

Original citation:

John, Eileen. (2014) Meals, art, and artistic value. *Estetika : The Central European Journal of Aesthetics*, 51 (2). pp. 254-269.

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Meals, art and artistic value

Eileen John

Abstract: The notion of a meal is explored in relation to questions of art status and artistic value. Meals are argued not to be works of art, but to have the capacity for artistic value. These claims are used to respond to Dominic Lopes's arguments in *Beyond Art* that demote artistic value in favour of the values that emerge from specific kinds of art. A conception of artistic value that involves 'taking reflective charge' of the possibilities for goodness available in an activity is sketched.

Let me begin with two questions about the human practice of eating meals. Can meals be works of art? Can meals have artistic value? By a meal I mean an occasion which has the central purpose of eating food and which belongs to a routine of such occasions. A meal in this sense is not just the food that is eaten but is an event, encompassing relevant activities and circumstances. A given meal is a token of a type of meal (say, of breakfast or dinner), that fits into a daily pattern of meals. One way in which meals and art relate is via artistic representation: meals are a rich form of 'nourishment' for the arts, especially for painting, literature, and film, as the occasions on which humans gather to eat provide excellent symbolic, sensuous, ethical, narratively pivotal, and socially illuminating subject matter.¹ While that relation of meals to art is not my concern in this discussion, it should become clear that the reasons behind meals' rich representational potential are in various ways relevant to my framing questions. I will argue that meals are not works of art, and that they yet can have artistic value. I do not take these in themselves to be surprising claims, but the issues that come to the surface in exploring them are significant for understanding the work that the notions of art and artistic value do. Meals, considered as artistically valuable non-art, engage in particular with some compelling arguments offered by Dominic Lopes concerning 'the myth of artistic value', and this discussion of meals will serve as a route into responding to those arguments.²

1. Meals as non-art

As occasions go, meals seem fairly promising as candidate artworks. With the eating of food as a necessary element, meals have access to all the possibilities for flavour, cultural significance and culinary creativity that food allows. We are comfortable in speaking casually about cooking and food in artistic terms, as we can get a degree in culinary arts and can perhaps master the art of French cooking. But food of course does not have a consistent history of being recognized as an art form or medium of art, running up against a variety of charges: food itself is too useful, and its sensations and pleasures are too bodily and subjective, too causally determined, too 'agreeable' and 'unreflective' in Kantian terms, and not able to support complex form, sophisticated cognition and meaning.³ Beardsley presents the modalities of taste and smell, integral to food experience, as

¹ See, for example, Gian-Paolo Biasin, *The Flavors of Modernity: Food and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Anne Bower, ed., *Reel Food: Essays on Food and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and Chapters 5 and 6, on food in visual and narrative art, in Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

² See especially Chapters 5, 7 and 8 of Dominic Lopes, *Beyond Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

³ See Chapter 3 of Elizabeth Telfer, *Food for Thought: Philosophy and Food* (London: Routledge, 1996), and Chapter 4 of Korsmeyer, *Taste*, for treatments of these arguments.

relatively diffuse and unsystematisable, and takes the overall project of cooking to lack the kind of principles that would support complex artistic form: ‘No doubt there are vague principles of cooking appetizing meals [...]: include foods different in flavor, texture, shape, and color. [...] But there does not seem to be enough order within these sensory fields to construct sensory objects with balance, climax, development, or pattern’.⁴ The status of *food* as art is not my direct concern here, but I will register that the arguments against its art status seem unpersuasive. Having a function does not rule out being a work of art, and it seems fairly obvious that food can, sometimes, ‘tick sufficient boxes’—say, with respect to intentions, meaning, skill, originality, relation to tradition, and experiential intensity and complexity—to count as art. I will assume in what follows that food at least makes an *aesthetic* contribution to meals, where this means minimally that it has an experiential presence within the meal, through smell, taste, texture, shape, colour, temperature, and even sound, perhaps prompting imaginative and emotional experience as well, and more ambitiously, that this experiential presence gives us scope for appreciative judgement, for recognition, understanding and evaluation of qualities of experience that are not a matter of merely reactive pleasure or displeasure.⁵ Meals, then, in virtue of including an experience of food, have an element that can either be art or can make a kind of aesthetic contribution commonly required for art.

