

# Reflections on Art's Genus, Species, and Individual Works

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**ABSTRACT** | This paper traces philosophers' efforts to get to where and what art is. It begins with Margolis' persuasive argument against Morris Weitz's claim that we cannot get a conceptual grasp of the concept art because it is essentially open, able to be changed at any moment by a creative act. Margolis avers that there are practical and normative reasons for attempting to define the concept. Some 50 years later, responding to the lack of agreement on any definition of the genus, Dominic McIver Lopes claims that attention should be turned to framing theories of each of the species or kinds of art that are no longer defined in terms of their mediums. His focus is on appreciation and evaluation of art, not on its essence of Platonic-like form. Hard cases and free agents can create new kinds, allowing kinds to proliferate. A next step in the history is the increasing particularization of works of art, which leads Peter Osborne to argue that each work has to make the case for itself that it is deserving of the name "art." What mediates the relation between the individual and generic art is not an art-defining theory of membership in a kind, but the criticism about the interpretations that are made of it. Lopez, in a like manner, had said that the theory of each art kind was implicit in the work of critics and curators. Osborne has it that the work itself declares what it is to those who have ears to hear, as art-engaged people do. And in their so declaring themselves, the individual work of art affirms its existence, which outweighs by far any definition.

**KEYWORDS** | Closed Concept; Appreciative Kind; Ontology; Individual

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## Introduction

This paper asks where best to go to get a clear and close look at what art is. Is it to theories of art and their definitions, to languages and the criteria for their use, to art criticism and social and natural sciences' studies, or to the artists, artworks, audiences and critics, curators, and collectors that comprise the art world? Theory-defined concepts, words, folk concepts, and art itself are intertwined, with no clear boundaries between them. How we see things undeniably influences and is influenced by the languages we use and the concepts they convey. Even so, there are boundaries enough to let us explore the questions of where best to go to see what art is and where to place the authority to determine what it is. Each of the paper's three parts is dedicated to one of three proposed answers, the genus art, its species, and their individual works. Particular definitions of art are not here considered in light of Kendall Walton's astute observation that: "It is not at all clear that these words—'What Is Art?'—express anything like a single question ... The sheer variety of proposed definitions should give us pause. One cannot help wondering if there is any sense in which they are attempts to ... clarify the same cultural practices, or address the same issue" (Walton 2007, 4).

Part One looks to the genus art, with our narrative beginning in the 1950s with Ludwig Wittgenstein and his disciple Morris Weitz saying precisely that one ought not to try to define art, but should ask how the word "art" is used in ordinary language or what kind of concept art is. Joseph Margolis, ever the disciple of Socrates in letting no claim to truth go unexamined, takes issue with Weitz's account of the concept art as one that is essentially open, arguing that the case has not been made that the concept cannot be closed and that no definition can capture what it is that makes something art. The tide turned, as tides do, and after decades of ordinary language philosophy and its close cousin, conceptual analysis, the 1980s saw a spate of influential definitions of art including those of Monroe Beardsley, George Dickie, and Arthur Danto.

Part Two turns to Dominic Mclver Lopes' 2014 *Beyond Art*, which argues against trying to define art *qua* art and for trying instead to construct theories of each of the kinds or species of art. This would afford a better understanding of what we consider art by acknowledging the vast differences among the various species of art and holding lightly the idea that there are art-making traits that all artworks share. This move is made in response to the apparent impossibility of finding a principled way to decide among competing definitions, as Walton saw, and the increasing frequency of the appearance of definition-challenging cases like Duchamp's *Bottle Rack* (1914) and John Cages' *4'33"* (1952). Weitz took these examples to prove the virtual impossibility of providing a definition of art that can ensure that its conditions will not be undermined.

