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The University of Montana

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On the Need for a Subsumptive Evaluative Approach:

**Societal Evaluation and Devaluation of
Art Works and Artistic Practice**

by

Julie Wills Sleightholm

B.F.A., University of Montana, 1998

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Montana

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Approved by:



Chairperson



Dean, Graduate School

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On the Need for a Subsumptive Evaluative Approach:
Societal Evaluation and Devaluation of Art Works and Artistic Practice

Chair: H. Rafael Chacón 

An ongoing axiological debate concerning the relative autonomy versus moral or ethical responsibility of art works and the art-making practice has, in recent years, occupied significant space within the major aesthetic journals. While the moralist posits that a work of art's value may be enhanced by the moral virtue that it exhibits, the autonomist maintains that the work of art is valuable intrinsically. This 'instrumentalist' versus autonomist debate inevitably ends in a stalemate, as the two sides cannot come to a shared understanding of 'aesthetic' value.

This impasse renders both the instrumentalist and autonomist positions impotent in terms of relevant artistic inquiry, and illustrates the need for an evaluative position which can transcend categoric designations of the aesthetic and the operational. I will argue for an evaluative position which is better poised to undertake issues relevant to the continued existence of art in society today. I will refer to this evaluative stance herein as the 'subsumptive' position, because of its implicit understanding that in contemporary society, art must be defended and evaluated simultaneously on social, political, and ethical- as well as on aesthetic- grounds.

The first section of this paper will establish the inadequacy of the current debate, and will validate a 'subsumptive' understanding of art and society. The subsumptive position maintains that aesthetic, moral, political, and other concerns are inextricably wound and must be evaluated comprehensively if art is ever to be accorded the societal value ascribed to it by both the instrumentalist and the autonomist positions.

The second section will establish the subsumptive position's relevance in contemporary society. I will address the contemporary era's expansion of visual culture and blurring of disciplinary boundaries, and will discuss specific issues in need of further investigation, including the artist/ audience relationship, censorship, and artistic responsibility. Finally, I will issue a call to artists, critics, and aesthetes to consider a broad view of a work of art's effects and merits in its evaluation or defense.

Introduction

An ongoing axiological debate concerning the relative autonomy versus moral or ethical responsibility of art works and the art-making practice has, in recent years, occupied significant space within the pages of the major aesthetic journals. While the origins of this debate predate the advent of aesthetics as a discipline, contemporary participants in this discussion frequently build upon upon three foundational position papers: Noel Carroll's "Moderate Moralism" (1996), Berys Gaut's "The Ethical Criticism of Art" (1998), and James Anderson and Jeff Dean's "Moderate Autonomism" (1998), which serve to define the moralist, ethicist, and autonomist positions respectively.¹ Carroll and Gaut have argued for the inclusion of moral or ethical considerations as a valid component of aesthetic evaluation, while Anderson and Dean hold firmly that the moral and the aesthetic must remain evaluatively as two distinct and separate realms.

This discussion has continued, in some form, in nearly each issue of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* and *The British Journal of Aesthetics* since the mid 1990s.² While certainly interesting and relevant new points are argued with each new contribution, the underlying issue remains one of artistic justification. That is, the moralist/ ethicist posits that a work of art's value may be enhanced by the moral virtue that the work of art exhibits, while the autonomist maintains that the work of art is valuable intrinsically, and that this value is not affected by moral virtue.

As Casey Haskins has argued in "Paradoxes of Autonomy: Or, Why Won't the Problem of Artistic Justification Go Away?," this 'instrumentalist' versus

¹ Berys Gaut, "The Ethical Criticism of Art," in *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), originally delivered as part of the 1994 American Society for Aesthetics national conference; Noel Carroll "Moderate Moralism," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 36, no. 3 (July 1996): 223-38; James Anderson and Jeff Dean, "Moderate Autonomism," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 38, no. 3 (April 1998):150-67. I refer also to Noel Carroll's "Moderate Moralism Versus Moderate Autonomism," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 38, no. 4 (October 1998): 419-24, in which Carroll offers as an answer to Anderson and Dean's "Moderate Autonomism."

² The continuing discussion to which I refer, and its participants, shall be come clear within the text of this paper.

autonomist debate inevitably ends in a stalemate, as the two sides cannot come to a shared philosophical understanding of the nature of the 'aesthetic'.³ The instrumentalist, a term Haskins utilizes to encompass both Carroll's moralist and Gaut's ethicist positions, believes that aesthetic value can be affected by nonaesthetic or nonformal concerns. The autonomist, meanwhile, will remain steadfast in the assertion that aesthetic value is comprised solely and completely of aesthetic or formal factors. Because a shared understanding of the nature of aesthetic value cannot be reached, the debate never leaves the theoretical sphere, and seems destined to continue without resolve *ad infinitum*.

This impasse renders both the instrumentalist and autonomist positions impotent in terms of relevant artistic inquiry, and thereby illustrates the need for an evaluative position which can transcend categoric designations of the aesthetic and the operational. I will argue for an evaluative position which is better poised to undertake issues relevant to the continued existence of art in society today, for indeed the need for artistic justification has not gone away. I will refer to this evaluative stance herein as the 'subsumptive' position, because of its implicit understanding that in contemporary society, art must be defended and evaluated simultaneously on social, political, and ethical- as well as on aesthetic- grounds.

The subsumptive position does not insist that a work of art's moral or ethical merit can have a direct bearing on its aesthetic value. Neither, however, does the subsumptive position legitimize 'pure' aesthetic evaluation, as does the autonomist position. Rather, the subsumptive position acknowledges the systemic nature of human experience, and insists that art must be both evaluated and defended as a facet of such experience. The subsumptive position thus argues that the autonomist position is indefensible in the practical, societal context. Furthermore, while the subsumptive position acknowledges the relevance of instrumental value, it argues that the instrumentalist position in its current state is unable to adequately address issues facing the work of art in the

³ Casey Haskins, "Paradoxes of Autonomy: Or, Why Won't the Problem of Artistic Justification Go Away?," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 1 (winter 2000):1-22.

practical world.

The first section of this paper will establish the inadequacy of the autonomist position and the ineffectiveness of the instrumentalist position in its current form, and will validate a comprehensive- or 'subsumptive'- understanding of art and society. I will show that a purely utilitarian view of artistic value will not satisfy society's expectations for 'art', while claims for art's intrinsic value will not adequately defend its continued existence in the current political and social climate. The subsumptive position maintains that aesthetic, moral, political, and other concerns are inextricably wound in practical experience and, as such, must be evaluated comprehensively if art is ever to be accorded the societal value ascribed to it by both the instrumentalist and the autonomist positions.

The second section will establish the subsumptive position's relevance in contemporary society. I will address the contemporary era's expansion of visual culture and blurring of disciplinary boundaries, and will discuss specific issues in need of further investigation, including the artist/ audience relationship, censorship, and artistic responsibility. Finally, I will issue a call to artists, critics, and aesthetes to consider a broad view of a work of art's effects and merits in its evaluation or defense. This will include an identification of certain strengths in various modes of contemporary visual communication as well as a recommendation for change in regard to certain practices which do not effectively meet the practical challenges defined herein.

Section I: The Need for a Subsumptive Evaluative Approach

The Impasse of the Instrumental & Autonomist Positions

In order to effectively argue the need for a comprehensive understanding of art and society, it will first be necessary to elaborate further on the current instrumentalist versus autonomist discussion, including a thorough description of the tenets of each position.⁴ Haskins has called the quarrel over artistic justification a longstanding humanist problem,⁵ and indeed the discussion did not begin with nor is it limited to the ideas put forth by Gaut, Carroll, or Anderson and Dean. For the purposes of this argument, however, I will rely chiefly on the current discussion outlined above, which centers on the effects of moral or ethical factors on aesthetic value.

It is worthy of notice that both Carroll and Anderson and Dean modify their respective positions with the term 'moderate'. If we view this in relation to the 'radical' position, the moderate view is indeed far more sensible in terms of shared understanding between the instrumentalist and the autonomist and in terms of the subsumptive position.

In the view of the radical autonomist, moral or ethical evaluation of art is never appropriate. Radical autonomism holds that art is a strictly autonomous realm of practice, distinct from all other social realms. To the radical autonomist, the evaluation of art in moral, ethical, or political terms is incoherent. As such, the introduction of moral or political ideas for the purpose of artistic evaluation

⁴ Like Haskins, I will use the term 'instrumentalist' when referring jointly to Carroll's moralist and Gaut's ethicist positions. I do so with caution, however, as the term can negatively be associated with propaganda or mere utility. I do not wish to imply that Carroll or Gaut would reduce 'art' to a purely sociological function; both take pains to illustrate the opposite. I use the term here simply for ease of syntax.

⁵ Haskins, p.1

presents an incoherent and inappropriate evaluative dilemma.⁶

The radical moralist, meanwhile, holds that moral value is the only criterion of aesthetic value. Oliver Connolly has further distinguished between two views of the radical moralist position: the 'narrow' view of radical moralism holds that formal criteria have no role in determining aesthetic value, while the slightly less limiting 'broad' view maintains that all formal criteria are deeply morally significant.⁷ In each instance, the radical moralist submits that moral value must be the primary consideration in the evaluation of art.⁸

The distinction between the 'radical' positions and the 'moderate' views claimed by Carroll and Anderson and Dean, then, becomes significant. The moderate autonomist position, to which Anderson and Dean subscribe, states that autonomy is granted only to the aesthetic dimension of a work of art. Unlike the radical autonomist, the moderate autonomist will concede that a work of art may have moral or political value. The moderate autonomist holds that a work of art may be evaluated both morally and aesthetically, but such evaluations are distinct and have no bearing on one another. That is, while the moderate autonomist will acknowledge the nonaesthetic values of a work of art, these nonaesthetic values are not relevant to aesthetic valuation; a work of art will never be aesthetically improved by its moral strengths nor aesthetically devalued by its moral shortcomings. For ease of discussion, I will refer to this moderate view herein as the 'autonomist position'.

The moderate moralist position with which Carroll identifies, meanwhile,

⁶ Carroll suggests Clive Bell as an exemplar radical formalist, justified through Bell's insistence that formal qualities alone determine aesthetic merit. Bell does acknowledge the existence of non-formal values, but maintains that these values have no bearing upon the work of art *qua* art: "Let no one imagine that representation is bad in itself; a realistic form may be as significant, in its place as part of the design, as an abstract. But if a representative form has value, it is as form, not as representation. The representative element in a work of art may or may not be harmful; always it is irrelevant. For, to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation." [Bell, *Art*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1921, p. 25.]

⁷ Oliver Connolly, "Ethicism and Moderate Moralism," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 40, no. 3 (July 2000):302-316.

