity of art status. There was sufficient critical and practitioner understanding that these records were art (in the form of creative music), yet there still lingered a public attitude that this was "noise" or "cRap", and that utilizing others' music in the creation of new sounds was not in actuality music at all. These sorts of reactionary stances do not really matter to the question at hand, as the substantial community of critics, aficionados, and creators recognized the artistic accomplishments of the era. However, this again demonstrates that the perception of this creative activity as 'art', while it may enhance the production and reception as an additional sheen over the essential content, as a spotlight on a performance, the creative activity itself does not require this extra step to be art. An interesting response to the reactionary disregard of hip-hop is that the practitioners were largely from neighborhoods where underfunded schools did not provide music lessons of any type; the young people made music with the means that were available, the turntable. Coleman, Pg. 169.

¹³⁹ An apparent counterexample might occur in the form of a single artist creating a representation of a place. Bjork for example created the album *Homogenic* as an explicit expression of Iceland. But here too we can see that Bjork's music as collaborative with the various musicians involved, but also with all of her own influences. Seeing the work as an expression of Icelandic culture through the person of Bjork has simple and powerful explanatory force. Bjork, as an individual artist, undoubtedly makes the work unique, but ultimately the ideas and techniques

example of early hip-hop and jungle, the lack of an awareness of these creative activities as ‘art’ does not interfere with their cultural importance as art. In the example of the golden age of Hip-hop, the elevated status as ‘art’ within the relevant contexts of western culture adds a sheen to the proceedings, directs attention, perhaps contributes helpfully instructive parallels to other artmaking.¹⁴⁰ But calling it ‘art’ doesn’t impact what really matters, its core cultural function in relation to the creative value of its cultural context. Calling it ‘art’ may well hasten its demise as an active art form, as it introduces a trendiness and financial value that can contribute to an artistic practice becoming widely imitated, passing into art history, general cultural consumption, or disposable entertainment in the process.¹⁴¹

The ability to play within group dynamics requires an awareness of what one is doing in relation to others, and the level of consciousness involved is not mere processing or mere intent. Rather it is interactive—the creation occurs between group members—no one person can absolutely direct the affair. The level of consciousness is an awareness of one’s actions being entrained by the group dynamic. Keith Waters analyzed Miles Davis’s “group interactions” in the second great quintet of the mid ‘60s. Waters explains that “[r]ecent analytic jazz literature has stressed the role of improvisation as a collaborative group activity.” Waters, Pg. 73. Waters continues: “These writers stress the role of ensemble communication during

derive from the historic confluence of cultural influence. Her specific actions have particular explanations that depend on her social connections and the value imparted therein. This is particularly made clear when the origins of her electronic aesthetic are traced back to the producer Nellee Hooper, an originator of trip-hop. Hooper’s music and trip-hop as a genre in turn evolved out of a loose association of Bristol youth inspired by U.S. hip-hop.¹⁴⁰ Mary Ann Viera from Digable Planets identifies Miles Davis as a key influence in the group’s attempt to “raise the standard of art”. Coleman, Pg. 174.

¹⁴¹ Levinson’s model of beginning, middle, and end is helpful here to understand the process of artforms emerging within a culture, the creative process of building on existing practices, posing new problems, and resolving these into established works.

improvisation, and downplay the analysis of individual solos.”¹⁴² Herbie Hancock, a member of that group similarly reflects on the contemplative yet intuitive nature of the participation: “You have to be fully present, because there’s a lot going on, and it’s happening so rapidly that you can’t get slowed down by thinking about it.”¹⁴³ Hancock mentions the “alchemy” and “magic” of the quintet’s experience.¹⁴⁴ We can reasonably take the Hancock’s use of terms like “magic”, “miracle”, “alchemy”, and “spells” to be placeholders for a certain type of awe in light of non-intentional processes that are difficult for an individual to comprehend while at the same time appear to that individual to essentially require the individual. People in flow states, or sublime experiences, report a “mystical” experience—although this does not require a mystical explanation. There is at the level of experience a sense of automatic activity, the action occurring in what seems the right or best way but yet is somehow outside of mere intent. This mental experience might be seen as a certain type of epiphenomenalism, the realization that the freedom is not in the individual but that the individual gets absorbed into the identity of the

¹⁴² Describing the interaction within Miles’s quintet Waters uses the terms “circulation”, “echo”, “aiding one another”, “resolving ambiguity”, “heightened reliance”, saying that “the role of group interaction, response, and communication is critical” Waters, Pg. 74

¹⁴³ Hancock, Pg. 23. Of course we can study the individual mind processing, such as Boden does, but that isolated process alone is insufficient to count as creative. When the individual mind is part of the creative process, we can still describe those individual processes without ever mentioning creativity. That the individual mind can be described during creative activity does not speak against the claim that the relevant creativity is within the social interaction and creativity, and this occurs even when the individual is (temporarily) removed from the group. The reason for that is that the concept of creativity and its evaluative framework are social functions, each individual mind a node on a network, with mental content that is necessarily connected to the whole of the relevant creative context.

¹⁴⁴ Hancock amidst the group flow, says that he plays a wrong chord at a key moment: “it’s the wrong chord, in the wrong place, and now it’s hanging out there like a piece of rotten fruit... Miles pauses for a fraction of a second, and then he plays some notes that somehow, miraculously, make my chord sound right. In that moment I believe my mouth actually fell open. What kind of alchemy was this? ...He somehow turned my chord from a wrong to a right.” Hancock, Pg. 1-2.

group. “The five of us have become one entity, shifting and flowing with the music,” says Hancock.¹⁴⁵

4.5 Social justice and Aristotelean “awe”

In *Making Space for Justice* Michelle Moody-Adams describes the way communities of people develop a collective conscious awareness of identity and need, using collective imagination that establishes and constitutes a self-aware community. Bringing social movements into reality requires three persuasive tasks, she explains: convince people of the injustice; that it is reasonable to hope for some remedy; and that what is hoped-for is possible.¹⁴⁶ Art need not be political in this sense, but art always involves the community (the *polis*) and that community coming to awareness. The relevant analogous point is that there is an awareness on the part of the community of its wellbeing or lack thereof; in both cases, there is creative reflection on the status of the community. The philosopher-novelist Albert Camus saw the function of art in a similar way, although he dissolves the line between politics and art, saying that the purpose of art is “to speak up...for those who cannot do so.”¹⁴⁷ While social movements can be art, just as anything can, there is an important distinction to be made between propaganda and art. John

¹⁴⁵ Hancock, Pg. 1. The jazz example could easily be replaced by say the Dutch soccer team or the renaissance workshop, or Jeff Koons’s workshop, or a scientist’s lab, or the way that a philosophy paper is workshoped and interacts with its relevant literature. Daniel James Brown’s book *The Boys in the Boat* references throughout the experience of ‘swing’, when the rowing crew of the boat experience selflessness as they achieve more than the sum of their parts as he documents the 1936 U.S. gold medal rowing team’s journey from Washington state to the Munich games.

¹⁴⁶ Moody-Adams, Pg. 4.

¹⁴⁷ Ramin Jahanbegloo offers that Camus “art is the march of the artist from injustice to justice”. Jahanbegloo, Pg. 3. Art on this model is “empathetic pluralism”, an “interrogation of life...rooted in hope”, an “interconnectedness... [as] a means of the non-violent self-transformation of humanity.” Jahanbegloo, Pg. 55.

Elderfield, in discussing the Manet painting *The Execution of Emperor Maximilian*, ends his article with this observation: “Most of what is generally referred to as political art is really polemical art, simply asserting or reinforcing a belief, or often a blame. Truly political art, in contrast, does not reduce human affairs to slogans; it complicates rather than simplifies.”¹⁴⁸

This “complication” is the invitation to mindfully consider whatever the artwork consists in. The Manet is layered with political critique, particularly of Napoleon III who makes an incognito cameo in the painting. What Elderfield is identifying is that the work does not function as simple propaganda (purposefully manipulative political communications in a delivery-system that resembles art), but rather is an invitation to reflect on the situation, an instance of what Elderfield refers to as “truly political art”.

Moody-Adams centers her discussion of social justice movements on “compassionate concern for others’ vulnerability to suffering.”¹⁴⁹ This then connects to the second model mentioned above, the model of Zen meditation. Thich Nhat Hanh describes a classic Zen understanding of the source of wisdom, the contemplative realization of the origin of one’s own suffering and that of others, coinciding with a realization that this suffering can be transformed into compassion. One’s outward actions are then informed by compassionate wisdom, the idea goes, and the lack of judgment in the interactions with the community thus brings benefits of understanding. Whether or not this is true, it does model a plausible account of how individuals coming to understanding contribute to group understanding, what in Zen Buddhism involves the sangha, the group of practitioners. This is essentially a team, or an

¹⁴⁸ See Elderfield.

¹⁴⁹ Moody-Adams, Pg. 7.

ensemble. I think understanding how the individual meditator experiences the connection gives insight to what happens when large groups of individuals do the same.¹⁵⁰

Emily Esfahani Smith gives us a further sense of how the relevant analogous connections contribute to a model of art, by virtue of the meaningfulness in artworks. A look at Smith's work then gives us the means to connect the above models, along with the intersection of the theoretical approaches, to conceptual art, the ultimate model for what occurs with art. Smith is particularly focused on meaning in our individual lives, but her emphasis on meaning in an individual's life depends explicitly on their being social creatures, echoing Aristotle's proclamation that those who live in isolation must be "either beast or a god". The resulting 'four pillars of meaning' identified in her wide-ranging study of philosophical and psychological accounts of meaningful lives consist of belonging, purpose, storytelling, and transcendence. With *belonging*, compassion for others is key: "the search for meaning is not a solitary philosophical quest... and meaning is not something we create within ourselves and for ourselves. Rather, meaning lies largely in others".¹⁵¹ With *purpose*, Smith concludes that "living purposefully requires self-reflection and self-knowledge", yet the goals of a purposeful life are directed toward improving the world and the situation one finds oneself in, one's community.¹⁵² *Storytelling* is a way that humans make narrative sense of their identity, which "emerges from a deep-seated need all humans share: the need to make sense of the world".¹⁵³ Finally, *transcendence* as an experience of mystery, such as in sublime experience of nature,

¹⁵⁰ Nhát Hanh 2014, Pgs. 38-39.

¹⁵¹ Smith, Pg. 72.

¹⁵² Smith, Pg. 90.

¹⁵³ Smith, Pg. 104.

birth, art, and religion, resulting in an emotional experience, what scientists call “awe”, is transformative.¹⁵⁴ In these states we lose a sense of individuated self and “feel deeply connected to other people and everything else that exists in the world.”¹⁵⁵

Emily Esfahani Smith thus provides a philosophic-psychological picture of human flourishing that prioritizes our purposeful connection to community, including creating symbolic externalizations and losing a sense of being an individual in the process, as the meaning comes from our being part of our communities and expressing ourselves symbolically, meaningfully as such. The scientific grounding of the deference to community over the individual is compelling. Studies of people in transcendent “awe” experience, such as meditators, have shown “decreased activity in the posterior superior parietal lobe”, the area of the brain that orients us individuals in the world. The result is a sense of unity with “everyone and everything” along with a deep awareness of consciousness, a deeply reflexive self-awareness while losing any sense of self.¹⁵⁶

Humans, like any other creatures, demonstrate a capacity for entrainment, dissolution of individuation. This is what I’m suggesting happens in art, what happens in Aristotelean katharsis, and that that experience of deeper connection to community and an accompanying selfless-awareness is what distinguishes art from other experiences. Smith’s work then supports the claims I am making about the sociocultural creative function of art within the community combined with an Aristotelean account of katharsis. These connections receive further support

¹⁵⁴ Smith, Pg. 131.

¹⁵⁵ Smith, Pg. 133.

¹⁵⁶ Smith, Pgs. 140-141, 153.

from Smith's research on personal growth. It turns out that after experiencing trauma, very few people actually develop PTSD. Most people experience what Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun have termed "post-traumatic growth". The result of growth stimulated by trauma is stronger relationships, increased levels of personal wellness, and a sense of place within a community and the universe. This I believe is the answer to why the Greek's timeless invention of drama, the staging that captures the tragic and comic in human experience, results in such an important experience, katharsis for the community. The community identity, its bond and its wellness, depend on a certain type of externalization, a representation of conceptual meaning for and about the community.

4.6 Conceptual art as model for all art

Now we come full circle to how exactly conceptual art instructively resembles the improvisational jazz band, the social movement or Zen sangha, and how it exemplifies the thought of Aristotle, Moody-Adams, and Anderson. Conceptual art, as the most streamlined art possible, shows in its barest possible contours what constitutes any art. There is a social understanding of the creative value involved that underscores the possibility of any work being creative, but the group improvisation model helps us see the interdependence required in making culturally-valuable creative work. There is an invitation to self-reflection as in a social justice model, but without the overt practical ethical or legal outcomes being required in the case of art. And the process of self-awareness generating social compassion and selflessness suggests what might be at work in the collective katharsis experience described by Aristotle.

The golden age of hip-hop I've presented as an example of the social nature of creativity can in turn give us a clearer idea of how conceptual art serves as a paradigm. The use of sampling as a medium results in creations that are new, because of novel combinations, and surprising, because of unique juxtapositions, but they are also valuable, which requires the contribution is neither too new nor too valuable at the expense of comprehension by the relevant community. The schizophrenic production of novel and surprising strings of words is not creative because it doesn't meet the expectations of the creative value context set by the sociocultural situation. Sampling in particular illustrates this important fact about creativity: in its creative re-presentation it presents a nostalgic past reimagined as present, the old as new.¹⁵⁷ With sampling, the familiarity built into the medium matches the creative value context as set by the community. The same is the case with conceptual art. Conceptual art as artmaking stripped-down to its barest essentials is centered on the primary component of creative activity, the creative value set by the context of its audience. The familiarity of the audience with the type of creative value in conceptual artmaking requires something-like-Danto's-artworld, which we've identified as the cultural value set for that specific context and not merely the whims of an artworld. Not everyone will be able to value conceptual artmaking as long as some do not have access to the relevant creative value. But conceptual art nonetheless illustrates crisply what all art must have and do: a community context in which creative value operates to support that creative activity as art. To qualify as art, though, the imaginative presentation and appreciation of the creative activity must invite the audience to a space of reflection on the values of the

¹⁵⁷ The sometimes glam, sometimes avant-garde rockstar David Bowie shrewdly recognized the importance of familiarity; each of his albums contained some element of the previous alongside more radical experimentation, so as to not alienate part of the audience by severing the creative value comprehensible to a popular audience.

community more generally, in addition to any reflection on the creative process and the role of art itself.