Part Three is historical as Part Two is classificatory and starts with Peter Osborne's 2013 *Anywhere or Not at All: A Philosophy of Contemporary Art* whose brief is that the art of the 1960s began the destruction of the hegemony of species or kinds of art. Since species are identified by their mediums, Osborne refers to species as mediums and says that because of the destruction of their authority, each individual work has to make the case for itself that it is art. It has to negotiate its relation to the universal art without the benefit of mediating species. A way for an individual, including a work of art, to say what it is, is to do what, in "As Kingfishers Catch Fire" (1881), the Welsh poet Gerard Manley Hopkins says each mortal thing does. Each "finds tongue to fling out broad its name: / Deals out that being indoors each one dwells; / Selves—goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells; / Crying *What I do is me; for that I came.*" Reading "mortal" as "belong to the world" or being "subject to generation and decay," as all physical things are, works of art can be seen "to fling out broad" their names. This way of an individual's saying what it is, is compatible with what Osborne wants to say. When what is doing this is a work of art, its name is "art." When anything flings out broad its name, it is a way of asking to be paid attention to. When it is a work of art, in saying "*What I do is me; for that I came,*" it is saying that it came to be listened to, to be paid attention to. Given the various things that works of art can say and do, they succeed in their saying or doing only if attention is paid them.

One path out of Part Three leads to a metaphysics that privileges individuals over, say, the immortal forms posited by Plato or the concepts the Enlightenment thinkers depended on to identify the individuals to which they apply. Individuals, species, genera, and the families to which all belong are classifying abstractions that identify an individual as belonging to a species of a genus of a family and, finally, to the class of all that exists. An individual's kind takes second place to the sheer fact of its existence. That anything whatsoever exists is a miracle. Each mortal thing "Deals out that being indoors each one dwells ... *Myself*[not its kind], it speaks and spells."

There is a connection between the individual and the global that is beyond this paper's scope. It is that that the more global art becomes, the less apt we are to put culturally relative theories and languages of art in the foreground, and the more we are wont to engage with real concrete objects and events that themselves bear the imprint of the artists and cultures from which they come. This matter is addressed in Peter Osborne's proposition, also not to be addressed here, that for art to be contemporary is for it to be global, no longer married to its place and time, as the individual in the wonder of its existence is no longer wedded to its kind.

## Part One

Wittgenstein died in Cambridge, England in 1951. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, posthumously published in 1953, he claims that the meaning of language lay in its use, and, therefore, one ought not to ask of, say, time, what it is, expecting an answer in the form of a set of time's necessary and sufficient properties. One should ask instead how the word "time" is used. This gave rise to the ordinary language philosophy that was a key part of analytic philosophy's linguistic turn inspired by the Vienna Circle in 1917 and Wittgenstein's 1924 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that for decades played a prominent role in philosophy departments in the English-speaking world.

In 1956, Weitz published "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics" where he argues that we should ask not what art is but what kind of concept art is. He does not want an analysis of the concept art, which would consist in envisioning scenarios in which a candidate for arthood would play certain roles or have certain properties about which we ask ourselves what we would say were they actually to play the roles or have the properties. The answers such analyses yield are more fine-grained than are those that show how a word is used, but neither kind of analysis is expected to say what art is. These strategies do give an idea of what people understand art to be and how it functions in their world. Weitz is convinced that the concept art can never be so defined as to deliver up the essence of art. One characteristic of an open concept on this view is that we can imagine a case that calls for us to decide whether "to extend the use of the concept to cover it or to close the concept down and invent a new one to deal with the new case and its property" (Weitz 1956, 11). To close the concept would be, Weitz says, arbitrarily to stipulate the range of objects to which the concept could refer, which would close the concept to objects outside that range.

Margolis in his 1958 "Mr. Weitz and the Definition of Art" enters the conversation about open and closed concepts, adroitly challenging Weitz on his equivocal understanding of what closed concepts are. What undermines a definition is the appearance of cases that we are inclined to want to count as falling under the definition even though they do not satisfy all its conditions. To close the concept novel, say, to new and unexpected cases would be so to define it that it was without risk of being found to be inadequate. To do this, Weitz says, would be arbitrarily to stipulate the range of the concept's referents and would, for example, refuse to count James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) as a novel on the ground that, for example, it cannot be read as novels such as George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871) are. One has to learn to read *Ulysses* in a new way, slowly and laboriously, as Roland Barthes put it, learning how language works in it.

