

## Trust and the Appreciation of Art

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### Abstract

Does trust play a significant role in the appreciation of art? If so, how does it operate? We argue that it does, and that the mechanics of trust operate both at a general and a particular level. After outlining the general notion of ‘art-trust’—the notion sketched is consistent with most notions of trust on the market—and considering certain objections to the model proposed, we consider specific examples to show in some detail that the experience of works of art, and the attribution of art-relevant properties or characterisations to works of art, very often involves the notion of trust; in such cases—perhaps most or even, implicitly, all—the question ‘Do I trust the artist (or art-maker)?’, is inescapable.

### 1: INTRODUCTION

Art is a social activity. Paradigmatically, artists present their work to audiences, and audiences engage works of art specifically as creations of certain artists. Art is often used to mediate and navigate complex social relations. This is to say that art typically involves, at least implicitly, how we relate to each other. Social relations in turn are mediated by trust. Recent work in the epistemology of testimony has taken trust to illuminate how people interact and gain knowledge from each other (for prime examples see Faulkner 2011 and Hawley 2019). In this paper, we render a similar analysis to art appreciation. This will provide a novel and enriched understanding of art as a social phenomenon.

Just as there is moral trust and testimonial trust, so too is there trust that is particularly relevant to art and art appreciation. In this paper, we will articulate and defend an account of just that trust that is relevant to art and art appreciation, which we call art-trust. We will rely on the reader’s general understanding of the terms ‘art appreciation’ and ‘art evaluation’, not define them. We will demonstrate that not only does art-trust fit comfortably within the standard way of formulating accounts of trust, but that it helps to make sense of certain intuitions concerning the evaluation and appreciation of popular and industrially-produced art, as well as those of more traditional art. Our plan for this paper is to begin with a basic account of trust, develop it into an account of art-trust, and demonstrate how it can be applied to artistic evaluation and appreciation. We begin by articulating our account of art-trust, and addressing *prima facie* concerns about the appropriateness of the account. The next section takes this account and shows how it may be applied in aesthetic evaluation and appreciation. We use this section to build towards an articulation of artistic clarity, which we take to be a notable way that trust influences a work’s artistic value. In the final section, we connect trust with aesthetic experience and show how this provides a further avenue for a work’s trustworthiness and its effect on the epistemology of aesthetic properties, and potentially on the status of aesthetic properties themselves.

We do not pretend to *prove* that it is indeed the language of trust—rather than the simpler language of belief, for example—that is the right way to characterise the sorts of examples we discuss. We think rather that thought through with care, the language of trust is the best way to make sense of such examples, that the language of trust is warranted or justified.

With a certain exception to be referred to in due course, our topic has not in general been written about; we recognise that we are perhaps pushing on an open door. Nevertheless, we think that once certain questions are posed—especially that of how specifically trust enters in to the appreciation of art—there are important non-trivial choices to be made, certain clarificatory tasks to be undertaken. The language of trust, made suitably precise, has a much wider range of application in art than one might initially suppose. Doing so, if we are not mistaken, will deepen and expand our philosophical understanding of the value of art. As we said at the outset, art is a social activity; our interest in the trust-dimension of art is ultimately an interest in human beings, in the normative structure in which we encounter one another.<sup>1</sup>

## **2: ESTABLISHING ART-TRUST**

This section provides a basic account of trust, and begins to connect trust to art practice. It will accomplish three things. First, it will offer a brief survey of accounts of trust and establish that the focus of this paper is normatively-loaded trust (sometimes called affective trust), as opposed to predictive trust (sometimes called mere reliance). Second, it will use the basic account of trust to scaffold the basic framework of art-trust which will be used through the rest of the paper. Third, and last, it will consider two initial objections.

### **2.1 Trust: The Basic Account**

Trust is standardly understood in terms of places: the truster (first place) trusts the trustee (second place) with respect to some domain (third place). Some trust is normatively-loaded. This normatively-loaded trust is usually understood in its breach: if the trustee fails to meet the truster's trust, then the truster might rightly feel betrayed or otherwise entitled to redress (Baier 1986: 235). Karen Jones (2017) suggests the truster's response of 'but I was counting on you!' In contrast, people sometimes talk about trusting inanimate objects, like a shelf or a computer. If a shelf were to collapse a feeling of disappointment might be apt, but being offended at the shelf for collapsing would be misplaced. This sort of trust gets referred to as predictive trust, or mere reliance. This paper is interested in normatively-loaded trust. Accordingly, when we refer to trust it is always this normatively-loaded kind. We refer to predictive trust as mere reliance.

There are a number of definitions of trust on the market. We remain neutral in this paper, and what we argue should fit with all major accounts of trust. Philosophical accounts of trust tend to have three main criteria, and we use them to guide the analysis that follows.

