

Precisifying Art Pluralism

by

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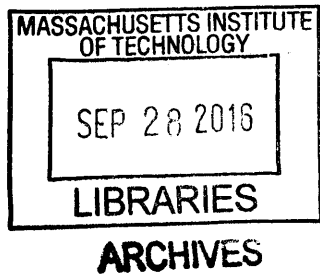
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## Abstract

This dissertation explores the legitimacy of *art pluralism*—the thesis that there are multiple, valid accounts of art. In 2011 Mag Uidhir and Magnus introduced the idea of art pluralism to revive the debate over the definition of art. This discussion has been pushed aside over the past half a century because all proposed accounts prove fallible under scrutiny. The overarching goal of this dissertation is to determine how this new approach—art pluralism—might prove useful in obtaining a satisfactory theory of art.

In the first chapter, I introduce art pluralism with the aid of species pluralism—the thesis that there are multiple, legitimate species accounts. I go on to criticize the arguments for art pluralism provided by Mag Uidhir and Magnus and go on to provide a stronger, direct argument for art pluralism.

In the second chapter, I consider the nature of pluralism in depth by introducing the notion of a complex kind. I claim that all pluralistic kinds are complex kinds and that there are multiple ways a kind can be complex. A kind is complex if and only if more than one account is required to explain its unification and working out the nature of this unification results in the precisification of that complex kind. I go on to precisify species pluralism as an example of this process.

In the third and fourth chapters, I demonstrate how each of the relevant art accounts—institutional, historical, and aesthetic—succeed and fail in providing *the* satisfactory account of art on their own. Instead we must understand these accounts as structurally dependent on one another. I describe the result of this particular structural dependence *focal-looping pluralism*.

In the conclusion, I acknowledge the importance of pluralism throughout the narrative of this dissertation but I am forced to question whether or not the thesis I end up arguing for is really best understood as *pluralistic*. I argue that art is best understood as a complex, not a pluralistic, kind and that the monist/pluralist dichotomy should be understood as less informative than the simple/complex kind distinction more generally.

## Dedication and Acknowledgments

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about the world and how it works. You would be proud of what I have  
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# Chapter One: Considering Art Pluralism

## I. Introduction

*In virtue of what is something a work of art as opposed to a regular old non-art thing?*

At the heart of this question lies a sentiment likely familiar to anyone who has visited a museum of modern or contemporary art. While looking down at a pile of candy in the corner of the room, one might wonder *Why is that art?* The question being asked is not “Why is this thing functioning as art should?”, but “Why should I experience this object as *art* at all?” Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* is a classic example of an artwork leading to this type of question; Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes*—nearly identical to the actual packaging of Brillo soap pads sold in stores in the 1960s, which is importantly taken to be not-art—provoked prominent philosopher of art Arthur Danto to write his influential book *The Transformation of the Common Place* and continued to fuel his work throughout his career. These types of works of art have instigated numerous attempts to explain the complex nature of art.

For a very long time—up until the mid-1900s, really—any answer to the above question coming from aesthetics and philosophy of art assumed some aesthetic theory of art. This means that the focus of the question was not so much on what *counts* as art, but instead, what it is about works of art that make them function the way that they do. In other words, the intention of any such answer was not to provide specific criteria with which we could assess whether any particular thing counted as art or not-art; the intention was to explain why it is that artworks function in the way that they do. The

difference here might be subtle, but its importance is great when considering the discussion of the nature of art today. The emphasis in the last century has changed in response to the variety of new types of artworks being made; the question at the forefront nowadays does *not* assume an aesthetic theory of art, as has been done throughout most of history.

Influenced by avant-garde works of art and certain trends in the philosophy language, philosophers have argued for and against different definitions that provide *the criterion* for something's being a work of art; this back-and-forth attempt at reflective equilibrium has not lead to anything resembling a consensus. As I go on to describe in detail, this deadlock is due to the fact that counterexamples always arise, and when a definition attempts to accommodate these counterexamples, the definition quickly becomes vacuous. For this reason, a majority of aestheticians and philosophers of art often choose to investigate other questions in their research, as demonstrated by Aaron Meskin in his 2008 publication "From Defining Art to Defining the Individual Arts: The Role of Theory in the Philosophies of Arts":

I think contemporary aesthetics has been most successful either when it has... pursued the 'careful and imaginative scrutiny of the individual arts and their individual problems', or, on the other hand, when it has investigated distinctive phenomena... as they are manifested across a range of the arts. In fact, it has largely been the success of those sorts of aesthetic projects and the failure of most definitional projects to provide much insight into the arts... that have moved the definitional question out of the centre of the field. (126)

I do not mean to deny that the issues Meskin mentions are important questions to address; the problem I am raising is that some of this work, either explicitly or



implicitly, assumes a particular account. For example, Sherri Irvin, in her paper “The Ontological Diversity of Visual Artworks,” argues for a claim regarding the ontological status of works of art from the explicit assumption that artworks are those “things that the artist creates” (4). Irvin is here assuming that what makes something a work of art is that an artist has created it. But not everything that an artist makes becomes a work of art; the sandwich that painter Julie Mehretu made for lunch isn’t a work of art. That is, on her view something is a work of art in virtue of being created in a particular way—being created by a certain kind of individual—and not in virtue of how it functions. The metaphysical conclusions that Irvin draws in her essay depend on her definition of art despite the fact that this definition is contentious and requires considerable elaboration.

My intention is not to argue against Irvin’s conclusions here, nor do I intend to insinuate that philosophers of art should not research the multitude of other questions that arise in our discipline. I do mean to emphasize, though, that perhaps we should continue the conversation and engage in reflective equilibrium because the issue continues to be fundamental. At least part of the problem is due to the fact that the same counterexamples are brought up in response to the same types of definitions. In this chapter, I introduce a new proposal that breathes new life into this important debate: art pluralism. Christy Mag Uidhir and P. D. Magnus argue for this theory in their 2011 paper “Art Concept Pluralism” and, although I ultimately find their argument unsatisfactory, their paper provides a very useful tool. In their argument they introduce an analogy with species pluralism, a theory in the philosophy of biology which has developed out of actual biological practice, which I use to explain and precisify art pluralism throughout this dissertation.

## II. Kinds and Concepts

Mag Uidhir and Magnus' paper is titled "Art Concept Pluralism" and not simply "Art Pluralism" as I will speak of it, and the same goes for much of the literature on species pluralism—the thesis is most often referred to as "species concept pluralism". However, I believe that researchers in both philosophy of biology and philosophy of art are attempting to explain the nature of art and species, i.e., the *real stuff in the world* that our concepts hopefully correspond with.

Although an examination of *our concept* of art—where *our* here can have multiple meanings—would be an interesting research project, I do not believe that Mag Uidhir and Magnus, along with many other philosophers of art, have made it the focus of their research to explicate the concept, just as biologists did not come up with species pluralism simply by considering their concept of species. This research has been based on investigation and theorization of the organic and social world—actual observation of biological kinds and works of art, respectively.

It can, quite quickly, get messy talking about the world while also talking about how we conceive of the world; to avoid this, I appropriate the framework and terminology from Sally Haslanger's 2016 essay "Theorizing With a Purpose: The Many Kinds of Sex":

In order to be clear in discussing the role of kinds in explanation, let's use the term 'distinction' and 'distinguish' or 'classification' and 'classify' for the linguistic/conceptual acts of noting or marking differences, and the terms 'difference' and 'differentiate' for the ontological basis for distinctions when they are apt, i.e., we distinguish objects, properties, relations or kinds that are

*different*; our *distinctions* aim to capture what *differentiates* the kinds we are interested in. (132)

Thus, we distinguish the stuff that is art from the stuff that is not art in the world because, first of all, there is an actual difference in the world between art and non-art stuff and, second of all, we have a purpose for drawing the distinction. In providing an account of art, we are interested in formulating exactly what these differences are; in other words, we are interested in figuring out the conditions, or grounds, that differentiate art from non-art.

Following this logic, we can rephrase art pluralism as claiming that there are multiple, different grounds for the kind art, not only multiple art concepts. We need the concepts to help distinguish the actual differences, but it is the differences that we are attempting to explain. Discussing things in this way does not preclude the kind art to have social grounds; exactly why the grounds for a kind are what they are is another investigation altogether, recently discussed in the work of Brian Epstein as the *anchoring project*. Whether or not the kind art is the kind it is because of social construction, natural forces, or anything else is a question that the anchoring project addresses. For our purposes, and the purposes of the research being discussed, we are interested simply in what the grounds *are* for the kind art.