*Ulysses* is a classic modernist reflection on its genre, brilliantly trading on how the Greek hero Ulysses had to spend ten years after the Trojan War overcoming myriad obstacles to get back to what was familiar, home. So too has

the reader of *Ulysses* to get herself out of the hardships its language presents to get to what feels natural and right, a new way to read, a way that lets her feel at home in the novel. Simply to stipulate that *Ulysses* is not a novel is to ignore its having the form of a novel and being a scrutiny of the sundry styles of the novels in the canon. It is this connection with the canon that entitles it to be counted a novel, not, as Margolis alleges, a grasp of the eternal form of the novel. He says that: "Either all definitions have some stipulative basis or we must hold to some version of the theory of forms" (Margolis 1958, 91). There can, however, be a principled way to stipulate the range of objects to which a concept can apply that does not suppose the principle to rely on a necessary or sufficient condition of the concept novel or an eternal form of the novel.

Margolis is right, however, that Weitz gives no satisfactory account of what an open concept is, saying that it is such that, one, it is in principle not closed. Two, it is open to new cases. Three, we can imagine new cases that we would include under the concept. Four, it has family resemblances rather than defining conditions. Consider each in turn. Of one, Weitz says that it is logically impossible to ensure that the necessary and sufficient conditions that a definition lays out will not be undermined by challenging works like Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917). Given the ever-changing nature of art, it would be, Weitz says, ludicrous to try to close the concept by defining it. Margolis correctly accuses him of confusing a practical difficulty with a logical impossibility. True, it is impractical to keep framing definitions that get undermined by challenging cases, but it is not impossible. The most Weitz can say is that whatever definition we propose for art is likely to be found wanting. Then it will be given up as the result of a practical decision. Of two, we note that the concept novel was emended to accommodate *Ulysses*, while three puts pressure on the concept in question, asking us to decide how much we would be willing to change it to include an imagined new case, showing that it is our decision as to how much to emend a concept before it becomes unrecognizable or, in Weitz's words, to close it down and invent a new one to take its place. Finally, four takes us back to Wittgenstein who is closer to the ground than Weitz in focusing on how words are actually used, not on experiments in imagination that ask us what we would say were, counterfactually, a concept to change in a certain way.

Wittgenstein said that when we look at the wide variety of what we call games, for example, we see resemblances among them, different ones belonging to different games. No one game has them all, but all have at least one. We do not close the list, allowing that new games might appear that will reveal new resemblances. So it is with art, Weitz would say. The point is that members of the genus art are loosely tied together by resemblances, not closely tied by sharing necessary art-making traits. Of this Margolis says that lists of resemblances should not be open because everything resembles everything else in some way or other. Were a list not closed at some point but added to willy-nilly, linguistic

anarchy would result. This is possible, but unlikely, because language users do not want anarchy. Margolis said also that family resemblances are a makeshift, a second best to necessary and sufficient conditions, and their presence among a set of individuals does not rule out the possibility of our finding defining conditions for the members of the set. This has been his mantra: do not close the question of whether or not art can be defined. The question of the possibility of defining art aside, Wittgenstein and Weitz are more alive to the ordinary life of art by their looking to art's appearance and behavior in language and to its conceptual maps than are those who want a theory to say once and for all what this marvel called art is.

Margolis inveighs against Weitz's focus on art's always wanting to make itself new and claiming that because this is so, it is logically foolhardy to close the concept art by defining it. Part of the issue between them is that Weitz has set the bar for a concept's being defined so high that nothing that is empirically definable or normative can be defined. Necessity reigns in formal systems like mathematics and logic, but not in the world of everyday. Yet, as Margolis is keen to point out, Weitz allows that for practical reasons one might define something within the realm of the empirical or normative, knowing the definition to be vulnerable. Margolis has shown that Weitz has not proved the impossibility of an adequate definition of art or of anything empirically describable. However, though Weitz is willing for reasons of convenience or efficiency to countenance definitions that will most likely turn out to be inadequate, he is not willing to do so for art because that would fly in the face of what art has shown itself to be, creative, innovative, ever seeking new ways to see.