⁸ Plato may similarly be regarded as the exemplar radical moralist, through his assertion that art should only be discussed in terms of its contribution or role in moral life.

contends that “for certain genres [of art], moral comment, along with formal comment, is natural and appropriate.”⁹ Unlike the radical moralist, who holds either that formal criteria lack any significance in aesthetic evaluation or that all formal criteria have moral significance, the moderate moralist will acknowledge that some works of art have no moral dimension. Furthermore, Carroll will submit that moral considerations do not trump all other evaluative factors. A work of art which exhibits a moral flaw will not necessarily be deemed aesthetically inadequate; if formal and other criteria are strong enough to establish a work’s value despite a moral shortcoming, the work will retain aesthetic value. Likewise, a work which exhibits a ‘correct’ moral viewpoint will not necessarily be deemed aesthetically valuable; formal criteria viewed in conjunction with moral criteria will establish the relative aesthetic value of a work of art. Again, for unity and ease of discussion, I will refer to this moderate moralist view as the ‘moralist position’.

The impact of utilizing the moderate rather than radical positions in the moralist versus autonomist debate is readily apparent. Both the moderate moralist and autonomist will acknowledge a multiplicity of values in the evaluation of art, creating a seemingly fertile ground for debate. However, the ultimate futility of the debate in its current form can be detected at this early stage as well. While the moralist supports a composite evaluation of a work of art’s various attributes in determining the work’s aesthetic success, the autonomist resolutely separates formal from moral and other values, and maintains that no relation exists among such values.

The ethicist position, as defined by Gaut, bears a strong resemblance to Carroll’s moralist position, and as such I have allied the ethicist and moralist positions in the debate with that of the autonomist. The ethicist position is slightly stronger than the moralist in tone. While the moralist holds that a moral defect *may* contribute to a devaluation of the work of art, the ethicist claims that an ethical defect *will* constitute an aesthetic defect. Gaut submits that if a work of art displays an ethically reprehensible attitude, the work is to that extent

⁹Carroll, “Moderate Moralism” p. 226

aesthetically defective, while if the work exhibits an ethically meritorious attitude, the work is to that extent aesthetically valuable. Like Carroll, Gaut acknowledges a plurality of aesthetic values, and holds that an ethical value or demerit is not singularly sufficient for a similar aesthetic valuation of the work as a whole. The ethical, Gaut states, is one aspect of the aesthetic. The autonomist, of course, differs from the moralist and ethicist in the belief that moral, ethical, and other values are distinct from aesthetic value, and that as such any discussion of aesthetic value which includes nonformal concerns is incoherent and inappropriate.

The instrumentalist position's claim that a moral/ ethical virtue or flaw can constitute an aesthetic virtue or flaw is based fundamentally on what Gaut refers to as the 'prescribed response' of a work of art. According to Gaut, a work of art directs its viewer toward a specific response; this response may be emotional, physical, or perceptual. The direction by a work of art toward such an experience constitutes the work's 'prescription', and the specific experience constitutes the work's prescribed response.¹⁰ Both the ethicist and moralist positions hold that the response prescribed by a work of art may be either ethical/ moral or unethical/ immoral, and as such may affect the overall aesthetic success of the work.

Gaut and Carroll argue that if the response prescribed through a work of art is morally or ethically incongruent, the work will fail to elicit the prescribed response. That is, if the audience response prescribed through a work of art is morally unacceptable to the audience, then the audience will not respond in the way prescribed by the work of art. Gaut refers to this incongruity in terms of 'merit'; if the responses prescribed by a work of art are unmerited because they are unethical, the audience will have reason not to respond in the way prescribed by the work. Thus, says Gaut, the prescription of an unmerited response will result in the failure of that response. As the response is necessary to the aesthetic success of the work, the failure of the prescribed response will constitute an aesthetic failure. Carroll calls this failure of the prescribed response

¹⁰ For a complete discussion of the work of art's 'prescribed response,' see Gaut pp. 192-199.

a failure of the work on its own terms, and holds that the work's power to effect its intended aesthetic experience will be hindered.

Gaut makes clear, however, that the representation of an unethical element does not in itself constitute grounds for aesthetic failure. An important distinction of the ethicist position lies in what Gaut refers to as a work's 'attitude', which can be determined through critical evaluation. A work's attitude is manifested in its prescribed responses; a composite view of a work's prescribed responses will yield the work's attitude. Thus, the representation of Satan in Milton's writings does not make Milton a Satanist; Milton's attitude toward Satan is disapproving. Works can be effective *because* they violate ethical sensibility, if the success of the work requires the viewer's disapproval. Other works may offer an approving attitude toward an unethical element, and will encounter an aesthetic failure when the audience fails to respond in the intended manner. Furthermore, if a prescribed response or attitude is merited but ineffective, an *aesthetic failure still occurs*.

Prescribed responses, therefore, must be considered in composite, as a single prescribed response considered alone may give an incorrect understanding of the work's overall attitude. The attitude displayed in a work, and not its subject matter, is paramount.¹¹ Nonetheless, it is important to recall that to the ethicist, the relative merit of a work's attitude will not singularly determine aesthetic worth. The ethicist position merely claims, as Gaut states, that "Whether prescribed responses are merited is aesthetically relevant, and among the criteria that are relevant to determining whether they are merited are ethical ones."¹² The ethicist holds that a work may be aesthetically valuable even if ethically depraved based on the strength of its formal qualities, assuming these formal elements are strong enough to salvage the value diminished by the ethical shortcoming.

Anderson and Dean, as proponents of the autonomist position, counter that an understanding of moral and aesthetic criticisms as distinct will be helpful

¹¹ Gaut, p. 188

¹² Ibid. p. 197

when confronted with conflicts between the criteria. Anderson and Dean point to works in which moral values predominate for some audience members while aesthetic values predominate for others. The novel *Huckleberry Finn*, for instance, is constantly embattled. Certain readers feel that the work's overall aesthetic merit surpasses concerns of racist undertones found within the text, while others feel the book should be removed from school libraries on moral grounds. To the autonomist, these conflicts exist outside of the aesthetic domain.

The initial constrictive disagreement between the instrumentalist and the autonomist positions, then, is one of categoric inclusion. The instrumentalist holds that aesthetic value is comprised of a multiplicity of values, including formal, moral or ethical, and otherwise. The autonomist believes, however, that while moral or ethical considerations may be worthy of independent evaluation, they are not to be included in aesthetic evaluation. The autonomist and instrumentalist positions have failed to reach a shared conceptual definition of the aesthetic domain. The debate in its current form can thus proceed no further, and continues endlessly into what Haskins has called "dialectical oblivion."¹³

Whether a given value found within a work of art is, in nature, ultimately aesthetic or otherwise is really of limited consequence to a comprehensive evaluation of the work in practical terms. The subsumptive position may perhaps be thought of as a 'practical aesthetics,' in the same way that practical ethics concerns the application and implications of ethical principles in the physical world. A practical aesthetics makes use of the instrumentalist and autonomist positions' observations about the various values of art, while disregarding designations of such values as aesthetic or nonaesthetic. The subsumptive position, while acknowledging the significance of the theoretical debate's observations, is concerned with the application of and implications for the work of art in the societal context.

¹³ Haskins, p. 3

The Inadequacies of Intrinsic Value

Despite the apparent quagmire created by this discussion of aesthetic categorization or inclusion, the debate is not merely semantic. While the language of the current debate inevitably returns to definitions of the aesthetic domain, each position does offer a tangible view of art's societal role. According to the instrumentalist position, in the same way that a work of art may exhibit appropriate or inappropriate moral or ethical attitudes, the work of art can advance or pervert moral or ethical understanding. Meanwhile, the autonomist position's defense of aesthetic value as an independent category rests on a notion of aesthetic sanctity. That is, the autonomist holds art to be intrinsically valuable, and thereby believes that an evaluation of a work of art which includes its instrumental use ineluctably violates the work's intrinsic value.

In order to fully establish the validity of the subsumptive position, it will also be necessary to demonstrate the inadequacies of both the autonomist and instrumentalist positions in terms of art's societal context. The 'aesthetic experience' plays a central role in the autonomist's argument, and appears in the instrumentalist position as well. The aesthetic experience, the autonomist maintains, is singularly constitutive of the work of art. That is, the aesthetic experience offered through an encounter with a work of art is unique and significant; a work which offers no aesthetic experience is not successful as a work of art.¹⁴ The instrumentalist, of course, counters that the aesthetic experience encountered through a work of art is affected by moral or ethical factors.

The autonomist position equates the aesthetic experience with a state of 'absorption'. That is, an aesthetic experience is encountered through a work of art when the formal qualities of the work are strong enough so as to completely hold the viewer's attention, or to absorb. The autonomist will not acknowledge

¹⁴ For a further discussion of the 'aesthetic experience' and its centrality in formalist theory, see Jeffrey Petts, "Aesthetic Experience and the Revelation of Value," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 1 (winter 1998), derived in part and based upon John Dewey, *Art As Experience* (New York: Perigee Books, 1980).

cognitive or other nonformal values as part of the aesthetic; as such it may be assumed that the autonomist identifies an aesthetic experience intuitively. Jeffrey Petts, in his essay "Aesthetic Experience and the Revelation of Value," counters the autonomist's intuitive approach with his assertion that the aesthetic experience must involve "specifiable intellectual content."¹⁵ If the aesthetic experience could be described merely through a feeling of 'rightness', says Petts, then intensity of emotion could simply serve as the gauge of aesthetic value. To limit the aesthetic experience to an experience of 'beauty' is similarly inadequate. The expressive power or cognitive insight found in a work contribute to the aesthetic experience of the work, which as Gaut explains, is why masterful works of art may be brutally ugly.¹⁶

While Petts' claim may appear to boost the instrumentalist argument, he has not established any need for the inclusion of moral, ethical, or other factors in an aesthetic designation per se. Rather, he has established that a 'pure' aesthetic experience cannot be practically separated from a cognitive or expressive experience encountered through the work of art. The work of art is experienced by the viewer in composite; that is, all experiences offered through the work of art are encountered by the viewer at the same moment. Without a careful and methodical investigation, the viewer will not be able to practically distinguish among a 'purely' aesthetic experience and a cognitive or other experience encountered in unison. Petts states:

aesthetic experience is neither a trivial (and possibly expendable) 'felt response' nor a 'critical approach' to art (or to anything else for that matter), but is an experience that accompanies and marks a job that has been well done, a problem that has been solved, a work of art that is beautiful, where animal life (that is, life characterized by a biological constitution and by the need to adapt to a changing environment, achieved through the sensory detection of one's environment, and the capability of motion) is a precondition of such experience.¹⁷

While certainly the autonomist will object to Petts' utilitarian conception of the aesthetic experience, the real point of interest here is his acknowledgment of the active viewer. Petts illustrates that the aesthetic experience can only exist in

¹⁵Petts, pp. 61-71.

¹⁶ Gaut, p. 185

¹⁷ Petts, p. 63

the presence of animal life. Clearly, if the aesthetic experience offered by a work of art can only be discussed in terms of its effects on animal (human) viewers, then a practical understanding of the effects of such an experience in the human sphere is valid and appropriate. This lends credence to the need for a subsumptive position. While the standing instrumentalist and autonomist debate culminates in a disagreement over the relative merits of aesthetic versus cognitive experiences in the theoretical realm, the subsumptive position acknowledges that such experiences can only exist within the physical world. The subsumptive position undertakes an investigation of the effects of and implications for the work of art in the practical, or human, world.

