

The Buck Passing Theory of Art

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Abstract: In *Beyond Art* (2014), Dominic Lopes proposed a new theory of art, the buck passing theory. Rather than attempting to define art in terms of exhibited or genetic features shared by all artworks, Lopes passes the buck to theories of individual arts. He proposes that we seek theories of music, painting, poetry, and other arts. Once we have these theories, we know everything there is to know about the theory of art. This essay presents two challenges to the theory. First, this essay argues that Lopes is wrong in supposing that theories of arts were developed to deal with the 'hard cases' – developments such as Duchamp's readymades and conceptual art. This is a problem since Lopes holds that the buck passing theory's capacity to deal with the hard cases is one of its virtues. Second, this essay argues that the buck passing theory has no account of which activities are arts and no account of what makes some activity an art.

Keywords: aesthetics definitions of art, buck passing theory of art, Dominic Lopes, philosophy of art, theories of art.

1. Introduction

Challenged to define art, philosophers have typically adopted one of two general strategies. Those who adopt what Dominic Lopes (2014) calls the "traditional stance" identify some exhibited feature that all works of art share. Advocates of the 'genetic stance' define art in terms of a distinctive genesis that artworks share. Both the traditional stance and the genetic stance have something in common. They begin by defining art in general. Only then do they go on to define the individual arts, such as music, painting and literature. Recently, Lopes has proposed a striking and original alternative approach to the definition of art. Instead of attempting to define art (or develop a theory of arts), he proposes that the buck be passed to theories of the individual arts. On his view, philosophers should aim to provide theories of music, painting, sculpture, dance, and so on. Something is a work of art if it is classified as such by a theory of some art. Lopes' proposal deserves careful attention, but there are reasons to doubt that he has succeeded in passing the buck to theories of the arts.

As Lopes understands it, a buck stopping theory of art completes this schema:

x is a work of art = x is...

or this schema:

x is a work of art iff x is...

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Traditionally, buck-stopping theories replaced the ellipsis with “imitates *belle nature*” (Batteux 1746/2015), “has significant form,” (Bell 1914/1961) “communicates emotion from an artist to an audience” (Tolstoy 1899) or some other exhibited feature shared by artworks. More recently, genetic theories have replaced the ellipsis by something like “has been enfranchised by an art theory,” (Danto 1986) “has been produced for presentation to an artworld public” (Dickie 1984) or some other genetic feature that artworks share. Lopes, on the other hand, thinks that the schema should be completed in these terms:

x is a work of art = x is a work of K , where K is an art.

On this view, the responsibility for coming up with a theory of art is passed to the theories of the arts. So, for example, if x is a work of music, and music is an art, then x is a work of art. A theory of music will determine what a work of music is. Once we know what the K s are and know the theories of each K , we know everything there is to know about a theory of arts.

The candidates for K s are what Lopes calls ‘appreciative kinds.’ Appreciative kinds include arts such as music and activities such as flower arranging, ice dance, dog breeding and so on. A challenge for Lopes, as we shall see, is to determine which appreciative kinds are arts.

2. Lopes’ Desiderata

Before we can begin to evaluate the buck passing theory, we need to have an idea of the desiderata that a satisfactory theory of art will satisfy. In making the case for the buck-passing theory, Lopes states four desiderata for any good theory of art. For a start, the theory must be viable. Next, the theory should be systematically informative. It must ground empirical research in the arts. Finally, it must deal with the hard cases. In Lopes’ view, the buck passing theory of art satisfies these desiderata better than any buck stopping theory.

One can take issue with Lopes’ position in two ways. One can differ with him in his assessment of the degree to which the buck passing and buck stopping theories meet his desiderata. Alternatively one can argue that Lopes has chosen desiderata that wrongly favour a buck passing theory. Here I will accept Lopes’ desiderata but question whether the buck passing theory satisfies them better than buck stopping theories. Before undertaking this task, I will say a few words about each desideratum.