Where Weitz claims that all and only closed concepts are in formal systems, Margolis argues that, on the contrary, there can be open concepts even in mathematics in light of Weitz's saying that a concept is open if we can decide to extend its use to cover a new case or to close it down and invent a new one. Parallel lines are an example of concepts in a formal system that are not open even though they seem to satisfy Weitz's characterization of openness. The reason they are not open applies to all concepts in formal systems. In short, the concept of parallels is not challenged by disparate definitions constructed within different formal systems. A parallel line was defined by Euclid (4th century BCE) as follows: for any point outside a given line, there is only one line parallel to it that is at every point equidistant from the given line. Two alternative geometries appeared in the 19th century that, were the concept parallel lines open, would have closed it down or replaced it. Neither happened. The Euclidean concept was not closed down by Bernhard Reimann (1826-1866), who devised an elliptical geometry of space in which there are no lines parallel to any given line. Nor was it replaced by the concept of parallel lines in the hyperbolic geometry of Nikolai Lobachevsky (1792-1856) in which there are at least two parallel lines on a dot outside a given line that merge in one direction

and diverge in the other. The Euclidean concept of parallels is intact, sitting happily next to the concept as defined by Lobachevsky and indifferent to Riemann's seeming to have closed it down. This is because definitions of concepts in formal systems are what they are relative to the theory in which they were constructed. No cases from another theory can challenge them, nor can they be changed within their theory. To do so would be to change the postulate that defined them, which would in turn change the theory.

Suppose we were to replace the idea of formal systems with that of realms of discourses that reflect the different interests we have in art, like interest in its moral dimension, in how gender figures in its creation and appreciation, in the political and economic conditions in place when a given work was made. We could then entertain disparate definitions or conceptions of art generated by each discourse that would sit as happily together as the two definitions of parallel lines do. The tack taken by Lopes discussed in the next section is a different one, however. He fragments art not into discourses reflecting our different interests, but into its species. In this he is making good on a proposal made by Peter Kivy in his 1997 presidential address to the American Society of Aesthetics: "The search for sameness ... has blinded the philosophical community to a bevy of questions of more than trivial importance, involving the arts not in their sameness but in their particularity ... [in the] determined way we perceive, misperceive, or fail to perceive the individual arts in various pernicious ways." (Kivy 1997, 5).

## Part Two

In the beginning of *Beyond Art*, Lopes, like Wittgenstein and Weitz, says that the question "what is art?" is the wrong question for philosophers to ask, even though it does have a "place as a tool of appreciation" (McIver 2015, 1). This comports with Weitz's saying that: "If we take the aesthetic theories literally ... they all fail, but if we reconstrue them in terms of their function and point, as serious and argued for recommendations to concentrate on certain criteria of excellence in art, we shall see that aesthetic theory is far from worthless" (Weitz 1956, 34). Lopes' example of how the art question can foster appreciation is that for someone unfamiliar with the art world, the presence in the Louvre of paintings of kitchen utensils and bowls of fruit by Jean-Baptiste Chardin (1699-1779) in which there are no interesting messages or strong charges of emotion would be puzzling. Lopes says that were such a person to try to solve the puzzle by looking at and thinking about the paintings by Chardin, other still lifes, and ordinary things in paintings where they are not the center of attention as Chardin's kitchen utensils are, she would be taking the same stance as one who was trying to define art. This is to assume that we would define art in terms of

how and why we appreciate it. But what our viewer who is puzzled about why paintings of such ordinary things are in the Louvre is doing is not trying to discover what makes all art, in its wild variety, art. Her desire is more modest, it is to understand why people want to look at the Chardins, what it is about them that makes them worth looking at, not what, for example, makes it worth listening to John Coltrane or visiting the Taj Mahal. It may be that a reason to look for a theory of art is as much to learn what it is we appreciate art for as it is to find art's essence. But our viewer wants to know why it is worth looking at the Chardons, not listening to Coltrane or going to see the Taj Mahal.

Putting aside the assumption that art has an essence and asking what, if anything, one appreciates about a work, would make of the art question a critical rather than a theoretical one. This takes us closer to the ground where art is made and criticism written. It also takes us closer to art works themselves than did the 1950s interest in how art is talked about and how its concepts are analyzed. Sixty years later, in the 2010s, Lopes dismisses the search for a definition in the face of the 1980s resurgence of interest in definitions and of the increasing number of so-called hard cases that challenge traditional theories of art. Lopes defines a hard case as "any work whose status as art is controversial from a theoretical point of view." (Lopes 2014, 6). Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* do not count as hard cases. They did challenge the concept of novel that was emended to include them, but there was no temptation to close down the accepted concept and invent a new one. Duchamp's *Fountain*, a urinal signed "R. Mutt," is a hard case. What kind would it belong to were it art? If it is a sculpture, we have to think hard about what a sculpture is and develop a sculpture-defining theory. If it is not a sculpture, then of what kind is it? When a work seems to fit into no kind, it is considered a free agent, which is an especially challenging kind of hard case for Lopes. On his theory something is art just in case it belongs to an art kind or species. The existence of hard cases turns out to be a major reason that Lopes moves the playing field from the genus art to its various species.