The autonomist argues that to view a work of art in terms of moral education damages its integrity. This position holds that art is intrinsically valuable and therefore should not be bound to external purposes, such as moral education. The argument, as Haskins has rephrased it, holds that artworks *do* any number of things, but what they do is not what makes them art. Anderson and Dean state that art's design, and not its content, hold our attention; to subject the work of art to utilitarian criteria for evaluation confuses art's intrinsic- or 'aesthetic'- qualities with external valuations.

The 'intrinsic value' of art is the essential tenet of the autonomist position; phrases such as "art for art's sake" or "the work of art *qua* work of art" assume that art is inherently valuable. Intrinsic value, the autonomist holds, exists in the very nature of art, whereas instrumental value necessarily refers to an outside interest. Malcolm Budd has asserted that art's intrinsic value is directly linked to the experience the work of art offers, or the 'aesthetic experience' discussed earlier.¹⁸ Says Budd, the value of such an experience is not instrumental. Thus, the work of art which fails to move or inspire lacks only instrumental value; its intrinsic value is not diminished. In true moderate autonomist form, Budd asserts that aesthetic values are not necessarily more important than cognitive or moral values, but are distinct.

¹⁸ Budd's theories are referred to by Haskins, p. 4, and are drawn from Malcolm Budd, *Values of Art: Pictures, Poetry, and Music* (London: Penguin Books, 1995).

The need for a subsumptive position in light of the intrinsic value argument can be defended on two points. First, as Petts has demonstrated, the aesthetic experience does not exist without the presence of a human participant. If, as Budd maintains, the work of art is valuable by virtue of the aesthetic experience it offers, then the value of the work of art cannot exist without the presence of an audience. Art's 'intrinsic' value, it appears, can only be discussed in relation to its human effects.

My second point of defense requires a more thorough understanding of the nature of 'intrinsic value'; for this, I shall refer to John O'Neill's "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value."¹⁹ O'Neill identifies three conceptions of value which are typically termed 'intrinsic': 1. non-instrumental value, 2. value by virtue of intrinsic, or non-relational, properties, and 3. objective value. Each successive conception is slightly stronger than its predecessor. Although O'Neill discusses these points generally I shall refer to them as they apply to the work of art. The first definition of intrinsic value is 'non-instrumental' value, which holds merely that art is an end in itself. That is, art need not serve any function; it is valuable simply by virtue of its existence. The second type O'Neill offers is a value based on intrinsic or non-relational properties. To apply this type of intrinsic value to art would require that art be valuable without relation or reference to human experience. Finally, objective value requires that art's defense not be dependent on human designations of value.

O'Neill submits that while the non-instrumental defense of a given entity's intrinsic value (in this case, art's intrinsic value) is common, it may be necessary to defend such a position in terms of non-relational and objective value as well. That is, a claim for a work's non-instrumental value may not hold up under scrutiny if similar claims cannot be made for the work's non-relational and objective values. The reasoning behind such an argument is as follows: an entity may be defended non-instrumentally merely through the claim that the entity does not serve any human function. However, true non-instrumentality can only be assured when no reference to human experience is required. Further

¹⁹ John O'Neill, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," *The Monist* 75, no. 2(April 1992):119-37.

still, non-instrumentality cannot be convincingly demonstrated if the entity being defended requires a human designation of value.

The first or non-instrumental conception of intrinsic value, as can be seen in the autonomist's argument, poses no great challenge to the work of art. The second, or non-relational, and third, or objective, varieties prove more difficult. Clearly art cannot be deemed valuable without relation to human experience because the work of art was itself created through a human act. Its very existence is relative to human experience. The argument for art's objective independence from human valuation may be made, but will encounter strong reservations. Certainly human valuations were involved in the creation of a work of art, making the work's post partum autonomy an unlikely eventuality.

O'Neill asserts that true intrinsic value must be determined through an evaluation of an entity's 'real' properties, though he distinguishes among two definitions of a real property:

- (1) A real property is one that exists in the absence of any being experiencing that object. (Weak interpretation.)
- (2) A real property is one that can be characterized without references to the experiences of a being who might experience the object. (Strong interpretation.)²⁰

The 'aesthetic experience' may meet the qualifications of O'Neill's first, or weak, definition of a real property but not without some difficulty. It could be argued that a work of art might continue to exist in its current form even if it were placed in a closet and never seen again. This situation bears a remarkable resemblance to the cliched Zen koan, "If a tree falls in a forest, and there is no one present to hear, does it make a sound?" Transposed for our purposes, the question might be, "If a work of art is never seen again, does it still produce an aesthetic response?" Thus, for the work of art, the possibility of the aesthetic experience as a real property could be argued, but weakly.

O'Neill's second, or strong, position simply cannot be fulfilled by the aesthetic experience. We cannot discuss the aesthetic experience without reference to human experience. The aesthetic experience, then, cannot be

²⁰ O'Neill, p. 126

included among art's 'real' properties, and therefore cannot be used to support art's intrinsic value.

In this regard, the subsumptive position supports the instrumentalist position's claim for the instrumental nature of art. The instrumentalist holds that art is valued or devalued by virtue of its instrumental contributions. Both the subsumptive and the instrumentalist positions, then, advocate for the consideration of moral, ethical, and other cognitive values in the evaluation of works of art. The subsumptive position will take this instrumentalist view a step further, however, by asserting that not only instrumental values but instrumentality itself must be considered in a comprehensive practical evaluation of art. This acknowledges that as the work of art does exist exclusively within the human sphere, its instrumental use is inevitable. Not only the values used instrumentally- moral, ethical or otherwise- but the manner of instrumental use is available for evaluative comment. I shall return to this point in greater detail in the second section of this paper.

Meanwhile, another point relevant to the subsumptive position can be gleaned from O'Neill's argument. In his discussion concerning the intrinsic value of 'nature'- or the natural environment, O'Neill offers a notable insight: the argument for nature's intrinsic value can be compellingly made in terms of non-instrumental, non-relational, and objective value, but is still insufficient to guarantee its preservation. That is, nature's value meets the earlier-defined requirements of intrinsic value, but this assured intrinsic value will not necessarily protect it from human abuse. In order to effectively alter the treatment of nature, we must also demonstrate that it is in human society's best interest to protect the natural environment.

This observation can similarly be applied to the protection of art and artistic practice. O'Neill's allegation concerning the protection of nature illuminates the challenge facing the work of art in the societal context. That is, in order to protect the right to existence of the work of art and artistic practice, we must demonstrate that the presence of art is beneficial to society.

This, precisely, illustrates the need for the subsumptive position. Even if the intrinsic value of art can be established, a demonstration of art's societal value may still be necessary to protect it from societal constraints. In the practical realm, this assertion deems the autonomist position irrelevant. The instrumentalist position is better positioned to defend art in terms of societal benefit, but the moral or ethical values ascribed to works of art under the instrumentalist position will similarly prove inadequate to a practical societal acknowledgment of art's worth. The subsumptive position is better poised to demonstrate such societal artistic worth because the subsumptive position evaluates comprehensively the effects of and implications for the work of art in the societal context.

The Need for an Expanded View of Artistic Worth

According to the instrumentalist position, art has the ability to advance moral understanding. The autonomist will, of course, reply that we learn nothing new from art-- that moral education is not affected by the aesthetic element. As the autonomist critic Clement Greenberg has said, "I have never really felt that morality should in any sense be affected by the aesthetic factor. That's an absolute separation... I don't see art as having ever, in a real sense, affected the course of human affairs."²¹ To the autonomist's charge that we learn nothing new from art, the instrumentalist answers that not all education comes in the form of new knowledge. Carroll holds that artworks activate preexisting moral knowledge in the audience. He submits, "It is an error to suppose that moral education only occurs when new moral emotions or tenets are communicated."²² Gaut concurs, and offers that indeed much of art's value is derived from 'affective-cognition'. That is, art offers us new conceptions of the world, by making our already possessed knowledge "vividly present, so disposing us to

²¹ Greenberg's remark was quoted in the same context by Haskins, p. 2, and was originally drawn from a discussion with T.J. Clark in *Modernism and Modernity: The Vancouver Conference Papers*, ed. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh et. al. (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983): 90.

²² Carroll, "Moderate Moralism," p. 226

reorder our thoughts.”²³

In order to assess these arguments, it is necessary to understand more comprehensively the values ascribed to art in the societal context. This will demonstrate that our society values art for its original contributions to knowledge, moral and otherwise. In this regard, the instrumentalist position is validated. However, it will simultaneously be shown that our society allows aesthetic factors to inform its moral opinions, and that these opinions do have an explicit effect on art’s continued societal role. The theoretical debate between the autonomist and instrumentalist positions cannot adequately encompass the challenges facing art and artistic practice in the physical world, thus providing further validation for the subsumptive position.

First, I would like to take up the problem of artistic contributions to human knowledge. As a discipline, and in terms of contributions to human understanding, science enjoys a great deal of societal enthusiasm due to its perceived verity. To the scientist, art does not so much acquire new knowledge of the world as express it in socially novel ways. Sigmund Freud dismisses art for the sake of science, because unlike science, art “never dares to make any attacks on the realm of reality.”²⁴ The understanding here is that artists merely rearrange, albeit in visually stimulating ways, information which has been previously established, usually through scientific investigation.

Donald Kuspit, in his provocative essay “Artist Envy,” cites Heinz Kohut’s slightly more art-affirming ‘hypothesis of artistic anticipation,’ which credits the artist with being “ahead of his time in focusing on the nuclear psychological problems of his era.”²⁵ Kohut maintains, however, that the scientist eventually comes to an empirical understanding of what the artist merely intuits. According

²³ Gaut, p. 195

²⁴ Freud’s views on art and science are here referenced as cited by Donald Kuspit, “Artist Envy,” in *Postmodern Perspectives: Issues in Contemporary Art*, ed. by Howard Risatti. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990: 290-99. The original source comes from Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1933: p. 219.

²⁵Kuspit, p. 296; derived from Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self*, New York: International University Press, 1977:p. 285-86

to Kohut, the artist sets critical new ideas in motion, but these ideas remain incomplete until the scientist arrives at substantiation. Kohut's model places the artist as a kind of harbinger of future knowledge. While this acknowledges art's inquisitive or investigative nature, it seems to affirm the autonomist position's assertion that art cannot contribute directly to moral education.