Beyond the food, meals are able to incorporate a host of other elements, many of which have similar potential, either as art or as aesthetically relevant contributors to the occasion. The furnishings and decoration of the dining space, the implements for serving and eating food, accompanying music, and the dress of the people gathered for the meal can all play a role. Brillat-Savarin speaks of ‘artificial embellishments’ that have been used to add to the ‘duration and intensity of the pleasures of the table’, including crowns of flowers for the guests, ‘exquisite perfumes sprayed into the air’, ‘dancers, wrestlers, and clowns [...] to amuse the eyes of the diners without boring their palates,’ and even ‘naked beauties’ to serve food, ‘so that every human sense joined in a complete pleasure.’⁶ This picture of sensations and pleasures piled up within the context of a meal does not speak clearly in favour of the art status of meals so embellished, as this sensory complexity could be a mere conglomeration or even competition of stimuli, with no particular artistic ‘shape’ or character. Nonetheless, the fact that meals can exploit such a wide array of factors with aesthetic potential is relevant to the positive case—a meal provides an opportunity for putting together a sensuously complex and saturated experience.

So far, by emphasising taste and other forms of experience that can contribute to meals, a quite central aspect of meals has been neglected, which is that it is paradigmatically a social and participatory occasion. Arguably, even when I eat a meal by myself, it counts as a social occasion in the sense that I am participating in a routine that reflects the practices of my social group, meeting some socially shared expectations for when, what, and how to eat. Food historian Margaret Visser uses the vocabulary of a particular art form, theatre, to express how food, social behaviour, and artistic structure come together in a meal:

⁴ Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 99.

⁵ Lopes characterizes aesthetic appreciation as ‘experiential’ in an enhanced sense: while paradigmatically a matter of perception via any of the five senses, ‘it may involve sensory imaginings instead, or experiential states that are not sensory imaginings’ (Lopes, *Beyond*, 170). Korsmeyer appeals to Nelson Goodman’s ‘symptoms of the aesthetic’, arguing that food is aesthetic in having exemplifying power and ‘relative repleteness’ with respect to its significant features (Korsmeyer, *Taste*, 115-8, 128-31).

⁶⁶ Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste*, trans. M.F.K. Fisher (Washington, D. C.: Counterpoint, 1949), 183-4.

A meal is an artistic social construct, ordering the foodstuffs which comprise it into a complex dramatic whole, as a play organizes actions and words into component parts such as acts, scenes, speeches, dialogues, entrances, and exits, all in the sequences designed for them. However humble it may be, a meal has a definite plot, the intention of which is to intrigue, stimulate, and satisfy.⁷

She considers a simple meal that nonetheless ‘can mean for us a good many things, and entertain us like a well-constructed play in which the partakers are both actors and audience.’⁸ Visser thus offers the theatrical work as an analogy for how and why a meal is put together as it is, and this has some fruitful consequences. It suggests an ambition for the structure of the meal, that the parts in their sequence should be organised in a way suited to engaging a human audience, maintaining our interest and unfolding so as to allow for an experience of progress and completion. The component food experiences, the encounters with discrete aesthetic properties, become subordinated to this larger ‘dramatic’ ambition. The possible trajectories of human interest and satisfaction in the relevant foodstuffs move to the fore. The way in which, moving slightly away from theatrical norms, this ‘play’ involves the human participants both as the makers and the receivers of a constructed experience also helps to shift the focus away from the ‘sheer food experience’.