1. *Regard*: Trust is a way that the truster regards the trustee. Some accounts take this regard to be a belief; others take it to be some other attitude.
2. *Reliance*: Most accounts hold that for the truster to rely on the trustee is for the truster to regard the trustee's intentions in some optimistic way. Jones (1996: 6) suggests the truster is optimistic as to the trustee's good will, whereas Russell Hardin (2002: 1) holds that the truster regards the trustee as having encapsulated the truster's interests into her own. An alternate understanding is provided by Katherine Hawley (2019: 9), where reliance involves acting as if the trustee will meet some commitment.
3. *Normativity*: This is the criterion that takes trust above mere reliance by including something which gives trust normative weight. This is often a kind of reflexivity condition where the truster's reliance provides the trustee with a direct and compelling (but not indefeasible) reason to meet that reliance (Jones 2012). In

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<sup>1</sup> Comments from an anonymous reviewer motivated this paragraph.

contrast, Hawley (2019) holds trust to involve the belief that the trustee has a commitment, and it is that commitment which lends the trust its normative weight.

## 2.2 Normativity in the Art Context

In art appreciation, the audience fills the role of the truster. The audience should be understood in the way that audiences are usually understood when discussing meaning and communication through reflexive intentions, which is as an appropriate audience. But we will sometimes refer to the work directly as a trustee, rather than the work's maker or its author. This is just for simplicity, when the nomenclature of trusting the work seems more natural, and when the distinction between work maker and author does not matter for the point at issue. The degree to which the normalized audience trusts the work is thus the degree to which it is appropriate to trust the work's author or maker with respect to the domain in which the work centrally figures.

## 2.3 The Art-Trust Framework

We refer to the trust that is relevant to art appreciation as art-trust. Articulating art-trust requires understanding what fills the three places of trust. For this paper we take the first place to be filled by the appreciating audience. The role of the trustee, in the second place, is filled by someone or some group who may have input into an artwork's creation (and need not be known to the truster, who may refer to trustee merely as 'The creator of this'). Depending on context this may be a work's author or merely someone with a hand in making it.<sup>2</sup> The phrasing that the second place is filled by someone who *may* have input is important. In section 3.4 we will show that it is possible for the trustworthiness of someone who was merely potentially involved in a work's creation is relevant to that work's appreciation. While a work's maker and its author may be the same person, they may also come apart. Accordingly, it is better to consider work-maker and author as different roles, and distinguish between the two as potential trustees.

There are many domains of art-trust. These domains may be as broad as trusting that some object is an intentionally-created work of art, or as narrow as trusting that a feature of a possibly-satirical work is underlain by a particular set of ethical convictions. One way of understanding domains sorts them into two general categories: competence-related domains and character-related domains. Competence-related domains simply have to do with the truster trusting the trustee to have the competence to successfully execute whatever the trustee is trying to do. Character-related domains are slightly more complicated. These have to do with trusting what the trustee is trying to do, or what the trustee is intending. An example may elucidate the contrast: in the film *Transformers 2: Revenge of the Fallen* we may trust that the image of Megan Fox poised sexually over a motorcycle is as it is supposed to be. Director Michael Bay attempted to create an image of Megan Fox poised sexually over a motorcycle and he succeeded. That is competence-related trust. It would be a separate question as to whether or not that image was meant to be subversive. One may (or, more likely, may not) trust that Bay intended to satirize the intersection of consumerism and the male gaze. The truster's trust concerns what Bay wanted to do, not whether Bay succeeded in doing what he wanted to do. The truster is trusting that Bay had the particular intention of being subversive. This is character-related trust.

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<sup>2</sup> The language of trust may also be invoked to describe the audience's attitude towards curators, art-lecturers, reviewers, and one's friends when talking about art; we leave these issues aside because we see this as trusting testimony, not as trusting the work; but see Nguyen, forthcoming (15f) for more.

The domain of art-trust may be specified in another way. Some trust has to do with the form of a work.<sup>3</sup> In this case the truster trusts that whatever a work is, it is what it is supposed to be. In addition to form-related trust is content-related trust. This is trust that is concerned with a work's content, often its meaning. The *Transformers* example tracks this distinction too. The trust that the image of Megan Fox poised sexually over a motorcycle is as it is supposed to be, concerns what the filmic image is. The trust over the satire that that image putatively conveys concerns that image's meaning.

This is an appropriate point at which to outline the main difference between our view of art-trust and a recent account given by C. Thi Nguyen (forthcoming). Nguyen (16) lists two other trust-domains—'aesthetic competence', which we can accept as aligning with our account, and one which he terms 'aesthetic steadfastness'—but by far the most importance for Nguyen is 'aesthetic sincerity' (his title is 'Trust and Sincerity in Art'). He claims that 'our greatest ire is often directed, not at the artist that makes bad art, but at the insincere artist—the sellout' (4); and that 'trust in aesthetic sincerity is particularly characteristic of contemporary aesthetic life'(19). We have three main objections to these claims, in ascending order of importance.