Conceptual art is historically associated with the avant-garde “interrogating” the state of the arts (such as the post-impressionists abandoning strict mimeticism and local color, or the development of non-objective abstraction in the early 20th Century) and the status quo of the culture (such as Dada creatively critiquing western rationalism, or the Constructivists in the U.S.S.R examining how an ideal culture ought to function). importantly there are two primary ways of understanding what the avant-garde has been historically up to. Where once the avant-garde was thought to be heroically investigating a teleological given, as though discovering a periodic table of facts about pure medium-specificity in the arts, most notably in the proposals of Greenberg and Bürger, the recent consensus is instead that the avant-garde functions as the aforementioned “interrogation of the status quo”, whether that is the status quo norms of an art practice or a cultural practice more generally.

Interrogating the status quo then points back to the Aristotelian nature of the arts, the bringing to awareness on behalf of the community of some aspect of that community in relation to its ideals: in tragedies like Oedipus Rex, the story combines with the practical wisdom for the community. All artworks have this dual nature of content and relation to the community, although the level of “interrogation” can be more or less salient.

It is worth noting that there is some apparent irony with denying teleology and endorsing Aristotle. Aristotle had a teleological view of the world, and teleological assumptions are a significant part of the failings of earlier theories of the avant-garde. But one need not

accept Aristotle's whole teleological framework to recognize the insights on the role of art in community. And accepting that there is a telos of wellness of community involved in human societies and an essential role played by creative reflection—or in other words, interrogation of the status quo via art experience—in achieving that wellness, in no way entails any essentialist claims about medium-specificity. This explains too the primary role of conceptual art as the philosophizing about art within the avant-garde community. The nature of conceptual art is self-reflective awareness precisely because it is art streamlined to its essentials of self-aware creativity on behalf of the community, what amounts to creative philosophizing, whether that be through ideas intended as art or the actions and objects that are generated in the process. Notice that the earlier-mentioned ideas about a cathedral, its meditations on light, allegory, and form, express the same core meaning as does a construction that takes a community decades to accomplish in service of the community, the physical structure. By building the cathedral in its multimedia glory, as architecture, as sculpture, as theater and song, this expands the community that sustains the creative value in the architecture, broadening the audience, and increasing the level of its impact as a work of art. But the cathedral need not have been made to express the relevant philosophical content at the core of the work. Sol LeWitt's observation about conceptual art applies to any work of art, although most works would be poorer for not being instantiated in what the anthropologist philosopher of art Richard Anderson calls "*an effective, sensuous medium*".¹⁵⁸ Most art of course is not merely conceptual, its expressiveness and mastery of technique, its aesthetic richness of form and variation, these are what draw us into works to begin with. But the suburban split-level or big

¹⁵⁸ Anderson, Pg. 277.

box store falls short of a cathedral, just as soap opera falls short of Sophocles, even while on the surface appearing as art forms. What they lack is sufficient sophistication in meaning, thus insufficient expression in instantiation.

Anderson recognizes the role of meaning in all art in his classic anthropological cross-cultural study *Calliope's Sisters*, where after surveying ten separate very distinct cultures, from the Inuit and other tribal and aboriginal cultures to Japan and the west's various systems of philosophy of art, he concludes that across human cultures art is consistently "culturally significant meaning". I agree, although it is unclear what Anderson would say about conceptual art, as Anderson only studies physically instantiated works in various cultural modes, and so perhaps Anderson wouldn't necessarily agree with me in turn.¹⁵⁹

The awareness involved in katharsis, the cultural self-awareness of art experience, is key to the view I am promoting. But how it works in its details I have no explanation. I am not here concerned with the scientific details, or theories in the philosophy of mind or perhaps social epistemology. I will only say two things. One, that how groups of humans become entrained in a highly self-aware state is an important mystery to explain to many purposes. And second, that pointing to examples like the Zen arts helps to get a sense of what we are talking about, as

¹⁵⁹ As further support for identifying an essential cultural function of art in human societies, Hans-Gorg Gadamer's conception of play (and particularly festival) resonates importantly with Aristotle's conception of katharsis around human ritualistic celebration. Gadamer suggests that all art is play, connected both to the play of children, play-acting imaginatively by creating worlds and scenarios, as well as in the sense of playing in the plays of Aeschylus, Albee, or Tennessee Williams. While it might be true that play (along with wonder and curiosity) is an important part of creativity and thus art, it seems unlikely we can reduce all instance of art to a definition of play; that just seems too broad given the way play occurs in meaningless ways in addition to meaningful ways. Gadamer though connects with Aristotle by fore-fronting the play of festival, the communal coming together in celebration and mystery. Recognizing that carnival, Mardi Gras, and other ritual celebrations corresponds with art and katharsis, Gadamer points toward the idea that art is an essential cultural function to healthy human societies.

flowering arranging, raking the garden, admiring a stream or patch of moss or cup of tea, make for useful examples of the expression of a culture by the culture in a self-aware manner.¹⁶⁰ As Lopes discusses throughout *Beyond Art*, there was an influential idea in the enlightenment era that art imitated nature. This is consistent with an early modern and enlightenment outlook that puts humans as separate from nature. Yuriko Saito on the other hand, in discussing why there is no art of the sublime in the east, helps us understand that we humans *are* nature where the western tradition is historically antagonistic to nature.¹⁶¹ Our natural human state includes mimicry, expression, appreciation of beauty and symmetry. Of course no one reasonably suggests birds and squirrels make architecture when they make nests. The distinctive human characteristic seems to be self-awareness, a conscious realization of value in a non-obvious way. The expressed role of meditation in the Zen arts seems to me a plausible key to understanding katharsis in the sense I am treating it here.

I think we can now see how all of these conversations come together to support the claim that conceptual art is a paradigm for the social function of art. All art becomes more than a mere exercise in a medium by virtue of it creatively says, what it is about, its meaning. Artworks are created on behalf of the community in order to reflect on the relevant content presented. People who subsequently experience works are reimagining the work, accessing the metaphorical content, and becoming attuned with the creator's thought, the creator's relevant

¹⁶⁰ Not coincidentally, the Zen arts are also useful in understanding the genesis of 1950s hard cases. The avant-garde watershed that was Black Mountain College featured many of the key hard cases from Rauschenberg, John Cage, David Tudor, Jasper Johns, and others. The influence of Zen in 1950s New York City is well-established, with Cage in particular practicing many of the Zen techniques and approaches in his development of his ideas around 'silence'. The combination of Zen ideas and the precedence of the interwar avant-gardes of Dada, Constructivism, and Surrealism set the stage for Warhol's Brillo Boxes, Fluxus, Happenings, ABC Minimal Art, Land Art, and Concept art. Danto recognizes this. Danto 2003, Pg. 20.

¹⁶¹ Saito 1985.

influences and context; the audience becomes an essential part of the 'swing' of the ensemble. Note that Danto was correct about much of this: art philosophizes, its possibility is sustained within a social context, art need not be aesthetic (but can and often does utilize that mode of presentation). But the even harder cases demonstrate the limitations of the artworld having sole say. We have now addressed that issue, and what is presented as a result forms a clear response to Lopes's concerns without falling to the issues Lopes faces and identifies in other views.

4.7 The Even Harder Cases: counterfactual instances of art and Ur-works

Danto can explain why art of any kind is theoretically explicable. An artwork is what the artworld experts call 'art', plus there's a certain set of properties artworks have—embodied philosophical meaning that is about something, an internal/external distinction to account for the way beauty functions in a work, and a mode of presentation appropriate to what the work says philosophically via its internal/external content. This view is ultimately motivated by indiscernibles, a sub-class of hard cases. But there is on my thinking another class of indiscernibles, the even harder cases that are detailed in Chapter One: the Bright Young Things' performances, the hibachi goldfish bowl, Buddhas on the ocean, and jungle. These are works that check the boxes of Danto's criteria for an artwork, except that they are neither endorsed nor even recognized as art by an artworld. And that is an important exception, as through the years Danto consistently maintained that dimension of an artwork being in fact a work of art.

Danto's description of anthropological works being recognized as artworks retroactively provides a helpful example though.¹⁶² The meaningfulness and creative content has not changed in the work, but the valuation of it via a refined theory of art has shifted. It would be absurd to say that the works suddenly came into being as artworks, yet they do not have an origin narrative from a clear art tradition. And it doesn't help to say that any artwork from the anthropological record is necessarily an artwork, because most such works are practical utilitarian artifacts that are neither recognized as such nor should plausibly be expected to be recognized as such.

However, if we consider the idea posed in Chapter One of counterfactual instances of art, we have a solution. The counterfactual suggestion is that under reasonable circumstances someone with the relevant understanding of art and of the work's meaningfulness would in a different context understand the work as an artwork, even if in this world this never becomes the case. This seems intuitively clear to me. It captures the correct intuitions about artworks being artworks and not some other kind of work even when they are not recognized as such. It also resonates with Carrie Figdor's definition of objectivity, something that a rational person with the relevant facts would agree to.¹⁶³ We can combine the two thusly: a counterfactual artwork is a work that under the relevant conditions and context a rational person would comprehend the work as art. In these counterfactual cases the works are functioning exactly

¹⁶² Jerry Fodor's suggestion that origins and intent can explain that a work is a work of art won't help here because it doesn't account for accidental or unintentional artworks. Fodor's approach and others similar (Levinson, Carroll) that look to tradition and histories to account for a work being an artwork do not make clear sense of works that are prized by one culture as an artwork while not so by its originating culture. Fodor in *Danto and His Critics*

¹⁶³ Figdor 2010.

like artworks that are recognized as artworks, but merely lack the acknowledgement that they are such.

Retroactive attribution of artworks provides a model for how counterfactual attribution works. In the case of recognizing works in anthropological collections as artworks, or Duchamp realizing *Bicycle Wheel* was a work of art all along, the works status as art was unrecognized, yet still an artwork. Of course, one could argue that the works only came into being with the realization that they were works, but this is giving pronouncement powers that seem to be indefensible; the ex cathedra proclamation has the ring of metaphysical powers or magic. The counterfactual claim is that plausible candidate works of art have a sort of proto-art status as Ur-works, works that have the fundamental qualities and functions of artworks without having the status of artworks. The suggestion then is that there is an explicitly core cultural function that artworks serve, whether or not they are recognized as such. The classic, or classical, example would be the ancient Athenians rich flowering of cultural expression without having the understanding of these meaningful expressions of civic identity as artworks, as they lacked the term. Some have argued that the ancient Greeks had the concept, but just not the term. If this is to be taken as true, then it suggests there is a core functionality of art in the cultural functioning of any society. The reason is this: if cultures can make what we now understand as paradigmatic artworks (*Winged Victory of Samothrace*, *Oedipus Rex*, the *Parthenon*), yet were not considered artworks, then the culture clearly valued to function of works of that sort if not valuing them outright as 'art' works. That they later are seen as paradigmatic artworks on account of those qualities that constituted their function suggests that the recognition is icing on top of the cake. The Ur-artwork then is a work that has the fundamental cultural function

that meets the criteria of being recognized as art, but yet has not been recognized. The counterfactual move then is to say that under the right conditions, these works would be properly recognized by relevant experts as artworks. One of our even harder cases, which are not artworks but have the qualities to designate them Ur-works, then would be seen as artworks given the right conditions. So, if the Zen hibachi goldfish bowl was given the context of a Chelsea gallery, the work might be properly recognized as art; but as long as it remains in its originating context, it is an Ur-work, and not an artwork.

The obvious worry about a counterfactual account though is that it seems to capture just about anything, not just these alleged Ur-works. If Danto is correct that anything in the universe could be an artwork, or the basis for making an artwork (and I think he is correct here), then what is to stop the counterfactual claim to apply to everything in the universe? This of course would make it a less than handy theory, as it would trivially assign everything the same property. David Lewis's account of counterfactuals and possible worlds is helpful here. The worlds that are closer to our own are more counterfactually relevant than those more distant. The epistemic skeptic for example, on Lewis's view, directs our attention to possible worlds where we are brains-in-a-vat and not embodied people in the world; those worlds are however extremely distant from our own.¹⁶⁴ So, the thought is that while yes everything is theoretically a potential artwork, in practice, we need only concern ourselves with the counterfactual possibilities that characterized those worlds actually nearby. The world in which works at the beginning of the genre Jungle are artwork is very near our very own, such that it was not

¹⁶⁴ Lewis 1996.

difficult for those works to be recognized as artworks within a short period. Likewise similar cases of “outsider” art. The hibachi goldfish bowl on a hot day though is a bit further out from our own world. Whatever the truthfulness of such a model, I think it is useful in clarifying the proposal at hand. (The same thoughts could be expressed without the possible worlds framework, for example.)

Explaining the even harder cases is therefore a prime feature of an acceptable account for art. The sociocultural arts view centered on conceptual art does so effectively, while Lopes, the traditionalist, and geneticist have no clear answer.