Nelson Goodman, in his discussions of art and science, acknowledged that art and science are not cognitively equivalent, however, recognized that "the arts must be taken no less seriously than the sciences as modes of discovery, creation, and enlargement of knowledge in the broad sense of advancement of the understanding."²⁶ Indeed, art and science play two distinct investigative roles. While both seek truths in some sense, the range of permissible truths is more precisely delimited in science than in art. As Catherine Elgin points out, science does not seek every truth.²⁷ There are a myriad of truths about our world which science deems irrelevant or trivial. Science does not investigate the number of dandelions in a lawn, for instance, because the fact is not applicable to any larger understanding of the world. Artistic practice and dialogue, on the other hand, make use of truths unappealing to the scientist and investigate the ways such truths interact with one another to inform our world view. Furthermore, any given scientific experiment seeks answers to a narrowly specified group of questions. Art allows for a multiplicity of truths.

Elgin notes that the artistic pursuit of truth holds several key advantages over the scientific, namely interpretation and enduring interest. She cites Shakespeare's *Henry V* by way of example, and finds that in interpreting the work, we may view it as a story about morality, about war, about leadership, about Shakespearean England, or in various other lights, either separately or intertwined. She further submits that this complexity of interpretation allows the work to maintain enduring interest, unlike an investigated scientific principle, which once established, loses its general interest as it is absorbed into the

²⁶ Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978) p. 102

²⁷ Catherine Elgin, "Reorienting Aesthetics, Recovering Cognition," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 3 (summer 2000) pp. 219-25

compendium of human knowledge. As Elgin eloquently summarizes, "Where reference is multiple or complex, interpretation is not straightforward."²⁸

Goodman's 'five symptoms of the aesthetic' offer further understanding of art's advantages over science. These 'essential ingredients', according to Goodman, include: 1. syntactic density- that is, with the slightest difference in line between two symbols the symbol is altered; 2. semantic density- that the system (in this case, work of art) is able to represent the most minute of contextual differences between things; 3. relative repleteness- the ability of a work of art to symbolize or effect meaning on multiple levels, as in the *Henry V* example; 4. exemplification- that a given representation may exemplify, and thus refer to key features of, other things or ideas; and 5. multiple and complex reference- that symbols may perform a variety of referential roles, and in limitless combination with other symbols, identify an infinite number of possibilities.²⁹

According to Goodman, an exemplar is a "telling instance," which rearranges and highlights certain features of our world which may otherwise go unnoticed, thereby enhancing familiarity with a given circumstance. This places art in the powerful position of being able to exact societal notice, and thus opens the potential for effected societal influence. Repleteness allows for a view of a 'larger picture' seldom offered through the sciences, which typically achieve a relative repleteness only when viewed in composite. That is, while a multitude of scientific experiment results and findings must be held together to offer an understanding of multiple aspects of a given situation, a work of art allows, through multiplicity of reference, for this same understanding to be achieved in a glance.

Elgin builds a strong case for the value of the aesthetic as defined by Goodman in terms of education and human development: while semantic and syntactic density allow for "limitless precision," they invite indecision. Certainly, not all distinctions are worthy of notice, and triviality can plague art as much as science. Through contact with the arts we develop a discriminating ability to

²⁸ Elgin, p. 224

²⁹ Goodman, pp. 67-68

differentiate between those things worthy of our attentions and the merely trivial, or *discernment*. Furthermore, says Elgin, we learn to heighten our sensitivity to significance and thus “expand our cognitive range.”³⁰ She summarizes, “The acuity promoted by encounters with the arts is a wide-ranging ability to recognize sameness and difference, pattern and variation, at different levels of abstraction.”³¹

Elgin thus acknowledges art’s potential contributions to human knowledge, and demonstrates that some truths are more readily contributed through art than through science. This appears to validate the instrumentalist position’s argument for moral education, though Elgin makes no claims for the effects of moral value on aesthetic value *per se*. Nonetheless, art’s contributions to moral understanding will not be enough to justify its continued existence. That is, while an encounter with a work of art may promote enhanced factual, perceptual, or moral understanding, this gained knowledge will not adequately fulfill societal expectations for art. Elgin goes on to say:

Works of art can express things other than emotions, and works can express emotions they do not evoke. Nonetheless, it is clear that many works of art evoke emotions, and that their doing so is vital to their aesthetic function. Goodman neither denies nor belittles this point. What he denies is that the evocation of emotion is the end of art. A kick in the shins is a far more efficient way of evoking pain than composing a sonnet is. If a poet wants merely to evoke pain, he should eschew poetry and take up mayhem. Rather than the end of art, Goodman contends, the evocation of emotions is a powerful, sometimes subtle means by which some works of art advance understanding.³²

Moral understanding, as Goodman and Elgin contend, can be enhanced through encounters with art. However, there may be more effective means of advancing such moral understanding. Art, then, cannot be compellingly defended solely by virtue of its moral contributions. The autonomist refers to this as the ‘argument from irreplaceability’: if an artwork is valued because it performs *function f*, and *function f* can also be performed satisfactorily by a social service organization, then art loses its distinctive identity.³³ In the same way that intrinsic

³⁰Elgin, p. 221

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 223

³³ As explained by Haskins, pp. 2-3

value will not assure art's continued protection and esteem, instrumental contributions (in this case, in the form of moral education) will never define art's unique significance. While aesthetic and instrumental values may be understood as two distinct valuative domains, it is critical that the instrumental and aesthetic values of a work of art be evaluated subsumptively in order to ascertain its societal worth.

While instrumental value cannot define art, as a society we do value new contributions to human knowledge, and these original contributions must be included in a compelling evaluation or defense of art. Ross Bowden builds a case for an 'informative' aesthetic in his anthropological assessment of art and forgery.³⁴ Bowden, whose primary research lies with the culture of the Kwoma people of Papua New Guinea, distinguishes between the value placed on originality of ideas in Kwoma society versus in Western society. To the Kwoma, the name of the creator of a ritual or art object is insignificant. This is because, Bowden argues, the whole of human knowledge and understanding is believed to have had a divine origin. Thus, the 'artist' is adding nothing new to the knowledge bank, but is simply recreating an object based on an earlier model, whose existence was at some point in time divinely created. On the other hand, knowledge in the Western world is largely believed to be built upon the achievements of earlier humans. Thus, Bowden argues, in the Western world works of art which contribute the most to a further understanding of our world are ranked aesthetically highest.³⁵

Bowden offers an examination of the value our culture places on original works of art and on art forgeries as further testament to the necessity of original contribution. This argument begins with a question: Why should a work of art once thought to be an original masterpiece be devalued when it is discovered to be a forgery? Clearly, the aesthetic or visual aspects of the work remain intact. If the forgery is good enough to have been exhibited in a museum, the visual

³⁴ Ross Bowden, "What is Wrong with an Art Forgery?: An Anthropological Perspective," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 3(summer 1999): 333-43.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 337

distinctions between the forgery and the original are likely to be insignificant. The potential to evoke emotion remains intact as well. However, "Forgeries are disvalued, says [Bowden, paraphrasing Alfred Lessing], not because they lack aesthetic merit but because they lack one of the defining features of art, notably creativity."³⁶

There is a perhaps unfortunate tendency among cultural critics to equate novelty with triviality. Certainly, newness alone does not indicate significance. However, as a culture, Westerners do exhibit a sense of appreciation for the individual who first contributes a given piece of information to the social compendium of knowledge. As Bowden points out, this is demonstrated in our selection of recipients for the Nobel Prize. At least in theory, we offer the prize to the contributor(s) who first achieved a certain feat, and not to those who emulate it, no matter how successfully. Says Bowden, "Forgeries are disvalued not just because they involve deception but because they contribute nothing new to knowledge."³⁷

Arthur Danto and Mark Sagoff point out that whereas the painter of an original takes a given set of stimuli and paints a representation of these processed ideas, the painter of a replica merely paints a painting.³⁸ Our culture values the original as an insightful and articulate contribution presented to society by an individual artist. The forgery, meanwhile, is devalued not for its aesthetic qualities per se but for its apparent lack of intelligence and insight. Art is appreciated not so much for what it depicts as for what it reveals.

This 'revelatory' element, according to Hanna Segal, is integral to aesthetic appreciation. Nonetheless, as the instrumentalist position earlier argued, revelation can be inherently a discovery, rather than an invention, of truth. Segal says,

³⁶ Bowden, p. 334

³⁷ Ibid., p. 337

³⁸ This discussed by John Bohn, "Museums and the Culture of Autography," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 1 (winter 1999) p. 60 and originally derived from Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) and Mark Sagoff, "The Aesthetic Status of Forgeries," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 35(1976): 169-180.

There is often a feeling, both in the artist and in the recipient, that the artist not so much creates but reveals a reality. It has been said that nobody noticed the mists on the Thames until Turner painted them. If a painting is of a landscape known to us we feel that aspects, features, feelings have been revealed which we never noticed before.³⁹

Clearly, as a culture we value new information or attention to existing information brought to light through an encounter with art. Our society acknowledges that original works of art can offer valuable and unique contributions to collective human knowledge and understanding. Nonetheless, originality and instrumental contributions to knowledge as well as formal or aesthetic merit will need to be considered conjointly in order to defend a work of art or artistic practice itself as being of benefit to society. This again demonstrates the fruitlessness of the current autonomist versus instrumentalist debate, which is bound in theoretical definitions of the 'aesthetic', and elucidates the need for an evaluative position which subsumptively considers art's instrumental contributions along with other explicit and contextual factors.

Finally, while as a culture we acknowledge the potential for valuable artistic contributions, the inverse is that such valuations are not always positive. In order to effectively defend art's existence against practical, societal challenges, it is necessary to understand the bases for such challenges. Once again, a subsumptive consideration of aesthetic, instrumental and other factors is essential to an effective evaluation of art in the societal context. I will demonstrate that our society frequently intermingles aesthetic and moral judgments, and that such judgments have a real effect on the work of art and on artistic practice.

It is in this arena where Mark Packer's work deserves notice.⁴⁰ Packer has made a convincing argument, picked up by Marcia Muelder Eaton, that aesthetics and morality or ethics cannot always be definitively separated. He offers several hypothetical accounts of situations in which specific conducts are

³⁹ Hanna Segal, *Dream, Phantasy, and Art*. London and New York: Tavistock/ Routledge, 1991: 94-5; This aspect of Segal's work is referenced and was brought to my attention by James S. Grotstein, M.D., "The Enigmatic Relationship of Creativity to Mental Health and Psychopathology," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* Vol. XLVI, no. 3 (July 1992): 405-21.

⁴⁰ Mark Packer, "The Aesthetic Dimension of Ethics and Law: Some Reflections on Harmless Offense," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (January 1996): 57-74.

deemed unacceptable despite a total lack of evidence against such conduct for injury caused or rights infringed. Eaton summarizes one of Packer's scenarios succinctly:

Suppose, he says, we could use DNA painlessly extracted from cows or chickens to create rib eye steaks or boneless breasts. Since no animal would suffer, vegetarian arguments against eating meat lose their force. And suppose further, that we could produce and serve human flesh in the same way. Does all moral offensiveness disappear? ⁴¹

The remaining 'moral' offense, Packer proffers, is aesthetic. That is, while no creature would suffer from the DNA-based creation of human steaks, the general population would likely reject this scenario on aesthetic grounds.