First, it is perhaps appropriate to trust in the sincerity, say, of a poet, maybe of a solo musician, but the idea becomes at best strained when we think of plays, operas, movies, and especially works of architecture; there is often no one we can rightly hold responsible to be sincere, even if in many cases it will be surprising to find that, for example, a certain actor was not sincere. Second, insisting on sincerity, although again it will be manifestly appropriate in some cases, assumes a certain romanticism, if not a naïve romanticism, about one's relation to the artist or art-maker.<sup>4</sup> Even if we restrict the claim with Nguyen to 'contemporary aesthetic life', one's attitude as a modern gallery-goer, concert-audience, visitor to works of architecture, or patron of the cinema, is in general much more sophisticated, more worldly, more forgiving and perhaps even cynical. One needn't feel betrayed if as it happens a production by Picasso or Tintoretto which passed all one's other aesthetic tests was in fact produced insincerely (whatever that would mean); or if the various architects responsible for St. Peter's were merely cunning. In such cases, the proof really is in the pudding, and one is quite prepared to overlook a good deal. Third, one can make distinctions of time and place. If one can think of Duchamp or Warhol, or of Cage and Berio,<sup>5</sup> of Verhoeven and Snyder, that is of artists of more or less our age who are sometimes wilfully *insincere*, one can also think of art outside the realms which invite the idea of the sole artist, which can in turn encourage the invocation of aesthetic sincerity. Our attitude towards pre-fifteenth century plastic art is one that is at peace with the thought that many of the works may well have been produced 'insincerely', for example by a workshop, and very much for pecuniary reasons; towards the architecture of the Mayans without dragging in the imagined artist for interrogation; towards recent art from all over the world without feeling vulnerable to betrayal if the motivation were a religious and indeed a practical one. The attitudes are *our* attitudes, part of the contemporary scene. We're by no means saying that a demand for sincerity is not a significant ingredient for some or even many works, and Nguyen does say explicitly that he is characterising only the 'typical' attitude, but the attitude

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<sup>3</sup> In this paragraph we refer to the form of a work and the content of the work. This distinction is merely meant to distinguish between the questions of what a work is and what it means, and we do not want to commit to a more thorough Formalist form-content distinction.

<sup>4</sup> In addition, Nguyen verges on an individualistic doctrine: that artists 'coordinate with each other in the larger scheme of things by taking up commitments to largely ignore each others' needs in daily practice. Artists cooperate by pledging to be independent'(forthcoming: 24).

<sup>5</sup> Nguyen says (forthcoming: 27): '... avant-garde artistic communities seem marked by much trust in aesthetic sincerity'. Again, if this is meant to apply to the avant-garde in general, then this seems to us to underestimate the capacity, in the case of the avant-garde mind, for flexibility, even for aesthetic immorality.

is not so typical of the ‘contemporary scene’ as Nguyen makes out, and the extent to which the invocation of trust is appropriate runs far beyond it.

If sincerity is too narrow as well as misrepresentative of the appropriate normative attitudes in many cases, is our view then that the appropriate normative attitudes are too general, multifaceted or abstract to be captured with single concept? No. As will emerge below, we think that this more sophisticated, flexible and worldly domain of art-trust can adequately be summarised as trust in artistic *clarity*. Our trust operates at a less personal level, at a level more squarely concerned with the art-object, and the operation of trust can affect the perceived aesthetic content of a work. We will say much more about this explicitly in section 3.5.

This, then, is the basic story about trust which we will apply through the rest of this paper. Art appreciation is, in part, guided by trust. The appreciating audience may trust either a work’s maker or its author. There are many domains for trust, but they may be sorted into two sets of two: competence-and-character related trust, and form-and-content related trust.

## 2.4 Prima Facie Problems

As articulated so far, art-trust has two problems that ought to be addressed. First there is the problem that trust, as standardly formulated, is about the trustee’s future action while art appreciation is standardly aimed at an already-completed work. Second there is the worry that trust, in valuing adherence to norms, will incorrectly disvalue norm-violating artworks. We treat the two challenges in turn.

Accounts of trust standardly present trust as concerned with how the trustee will act. For example, Hawley (2019: 9) frames trust as involving the belief that the trustee will meet her commitments, whereas Jones (1996: 4) requires that the trustee take the truster’s reliance as a direct reason to act as relied upon. Art-trust, by coming at the moment of appreciation, seems to come after the trustee has acted. The work is already complete. If the work is complete at the time of appreciation, then there is nothing left for the trustee to do when the audience comes to rely on them.

This worry may be answered straightforwardly on two counts. The first is that while trust is standardly framed as concerning future action, there is no cost to allow it to concern past action as well. Analogous cases may be found in both moral and testimonial trust. We may only cross a rope bridge because we trust that our friend has safely affixed the end of the rope on the other side of the crossing. Similarly, we may trust the words written by a 19<sup>th</sup>-Century testifier, even though she is long dead. The second way to address the worry is by recalling that art-trust is about a norm-governed practice. Even if a work-maker may not be trustworthy by meeting a specific, actually-existing person’s reliance, he may still be trustworthy by adhering to artworld norms. In this sense, the artist meets the audience’s reliance by creating a work that can be appreciated consonant with standard norms of art appreciation.