I want to relate these passages from Visser briefly to a fictional meal that initially raised some of these questions for me. At this meal, described at the beginning of Marilynne Robinson’s novel *Gilead*, the only food eaten is an old carrot, just dug up, roughly brushed off and cut into pieces for two people to share. ‘It was about like eating a branch, and there was nothing to wash it down with, either.’⁹ In reading this episode, I had the probably typical philosopher’s reaction—‘why does that count as a meal?’ I was not disputing that it was a meal, but I was interested in what allowed it to be a meal, given the minimal, miserable foodstuff and circumstances. Part of the reason, I think, is that even that occasion, as Robinson portrays it, had some dramatic interest and structure, shown in the behaviour and focused attention of the partakers. They took on well understood roles in participating in the meal, with one person, the father, preparing and presenting the food (cutting the carrot and putting the slices on top of his hat), and the son being a sort of guest or recipient of care from the ‘cook’. The father says grace over the carrot, expressing thanks ‘for all we are about to receive’, then they laugh until they cry, and then they eat the carrot. The saying of grace, a Christian grace in this case, may not now be standard at mealtime, but some form of giving thanks or showing reverence for food has been widespread in human societies, and in this particular imagined scene, the brief ritual prayer is a striking deferral of eating by very hungry people.¹⁰ The pause, to honour the nearly inedible nourishment and the divine being it is attributed to, helps to give this occasion a slight but essential structure, enacting a controlled, anticipation-laden progress toward a reward, and signalling that they see this moment as witnessed by an unseen divine audience. The laughter seems to be at least a mild subversion of the honouring moment, but I think it too helps make this a social and participatory occasion, as it is a shared recognition of and reaction to their circumstances.

The dramatic analogy thus brings out the ideas that we play coordinating roles at a meal, and that there is a line of development, perhaps a very basic plot, that is supposed to guide and

⁷ Margaret Visser, *Much Depends on Dinner* (London: Penguin, 1986), 14-5.

⁸ Visser, *Much Depends*, 19.

⁹ Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 15. All references are to this page.

¹⁰ Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1991), 259-63.

move us in our participation. Does the fruitfulness of the analogy help to show that the meal too is an art form, like the art of theatre or like a specifically participatory genre of theatre? The reason I resist this view, broadly, is that it still promotes a kind of oversimplification and unwarranted integration of the elements of meals. While food may sometimes be dismissed as art because it is taken to be too simple or too vaguely structured, meals seem rather to be disqualified because they go overboard with respect to complexity and meaning. Too many purposes, roles, values, unreflective processes, and possibilities for experience and meaning converge in meals. The theatrical analogy, while introducing complexity in its acknowledgement of the social and participatory nature of meals, still promotes a conception of the meal as embodying a coherently structured and 'knowing' or consciously role-playing participatory process. The suggestion that an intention to stimulate and satisfy the human participants is dominant in guiding the 'plot' of meals (even if the intention is granted to be implicit in or emergent from social practices) seems to overemphasise one aspect or working principle of meals. To put it slightly provocatively, a meal does not have the focus and integrity that we ask artworks to have. This is not a lack or a failing in meals, but is rather a reflection of what meals have come to be for us. What I assume as a necessary condition for artworks is that they are artefacts with a governing identity that provides an unusually careful and ambitious focus for what is relevant to experiencing, understanding, and appreciating them. This will not go far in defining art, but it is a provisional way of articulating the contrast I seek to highlight. An artwork—with the help of various entrenched expectations and conventions—screens out a number of hovering possibilities for experience and meaning and isolates something for attention and appreciation. Meals, I am claiming, call for a quite different structure of attention, experience, and meaning-making, in which not much of human significance is screened out. Any aspect of a meal that does particularly grab our attention does not really 'hold the centre', but might perhaps be described as a temporary neglect or silencing of all the other factors that remain at work.

The basis for this broad conception of meals, as complex enough to lack focus and coherently structured meaning, is indeed well stated by Visser:

Precisely because we must both eat and keep on eating, human beings have poured enormous effort into making food more than itself, so that it bears manifold meanings beyond its primary purpose of physical nutrition. It becomes an immensely versatile mythic prototype [...], an art form, a medium for commercial exchange and social interaction, the source for an intricate panoply of distinguishing marks of class and nationhood. We have to keep eating, so we make eating the occasion for insisting on other things as well—concepts and feelings which are vital for our well-being, but many of them complex, difficult to analyse or understand, and definitely not so easy to concentrate on as food is when we are hungry.¹¹

The explanatory claim, that the routine, lifelong necessity of eating *explains* the accumulation of meanings around meals, may not be easy to establish, but I take the general picture to be illuminating. Meals are immensely versatile, including the possibility of incorporating food that is art, but I think this versatility and the accumulation of meanings ultimately disqualify meals themselves from being artworks.