### **III. Species Pluralism**

Although many of us may think that providing a monist account of the nature of species should be relatively unproblematic, we find that actual biological research dating back to pre-Darwinian times have lead both biological researchers and philosophers of biology

to accept—to some degree—species pluralism. According to species pluralism, there does not exist any privileged or fundamental account of what it is for something to count as a species. Instead, there are multiple accounts of what it is to be a species, and each of these accounts is legitimate; there are many ways of being a species. This can be a surprising realization, given that we often talk of species as a taxonomic heuristic when making definite distinctions between things; in other words, it has been considered one of those special kinds that really carves the world at its joints.

Just to clarify, a species is to be understood as a four-dimensional group of organisms because a species exists throughout time.<sup>1</sup> In the literature, biologists utilize over twenty-five different accounts for the kind species. Just to experience how overwhelming this reality is, let's look at a list that Richard Mayden put together in his essay "A hierarchy of species concepts: the denouement in the saga of the species problem":

- |                                    |                              |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Agamospecies                    | 12. Hennigian                |
| 2. Biological                      | 13. Intermodal               |
| 3. Cohesion                        | 14. Morphological            |
| 4. Cladistic                       | 15. Non-Dimensional          |
| 5. Composite                       | 16. Phenetic                 |
| 6. Ecological                      | 17. Phylogenetic             |
| 7. Evolutionarily Significant Unit | 18. Polythetic               |
| 8. Evolutionary                    | 19. Recognition              |
| 9. Genealogical Concordance        | 20. Reproductive Competition |

---

<sup>1</sup> Whether the kind species should be understood ontologically as a set or an individual is discussed in more in detail in the next chapter, "Complex Kinds and Varieties of Pluralism."

10. Genetic

21. Successional

11. Genotypic Cluster Definition

22. Taxonomic

Each account provides us with different criteria for what it is to be a species, and each account has been put to use in actual biological research for specific, but differing, reasons. Thus, one biologist may use the genetic species account for one research project, and then use the cladistic species account for another research project without any compromise or conflict on the part of the biologist.

Although there are a multitude of accounts, it is noted in several places that we can group the accounts into different types. In his book *The Poverty of the Linnaean Hierarchy*, Marc Ereshefsky argues that there are three main kinds of accounts based on the three important aspects of evolution: sex, selection, and genealogy. Despite some similarity amongst the accounts, he also demonstrates how different accounts cross-classify organisms:

Because biologists disagree on the correct approach to species, they provide different classifications of the organic world. Moreover, these approaches cross-classify the world's organisms by placing the same organisms in different species taxa. Cross-classification occurs in two ways... First, an organism may belong to two lineages with one lineage properly contained in another. For example, a member of the phylogenetic species A is also a member of the interbreeding species A + B. Second, an organism may belong to two lineages that are disjoint. For example, an organism in population B belongs to both the ecological species B + C and the interbreeding species A + B". (1653)

For further illustration of this point, note that if we utilize the phylogenetic account instead of other accounts, there was “an increase of 48.7% when a phylogenetic species concept replaced others” (Agapow et al. 164). Thus, although there are similarities between some of the species accounts, they often divvy up the organic world in very different ways.

For the sake of brevity, I won't explain all twenty-two accounts; instead, I will describe a few of the most well known to illustrate the pluralist thesis.

The **biological account** defines a species as members of populations that actually or potentially interbreed in nature, not according to similarity of appearance.

A biological species is an inclusive Mendelian population; it is integrated by the bonds of sexual reproduction and parentage. (Dobzhansky 354)

...groups of actually or potentially interbreeding natural populations which are reproductively isolated from other such groups. (Mayr 120)

On this account, horses and donkeys do not make up a species because their offspring is infertile. And although Western and Eastern meadowlarks are very similar in appearance and even overlap in range, they are distinct species on the biological account; their bird songs differ so drastically that they do not interbreed (Lanyon). Outside the realm of biological research, this is the most well known species account; anyone taking an introductory biology class is introduced to it. The main problem with this account is that it only allows for species that reproduce sexually, leaving out all asexual organisms as possible members of a species. This has led to critical evaluation of this account, though it is still used in research when taking sexual reproduction as the focus of inquiry.

The **recognition account** takes sexual reproduction to be central when identifying species, though from a different angle. This account takes a species to be a set of organisms that can recognize each other as potential mates. Similar problems arise with this account as do for the biological account.

The **phenetic account** takes a species to be a set of organisms that are phenotypically similar; that is, the organisms that make up a species possess observable physical or biochemical similarities as determined by both genetic makeup and environmental influences. This account allows for organisms that reproduce asexually to count as species.

The **ecological account** takes a species to be a set of organisms adapted to a particular set of resources, called a niche, in the environment:

... species is a lineage (or a closely related set of lineages) which occupies an adaptive zone minimally different from that of any other lineage in its range and which evolves separately from all lineages outside its range. (Van Valen 233)

Thus, instead of observing breeding patterns, this account takes environmental forces to be a much more accurate process. It is capable of classifying unisexual and bisexual species, and species that evolve by hybridization. There are just two constraints on what counts as a species on this account: similar adaptive zone and single lineage participation.

The **evolutionary account** is explained in multiple ways in the literature:

... a lineage (an ancestral-descendent sequence of populations) evolving separately from others and with its own unitary evolutionary role and tendencies. (Simpson 153)

... a single lineage of ancestor-descendant populations which maintains its identity from other such lineages and which has its own evolutionary tendencies and historical fate. (Wiley)

... an entity composed of organisms which maintains its identity from other such entities through time and over space, and which has its own independent evolutionary fate and historical tendencies. (Mayden and Wiley 395)

The basic idea is that a species is a lineage resulting from some evolutionary process.

This account has many advantages, as recounted by Richard Richards' in his book *The Species Problem*:

This species concept satisfies the historical component implicit in evolutionary theory by virtue of being a historical lineage connected by ancestor-descendent relations. And given that this is a lineage of *populations*, it also satisfies the synchronic component of species as groups of organisms at particular times.  
(132)

For these reasons, among others, it satisfies many of the theoretical requirements for an account of species. This benefit is, however, also a burden: the evolutionary account is too vague for research purposes. This account leaves us with many unanswered questions regarding the nature of species: What is historical fate? What is a lineage? Several aspects of the definition provided by this account require further explication to be operational.

Many philosophers have argued that species pluralism is inevitable because none of the accounts fulfill all of the requisite criteria. In his 1997 paper "The ideal species concept—and why we can't get it," David Hull provides what he argues to be the three



crucial criteria that a scientific concept must meet three of the most common criteria that concepts are supposed to meet in science:

1. *Theoretical Significance*: the concept must adhere to the recent theoretical conclusions in that area of study,
2. *Generality*: the concept must apply to all desired cases, and
3. *Applicability*: the concept must be able to aid researchers in distinguishing between things that satisfy the concept and those that don't.<sup>2</sup>

Mayden (1997) explicitly utilizes these criteria when he painstakingly analyzes each of the twenty-two species accounts and demonstrates how each of them has failed as *the* species account which I will discuss in more detail in the second chapter.

With one important exception, all of the species accounts fail either theoretical significance or generality. The biological account fails the generality criterion, as it only applies to sexually reproducing organisms; the others have similar failures in that they leave out some members of the organic world that should qualify as members of a species. That is true for all accounts except for the evolutionary species account which does apply to all desired cases. For the same reason that the evolutionary account meets the generality criterion, it fails the applicability criterion; it is so general that it captures all organisms in the organic world, but it is so vague that it does not aid researchers in distinguishing species from non-species. The twenty-one species accounts that fail the generality criterion, however, pass the applicability criterion because they provide more specific constraints. Just as with the generality criterion, every account except for the evolutionary account fails the theoretical significance criterion. This is because those

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<sup>2</sup> Given Hull's use of the term "concept," I have also used it here in discussing his work.

twenty-one accounts imply that species are—ontologically—sets, while the current theoretical consensus is that species are best understood to be individuals made up of parts, not classes consisting of members.

In practice, biologists continue to conduct research with the multiple accounts as if they do not conflict. On the basis of all this evidence, philosophers—along with several philosophically minded biologists!—argue that species is a pluralistic kind. Marc Ereshefsky simply states this argument in his book *The Poverty of the Linnaean Hierarchy: A Philosophical Study of Biological Taxonomy*: “According to contemporary biology, each of the approaches to species highlights a real set of distinctions in the organic world” (1717). Species pluralism most accurately describes the way the world is; refusing that any one account is legitimate amounts to ignoring significant aspects of evolution and, in so doing, provides an impoverished picture of organic life. Given that the goal of biology can be stated as explaining the entirety of the organic world, species pluralism should be taken to be an attractive theory.