According to Lopes, the current disagreement among theorists of art is best characterized as an impasse between traditional and genetic stances toward art. The former "conjoin being made in an institutional context while satisfying an aesthetic interest," whereas a theory that would "disjoin the two features takes the genetic stance because it makes genesis sufficient for being a work of art" (Lopes 2014, 50). A traditional definition is Monroe Beardsley's: "A work of art is either an arrangement of conditions intended to be capable of affording an experience with marked aesthetic character or (incidentally) an arrangement belonging to a class or style that is typically intended to have this capacity" (Beardsley 1982, 299). The definition of George Dickie is genetic: "A work of art is an artefact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public by an artist,



who is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art" (Dickie 1964, 80).

Beardsley looks to the kind of experience a work produces, while Dickie looks not to an artist's intention to produce an aesthetic experience, but to the constellation of critics, curators, gallerists who decide among themselves what is a work of art and who is an artist. Arthur Danto, like Beardsley, looks to the viewer, but not to the aesthetic experience her engagement with a work affords, but to what the viewer has to do, which is to discover the distinctive attitude the work expresses toward its subject by way of the metaphor that art is. It is to interpret the work and in so doing become a co-creator with its artist.

The impasse leads Lopes to call the traditional theories *buck stopping* because they are where the question "what is art?" seems to stop. However, what if the buck were not to stop until it reached cave paintings, Greek pottery, the statues in Chartres Cathedral intended to illustrate Bible stories for an illiterate audience, early 20th century industrial art? Would not these give pause to the theorists? It could either make them search harder and wider for what the works all share or incline them to divide the field, but not in the way that Lopes does. He divides it into the kinds initially laid out in the mid 18th century, when art was divided from craft and became "fine." To the initial kinds that were painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry, Lopes adds conceptual, installation, and performance art, as well as kinds that might be suggested by free agents. They would consist of works that shared certain (kind- defining) characteristics of the hard case. The defining characteristics would be given in a theory of that and only that kind.

Given our understandable commitment to the idea that art is one, whether it is an essence, a self-contained concept, or a word, we do not easily pass the buck from the genus art to its species. Lopes does not eschew the search for definition-constructing theories, but the search for one theory that would define the genus art or one that would define all the various species of art. So committed is he to the differences between, say, or street art and painting that he said if there were only one message readers take from *Beyond Art*, it should be that there is a crucial difference between a theory of art, a theory of the arts, and theories of each of the art species.

The gist of his argument for turning from genus to species is that he can show that a theory of a particular art can do pretty much what Beardsley said a theory of art ought to do, like be viable and informative, with this one difference. Where Beardsley said a theory of art should underly art criticism, art theory, and empirical studies of the arts, Lopes goes the other way around and says that an art kind's theory is implicit in these practices, to which we should turn to elicit the theory. His reason for turning away from traditional theories is that they do not treat hard cases as puzzles to solve for which philosophy, responding to what is going on in the world of contemporary art, will develop

tools. Far from being test cases left at the margins of traditional art theories, hard cases are at the center of theories of the arts. When they become free agents, seeming to fit into no art kind, they provide a reason to ratchet our study of art down from the universal, art, to its species. Given the unwieldiness of the field of individual works of art, there is, however, an apparent necessity to have a mediator between the individual and its universal.

It is not for Lopes to develop the theories himself, but only to create a framework for their development in terms of *appreciative kinds, medium-profiles, and practices*, all of which reflect the homespun fact that an artist makes a product by doing something to something. What she is doing is engaging in a practice and what she is working on is a medium or technical resource, which may or may not be material—words and ideas are common resources used in conceptual art—and may or may not be single. Because works can have more than one medium, Lopes speaks of a work's medium-profile, a non-empty set of media, rather than its medium. The fact that works were being made that were in more than one medium constituted a weak challenge to the identification of a specie by its medium, but the introduction of conceptual, installation, and performance art, none clearly identified by a medium, constituted a strong challenge to the authority of medium-specific art. Lopes does not, as Peter Osborne, discussed below, does, take art kinds to be defined by their mediums. Therefore, the alleged destruction of medium-specificity does not lead him to eschew kinds as what mediates the relation between individual works of art and the universal, art.