This appeal to norms of art appreciation segues to the second worry. An account of trust may appeal to norms as we have done, but art is frequently in the business of norm violations. Artists do, on occasion, look to startle, confuse, trick, and deceive audiences, and artworks are praised for these effects. If this makes a work less trustworthy, then it seems our account of artistic trust might wrongly penalize works for what should be aesthetic achievements.

There are two ways to address this worry. The first is that in the case of art, some norms are more relevant than others. A work that violates a lower-order commitment (such as with respect to genre convention) may still adhere to higher-order conventions (with respect to general aesthetic engagement). Accordingly, we can account for works that are better for their norm violations by holding that a work that violates a lower-order commitment in the

service of a higher-order commitment is good as a transgressive work precisely because the lower-order transgression serves the higher-order norm. For example, the film *Knives Out* violates the genre norm of detective stories by not having the detective as the protagonist. However, it adheres to higher order norms about a work being for the audience's enjoyment. This is all to say that many norm violations are not so significant as to substantially affect a work's trustworthiness. It might even be the case that norm violations are expected. A work of Avant-garde art, for example, might adhere to higher-order norms about Avant-garde art specifically by violating lower-order norms.<sup>6</sup>

The second and stronger response is simply that a work's being less trustworthy does not necessarily make it an aesthetically worse work. Art appreciation, at least in the sense that we are engaging it, is governed by artistic and not ethical norms (or at least: as well as ethical norms). This means that a betrayal of trust can be (artistically) good. Sometimes the artist really is trying to take advantage of the audience; we find that acceptable.

In this section we have articulated our basic account of art-trust, and addressed a pair of prima facie problems. The next section begins to apply and elaborate this account, focusing on examples drawn from film and literature. This section drives towards articulating the value of clarity, which we take to be the main way a work's trustworthiness affects its artistic value.

### **3: TRUST, THE INDUSTRIAL CONTEXT, AND CLARITY**

Thus far we have provided a basic account of art-trust. In this section we begin to elaborate that account in two ways. First we will apply our account to two basic questions of art appreciation: What is the work and what does it mean? This will help demonstrate how the account functions. Second, we will show how the account makes sense of works with multiple or ambiguous authors. In particular, we will show that the art-trust account is helpful for understanding certain aspects of industrially-produced works, like a weekly television show or a major studio movie. This section concludes with a point about the artistic value of clarity, which we take to be the main way that a work's trustworthiness is manifested in a work's artistic value.

#### **3.1 Basic Application: What Is the Work?**

Let us begin with how trust is relevant to art appreciation when what is in question is understanding what the work is. This is usually going to be trust that takes the work's maker (rather than its author) as the trustee, and artistic form as the domain. Trust of this sort concerns whether or not some object is (or is part of) an art object which is a possible subject for appreciation. If the object is not a work of art (or part of one), then it is inapt as a subject for appreciation.

Universal to definitions of art is that a work of art must, in some way, be intentionally created. This intentional creation may range from constructing an object from scratch to simply putting forward a found object for artistic appreciation. Accordingly, part of an audience engaging a work of art is trusting that the object before them has in fact been put forward as a candidate for appreciation. The trust inheres in the audience relying upon the artist to have created the work in front of them. Most of the time this is a simple affair. Works are presented in institutional contexts like museums or theatres where attention is clearly drawn to the object as a candidate for appreciation. However, there are more complicated cases where the role of trust is more relevant. Consider the two following cases.

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<sup>6</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

*Glove*: Someone drops their glove at the Museum of Modern Art. The audience cannot tell whether or not this is a work of art.

*Boom Mic*: In one scene in a film, the boom mic is clearly visible.

In both cases, there is ambiguity as to what is or is not a candidate for appreciation. The glove in *glove* may be nothing more than a glove, but it is also not impossible that it is a work of art. It is, after all, located in a museum of modern art. Accordingly, when the audience engages it as a potential work, the question they ask is whether or not it is intentionally presented as a candidate for appreciation. Engaging the glove as a work of art requires trusting that it was in fact put forward as a candidate for appreciation.<sup>7</sup>

Similar to *Glove*, *Boom Mic* interrogates whether part of an object is an intentional part of a work. Usually, a piece of technical equipment being visible in a film shot is an error. However, there are some film approaches such as that of Lars Von Trier's *Dogme 95* project which make a point of having low production values. In such a case, the visibility of the boom mic might not be a mistake, but rather an intentional feature of the film.

In both cases, such that the audience is trusting that what is in front of them is supposed to be a candidate for appreciation, the domain of trust is the work maker's competence. They are trusting that the work maker was able to successfully achieve whatever she was trying to accomplish.