The implicit argument is as follows: We assume that our best theories should accurately capture the differences found in the world. As demonstrated in biological practice, there are multiple species accounts that accurately capture the differences found in the world. Given the above assumption and the demonstrated fact, our best theories should utilize these multiple species accounts, and because such theories are taken to be the best indicators of how the world actually is, we can conclude that there are, in the world, multiple kinds of species.

## **IV. Art Pluralism**

### **A. What's the Analogy?**

Just as with species, there exists at least more than one plausible and productive account of art. Where do we go to find these multiple accounts? In the case of species, the pluralistic thesis came out of biological practice. In the case of art, however, we find that pluralism comes out of the philosophical literature itself. At first glance this may seem disanalogous; shouldn't the pluralism come out of the research, or work, of artists? Or the research, or experiences, of the audience? I argue that this is not the right way to understand the situation; biologists study the nature of organisms, they don't make the organisms, nor do they base their conclusions purely on their *experience* of organisms, at least in the way we think of an audience experiencing art. Artists are the creators of art, not the observers of art, and although audience members do observe art, their relationship is best understood as experiencing, not observing. Biologists are not the creators, nor are they the experiencers of species; they are the observers of species. In this way, philosophers of art are observing and investigating the nature of art in an analogous—though methodologically very different!—manner to biologists observing and investigating the nature of species.

Mag Uidhir and Magnus claim that there are four main types of art accounts that have proven to be more productive and plausible than others: aesthetic, communicative, historical, and institutional. I claim that the communicative account can be subsumed under the aesthetic account. Various versions of these accounts have been argued for and successfully utilized in the literature to explore the nature of art, just as the multiple accounts of species have in the study of biology. I will follow Stephen Davies in

classifying the types of accounts mentioned into two sorts: conventional/procedural accounts and functional accounts.<sup>3</sup> The distinctive feature of a work of art for a conventional or procedural account will be that the thing is created in some particular way or through some requisite process, whereas functional accounts take the distinctive feature to be that the thing has a particular function. I will discuss each account in much greater detail in the final two chapters of this dissertation.

### *Conventional/Procedural Accounts*

On **institutional accounts**, artworks are those things that have been deemed art by the artworld in some way; there are different ways of working out this account. Although Danto is often credited with first hypothesizing the account, he denies that his own worked out theory of art is institutional. George Dickie was the first to work out and argue for an institutional theory. In 1971 he argued that artworks are artifacts which have had the status of ‘candidate for appreciation’ conferred upon them by the institution of the artworld.<sup>4</sup> In his later work, he goes on to alter this definition but the main idea remains the same: something is a work of art not because it possesses any intrinsic “art” properties or because people think it is beautiful and moving; instead, something is a work of art if it plays a role within an art system; it is a work of art by convention. Duchamp’s urinal, then, is a work of art because the artist put it on a pedestal in a gallery, not because the porcelain is especially beautiful.

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<sup>3</sup> In an important way that will be touched upon later, all of the accounts are functional in that all artworks are considered to be intentional. However, for the purpose of this discussion, I will utilize Davies’ distinction, as I believe it is helpful in bringing out the differences between the two kinds of accounts.

<sup>4</sup> Note here how being an artwork depends on the intention for the work to be appreciated.

On **historical accounts**, artworks are those things that have, in some way, been produced in relation to the history of art. It's easy to image examples of this account: Michelangelo's *Sistine Chapel* easily fits into this category, as does Pollock's drip paintings. As with the institutional account, there are different ways of working out what that relation is. Jerrold Levinson (1990) provides an intentional-historical account that is borne out of the institutional account, while making important changes:

I propose to construe this relation solely in terms of the *intention* of an *independent individual* (or individuals)—as opposed to an *over act* (that of conferring the status of a candidate for appreciation) performed in an *institutional setting* constituted by many individuals—where the intention makes reference (either transparently or opaquely) to the *history of art* (what art has been) as opposed to that murky and somewhat exclusive institution, the *artworld*. (2)

Thus, whether or not something is a work of art depends on whether the artist intended it to be experienced as works of art *have been* experienced throughout art history.

### *Functional Accounts*

On **communicative accounts**, artworks are the vehicle for the communication of content, and different accounts given argue for different kinds of content. Many accounts of art throughout the ages have argued that art is a vehicle for truth, in other words, semantic content. In the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century in Germany we find several such accounts. Martin Heidegger (1950) provides a striking example when he argues that art is the primary vehicle with which the most fundamental truths about our nature are revealed to us. Thus, a thing which produces this kind of cognitive experience will be

understood as a work of art. A more contemporary communicative account is to be found in Arthur Danto's work (1981), wherein he argues that works of art express both important ideas and truths, and also important emotional content. In Volume 3 of his *History of Modern Aesthetics*, Paul Guyer describes Danto's account as follows:

A work of art is thus a representation that reveals how its artist thinks and feels about its subject, that reveals that artists' particular way of making representations, and that does or is intended to move its audience to think and feel in some particular way; and this is true of any work of art... (486)

In this case works of art intend to communicate very complex contents, both semantic and emotional. On these accounts, something is a work of art if it serves the function of communicating particular content. We aren't *only* considering the artist's intention, for example, of whether or not it fits into the previously accepted conventional understanding of art. It could be argued that on one such account, Duchamp's *Fountain* is a work of art because it communicates certain important, fundamental truths about the state of the then-current artworld itself and its ridiculousness, for example. I consider the communicative account to be a version of the aesthetic account because the communication must be carried out in a particular *way*; this *way* is specific to works since we do not want every conversation we've ever had to count as a work of art. I consider this *way* to be aesthetic.

On **aesthetic accounts**, artworks are those things that satisfy some aesthetic function. There are many different ways of approaching this function in the literature, especially given the fact that the focus of philosophy of art was aesthetics for centuries

before the 1950s.<sup>5</sup> For example, the function could be aesthetic experience as argued by John Dewey in *Art as Experience* and the work of Monroe Beardsley, aesthetic judgment as argued by Nick Zangwill in “Groundrules in the Philosophy of Art” and “The Creative Theory of Art”, aesthetic expression as argued by R. G. Collingwood in *The Principles of Art*, or aesthetic communication as argued by Arthur Danto in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. In contemporary literature, the most discussed account is that of Monroe C. Beardsley (1982); his account focuses on the function of aesthetic experience: “Either an arrangement of conditions intended to be capable of affording an experience with marked aesthetic character or (incidentally) an arrangement belonging to a class or type of arrangements that is typically intended to have this capacity” (299). Beardsley’s account draws heavily on the work of John Dewey, who provides another aesthetic experiential account of art. In his famous work *Art As Experience*, he states that, in the same way that Heidegger argues that works of art function as a vehicle for fundamental truths, works of art function as a trigger for aesthetics experiences, which are the most unified, intense, and complete ways of experiencing the world. On these accounts, works of art are those things that trigger, or induce, aesthetic experiences.

Despite the convincing nature of the arguments for these accounts, none of them fulfill the requisite criteria for being *the* account of art. Just as there are criteria for a satisfactory account of species, there are criteria for a satisfactory account of art. In the literature we find two main criteria that philosophers utilize during criticism: the account must be free of counterexamples and it must be operable. That is, for an

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<sup>5</sup> For an extensive account of these multiple functions, please see Paul Guyer’s *History of Modern Aesthetics* volumes 1, 2, and 3.

account to succeed it must account for all intuitive examples of art and be able to provide operable criteria for differentiating art from non-art.

Conventional accounts cannot satisfy the counter-example free criterion; instances of folk art, non-Western art, and outsider art prove problematic. What about works of art created by individuals lacking any contact with the history of art as we know it? Would they simply have a different sort of art than we do, and if so, would there be any connection between the two kinds of art? What about handmade quilts: Do we want to say that they only became art when introduced into the artworld? Or were they artworks before coming into contact with the proper process of art-accreditation? There are too many possible counter-examples for the conventional account to meet the first criterion.