Packer demonstrates that some evaluative notions used morally are in fact aesthetic. He offers that "Revolting', 'shocking', and even 'vulgar' are terms we frequently employ to express an irreducible response to the pure and simple idea of offensive conduct without any reference to the consequences."⁴²

Consider the offense most Westerners take over the consumption of dog as a delicacy in parts of Asia. In these Asian cultures, the consumption of dog meat is neither morally nor aesthetically offensive. As most Westerners eat meat from cows or chickens without moral concern, Western society's subsequent revolt over the consumption of dog cannot be morally justified in terms of genuine harm to the animal. As with the human DNA steaks, the remaining offense is aesthetic.

Furthermore, and importantly for the work of art, some harmless behaviors are judged to be justifiably restricted because they violate well-established aesthetic norms. For example, our 'rules' of English grammar are not based upon the prevention of or protection from harm, but upon established, aesthetic standards. As Packer points out, "the use of aesthetic values to justify prohibition is already a well established convention in our moral and legal culture..."⁴³

Packer distinguishes between external and internal factors of situations, or

⁴¹ Marcia Muelder Eaton, "Aesthetics: The Mother of Ethics?," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 4(fall 1997): p. 356

⁴² Packer, p. 61

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 57

between genuine harm rendered and mere offense. External factors refer to the potentiality or probability of harm or injury; internal factors refer to abstract emotions, such as disgust. Internal factors, as Packer demonstrates, are frequently deemed adequate to justify behavioral restrictions. By way of example, he offers the legal case of *State vs. Bradbury*, in which an elderly man is challenged for burning his already-dead sister's body in a furnace. Although the man played no role in his sister's death, the state found his action to be indecent "in light of public sensitivity." That is, the state deemed his behavior unacceptable for internal, or aesthetic, reasons. As Packer summarizes,

our intersubjective intuitions say that the non-injurious consumption of human flesh, the rape and mutilation of robots without consciousness, and even the real life instances of harmless offense, such as incest between consenting adults, are instances of behavior that are found unacceptable in virtue of the actions themselves, i.e. for aesthetic reasons.⁴⁴

Aside from isolated and highly uncommon incidents of death-by-umbrella and the like, charges of moral wrongdoing levied against art are usually of the internal variety.⁴⁵ For example, recent uproar over Chris Ofili's elephant dung paintings at the Brooklyn Art Museum was incited not by any harm caused through the depicted image, but by the aesthetic offense in its corresponding irreverent medium.⁴⁶ Packer's writing precedes the Brooklyn Museum scandal yet prophetically uses an imaginary illustration of a 'puppy poop painting,' which in turn is rejected by the public as scandalously inappropriate.

⁴⁴ Packer, p. 65

⁴⁵ I refer here to an incident involving a work by the 'environmental' artist Christo. In October of 1991, Christo installed several thousand umbrellas along coastlines in California and Japan. The umbrellas were removed by the artist ahead of schedule after a severe windstorm lifted an umbrella, which pinned a woman against a boulder and caused her death. See Jan Van der Marck, "Blue/Yellow Diptych: Christo's Umbrellas Project," *Art in America*, v. 80 (March 1992):100-105. The case involving Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* may also be argued as an externally-injurious situation: the sculpture was removed from a public plaza after the plaza's users protested that the work interfered with their daily routines and with their happiness. See Robert Storr, "Tilted Arc': Enemy of the People?," *Art in America* v. 73 (September 1985): 90-97.

⁴⁶ While on exhibit at the Brooklyn Art Museum in the fall of 1999, a painting of the Virgin Mary by British artist Chris Ofili prompted a great deal of media attention. New York's then-mayor Rudolph Giuliani called the work an "outrage", and threatened to eliminate public funding for the museum if the work were not removed (a threat which did not withstand legal challenge.) See Donald J. Cosentino, "Hip-hop Assemblage: The Chris Ofili Affair," *African Arts* v. 33, no. 1 (spring 2000): 40-57.

In Packer's fictitious scenario, the offending medium has been somehow sterilized so as to render it neither bacterially dangerous nor olfactorially unpleasant. Packer says that though the excrement has now been stripped of any possibility for genuine harm, the general public would agree upon a "sound and convincing" reason for its subsequent rejection: it is disgusting. Indeed, the Ofili case strengthens Packer's argument. Public outcry began over the dung's proximity to the Virgin Mary; the aesthetic offense of the dung applied to a conceptually revered image furthers its injury, though most would acknowledge that Ofili is in no way forcing actual harm on the Blessed Virgin. Claims to Ofili's Christianity and culture did little to assuage accusations. Hence, cries of blasphemy and moral imprudence are here as elsewhere tied to aesthetic values.

The argument has been made that internal factors of situations can influence our external behaviors, or that aesthetic encounters can influence our physical actions. This is legally referred to as the 'harm principle'. For instance, consider Packer's fictitious scenario of a man who rapes robots. It must be agreed that the robot, as a non-living entity, cannot suffer any real harm. However, it may be argued that the man who rapes robots may transfer this behavior to real women, thus creating the possibility of harm both to real women and to the 'moral character' of the perpetrator. Indeed, Gaut argues that not only actions and motives, but feelings that do not motivate, are significant. Says Gaut,

[I]t is inevitable that, however apparently exotic the fictional world, the [situations] shared between it and the real world will be vast, given the limits on human imagination, the interests we have in fiction (which include exploring possibilities that reorder the actual world), and interpretive constraints, which involve drawing on background information about the real world in the interpretation of fictions.⁴⁷

Here as elsewhere, aesthetic values and moral values are not easily separated. As Packer states, "When we feel very strongly about a moral principle, we want our position to be taken as an assertion of fact and not merely as a personal expression of our outrage or indignation."⁴⁸ Accordingly, as a society, we exhibit a tendency to "prohibit the offensive behavior... simply

⁴⁷ Gaut, p. 188

⁴⁸ Packer, p. 68

because it is evil.⁴⁹ Without taking the time to methodically separate aesthetic from moral judgments, our society places legal restrictions on behavior based on the 'harm principle'. This can be seen, for instance in the *Helms Adult Radio Amendment*, which limits acceptable broadcast material in order to protect the young listener's moral character.⁵⁰

Packer does not assert that aesthetic value is the foundation of moral value, but merely that the aesthetic sometimes informs morality. Nonetheless, aesthetic valuations perceived to be moral often constitute "industrial strength judgments," and having shown that aesthetic values often condition our moral beliefs, Packer asserts that actions or behaviors are often restricted on aesthetic grounds.⁵¹

This has important implications for the work of art and artistic practice, as a perceived moral flaw in a work of art may be sufficient grounds for its societal rejection or even legal repression. In this way, the autonomist position's argument for the evaluative separation of formal and nonformal factors loses its validity. That is, a moral criticism levied against a work of art may be shown, upon close investigation, to be aesthetic in nature. This demonstration will not, however, assure the work's protection against legal rejection, based upon the harm principle. Our society is simply unwilling to evaluatively separate moral from aesthetic concerns in the practical realm. Similarly, the instrumentalist position's argument for the inclusion of moral factors in aesthetic evaluation cannot adequately address the challenges facing the work of art in the practical, societal context.

The Benefits of a Subsumptive Evaluative Approach

The 'subsumptive' evaluative position, then, takes issue with the current autonomist versus instrumentalist debate on several key points. First, the

⁴⁹ Packer, p. 63

⁵⁰ Discussed by Packer, pp. 63-4. The *Helms Adult Radio Amendment* was signed into law October 1, 1988.

⁵¹ Packer, p. 59

instrumentalist versus autonomist argument culminates in a disagreement over what precisely constitutes the 'aesthetic', and what may thereby be included in an evaluation of aesthetic worth. Even within the theoretical sphere, as Haskins has observed, it may prove impossible to find a definition of aesthetic evaluation so readily agreed upon as the 'Unified Field Theory' of physics.⁵² The subsumptive position argues that such essentialist claims have little merit in the practical world, where aesthetic or moral considerations are not easily isolated.

Second, the subsumptive position takes issue with the manner in which the instrumentalist and autonomist positions debate artistic function. While the autonomist holds art to be valuable without reference to its instrumental use, and the instrumentalist holds art to be valuable in terms of moral education, the subsumptive position acknowledges that neither intrinsic nor instrumental value will adequately defend art's continued existence. The subsumptive position is more closely allied with the instrumentalist than with the autonomist, but maintains that the instrumentalist position in its current form is unable to transcend categorical debate and thus cannot adequately address real-world situations. As art exists exclusively within the human sphere, the subsumptive position insists that art must necessarily be evaluated and defended with an inclusive, comprehensive understanding of its societal effects- moral, political, economic, aesthetic, and otherwise.

⁵² Haskins, p. 3

Section II: The Subsumptive Position's Relevance in Contemporary Society

Challenges to Artistic Evaluation in Contemporary Culture

Having established the current debate's inadequacy when confronted with real societal challenges, I would next like to address a variety of situations facing the work of art and artistic practice in contemporary society, and discuss these issues from a subsumptive point of view. These challenges will be made evident through an examination of the nature of contemporary visual culture, including the contemporary era's fusing of 'high' and 'low' cultures, blurring of disciplinary boundaries, and expanding arena for artistic expression. Censorship, the artist/audience relationship, and artistic responsibility must all be addressed in any comprehensive evaluation of artistic practice. The subsumptive position's relevance will become clearer during the course of this examination.

As discussed earlier, Western society recognizes the value of original artistic contributions, but simultaneously holds such contributions to certain evaluative standards. Works of art which do not meet such standards may face rejection or even legal repression. Certainly, a valid and valuable function of art is to challenge such societal standards or *status quo*. Nonetheless, a subsumptive understanding of art's effects on society and of societal implications and expectations for the work of art and artistic practice is crucial to any effective artistic 'challenge', as well as to any effective evaluation or defense of art.

Censorship and the Societal Defense of Artistic Practice

The most readily apparent opposition to the work of art in contemporary society comes in the form of censorship. Justifications for the restriction or censorship of art are almost invariably intertwined with its moral evaluation, which lends credence to the need for an evaluative position that considers aesthetic, moral, and other values comprehensively. As discussed earlier, the 'moral' valuations society uses to justify censorship are easily confused with

valuations that are actually aesthetic. Nonetheless, as Nathalie Heinich has observed, aesthetic evaluation and moral or ethical evaluation are often diametrically opposed in public perception.⁵³ Mary Deveraux concurs, and offers that public suspicion of art centers on its perceived moral rather than artistic failings.⁵⁴

In general, it may be said that the majority of our society feels more comfortable in its ability to evaluate moral value than it does aesthetic value. For this reason, attempts at artistic censorship are typically addressed toward a work of art's perceived moral rather than aesthetic failures. That is, while the aesthetic evaluation of a work of art is most frequently left to art 'professionals', our society's mainstream legislative and socially influential bodies feel perfectly qualified to assess a work's moral value. Notwithstanding, these moral judgments appear to provide our society with ample justification for the restriction of a work's aesthetic qualities as well. Deveraux summarizes this observation as such:

The increasing public suspicion of, and perhaps even hostility towards, art centers on the moral rather than artistic failings of contemporary art. So, in the Mapplethorpe controversy, public outrage centered not on the question of artistic value (that question being largely left to artworld 'experts') but on whether the funded art was obscene (the assumption being that obscene art can't have been worth the money the taxpayers 'paid for it').⁵⁵

Once again, it can be observed that our society intermingles its moral and aesthetic evaluations to the extent that the two cannot be practically separated. Except in rare instances, proponents of art will be unable to persuade the majority of society that its moral judgments are actually aesthetic, and even less able to demonstrate that autonomy should be granted to these aesthetic values. As Michael Brenson has observed, "we live in a time when any view of the artist as a heroic outsider and any separation of the artist and society are being severely challenged by the Left, and where the idea of the artist's moral authority

⁵³ Nathalie Heinich, "Framing the Bullfight: Aesthetics Versus Ethics," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 33, no. 1 (January 1993): 52-58.