When Lopes says that a theory of art must be viable, he means that it must be able to withstand two objections. The first is the coffee mug objection: Suppose that ceramics is an art. Even if it is, intuitively a mundane coffee mug bought at Walmart is not a work of art. A theory of art must be able to explain why this coffee mug is not an artwork while a piece of fine Imari porcelain is. The second is the free agent objection. It seems that there are works of art, such as Robert Barry’s *Inert Gas Series*, which consisted in releasing inert gasses into the atmosphere,

which are not works of some *K*. For every work of art, including *Inert Gas Series*, Lopes must identify a *K* to which it belongs.

The second desideratum is being systematically informative. That is, a theory of art should yield an account of the individual arts. Such an account completes this schema:

K is an art = *K* is...

That is, ideally a theory of art will indicate what makes some *K* an art kind. Usually, a theory has been thought to satisfy this desideratum when it explains what the *K*s have in common.

Next a theory of the arts should ground empirical art studies. That is, it should pick out the works of music for musicologists, identify the works of painting for historians of painting, and so on.

Finally, a theory of the arts should assist us in dealing with the hard cases. By the hard cases, Lopes means those works of art, created since the beginning of the twentieth century, that have challenged traditional conceptions of the arts. They include *Inert Gas Series*, Duchamp's *Fountain*, Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*, Chris Burden's *Shoot* and so on. A good theory will resolve the question of whether or not they are artworks.

The buck passing theory does well when measured against two of Lopes' desiderata. I grant that Lopes' buck passing theory is viable. That is, he has good responses to the coffee mug and free agent objections. To the free agent objection the response is that conceptual art is a *K* and the supposed free agents (*Inert Gas Series* and so on) belong to this kind. The medium of works of this kind is something like language or ideas. The response to the coffee mug objection is more complex. In essence, Lopes argues that being a work in some medium is not a sufficient condition of being a work of art in that medium. He writes that, "Works in an art are not merely works in an associated medium. They are works that exploit a medium in order to realize artistic properties and values." (Lopes 2014, 144) Works of art have an associated 'appreciative practice' lacked by non-artworks. The coffee mug, since it has no associated appreciative practice, is not a work of art. I also grant that the buck passing theory is able to ground empirical art studies. Indeed, it is here that we can expect this theory to be superior to buck stopping theories. This is because the buck passing theory grows out of theories of the individual arts and these theories grow out of empirical studies of the individual arts.

Having granted that Lopes can deal with the hard cases and can ground empirical studies of the arts, I will question whether Lopes is justified in placing as much emphasis on the hard cases as he does. Most importantly, there is reason to doubt that the buck passing theory is just as systematically informative as some buck stopping theories.

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3. The Hard Cases

When it comes to the hard cases, Lopes believes that the buck passing theory beats buck stopping theories hands down. Buck stopping theories have reached what Lopes calls a 'dialectical impasse.' Holders of the traditional stance are unwilling to accept that *Inert Gas Series*, for example, is an artwork. Advocates of the genetic stance disagree. Each stance is the product of conflicting intuitions and these intuitions establish conflicting criteria of theory choice. Only the buck passing theory, Lopes believes, establishes a way forward: pass the buck to a theory of conceptual art. (Of course, we then need some reason to believe that conceptual art is an art and people differ on this question.) Lopes takes the ability of the buck passing theory to cope with hard cases to be a reason to favour this approach. Unfortunately, it is not obvious that a capacity to deal with the hard cases is an important desideratum of a satisfactory theory of art and Lopes is aware of this. His theory faces what he calls "the objection from history." (Lopes 2014, 24)

Lopes recognizes that he needs to establish that theories of art emerged to deal with the hard cases: "The hypothesis is that, as a matter of historical fact, the hard cases spurred interest in theories of art." If the search for a theory of art is a long-standing enterprise, then the attempt to address the hard cases that emerged in the course of the twentieth century is an afterthought. The inability of a theory of art to deal with these hard cases would be "no great strike against it." (Lopes 2014, 24)