4.8 Questions that need answers, questions that need asking

We can now turn to the list of questions presented at the end of Chapter Two, the questions to which a successful theory of art ought to have reasonable responses. Here’s one question. In order to understand a cultural phenomenon deeper than Danto’s artworld, we ought ask “why is there an artworld at all?” To get at an acceptable answer here, we need to take our eye off the ball so to speak. Lopes appears to focus on the object, the thing or material, thus the focus on art kinds. This is consistent with most traditionalist approaches to explaining the arts. A mimetic theory ascribes a property of representation to the thing or performance. An aesthetic theory a sense-based experience of pleasure in the beautiful as determined by the aesthetic properties of the artwork; an expressivist theory locates the expression as a property within the artwork, and so forth with other approaches. Conceptual art becomes a useful test case and paradigm for explaining art because the very idea-as-art is itself the artifact. But that idea can

just as easily not be an artwork, as it has no specific property in itself that constitutes it as an artwork. It is the same in the case of ¹⁶⁵□ The relevant artifact in conceptual art cannot merely be any idea alone; something must distinguish an everyday idea (the idea that today is Thursday, for example) from a work of conceptual art consisting of the same idea (that today is Thursday). The idea that actually is a work of conceptual art has some *relationship* to the possibility of being conceptual art, and thus has a relationship to the possibility of being art as well. An idea as a work of conceptual art must then include at least one additional thing than the everyday version of the same idea does not: a relationship to art.

Danto helpfully explains how a background theory sustains the possibility of an artwork being art for an artworld that itself sustains that theory. Now, while I do not think Danto is entirely accurate in his conception, I do think that he captures something that occurs in an instance of conceptual art that sustains the possibility of its being conceptual art. Boden's explanation of the social role of creative value helps here in how it explains the work's possibility as a creative work. A work is creative because it meets the aforementioned NSV conditions relevant to that context. This explains too its meaningfulness: the background conditions of a creative work's status as a meaningful work to the community for which it has meaning—as new surprising and valuable. So, between Danto and Boden, we can see that the conceptual artwork has its meaningfulness as a creative work due to its social context.

Understanding that the conceptual artwork is sustained as such by its cultural context leads to this question: Why is there an art world at all? What is the function or utility of an art

¹⁶⁵ I'll follow George Dickie here in the understanding that an idea can itself be an artifact.

world such that it manifests within a culture? If all human cultures have art, as is suggested by Anderson's work, then this implies the existence of some sort local cultural value on the cultural meaningfulness of the artworks—in other words, something like an artworld is operative within any culture that has art, even if it is not self-aware as an artworld as in the case with Danto's Brillo Box and Musee Beaux Art examples. Danto's view that all art requires an art world becomes tenuous when we consider that all human cultures have art; we should then prefer the phrase here "something like an artworld" to capture in rough outline what the cultural context is for an artwork to exist meaningfully for that culture—even if they have no conception of art *qua* art. The question "why is there an art world?" can be rephrased then as "Why do human societies have a culturally self-aware positive valuation on creative activities that serve no obvious practical function?" I think as in many things, Aristotle points the way to a productive answer.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle recognized that art serves a function of culturally self-aware improvement or maintenance in relation to an implied ideal of the society. This amounts to creative problem-posing and problem-solving in relation to cultural identity. Art is certainly not merely the economic circulation of aesthetic luxury items within bourgeois economies, although it has clearly been subsumed as such under capitalism.¹⁶⁶ The Aristotelean conception of art as a calibration of *ethos* (the relevant principle or understanding that contributes to the wellbeing of the culture being reinforced) being communicated meaningfully via the *mythos* (the form of the work, a dramatic work in Aristotle's analysis). The mythos can be understood

¹⁶⁶ See Dewey, Bourdieu, and Adorno.

as the artisanal craft of *poesis*, the making of a work. The ethos is the conceptual content that calibrates the culture via the effects of the *poesis*, the *katharsis*. Aristotle then furnishes us with a picture of what a socially-mediated account of artistic value that features a culture becoming aware of itself in relation to its ideals.

According to the anthropological record, art appears in all human societies, whether there is an awareness of art at all. While it's tempting to think we may be projecting the concept of art onto cultures that may not have such, the evidence is strong that a culture can have art without deploying any relevant terms. The ancient Greeks did not have an understanding like ours of art, yet they furnish classic examples of various forms: theater, sculpture, architecture, music, poetry, painting. Extremely similar creative activity occurs in the tribal record as well. The apparent universal appearance of such a function within all human cultures can be modelled on the similarly apparent universal nature of ethics appearing in all human cultures.¹⁶⁷ Human societies require ethics so that the society can maintain. Prohibitions on lying, stealing, and unjustified causing of harm are universal. Likewise is the presence of apparently non-practical meaningful creation in forms such as song, dance, and visual modes. Call it an assumption if need be, but it does not seem rash to say that human cultures value what appears on the surface to be non-practical creative behaviors that tie into the society's understanding of its and its members place in the universe.

What is an artist? This is another question that needs answering. If we attempt to answer the question 'what is an artist?' by saying 'someone who makes art' or 'a creative

¹⁶⁷ Simon Blackburn makes this point as do others

person who makes art' we won't have made it very far, although the latter formulation points to an important component, creativity. It is trickier to label an individual as an artist than may at first seem. Not all art is made by recognized artists or by individuals who identify as artists, and not everything made by artists is art. Duchamp is an artist. But was Duchamp still an artist when he ceased making art and instead played chess and taught French lessons? Note too that the 'What is an artist?' question cannot be answered by any one individual art kind. Leonardo, Michelangelo, or Picasso are known as painters, but they were presumably not any less or more of an artist when they wrote poetry, made sculptures, and so forth. Artists freely move from medium to medium; this does not impact the nature of their being artists—they are merely alternating between creative modes of artistic production. If we require only theories of individual arts to explain what an artist is, then we presumably abandon the very idea of an 'artist' in the process, an unfortunate result. If we only have practitioners of individual media (painters, photographers, poets, etc.), then the multi- and interdisciplinary nature of creative artmakers seems a contradiction rather than a defining feature to the nature of creative artmakers. Someone like Julian Schnabel, who makes paintings, drawings, narrative films and documentaries, music, sculpture, in addition to mixed-media works and writings, is throughout the varied activities an artist. Schnabel remains the same artist; he is not now a painter-artist and then next a film-artist, a status popping in and out of existence in relation to the specific art kind he happens to be creating within. One might argue that an artist accumulates a laundry list of more specific statuses that once established are retained, like technical certifications, but this loses sight of the commonality shared between these artistic activities—their creative nature as art activity. So instead of generating a theoretically endless list of various activities, it

seems clear that the simpler explanation is this: artists make and do stuff in creative ways, with the approach determined by its appropriateness at the time of creation. The medium or kind is secondary to the creative process. The specific creative mode, whether using text, light, sound, or physical materials in space, informs the options and processes available to the creator at that time, but do not define the creative process. The creative process itself is something largely, if not entirely, independent of its specific application. Yes, there are technical opportunities and restrictions within a certain mode or medium; but the creative process as studied by social scientists is independent of the technical specifics, whether in art, science, or technology. And while creativity and technical know-how are intertwined (one presuming couldn't make a bronze statue oneself without knowing how to create a mold and cast the bronze, or make a piece of computer art without knowing how to use a computer), a painter who is an artist is foremost a creative artist rather than a technician. Being a technician is not sufficient on its own to be an artist, for technique can be at the service of brute practical ends—ceramics to make a coffee cup, to use Lopes's example.

Answering the question posed in this way, 'what is an artist?', still yet requires getting clear on what constitutes an artwork, and how and when artworks come into being. My suggestion that moving away from the object-oriented or artifact-oriented question 'what is an artwork?' will help us make progress on developing an acceptable theory of art also suggests that the question 'what is an artist?' can be better asked as '*why* an artist?' or '*how* an artist?' But let's assume we know what art is, and assume too that artists at least some or most of the time identifiably make artworks. The mention of creativity suggests a different way to ask the question: 'what is the function of an artist as creative practitioners within the culture?' Artists

are a subset of the population (whether they are defined as individuals or clusters of creative group activities, or both). They make up then a creative subset of cultural function. This way of asking the question gets at the cultural utility of the role of the artmaker or makers as a creative contributor to culture. Not all creative contributions to culture are art, but art is as discussed earlier, paradigmatically creative. What then is the cultural use of creative cultural activity under the designation of 'art'? Artmakers provide meaningful creative experience opportunities for members of the culture in which they create. The relation between these to—the creator and the audience—is a social relationship. Successfully answering the cultural function of art question is useful because it can reveal the relations between our experience of artworks, their creative makers, and the relevant impact these experiences and activities contribute to a society. These relations between artistic production and experience

If a society were to lack creative cultural experience identifiable as art, what then would it lack in its overall social functioning? As said, the anthropological and historical record suggests that no human culture has lacked art, but in the possible world where there is no art in a human society, what happens next? What, if anything, would be missed? On the surface, art serves no obvious practical function. In terms of our hierarchy of human needs—shelter, sanitation, safety, food—there are more obvious practical functions required of a society. To the extent that art can provide aesthetic experience, this may result in pleasures, perhaps edification and inspiration. But art does more than that in its opportunity for meaningful experience. A culture's array of artistic production provides its members with the possibility of meaningful experience about the culture itself. The nature of artistic experience of creative value is abstract and not-obviously practical, whereas the invention of a better set of pliers, a

technical tool, has obvious practical utility, while also asking the community to consider how it accomplishes this in relation to other similar inventions. Art then serves a function, a very practical two-fold function, albeit an abstract cultural function that relates to identity and modes of expression, and not through obvious usefulness. A pair of pliers can theoretically be utilized as an appropriated artwork then by making the jump between obvious practical value to non-obvious (yet still abstractly practical) value; this is accomplished by virtue of an invitation for the community to value the pliers as artwork, as opportunity to reflect on its meaning and its relation to other art experience.

4.9 Speculating on Cultural functions: aura and autonomy to articulate how cultural activity connects to self-awareness

Art has the capacity to bring members of a culture to self-awareness, on the model of philosophy and metafiction, the meditative Zen arts and katharsis. This self-awareness is a realization, an opening to a perspective. The work functions as an invitation to self-awareness as an individual and as a society. Art then is a non-instrumental conceptual creativity, serving a non-obviously practical function of kathartic alignment toward cultural wellness. As Collingwood says, the artist imaginatively engages on behalf of the community so that the members of the community have the opportunity to imaginatively experience the work in turn. Here is a closer look at how art's autonomy can play a central role in what we can call social autonomy.

In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin uses the term 'aura' to reference the special nature of artifacts that emerged from shamanic settings.¹⁶⁸ In that essay, Benjamin is concerned with two main themes: the apparent loss of the aura in light of modernity's then-new mechanical reproduction capabilities (e.g. photography-based offset prints); the use of mass communications technology like film to actively resist fascist propaganda use of same. Both points deserve attention here. If we cast back to what we understand about early human culture, the shaman figure coordinates both an understanding of the culture's place in the universe (through ritual) and the creation of artifacts (through creative activity). In such a tribal shamanic setting, the relationship of creative activities—via physical movement, carving, image-making, body adornment, theatrical staging and expression—all of these activities are of a whole, connected to this sense of 'magical' aura derived from its supposed supernatural context. The creative use of charcoal, earth, body, clay, blood, lime, fire, and various plants, animals, and minerals ritualistically embody the magical thinking of the culture, such that there is a specialness about the resulting artifact—the works say something about the culture in a way relevant to the identity of that culture.¹⁶⁹

The second theme of Benjamin's essay is the defense of freedom and democratic principles against overt and covert fascist uses of mass communication technologies. The Third Reich famously used radio, print, and film technologies to indoctrinate a nation with slick

¹⁶⁸ Benjamin 1969.

¹⁶⁹ A charitable interpretation of Dewey reinforces this point: while Dewey's suggestion that we can understand a culture through its art is problematic if we assume what art is as narrowly defined historically in the west, potentially resulting in presumptuousness and cultural insensitivity, the spirit of approaching a culture respectfully via its cultural creative expression seems apt to me, particularly given the creative identity model I'm suggesting here.

jingoism, racial mythologizing, and alarmist reactionary patriotism. Leni Riefenstahl's famously beautiful, yet darkly troubling, *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympiad* are key examples, as are the use of visual artworks and prints created under the direction of the ministry of propaganda (e.g., an oil painting of Hitler in medieval armor atop a charger). The epigraph to Jason Stanley's *On Propaganda* is in this sense very well-chosen: "This will always remain one of the best jokes of democracy, that it gave deadly enemies the means by which it was destroyed. --Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister of Propaganda, 1933-1945".¹⁷⁰ The use of propaganda in contrast to the use of reproductive technologies to advocate for freedom highlights an important aspect of art's function: autonomy.

Autonomy is relevant to art in at least two ways. We'll need to disambiguate between these. Since Schiller, art has been said to be autonomous in the sense of its standing on its own, what Gautier termed '*l'art pour l'art*', art for its own sake. The autonomous artwork does not require reference to anything beyond the work itself (such as is required with a mimetic approach to explaining art, where the value of the work depends on its relation to what it is it purports to represent). Schiller speculatively suggests that our human sense of personal autonomy derives historically from our aesthetic experience of nature. Natural beauty causes the human to realize one's own freedom, says Schiller. Educating a culture in the arts then is on Schiller's view the path to creating a free and ideal society. Whatever the accuracy may be in terms of Schiller's speculation or the efficacy of his political-aesthetic philosophy, this points to the second way that we can understand autonomy in art, as an expression of freedom in

¹⁷⁰ Stanley 2015.

relation to a cultural ideal. The relationship of art to political freedom and the ideals of a culture also echoes Benjamin's insight on the use of mimetic communication technologies to enhance freedom. (Marcuse as well describes the role of art in a culture as a basis of resisting the superstructure, a point we will return to below.)