⁵⁴ Mary Deveraux, "Protected Space: Politics, Censorship, and the Arts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 3 (summer 2000): 219-25.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 209

is a joke to the Right."⁵⁶

Lynne Warren, the Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 1989, noted the difficulty artists and art 'professionals' encounter in attempting to persuade the general public of art's omniscient contributions to our moral and aesthetic culture:

Did the arts community really believe it could 'reach a broader audience' without having to stop and think maybe that broader audience wouldn't really know what to do with those often morally bankrupt, cynical, obscure, self-referential, and downright self-indulgent products contemporary artists are spewing forth?... Or that a conservative Christian will stop himself and say, 'No, I won't judge Mr. Serrano's *Piss Christ* until I've understood it in context.' The arts community has often been accused of being morally lax and socially arrogant; it seems the chickens are finally coming home to roost.⁵⁷

In light of these observations, it appears critical that proponents of art- artists, critics, and aesthetes- subsumptively understand the nature of the charges levied against art as well as its points of defense.

Censorship results from and is backed judicially based on the earlier discussed 'harm principle'- that is, that a negative moral value found in a work of art may have a negative impact upon the 'moral character' of either the artist or viewer. This censorship may be legislated, as was the case with the *Helms Adult Radio Amendment*, or may be voluntarily initiated through groupings of like-minded individuals, as was the Los Angeles Police Department's suggested boycott of Ice-T's *Cop Killer*.⁵⁸

The autonomist position, we may recall, refutes the harm principle through the assertion that the aesthetic value found in a work of art is distinct from its moral and other values, but this assertion does not protect the work of art from its subsequent rejection on moral grounds. Packer has observed that our society accepts "probable damage to the moral character of the perpetrators" as an acceptable reason for the regulation or condemnation of a given behavior- in this

⁵⁶ Michael Brenson, "Where Do We Go from Here?: Securing A Place for the Artist in Society," in *The Artist in Society*, ed. Carol Becker and Ann Wiens. (Chicago: New Art Examiner Press, 1995), p. 73

⁵⁷ Lynne Warren, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, speaking on censorship in "Against Intimidation," *New Art Examiner*, October 1989 p.27, quoted and referred to by Heartney, p. 44- 45

⁵⁸ This scenario is noted and discussed in greater detail by Deveraux, p. 213

case, either artistic creation or observation.⁵⁹ He does note that this argument is losing force in the courts in favor of personal autonomy, a point to which I shall return briefly.

The notion that art can have a tangible effect on moral character is deeply rooted within our culture.⁶⁰ As such, aesthetic autonomy is difficult to enforce. Deveraux has noted that the National Endowment for the Arts' conservative opponents are chiefly concerned not with art's aesthetic merits but with art as a moral or educational vehicle. For this reason, any effective evaluation of art must take into consideration its practical effects, and defend it both against and from within its likely societal valuations.

Such an approach does present difficulties or dangers for the work of art and for artistic practice; these, too, must be acknowledged and subsumptively understood. First, it is important that the proponent of art not surrender perfunctorily to the 'values' of the oppositional body. As Deborah Haynes has duly noted, there exists a problem in limiting ethics or morality to 'family values.'⁶¹ As members of society, proponents of art must claim a role in determining that society's 'moral' values.

Second, as Deveraux has stated, "a political conception of art risks making artists and their works dependent on popular opinion and the whims of political fashion."⁶² While a 'political conception of art' does indeed open it to public evaluation, to isolate art as an exclusive and autonomous realm renders it impotent. Furthermore, as discussed above, it is likely impossible to protect art as an autonomous realm of practice. It is necessary to subject art to 'political' evaluation in order to consider the full range of its effects and limitations in the societal context. Once again, however, it is important to recall that the proponent of art is an active participant in this political dialogue.

⁵⁹ Packer, p. 59

⁶⁰ Consider St. Thomas Aquinas' assertion that art can have both positive and negative effects on moral life, among other examples.

⁶¹ Deborah J. Haynes, "On the Need for Ethical Aesthetics: or, Where I Stand Between Neo-Luddites and Cyberians," *Art Journal* 56, no. 3(fall 1997): 75-82, p. 75

⁶² Deveraux, p. 213

The censorial restrictions our society places on art notwithstanding, society does also possess an intangible understanding of art's unique character both within and outside of moral or political evaluation. For this reason, art retains a role in societal dialogue. As Deveraux has said, "The demand for special protections [for art] rests on the intuition that art is not just any kind of expression- in burning all the existing copies of *The Grapes of Wrath* we lose more than just Steinbeck's opinions."⁶³

Similarly, it can be argued that a society which allows artists and others to explore even its negative aspects is healthier than one which sets rigid guidelines for acceptable artistic inquiry.⁶⁴ Freedom of speech and expression is a foundational tenet of American culture; during the Cold War, artistic freedom was used to demonstrate American superiority over repressive totalitarian societies.⁶⁵ That as a society, Americans are conflicted over the degree of inquisitive latitude which should be granted to art demonstrates that art is simultaneously valued and mistrusted. Understanding the reasons behind these values and fears allows the proponent of art to establish a more secure place for art in society and opens the door for the creation of art which more successfully accomplishes its intended moral, political, and aesthetic effects.

A subsumptive approach to artistic evaluation acknowledges that public or societal censorship does pose a threat to art's sovereign existence, but contends that an understanding of societal motives will benefit art both creatively and evaluatively. Of artistic sovereignty, Kathy Acker has said "innocence will soon be dead"; the artist who chooses to work in ways which do not support the status quo must at minimum be able to make clear the reasons for the things she does.⁶⁶ A subsumptive understanding of art's societal effects and implications

⁶³ Deveraux, p. 214

⁶⁴ A form of this argument is taken up by Danny Goldberg, "Media Morality," *Tikkun* 15, no. 6: 5-6.

⁶⁵ See Max Kozloff, "American Painting During the Cold War," and Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," both found in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, edited by Francis Frascina (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985.)

⁶⁶ Kathy Acker, "Proposition One," in *The Artist in Society*, ed. Carol Becker and Ann Wiens (Chicago: New Art Examiner Press, 1995), p. 44

enables the artist or evaluator to defend art's function or lack of function, moral values or lack of moral values.

Artistic Value and Societal Significance

As Mark Packer earlier suggested, censorship based on the harm principle is losing ground in the courts to the notion of 'personal autonomy.' That is, our society is currently experiencing a conflict between protecting individuals from moral or physical harm and upholding the individual's 'right' to self-fulfillment. Self-fulfillment is a pervasive notion in contemporary culture, affecting all disciplines, and creating some interesting and important implications for art and artistic evaluation or defense. As such, a closer investigation of personal autonomy or self-fulfillment is warranted.

Charles Taylor has discussed this trend in contemporary society at length; he refers to self-fulfillment in terms of 'authenticity.'⁶⁷ The moral ideal behind self-fulfillment, says Taylor, is "being true to oneself", or being 'authentic.'⁶⁸ He further distinguishes between two forms of authenticity as experienced in our society; both forms place an emphasis on the individual, but only one acknowledges the individual's inseparable societal role. To pursue the ideal of authenticity is to pursue self-truth, or a fulfillment of self-potential. The danger in such a pursuit, Taylor warns, is an excessive centering on the self, at the expense of those around us. Taylor refers to this excessive self-centeredness as 'deviant' authenticity, characterized by a narcissism which causes us to instrumentalize everything and everyone with whom we have contact.⁶⁹ That is, in the 'deviant' pursuit of self-fulfillment, we begin to view all else in our lives solely in terms of the potential advancement of our own situations. More

⁶⁷ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991)

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15

⁶⁹ It is important to note that the term 'deviant', as used by Taylor, does not refer to 'degeneracy' or to values or practices which deviate from societal norms, but rather refers to an attempt at self-fulfillment (or *authenticity*) which cannot ultimately be satisfied. That is, this attempt 'deviates' from an attainable (or 'genuine') form of self-fulfillment which is of benefit to both the individual and society.

egregious still, Taylor submits, is that with this deviant form of authenticity, we feel *compelled* to forsake the needs of others if they come at any expense to our own self-fulfillment. Families, communities, and friendships lose their value as we lose the 'moral force' of our culture.

In this position, says Taylor, a culture of 'moral subjectivism' emerges. We begin to feel that as we would not want our own self-fulfillment to be stunted, we cannot impose any sanctions against the values of another; this is at the root of the judicially-upheld personal autonomy discussed by Packer. According to this position, no one has the right to criticize another's values, as 'value' must be a subjective notion. We feel that things are only as important as we, as individuals, deem them to be, and similarly that by virtue of our own personal designations of importance, things become inherently worthwhile.

Taylor points out, however, that our own feelings and designations cannot assign genuine significance. Indeed, to give equal importance to all facets of human experience according to the whims of the individual is to relegate all of life to the status of triviality. As Taylor observes, "I couldn't just *decide* that the most significant action is wiggling my toes in warm mud."⁷⁰ If as a society, we lose any collective understanding of importance or significance, then we also lose all opportunity for meaningful discussion. Taylor notes that a general feature of human life, and thus of our selves, is its fundamentally dialogical nature. Again, he explains:

When we come to understand what it is to define ourselves, to determine in what our originality consists, we see that we have to take as background some sense of what is significant. Defining myself means finding what is significant in my difference from others. I may be the only person with exactly 3,732 hairs on my head, or be exactly the same height as some tree on the Siberian plain, but so what? If I begin to say that I define myself by my ability to articulate important truths, or play the Hammerklavier like no one else, or revive the tradition of my ancestors, then we are in the domain of recognizable self-definitions.⁷¹

Genuine understanding of ourselves requires an understanding of our histories, backgrounds, and cultural values. We cannot define ourselves as

⁷⁰ Taylor, p. 36

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 35-6

unique individuals without reference to societal standards. Furthermore, we cannot attain genuine self-fulfillment as individuals at the expense of the society we collectively form. True individual authenticity cannot be attained at society's expense, because we as individuals form society; when we inflict societal harm, we similarly harm ourselves as individuals. In order to understand what makes us unique as individuals, we must understand what our society values, and how we as individuals reflect *or challenge* those values.