Unfortunately, Lopes is wrong about the history of theories of art. Paul Oskar Kristeller (1951, 1952) is the principal authority cited in favour of the claim that the question "What is art?" has not occupied philosophers for long. This is unfortunate, because the consensus that Kristeller is right about the history of aesthetics is rapidly unraveling (Halliwell 2002, Porter 2009, Young 2015). Reduced to its essentials, Kristeller's hypothesis states that nothing quite like the modern conception of the fine arts existed before the eighteenth century. In antiquity, the middle ages, the renaissance, and even into the eighteenth century, he believed, people had conceptions of poetry, painting, music, sculpture and dance. According to Kristeller, however, these arts were not grouped together as the fine arts until Batteux's *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle* (1746/2015).

Lopes goes on to put his own spin on Batteux. Lopes argues that Batteux was not interested in providing a theory of art. That is, Lopes holds that Batteux is not interested in completing the schema:

x is a work of art = x is....

Instead, Batteux is alleged to be interested in completing this schema:

K is an art = K is....

That is, he was supposedly interested in determining which of the arts is a fine art. Thus, according to Lopes, Batteux had a theory of the arts, not a theory of art. A

(buck stopping) theory of art would give an account of what art is by giving an account of what all of the arts have in common. A theory of arts would merely identify the arts and distinguish them from other activities. According to Lopes, only theories of the arts existed prior to the twentieth century. In fact, the search for a theory of art goes all the way back to antiquity.

Here the consequences of reliance on Kristeller come home to roost. Contrary to what Kristeller believed, the category of the imitative arts was well established in antiquity. Both Plato and Aristotle grouped together poetry, painting, music, sculpture and dance. These arts were clearly distinguished from other arts, such as rhetoric, agriculture, carpentry and so on. However, the ancients did not have a theory of art unless they had an account of what poetry, painting, and so on have in common. They did: these arts imitate and they are distinguished from the arts that provide for the necessities of life. Aristotle writes that, “epic and tragic poetry, as well as comedy and dithyramb (and most music for the pipe or lyre), are all, taken as a whole, kinds of mimesis [representation or imitation].” (Aristotle 1987, 32) In this context, Aristotle adds painting to the list of imitative arts and elsewhere he adds sculpture (Aristotle 1909, 49). Plato gives the same list of arts and agrees on their common feature: they imitate.

The ancient theory of art was well known to Batteux, who wrote that, his “position is not novel. It was ubiquitous in the ancient world. Aristotle began the *Poetics* by stating the principle that music, dance, poetry, and painting are imitative arts.” (Batteux 1746/2015, 8) Batteux also names Plato as a forbearer. It is easy to demonstrate that for at least two hundred years prior to Batteux there was widespread agreement about membership in the category of the fine arts: poetry, painting, music, sculpture and dance. Glareanus, Bartoli, Vasari (contrary to what Kristeller claims), Lodovico Castelvetro, Sidney, Marshall Smith, Pope, Charles Rollin, Toussaint Remond de Saint-Mard, Dubos (again contrary to what Kristeller claims) and many others broadly agreed on membership in the category of the fine arts from the sixteenth century on (Young 2015).

So we need to ask what Batteux was doing, if everyone already agreed on membership in the category of the fine arts. Batteux answers this question in the Preface to *The Fine Arts*. There he explains how he began by asking himself the question, ‘What is poetry?’ Although Batteux had an intuitive grasp of what constituted poetry, he was not content with this. He “wanted an exact definition.” (Batteux 1746/2015, lxxvii-lxxviii) Following Aristotle, Batteux concluded that poetry is essentially imitation. Batteux went on to explain how his search for an exact definition of poetry morphed into an effort to give a definition of the fine arts in general (the list of which he took for granted). He wanted to know what they all have in common. He concludes that the fine arts are essentially imitations of *belle nature*. If we want to know of any individual work whether it is a work of art, we need only ask whether it is an imitation of *belle nature*. In short, Batteux developed a theory of art.