Schiller's understanding of art as an experience of freedom, and that freedom's connection to a political ideal of freedom and goodness resonates with Iris Murdoch's explanation of art experience as access to the true and the good. Murdoch describes our experience with artworks as 'piercing the veil' of ordinary reality. The epistemic function of an artwork on Murdoch's view is a revelation of truth and goodness. The idea here clearly echoes Plato's Allegory of the Cave, with our ordinary perception clouded by illusion, and the path to wisdom beyond the here and now of practical affairs. But we need not think this suggests some never-never land beyond the here and now. Martin Heidegger's explanation of how art functions follows a similar line of thought while staying grounded in the basic stuff of the world. On Heidegger's explanation, *being* (that is, the ontological nature of how things are in noun form, the 'to be' of existing) is normally concealed by practical utility in our everyday lives--we just don't notice that something *is* when we use it to do some task; however being becomes unconcealed in our experience of an artwork. What all of these views share is twofold: the idea that art experience is beyond the normal everyday concerns of a functioning society and our place within it; and second that we can gain through art experience a connection to or understanding of truth and the good. What I'd like to suggest simply takes these ideas as consistent with one another, and posits that art affords us a connection to the ideals of a just society: autonomy, truth, and goodness.

Understanding the autonomy of art in this second way, as an opening to freedom not for the work itself but for the individuals within the community who experience it, helps us to address a puzzle that arises with the cultural creative model I am proposing: how do we distinguish non-art cultural expression from cultural expression that ‘counts’ as art? Moreover, how do we respond to Lopes’s claim that a cultural approach to a theory of art is not possible? This shall be addressed in Chapter Five.

I suggest then that art is an instance of *social autonomy*. Schiller speculates that our own sense of freedom and self as autonomous beings derives from our aesthetic experience of nature, an autonomous experience leading to a realization of one’s own autonomy. I think this captures an important feature about the relationship between creative art experience, autonomy, and self-knowledge. Art, like creativity, is a social phenomenon. Art would not exist in a possible world with one person. Kant for example distinguished the “agreeable arts”, those that bring enjoyment, from the fine arts (*schön*), “which furthers the mental powers that facilitates social communication.” [Kant section 43 on, 51-54] The agreeable restricts experience to particular tastes, such as in food and wine, which involves desire. The fine arts on the other hand, are universal. I find this distinction to be consistent with the broad outlines of how I’ve proposed art to function, as well as to capture something in the ballpark of the art and entertainment distinction considered earlier. While the pleasures we receive from art may be welcome, they are not essential. What is essential is this human awareness that explains how we connect with works in meaningful ways. Where I think Kant got it wrong though was his insistence on an aesthetic focus that restricted the possibility of art’s explanation “under a concept”. So, while Kant’s distinction of the judgment of the beautiful includes this idea of

social communication, but it is lost with its inability to distinguish art from nature except for a problematic claim to “genius”, and with its claim that art cannot be explained under a concept.

4.11 Conclusion

I believe I’ve satisfactorily accounted for the series of questions that emerged through the critique of Lopes and the requirements that were revealed through a look at Boden’s creativity theory of art. A broader look at the anthropological record and a survey of positive and negatives in the history of philosophy of art and art theory have also contributed to crafting of the positive proposal here, one I think is defensible in the face of reasonable concerns. A sociocultural account of social autonomy makes robust sense of the relevant phenomena—the hard cases and the even harder cases, as well as many traditional attitudes about masterworks and cultural significance—but also avoids the pitfalls of other views, and has to my mind an agreeable simplicity.

Lopes can maintain his buck passing to the extent that individual art kinds can be deputized to assist the overall project in concert. But this should not be done at the expense of sacrificing an important creative aspect of humanity, namely the way we creatively make sense of our human experience. Denying the project of a theory of art denies a complete explanation of human experience; it only fragments into different silos what should be accomplished in concert. The characteristics of conceptual art as metaesthetic is an awareness and insight all art shares in to varying degrees, a creative awareness. Exploring truth, beauty, and the nature of the creative exploration itself just is what art is. If there is any sense of “beyond art”, it is in my

view that 1) 'art' as it is 'traditionally' understood (i.e., over the last few centuries) is limited in its descriptive and explanatory powers to explain human artmaking on the whole; and 2) the philosophy of art that the conceptual artist creatively engages in is a self-aware creative act that is akin to metafiction, fiction that philosophizes, and as such this 'meta' characteristic suggests an additional sense of a bird's eye view of things, beyond the commerce and spectacle of what is commonly taken to be art.

So there it is. I have now presented the positive view that falls from a critique of Lopes's *Beyond Art*. Next, I will defend this view against a series of counterexamples and questions, and end with a brief discussion of implications and thoughts on future work.

Chapter Five: Defense and Conclusion

5.0 Chapter overview

In this final chapter I will revisit significant parts of the previous chapters while responding to a series of challenges. The challenges offer an additional opportunity to provide details of the positive view I am offering, as well as a chance to hopefully quell any concerns that may have arisen in the preceding. Challenges (and questions) I consider below include: 1) a dialectical response on behalf of Lopes (Why think a cultural approach viable? and as a quick follow-up, on my view must all art be ideologically-critiquing?); 2) a look at the traditionally-made distinction between art and entertainment (Does my view accidentally include forms that are widely understood to resemble but not actually be art?); 3) an account of the role of metaphor and mystery in art, as a response to a concern that art may just be 'bullshit' (Why think art rewards repeat viewing and supports multiple interpretations?); 4) the worry of a possible trivialization of the concept of art (Does the proposal lose sight of art having any distinct value?) 5) a concern that my view lends itself to relativism and perhaps nihilism, as well as concerns about cross-cultural paternalism (Who gets to determine what art is? and doesn't that jeopardize claims about art and its value?) 6) challenges to my claim of art as not obviously practical, including a comparison with psychoanalysis and psychological wellness (How can art be not-obviously practical yet essential to a flourishing society?) 7) and finally, a concern that I may have inadvertently abandoned beauty (Has the baby been thrown out with the bathwater?)

Before getting to these challenges, I will first look at the benefits of a sociocultural creative view that features conceptual art as its paradigm. I will then offer a quick suggestion of

how Lopes can adapt to my critique and proposal, before addressing the above concerns and concluding. I do not consider here any additional challenges against two key assumptions, that art is not exhausted by considerations of the aesthetic, and that the sociocultural approach to creativity is the correct approach. I have sufficiently addressed those concerns elsewhere, primarily in the introduction, but also at various points in Chapters Two through Four. I believe both to be reasonable assumptions, but have not presented complete arguments in their support.

5.1 Benefits of the view and possible compatibility with Lopes

I take the sociocultural creative approach I've outlined to be a far less cumbersome explanation than Lopes's, one that avoids the pitfalls the buck passing approach engenders. I think my approach also makes very good sense of the intuitions involved in the range of historical theories that have widely been seen to fail as complete theories of art. Lopes says that a key benefit of his own view is that it treats the hard cases better than any alternative views; by making these sorts of "hard" cases central in my own view, the approach I am outlining does more than throw them into a somewhat *ad hoc* grab bag, and instead gives them pride of place in explanation. This to my mind at least takes them far more seriously than the buck passing view. It is difficult to see how one could take them more seriously than as an explanatory paradigm. By Lopes's own lights then, the view that accommodates these sorts of cases best ought to receive pride of place. In addition, Lope's work-oriented approach struggles to free itself from the influence of aesthetic theory as dominant explanatory paradigm, and indeed

aesthetic theory remains the glue of Lopes's system (alongside a dubious claim to theories from sequestered art kinds). The conceptual-oriented cultural approach is independent of the traditionalist aesthetic explanation, giving it freer range of explanation, such that it can make use of aesthetic theory when useful, and set it aside when not, while still ably explaining art and its value, in particular its cultural meaningfulness. Not being beholden to arbitrary tradition is a strength, as tradition and common sense have shown themselves not entirely free of bias and unjustified assumptions. The view I've presented also has the advantages of simplicity: art just is a certain type of meaningful cultural creativity, one that invites a specific type of conscious conceptual attention. Artists create opportunities for imaginative participation, whatever the stuff is they utilize in doing so—sound, objects, text, raw materials, images, flora, fauna—or even just thought itself.

There is a tension in Lopes's proposed buck passing theory. It cannot help but be a theory of art itself, in that it acknowledges the question 'what is art?' by providing an intelligible response, that art consists of individual works of art kinds. So even though the theory redirects the attention to a lower level of generality, it still says something about the nature of art, that it cannot be explained from a general perspective. But this then is where the tension is: such an approach appears to want to both deny and affirm a theory of art all at once. Accordingly, I think we can still reasonably ask whether it is an acceptable answer to the overall question, and disregard Lopes's claim that a general theory of art is not possible. I believe I've shown three reasons why it is not: the buck passing approach requires theoretical guidance within the presumed siloed forms (i.e., it still relies on a tacit theory of art—in Lopes's case the assumption that aesthetic theory is sufficient guidance), and then secondly the presumption

that there are art kinds is itself problematic for numerous reasons (identification of alleged or new kinds, granularity, plurality, and regress problems). Thirdly, I believe there is a better response available that meets all three of Lopes's criteria: a sociocultural creative account can address the so-called "hard cases" more directly and effectively, and can be more informative and more viable in the process. Lopes's theory is a theory of art-as-plural. But this does not preclude a theory of the singular, and it appears fair to interpret Lopes as responding with an answer to the art question after all, and thus fair to interpret his buck passing view as a strange sort of singularity, albeit fractured.

More charitably, Lopes's buck passing theory is useful in exploring theorizing about individual arts. A theory of art does not prevent that utility. Encouraging theory development within different areas of art activity is of practical use to critics, particularly in our climate of specialization. The parallel with biology, where an account of koalas may not necessarily tell us much about chipmunks, but neither stands in the way of there being a theory of mammalia that applies to both species. There may well be contradictions that arise between accounts of individual sub-categories and the general account (koalas don't have stripes or collect nuts), but that is just the nature of trying to develop a theory that fits the world. There is no reason to think that any apparent contradictions will only strengthen the relevant accounts once those contradictions are satisfactorily resolved. True statements about the nature of Dutch renaissance still lives need not apply to rose windows or video art. This sacrifices nothing about the possibility of saying something true about human artmaking in varying levels of generality.

Lopes can maintain a theory of art with his given structure, save the claim that there is no value or function in a theory of art on the whole. The solution is remarkably easy to come

by: take the Helter Skelter objection raised earlier, that when the buck gets passed down to the individual arts it must be passed back up again, at least from time to time, in order to maintain some coherence across kinds and to address questions such as any new troublesome cases. This exchange or interplay of communication provides a healthy role for the specialists of the various media and kinds, and for the conceptual artist as philosopher of art in addition to any tweed and pipe armchair philosophers of art themselves. And there is no cost or burden. In fact, Lopes's view is consistent with Danto's artworld view. The background theory of the arts would just in this conception be maintained by specialists, but this does not preclude their contributing to a general mosaic or a generalist's perspective either. As long as the lines of communication remains open for buck passing in any direction, then we need not have a buck stopping view at all. The general theory of art need not be hermetically sealed. It can leave open the unearthing of new ideas and approaches, new solutions and problems, while maintaining a predictive, explanatory, informative theory of human artmaking, such as I am sketching here. However, as I've argued, Danto's artworld approach fails to make sense of the even-harder cases, and faces reasonable charges of arbitrariness. The key planks of my proposal then are: Lopes needs to ease back on his claim that a theory of art is untenable, and recognize that an array of specialists is not mutually exclusive to a general understanding; conceptual art is neither outlier nor a separate art kind, but rather a central unifying component of art on the model of metafiction; and that the creative cultural function of art is universal to human culture, a process of self-awareness via non-practical meaningful enquiry to various ends.

Combine this positive integration of Lopes's work with my own approach with this other observation: the view I've proposed is one that explains very many views that in isolation fall short, such as mimetic or expressive. Each has its own merits, but fails on its own. By refraining from saying any one technical approach explains art, but instead saying that there is a conceptual cultural function, each of these technical appraisals of approaches to creating artwork maintains its usefulness in specific local application. [Note: So in addition to buck passing, we can see how expressionist theories and mimetic theories contribute to the details of art's production and appreciation. The meaning and its value as a creative artifact ultimately comes from the cultural conceptual content and the work's relationships to the culture on the whole. This is the reason the various approaches to general theories have failed.

5.2 Dialectical Challenges to a Sociocultural Account: questions and answers

Challenge number one. The first question to consider is asked on account of Lopes. Why should we think that a theory of cultural activity can give us insight on art? Lopes says cultural accounts are too broad: "Buck stopping theories of art have a job to do if some cultural explanations are true of all and only works of art".⁶⁶ It is true that a general theory of culture doesn't necessarily tell us much specifically about art opposed to any number of other cultural activities. But there's a way to narrow down cultural explanations, such as by identifying what particular cultural function artworks serve. Lopes's claim also assumes other cultural phenomena shouldn't be classified as art. The fluidity of what has been included as art or just mere culture over the last several centuries speaks against this assumption. In the 20th Century

alone, some pulp fiction has been elevated to the status of literature, some movies similarly became regarded as art films, popular music like jazz acknowledged as art music, and so forth. Slightly more challenging are cultural entities like sport, food, and fashion, cultural activities and products with clear aesthetic and expressive content. It would be an error to simply assume that sport could never be art, say, just because it is not commonly regarded as having artistic content or status. This of course is another instance of assuming a siloed essentialism. The historical record changes in its classification schema—and there's not good reason to think it's zeroing in on a metaphysical target with greater accuracy as some teleological accounts have suggested; there's no apparent convincing reason to think these classifications aren't vague and sensitive to context. However one constant maintains: art is always a cultural artefact, whether that's an event, object, performance, or idea. Art is necessarily cultural, so if a cultural approach can account for the fact that culture is by its nature more general than art and the fact that artworks are some subset of broader cultural entities, then a cultural approach is a promising approach.