Here are a few claims made, with varying degrees of speculation, to suggest the meanings, functions, and expansive reach of eating and meals. An anthropological survey of eating practices

¹¹ Visser, *Rituals*, 7.

affirms that, 'In all societies, [...] eating is the primary way of initiating and maintaining human relationships', including importantly the impact of meals on children: 'Each society's culture is transmitted to children through eating with the family, a setting in which individual personalities develop, kinship obligations emerge, and the customs of the group are reinforced [...] what is eaten establishes one's social, religious, and ethnic memberships.' And 'eating inevitably brings humans into broader contact with their total environment—not only their natural surroundings, but also their social, economic, and political relations with neighbors—than any other essential behavior'.¹² Brillat-Savarin ties meals, and 'the pleasures of the table', to linguistic and to ethical development. 'It is during meals that languages must have been born and perfected' perhaps because 'the relaxation which accompanies and follows a feast leads naturally to confidence and loquacity.' When travellers were welcomed at 'primitive feasts', telling stories of their travels, 'Thus was born hospitality, with its rights sacred to all peoples, for one of the strongest of human laws is that which commands respect for the life of any man with whom one has shared bread and salt.' One of his aphorisms is that 'To invite people to dine with us is to make ourselves responsible for their well-being for as long as they are under our roofs.'¹³ Korsmeyer discusses related ideas, pointing to somewhat ethically fraught social functions of affirming kinship and equality as well as marking inclusive and exclusive relations: 'Those who eat together are to some degree equals, alike, kin. [...] Mutual recognition of what counts as proper food preparation and as conditions of edibility demarcates one group from another. Those who choose to eat together tacitly recognize their fellow eaters as saliently equal.'¹⁴ The possibility for dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, and social competition, through the display and consumption of foods is detailed well by Braudel, who portrays the shifting status of luxury foods as markers of social change and struggle between classes and civilisations, affording 'plenty of scope for futility, pretentiousness and caprice.'¹⁵

What seems particularly interesting about the way meals bring diverse factors together is that, in doing this, no one factor, not even nutrition or attentive experience to the food, is 'the point' of a meal. It is essential that a meal provide nutrition, and let's suppose that pleasurable experiences of food are always at least sought in a meal, but even those constant factors do not have a stable focal role or salience in the meal participants' activities and experience and in the meaningful character of the event. It seems that, in principle, we would not need meals if either nutrition or aesthetic pleasure was fundamentally what we were after. Human beings have traditionally been quite resourceful and dogged in making the nutritional project combine as well as possible with other projects (such as adapting to a given environment, using available labour and economic resources, having a social group to belong to, treating members of one's group ethically, and seeking pleasure in food), but those projects each bring different and possibly conflicting concerns into play, all of which can show up in the fine detail and habitual practices of meals.¹⁶ We are typically doing, undergoing, reinforcing, and striving for more than we are likely to think we are, certainly at a given ordinary meal. In the contemporary moment, it seems that people are especially uncertain about

¹² Peter Farb and George Armelagos, *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 4, 5-6, 10.

¹³ Brillat-Savarin, *Physiology*, 182, 181, 4.

¹⁴ Korsmeyer, *Taste*, 200.

¹⁵ Fernand Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life*, vol. I, translation revised by Siân Reynolds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 184 and surrounding discussion.

¹⁶ Korsmeyer remarks, 'While eating is often praised for its role in hospitality and formation of community, the sustenance of social bonds through shared eating occurs against a backdrop of disturbing moral significance, for eating consumes its objects and appetite is a drive that must destroy in order to be appeased' (*Taste*, 9).

how to combine effectively the various projects converging in meals (can I eat meals in a socially constructive, ethical, caring, pleasurable, healthy, affordable, environmentally responsible way?).

