

Dominic McIver Lopes. *Beyond Art*. Oxford University Press 2014. 240 pp. \$35.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780199591558); \$30.00 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780198748083).

Two approaches to the definition of art have been widely adopted. The first sort of approach (the ‘traditional stance’) focuses on what Lopes calls the ‘exhibited features’ of artworks. For example, artworks have been held to exhibit the feature of imitating nature, expressing emotion or having significant form. The second sort of approach focuses on what Lopes calls the ‘genetic features’ of artworks. Genetic features are facts about the genesis of some work of art. Dickie’s institutional theory of art, for example, states that all works of art are produced in a certain way. In particular, they are produced for presentation to an artworld public. For all of their differences, definitions of art in terms of exhibited or genetic features have something in common. When challenged to define art, advocates of the traditional stance and advocates of the genetic stance accept the challenge and attempt to identify the features that all works of art have in common. In this sense, both the traditional stance and the genetic stance are buck stopping theories. Lopes, one of the most important contemporary philosophers of art, proposes a bold and dramatically new strategy. Instead of attempting to define art (or develop a theory of arts), the buck should be passed to theories of the arts. Philosophers should aim to provide theories of music, of painting, of sculpture, of dance, and so on. Something is a work of art if it is classified as such by a theory of some art.

Lopes puts his point in these terms. 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...

Traditionally, buck-stopping theories replaced the ellipsis with ‘imitates *belle nature*’ (Batteux) or ‘has significant form’ (Bell) or ‘communicates emotion from an artist to an audience’ (Tolstoy). More recently, the ellipsis has been replaced by something like ‘has been enfranchised by an art theory’ (Danto) or ‘has been produced for presentation to an artworld public’ (Dickie). Lopes 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 something is a work of music, and music is an art, then the thing 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 K s, we know everything there is to know about what art is.

In making the case for the buck-passing theory, Lopes begins by stating the 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. I will say a little about each of these desiderata.

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 a work of art but 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 part of some *K*. Lopes needs to identify a *K* to which all works of art belong. The second desideratum is being systematically informative. That is, a theory of the arts should yield an account of the individual arts. Such an account completes this schema:

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

That is, we want to have an account of the individual arts. 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 conceptions of the art. They include 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 works of art.

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. The best that a buck passing theory can do is say that "if *x* is a work of *K*, where *K* is an art, the *x* is ϕ partly in virtue of its taking advantage of *K*'s medium" (20). (ϕ might be replaced by something like "imitates *belle nature*.") So, 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" (20). I do not share Lopes' worry here. Specifying the medium of music is hardly difficult: it is sound. And, in fact, Batteux specified the media of all of the arts (at least those known in the eighteenth century). 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." (Charles Batteux, *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle*, Oxford University Press, 2015, 20) Here Batteux was echoing Plato and Aristotle and, in particular, *Epinomis* 975d and *Poetics* 1447c. Some buck stopping theories seem to have it all over buck passing theories when it comes to being systematically informative.

The buck passing theory fares better when it comes to the viability desideratum. Lopes has plausible responses to both the coffee mug objection and to the free rider objection. To the free rider objection the response is that conceptual art is a *K* and the supposed free riders (*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' (144). Works of art have an associated 'appreciated practice' lacked by non-artworks.

Lopes believes that, when it comes to grounding empirical art studies, the buck passing theory has the advantage. There are musicologists and historians of painting. There are students of architecture and people who study sculpture. However, there is, he tells us, no such thing as an historian of art. The buck passing theory calls for theories of each of the individual arts to guide students of the individual art. "Since art is not a phenomenon that figures in our best empirical theories, a theory of art should model that, which is exactly where the buck passing theory excels" (82).

Finally, 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, for example, *Inert Gas Series* is an artwork. Holders 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.

This leads us to the greatest of the challenges facing Lopes: he needs to provide some reason to think that a *K* is an art. There are many appreciative kinds (as he calls them) that are usually excluded from the category of art: upholstery, perfumery, and flower arranging, for example. There seems to be no reasons why these are not arts. Moreover, Lopes opens the possibility that the traditional arts are more radically heterogeneous than previously thought. Lopes suggests that the best theory of poetry may be an expression theory while the best theory of painting is a Dickie style institutional theory. On the whole, however, Lopes seems to favour the view that arts are to be understood in terms of aesthetic value. As understood by Lopes, the concept of aesthetic value is so broad that, so long as a medium has an associated “appreciative practice,” there are no grounds for excluding works in the medium from the category of artworks. So, for example, flower arranging and wine making may turn out to have as much claim on being arts as poetry and music do. Lopes seems comfortable with this consequence of his view. Those less comfortable with this consequence will find the buck passing theory to be unsatisfactory. They will continue to seek something that makes music an art but upholstery not an art. There can be no doubt, however, that Lopes has made a striking and original contribution to the philosophy of art literature.

James O. Young, University of Victoria