Lopes is in particular quick to dismiss Marx and Pierre Bourdieu as counters to his claim that the cultural approach is not viable. Marx for example is said to be interested in cultural production generally, and not merely artistic production.¹⁷¹ As true as this claim may also be, in Marx's wake his thinking was applied to art in particular by the cultural philosophers of the Frankfurt school: Adorno explains art as a creative response to ideological superstructure; Benjamin examines art as means of resisting fascism and extending freedom; Marcuse

¹⁷¹ Lopes 2014, Pg. 65.

discusses art as subjective consciousness within a dominant culture that limits autonomy. Each of these taken alone speaks of the plausible coherence of a Marxist critique of art; collectively they can be argued to comprise a compelling critical theory of art. Bourdieu meanwhile is treated similarly, Lopes saying that the author of *La Distinction* is only interested in the more general category of 'aesthetic products' and not art in particular. While it is true that *La Distinction* is a sociological study of class-conditioned aesthetic consumption (a response to the alleged obviousness of Greenbergian aesthetic experience being naturally superior to 'kitsch'), it is not the only work on arts that Bourdieu wrote. *La Distinction* itself is a response to Kantian aesthetic theory, and so does indeed treat aesthetic experience generally, as did Kant in the third critique. That blurring of aesthetic experience is really attributable to Kant then, and not Bourdieu himself. Lopes's mistake is not uncommon, but it is a mistake, as Bourdieu since 1968 was at times specifically interested in a "discussion of artistic practice: the nature of aesthetics, artistic groups, the formation of the avant-garde, technique and the social roles of artists."¹⁷² But more importantly to refuting Lopes, Bourdieu's interests culminated in a complete theory of art in the book *Les règles de l'art (Rules of Art)*, Part II of which is titled "theory of the history of the science of art". His intent was to provide a "scientific analysis of the social condition of the production and reception of a work of art."¹⁷³ He focuses in that text on modern French literature as a primary example, but his argument and interest are expressedly about art in general. In *The Rules of Art* Bourdieu diagrams art as a smaller scale specialized form of cultural production within the larger scale cultural production that operates as a "field" of power

¹⁷² Grenfell and Hardy, Pg. 1.

¹⁷³ Bourdieu 1995, Pg. xix.

relationships within a nation's social space. The work of art is interconnected such that it "is ultimately the collective product of the whole cultural field: the accumulated, historically engendered products of all agents working within that field."¹⁷⁴ In essence we have a cultural artefact that comes to be in a Danto-esque artworld within a particular cultural context. The Brillo Box reflects the artworld, yes, but its meaning depends on the non-art cultural sphere as well.

Lopes is correct of course that a cultural theory does not exclusively concern art works or their production and consumption. However, as all art is cultural, then an acceptable theory of culture in its general outlines does apply to art, if not in a targeted sense. But it is uncontroversial that a refined cultural theory can apply to some subset of targeted cultural behavior. So, there's no reason that a cultural theorist (like Bourdieu) couldn't in principle (do what Bourdieu actually did and) develop a targeted cultural theory of art. I am offering neither a defense of a Marxist or a Bourdieusian theory of art here, nor am I developing one on those grounds. But getting an accurate picture of the viability of those cultural approaches helps substantiate the cultural approach as a possibility, contra Lopes's unjustified dismissal of such an enterprise.

Relatedly one might wonder if all art is required to form an ideological critique given my embrace of the avant-garde model of interrogating the status quo, and this above discussion of the Frankfurt school, critical theory, and Bourdieu's critical sociology. Given the sociocultural basis of my proposal, and the emphasis placed on historical avant-garde works as a model,

¹⁷⁴ Cook 200, pgs. 166-168.

there's an implication that all art must be politically critical in some way—but obviously not all art is ideologically critical in that sense (although I will explore how ideological content is possibly useful in distinguishing art from entertainment in the next section). The simple answer is that while much of the conceptual tradition was indeed avant-garde in terms of the practice and reception of the artist-philosophers who explored art in the Modern and Contemporary eras, and that avant-garde revolutionaries in art often were cheek-and-jowl with revolutionaries in politics, not all art is avant-garde. Very little of it is, even some that may be mistaken as avant-garde. Some art is merely autonomous assertion of identity. Some art is nearly entirely aesthetic in its experience, with no outward trace of political commitments. Some art explores existing forms without question. Much art celebrates ideological content, such as great works of religious art like the *Missa solemnis* or the frescoes of Fra Angelico. We do not want to sacrifice the Impressionists or Matisse or the middle movement of Mozart's 21st piano concerto, or works historically relegated to craft status, or even great works of entertainment. As said, I am not advocating a Marxist view here, which might tempt one to reduce all art to either propaganda or critique. That some artworks critique political norms explicitly is a feature of those works, but if 'ideological critique' is understood as political and negative, then that is not a feature of my view. However, if 'critical' is understood in light of its etymology, i.e. capturing the sense of arriving at a clear judgment, then I can imagine supporting the claim that there is a critical dimension to all art given my commitment to cultural self-awareness in art. And if ideology is a set of beliefs a culture has, then those together, arriving at a clear judgment about a society's beliefs, sounds plausible. To some extent, I agree with Schiller that autonomy is a central dimension of all art; and arguably

assertions of autonomy can be political in political contexts, but not all art operates in such contexts. But I am not prepared to offer an epistemic theory of art (although Iris Murdoch has suggested such an approach that does appear promising, and I am interested in what light social epistemology might throw on my proposal). And at any rate, I don't believe that's the concern here. Similarly, to say that all artworks philosophize need not entail explicit argumentative exploration or stating the conclusion of some sound argument—an awareness of a philosophical sense of questioning, or considering a line of philosophical thought, will suffice.

5.3 Challenge number two

If art involves a cultural function of alignment, does this include all culturally-aligning works in art-related media? In the following section I will look at the distinction commonly made between art and entertainment. Presenting a cultural theory requires distinguishing art from other cultural activities, particularly given my embrace of the even harder cases. More specifically, one may fairly wonder how culturally-aligning content in paradigmatic non-art cases (e.g. entertainment, propaganda, advertising) differs from katharsis-as-calibration, aligning the culture via art. Does understanding art as kathartic alignment with a culture not suggest that non-art forms (such as propaganda and entertainment) are *in toto* included in my account of art? My quick answer is that these forms lack the invitation to self-consciousness, and the appeals to individual autonomy in relation to society that artworks possess, while also

not requiring creative value. A closer look at how entertainment, propaganda, and advertising are not art can help us see why this is, among other points of interest that will arise *en route*.¹⁷⁵

A basic distinction is that, quite simply, art requires creativity while entertainment does not. Entertainment can be creative, and much of it is. There is nothing inherent in the digestible format or popularity involved in mass entertainment that precludes creativity. *Anna Karenina* with its soap-opera-like themes was serialized, and Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* is wildly popular. These are not strikes against their creative value or status as artworks. David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* was a popular television show, hard enough as that is to believe. The songs of Lil Nas X are anything but uncreative. Lady Gaga, Madonna, *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Further afield from entertainments with obvious resemblance to the arts, consider computer games or sport. The creations of Nintendo or the matches of Roger Federer versus Rafa Nadal at Wimbledon offer an abundance of creativity to be endlessly marveled at. Creativity occurs widely, so it is unsurprising that it appears in entertainment. Great entertainment likely requires creativity just as good art does, and arguably great entertainment ought be considered art, so the traditional class-based distinction breaks down under close examination. But as a rough and ready distinction, art requires sufficient creativity to be successful, while entertainment does not. The cookie-cutter assembly line of the model-T inspired "Dream Factory" known as Hollywood built its success on this genre/genericness; this though did not preclude the artistic accomplishment

¹⁷⁵ One traditional way to understand the art and entertainment distinction is its association with class. On this view, members of upper classes appreciate art while lower classes consume entertainment. This dismissive snobbery is a vestige of assumptions about nobility and commonness, and should be resisted. If this were the only distinction, then it would be obviously arbitrary and false. But there are more principled ways to distinguish between works of art and entertainments, and there are helpful ways, some more and some less, to understand the difference. Key ways that art is sometimes distinguished from entertainment include: ideological, economic, creativity and complexity, metaphorical richness, and awareness. These are of varying levels of utility.

of *The Great Dictator* or *Vertigo*, great Hollywood art while also being created in recognizable genres. The endless string of number one hits in pop and country that share the same form, lyric, and melodic approach attest to this as well, although again not precluding that great releases by Miles Davis or the Beatles could also share characteristics of popularity and format.

Entertainment success depends on the masses readily consuming the product, and it courts the largest possible audience to ensure this result, so content calculated to match expectations is unsurprising. This economic strategy disrupts the possibility of art experience, the creativity, subtext, and invitation to cultural self-awareness. And it does so as part of an ideological function. The director Orson Welles, renowned for the way his artistic vision and execution transformed cinema in the mid-twentieth century, furnishes a nice two-fold example of entertainment and its economic and ideological pressures: heavy-handed corporate editing; and pressure from censors. On the first, Welles turned in highly-realized and artistically compelling cuts of both *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *The Lady of Shanghai*. In both cases, the studio ruthlessly recut the films, in the latter inserting dozens of titillating cheesecake glamour shots of Rita Hayworth (coincidentally Welles's estranged wife) as befits the male gaze of the default audience member. On the second, Welles makes a revealing observation about the pressures of ideological constraints in which entertainment exists: this was the era of the Motion Picture Production Code, the moralizing "Hays Code" that stipulated a whitewashed limit on what could be shown to mid-American audiences from 1935-1968. When the Hays Code expired, Welles keenly observed that the post-code cinematic market was flooded with films that were low on creativity and other artistic qualities, but high on animalistic sex and violence. One might well guess Welles would bemoan the ideological restrictions on his

creativity during the code years, but his point is more nuanced: the existence of these conformist rules posed a creative challenge, where filmmakers had to work around using subtlety and nuance, innuendo and entendre, to express themes such as sex (Howard Hawks's iconic scene of Bogie and Bacall smoking while discussing racehorses is a deservedly well-known example.) Welles's concern was that while sex and violence films were titillating and profitable, they lacked any artistic content. In other words, they were entertainment. Artistry was not needed to make a commercially successful product—images of blood or young female actresses in the nude, or a combination of both, sufficed. Film is a bridging art, capable of incorporating the advantages of the other established arts via script, shots, performance, sound, and so on. These sorts of movies need not draw on any of those traditions when frank exhibitionism and thoughtless brutality sufficed.¹⁷⁶

A closer look at ideology and its function as propaganda, a close relative of entertainment, can help us see how entertainment exists as an ideological (and therefore not artistic) function. Ideologies are a set of beliefs within the dominant power structures of a culture. The use of media forms that reinforce ideological norms of the status quo are considered entertainment via this distinction. This is because entertainment on this view does not challenge the established order of things, but rather reinforces the status quo for the purpose of providing easy pleasures. Meanwhile, art is distinguished from this by virtue of its “interrogating” the status quo in some way (which need not be political, as discussed in the

¹⁷⁶ Welles also observed that just prior to the fall of the Roman Empire the chief entertainments were live copulation and murder. Setting aside the legitimacy of his decline-and-fall pronouncements or the role of censorship in relation to creativity, I think the Orson Welles points illustrates well the way that economic interests structure entertainment in a different manner than art, and that the relevant content that distinguishes art and entertainment tends to correlate for good reason.

previous section). There are reasons to doubt that the ideological approach is valid (such as implied in the first challenge above), but let's assume for now that it captures at least something like this: entertainment is more easily digestible than art for most people, in part because it is familiar, matching a conception of the world, while art creates an experience of some sort of acute awareness of human and social norms and our meaningful place in them, which promotes an awareness of these norms, whatever they may be, in some way.¹⁷⁷

Karen Ng traces a history of critical thought descended from Hegel's critique of Kant via Marx that helpfully resonates with the view I've described here. To put my thinking more in those critical terms, entertainment is cultural activity that reinforces the pathology of ideological situations, those conditions that alienate people from their autonomy and reflective self-consciousness. Art experience is an opportunity for social emancipation from an ideologically-conditioned life, leading to freedom through the opportunity of increased self-awareness within the given cultural context (and not merely considering the abstract ideas associated with the art experience as isolated from social and material life). To remain conditioned within entertainment then is to be in a state of alienation from self-determination, a state of alienated suffering. Entertainment though might be said to contain a useful contradiction, that as an ideologically-conditioned form that uses art processes it contains

¹⁷⁷ Nietzsche developed an analysis of an authentic vital art culture in comparison to the bourgeois norms of claptrap entertainment in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche traces the development of drama in ancient Greece as a rise and fall narrative. The emergence of the tragic arts out of mystery cults reaches a flowering in works like *Oedipus Rex* before succumbing to pallid, predictable, and insipid easy-to-digest fare in fairly short order. The same lines of critique levied against new attic comedy are levied against Richard Wagner in *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, there accusing Wagner of succumbing to bourgeoisie tastes and playing it safe.

within it the potential of meaningful art, or a potential bridge to overcoming the pathological situation.¹⁷⁸

Entertainment and propaganda to varying degrees reinforce power structures that do not necessarily promote, and in many cases limit, autonomy. Entertainment forms, such as film genres, reinforce the norms of a society in an uncomplicated way, in their simplest forms providing platitudes.¹⁷⁹ Propaganda is manipulative by denying the freedom to make a rational decision about attitudes to adopt or actions to perform in relation to ideological content. Art is on the contrary an invitation to self-reflection in relation to human experience and freedom, fostering autonomy (where again I agree with Schiller).¹⁸⁰ Propaganda is not considered art, nor

¹⁷⁸ Ng 2015. Marx's describes the situation of "species-being", the state of humans coming to self-consciousness within our historically and materially conditioned situation within the world. This increased reflective awareness then leads to the valuing of freedom, our own and those of our "species" type. This then is how one arrives at self-determination, how one overcomes one's current situation and embraces freedom, overcoming the alienated state of an animalistic conditioned life without self-consciousness. Ng says that the socially-embedded nature of humans requires that an investigation of human freedom become a critique of ideology. The limits of our embeddedness suggests difficulties for a critique, as we cannot get outside of this entrenchment, but Ng suggests this is the case with any comparable critique. Citing Marx, Ng says that we should understand ideologies as "social practices and forms of rationality that distort the relation between life and self-consciousness and block the full actualization of human reason and freedom. Ideologies are thus social pathologies, wrong ways of living." Ng suggests that we can use freedom as a concept to structure a critique of pathological ideology. This is self-referential though, as ideological critique requires our being socially situated and thus within ideology, a distinctive feature of critical theory as opposed to Kantian critique of pure reason. The realization that one is responsible for one's own situation leads to the realization that the situation can be transformed via freedom. The concern here though is that one cannot get outside of one's situation to critique, but if one claims an object position removed from the social situation, one returns to the Kantian perspective that ideological critique intends to displace. The reply however is that with the goal of freedom, the critique necessarily occurs within the ideological situation or risk the inability to transform the situation by taking it as fixed. The ideological life situation incorporates contradictory epistemic situations, such that people are within a state of false consciousness, with people receiving personal benefit within situations fraught with falsehoods and distortions. However, within these situations are normative truths that can lead to emancipation.