In relation to status as art, this picture of capacious, not inevitably coherent or reflectively accessible projects and processes, partly serves to make it clear that the aesthetic values that can be experienced in meals do not have priority. We indeed have the capacity for what Telfer calls 'aesthetic eating', in which we eat 'with attention and discernment food which repays attention and discernment'.¹⁷ But to the extent that a single element, such as aesthetic eating, dominates one's participation in a meal—is treated as *the point* of the meal—this neglects the complexity of our roles in the projects and processes that converge in meals and it to some extent undermines the realisation of the meal as a meal.¹⁸

This way of situating the aesthetic experience of the meal, as present but not focal, echoes in various ways Yuriko Saito's approach to 'everyday aesthetics'. She emphasizes a contrast between conceptions of art, on which art calls for especially intense, focused and contemplative aesthetic attention, and the mundane, practically engaged, and often little noticed role of aesthetic reactions in the course of daily living. 'This action-oriented, rather than contemplation-oriented, dimension of everyday aesthetics tends to move it outside the aesthetic radar calibrated to capture contemplative experiences,' where this 'radar' is represented in what she calls 'art-centred' and 'aesthetic experience-centred' aesthetic theories.¹⁹ The latter theories prioritise aesthetic experience that is special and lifted in some way out of the ordinary run of things. Saito proceeds to argue for the significance of non-art-centric, but aesthetic aspects of life, emphasising the role of the aesthetic in humdrum and practical activities (such as cooking and eating an ordinary meal). By

analyzing our aesthetic experiences outside art on their own terms rather than as proximate or "wannabe" art experiences, we can unearth a wealth of aesthetic issues that are not shared by, or relevant to, our experience of art. Similarly, by exploring the mundane everyday judgments and actions motivated by seemingly trivial aesthetic preferences, we can come to appreciate the ways in which our lives and the world are profoundly affected by aesthetic concerns, different from the way in which art or memorable aesthetic experiences exert their impact on our lives and the world.²⁰

This approach is quite apt for the case of meals, in which the appreciation of aesthetically satisfying foods is only one aspect of our activity and in which its impact has to reckon with the projects of seeking nutrition, respite, environmental viability, familial harmony, social cohesion and regulation, and the rest. The discussion above leads me to say that Saito's approach is in certain respects apt even for self-consciously 'aesthetic' and special meals, as I have claimed that the complexity of meals ultimately subordinates or submerges every individual element, even component culinary artworks, to a jostling interaction with other elements.²¹

¹⁷ Telfer, *Food* (London: Routledge, 1996), 57.

¹⁸ Brillat-Savarin, though certainly a celebrator of culinary excellence, when listing what is 'indispensable' to 'the pleasures of the table', says only that the food has to be 'at least passable'. The other requirements are 'good wine, agreeable companions, and enough time' (*Physiology*, 184).

¹⁹ Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4-5, 12.

²⁰ Saito, *Everyday*, 53.

²¹ Saito's discussion of the Japanese tea ceremony as an artform that attempts to incorporate a mundane occasion is particularly interesting here: 'As for the tea ceremony, while consisting of the most mundane activities, there is an inherent paradox. A "ceremonious" occasion to savor mundane activities isolates them from the flow of everyday life and environment. [...] Although this art form celebrates the mundane, it does so

However, my second goal in this discussion is to make sure that we do not make too decisive a break between meals and conceptions of artistic activity. The notion of *artistic value* still seems important to understanding and appreciating meals, even though this is not by way of identifying meals as artworks. Thinking about artistic value in this context is also an indirect way of raising the worry that *aesthetic value* is relied on too much to capture the value of art; I take there to be such a thing as artistic value, though it is a somewhat odd kind of value, and we cannot do justice to it in aesthetic terms alone. Meals are a good example of why we need notions of artistic and aesthetic value.

2. Meals as artistically valuable

A substantial case for demoting or side-lining artistic value as a ‘load-bearing’ theoretical notion is made by Dominic Lopes. On his view, the core values of art are the values associated with specific ‘appreciative kinds’ of art, such as the arts of painting, music, dance, and literature, or more specific kinds such as portrait painting, tragic drama or graphic novels. These art kinds with their characteristic practices provide the categories and norms of achievement that allow us to carry out substantive evaluations of artworks in those kinds. If we try to appeal to artistic value without specifying a particular art kind, Lopes thinks we risk ending up with a far too broad and uninformative grab-bag of ‘values in art’, including any kind of value that artworks possess (such as value in protecting passersby from the rain). We might narrow that down somewhat by specifying that a value in art is a value that an artwork is ‘made or distributed in order to realize’, but it seems this too will embrace an overly wide selection of the values that artworks have been intended to have (e.g., moral value, religious value, propaganda value).²² Lopes ultimately endorses what he calls a ‘buck-passing theory of artistic value’:

V is an artistic value of an art work = V is a value of the work as a K, where K is one of the arts.