Batteux was not the only eighteenth-century writer seeking a theory of art. Consider, for example, James Harris. At the outset of the Second of his *Three Treatises*, Harris writes that his design is “to treat of Music, Painting, and Poetry; to consider in what they *agree*, and in what they *differ*; and WHICH UPON THE WHOLE, IS MORE EXCELLENT THAN THE OTHER TWO.” (Harris 1744, 55) (Later Harris adds sculpture to the list of the fine arts.) Like Batteux he reaches the conclusion that “They *agree*, by being all MIMETIC or IMITATIVE.” (Harris 1744, 58) In addition, they contribute to the ‘elegance’ of life, unlike other arts that provide for necessities. The fine arts differ in that they employ different media.

It is important to Lopes’ case that no one seems to have presented counter-examples to Batteux’s theory. This is important because Lopes takes it as evidence that eighteenth-century authors were not interested in establishing, as a general principle, that a work of art is an imitation of *belle nature*. As evidence of this Lopes writes that it “is striking that nobody seemed to worry that paintings and sculptures of crucifixions and martyrdoms (or the horrible scenes of battle and despoliation in much epic poetry) are works of art that do not imitate beauty in nature.” (Lopes 2014, 32)

The trouble with this passage is that it depends on a mistranslation of Batteux’s term ‘*belle nature*.’ Literally, it means beautiful nature, but this translation is misleading. One of Batteux’s examples of the representation of *belle nature* is Molière’s *Misanthrope*:

When Molière wanted to represent misanthropy, he did not search Paris for an exemplar of which his play was an exact copy. This would only have been a history or a portrait. Half of his point would have been lost. Instead, he collected all of the characteristics of a bleak disposition that he was able to find in people and combined them with all characteristics of the same type that his imagination could produce (Batteux 1746/2015, 12).

This passage indicates that when Batteux talks of *belle nature* he does not necessarily refer to something beautiful. Rather, when Batteux spoke of *belle nature* he refers to archetypes or exemplars created by an artist. Consequently, representations of a crucifixion or a battle can be representations of *belle nature* in Batteux’s sense and they do not count as counter-examples to Batteux’s theory of art.

Worse still from Lopes’ perspective, Batteux spends a considerable amount of time refuting alleged counter-examples to his theory. For example, he considers the objection that his theory has the consequence that, “the Songs of the Prophets, the Psalms of David, the Odes of Pindar, and Horace [are] not real poems.” (Batteux 1746/2015, 119) He does so in the approved manner, imagining an interlocutor who presents these as counter-examples to his theory. Batteux concentrates on dealing with the alleged counter-examples provided by the Songs of the Prophets and the Psalms of David. It could be objected that these are works of art despite the fact that they do not represent *belle nature* since they are outpourings of genuine emotion. He explains the distinction between these works

and poems that are works of fine art: the prophets were in the grip of 'enthusiasm' (that is, in the grip of some emotion) and not imitating anything. Poets merely feign enthusiasm for the purposes of imitating *belle nature*. Consequently, Batteux concludes, David's *Psalms* are not works of art.

Batteux also devotes considerable effort to explaining how music is an art and musical compositions works of art. He is aware that someone might think of music as a counter-example to his theory: an art that does not imitate *belle nature*. So he argues at some length that music is, contrary to this suggestion, an imitative art. He explicitly states that even purely instrumental music is imitative.

From these reflections we can conclude that, contrary to what Lopes believes, philosophers in antiquity and in the early modern period had a theory of art. Theories of art received new impetus from the need to deal with the hard cases, but philosophers have always had buck stopping theories of art that attempt to identify features that all artworks have in common. That Lopes is wrong about the history of aesthetics does not, however, doom the buck passing theory. Buck stopping theories may still be less able to provide a satisfactory account of the hard cases than the buck passing theory. I am not certain that the objection from history is a decisive objection to Lopes' theory. On the other hand, an inability to deal with the hard cases is not an insurmountable problem for buck stopping theories.

