In the last sentence of my own book in the philosophy of art, I write that “art provides the evidence of things not seen” by “presenting a subject matter as focus for thought and emotional attitude,” where the presentation is “distinctively fused to the imaginative exploration of material” (263) in a medium. In doing this, art serves, as John Dewey puts it, as “the means of keeping alive the sense of purposes that outrun evidence and of meanings that transcend indurated habit” (Dewey, 348). The experiences of making and responding to works of art provide the best models and opportunities we have for achieving what I call expressive freedom, understood as involving “originality blended with sense, unburdening and clarification blended with representation” (11). Too often we live inexpressively, palely, and conventionally, under the guidance of technical imperatives and without real conviction in what we do. But by either producing or entering interpretively and with felt involvement in the dense aesthetic, semantic, and expressive texture of a powerful work of art, we can live, at least temporarily, with more conviction in what we are doing, with more expressive freedom, than we are otherwise accustomed to finding ready to hand in life.

Given these views of mine, I am in enormous sympathy with the projects of both Lambert Zuidervaart and Martin Seel, and I have, further, enjoyed and learned
from each of their works. What I want to do today is to sketch briefly some points of affinity between their projects and mine and then to point to a kind of common Kantian-Hegelian background that, I shall argue, all three of us share. Here the fundamental idea will be that art—both making and responding to it—has, as I have suggested, a fundamental role in modeling and anticipating activities that would be constitutive of freer and fuller life than we mostly experience in present circumstances. Kant is right against Hegel that there is no fixed logic for the production and reception of important art in historical life; instead we must take seriously and attend to the dense, aesthetic workings of individual works, taking them one by one as objects of experience and criticism. But Hegel is right to argue that our experience of art also has a semantic or cognitive dimension that is bound up with address to fundamental tensions that appear in specific ways in certain cultural formations, certain forms of sociohistorical life.

But this is just a foretaste of where I will end up. First some remarks directly about Zuidervaart and Seel. Especially in *Artistic Truth: Aesthetics, Discourse, and Imaginative Disclosure*, but also to some extent in the companion *Art in Public* volume, Lambert Zuidervaart is concerned to address what J. M. Bernstein once usefully described as the constitutive aporia of contemporary aesthetic discourse. Either we can defend both the autonomy and importance of art by developing a broader concept of truth that goes beyond correspondence to and correct representation of a simply given, external, material reality to include an element of aesthetic disclosure of fundamental, but perhaps repressed or distorted, human concerns and interests. This will run the risk of falling into a discourse that is
unintelligible and unacceptable to both a public and a body of professional philosophers outside aesthetics who are fixated on truth as correct representation. OR we can try to characterize the importance of art as consisting in its more simply teaching us new, stateable truths about ourselves, that is, as trafficking in correct representations. This will run the risks of trivializing or ignoring the aesthetic densities of works of art, of reducing art to the purveying of dogma or propaganda (since in fact we learn few if any new, simply stateable truths from the experience of art), and of casting art as instrumental to cognitive or practical ends that are in fact better pursued otherwise. In fact, this latter course—seeing art as aiming at the kinds of results stateable in propositions that are achieved in science or in ethics—is the way of implausibility and madness. Zuidervaart, seeing this, resolutely seizes the first horn of the dilemma. He develops a non-propositional, non-correspondence understanding of artistic truth—the truth of the work of art—as a matter of its embodying and affording a life-giving imaginative disclosure, which disclosure helps us in our projects of improved cultural orientation and pathfinding, that is, roughly, of getting a more articulate sense of what, beyond more obvious matters of science, technology, politics and ethics, is worth doing and why, “Gaining orientation,” he writes, is essential to the acquaintance, recognition, understanding and know-how that belong to knowledge in a broad sense” (3) A disclosure or an orientation enabled is “life-giving” just to the extent that it opens or affords or points toward “a process in which human beings and other creatures come to flourish..., all of them in their interconnection” (97). “The artist’s self-disclosure [in making the work] is simultaneously a self-discovery, self-interpretation, and self-presentation” (200),
carried out, at best, on behalf of us all, of possibilities of more significant meaning-making, of more significant, expressive, and truthful activity and life. This—seizing the first horn of the dilemma—is, I think, exactly the right move, or at least the most promising one in thinking about art, and I want to endorse it whole-heartedly before going on to describe the Kantian-Hegelian background and to cast this move in a slightly different vocabulary.