Taylor's second, or 'genuine' form of authenticity thus takes into account the health of the body politic, and acknowledges the existence and importance of 'horizons of significance,' or societal standards of importance and worth. Authenticity cannot be defended in ways which collapse these horizons.⁷²

According to Taylor, authenticity *involves*: (a) creation, construction, and creativity; (b) originality, and (c) frequently, opposition to social norms, while simultaneously authenticity *requires*, (a) openness to the horizons of significance, and (b) self-definition in dialogue. That is, genuine self-fulfillment involves creativity and originality which may frequently be at odds with societal standards, but requires that the individual maintain an understanding of what these standards, or horizons of significance, involve. These demands, he acknowledges, may frequently be in tension with one another.

Art, then, becomes a place where authenticity can thrive. Taylor holds the artist up as the paradigm agent of self-definition, for the artist by definition fulfills the above-stated demands of authenticity. If authenticity, as Taylor explains it, brings deep satisfaction through the fulfillment of self-potential in accordance with the needs of societal health, then the artist plays an important role as an agent of that societal transformation.

The requirements of authenticity, however, deserve some further examination in terms of their implications for the artist. First, genuine authenticity requires openness to the horizons of significance, or societal standards of what is important. This does not require that the individual (in this case, the artist)

⁷² For ease of use, from this point forward I will refer to Taylor's genuine form of authenticity as simply 'authenticity', and I will denote the deviant form as 'deviant authenticity.'

submit to or wholly agree with what society deems significant; indeed, Taylor informs us that authenticity frequently involves opposition to social norms. Rather, this requirement specifies that in order to avoid triviality, the artist must be aware of current societal expectations, and may challenge these expectations only from within this societal framework. That is, the artist (or critic) must not rest upon claims of art's subjectivity, but must defend his choices in relation to the horizons of significance.

Second, authenticity requires self-definition in dialogue; again, this cannot be attained autonomously. That is, the artist may not attain self-fulfillment without engaging in a dialogue with other members of society, in an effort to establish his or her individuality. The necessity of a presumptive understanding of art's effects and implications in society is thus, once again, made manifest.

As Taylor has demonstrated, however, the deviant form of authenticity present in our culture has caused a fragmentation of society through our instrumentalization of one another. That is, as individuals have pursued their own self-fulfillment without regard for their relational effects, our society has become fractured into a myriad of specialized interests. Taylor discusses the accompanying disregard for the horizons of significance in terms of 'moral subjectivism' or 'soft relativism'; within the art profession this same concept is frequently referred to as 'pluralism'.

Pluralism in artistic evaluation retains the notion that one cannot criticize another's values. This is frequently discussed in terms of art's *subjectivity*. One frequently hears, especially outside of the art profession and particularly in reference to aesthetic value, that art cannot be decisively deemed good or bad, due to its subjective nature. Art, according to this position, is all a matter of preference. Pluralism thus absorbs all argument; in art, as in life, total autonomy brings with it merely irrelevance. Hal Foster explains the situation as such:

[Pluralism] grants a kind of equivalence; art of many sorts is made to seem more or less equal- equally (un)important. Art becomes an arena not of dialectical dialogue but of vested interests, of licensed sects: in lieu of culture we have cults. The result is an eccentricity that leads, in art as in politics, to a new conformity: pluralism as an

institution.⁷³

The total freedom of art, says Foster, brings with it the end of art's significance. As such, a 'pluralistic' evaluative position- that is, an approach to the evaluation of art which deems all values to be subjective and relative- effectively denies art's societal significance.

Says Taylor, authenticity is clearly self-referential, but its content need not be. A subsumptive approach to the evaluation of art must acknowledge that the creation and existence of art necessarily has practical, societal implications, and must consider the effects generated by a work of art as a valid component of its evaluation. This sort of evaluation both considers and fulfills the requirements of authenticity and thereby encourages the development of art works which can be defended in terms of societal benefit.

The Artist/ Audience Relationship & Artistic Responsibility

We see then that the artist, by virtue of creativity, construction, originality, and dialogical self-definition, is ideally suited to perform as an agent of genuine authenticity, operating always with a recognition of our society's background horizons of significance. It is also apparent that art is susceptible to the same dangers that befall the rest of society through 'deviant' authenticity, namely to fragmentation and pluralism.

Eleanor Heartney, like Taylor, has remarked that art provides both the artist and the audience with a place where authenticity can thrive.⁷⁴ She observes a current problem, however, as such:

Only if there is a way of achieving authenticity within society can genuine [authentic] experience be a real possibility. The problem is that art in the modern era has defined itself as a vehicle of self-expression that is meaningful only to the degree that it expresses a private vision.⁷⁵

As Taylor has illustrated, there can be no genuine personal fulfillment without a

⁷³ Hal Foster, *Recodings*. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), p. 15

⁷⁴ Eleanor Heartney, *Critical Condition: American Culture at the Crossroads*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.), p. 13

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19

corresponding societal fulfillment, rooted in fluid yet ever-present horizons of significance. The dominant culture of today, however, assumes a deviant form which lauds the individual at the exclusion of societal health. Similarly, artistic practice and evaluation has frequently been concerned with individual achievement and has neglected to consider societal effects. As Heartney claims,

any casual survey of the contents of galleries and contemporary art museums reveals that the vast majority of work on display has less to do with the expression of eternal or difficult truths than it does with fitting into the categories of high-priced collectibles or light entertainment. For decades, the art world proper has resolutely separated itself from any sense of responsibility toward the social world, which makes the humanistic terms with which it defends itself now more than a little suspect.⁷⁶

Taylor warns us that authenticity, like all other forms of freedom, requires a corresponding individual responsibility; of benefit, however, is that a society is made more self-responsible through the development of this type of culture.⁷⁷ The artist, acting as agent of authenticity, must then reclaim responsibility for the effects and implications of his art in societal terms. This disclosed relationship between the artist and societal audience strengthens the work of art by restoring its authentic significance and strengthens the evaluative defense of art's societal worth.

An important function of art, and responsibility of the artist, is thus the contribution to public discourse. As we have seen, however, the deviant form of authenticity present in our culture has caused a fragmentation of society through our instrumentalization of one another- or, through our tendency to value in others only those things which affirm our own individual choices. As individuals seek self-fulfillment without regard for our shared history, allegiances are redivided or eliminated. That is, as individuals seek to affirm their distinguishing characteristics, geographic communities lose their unifying character, and multifarious political groupings emerge in the place of 'community.' In some instances, these groups are formed around a shared value; in others, groups may develop based on a shared circumstance. As John McHale has explained, "The inhabitant of any of the world's large cities- London, Tokyo, Paris, New

⁷⁶ Heartney, p. 43

⁷⁷ Taylor, p. 77

York- is more likely to find himself 'at home' in any of them, than in the rural parts of his own country; the international cultural milieu that sustains him will be more evident."⁷⁸ Similarly, a homosexual man living in Iowa may consider his 'community' to consist of other homosexuals living many miles away in every direction, rather than of his immediate neighbors.

Increasingly, the individual pursuing this deviant authenticity is unable to claim allegiance with a single societal faction. To which singular 'community' would a single, Islamic, immigrant mother with multiple sclerosis, by way of example, claim allegiance? The division of 'communities' along political lines makes increasingly unlikely the possibility of large groups who share common values.

The potential for dialogue between the artist and the 'public' is thus made increasingly difficult, as individual members of our society are increasingly loath to define themselves collectively as a 'public'. This presents a difficult dilemma for the artist as well as for the art evaluator. As we have seen, art cannot attain genuine significance merely through the artist or critic's designation of such merit; in order to avoid triviality, art must be created and considered against the background of the horizons of significance. However, these horizons have grown increasingly difficult to decipher, as society has fractured into infinite factions with a decreasing number of valiative ties between them.

Art frequently moves between the public and the private realms, though it is often criticized for doing so. The artist is attacked for 'politicizing' private matters such as sexuality and family dynamic. This is a difficult position, for the artist will be in continuous opposition to some faction of society.

Friedrich Engels offered us the model of the artist as a 'cultural worker' rather than image or object producer; the subsumptive position will adhere to that model. The realm of the cultural worker includes an expanded knowledge of popular culture, street art, media, science, and technology.⁷⁹ Engels' cultural

⁷⁸ John McHale, "The Plastic Parthenon," in *Pop Art Redefined*, ed. John Russell and Suzi Gablik. (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1969), p. 48

⁷⁹ Henry Giroux, "Borderline Artists, Cultural Workers, and the Crisis of Democracy." in *The Artist in Society*, ed. Carol Becker and Ann Wiens. (Chicago: New Art Examiner Press, 1995) p. 10

worker provides an effective model for the subsumptive position's artist or critic, because the cultural worker must operate with a constant and simultaneous awareness and consideration of art's aesthetic, formal, contextual, instrumental, and dialogical properties and possibilities.

Henry Giroux claims that the most provocative contemporary art is that which is sited at 'crossings' of the various realms of the cultural worker, for example, the art institution and the political economy, or sexuality and social life. Performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña has similarly coined the term 'border intellectual' to apply to the artist as cultural worker; Giroux explains it as such:

If the universal intellectual speaks for everyone, and the specific intellectual is wedded to serving the narrow interests of distinct cultural and social formations, the border intellectual travels within and across communities of difference, working in collaboration with diverse groups and occupying many sites of resistance while simultaneously defying the specialized, parochial knowledge of the individual specialist, sage, or master ideologue. As border intellectuals, cultural workers can articulate and negotiate different struggles as part of a broader effort to secure social justice, economic equality, and human rights within and across regional, national, and global spheres.⁸⁰

Foster echoes this in his call for an art which is not defined by either its formal or moral properties, but rather "seeks affiliations with other practices," in the culture industry and elsewhere- in philosophy, science, and religion. "As public intellectuals," says Giroux, "we must define ourselves not merely as marginal, avant-garde figures, professionals, or academics acting alone, but as critical citizens whose collective knowledge and actions presuppose specific visions of public life, community, and moral accountability."⁸¹

The State of Contemporary Visual Culture

Engels' 'cultural worker' and Gómez-Peña's 'border intellectual' acknowledge both the need for artistic practice which achieves its significance within the societal horizons of significance as well as the difficulty in delineating a singular set of cultural horizons. The artist as border intellectual navigates this apparent quandary through the subsumptive recognition of art's effects and

⁸⁰ Giroux, p. 12

⁸¹ Ibid., p 13

implications- both potential and actual- within an expanded conception of visual or artistic culture.