At least in theory, conventional accounts provide us with the means to differentiate art from non-art; once the account is worked out, we possess specific criteria for what counts as art and what doesn't. For example, whether or not an object is properly related to the artworld institution or art history would provide us with the knowledge to label it art or not-art. Is that soda can on the table a work of art? Well, it wasn't created or appropriated along the proper channels, so it is not-art. However, the *Mona Lisa* certainly does count as art. These accounts, then, provide us with somewhat clear rules for operability. However, when trying to account for the counterexamples that plague these accounts, we find that the operability goes away; the accounts become more and more vague as they adapt to account for the problematic cases. Although this may seem to be the case for some visitors of today's contemporary art museums, this is not a theoretically useful way to address the nature of art.



Arguably, functional accounts can meet neither of the criteria. Most people argue that works of conceptual art provide us with counterexamples to any aesthetic account of art.<sup>6</sup> A favorite example of mine that may illustrate this is a piece by artist Tom Marioni titled “Drinking Beer With Friends is the Highest Form of Art.” He invites his friends to his apartment and they drink beer. This piece is somewhat of a hit in the artworld and he has conducted many performance of the piece. As a viewer in a museum or gallery, it seems unlikely that reading an explanation of this work, or seeing photographs of folks drinking beer, will bring on the kind of aesthetic experience intended by the aesthetic accounts. Even beyond that, it seems questionable that the individuals partaking in the performance are experiencing the work aesthetically, given that drinking beer at a party is a typical experience. Communicative accounts of art are questionable because they have a hard time explaining works of ‘absolute’ or ‘abstract’ music along with minimal works of art like those of Donald Judd or Sol LeWitt. It is argued that these works don’t have any content to communicate.

At the same time, it can be argued that both aesthetic and communicative accounts do not meet the operability criterion because they do not provide any helpful guidelines to delineate art from non-art. How do we determine whether something functions aesthetically? If prompted, it seems that individuals can have an aesthetic experience of most things. Does everything count as art now? And it is also arguable that the communicative includes too much in the extension. What *doesn't* communicate some

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<sup>6</sup> There is an assumption here that conceptual art cannot be aesthetic because it is purely conceptual and, thus, not phenomenal and that the only types of experience that can be dubbed aesthetic are phenomenal ones. I question this assumption in later sections of my dissertation.

kind of content? Are philosophy books to be considered art now? What about advertisements in car mechanic magazines?

Despite the fact that all of the accounts provided do capture *some aspect* of our intuitions regarding art, they all also fall prey to counterexamples and a lack of operability. These problems have stunted the attempt to reach reflective equilibrium regarding the nature of art, and have led to frustration in the literature within philosophy of art. Because there doesn't seem to be any way to meet the required criteria, philosophers have reservations regarding whether or not we should even be addressing the question. Despite this doubt, these accounts *do* capture important intuitions about art; the intuitions are so strong that they aren't given up in the face of counterexamples. Thus, there is something to be gained from continuing the conversation regarding the nature of art, while trying to adapt or adopt the accounts given in the past.

## **B. Mag Uidhir and Magnus' Argument**

In their 2011 paper "Art Concept Pluralism," Mag Uidhir and Magnus argue for art pluralism on the basis of past art accounts failing to fulfill the requisite criteria. Although their argument proves unsatisfactory, their discussion points us in a promising direction. Their argument fails because it provides a weak, inductive argument for the thesis, yet they still provide good reasons to consider the thesis as plausible, and, more importantly, entices us to seek out a direct argument on the basis of this plausibility.

They sum up their argument in the following concise way: “We argue that the ART concept can be saved only by abandoning concept monism for a responsible form of art pluralism” (2). The main assumption of this argument is that a theory of ART must be either monist or pluralist.<sup>7</sup> They argue by induction: given that all monist theories provided throughout the history of the debate have failed, we can go on to say that all monist theories fail. Thus, if there is a plausible pluralist theory out there, then it makes a lot of sense to go with that instead of the failed monist theories.

They then argue that we can only accept that conclusion if there is a model of responsible pluralism that helps explain the nature of art. They then provide this explanation with the help of species pluralism in philosophy of biology. They go on to explain how we can use this model to construct a responsible art pluralism in the same way that I have done above: we take the working accounts found in the literature and accept them each as a legitimate account of art. Given that we have a reasonable pluralist theory ready at hand, and monist theories have—at least up until now—failed; we should go with the reasonable pluralist theory. Here’s the argument reconstructed:

- 1) All monist theories of art have failed thus far.
  - All monist theories of art are either definitional or non-definitional.  
(assumption)
  - All definitional-monist theories of art have failed thus far. (demonstrated fact)
  - All non-definitional theories of art have failed thus far. (demonstrated fact)
  - Therefore, all monist theories of art have failed thus far.
- 2) If a kind of theory has continued to fail up till now, if there is a reasonable alternative account available, then we should accept it. (inductive assumption)

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<sup>7</sup> They use the convention of capitalization—“ART”—when referring to concepts throughout their paper.

- 3) If there is a reasonable alternative to monist art theories, then we should accept it. (1,2)
- 4) There is a reasonable alternative to monist art theories: art pluralism (species pluralism model)
- 5) We should accept art pluralism. (3,4)

In their paper, they provide an argument for premise 1 in a manner similar to that I provided in the previous section. Their first premise will lead to art pluralism, according to their argument, if the inductive assumption stated in premise 2 is true. After these argumentative moves, the third and fourth steps of the argument are purely deductive.

The main issue is whether or not the inductive assumption is true. If we have an alternative to the monist theories and that alternative seems plausible, should we accept the alternative? There is a way we can accept it that is quite weak: we can assume the pluralist position while we seek out the correct monist theories because it is the only one we have at the moment. But this is not a strong philosophical position to take as an advocate for art pluralism. The problem is that it gives us a conclusion based mostly on the failures of past monist accounts, not a direct argument for the conclusion that we should accept art pluralism. This result is an account that merely points out the complexity of art, while failing to provide an explanation of this complexity. Thus, I take Mag Uidhir and Magnus' inductive arguments to provide us with a weak conclusion, one that essentially boils down to *give pluralism a chance*.

### **C. Strengthening the Argument**

Luckily, we don't have to look very far for a stronger argument given that the argument for species pluralism provided above, works analogously for art pluralism. Just as Mag

Udhir and Magnus appropriated the species pluralism model because of similarities, I claim that the argument for species pluralism can also be appropriated to attain the desired direct argument.

The main idea is that art pluralism most accurately describes the way the world is. Ignoring any of the accounts as legitimate amounts to ignoring significant aspects of what we all intuit as the nature of art, and, in so doing, provides an impoverished picture of both our nature as human beings and the architecture of the world we live in. The implicit argument is as follows: We assume that our best theories should use accounts that accurately capture the differences found in the world. As demonstrated in the philosophical literature, there are multiple art accounts that, in some respect, capture differences in the world—albeit not successfully according to the monist’s criteria. And just as with the species pluralism case, these different art accounts play different explanatory roles in different circumstances. For example, the historical art account provides us with a great explanation of art *movements*; an art movement is a historical entity that contains all works of art that bear some sort of relationship to a historical moment in time, usually a specific work of art. The institutional art account provides us with a great explanation of how avant-garde works of art become well-known and accepted. While the aesthetic account of art provides us with an explanation of why we find works of art valuable to individuals and our societies at large.

Given the above assumption regarding what we expect of our best theories and the demonstrated fact that there are multiple legitimate accounts of art, our best theories should utilize these multiple species accounts. Given that our best theories are taken to

be the best indicators of how the world actually is, we can conclude that there are, in the world, multiple art accounts, or more suitably, art grounds.

Here the disanalogy brought up in the beginning of the paper may seem problematic again. The difference could be found in the evidential basis for the premise that there are multiple accounts that accurately capture divisions in the world. In the case of species, the evidence comes from biological practice. In my argument for art pluralism the evidence comes from philosophical practice, specifically the philosophical practice of aesthetics and the philosophy of art. In order for the argument to be analogous must it be the case that the pluralism arise from the artistic practices of creating or experiencing?

Again, although *seemingly* problematic, we find that the analogy is not tainted. Biologists *study* the organic world, they are not *creating* nor *experiencing* the organic world. Artists, on the other hand, are *creating* the art, not studying its nature in order to make inferences on their findings, while audience members are experiencing the works without the intention of creating an overarching theory of art based on those experiences. This is certainly not to say that artists never think about the nature of art or have a practice which engages with their beliefs regarding the nature of art, nor does it mean that sometimes audience members do create overarching theories based on the totality of their experience with art! The point is that their primary relation to *art* is as making or as experiencing and not as investigator. Rather, the aesthetician or philosopher of art is in that position. Just as the biologist observes and studies the organic world in order to describe it and infer other truths from her discoveries, the

aesthete observes and studies the world of artifacts and human activity in order to describe it and infer other truths from her discoveries.