¹⁷⁹ See Keith 2007.

¹⁸⁰ Popular culture shares much with the structures of mass communication-based propaganda. Jason Stanley explains that a key dimension of propaganda is whether it is "undermining" or "supporting" of ideals in its operations. A "flawed ideology" is involved in the undermining of important societal ideals, such as democratic ideals in a free society. Ideologies "are flawed in the relevant sense, when they function as persistent barriers to the acquisition of knowledge." Stanley, Pg. 223. The establishment and function of a flawed ideology depends on the control of resources, which determines the character of the flawed ideology.

is advertising. We may loosely speak of the ‘art’ used in an advertising campaign, say a painting of tacos on the side of a food truck. But this is a completely different usage from a claim about a still life by Picasso or Chardin being a work of art. No matter how crude or advanced the execution of the taco painting, the instrumental nature of it, an illustration to increase the sale of tacos, makes it not itself a work of art—it is a mere painting. The ‘how’ of the work in the medium is as important a consideration the materials in use. Some propaganda is also art, most notably Leni Riefenstahl’s stunning and infamous film *Triumph of the Will*. The aggrandizing of political power in David’s *The Coronation of Napoleon* is another example. A portrait can be an artwork, but it also can be propaganda or an advertisement. Rembrandt’s late self-portraits are masterpieces of both western and human traditions, deeply engaging works that speak to us. State portraits of Saddam Hussein (insert your chosen totalitarian dictator) may have been effective propaganda, but are not considered art works, what Collingwood called “art proper”.¹⁸¹ Likewise, a portrait of Santa Claus in the service of selling Coca-Cola is not considered a work of art, but an instance of illustration or graphic arts in service to generating sales of the soft drink. Clement Greenberg famously distinguished between avant-garde art (the heroic handmaiden delivering art to ever-greater refinement and purity) and what he termed disparagingly, “kitsch”. Kitsch has the *prima facie* appearance of art, but is regarded as sentimental, simple, and disposable, palely imitative of works considered art. A porcelain figurine of Santa Claus visiting Jesus in the manger, praying; snow globes of elk in national parks, cartoonish depictions of love, or frolicking dinner-plate-eyed ceramic kittens covered in glitter. In many ways these are indistinguishable from sculptures considered artworks, some of

¹⁸¹ Collingwood 1938.

which are also made of porcelain or clay, and many of which often deal with religious, romantic, and domesticated animal themes.

The unexamined life may or may not be worth living. That's up to the individual I suppose. But the unexamined life, whether in the form of entertainment, propaganda, or advertising, is for a culture dangerous. Creative cultural production that invites us to self-awareness and cultural self-awareness is an antidote to those dangers, and is what prevents a culture from simple repetition and propaganda. The creative work of art then is an ideological bulwark against the dangers that may result from propaganda, narrow economic interests, and bids for power. (In this sense then there is a loose way that art is always political, in its raising awareness of the ideals of one's polis and one's autonomy within it.)

5.4 Challenge number three

Someone might be skeptical about why art rewards repeat viewing and multiple interpretations. If art's meaning cannot be clearly stated, then perhaps this means that it is meaningless, or at minimum entirely subjective. The idea of metaphorical richness provides recourse to these concerns by substantiating the observation that great art rewards repeat viewing. The easily digestible nature of entertainment (that is, when used as intended) makes it ideal for mass-marketing and mass sales. Entertainment is a great economic driver, and needs to balance accessibility with a level of interest in consuming it to create the vast audience it needs to fulfill its economic function. Its supposed disposable nature is on this reading due to how easy it is to understand and enjoy it. The access to great art works may be more difficult

for some than say Saturday morning cartoons promoting the toys in the accompanying commercials, but this is not due on this view to needless obfuscation or insiderness (although that may well sometimes happen). Rather, the Beethoven late string quartets, T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, or Damien Hirst's vitrines and installations all have what Nelson Goodman characterizes as "metaphorical truth".

Metaphor has an interesting relationship to art and truth. Danto says that metaphor is at the heart of art's meaningfulness. When we engage with a work of art we encounter metaphor embodied within the work, a relationship of the work's internal and external composition and our encounter with it within the context of the experience. The meaning of the art exists within the interpretive moments of the metaphorical content. This is particularly interesting because as Donald Davidson notes, metaphors are always literally false. Where a simile is always trivially true, as everything in the universe is like everything else in some trivial way (such as having the property of existing in this universe), a metaphor says that something is what it is factually not. If we say 'the University is a galaxy', this is clearly false. There is no reasonable way that a cosmologist or amateur astronomer, either one, will mistake a collection of buildings, staff, students, equipment, books, records, and traditions for a gravitational mass of millions of stars and space dust. This is because the claim is propositionally simply not true. But this then poses a puzzle. How on earth can we reasonably speak of the content of artworks as something we can understand as subtext, if that content is itself false? It clearly sounds odd to say that we should celebrate and prioritize obscurely put falsehoods (assuming of course, as I am here, that Danto is correct). Moreover, how can we say truthful things about artworks when at their heart they are propositionally false in their purported meanings?

If it is indeed true, which experience does seem to bear out, that art can be approached multiple times while continuing to bear interpretive and meaningful fruit, then what explains this apparent inexhaustibility? Falsehood seems the wrong thing to say here (although technically an absurdity from contradiction can lead to countless logical claims via explosion, which is interesting but not particularly helpful here I don't think). But recall that the content of art's meaning, such as modelled on subtext, is not propositional. However, keep in mind too that we can generate propositions that are true about this metaphorical content. So we're back to the puzzle, newly formed as asking how it is that we can we say very many true things about a work of art when it is at its core false in its purported meaning? Nelson Goodman has I think an idea that forms a satisfactory answer to this puzzle. Goodman writes in *How Buildings Mean* of how architecture bears meaning via what he calls there 'metaphorical truth'. A metaphor may well be false propositionally speaking, but we can ask if it is appropriate and instructive. Metaphors are useful, sometimes more, sometimes less. If a metaphor is apt and enriches our understanding, then it tends toward metaphorical truth, the kind of truth that is appropriate to the use of metaphor.¹⁸² Metaphors then allow us to say something beyond the limits of literal meaning, opening up the figurative dimensions of suggesting and alluding, of making valuable connections via comparison and verbal gesture.

The inability to state exactly what an artwork means then is presumably due to the metaphorical truth operative in our experience of an artwork. But then this also explains the rich and rewarding experiences we have when we return to artworks and gain new insights

¹⁸² Goodman 1985.

about the work, the world, and our place within it—contributing to Goodman’s noted concept of worldmaking. This also speaks of the important dimension of art’s mysteriousness. Artworks are not obvious and practical in the way that plumbing fixtures and spreadsheets are. If artworks can be said to have a logic, then there is one that is reticent to clear articulation in any mode other than the specific embodiment, what actually constitutes the work, whether that be air, light, multidimensional materials, or thought. This mysteriousness though also suggests that there is always some part of an artwork (or a particularly good artwork anyway) that is always inexplicable in exact terms, unanswerable, unfathomable, unable to be pinned down exactly. This mysteriousness, explained via metaphorical aptness, forms a response to apparent difficulties in providing necessary and sufficient conditions for art (Weitz) and the perennial that speak against general theories of art (Lopes).

There is an instructive parallel here to the metaphysical problem of free will and determinism. The problem poses a mystery for us. The world is deterministic in nature, and as we are composed of materials and regulated by laws in this deterministic world, it seems clear that we do not have radical free will, a way to choose from available options such that we could have chosen otherwise. Peter van Inwagen says that while this is a mystery, he himself prefers the “smaller” mystery, that of assuming we do have free will, but leaving how that works exactly unexplained. Whatever one may think of van Inwagen’s answer, the parallel I want to highlight here is that art may well be mysterious, may well have an incompleteness to it, but that this is part of the answer. The meaningfulness that art brings to our lives resonates with the mysteriousness of our own existence via its own mysteriousness. That may not be as tidy an answer as some would hope for, but it is, to paraphrase, a mystery I am comfortable with.

5.5. Challenge number four

Does the view trivialize 'art'? If art is to be understood as I suggest, that is as a meaningful cultural experience of a certain type, it might seem reasonable to wonder if this does not trivialize art. The concern is that if I'm correct that we are surrounded by these Ur-art or proto-art experiences, works that are actually functioning as artworks but which have hitherto gone unrecognized, then the concern is that this could water down what we mean when we use the term 'art'. Would this then sacrifice the 'special' quality of art versus everyday activities? I think the motivation for this concern is fair, mainly because it's probably true that art could potentially become less lofty and less serious than we have taken it to be. In other words, the elitist, aristocratic, and like associations with classical bastions of power, whether royal or religious or the powers that be in the artworld, would possibly be diminished. This could in turn tarnish the respect some people have for museums, galleries, and opera houses, as well as collectors, foundations, and some experts, along with enormous financial ramifications. But I myself am not too worried about that concern. For one, we shouldn't let a concern about status influence the quest for the correct view on how art functions. Accuracy is more important than keeping up appearances here, at least in my opinion.

But another reason not to worry too much about trivializing art on account of my view is that it really shouldn't do anything like that at all. True, what I've suggested implies a sort of redistricting, an un-gerrymandering of the geography of art. I think it true that very many things we have not called art are actually art, and that very many things we have assumed are art are in fact not art at all. But to trivialize art would be to diminish its importance. I think what I've suggested actually enhances the importance of art by focusing on its meaningfulness within the

cultural context in which it is created and appreciated. Traditional representations of absolute and bourgeois power structures may lose some of its glitter and esteem, yes. But the privilege afforded portraits of burghers and baronesses, bankers, admirals, and landowners was undeserved—art is something special, and arbitrary positions of power combined with executions in media associated with artmaking is insufficient to receive esteem as art. While much great art has an important connection to patronage, no one thinks the vanity holiday cards of the rich and powerful today are inherently valuable works of art; why should we worry about the early modern equivalents? If such diminishing makes room for sundry things like meaningful sports events, conceptually rich culinary developments, inventive local festivals, and meaningful street performances or creative philosophy lectures, so be it. This is not trivializing; it is celebrating and appreciating what is meaningful, enhancing what deserves recognition.

There is a related worry that arises, that if we explain creativity we domesticate it such that it loses its special character. If creativity is something completely explicable, and dependent on its sociocultural context to have the value of being creative, why doesn't this rob it of its "special" character? If by the same token art is to be explained as a subset of creativity, then wouldn't this suggest art is not special as well? David Hume's compatibilist free will account provides a model for how we can resolve the issues raised with creativity as special. In the problem of free will and determinism, we might reasonably conclude that a deterministic universe renders us incapable of free will, if that means a radical ability to zig when all relevant forces ought to lead us to zag. We can solve that problem by changing what we mean by 'free will', and lowering the bar to qualifying as free in the process. We have a limited capacity of mind as humans, and our limited minds can accept the idea of free will, when we are outside of

our study. This I think provides a helpful corollary with creativity as special. Creativity in its more extravagant, magical *ex nihilo* sense may not be strictly speaking possible in an absolute metaphysical sense. But with our limited epistemic vision, creativity can be understood in this 'good enough' sense. And that's in my opinion just that, good enough. So, a compatibilist sense of creativity is possible, and tends to match up with how a given linguistic community uses the word 'creative'. By the same token, 'art' may not have the metaphysical chutzpah or oomph to warrant an essentialist claim—even a wishy-washy one like Danto's—but we don't have to be essentialists about 'art' to do two important things: 1) recognize its social ontological reality; 2) see that there may be a deeper, possibly (likely?) vague thing referenced about human meaningful social creativity that serves a self-awareness function, an Ur-art.

Another way to satisfactorily resolve this puzzle is to look at similar social constructions that are deeply meaningful. Race for example, is not a biological given. Rather, it is constructed via a sociohistorical understanding due to a confluence of various factors, primarily initiated by the colonial activities of Europeans, and the need to justify those and accompanying activities (slavery, genocide, cultural intolerance). This does not entail that race does not exist. Its ontology is social; race depends on the social understanding of its existence, and thus has meaningful existence, even when it does not have a basis as a natural kind such that it can be reduced to genetic information, for example. Creativity, and art with it, likewise can retain its special character and meaningfulness even if it is dependent upon a sociocultural basis for its existence

5.6 Challenge number five

A related concern to trivialization is due to the implications of relativism or nihilism suggested by the social nature of what constitutes an artwork. By relativism here, the worry would be that there's no ontological basis for artworks, such that everywhere one goes one is presented with potentially unfamiliar forms willy-nilly. On the surface, that sounds quite wonderful—rich cultural experiences that differ from place to place, each with its own creative and meaningful way of evaluating and presenting activities and objects valued by the culture. What's so bad about cultural relativism anyway? Some use turmeric, some use saffron. But the worry is deeper, that any claims about art lack any factual basis. One might worry that as art involves value, and expressly in my view creative value, that this opens up a concern of groundlessness. The suggestion is that art, and not merely conceptual art but all art, depends on a value claim, and that therefore there is no factual basis. Hilary Putnam's insight on the fact-value distinction is useful here. Putnam argues that any human enterprise is loaded with values, and so the dismissal of value's role in non-scientific, non-technological type scenarios, namely ethics and in our case art, is unfounded.¹⁸³ If all cultures have art, and creative value is at the basis of supporting the possibility of that activity, then there is to be expected some relativity between cultural expression. But just as Aristotle recognized that any human anywhere requires similar traits to live a flourishing life, on account of being human and thus a social creature with mortal needs, cultures can reasonably be expected to have deep similarity in the types of meaningfulness they engender in their cultural expression. That creative value is operative to

¹⁸³ Putnam 2002.

some extent in all thriving societies then becomes an anthropological fact, something that can be measured, studied, and theorized about. The view I've presented can be understood to be as essentialist as Danto's. Whereas Danto said that it is an essential part of the definition that there is an artworld that determines what that art consists of, I am arguing instead that art happens automatically within a flourishing human culture, whether there is any awareness or theorizing about it as 'art'. Calling it art introduces of course a framing narrative for whatever the work is, and that framing narrative itself can become the basis for further artmaking. But the essential aspect of human artmaking occurs with or without that step. This is the same as I've attempted to show as human ethics. Members of human societies intuit that causing unjustified grievous harms to one another is bad for business. Societies would perhaps not collapse without human artmaking, but I think it is clear that they would not thrive, particularly given my suggestion that artmaking and art experience provides opportunity for cultural self-awareness in service of a flourishing community.