### 3.2 Basic Application: What Does it Mean?

The art-trust account is also useful as an approach to work meaning. When applied to work meaning, art-trust takes the author as the trustee. Since most accounts of work-meaning in analytic philosophy make use of a Gricean-style framework this kind of trust will also take a character-centred domain, usually the author's intentions. This Gricean framework is, roughly, that works of art possess non-natural meaning which is encoded or otherwise embodied in the work and retrieved by the audience through a process of reflexive intentions.

Analytic philosophy offers a range of approaches to work-meaning and author's intentions. These approaches may be thought of as ranging from strong forms of intentionalism, which take the meaning of a work to be what the actual author intended, to forms of anti-intentionalism which hold that meaning is just what the audience reconstructs, with approaches in between which make use of implied or hypothetical authors. We think that with a certain exception which we will come to shortly, the account can be adapted to these alternatives. We address each in turn, and show for each what fills the roll of trustee in our account of art-trust.

Strong intentionalist accounts that make use of real authors may be accounted for straightforwardly. The trustee is the real person who is the author, and the domain of trust is their intentions. The audience trusts the author such that they appreciate a work of art on the basis of the author having particular meaning-relevant intentions. This is not about whether an action is intentional, but what the intention is. Consider Zack Snyder's *Man of Steel*. If one is to interpret the work as allegorizing Superman to Jesus Christ, part of what is necessary is to trust that Snyder intended for Superman to be a Christ allegory.

Not all intentionalist accounts of work meaning make use of the real author. Some use inference to attribute intentions to a fictional author. In these cases, it must be explained how art-trust works without the trustee actually existing. We argue that the approach of trust still holds. While the audience does not attribute intentions to an actual person, they may still rely upon the fictional author. In the Hawleyian sense of rely, this is straightforward: the audience

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<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that *Glove* actually did take place; it was merely a dropped glove. The gallery audience kept a respectful distance from the glove, but mostly did not stop to appreciate it. They did not trust that the glove was intentionally put forward as a candidate for appreciation but were uncertain.

appreciates the work on the belief that the fictional author has the relevant meaning-making intentions. In Jones' attitudinal sense of 'reliance' the process is also straightforward. The attitude is simply directed towards the fictional author, rather than a real one.

Anti-intentionalist approaches supply a slightly stronger challenge. Under anti-intentionalist approaches there may be no author, real or fictional, to whom intentions may be attributed. If the intentions are the relevant domain of trust, as we have suggested, then there is no trust to be had. We suggest that in this case, the proper domain of trust is whatever inputs are necessary to create meaning in a work, and the proper trustee is whatever the source of those inputs may be. Consider again the *Man of Steel* example. The audience may justify the Superman-as-Christ allegory by appealing to the fact that the film was produced in a Christian society which has a prominent story about a chosen son being sent to earth to sacrifice himself for their moral benefit. Accordingly, the audience may trust that the Christological elements of the story reflect the Christian society.

It may be countered that this sort of trust is at best reliance and cannot be normatively-loaded trust. The outputs of society can only be understood mechanistically and whatever broad, abstract process connects the Christian values of society to the Christological themes of the film cannot be appropriately motivated or committed in the way that normatively-loaded trust requires. We believe we can accept this point at little cost. It may be that in the particular context of anti-intentionalist interpretation of work-meaning, the interpretive process does not make use of normatively-loaded trust. Since this is still a trust-like process, and since the rest of our analysis of art-trust is unaffected, we believe we can accede and continue. We add that if radical anti-intentionalism is being contemplated—such as views associated with Barthes (1978a, 1978b) or Derrida (1978)—then evidently the view cannot be made consistent with our view of art and trust; we find that to be an acceptable implication.

### 3.3 A Finer Point About Intentions

We have so far talked about competence-centred trust and character-centred trust separately. However, they can intersect in an interesting way. Specifically, it is possible for the audience to trust the competence of the author's intentions. Return to the *Transformers 2* example. The audience may rightly interpret Bay to be intending a subversive point about the male gaze. However, the audience may also worry that Bay's conception of femaleness or femininity is such that Bay fails to have the work express that subversive point. In this sense, he is incompetent in his intentions: he has failed in his attempt to intend an anti-sexist point.

This sort of trust is particularly relevant in cases of ethically dubious humour (Abrahams 2020).<sup>8</sup> There is humour that stands or falls based on the attitudes it manifests towards marginalized groups. Some humour putatively manifests a positive attitude towards its marginalized targets. However, the humourist may have a negative conception of the marginalized group in question. Consider a Jewish joke that trades heavily on anti-Semitic caricatures. The audience may trust that the humourist intends well towards Jews, but they may distrust how the humourist thinks of Jews generally. They may worry that the humourist believes the anti-Semitic caricatures employed are accurate. The ethical content of the humour is dubious: its goodness and badness are under doubt. In such a case, the humour is ethically dubious, at least in part, because the audience cannot fully trust the competence of

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<sup>8</sup> Abrahams situates his account in the ethical evaluation of humour theories from Carroll (2014a, 2014b), Smuts (2007, 2009, 2010), and Gaut (1998). While accounts of evaluating humour are not necessarily identical to accounts of evaluating art, Carroll's moderate moralism and Gaut's ethicism hold the same structure as their arguments for the ethical evaluation of art in general (Carroll, 1996; Gaut, 2007). Accordingly, Abrahams' account of ethically dubious humour is relevant to the evaluation of art in general.



the humourist's intentions. Insofar as works of art contain representations of marginalized groups, this argument applies to art as it does to humour.