Especially in his central chapter on the Aesthetics of Appearing, Martin Seel both reminds us of the importance of aesthetic experience and sets about unpacking its nature and significance. In experiencing a work of art properly, we “linger,” he writes, with an end-in-itself attentiveness” (28). No reduction here of the significance of art to purposes exterior to it. We attend to “an animated intertwinement of aspects” (29), caught up in something like what Monroe Beardsley describes as the distinctive unity, intensity, and complexity of aesthetic experience that is afforded by the densely interrelated aspects of the work. The work of art is by its very nature “made to be explored” (84) in this absorbedly attentive way. At the same time “we sense ourselves listening and seeing and feeling” (31, emphasis added), so that we are, as it were, also distinctively aware of enjoying the exercise of our powers of absorbed attentiveness. “The aim of [the] interpretation and knowledge [of art] is first and foremost to be with the articulating appearing of their objects” (16). And the aim of this being with, in turn, is the satisfaction of “the desire to be perceptually aware of the presence of one’s own being” (16), as though through our self-awareness in being thus absorbed we were deeply at home with ourselves and in our exercises of our powers. Here I am
reminded of Hegel's observation in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* that the aim of art is achieved in that the human being alters

external things whereon he impresses the seal of his inner being and in which he finds again his own characteristics. …Even a child’s first impulse involves this practical alteration of external things; a boy throws stones into the river and now marvels at the circles drawn in the water as an effect in which he gains an intuition of something that is his own doing. …The universal need for art, that is to say, is man’s rational need to lift the inner and outer world into his spiritual consciousness as an object in which he recognizes again his own self (31).

Just so for Seel as well. The work of art is "a choreography of real processes of appearing [that] establishes contact to situations of extended or unreachable existence" (78) in which choreographed appearings we are also reflected back to ourselves. As with Lambert Zuidervaart’s work, I want to say yes to all this, before now going on to develop a version of these thoughts in a somewhat different vocabulary.

A key text for me in thinking about what works of art as objects of absorbed attention to their choreographed appearings are, about how we produce them, and about how and why their production and reception matter for us is a remark of Kant’s in §49 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Here it is.
The imagination (as a productive cognitive faculty) is, namely, very powerful in creating, as it were, another nature, out of the material which the real one give it. We entertain ourselves with it when experience seems to mundane to us [uns zu alltäglich vorkommt]; we transform the latter [that is, the given real nature], no doubt always in accordance with analogous laws [analogischen Gesetze; laws of analogy or association], but also in accordance with principles that lie higher in reason (and which are every bit as natural to us as those in accordance with which the understanding apprehends empirical nature); in this we feel our freedom from the law of association (which applies to the empirical use of that faculty), in accordance with which material can certainly be lent to us by nature, but the latter can be transformed [verarbeitet] by us into something entirely different, namely into that which steps beyond nature. (5: 314; p. 192).

Let's spend a little time on this passage. Experience [Erfahrung] sometimes seems too mundane [zu alltäglich] to us. That is, we find ourselves doing this or that, in accordance with technical or prudential imperatives for the satisfaction of empirically given desires, including desires for survival, comfort, enjoyments of various kinds, and so forth. For us, this will often mean acting according to the technical demands of education or the workplace, in order ultimately to win a good
enough wage. And Kant’s point is that doing *that* can seem mundane or pointless or somehow not to be the doing of what we are really meant for. So why, really, should we do it? Why does it matter whether or not I survive and whether or not my empirically given desires are more or less satisfied? Of course this mostly does matter to us. In fact we mostly don’t stop trying to survive, and we prefer the satisfaction of our desires to their frustration. But sometimes, at least in reflection, getting on with all that seems not to be enough. Doing all that seems stale or dead. As Wordsworth famously puts it, for us, sometimes, “The world is too much with us; getting and spending we lay waste our powers.” In engagement with the ways of the world as it stands, we sometimes seem to ourselves, when we reflect, to be doing something other than what we were, as it were, meant for, and something other than what would be more fully satisfying. And then what? “In accordance with principles that lie higher in reason”—in particular with the principle that we *are to be* makers of free and meaningful life according to self-legislated laws of reason—we take materials afforded by ordinary experience (words, bits of stone or paint, bodily motions, incidents or events) and subject them to rearrangement, to some kind of emplotment. This might involve explicitly imagining human life otherwise, as in for example a utopian novel or in reversions to a fantasized pastoral that is free of conflict. Or it might involve dwelling on aspirations to freer and more meaningful life that are somehow systematically frustrated by current social formations, as in the sort of realist novel that interested Lukács. But what we do when we rearrange or emplot materials is also very often more indirect and more interesting than that. The very activity of arranging materials originally—in accordance, that is, with no
determinate rule or plan that is simply given—but also in a way that makes sense
and is improved and perfected by practice itself becomes a deeply satisfying form of
human activity, and its product—the material thing or text or score or performance
that is the vehicle of the activity of free imaginative arrangement—itself becomes a
kind of concrete, sensuous precipitate of and so piece of evidence for human
freedom, for free human meaning-making. We rework [verarbeitet] the materials
given by actual nature so as to produce something that steps beyond [übertrifft]
nature. That is, we produce a product that is a not simply a commodity to be used to
satisfy an empirically given desire and not simply an object of or for theoretical
understanding, but rather an embodiment of original sense-making, a work that
functions as both an anticipation and a symbol of further possibilities of free
meaning-making. Either in making such an object or in following in attentive feeling
its densely materially embodied original internal sense we are, as Kant goes on to
put it animated [belebt; quickened] as though we were summoned by the work as
herald into the awareness and exercise of powers of meaning-making beyond the
mundane. Not for nothing did Adorno, in a similar spirit, describe the work of art as
“the image of what is beyond exchange” (83) and “the plenipotentiary of a better
praxis than that which has to date predominated” (14).