Before looking at the role appreciation plays in the articulation of the framework for creating theories of the arts, it is important to see why Lopes holds both that the theory of a particular art is implicit in the practice and criticism of that art and that our best empirical understanding of an art is by way of the social and natural sciences that study it. Lopes has it that we should go to the very empirical activities and studies in which the arts are involved to find the theory implicit in them. One cannot get from something what is not in some sense already there, but to say that the theory of an art is implicit in the practice, criticism, and studies of the art is to say more than this. Perhaps the theory is there, more or less inchoate, as unconscious beliefs and desires are there in the unconscious, to get at which psychoanalyst and patient must ask this question and that and look this way and that, to some extent determining what they are bringing to the surface. Just as the psychoanalyst has probative tools at her disposal, so does the philosopher have a framework for constructing a theory to whose creation *Beyond Art* is devoted. In whatever way we parse a theory's being implicit in the empirical data and whatever the tools used to elicit it, the best case is one where there is a reflective equilibrium between the empirical source and theoretical reflection on it. Theories do underlie the empirical practices and studies of the arts, but they were constructed not by an

*a priori* search for conditions of an art's possibility, but by going into the field to find what was implicit in the empirical practices.

Lopes outlines a framework for the definition of any art whose variables (K for kind, M for medium-profile, P for practice) are to be assigned values as the one studying the empirical data finds them. Putting value and appreciation at the center of the definition of any art, Lopes begins with the assertion that something is a work of art only if it is a member of a kind (species, medium). He has said that both what kinds are, and what kinds there are, empirically determined as they are, are up for grabs. The definition of a given kind represents our best understanding of the theory implicit in the kind's practices, criticism, and empirical studies. Our understanding can change and so can its empirical sources. Not only can the nature of a kind change, but also can the works that present themselves as free agents change. It was the appearance of works that could challenge any definition that led Weitz to insist that art by its nature routinely produces what are now called hard cases and, therefore, to construct an art-defining theory is folly. That did not stop the traditional theorist who said that hard cases could live at the theory's margins thanks to a certain ambiguity in the concept art. Genetic theories accepted them so long as they were sanctioned by an art institution. Indeed, Dickie said that his theory was inspired by their existence. Turn now to Lopes' framework for the construction of theories of the arts.

"An appreciative kind is a kind whose nature connects to the value of its members" (Lopes 2014, 130). All the arts are appreciative kinds, as are many other kinds of things, like being a toaster or a tennis player. There is something that consists in being a good tennis player *qua* toaster or *qua* tennis player. It is good by its being a member of its kind, which is a goodness-fixing kind. Because not all goodness is assigned by goodness-fixing kinds, Lopes identifies being good-modified as a way of being worthy of appreciation. Acts, events, and facts are not goodness-fixing kinds, but an act can be worthy of appreciation for being morally good and a piece of music for being aesthetically good. Each is good-modified by being morally or aesthetically good. Species of art are appreciative kinds; their members have value by virtue of belonging to the species. We have the first variable, K, of Lopes' framework, which is that: x is a work of K, where K is an art = x is a work in medium profile M, where M is an appreciative kind, and x is a product of appreciative practice P. The media to which an artist applies the relevant practice and the practice itself are appreciative media and practices so long as the nature of what they are doing or working on connects to the value of what is being made.

A last word about media that in mid-century modernism were used to differentiate art species. Clement Greenberg reduced painting to its medium by stripping away from it everything that did not depend on its being a flat surface to which lines, shapes, and colors were applied. Le Corbusier had done this with

architecture in his 1922 *Vers Architecture* whose point was that modern architecture revealed what architecture is and always was, buildings made according to the same laws that govern the universe. Were we to strip away its styles that were, he said, like feathers on a woman's head, sometimes pretty but not always, we would see architecture in its purity. Le Corbusier's medium-centered modernism was called into question by Robert Venturi and Helen Scot Brown's 1972 *Learning from Las Vegas* that celebrated buildings' contexts, as well as their pasts, their particularity, and their difference. This launched postmodernism in architecture. Greenberg's reduction of painting and its values was followed by a similar return to content, contexts, and the past, but now a past that was to be cruised for precisely the styles that Le Corbusier had excoriated.