## **V. Conclusion**

With the helpful analogy of species pluralism, we can reengage with the debate regarding the nature of art while paying due respect to the multiple useful accounts of art that have been given throughout the years. This is not to be easily looked over as we have seen that throughout the literature there are multiple productive accounts of art. As argued, it makes more sense to treat them each as plausible and useful than neglect the explanatory worth within each. With species pluralism as our guide, we have come upon a promising and new way of considering the nature of art.

Although there are many issues to be addressed, there are some clear benefits to art pluralism besides the continuation of the process of reflective equilibrium. Species pluralism has led biologists to qualify their studies with the species account they are using; the work they give is explicitly dependent on a particular account. One result of our argument is that this should also be the case for art pluralism as well; instead of implicitly assuming an account of art or ignoring the issue altogether, philosophers should be required to make explicit the account they are working with.

You may wonder whether or not this makes any difference to the outcome of the philosophical work; I claim that it does. For example, when investigating the question of the ontological status of art, the assumed account can make a big difference. If you are working under the assumption of an institutional account, then you may argue for a position similar to Sherri Irvin's; as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, she

argues there is no particular ontological status associated with works of art. This is because the reason why the thing is considered art is not inherent to the thing itself but rather a relational property, on her view this has to do with the artist's sanctioning. Thus, ontological diversity can abound. However, if you are working under an aesthetic experiential account, then perhaps you will argue for a mental ontology of art given that the defining aspect of art is the experience that exists within the viewers' experience. These are not the only conclusions you might come to, but it does demonstrate that the account of art that you are working with effects the conclusions you draw. Thus, such an assumption should be made explicit.

There are many issues left to address if we are to obtain a working account of art pluralism. Exactly what does this pluralism consist in? Are these accounts completely separate from one another? Should we understand the nature of art to be simply disjunctive of these different accounts? Without addressing these questions here, we can conclude this chapter with the observation that the natures of both art and species are complex. That is, they are both complex kinds. In the next chapter, I investigate the nature of complex kinds in more detail, using the preexisting research provided in the species pluralism literature as a helpful guide.



# Chapter Two: Complex Kinds and Varieties of Pluralism

## I. Introduction

In the first chapter, I provided an argument for art pluralism—the thesis that there are multiple, legitimate accounts of the nature of art—and demonstrate some of its benefits. At the end, however, I recognize that the result of arguments for art pluralism—as well as the arguments for species pluralism that provide the analogous basis for my discussion of art pluralism—are not sufficiently explanatorily. The most we can conclude from these arguments for pluralism is that the kind under investigation is *complex*; more importantly, these arguments demand further exploration of the nature of pluralism. Complex kinds do not fit within current philosophical models and pluralism is a way of expressing this, though this alone does not explain the nature of either art or species satisfactorily.

In this chapter, I provide an in-depth account of what it means to say that a kind is complex and explain why we should extend the traditional metaphysical system of classification to include them in the philosopher's toolkit. I work through the concrete case of the complex kind species to illustrate its value.

## II. Types and Kinds

“Kind” is a technical term used in metaphysics, often used in unfortunately ambiguous ways. To avoid confusion I provide my account of what kinds are in this section. To begin, we need to examine the relationship between types, and kinds.

Let’s start off with what are sometimes called classes but can also be thought of simply as *groupings*; a class is a grouping of things of any sort whatsoever. A grouping may have some degree of unification amongst its members, or it may not. If it does not, then it is simply a gerrymandered grouping without any membership criteria beyond the disjunction consisting of each of its members. David Armstrong provides this helpful example:

You can take the Sydney Opera House, the square root of 2, the city of Berlin, the “Barbara” syllogism, your last thought on June 6, 1988, along with indefinitely many other things, indeed an infinite of other things. It is a perfectly good class.  
(13)

The world of groupings is filled with every possible configuration. We can imagine that the majority will be random groupings like the one Armstrong provides. However, there are groupings with some degree of unification. For the purpose of this research project I remain neutral on the metaphysical nature of this unification relationship. Following Armstrong, let’s call the unified groupings ‘types.’ Thus, all types are groupings, but not all groupings are types.

A further distinction arises from the fact that a type can be either weakly or strongly unified. Armstrong describes how to take his example of a gerrymandered grouping and turn it into a type by describing it as “the five things that have the property of being used as philosophical examples by a being having [the complex property of

being Armstrong]” (13). This imaginative property provides a requisite degree of unification to be considered a type. However, as Armstrong himself notes, this type is pretty uninteresting and explanatorily useless. There are many types that meet the unification requirement but still lack the requisite explanatory strength to be classified as strongly unified.

The last distinction is built on the weak/strong unification of a type. A strongly unified type is a kind. In this way, all kinds are types, but not all types are kinds. In the past, philosophers have understood “strongly unified” either in terms of shared essence or definition providing necessary and sufficient conditions. The latter is problematic because types that we intuit to be weakly unified can possess necessary and sufficient conditions—take Armstrong’s example above. Also, definitions that provide necessary and sufficient conditions may result in mere extensional satisfaction; that is, we may end up with a nominal definition—e.g., all humans are featherless bipeds—instead of a real definition—e.g., all humans are rational animals. The idea of shared essence is an attempt to explain what is intended by “real definition,” but understanding strong unification in terms of shared essence is also problematic because it is incredibly controversial.<sup>8</sup> For these reasons, I set aside shared essence and necessary and sufficient conditions when explaining strong unification and, instead, understand the notion in terms of explanatory power. That is, the nature of a kind’s unification is itself explanatorily powerful.

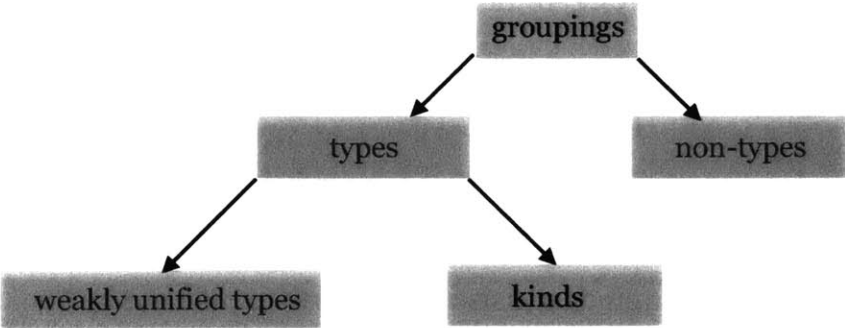
To illustrate the notion of explanatory power I am invoking, consider the following examples: The groupings consisting of fourteen philosophy books currently on

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<sup>8</sup> It is for this same reason that I also omit fundamentality, primitiveness, and the like as possibilities.

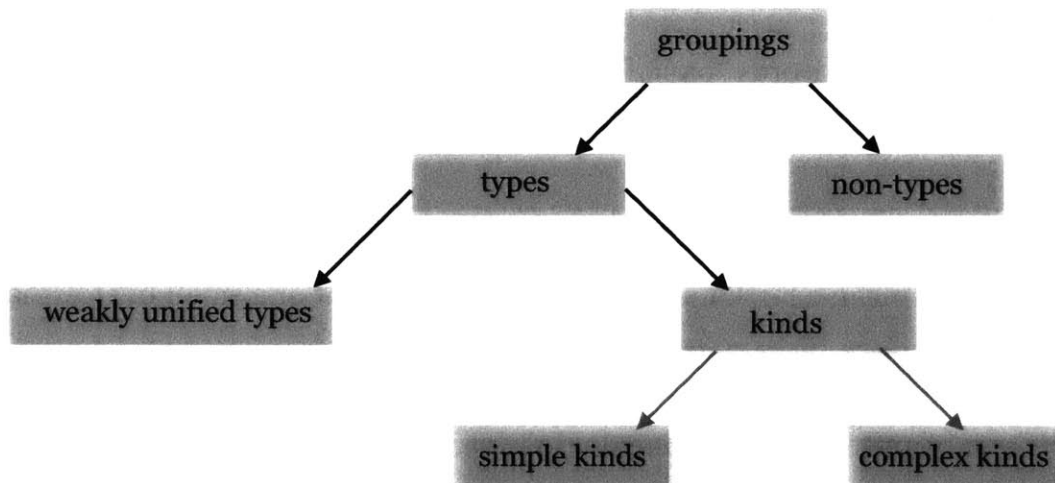
my desk are qualitatively unified in that they all share the quality of being philosophy books currently on my desk. But this unification explains very little; perhaps in some way it explains my philosophical knowledge and opinions—how it is that I used some quotes in this chapter and not others, but not much else. This is similar to how Armstrong’s example is, for the most part, explanatorily inert. However, consider the grouping of all muscular organs that pump blood; or the grouping of all vessels that are propelled on water; or the grouping of all systems by which a nation, state or community is governed; or the grouping of all limbless, cold-blooded, vertebrate animals with gills and fins that live mostly in water. Each of these groupings have proven to be extremely explanatorily powerful; they are so explanatorily powerful that we have specific words to denote them: hearts, boats, governments, and fish. Each of these groupings are, thus, strongly unified which is why we consider them to be kinds.