4. Systematic Informativeness

The buck passing theory faces another objection. Lopes admits that the buck passing theory is not systematically informative. It does not tell us what makes a *K* an art. He is not concerned by this because he thinks that buck stopping theories do not tell us this either. On this point Lopes is wrong. Buck stopping theories are typically explicit attempts to give an account of what all of the arts have in common. In this way, buck stopping theories give an account of what makes some *K* an art. If systematic informativeness is an important desideratum of a satisfactory theory of art, then buck stopping theories will have a crucial advantage over a buck passing theory. As Lopes writes, "It would be bad news for the buck passing theory of art if buck stopping theories do turn out to be systematically informative." (Lopes 2014, 19)

As Lopes notes, the question about whether a theory of the arts is systematically informative can be framed as Wollheim's *bricoleur* problem. This is the problem of why "certain apparently arbitrarily identified stuffs or processes should be the vehicles of art" while others are not (Wollheim 1980, 43). A theory that has an answer to the *bricoleur* problem is systematically informative.

As theories of art were initially conceived, they aimed to be systematically informative. Theories of the arts would identify some common feature that all works of art have in common. The individual arts were distinguished from each other according to their media. The medium of literature was language, the medium of dance was movements of the body, and so on. Works of literature have

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the common feature of all artworks, manifested in the medium of literature. Works of dance have the common feature of all artworks, manifested in the medium of dance, and so on.

In contrast, if the buck passing theory of art is correct, then art may well be far more heterogeneous than anyone has previously anticipated. Lopes embraces this consequence of his theory. A buck passing theory of art could easily be combined with a Dickie-style institutional theory of painting, a Beardsley-style aesthetic theory of music, and a Batteux-style imitation theory of dance. In such an event, we are left with a completely unsystematic theory of art. Lopes recognizes that not being systematically informative is the basis of an objection to his theory. At any rate, it would be if buck stopping theories were any more systematically informative.

Lopes begins the argument for the conclusion that buck stopping theories are not systematically informative as follows. Suppose that a buck stopping theory completes the art-defining schema thus:

x is a work of art = x is ϕ .

(ϕ might be 'has significant form' or 'imitates *belle nature*.) Lopes is quite right when he says that there is no valid inference from this completed schema to the conclusion that,

x is a work of K , where K is an art = x is ψ .

According to Lopes, the best that a buck passing theory can do is adopt a 'bridging assumption.' Such an assumption may say that, "if x is a work of K , where K is an art, then x is ϕ partly in virtue of its taking advantage of K 's medium." (Lopes 2014, 20) This bridging assumption does not, however, indicate K 's medium. For example, "It remains open what is the medium of music and a theory of music with nothing more to say on the matter is hardly systematically informative." (Lopes 2014, 20)

I do not think that specifying the medium of music (or any other art) presents any particular difficulty. (I will return to this point in a moment.) Lopes has, however, another reason for thinking that a buck stopping theory will not be systematically informative. As he says, a systematically informative theory aims to complete this schema:

K is an art = K is....

The schema is completed by "filling in a set of conditions met by all and every art." (Lopes 2014, 21) Lopes calls these conditions, whatever they may be, ξ . Lopes is quite right to note that,

x is a work of art = x is ϕ

does not entail

K is an art = K is ξ .

Once again, it seems that there is no way to infer an account of which *K*s are arts from an account of which works are works of art.

Perhaps, however, Lopes has misrepresented the sort of argument a buck stopping theory aims to provide. There is a way of representing how a buck stopping theory can validly infer from a general account of art an account of what it is to be any particular art. The key is to eliminate the second variable that Lopes introduces. Buck stoppers can be seen as looking for an argument for this conclusion:

K is an art = a work of K is ϕ .

If this is what they need to prove, buck stoppers have an obvious way forward. They can hold that 'a work of K ' may be substituted for ' x ' in the schema ' x is a work of art = x is ϕ .' They can then validly infer that,

A work of K is a work of art = a work of K is ϕ .