The theory

does not imply any substantive unity to the values realized by works in the different arts. Artistic value is the aggregate of pictorial value, musical value, and other such values; it need not be their common denominator.²³

The particular arts can play this role, of contributing individually to what counts as artistic value, because they are appreciative kinds. This means (setting aside a number of details of Lopes’s account) that they specify a medium and a practice relevant to working with that medium, and this practice is in some way ‘goodness-fixing’, providing standards for being a good member of that kind.²⁴

by creating a special setting and occasion for us to contemplate and savor the ordinary’ (*Everyday*, 38 and surrounding pages).

²² Lopes, *Beyond*, 86.

²³ Lopes, *Beyond*, 102.

²⁴ Lopes, *Beyond*, 130-3, 146-9.

Lopes tries out two ways of understanding art as itself an appreciative kind that can play this goodness-fixing role. First, taking off from Kendall Walton's views on the importance of experiencing a work in the correct artistic category, Lopes considers the idea that the artistic value of a work could depend on it being experienced in the category of art, plain and simple.²⁵ This would mean that the comparison class of all artworks was relevant to appreciation of a given artwork, as, in Waltonian terms, that class would specify what counted as standard, contra-standard, and variable features of an artwork. Could this framework of expectations establish what counted as a good work of art? Lopes thinks there is no such practice of comparing a work to all other artworks or to expectations simply for art. We do not appreciate a piece of sculpture in the light of expectations shared across works of poetry, etching, photography, jazz, and so on. We may carry out evaluations that cross some common boundaries of art kinds, perhaps bringing works of narrative art from different media together as a comparison class, but if we do this, Lopes suggests we can think of ourselves as projecting a new category of art 'on the fly'.²⁶ This line of argument—that art, approached as a category of objects, does not seem capable of guiding or defining artistic value—seems plausible. But I do not think that settles the question of the emptiness of the notion of artistic value.

The second strategy he considers involves the idea that there is a distinctive achievement involved in the production of art that determines specifically artistic value. He tries out this idea using Richard Wollheim's account of art-making as 'thematizing activity', such that the distinctively artistic achievement involves behaviours and materials acquiring intelligibility and meaning.²⁷ For Lopes this approach too is a non-starter:

There is art. Artists make it. What they do when making art is often an achievement of some kind. Yet it is not an artistic achievement, because there is no description under which their activity is a thematizing activity of making art. The reason is that the artist has no inert materials that she can make to carry meaning except the materials of some specific kind of art. The only resources for thematising are those of music, painting, and the like. [...] there are practices and traditions of painting and music, but there are no practices or traditions of making art over and above these.²⁸

We do not think about a work's artistic value by considering whether it achieves what *art* can achieve, but rather by placing it within the context of an individual artistic practice. The buck passing approach allows us to leave the empty and unconstraining level of art as a whole, and seek artistic value where standards of achievement really have a grip, within the practices of the arts engaged with specific media.

Now, I note that Wollheim's general conception of the relation between medium and achievement seems important to Lopes's further discussion (in arguing for the role of medium in individuating art kinds). Lopes here recounts Wollheim's view:

The imaginative activity that an artist engages in as she works is couched in a recognition of the possibilities and limitations of some of the means she employs. As a result, what she

²⁵ Kendall Walton, 'Categories of Art', *Philosophical Review* 79, 1970: 334-67; Lopes, *Beyond*, 92-6.

²⁶ Lopes, *Beyond*, 96.

²⁷ Lopes, *Beyond*, 96-100.