This idea is not a new one; so-called natural kinds are deemed extremely important because of the explanatory role they play in scientific laws and induction, just as so-called social kinds are attaining more legitimacy because they are, more and more, seen to be explanatorily powerful. In the end, we have an explanatory structure between groupings, types, and kinds that looks like this:



### III. Complex Kinds

I have no problem with the metaphysical classification as just explained; however, I claim that there is further level of distinction, one that is traditionally overlooked and/or neglected. This further distinction is between simple and complex kinds and the distinction has been overlooked and/or neglected because philosophers have traditionally assumed that all kinds are necessarily simple kinds. A kind is simple if and only if its unification is explained with a single account; such an account typically manifests as a definition providing necessary and sufficient conditions. On the other hand, a kind is complex if and only if more than one account is required to explain its unification.



To explain how complex kinds fit into this diagram, I will extend the well known analogy that Kit Fine utilizes in his paper “Essence and Modality” between kinds and meaning:

[T]here is more to the idea of real definition than is commonly conceded. For the activities of specifying the meaning of a word and of stating what an object is are essentially the same. (16)

Here I interpret Fine as providing an analogy between the meaning of a word and the unification of a kind.<sup>9</sup> We can use any of the previous section's examples here: the meaning of the word "boat" is "a vessel propelled on water," while the unification of the kind boat is to possess of the property of being a vessel propelled on water. I want to extend this analogy by considering how it might be forced to adapt when confronted with the very real possibility of ambiguous meaning. One way of understanding Kit Fine's conclusion is that the ontological unification of a kind is analogous to the meaning of its denoting term. What happens when the meaning under consideration is inherently ambiguous?

There are two different ways the meaning of a word can be ambiguous. It can be homonymous or polysemous. Homonymy occurs when a word shares different and unrelated meanings. The words "bank," "crane," and "mole" are good examples of homonymy. Each of these words can have multiple meanings: "bank" can mean a financial institution or sloping ground; "crane" can mean a piece of machinery or a kind of bird; "mole" can mean a birthmark or an undercover agent or a small burrowing insectivorous mammal.

This sort of ambiguous meaning doesn't force any change to the traditional metaphysical classification system. The meaning of a homonymous term does not, working with the analogy, result in a kind; at best, it corresponds to a type, viz., the class of things that are possible instances of some utterance of the English word 'mole.' This

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<sup>9</sup> Fine himself takes this to be *more* than just an analogy, but this is not necessary for my purposes. I do not intend to assume any particular theory of meaning to reach the metaphysical conclusions I come to.

resulting unification is not explanatorily powerful enough to breach the strong unification requirement for being a kind.

Polysemous ambiguity, on the other hand, does provide a challenge to the traditional metaphysical classification system; polysemy occurs when a word shares different *but related* meanings. The words “newspaper” and “bad” are polysemous in the following examples:

The newspaper broke my window this morning!

The newspaper just hired my friend Dakota to handle their Instagram account.

The movie we watched last night was bad.

The milk I poured into my cereal is bad.

The words “newspaper” and “bad” have ambiguous meanings, but these various meanings aren't completely disconnected in the way that the various meanings of “mole” are. The meanings associated with both “newspaper” and “bad” are related to some core meaning. There are different ways of being bad, but they all share some sense of negative evaluation. Different things can be called a newspaper, though they are all related to the printed product.

It is important to distinguish ambiguity from context sensitivity,<sup>10</sup> but it is instructive to show how knowledge of context helps disambiguate a polysemous utterance. If someone says, “I hate the newspaper!” or “This is bad!” you have to ask for further clarification to understand the meaning of the terms being used. However, all of the possible meanings of these terms *are related* so that you have *some* idea of what the

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<sup>10</sup> To illustrate this difference, consider the word “I” which is context sensitive but does not have an ambiguous meaning. Thanks to Bradford Skow for emphasizing this important distinction.

meaning is. Whereas if someone says, “I hate that mole,” you don’t really know what the meaning of the utterance is—other than it is one of the disjunctive meanings associated with the word—until you receive further clarification.

It isn’t possible to shrug off polysemous ambiguity as we did with homonymous ambiguity because although there are different meanings there is some sort of unification amongst those different meanings. If the resulting unification possesses the requisite level of explanatory power, then we are dealing with a legitimate kind. The relationship between polysemous meaning and ontological unification has a long history, going all the way back to the work of Aristotle. He discusses what he calls core-dependent homonymy—in an attempt to stray from confusion, I will refer to Aristotle’s notion as core-dependency:

There are many senses in which a thing may be said to ‘be,’ but they are related to one central point, one definite kind of thing, and are not homonymous.

Everything which is healthy is related to health, one thing in the sense that it preserves health, another in the sense that it produces it, another in the sense that it is a symptom of health, and another because it is capable of it. And that which is medical is relative to the medical art, one thing in the sense that it possesses it, another in the sense that it is naturally adapted to it, another in the sense that it is a function of the medical art. And we shall find other words used similarly to these. So, too, there are many senses in which a thing is said to be, but all refer to one starting point... (Met. 4.2)

The multiple meanings of “healthy” are all related in that they depend, in some way, on a core meaning. The same goes for the multiple meanings of “medical”. To provide a satisfactory explanation of the meaning of the word “healthy,” it is necessary to describe the core meaning along with the relations of dependence for the multiple other



meanings. The core notion alone does not fully explain the meaning; the meaning is inherently more complex than the necessary and sufficient conditions that capture that core notion. To state the meaning, one must account for the various meanings and the relationships between these meanings. For these reasons I take the ambiguity in meaning that results from polysemy to be *complex meaning*.

It is controversial whether, in the quote above, Aristotle is talking about the meaning of words, but if the meaning of a word is simply a manifestation of the unification of the related ontological kind—as we’ve been assuming for the sake of the analogy—then we have a sort of core-dependently unified kind. In his book *Order in Multiplicity: Homonymy in the Philosophy of Aristotle*, Christopher Shields points out that Aristotle talks of core-dependency in both terms of meaning and connection. I take the use of “connection” to mean precisely what I am talking about when I talk about unification. Shields points specifically to Aristotle’s discussion of *good*:

[Aristotle] claims, against the Platonists, that, ‘the good is not some common thing, universal and one’ (*EN* 1096<sup>a</sup>27–8). In urging this conclusion Aristotle seems indifferent to matters of linguistic use or intuition. (5)

Thus, the complex meaning of “good” corresponds directly to the complex unification of the kind *good*. The result is that there are many ways of being good; these different ways of being good provide us with different—but importantly related—accounts of *good*. Setting aside the issue of meaning—about which I do not intend to take a stand—the point is that goodness has a complex unification structure.

This complex unification structure is analogous to the complex meaning discussed above. The structure contains several separate but related unification

accounts that are dependent on one another in different ways. To work with the example Aristotle has given us, the kind good has a core-account—perhaps we can explain the unification of this core account as those things possessing some positive value. All of the other accounts of good are *core-dependent* on this core-account. However, the unification of the core-account alone does not provide us with much explanatory power. Simply *being good* does not provide us with an explanation of anything at all; the positive value needs to be qualified to be explanatory. In this way, the core-account is *explanatorily-dependent* on the other multiple unification accounts. These different accounts provide the contextual parameters for what it means to *be good*.

This explanatory-dependence is crucial in distinguishing complex kinds from cases of generality. In the case of generality, the unification of the core-account results in a simple kind because there is one unification account that provides the requisite explanatory power. For example, take the kind *boat*. There are many different ways a thing can be a boat: it can be propelled by wind alone, by an engine, by the current alone, etc. Each of these accounts of what it is to be a boat depend on the more general kind *boat*, but the general kind does not depend—explanatorily or otherwise—on any of these more specific accounts. The relationship between *boat* and the different kinds of boats is one of generality and specificity, rather than core-dependency and explanatory dependency as is the case with the multiple accounts of a thing that lead to a complex kind.