### 3.4 More Trustees and Known Unknowns

So far we have discussed trust with a singular trustee. However, the production of art works need not have only one work maker, or only one author. Especially at industrial scale, the process of assembling a work of art may require that work to pass through many hands. Similarly, a work may have multiple authors if the work permits multiple authorship.<sup>9</sup> This does not pose a challenge to art-trust — there is nothing special about differently trusting different individuals in a group, nor about trust directed at groups — but it does identify something interesting about trustworthiness in art-trust.

Art works produced in an industrial context may include the input of all sorts of people, including those who do not occupy what are conventionally thought of as artistic roles. Consider the studio head in the film *For Your Consideration*, who changes the fictional film *Home for Purim* to *Home for Thanksgiving* because Thanksgiving holds more universal appeal. As this example also suggests, decisions from managers are also much more likely to be motivated by non-artistic considerations, such as cost, marketing, and product placement. There are also inputs from organizations like the American military, who allow the use of military technology on the grounds that they approve how both that technology and the military more broadly is depicted. Whether or not there is any role that managers, patrons, and sponsors should have in the art-making process, the fact is that they are involved in the industrial art-making process. The ways in which they may be involved give them a particular place within our account of art-trust.

We want to draw attention to the financial considerations which animate managerial decisions, for this has direct effects on the ways in which art-trust comes into play. For industrially-produced art, these concerns are systemic. The production of, e.g., films are often approved on the basis of their profitability, and production houses make decisions based on maximizing that profitability. Pointedly, the role of managers who affect a work's production are generally obscure to the audience, and so these managers constitute a kind of known unknown. It may be understood that there are managers who may direct a work's production on economic grounds, but it is obscure who these people are and whether they have in fact intervened. This has two implications for art-trust. The first is that the trustworthiness of such managers is relevant even if they did not actually intervene in a work's production. To the extent that the appreciative process involves considering the candidate intentions behind a work — both whether some feature of that work is intentional and what the making intentions were — the managers' intentions must be considered. The second implication is that the industrial process forms a pall hanging over the trustworthiness of all works which that process produces. The managers and their conventionally non-artistic concerns are inextricable from the industrial process. Such that the merely potential input of managers is relevant to the appreciation of industrially-produced works, the appreciation of all industrially-produced works will be affected by managers' trustworthiness.

Notice that the demand of trustworthiness is indeed, in the ways outlined, a demand not to 'sell-out' in Nguyen's sense but it is not, positively speaking, simply a demand for sincerity. That may be involved, but many other aesthetically-relevant properties may also be involved, such as commitment to the film, respect for the actors and audience, belief and respect for the genre of the film; and more generally and fundamentally, the overarching clarity of the film. Which is our next topic.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, see Gaut (1997) on how film cannot be understood without appealing to multiple authorship.

### 3.5 Clarity as the Focus of Trustworthiness

If trust and trustworthiness is as much a part of artistic appreciation as our account suggests, then there should be some way to account for it in appraisals of artistic value. However, straightforwardly evaluating a work as better for being trustworthy seems inapt; ‘trust’ does not intuitively fit on a list of Sibleyan evaluative terms next to ‘unified’ or ‘dynamic.’

We spoke earlier of various domains of art-trust. But there is, we submit, an overarching value that knits these other domains together: We suggest that a work’s trustworthiness in general is positively correlated with its degree of clarity—where a work’s clarity may require a great deal of time, effort and hard-won skill to be revealed to a spectator. (To revert to a basic distinction introduced above, clarity is obviously competence-related but is also character-related, for judgements of the clarity of a work are not without implications for other works by the artist, which in turn involves the artist’s character; we’ll take up this point below.) We can sensibly ask of each subsidiary domain ‘Why is this important?’, but it will tend to end the conversation if it is explained in answer that the work’s clarity is at stake. A work is clear insofar as its artistic features are—in principle—accessible by the audience, and are accessible in the appropriate way and to the appropriate degree as intended by the author or work-maker. Thus if one’s attitude is justifiably one of trust, one can justifiably expend extra effort in coming to terms with a work that initially seems unclear. A trustworthy work will usually be a clearer work, and a less trustworthy work will usually be less clear. It is not logically impossible that an untrustworthy work should be clear—a case of artistic luck, perhaps; nor that an unclear work should be trustworthy—a case where a master fails, perhaps; but we take it that such cases are anomalous.