A related cross-cultural concern is an age-old colonial issue: paternalistic cultural insensitivity. One of the great lessons of the colonial era is to be cognizant of projecting what are in fact arbitrary values and concepts on local cultures for whom those values concepts are foreign. The John Dewey critique I alluded to in Chapter Four embodies this issue. Dewey thought that one could understand another culture via its art. The basic spirit of this seems benign, but the practice is loaded with the assumption of what art is—in Dewey's case it would be the art of the European-based aesthetic traditions. Looking around the world then with the constraints that art must match up with traditional European art kinds would be an error then, as forms like painting, sculpture, and so on in their distinct Greenbergian definitive sense of

absolutes are not self-evident givens to which all cultures aspire in their artmaking. If European forms are absolute givens, then any deviation from those would amount to an error. We can correct this shortsightedness by recognizing that cultures develop their own modes of expression as relevant to the meaningfulness of that culture. This assumption of forms issue was of course a dimension of the critique levied against Lopes's buck passing theory in Chapter Two. The corrective as well helps support the positive view I've presented in Chapter Four.

A slightly more abstract way to put this concern frames it as a problem of whether the concept of art loses currency. In other words, how can we be certain that we can identify art in other cultures without deploying a concept that is already loaded with bias? Expanding the scope some, how can we make cross-cultural claims with any confidence? The structural anthropologists of the mid-20th Century came under just criticism for just this. In the case of the legitimacy of any cross-cultural claims, I have no argument, save that doing one's due diligence, following established method, and deferring to experts is always good practice. That said, I am willing to wager that in the picture of art I am suggesting, the view is actually a corrective to cross-cultural bias in that it defers to any given culture to self-identify its meaningful creative production. Instead of asking what 'art' is, in practice one would ask what activities and artifacts are celebrated for meaningful conceptual embodiment of cultural identity, specifically those that invite self-awareness in the culture and its individuals. Worry about what to call it later.

5.7 Challenge number six

It is a fair question to ask why I stipulate that art serves no obvious practical application while also saying it serves an essential cultural function. If there indeed was such an essential art function, why wouldn't such a function be obviously practical in the society in which it occurs? The key to my point here is that the practicality is not obvious. Hannah Arendt cites the "uselessness" of art, claiming that it is "strictly without any utility whatsoever".¹⁸⁴ I think this almost right, but not quite. The utility appears to lack and practical usefulness, yes, but this is on account of the non-obviousness of its special type of utility. The nature of art experience as metaphorical shrouds the utility somewhat by making less obvious what one gets out of it. Theorists have tried to locate some sort of utility in pleasure (Hume, Kant, Bell), emotion (Tolstoy), fascination with skill (Plato), but these are non-necessary side-effects to the primary function of art, which is the imaginative and creative opportunity toward cultural self-awareness, the invitation for the community to immerse in what the artwork is about. Because of the nature of conceptual meaning in artworks, functioning as it does like the subtext in humor, its utility is never presented clearly and can only be seen by asking what value artworks bring to those who make and experience them.

I believe it is clear that it is indeed deeply practical for the wellbeing of a society to creatively moderate and modulate that society. I have understood it here that this is Aristotle's point about the role of katharsis-as-calibration of a society, a creative self-reflection and realigning of the culture in relation to its ideals. (Not all art is obviously kathartic, I should add; individual works may only offer a glimpse to the kathartic possibility, a compelling fragment.)

¹⁸⁴ Arendt 2002, Pg. 167.

But the practical nature of art is nonobvious due to the autonomous character art has. Art is a cultural space in which the conceptual is engineered, so to speak, not the immediate physical needs that are engineered in obviously practical ways to meet the needs of the era: viaducts, sewage treatment, barn-raising, 5G network infrastructure, maintaining a guardian class for the polis. Culture appears inessential when put alongside these brute needs, thus my claim that it is nonobviously practical. But without culture, how a people lives and potentially thrives at a given part of space-time, one might wonder what the purpose of the practical is.

Arendt did not see the non-obvious utility of art for two reasons: she associates the term 'utility' with the fabricating, cognitive, instrumental ends-aiming activities of science and technology (which would make the utility the Utilitarian moral philosophers have in mind somewhat mysterious, as it is the opinion nowadays that the utilitarian-consequentialist measure of 'utility' should be of the "good" created by an action, something non-obvious yet still), and as she separates thought and cognition, utility appears to not occur for her in the realm of thought; and secondly, she sees the meaning of thought as the aforementioned "unanswerable riddle"; thought remaining a riddle suggests it is unsolvable, but riddles are for solving, and I am frankly aiming to do just that with the discussion of metaphorical truth.

Not to stray too far into speculation (if I haven't already), but I will proffer a possible, and perhaps reasonable to others, explanation of the non-obvious practical usefulness by way of analogy. I think that part of the exploratory and salutary effects of art is in the characteristic of being nonobvious in an analogous way to psychotherapy. It has been claimed that part of the efficacy of psychoanalysis is in the patient coming to realize on their own what has been externalized, typically in discussion with a therapist. Part of the thinking here is that the patient

cannot simply be told what the trouble is, but must come to that realization themselves in order for the therapy to be successful. This then makes for a salubrious sort of enlightenment that accompanies self-awareness. A similar situation exists between the student of Zen and the Master working through koans. Realization cannot be prescribed, only drawn out via experience. These interactions strike me as useful guides to what happens with cultures on the whole in terms of how art functions. Education and public service announcements are more direct in their delivery, and serve an obvious practical epistemic function, for the members of the society to learn important things. The metaphorical nature of art allows it to be, when the art is good, a potential wellspring of meditative introspection, and potentially transformative when it is great. Art then can help a culture likewise come to an understanding about itself, allowing it to evolve in relation to the new understandings each generation's creative work potentially brings.

Another psychological point of contact circles back to R. Keith Sawyer's treatment of the "myths of creativity". Sawyer discusses ten common beliefs about creative activity that people in the west typically hold. These beliefs, such as people are more creative when alone or that mental illness is corrected with creativity, are focused on the independence of creative individuals, a thoroughly domesticated view in western culture, such that it seems common sense that the lone creative individual has a touch of magic or something different about them than the people of their time. Often have a kernel of truth in them, but on the whole most of them are shown by the relevant social science research to be undersupported by the relevant evidence and arguments. Only one of the beliefs turns out to be true in Sawyer's presentation, that of creative activity being a life-affirming process with positive psychological results

(wellbeing, confidence and a sense of self, plus a meaningful sense of place in society and the universe). The others sustain a myth of the isolated creative individual touched by some spark, a belief cherished by the western tradition, but not borne out by the research.¹⁸⁵

I find it very reasonable to take the structure of Sawyer's discussion to suggest two important facts: One, that creativity is deeply intertwined with one's creative social milieu, just as discussed by Gauthier and Baudelaire, such that creativity is best understood as a social function. And two, that the healthy, life-affirming mindful effects of creative activity can be generalized to the health, wellbeing, and self-awareness of a culture. In effect, these two points point in turn to the idea that cultures have an operative function, some sort of innate discourse, by which they healthfully express identity and come to assess the tenets and presentation of that identity. Now, this is of course a generalization. Cultures are only psychological by metaphor. This is not some sort of hive mind. But the evidence that sociological attunement occurs in groups working rhythmically together, and unconsciously so, is strong.

An interesting aspect of error theories is that while people may be in vast error, there may be yet still a certain justifiable appropriateness about their behavior and beliefs. Assume God does not exist, for example. Many people of religious faiths on our planet are therefore in drastic error. Yet there is a certain meaningful function these sort of expressive belief systems provide. This may be psychological, sociological, epistemic, I certainly don't know myself. But the meaningfulness comes apart from the question of the fact of the matter. It may well not matter much if God exists or not. Faith does not require proof or truth. Similarly, if art does not

¹⁸⁵ See Sawyer 2012 for an extensive look at the myths of creativity.

have any metaphysically verifiable status, this does not dash the enterprise. Art still has an important pride of place in the human tradition, whether or not that term picks out a clear set of exemplary existing objects. The culture's beliefs can be sustained for purposes other than verifiable truth conditions. And they need not be coherent. The human society, like the human mind, can maintain contradictory beliefs. When these contradictions are made salient, tumult may ensue. Without getting into any psychological specifics, it's clear that for the individual, mental health can involve avoiding these contradictions. If one holds a racist belief that contradicts other beliefs about the world, it might for that individual be a less contentious path to suppress this contradiction. However, coming to understand the contradictions one holds can also be a difficult path toward self-betterment for some individuals, with the possible benefit of increased well-being, however that may be accounted for in detail. Societies are similar in at least this respect: contradictory beliefs can circulate as part of the culture without being made salient. The culture may support certain beliefs via its institutions—schools, communications media, infrastructure, policy-determining entities, entertainment—as well as via its individual members who participate in the various cultural relations. The conflicting nature of the beliefs (such as valuing the concept of freedom while denying some members of a society fair opportunity to pursue such freedoms) can be suppressed so as to avoid sparking an unsettled state, such as by dominant communications media reinforcing a status quo in its messaging, while at the same avoiding the teasing out of the latent contradictions.

These the nature of latent contradictory concepts in a culture combines with the idea of metaphorical truth. This combination can go a long way in helping us understand how artmaking operates as a probing of a culture by the culture. Not all art functions in this way, but

the model of the avant-garde does capture an important aspect of all of the arts. When executions of art media are in fact art, and not just use of a medium associated with artmaking or other communications media that resemble art, the cultural function is to approach self-awareness, and in that process to expose, articulate, and explore the conceptual contradictions of the culture in relation to its understood identity.¹⁸⁶

5.8 Challenge number seven

The sociocultural conceptual view on offer is predicated on the assumption that all art does not require aesthetic explanation. One might reasonably wonder if this means that we should abandon centuries of aesthetics and ignore any aesthetic experience in art as some sort of trivial side effect. Beauty and sensory experience thrive in the context of art. When artists have experienced natural beauty or the sublime and have attempted to capture it using a range of technologies like language, dance, and painting, sculpture, music—these artists have created works that incorporate the meaningful human experience that is aesthetic. Aesthetic experience is important to our personal and cultural wellbeing. We are indeed creatures with the aesthetic capacity to respond to aesthetic stimuli, and this is not mere pleasure. Whether the experience results in truth or goodness, insight or wisdom, this is unclear. I suspect it does

¹⁸⁶ The avant-garde functions to explore contradictions in individual media and in the culture in which the particular avant-garde exists and operates. Not all art has characteristics of avant-garde activity. Avant-garde activity is explicitly revolutionary and experimental, and of course not all actions of an avant-garde are necessarily art. But all art involves the cultural self-reflection characteristic of an avant-garde: examinations of the ideals of the culture, its contradictions, and the examination of the cultural self-examination itself, a meta-reflective analysis as epitomized by metafiction-as-philosophy. These reflections and investigations can be in any media, and can involve local or more broadly human aspects of our experience.

have beneficial characteristics along those lines. But I'm not sure which or how or in what combination. What I am confident in saying is that aesthetic experience is a meaningful human experience, very likely just in itself, whether this is through nature, where it is abundant, or through human-made means. Aesthetic experience is neither sufficient nor necessary for art, but art can create opportunities for aesthetic experience, and aesthetic language is particularly useful for evaluating the artisanal craft that goes into much artmaking. A topic for further research is determining the relationship of aesthetic experience to meaningful experience. Danto has gone some way in showing a path here in his late work *The Abuse of Beauty: aesthetics and the concept of art*, in which he provides a clear role for beauty within contemporary art's focus on the conceptual. Danto is correct I think when he says that aesthetic experience is one possible mode of art's presentation, but not the exclusive mode.

The various classical theories of art include mimeticism (Plato), subjective pleasure (Hume), aesthetic pleasure or beauty (Kant), expression of feeling (Tolstoy), formalism (Bell, Fry, Greenberg), information (Goodman), and less influentially but a significant dialectical position, theories of truth revelation (Iris Murdoch, Heidegger). In the *Tittha Sutra* the Buddha famously used an analogy of multiple sightless men describing an elephant based on what they could feel from one part of the animal. One at the trunk describes a snake-like creature, at the foot a tree stump, the tail a rope, and so on, disagreeing contentiously about the animal's nature. It seems clear to me that whatever art may be, there is a similar situation going on with the various proffered theories. All of these approaches fail because they attempt to reduce art to one property, but this is a phantom. As established previously, artworks can make use of various modes of presentation: art can be aesthetic, expressive, pleasurable, and so on, but

need not be any of these in particular. This does not suggest that art cannot be explained, just that it has not been successfully reduced to a one-dimensional view—which in turn carries the reasonable implication that there may not be any one explanatory reductive property. However that may be settled, the individual property approaches are certainly of great utility in describing important and distinct positive aspects of artworks, and sometimes these explanations are mostly sufficient to explaining a work. Formalism for example is of great utility in explaining Jackson Pollock's all-over compositions, but that explanation leaves out an important additional dimension to these works, the performative "action" component.¹⁸⁷ It also leaves out an essential aspect of Pollock's intent: "I am nature." Similarly, Kantian aesthetic explanations may be of serviceable use when analyzing a Zen rock garden, explaining how we arrive at judgments of beauty, but this leaves out the key philosophic content of the Zen garden, its reference to impermanence and our place within nature; the aesthetic dimension misses what these gardens are 'about'. So, these theoretic approaches comprise an a la cart menu for explanation and interpretation of artworks.