²⁸ Lopes, *Beyond*, 98-9.

achieves through her imaginative activity cannot be grasped without taking into account the recalcitrance of those particular means. A medium is a means which must be taken into account in appreciating a work as the achievement of an artist.²⁹

For Lopes, again, this kind of achievement will be untethered and ill-defined unless it is specific to a given appreciative practice that has a way of fixing ‘goodness properties’. But I find it an illuminating, suggestive claim even when stated in this abstract way, without any particular medium or art practice in mind. The notion that artistic achievement involves imaginative activity, recognition of limitations and possibilities, and dealing with recalcitrant means, does not immediately mark off specifically artistic value, but I think this is the right territory to explore.³⁰ It is not an empty notion, despite not referring to the concrete practices of a given art, but sets out a pattern of conditions, understanding and activity that can be found in any art and that very broadly articulates a kind of challenge to be met.

Nonetheless, as with the ‘category of art’ strategy, it seems plausible to say, with Lopes, that we do not turn to art—taken as a whole, sprawling, immensely diverse practice—to determine or inform our judgements about artistic achievement and value. But I do not think that this is because the practices of the individual arts do the fundamental work of settling what counts as artistic value. My view is rather that artistic value depends on a different relation to the ‘goodness-fixing’ tendencies of our practices, and the achievements that count as distinctively artistic and basic to artistic value will not be settled, or not fully settled, by the standards operative in an appreciative practice. The artistic achievement is carried out with awareness of given conditions and constraints and of goods that are already envisioned or required within that context, but it involves in some way taking reflective charge of the context as a chance for goods to be realised. The artistic activity involves an awareness, perhaps very inchoate, that the available ‘goodness properties’ are not simply to be taken for granted but can be intensified, enhanced, realised in new ways, added to, and radically changed. ‘Taking reflective charge’ in this way comes in degrees, and can show up in tentative attempts to do a routine thing in a slightly better way, or trying to do more of a good thing than is required, all the way to doing something that actively critiques and supplants conceptions of the available goods. Taking charge in this way is an achievement in itself, which I count as a component of artistic value, and it is, problematically, not an easy thing to ‘detect’ and verify. The activity that flows from this assumed position may fall flat—the way of seeking to shape the goods that are realised may not work and may not be an achievement that raises the artistic value of the activity. For example, the radical, experimental nature of a response to given conditions is not in itself a measure of achievement, even if it establishes clearly the basic component of artistic value, that one has taken reflective charge of the possibilities for goods.

Let me return to the meal to illustrate what this view amounts to. To say that meals can have artistic value, despite not being art, means that the participants in a meal can take reflective

²⁹ Lopes, *Beyond*, 135.

³⁰ Note that the achievement approach does not steer us toward treating artistic value as a species of aesthetic value. David Davies, who resists collapsing artistic and aesthetic value, argues for works of art as performances, such that ‘To appreciate something as an artwork always requires that we ask, “What has been done, what has been achieved?”’ (*Art as Performance* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 27). In that passage he also quotes Denis Dutton pressing a similar view, ‘As performances, works of art represent the ways in which artists solve problems, overcome obstacles, make do with available materials’ (Denis Dutton, ‘Artistic Crimes’, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 19 (1979): 305).

charge of the possible goods to be realised at the meal and can achieve something valuable from that position. This is, right away, to fall away from the assumption that one's account of artistic value must have, as its central rationale, the goal of understanding the value of artworks *qua* art. Artworks have artistic value, and they often have it in especially marked and detectable ways, but that is a matter of art practices evolving to promote this kind of value, one that shows up in human activity very widely, and that usually does not result in the production of artworks. Although I will not argue for this here, I take this conception of artistic value to be crucial to explaining how we distinguish *art* appreciative kinds from non-art appreciative kinds (as in Lopes's extended example of ceramics as an art versus ceramics as a practice productive of everyday coffee mugs). In the case of the meal, I do not think that the human practice of having meals functions effectively as an appreciative practice, in the sense of fixing what it is to be good as a meal. As I have sketched above, meals seem to put a basically overwhelming array of goods 'on the table', with unclear priority, so that there is no settled practice as to how the participants in a meal should realise those goods (even if there are many quite detailed behavioural rules that claim to be fixed). However, meals certainly do provide constraints on and conceptions of available goods, and the participants in a meal can be more and less aware of these, and more and less reflective about their own capacity to respond to those constraints and to choose and shape those goods. One might say that meals have an abundance of ways of providing the substance and challenge to our imaginations, skills, and understanding that Lopes and Wollheim seek in the appeal to media and surrounding practices of art. The artistic value of a meal emerges in the achievement of a reflective position on these constraints and possibilities by the meal participants and in any further positive achievement that position leads them to, in intensifying, expanding, revising, and possibly innovating with respect to the goods realised in the meal.