A failure of trustworthiness on the part of the work may harm the work in either of two ways. The first is simply that a lack of trustworthiness on the part of the work renders engagement more difficult in general. The audience may be repelled from fully committing to the work because they have to second-guess what they are appreciating—and as will emerge in a moment, may tend to be repelled from committing to other works by the same maker or makers. The second is that cognitive value is harmed because the lack of trustworthiness obscures any point the work might be making. Returning again to the *Transformers 2* example with the sexualized image of Megan Fox, accepting a critical or anti-sexist point from the image of Megan Fox on a motorcycle is hindered if the audience cannot trust the artistically-relevant source to be making that point. In either case, the failure is normatively valenced, since the work demands time and energy and therefore incurs debt; one may rightly feel ripped-off, if only mildly.

If a work may be less clear and worse for being less trustworthy, then, given our account of trustworthiness and industrial production, industrially produced works face a penalty for being industrially produced. Industrially produced works are in general less trustworthy, and are therefore, in general, less clear. This may sound like a bold proclamation, but we believe it is already common to how much popular art is discussed. This is captured in the way that independently-produced works are valued over industrially-produced works, and the concerns over an artist ‘selling out.’

### 3.6 Unclear but Successful Works?

We have touched on this objection before—the ‘second worry’ of section 2.5—but now with clarity advanced as our *sine qua non* of art-trust we can consider a narrower point that may seem correspondingly sharper. Some works are purposefully unclear about their content, as when a horror film’s murkiness obscures the approaching killer. What might be called an ‘ambiguous’ work of art may be evaluatively clear by its being clear that it is supposed to be ambiguous, and it is supposed to be ambiguous to the degree that it is. Furthermore, many works—for example Beckett’s *Endgame*—merit very different interpretations, and not only

are none the worse for it, the aesthetic merit of such works seems to be *enhanced* by their multi-interpretability. One might go so far as to say that in these cases, it is the work's very lack of clarity that makes it into a masterpiece. Are these not counterexamples to our claim that aesthetic clarity is the over-arching domain of art-trust?

Two things. First—less significantly, and this is implicit in the two paragraphs closing the last section—there are many factors involved in the status of a work as a masterpiece. Failure on one measure, even an important one such as clarity, is consistent with its overall success (for example, the end of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony: many find it hollow, mocking, and others do not; but it is generally agreed that the Fifth is a great work). Second—more significantly—the intentions, perhaps the unconscious or implicit intentions, may be precisely to pose the questions that arise in the interpretation of the work. The ending of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony may again be cited. Beckett, insofar as he had determinate intentions in whatever sense, may have intended to ask questions rather than answer them. The clarity of *Endgame* lies at least partly in the force and urgency with which its questions are posed.

### **3.7 A Worry: Too Much Trust**

The story we have given of art-trust provides a large role for trust, and there is the worry that we have given trust too much of a role. The account we have provided, especially in sections 3.1 and 3.2, makes trust seem almost fundamental to the process of art appreciation. Trust being so fundamental to art appreciation, the worry may go, effectively adds an extra step to art appreciation and such an extra step is counterintuitive.

We believe this worry may be deflected easily enough. Trust plays a similarly fundamental role in some theories of testimony (Hinchman 2005, Faulkner 2011). We are confident that trust in art appreciation is no more burdensome than trust in common conversational exchange. Accordingly, to the extent that trust is plausible as an inescapable part of believing testimony, trust is also plausible as part of the process of art appreciation.

## **4. ART-TRUST AND THE APPRECIATION OF AESTHETIC QUALITIES**

For our final topic we shall examine more specifically the role of trust with respect to non-literary or non-narrative arts, taking examples from music and painting. The manner in which trust enters into the spectator's experience is we think enlightening and has further substantive implications.

Such arts primarily appeal to perception, but obviously trustworthiness is not a 'perceptually distinguishable' category in Walton's sense (1970: 337-339). The beliefs on which trust is in general based are not normally perceptual, and so it is with aesthetic trust. The way trust enters into the spectator's response is rather by influencing the response, which will in many cases influence one's beliefs founded on perception. Following Walton, the point comprises a Psychological Thesis and a Normative Thesis. The former is simply the point, adapted to our subject, that the experience of a work as having such-and-such aesthetic properties, will in point of fact depend on the extent that the spectator trusts the art-maker, whether explicitly or, what will typically be the case, implicitly (343). The latter is a corollary of Walton's more general claim that 'at least in some cases, it is *correct* to perceive a work in certain categories' (356; emphasis ours): The relevant category is nothing so sweeping as the Categories of Art which interest Walton, but simply the category where the artist did have those aptitudes and intentions which, when successfully realised, qualify him or her as bearing out the relevant type of trust. The latter is a truth-maker for the hypothesis, as it were, ventured under the former.