Far from seeking the single, pure medium that differentiates one species from another, Lopes is taken with the number of media or technical resources that are available to an artist working in a given species and the number of practices available to her to use on them. He identifies species by the media and practices capable of importing value to what they produce. As Lopes proliferates the number of media and practices available to an artist, so does he flirt with the proliferation of kinds in several other ways. Not only might a free agent invite the constitution of a new kind, but also an art kind might be divided within itself. Literature, for example, could divide into narrative and verse, and verse into free and metered or free and rhymed. A further proliferation of kinds that could be relevant to art appreciation would come from relaxing the borders between art and non-art kinds and looking at them alongside each other. Art and the everyday might turn out to share more than was expected. Yet there are no doubt differences within and between non-art kinds, like compatibility, contrariety, similarity, and difference, that map onto those of art kinds. We see the borders between art species themselves and those between art and non-art objects and kinds to be malleable. But for all this, we have yet to get individuals free from kinds. Peter Osborne will do this by following, but not resting content with, the European tradition of philosophy whose reach is as wide as that of the Anglo-American tradition is narrow and whose members are as deeply attuned to history as the Anglo-Americans are to analysis.

### Part Three

Osborne cites the posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* (1974) of Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) as the most important book in aesthetics in the 20th century. As much social historian and critic as philosopher, Adorno had an influence on Osborne that is apparent in the preeminence of socio-historical realities in Osborne's work. Embedded as his work is in European philosophy, primarily

German, Osborne allows that the Europeans failed “to come to terms with the decisive historical transformation of the ontology of the artwork that is constitutive of its contemporaneity” (Osborne 2013, 8). This followed the destruction of the ontology of mediums that began in the 1960s and created the need for an account of the ontology, the being, the what it is, of an individual work of art. once what the work is no longer consists in its being what belongs to, is made of, a particular medium.

Modernism's focus on the medium of each species is what leads Osborne to talk about mediums rather than, as Lopes does, kinds, whose members tend to share characteristics other than being made of the same kind of material. Where Osborne refers to the destruction of mediums, I refer to the destruction of their *authority* that was brought about by such postmodern works as Venturi and Brown's 1972 *Learning from Las Vegas* and Roland Barthes' post-structural 1970-*SZ*. The latter is a creative, writerly reading of Balzac's 1836 *Sarrazine* that traffics in the plural and possible meanings of its actual words that create paths out of the story to like items and events in other texts and in the world. *Learning from Las Vegas* embeds architecture in its contexts as resolutely as modernism ignores them, and *Sarrazine* undoes the unity of the Balzac story as it folds it into everything to which we are led by the paths leading out of it. One effect of the destruction of the ontology of mediums consists in works' contexts and all that the paths out of the work lead to having authority over what works are. Reduced as kinds or species were by Greenbergian modernism to their medium, the destruction of their authority makes them unable to mediate the relation between an individual artwork and the generic term “art.” Osborne calls the loss of status of art mediums the crisis of modernism and endorses Adorno's characterization of it in *Aesthetic Theory* as the threat that the increasing particularization or individualization of artworks poses to art. Were artworks to become utterly particular or individual, they could be assigned no meaning and absent a meaning, would be reduced to their physical components. Osborne claims, however, that Adorno failed to appreciate the fact that critical theories develop from the ground up out of critical interpretations of individual works, and the theories act as intermediaries between individual works and what he sometimes refers to as the universality of art and sometimes as the generic name “art.”

Osborne identifies another possible mediation between the individual work and art as the international biennale and “the transnational exhibition form that fulfills the requirement of providing meaning” (Osborne 2013, 16). This sounds as though critics whose interpretations give rise to theories and curators of international exhibitions, artworld members both, play the role of medium-defined species, so that instead of something's being art if it is a member of a species or a kind, it is art if it is interpreted within a theory or exhibited in an

international exhibition. However, for Osborne it is not critics and curators who have the art-conferring power, but the works themselves, of which he says:

the individuality of the work of art is the ontological marker of its autonomy—autonomous production of meaning (or ... the self-conscious illusion of an autonomous production of meaning)—as the basis of its constitution as an enigma. The enigma consists in the fact that in their autonomous meaning production, works of art act like subjects (Osborne 2013, 85).