In my very simple fictional example of the carrot meal, I am willing to say that placing the pieces of carrot on the crown of one's hat, when no table or dishes or food-specified surface is available—as opposed to simply handing them to one's fellow eater, and perhaps even as opposed to putting the pieces on the *brim* of the hat—is a minuscule achievement embodying a tiny flair-up of artistic value. It shows awareness of the conventional expectation that food is presented at a meal, and use of the hat in that way conforms to the constraints on a normal meal, but meets that expectation well, or as well as possible, with unpromising resources. As Dutton suggests, there is an achievement of 'making do' with the materials at hand. Let me give a clumsy, and possibly embarrassing, personal example of which I am yet a bit proud. Some years ago the hundredth anniversary of the Wright brothers' first flight was in the news, and my dinner that evening involved presentation of an airplane over clouds on each plate, using mashed potatoes and sausages (and some structural toothpicks). As you can imagine, this had very little aesthetic appeal, but it did achieve something that I am willing to call an artistic expansion of my ambitions for the significance of dinner. There is currently a feature in the food section of *The Guardian* that asks people to describe what they would choose for their last meal, including not only the food but who would prepare it, where and at what season and time of day it would be eaten, whether music would be played, who else would be there, and any other details of the occasion they would like to specify. This is of course a fantasy rather than an achieved meal, but I think the task attempts to put people explicitly in the reflective position, with responsibility for seizing the possibilities for meaning and value in a meal. I would characterise that as a task which orients people to the potential for artistically valuable achievement. Saito discusses the traditional Japanese lunchbox as involving the

ambition to bring each food component of the lunch to 'full life'.³¹ Though it might be that this treatment of food amounts to a food artwork, it seems plausible as well that it does not amount to art but demonstrate awareness of the possibility to intensify the presence of the food in a valuable way. These are, I hope, examples in which it is overall plausible that making an artwork, and contributing to an art kind that specifies what it is to be a good member of that kind, will not explain the value of the achievement.

Whether it is appropriate to treat these as achievements with artistic value, allowing artistic value to float free of the making of art, is obviously up for debate. I hope that the example of the meal, which seems to me such a wonderful context for artistic achievement without art, helps to make this case. In a project such as Lopes carries out, the theoretical side-lining of artistic value is tied extremely closely to the failure of art to function as an informative, goodness-specifying appreciative kind.³² I take that approach to misrepresent from the beginning the relation between artistic value and established goods. Artistic value is, I am urging, best conceived as a kind of value earned by activity that in some way—from the minimal to the deeply exploratory—takes reflective responsibility for the goods to be achieved. While such activity plays off of antecedent specifications of goodness, it does not take them as settling the possibilities for achievement. This is a modest descendent of grander conceptions, especially in the Idealist and Romantic traditions, of artistic activity as exercising capacities for play and freedom and as having value in that exercise. The artistic value of a meal, or of a painting or novel, assumes that the people involved in producing it do not just accept a given specification of goodness but reflect on and try to contribute to the development of the goods that can be achieved in their activity.

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³¹ Saito, *Everyday*, 116-7.

³² Dutton, though arguing for an achievement model of artistic value, seems to have this commitment: 'Before we can determine whether or not a particular artistic performance can be said to succeed or fail, we must have some notion of *what counts as success or failure in connection with the kind of performance in question*' ('Crimes', 307). Davies's discussion of *improvisational* performances and artistic achievement is relevant here (*Performance*, 225-9). Robert Stecker gives an extensive critical response to Lopes's position, raising a number of different problems for the view, but he too works for the most part within the assumption that artistic value needs the frame of art kinds: 'artistic value derives from what artists successfully intend to do *in* their works as mediated by functions of the art forms and genres to which the works belong.' But see also his example of a piece of furniture that we value as art despite it not fitting into an art kind ('Artistic Value Defended', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70 (2012): 357, 361).

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