We've now walked through a series of seven challenges, questions to which I have given answers—hopefully without raising too many more. I will now take the opportunity to reflect on the project as a whole along with its implications.

5.9 Beyond Art, but not how Lopes intends

¹⁸⁷ Greenberg and Rosenberg provide the classic dueling views here.

There is a way in which Lopes's title 'Beyond Art' does capture something important about the facts about art, but not how he intends it. I think I've demonstrated that we should not abandon a search for a successful theory of art. And I think I've sketched a promising avenue for doing so. So, no I don't think we need to go 'beyond art' in the sense Lopes has in mind. Rather, I see that there is a way in which we need to collectively think of art *beyond* art kinds and Eurocentric art traditions. Similarly, Danto's artworld and its sphere of influence is only a partial footprint, and a possibly mistaken one. Art as I've argued here is an essential part of human cultures. But it is an error to think art only occurs within certain kinds, traditions, or under the auspices of artworld experts. Some of what we think of as art based on it being of a certain medium or kind is not art at all. Some of what our traditions tells us about what is or is not art is on the view I've presented mistaken. A portrait is not necessarily art. It would be absurd to think so, no matter what medium it is constituted in. And to give an artworld *ex cathedra* powers is just to give too much credit and authority, even if mostly well-deserved.

There are works in the world that fulfill the cultural function of artworks. I have called these here 'Ur-artworks' to get at their foundational nature. The cultural function of artworks persists despite anyone calling the works 'art' or deploying the concept 'art'. The reasons that theory after theory have failed to successfully capture all artworks is complex, but not ineffable such that we have to abandon the quest altogether. Artmaking cannot be reduced to its media because those media are used for other things. Art cannot be reduced to technique or effect either, whether that be mimeticism, expression of emotions, feelings of pleasure, states of aesthetic beauty or sublimity, or reduced to the objects or actions that cause them. This is likewise because those human experiences, while they can indeed exist in art, exist well beyond

the ken of art as well. What constitutes art is the special cultural function these works and actions fulfill conceptually within the culture. This conceptual cultural function need only fulfill these criteria: creative, meaningful, opportunity for cultural self-awareness. [Not all creative works or activities are art, not all meaningful works nor all opportunities for cultural self-awareness are art either.

Fully understanding how conceptual art functions is key to understanding how art functions at all. In order for conceptual art to be art at all requires an understanding of its status. Danto was partially correct about this. For an everyday thought or action to be art requires it is understood or experienced in the right way, the way in which art is experienced as a relevant creative cultural experience. This conceptualizing by a community though can manifest in other ways than an artworld recognizes. Some works the artworld recognizes as works of conceptual art may on this view turn out to be simply not fulfill the art function I describe. This is perfectly acceptable. I do not intend all conceptual art (or any alleged conceptual artworks) to be the model of how art functions; only the possibility of conceptual art. Assume that some art in the world is conceptual art and rightfully considered so. Let such a work be Duchamp's *Fountain*. From that reasonable assumption, I have shown that all artworks fulfill the cultural function of art, a conceptual function. This function then does not depend on any of the various techniques, modes, materials, or traditions. It depends on the conceptual understanding of significant culture and relevant meaningfulness. What I have suggested then

is that there is a self-aware component that establishes that a work of culture is in fact a work of art.¹⁸⁸

If we think of the art kinds that Lopes suggests, and the works associated with those kinds, then it is easy to see how those are well within the traditional understanding of what art consists of. If we are including too the hard cases as constituting their own kind, as Lopes suggests, a sort of conceptual grab bag, then we have a clear picture of what the traditionalist and geneticist cover, both separately and together. Lopes should be congratulated on finding a path to meeting these intuitions. However, I believe my treatment of the even harder cases shows that there is art well beyond what we think we know. So, I suggest then a different kind of ‘beyond art’--a literal going beyond what we have established via tradition as art, out of the footprint of the artworld, its institutions and its traditions. These are works that be art given a different context of attribution, but fulfill the creative and meaningful cultural function that all artworks perform. The accidental and retroactive cases encountered earlier support this counterfactual aspect of what I have proposed. Moreover, the earlier analysis of art kinds and media I believe demonstrates that much of what commonsense takes to be art, simply based on it belonging to some established art kind, turns out to fall short of art. These executions in

¹⁸⁸ And let me repeat too that I think Weitz is correct that art is open-ended, but I disagree with the suggestion that we could not therefore arrive at a successful theory of art. Open-endedness due to the creative nature of artmaking need not entail we cannot have a theory of art. What is open-ended is the modes in which the cultural function that artworks fulfill are conceptually expressed. By taking the vantage point of the conceptual work of art we can see that anything is the stuff of artmaking. That is one of the great lessons of Danto. Where Danto falls short is that it does not matter whether we know it’s art or not. The creative open-endedness Weitz identifies is due to the creative nature of artmaking, just as he says. This does not threaten whether or not the art is art, unless we are mistakenly trying to tie artmaking to its media and established forms. As long as go ‘beyond art’ so to speak—that is, beyond the traditionalist conception and the geneticist conception that have characterized philosophic thinking about art over the past few centuries—then we can avoid the traps those views encounter. We also avoid having to take a misguided buck passing approach either.

media associated with art fail to be art themselves because they are merely works in some kind, and fail to perform the cultural function of an artwork, its contribution of conceptual meaningfulness.

5.10 Summary of contribution, implications, and future work

At the end of the movie *Mahattan*, Woody Allen's character (yes, that Woody allen) makes a list of the great things in life. There may well be a subjective component to what sort of lists each of us might make in terms of what art is. Some aspects of art appreciation are subjective, as art experience as Hume recognized, involves subjective experience. But as Kant recognized, there is a way in which when we point to a great experience we anticipate that those to whom we are pointing it out to ought to likewise respond similarly, at least given similar enough conditions—those within our community, which may not be limited in space of time, but perhaps by interest and identity. Kant thought art experience was a social experience and ultimately not merely a subjective experience. I agree. What I have attempted to do in this work is to provide an objective account of what art is, mainly, due to Lopes, because I am not willing to give up on the possibility of a theory of art.

I have in the course of this project now answered the questions that were established in Chapter Two. Here is a quick cheat sheet to the substance of those replies.

What is the cultural function of an artwork?

The cultural function of the artwork is to bring a community to cultural self-awareness, awareness of their autonomy, their relationship to their ideals, their cultural identity.

What social relations are involved in art experience?

Danto was correct that there is a community of theorizing involved in the possibility of art. As creativity is a social phenomenon, both creating and the imaginative appreciation of what is created is inescapably social, with even our private mental experience importantly connected to the community.

What distinguishes art from entertainment?

Art and entertainment are ultimately distinguishable by the extent to which the work brings the opportunity for cultural self-awareness. Entertainment does not invite reflection, does not invite interpretation of metaphorical philosophical content. Distinctions made on the grounds of complexity or sophistication, or class and economic snobbery, are to be resisted—art can well be simple and social origin or price tag or means of consumption tells us nothing about a work's (or a person's) status or value (aside from financial and social, that is). More promising is the distinction being made on the grounds of creativity, metaphorical richness, and cultural self-awareness. Art requires these characteristics, and along with the role of autonomy that falls out of the ideological discussion, we can begin to see which entertainments ought to be considered art, and those works we have mistakenly classified as art previously that need to be recognized as mere entertainments. Art contributes to the wellbeing of a flourishing culture by virtue of its creative value, its richness of metaphorical content, and its autonomous function—both the work's autonomy from the practical functions of the culture and its opportunities for enriching the autonomy of the community's members.

What is an artist?

An artist then is part of a function of a culture, imaginatively creating opportunities for reflection. Singling out an individual artist is less useful or appropriate than common sense would suggest. The individual artist is a contributor, but draws the meaningfulness out of the social and creative relations that fix the individual to the community or communities to which she belongs, by means of which creative value operates.

How do art experiences relate to self-understanding?

Creatively engaging with the meaningfulness of an artwork is an enriching mental experience for individuals, psychologically beneficial, and contributes to the wellness of the community.

How does art say something that leads to rich interpretation?

Art is necessarily creative, and so gives opportunity for meaningful reflection on something new, interesting, and valuable. Art philosophizes using metaphor, thus giving the audience creative interpretive opportunity, imaginatively investigating meaningfulness, creating meaning within a deep sense of the present moment as

connected to the cultural context and the enquiries of philosophical thought, ranging from the epistemic, metaphysical, to concerns of human experience.

How does art rewards repeated experience?

Because of the nature of metaphorical truth, particularly valuable artworks are seemingly inexhaustible in the meaningful artistic experience they can provide. Technical mastery of and creative execution within the medium can also induce awe; any aesthetic content that is central to experiencing the work allows for aesthetic, and possibly sublime, experience—if done creatively, this outward expression of the core meaningfulness of the work remains engaging as well, as the audience remains in awe of the expression of the work.

Why is an artist an artist?

An artist is called on by the community to participate in its culture expression. Particularly valued individual traits are of course relevant, but creativity and artistic ability is something that is developed socially in relation to the skills needed to accomplish creative cultural self-reflection.

There you have it. What next? Assuming what I have presented is correct, there are to my mind two entailments: one is the cultural project of identifying those meaningful activities like the even harder cases that deserve our respect and attention, those Ur-works all around us. This has implications far afield from the philosophy of art. Looking at the various dimensions that the art and entertainment distinction might be made reveals that what we classify and often denigrate as entertainment in some cases ought to be recognized as art. This thus carries with it implications for reshuffling our evaluation of cultural activities.¹⁸⁹ The art market, radically inflated as it is, looks ever more dubious—some of it may not even be art after all. The cultural attention we give to established forms via private funding and government grants needs to be reevaluated. Arts education, which at the primary and secondary levels embodies Lopes's

¹⁸⁹ Not all of what we classify as entertainment is art, far from it. Art-like forms that limit autonomy by being ideologically flawed or closed are sometimes dangerous, sometimes benign, but they fail to kindle awareness in relation to cultural flourishing.

medium-siloing needs overhauling. The second entailment of this project is the further work in philosophy suggested. There are tasks to be tackled in the philosophy of creativity, most notably properly accounting for the sociocultural creativity approach. I have argued that it is correct based on my criticism of Boden and the work of Sawyer. However, it is underdeveloped in the philosophy literature. Then there is too the question of how meaningful creative art activity is conceptually shared as a group—how that is that katharsis-like experience works in detail. I've only provided sketches here. Answering how large groups of individuals become entrained concurrently around creative opportunity for self-awareness needs explaining. Social epistemology for example may well provide a useful example in how to think through a relevant approach.¹⁹⁰

So that's how the even harder cases help us understand that conceptual art is the most appropriate model for how art serves a cultural function; and that's how we show Lopes how a general theory of art is not only possible, but informative and viable. This conclusion seems

¹⁹⁰ While I am not explicitly endorsing a particular view in social epistemology, a look at the outlines of that debate is helpful in considering how the details of my view might be explored. Jennifer Lackey describes a key feature of the social epistemology debate as occurring between summativists and non-summativists. Summativists think that anything that occurs at the group level is a sum of its components, and thus explicable on those terms. The critique of summativism is in some part based on “divergence arguments”. On the social epistemic concern, the general drift of a divergence argument is that knowledge (or justification, etc.) can occur at the group level, but fail to occur within any individuals who compose that group. Lackey, Jennifer (ed.) (2014). *Essays in Collective Epistemology*. Oxford University Press. Pg.2. Alvin Goldman refers to the anti-summativist as an “anti-reductionist”, describing the view that credence at the group level does not reduce to the solitary individual. Goldman, Alvin. “The Need for Social Epistemology.” In Leiter, Brian (ed.) (2004). *The Future for Philosophy*. Oxford University Press. Alexander Bird has an anti-summativist view. Bird asks the ontological question “when does a collection of individuals form an entity that is more than just the mereological sum of its constituent persons”, when is it that that entity has knowledge, arguing that science is such an example of an entity that is greater than the sum of its parts and one that has knowledge. Bird argues that science is a social agent as a subject that possesses knowledge. If Bird is correct, then I think the point generalizes to include parallel points in creativity, and thus art. If the value in science is knowledge (and its practical extension within technology, healthcare, artifacts, actions, and engineering), then this corresponds to the value of creative actions—that they are seen as worthy, typically in the sense that they pose and solve problems. I take it that this anti-reduction argument corresponds instructively with the approach to understanding art I am presenting here. Bird 2014, Pg. 42. Schmitt 1994.

almost self-evident to me: it matches the phenomena of artmaking everywhere and it helps us resist the biases that rank order cultural activities by arbitrary value; it fits with current creativity research and respects the realities of market forces and art historical expertise; it is simple, testable, and creates understanding. Lopes might reject the whole approach on aesthetic grounds, but I think that's a major mistake. I think Aristotle would be on board though, and that's pretty good company. The Catholic Church made him something of an honorary Christian retroactively through the doctrine of virtuous paganism, and the Renaissance retroactively celebrated the Greek culture he wrote about as 'art'. In a certain sense then, I'm merely likewise recognizing that Aristotle was the first great theorist of conceptual art.

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