Now, whenever works of K are ϕ , then K is an art. We can then conclude that,

K is an art = a work of K is ϕ .

So the buck stopping theory is systematically informative.

This reconstruction of how a buck stopping theory is systematically informative has the advantage of modeling the sort of arguments that thinkers such as Bell and Batteux actually give. Consider, for example, Batteux. He defined art as the imitation of *belle nature* and added that, "We will define painting, sculpture, and dance as imitations of *belle nature* by means of colours, three-dimensional shapes, and bodily attitudes. Music and poetry are imitations of *belle nature* expressed in sounds or by rhythmic speech." (Batteux 1746/2015, 20) So, on Batteux's theory, ϕ = "imitates *belle nature*." The *K*s that imitate *belle nature* are the fine arts. Buck stopping theories then need only distinguish the *K*s by reference to their different media or to the different processes that they involve. And that is precisely what Batteux does in the passage just quoted. Lopes suggests that it will be difficult to specify, for example, the medium of music. But specifying the medium of music is hardly difficult: it is sound. In fact, Batteux specified the media of all of the arts (at least those known in the eighteenth century).

In doing so, Batteux was echoing Plato and Aristotle. Plato's clearest statement of what the arts have in common is found in *Epinomis*. There he indicates that poetry represents with speech, dance represents with bodies, painting represents with moist media, sculpture represents with dry media, while music represents with the sounds made by instruments. (Plato 1961, 975D) Aristotle also holds that the arts are imitative and that what distinguishes them is their media. This is made clear in *Poetics*: Dancers represent by means of "rhythm without melody," painters by means of "colours and shapes," musicians represent in "rhythm, language and melody" either separately or in combination, while poets represent by means of "the voice" (Aristotle 1987, 32). Theories of art have been systematically informative since antiquity.

Some buck stopping theories seem to be more systematically informative than buck passing theories. In particular, it seems that traditional buck stopping theories are more systematically informative than a buck passing theory. One might wonder, however about whether genetic theories are systematically informative. Lopes suggests that they are not. In particular, he suggests that Dickie's institutional theory is not systematically informative.

Lopes' charge stems from Dickie's admission that whether a process or an activity (say, the activity of putting pigment on a surface or the activity of creating three dimensional forms) is an art is to a certain extent arbitrary. Dickie needs to give an account of why, for example, ballet is an art while ice dance is not. Otherwise, his institutional theory is no more systematically informative than a buck passing theory. Dickie's answer is that the class of artworks "is unified by the fact that its members are members in virtue of their place within an artworld system." (Dickie 1984, 76) As a matter of contingent fact, ballet has a place in this system but ice dance does not. Ice dance could have had a place in the system. It just happens not to have one. There is, then, a certain arbitrariness about whether some activity is an art.

Lopes believes that, by saying that it is arbitrary that some activities have a place in an artworld system while others do not, Dickie gives up the effort to find the common feature of the arts and thus gives up the effort to be systematically informative. That is, Dickie is charged with having no answer to the *bricoleur* problem. Contrary to what Lopes suggests, Dickie has a solution. A solution to the *bricoleur* problem indicates what the processes or activities that are arts have in common. Dickie states that ballet and painting are arts because they have a position in an artworld system. Ice dance, in contrast, has no such position. The fact that ice dance could have had a place in the system and is arbitrarily excluded is irrelevant. The *bricoleur* question asks what the arts have in common and Dickie gives an answer. Maybe it is a bad answer, but it is not, contrary to what Lopes claims, not an answer at all.

5. Conclusion: Is There any such Thing as Art?

The buck stopping theory of art is so unsystematic that it is unclear that there is any such thing as art. It is hard to see that there is a category of artworks unless there is some salient feature, call it ϕ , shared by artworks. A buck stopping theory has an account of which *Ks* are arts and which are not: the *Ks* that are arts resemble each other in respect of producing works that are ϕ . A buck passing theory cannot give an account of which *Ks* are arts without refuting itself. As soon as a theory of the arts tells us what the *Ks* that are arts have in common, the buck is stopped. The buck passing theory seems unable to specify which *Ks* are arts.