Thus, the kind *good*—if we understand it as Aristotle seemingly did—is complex in that more than one account is required to explain its unification such that it is explanatorily powerful. Instead of remaining content with the traditional metaphysical

classification system despite its inability to account for the explanatory power of complex kinds, we need to alter our metaphysical classification by accepting, introducing, and investigating complex kinds. Complex kinds allow for unification despite the existence of multiple accounts in a way that traditional kinds do not, and it is in this way that I understand both art and species to be complex kinds. In the remaining sections of this paper I will work through the concrete case of the kind species to further illustrate these concepts and then I will move on to art in the third and fourth chapters.

#### **IV. Varieties of Pluralism**

Before moving on to explaining how the kind species is complex, I want to briefly discuss the connection between complex kinds and pluralism. After we add complex kinds to the metaphysical classification system, we can distinguish three different sorts of ontological entity. The weakest sort of unification results in a type, the simple sort of unification results in a monist kind, and we now recognize that complex unification results in a pluralist kind. I say that there are a variety of pluralist frameworks because there are going to be many different ways a complex kind is structured. Because I take these metaphysical frameworks to be useful as explanatory tools, the pluralist frameworks that result from different sorts of complexity will themselves be importantly different.

Thus, in proving an argument that a certain sort of thing is pluralistic, the most informative conclusion we can draw is that the corresponding kind is complex *in some way*. The next step in investigating such a complex kind is to reveal its complex structure and, in so doing, precisify its pluralist framework. I begin this precisification

process for the kind species by considering the ways in which philosophers of biology have explained species pluralism.

## **V. Eliminative Species Pluralism**

Before I can explain how species is a complex kind and how this leads to a genuine pluralist framework, I must address the arguments presented in the literature for eliminative species pluralism. These arguments can be understood as claiming that species is not at a kind at all, but is rather just a type in the way discussed above. The result is that the multiple species accounts provide us with multiple different sorts of complex kinds and that the more general notion of “species” is best understood as only unified by the disjunction of these multiple accounts.

This conclusion is claimed to be a direct consequence of the most widely accepted ontological explanation of species—in the singular sense of the term: species are individuals, not sets. I argue that this assumed consequence is borne out of a category mistake and, thus, the conclusion should not be perceived as a legitimate option; this leaves room for other pluralist frameworks to explain the nature of the complex kind species. This mistake comes out of the erroneous confluence of two important—and importantly distinct—discussions in the philosophy of biology taking place in the 1970s: species pluralism and the ontological nature of species.

As discussed in the first chapter, the discussion surrounding species pluralism arises from actual biological research. Just to clarify, a species is to be understood as a group of organisms over time. Species pluralism, then, claims that there are multiple ways to distinguish one group of organisms over time as a species, and another group of

organisms over time as *not-a-species*. In the literature, biologists utilize at least twenty-two different accounts of species for different research purposes. The important thing to note is that each different account is providing an explanation of what it is to be a species *in the plural sense*. That is, for any one of these accounts, there will be multiple species in the singular sense of the term, but all these individual species will share *some* unifying property captured by that account of species—used in the plural sense of the term. Thus, the biological species account and the phenetic species account distinguish the difference between species and non-species in different ways, accordingly, these two accounts will disagree over whether or not a particular group of organisms over time will count as an individual species while others will not.

Although biologists were performing research with different species accounts unproblematically as early as the 1940s, philosophers of biology didn't begin their discussion regarding the philosophical consequences of multiple accounts of species until the 1970s. During this same decade, two important papers were published that disrupted the prevailing ontological understanding of the nature of a species as an individual.<sup>11</sup> Until then, an individual species was understood to be a set, or class, consisting of members unified by an essential definition. That is, for any particular species, it was thought we could provide the necessary and sufficient criteria for what it is to be a member of that species. Thus, all organisms with the same intrinsic properties described by these criteria will be grouped together as “lions,” “dolphins,” “Ginkgoites antarticas” (an extinct species of plant), and so on.

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<sup>11</sup> Michael T. Ghiselin's 1974 paper “A Radical Solution to the Species Problem” and David Hull's 1978 paper “A Matter of Individuality.”

The critical problem raised by Ghiselin and Hull is that species *do things*, that is “they speciate, they evolve, they provide their component organisms with genetical resources, and they become extinct” (Hull 141). This was a problem for the prevailing view because sets are not capable of *doing* anything; they are spatiotemporally unrestricted entities: “classes are immutable, only their constitute individuals can change” (Ghiselin 129). But this isn’t the case with individual species. If all the koalas died off and then one-thousand years later some creatures evolved that happened to be identical to the extinct koalas in all the relevant ways, the new creature would constitute a *new* species. We wouldn’t say, “Yay, koalas are back!” It would be spectacularly interesting, but it wouldn’t be the case that koalas came *back*. This is the same for persons: if in one-thousand years a person is born that is identical to me in every possible way, that individual wouldn’t be thought of as *me*. Why? Because I have specific spatiotemporal limitations; I have a particular historical origin and—eventually—a specific historical ending point. As Hull states, “When an organism ceases to exist, numerically that same organism cannot come into existence again” (Hull 349). The conclusion is that species, just like persons, are *individuals* and not sets. This conclusion has been widely accepted to be correct.

The category mistake I mean to point out occurs when philosophers make the following argument:

1. There are multiple accounts of species.
2. Species are not sets and do not have hard-and-fast necessary and sufficient membership conditions.

Therefore: There is no such thing as the right account of what it is to be a species.

In other words, the conclusion states that eliminative species pluralism is correct and we should understand the general notion of species to be a type and not a kind at all. The category mistake here should be obvious; in the first premise “species” is used in its plural form, in the second premise “species” is used in its singular form, while the conclusion uses “species” again in the plural form.

This sort of argument has lived beyond the decade wherein these two distinct debates began, as is demonstrated in Berit Brogaard’s 2004 paper “Species as individuals”:

When we treat species as spatiotemporal individuals rather than as natural kinds there is no overwhelming reason for saying that one and only one species concept gets things right. There are no real essences to go by... Eliminative pluralism is perhaps the approach most in the spirit of the species-as-individuals thesis.  
(236-8)

Here Brogaard makes the category mistake when she uses “species” in the singular sense when making the ontological claim that they are individuals and not sets, but then goes on to use that claim to defend her conclusion, using “species” in the plural sense when talking about species concepts—what I have been dubbing species accounts.

Mark Ereshefsky, the most prolific philosopher on the issue of species pluralism, claims that he argues for eliminative species pluralism in a manner that does not involve this category mistake. Despite the title of his paper “Eliminative Pluralism” and his uses of this phrase in the conclusions he makes, on my interpretation of the traditional metaphysical classification system, he is arguing that species is in fact a complex kind,

and that eliminative pluralism—in the sense I have interpreted its meaning—is not the proper framework for understanding species’ explanatory structure.

## VI. Precisifying Species Pluralism

The most promising account of species pluralism that we find in the literature is offered by Richard Mayden in his paper “A hierarchy of species concepts: the denouement in the saga of the species problem.”<sup>12</sup> Mayden starts off his paper by explicitly acknowledging the problematic category mistake I just discussed:

[T]he twin meanings of species refer to two, radically different and basic metaphysical categories, classes and individuals, that when confused generates elementary problems for understanding. As a class, the category species is temporally unbounded, has a definition, and only those things fitting this definition can be included. Species as taxa change with time, have no definitions, they can only be described, identified, pointed to, etc. (388)

In acknowledging the use of this category mistake in many arguments in the philosophy of biology, Mayden pushes aside those arguments for eliminative species pluralism and goes on to explain what he takes to be the accurate species pluralist framework, which I call hierarchical species pluralism.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Throughout the literature on species pluralism, philosophers and biologists talk of species *concepts*. I find this to be problematic and, instead, I talk of species *accounts*. Throughout the rest of my discussion of Mayden’s work, I will substitute “concepts” with “accounts.” This is due to my belief that in trying to understand the nature of species and the nature of art, we are attempting to explain the actual stuff in the world that form these complex kinds, not just what *we* think of as species and art. For more on this important issue, see Haslanger (2016) and Rosen (typescript).