Accompanying the fragmentation of our society has emerged a difficulty in discerning the boundaries between disciplines. That is, just as individuals have found it increasingly difficult to define themselves within a singular community, disciplinary boundaries between art, philosophy, religion, economics, and politics have become blurred. The implications of this for the visual artist are significant; the artist may now legitimately- or indeed may bear a responsibility to- operate not only within the traditional artistic sphere, but within the whole of our society. This blurring of boundaries has made it necessary for the artist or critic as border intellectual to recognize several accompanying phenomena, which include the amalgamation of 'high' and 'low' cultures, the melding of 'fine' and 'media' arts, and the correlative expansion of visual culture.

Henry Giroux has acknowledged that in order to effectively navigate among the various possible realms of artistic creation, evaluation, and participation, the border intellectual must expand her social knowledge to include both traditionally 'high' and 'low' cultural forms. The 'high' art forms include what Lawrence Alloway has dubbed "Renaissance-based" ideas of artistic value- painting, sculpture, theatre, dance-, while 'low' art includes kitsch, video games, and mass media. It is critical that the border intellectual be aware of the disparate forms of and possibilities for information dissemination and visual practice which occur within popular culture.

In Danny Goldberg's essay "Media Morality," he argues that if we are trying to build a society which adequately addresses the lives of individuals, we cannot ignore 'pop' culture.⁸² That is, in order for the artist to participate in the public dialogue required of genuine authenticity and genuine artistic function, the artist as border intellectual must acknowledge and operate within the framework of the cultural media most familiar to this 'public'. Giroux calls pop culture "a territory where pleasure, knowledge, and desire circulate in close proximity to the life of the streets," to include "comics, pinball machines, restricted codes, [and]

⁸² Goldberg, p. 6

visual excesses...⁸³

The primary vehicle of pop culture, certainly, is mass media. Alloway has observed that

Acceptance of the mass media entails a shift in our notion of what culture is. Instead of reserving the word for the highest artifacts and the noblest thoughts of history's top ten, it needs to be used more widely as the description of 'what a society does.'⁸⁴

The advent of new technologies have enabled the expansion of mass media forms to inhabit nearly every aspect of our daily lives- from print media at the breakfast table, broadcast media in our cars, and satellite television in school classrooms, to online video games, internet chat rooms accessed through public libraries, and moving billboards and LED signs in civic spaces. Heartney says this media saturation forms a basic postmodern tenet: our understanding of the world is based first and foremost on mediated images.⁸⁵

For the artist, this fusing of high and low cultures and fine and media arts has had the important effect of expanding the range and scope of visual culture. Several accompanying implications are worthy of note. First, while the proliferation of media spaces may widen the available avenues for artistic practice, the actual result has most frequently been the nearly ubiquitous expansion of advertising. Foster has referred to the "primacy of the image as a form of capital," and Herbert Schiller has noted that the media-informational sphere has been nearly entirely appropriated for marketing.⁸⁶ Bob Stein, founder of the media-development companies Voyageur and Night Kitchen, Inc., has said the following concerning advertising's appropriation of mass media and the effects of this situation on the artist:

The only thing really inevitable is that capital will seek every advantage it can. Big companies are going to use all the ways they can to deliver consumers to advertisers, to sell you their products and ideas; they're going to use new technologies every way they can, to do what they need to do, which is to create more capital. And the artist can be

⁸³ Giroux, p. 6

⁸⁴ Lawrence Alloway, "The Long Front of Culture," in *Pop Art Redefined*, ed. John Russell and Suzi Gablik. (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1969), p. 41

⁸⁵ Heartney, *Critical Condition*, p. 31

⁸⁶ Herbert I. Schiller, "Media, Technology, and the Market: The Interacting Dynamic," in *Culture on the Brink: Ideologies of Technology*, ed. Gretchen Bender and Timothy Druckrey. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1994)

yoked to that task quite easily through criteria for access to markets and the means to create.⁸⁷

Goldman has observed, however, that capitalism- in the form of advertising- will promote and exploit, but does not originate, popular culture. As evidence, he refers to new developments in popular music, noting that 15 years ago, the big record companies did not like rap music, and it was not used to sell shoes, soft drinks, and movie tickets. While advertising may dominate the media-informational sphere, it competes with art only for space and attention.

The artist as border intellectual must be subsumptively aware of the potential generated through the expansion of visual culture, as well as of the current ends to which this potential is used. A subsumptive understanding of art's effects and potential within this culture will similarly allow the artist or evaluator to create and promote artistic practices which are both effective despite increased visual competition and distinguishable within the blurred artistic definitions which this culture promotes.

Second, the development of a media-saturated culture has produced a generation of individuals whose primary means of accessing the world is through, as Heartney has said, "mediated images." In order for the artist to effectively engage in the earlier-specified public dialogue, it is important that he understand the means through which this public communicates, and subsumptively consider these factors in any creation or evaluation of art. As Alloway has phrased this, "Any lessons in consumption or in style must occur inside the pattern of entertainment and not weigh it down like a pigeon with *The Naked and the Dead* tied to its leg."⁸⁸ Public dialogue requires a subsumptive understanding of the languages spoken by that public.

The expansion of visual culture to include both traditional and newly emergent visual forms has had some noteworthy effects on the development of new art, and has similarly created some new contextual situations for our

⁸⁷ Robert Stein, "We Could Be Better Ancestors Than This: Ethics and First Principles for the Art of the Digital Age," in *The Digital Dialectic*, ed. Peter Lunenfeld. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 203

⁸⁸ Alloway, p. 42

historically-revered works. This recontextualization can be seen in the profligate postcard-kitsch variants of the *Mona Lisa* or *American Gothic*; in the use of once politically-charged art to sell consumer products, as with the use of Keith Haring's dancing figures to sell minivans; and in the expanding use of artistic works as consumable, status-enhancing corporate goods, as with the purchase of Leon Golub's paintings of torture scenes by the Saatchi collection.⁸⁹ These new uses require new critical evaluation as well, and a subsumptive evaluative approach will necessarily consider not only the original work, but also the newly emergent manner of instrumental use in any determination of value.

This appropriation of historical works has made its way into the creation of new art, as well. Contemporary artists, in the manner of advertising, have frequently 'borrowed' elements of historical works or even the old work in its entirety.⁹⁰ Foster has charged that while modern art frequently borrowed and deconstructed historical forms, postmodern art often merely borrows- without regard for context or intention. Postmodern references to historical examples, he says, "do not function formally so much as they serve as 'tokens' of specific traditions."⁹¹

Foster's argument holds that the historical appropriation sometimes found in contemporary art is too often present only for superficial reasons; that is, the reference has no bearing on the new work. Foster calls this a resolution of the new work in 'pastiche', and says "in the absence of any other relevance or legitimacy, the historical references in this art serve as a form of sanction."⁹² The charge, then, is that these works possess no genuine significance and have opened no new arenas for public discourse. Heartney agrees, and offers that

The strength of appropriation is that it challenges the blind adherence to modernism's progressive version of history. Its weakness is its failure to offer any alternative to the

⁸⁹ This latter example is discussed by Heartney, pp. 15-17

⁹⁰ Consider Sherrie Levine's controversial 'works' of the 1980s, in which Levine retitled unretouched, existing works by famous photographers and exhibited them as her own. A photograph by Walker Evans, for instance, became Levine's 'After Walker Evans.' See Eleanor Heartney, *Postmodernism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.), pp. 36-40.

⁹¹ Foster, p 28

⁹² *Ibid.*, p 42

rule of entropy.⁸⁹

A subsumptive approach to the creation or evaluation of new art, following Taylor's model for genuine authenticity, acknowledges that a critical function of art and of the artist is to engage in public discourse. Once again, works of art which cannot be defined in relation to society, or to the horizons of significance, cannot achieve any real societal significance.

In an effort to engage the public in this artistic dialogue more effectively, contemporary artists in recent years have attempted, through a variety of means, to reevaluate the designations and locations of 'art'. These efforts have included 'public art projects' which involve the non-arts community in the creation of large scale art pieces, the introduction of works of art to nontraditional spaces where the works might engage a new audience, and the advent of 'performance' and 'conceptual' art, which defy allegiance to the object in an effort to engage the audience more directly and experientially.

The subsumptive position does not offer an edict in the style of modernist theory and therefore does not make any claims regarding the most appropriate and effective means of artistic practice. Rather, the subsumptive position insists that the creation, evaluation, and defense of art will be improved through a subsumptive understanding of the effects and implications of both societal concerns on the work of art and of the work of art on society.

⁸⁹ Heartney, p. 21

Conclusion

While the debate between the autonomist and instrumentalist evaluative positions has consumed a good deal of the critical art community's time and energy, its assertions are grounded in theory alone and cannot make the transition to the practical world. That is, the debate over whether moral or ethical considerations should be included in an evaluation of aesthetic value does not adequately address the practical situations facing the work of art and artistic practice within society.

Furthermore, it may be shown that neither instrumental nor intrinsic value alone will adequately defend art's continued role in society. Distinctions between aesthetic and moral or other values are often difficult to determine in the practical, societal context, and in order to assure and defend the value ascribed to art by both the autonomist and instrumentalist positions, it is necessary to transcend the theoretical debate and address the societal situations faced by art. To do so requires a subsumptive understanding of art's instrumental, aesthetic, cognitive and other values and of the implications and effects these values create in society.

The subsumptive position achieves its validity through an examination of various actual situations facing the work of art and artistic practice, and through the demonstration that a comprehensive- or subsumptive- understanding and consideration of artistic and societal values will strengthen artistic creation and evaluation. The reasons for which art is censored or restricted in our society are complex and frequently dimly understood by that society; artistic practice requires a subsumptive understanding of those reasons in order to successfully navigate within the physical world.

As art exists exclusively within the societal realm, it can only achieve genuine significance within the framework of that society's values; these values are, nonetheless, open to influence and are effectively challenged by the work of art engaged in a societal discourse. A subsumptive understanding of the values

already possessed by society- aesthetic, moral, and otherwise- and of the work of art's effects on these values, is essential to a fruitful public dialogue and thereby to the success of the work of art.

Finally, as our society's definitions of 'culture' have expanded, so too has the realm for artistic practice. In order for art to effectively exist within this expanded culture, it is necessary that the artist or evaluator consider the languages and values of this culture, and subsumptively assess art's values and effects accordingly.

The subsumptive position holds that art's moral, ethical, political, economic, and status values- as well as aesthetic value- must be considered in composite as valid and necessary components of art and artistic practice. For the artist, a subsumptive understanding of these values and their practical effects will facilitate stronger works of art, which are valuable within the horizons of significance, and are societally defensible as such.

For the critic or art evaluator, a subsumptive approach to artistic evaluation will facilitate a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of a work of art's merits and faults in terms of genuine or authentic societal and aesthetic significance, and will strengthen and legitimize a defense or devaluation of the work. The subsumptive evaluation of art will similarly encourage the development of stronger art works in terms of genuine significance, which contribute effectively to a public dialogue, and may accordingly strengthen society.

Rather than establish a directive for the manner of artistic creation, the subsumptive position encourages an approach to artistic creation and evaluation which is aware of art's potential and real effects, and maintains an awareness of these effects within the course of artistic practice.

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