It follows that an aesthetic judgement as far as its psychological aspect vis-à-vis trust is concerned can in certain cases be fully justified—the attribution may be made based on

sound perception and on other sources of information about the work—yet the Normative aspect of trust fail. One is betrayed. This is interesting, but is not so upsetting to one's judgement in such a case because the trust dimension, should it fail, needn't be the be-all and end-all of aesthetic engagement with a work of art; one can be merely amused, or at worse chagrined, to find that one has been taken for a ride.

Nevertheless, the case of justified-but-non-veridical cases of aesthetic trust are, as we said, interesting. One important reason is that if it is true, as people such as Walton and Wollheim believe, that the experience of a work of art is typically not atomistic—that the fully justified experience of a single work of art always or often requires experience of other works of the artist's oeuvre—is that one requires trust (not moral trust, though that can enter in), and in particular aesthetic trust, which one grants to an artist in virtue of one's awareness of his or her other works, of the artist's (deserved) reputation, or both.<sup>10</sup>

Two examples will help, the first of a jazz solo. Sonny Rollins improvises a simple phrase, at the beginning of his solo. One is well-aware of Rollins' reputation. In another context, a very mediocre player who is known as such plays the exact same phrase, improvising on the same tune as Rollins was. In the Rollins case, one justifiably expects that Rollins will go on to use the phrase in the construction of a solo that is coherent, inventive, and passionate. One sits up in one's seat. Not so of the mediocre player's notes; it will typically lead, as one knows only too well, only to another derivative, indecisive and shapeless solo. Unlike the case of the mediocre player, one 'has confidence' in Rollins' abilities, one places trust in them—where the attitude is not merely belief, for one has something riding on it: One finds it worthwhile to invest one's attention, indeed is willing to risk one's reputation as a listener (if that is not too grand a characterisation), because one trusts. The situation does not change categorically if, in a one-in-a-million chance occurrence, the mediocre player keeps it up for the two minutes it takes him to play his solo. Perhaps he just got lucky, but the solo he played was indistinguishable from a solo by Rollins. Our hunch is that the continued feeling of guardedness, which it would be natural for a clued-in spectator to feel, would be justified. The mediocre player's solo, as good as it was—and as clear as it was—and one's experience of the solo, suffers from its not being fully trustworthy. Indeed one's experience of *just that phrase* can justifiably be different, for some reasons.

The same sort of thing happens with the plastic arts. Take the Danto-esque situation of two perceptually indistinguishable paintings, one by Paul Klee and the other by some execrable daubist (Danto 1964). One's knowledge that the piece is by Klee will encourage one to dwell upon the painting, looking for subtle virtues such as harmony and balance. If one knows that the piece is by the daubist, that it is a random high point in an otherwise eminently forgettable output, one would be justified in passing it over comparatively quickly. One trusts Klee, but not the other. The point is not immediately that the two pictures have different aesthetic properties (although perhaps they do; see just above and immediately below), but that the degree of trust plays a legitimate motivational role in the aesthetic experience of the two pictures. And again, the language of belief does not suffice, as a gallery-goer's time and energy must factor in.

At least one of us is inclined to accept that the right attribution of artistic value and that of aesthetic properties are indeed holistic. The stopped-clock achievement of the mediocre tenor and of the execrable daubist has in fact less aesthetic value than Rollins' solo or Klee's portrait, and the aesthetic properties differ correspondingly. It is partly because of the operation of trust as just described, and partly because certain expressive properties are

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<sup>10</sup> Nguyen (forthcoming: 7) is good on this: 'Trust can provide reasons for us to get past the apparent surface valuelessness or incomprehensibility of a work'.

such that one simply cannot be justified in their attribution without seeing similar phenomena in other examples from a given artist's output (Wollheim has made a meticulous case for this in extended discussions of Manet and Ingres in his 1987: 232-43, 249-75).

But as indicated two paragraphs ago we are not here assuming holism of this kind. Nor are we asserting that aesthetic trust is always necessary or sufficient for a defensible or 'correct' experience of a given work. We are not saying that aesthetic trustworthiness is itself an aesthetic property. What we are saying is that the dynamics of trust—perhaps merely implicitly—typically, if not in every case, plays an indispensable role in justifying one's confidence in the attribution of aesthetic properties and aesthetic value. If one cannot trust, then one might well have other ways of justifying one's experience. Yet where it is forthcoming, trust legitimately assists one in having a justified aesthetic experience of the work of art. We take the Psychological Thesis to be simple and intuitive, and established. As a Normative Thesis, as a thesis about the justification of the attribution of aesthetic properties and value to works of art, the thesis is that trust can legitimately be appealed to for such attributions.

## 5. CONCLUSION

We have provided a novel account of art appreciation, where the understanding and enjoyment of a work of art is mediated by the attitude of trust. Trust may be directed towards either a work's maker or its author, and may concern what a work of art is, what it means, what is the competence of its maker, or what is the character of its author. Accepting that trust may be involved in art appreciation in this way helps elucidate intuitions for example about valuing a work's clarity, the effects of industrial production on artistic meaning and value, and worries about selling out.

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