If there is no salient feature shared by all works of art, the concept of art seems to be useless. Recall Bell's famous pronouncement that,

either all works of visual art have some common quality, or when we speak of "works of art" we gibber. Everyone speaks of "art," making a mental classification

by which he distinguishes the class “works of art” from all other classes. What is the justification of this classification? What is the quality common and peculiar to all members of this class? (Bell 1914/1961, 22)

When we speak of art in general, and not just the visual arts, we would similarly gibber unless we can identify a common salient feature of all artworks. Bell, of course, held that common feature of all artworks was possession of significant form. Bell would say that *K* is an art = a work of *K* is significant form. In this way his theory is systematically informative.

A buck passer, in contrast, seems committed to saying that we cannot identify some feature shared by all works of art. Lopes writes that,

While the fact that painting and dance have been classified as arts can be explained historically and sociologically, it is unlikely that the classification can be given a principled foundation (Lopes 2014, 133).

Indeed, no classification can be given a principled foundation, lest the buck be stopped. One might wonder then how we are to come up with a list of the arts. Lopes suggests that we start with the traditional classification:

The art forms would be the arts traditionally included in the modern system of the arts – painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry – plus any subsequent additions (Lopes 2014, 133).

This is fine, but there is a danger here that the buck passing theory will collapse into a historical theory of art, *à la* Levinson. On such a theory, something is art if it bears a certain relation to works historically regarded as artworks. The danger of collapsing into an historical theory is particularly acute if works in subsequent additions to the list of arts are appreciated “in any of the ways *works of art existing prior to it have been correctly regarded.*” (Levinson 1979, 234) The trouble with this is that Levinson’s is a buck stopping theory.

At one point Lopes writes that, “the buck passing theory opens the door to aesthetic theories of the individual arts” (Lopes 2014, 163). Lopes seems to favor aesthetic theories of the individual arts and develops a conception of aesthetic value. One might, then, be tempted to say that the arts are activities whose products are appreciated for their aesthetic value. But, of course, Lopes cannot say that because then the buck-stopping theory would collapse into an aesthetic theory of art, *à la* Beardsley (1983).

The question of the ‘subsequent additions’ to the arts is a difficult one for Lopes. Many appreciative kinds can be identified: ice dance, upholstery, flower arranging, wine making, perfumery, dog breeding and a host of other activities produce appreciative kinds. We might well wonder which of these count as arts. Wollheim wrote that the answer this question “receives will in very large part be determined by the analogies and disanalogies that we can construct between the existing arts and the art in question.” (Wollheim 1980, 152) The trouble is that drawing attention to these analogies and disanalogies is to draw attention to

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features of artworks, either exhibited or genetic. But this is precisely what the buck passing theory forbids. There can, on Lopes' view, be no principled reason for some activity being an art. So it seems that, if the buck passing theory is correct, we do gibber when we speak of art.

The buck passing theory of art is the first completely novel theory of art to emerge in many years. The theory is developed by Lopes in a series of complex and nuanced arguments, not all of which can be addressed in a short article. These arguments deserve careful consideration. Lopes believes that his theory has the potential to break several long-standing stalemates. If it can, the theory is to be warmly welcomed. Unfortunately, the conclusion of this essay must be that the buck passing theory of art seems to face difficulties every bit as challenging as any other theory of art. Contrary to what Lopes believes, theories of art have been around for a long time. This is an embarrassment to the theory, even if it is not a damning objection. More seriously, the buck passing theory is, unlike its competitors, completely unsystematic. It is so unsystematic, that the concept of art seems likely to disappear. Perhaps the concept of art has outlived its usefulness, but that is a conclusion that some philosophers are likely unwilling to embrace.

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