The digital and the global or transnational contribute to what Osborne identifies as the ontology of the individual artwork. Before this claim, beyond the scope of this paper as it is, is so much as glimpsed, we need to examine Osborne's thesis that the contemporary is the post-conceptual and its debt to the culture of the photographic and post-photographic image.

First off, "the post-conceptual is not the name for a particular type of art so much as the historical and logical condition for the production of contemporary art in general" (Osborne 2013, 51). Once an artwork was no longer defined by way of a material that is worked in a certain way--a flat surface marked by colors and lines--apparently medium-free conceptual art came to the fore in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Osborne asserts that despite its "inherent problematicity," it is "only in relation to the category of conceptual art ... that a critical historical experience of contemporary art is possible." (Osborne 2013, 51). To say that the experience of contemporary art is critical is to say that it is not contemporary because it is in the present, but because it is in the historical present in which what is new is separated out from what is old and it satisfies the conditions that, Osborne claims, determine the contemporaneity of the contemporary.

They are, first, art's necessary conceptuality, which includes its being able to be interpreted. Second, its aesthetic dimension, necessary because every artwork has a material manifestation, Third, the expansion to infinity of the possible material forms of art. Herein lies art's debt to the photographic image, expanded to include chemically-based photography, film, television, video and digital imaging, to which may be added the remote sensing of microwave, infrared, ultraviolet and shortwave radio imagery. The debt lies in photography's enabling the infinite expansion of the possible material forms of art. One need only think of the myriad modes of access we have to works of conceptual, installation, and performance art, as well as to works such as the difficult-to-see statues in Chartres Cathedral. Not only is art contemporary in being represented through numerous and different media, but Osborne further reworks the borders of an individual work by including its past and future history as part of its ontology, as part of what it is. His example is of an essay and a film ostensibly only about Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* but what he counts as being not about but being part of the work itself

This generates the fourth condition for art's being contemporary, namely, the fact that a work's unity across all its material manifestations at any one time is not totalizing, but distributive. Here is how the photographic image and its successors determine the ontology of the individual work of contemporary art. "The question of the ontology of the photographic image is ... the question of unity of the relational totality of the variety of different photographic forms" (Osborne 2013, 18). The totality of the forms is relational because they share no single underlying technology that would allow photography to be specified as a medium. What, finally, distinguishes the digital image from the chemically-based photographic image is the multiplication of possible forms of visualization /projeccion ... deriving from the genetic power of digitalization to free itself from any particular medium" (Osborne 2013, 130). All works of contemporary art can be digitally mediated and can have potentially infinite material manifestations, *as originality moves from what is copied to the form of the cop*. Given the distributional unity of the potentially infinite material manifestations of an individual work, the fifth condition, the historical malleability of the borders of the unity, makes sense.

Where are Gerard Manley Hopkins and Joseph Margolis here? The poet would say that each of the possible material manifestations is the work itself. Distributed over the possible infinity of material manifestations, each manifestation do "one thing and the same:/ speaks out that being indoors each one dwells;/ Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells, ... " Osborne suggests that a work creates the illusion that it is a subject making its own meaning. He need not go so far. Hopkins has a model on which thing flings out its name, where its name is, in effect what it does "*myself* speaks and spells;/ Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*" Kingfishers catch fire in the light and works of art create meaning. All we need do is listen to what each thing speaks and spells. Artworks create meaning as they are engaged by their audience, who is to the artwork as the light is to the kingfisher.

Margolis, ever responsive to the new, would, while ever demanding, that it be clearly articulated, appreciate Osborne's addressing the role of the digital and the global in making contemporary art contemporary. What he would call for is a fuller account of what looks like the dispersal of what had been considered an individual work into its past and future histories and its myriad material manifestations. The manifestations are not copies. but originals whose unity is distributed along its possibly infinite manifestations. So too would he call for a fuller account of. a justification for, Lopes allowing for the proliferation of kinds by making it possible for a free agent by itself to constitute a kind, for a given kind to implode within itself, and for non-art kinds to share the same conceptual space with art kinds. In the end, he would have welcomed being made part of this conversation started by Weitz and continued by Lopes and Osborne, It has been my privilege to know Professor Margolis and to have been

able to contribute to this testimony to the significance of his contribution to philosophy.

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