I said earlier that Kant is right to hold against Hegel that the development of
art is not governed by any logic. That is, there is no formula, no pattern fixed in
advance, for predicting what kinds of works will take up what kinds of human
problems of the mundane and address them in specific ways in specific media.
Achievements of original sense do take place in material and social and artistic
circumstances, but how they can profitably engage with them is never fully decipherable in advance of their always partly improvisatory, non-rule-governed work. But it also seems to me, as it seemed to Hegel, that not everything is possible at every time and that Kant's account of free meaning-making in art is too individual-psychological or, as Hegel puts it, too subjective (see LA, 56). Despite the importance of unteachable creativity or genius, producing a successful and important work of art is not a simple straight shot from throwing pebbles into a pond to generating the *St. Matthew Passion* or *Demoiselles d'Avignon*. (Kant does register this to some extent in noting the need for genius to be improved and perfected by practice.)

Hegel argues, correctly, that human beings at any sociohistorical moment live within specific forms of fundamental opposition that appear as

the sensuous and the spiritual in man, [as] the battle of spirit against flesh, of duty for duty’s sake [and] of the cold command against particular interest, warmth of heart, sensuous inclinations and impulses and what is in general individual. …These are oppositions which have not been invented at all by the subtlety of reflection or the pedantry of philosophy; in numerous forms they have always preoccupied and troubled the human consciousness, even if it is modern culture that has first worked them out most sharply and driven them up to the peak of harshest contradiction (53-54, modified; Werke 13, 80).
This is to say, first, that human beings in general often enough have trouble balancing against one another and integrating the legitimate claims on them of technical and prudential imperatives, moral imperatives toward free and meaningful life, civic duties, and heart and feeling. In particular it is difficult for them to blend warmth of heart and feeling with what they are otherwise obliged or required to do. For example, I have to grade those freshman papers, fill out these tax forms, or go to a committee meeting, and so on, and I am not always so warmly happy about all that. Living within these oppositions, we have trouble believing in our lives. Experience can seem mundane to us. And it is to say, second, that modern culture—roughly, life under modern democratic political institutions and a modern market economy—gives a specific shape to these oppositions, even brings them to the greatest intensity. An 8th century BCE Attic shepherd or a 12th century CE weaver did not have to worry about how to sustain love and feeling in contexts of internal revenue services, health insurance companies, summer camps for computer skills for the kids, 401Ks, and annual performance reviews. As we say in my family—half in irony, half in truth—modern life is full, rich, and rewarding. But it's complicated, and complicated at various times in various specific ways.

Not only, then, is making art a matter of making original sense by arranging or choreographing sensuous materials to invite and sustain absorbed followings of their dense inner logics, thus animating us and temporarily overcoming immersion in the mundane, it is also at its best an address, both sensuous and semantic, to specific forms of fundamental contradictions that make experience seem mundane. This address is what makes an important difference between major and minor art.
While there neither are nor should be any sharp, bright lines, either between art and non-art or between major and minor art, art at its best most fully clarifies in both thought and feeling the most important oppositions that haunt our lives. Not all things that it is reasonable to call art either do or have to do this. There are many kinds and degrees of art that are important enough but are nonetheless not the most fully important art. But if I am right that the most important art does clarify significant oppositions in human life in this way, so that we see and feel more clearly where we are (even while also mostly not knowing what to do about it), then I think we should agree with Lambert Zuidervaart that works of art—some of them at least—are vehicles of life-giving imaginative disclosure that supports orientation, with Martin Seel that in experiencing some works of art attentively we come to be more “perceptually aware of the presence of [our] own being,” and with me that some works of art are vehicles of the achievement of expressive freedom.