<sup>13</sup> He actually calls it hierarchical *operational* species pluralism, though I believe this description connotes problematic issues and will refrain from using the term “operational” in my discussion. I believe that this does not change his explanation in any meaningful way.



He begins by criticizing the literature on species pluralism, and the philosophers arguing for eliminative species pluralism, for erroneously submitting to the traditional criteria used in assessing whether a species account is successful or unsuccessful. The traditional criteria he speaks of are the three that David Hull puts forth in his 1997 paper “The ideal species concept—and why we can’t get it”:

1. *Applicability*: The account must be able to aid researchers in distinguishing between things that satisfy the account and those that don’t.
2. *Theoretical Significance*: The account must adhere to currently accepted theoretical conclusions in that area of study.
3. *Generality*: The account must encompass all organisms and desirable cases.

His criticism is that the nature of the kind *species* is more complex than these criteria allow for. Yes, there are multiple accounts of species and none of them meet all three of these criteria; however, he argues that all of the accounts meet at least one of the criteria and, most importantly, we can understand how all of the accounts *together* do meet these criteria by creating a structured, complex kind.

Mayden painstakingly analyses all twenty-two species accounts found in biological research, demonstrating how each of them meet or fail the three traditional criteria. With one important exception, all the species accounts meet the applicability criterion but fail to meet the generality criterion. For example, the biological species account provides researchers with necessary and sufficient conditions for what counts as a species—on this account a species is a group of organisms that interbreeds and produces fertile offspring—but this account is only applicable to organisms that produce sexually, eliminating species-hood to all asexually reproducing organisms.

The one exception is the evolutionary species account which meets the generality criterion but fails to meet the applicability criterion. This account has been explained in multiple ways in the literature:

... a lineage (an ancestral-descendent sequence of populations) evolving separately from others and with its own unitary evolutionary role and tendencies. (Simpson 153)

... a single lineage of ancestor-descendant populations which maintains its identity from other such lineages and which has its own evolutionary tendencies and historical fate. (Wiley)

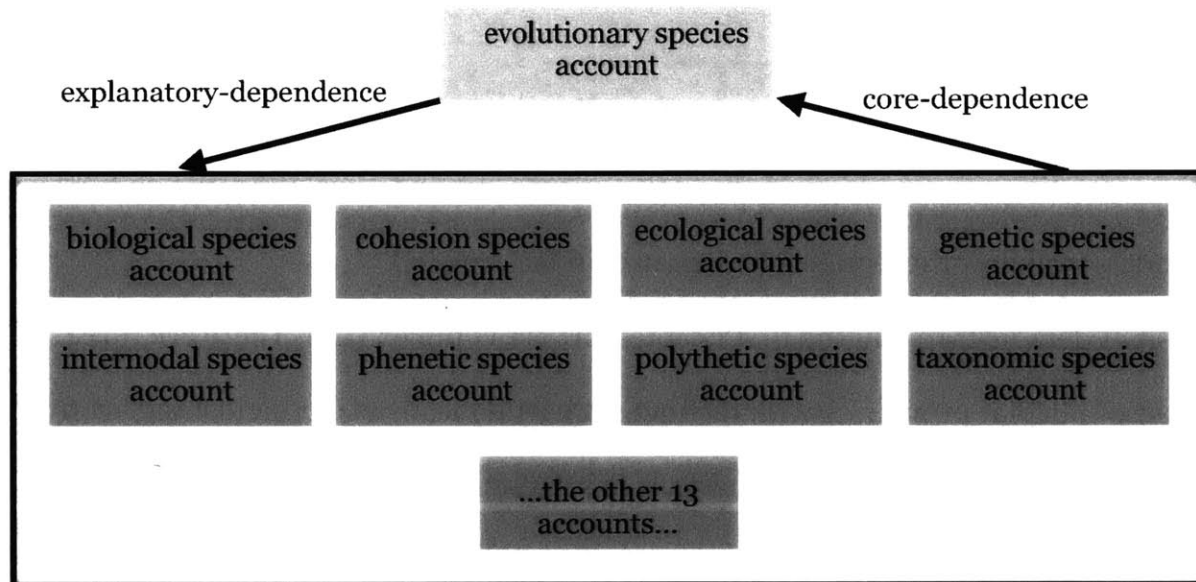
The connection between all of these explanations is that a species is a historical lineage based on some evolutionarily relevant distinction. It should be obvious how this account fails to meet the applicability criterion; many aspects of this definition need to get worked out before we can start applying it in declaring what counts as a species and what does not count as a species. However, it meets the generality criterion for this exact reason: it is vague enough to capture all organisms and desirable cases.

Mayden's criticism is summed up in the following quote:

This seemingly timeless debate has generated a heterogeneous proliferation of [accounts], most hoping to capture the operational and/or theoretical qualities of a good [account]. The search has been for [an account-definition] that is biologically relevant and meaningful, one that is easily applied, and one that encompasses natural biodiversity. That is, [an account] of real species assisting in and ensuring their recognition and our understanding of them in nature. (382)

His claim is that we can have all of this if we simply realize that the kind species requires a more complex structure than is traditionally tolerated. Given the new metaphysical

classification system I introduced at the beginning of this chapter I want to reframe Mayden’s hierarchical pluralism in the following manner: the evolutionary species account provides the core-account that the other accounts depend on, while the evolutionary species account is explanatorily-dependent on those other accounts. This provides us with the basic sort dependency relationships required for something to be a complex kind. We have a pluralist framework that looks like this:



In following Mayden, I will call this kind of structure *hierarchical pluralism* and the corresponding kinds, *hierarchically complex kinds*. I say that this is the most basic sort of complex kind because the different accounts are structured by only two dependence relations: explanatory and core. This is all we need for a kind to be complex. However, as I am currently exploring in my research, there are other types of complex kinds built out of more complex dependence relations.

This illustrates how the complex kind species—though none of the individual accounts—meets all of Hull's criteria. This structure captures the empirical nature of how the term “species” is used, along with providing the ontological backing to legitimate it as a complex kind. All we need to address the seemingly endless debate over the nature of species is to allow for the further distinction between simple and complex kinds in our metaphysical classification system.

## **VII. Conclusion**

It isn't enough to conclude that a kind is pluralistic or complex; this indicates that the kind's unification relationship is defined in multiple, related ways. We must go further and understand how these multiple ways are, in fact, related.

As I demonstrated in the first chapter, art is a complex kind. There are three main accounts that provide us with distinct yet useful means of distinguishing art from non-art. Each account has its own unification relationship, while the kind art's unification relationship is defined by the structured relationship of all three accounts.

Art's pluralism is different from that of species. Species has one theoretical core account that the others are core-dependent on while the theoretical core is explanatorily dependent on those others. Although there is a core art account, it is normative and not theoretical. Also, this core account is not explanatorily dependent on the other accounts as the evolutionary account is dependent on the other species accounts.

In the fourth chapter I will go on to precisify art pluralism, describing the dependencies between the three accounts. To successfully precisify art pluralism we need a better explanation of each of the three accounts. In the fourth chapter I discuss

the institutional and historical accounts in depth, but before taking the precisification head-on, I put forward my own aesthetic account of art, the conversation account.

# Chapter Three: The Conversation Account of Art

## I. Introduction

Since the term “aesthetic” was coined by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in 1735—and, arguably, since the time of the Greeks—aesthetic accounts of art were the norm; this was the case up until the philosophy of art shifted due to the influence of Wittgenstein discussed earlier in the first chapter. Throughout this history, philosophers have argued for many variations of the aesthetic account of art. In fact, up until recently when philosophers began questioning the definability of art altogether, philosophers did not concern themselves with whether or not something could be labelled “art” or not; instead, each account provided a particular understanding of the nature of aesthetic experience, which was simply assumed to be essential to the nature of art. Thus, in the first chapter I stated that aesthetic accounts were those that claimed art satisfied some specific aesthetic *function*; exactly what this function is differs on different accounts.

In his three-volume monograph *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, Paul Guyer demonstrates that we can classify those different aesthetic functions argued for since the 18<sup>th</sup> century into three models: the cognitive model, the emotional impact model, and the free play model. The cognitive model, perhaps the most popular monistic account throughout history, claims that aesthetic experience functions as a vehicle of truth and that the particular pleasure associated with the aesthetic is due to the resulting knowledge. The emotional impact model takes the particular pleasure of aesthetic experience to be the enjoyment of the emotional impact provided by the work of art and

the function of the aesthetic is to deliver such pleasure. The free play model claims that the function of aesthetic experience is to instigate the pleasure of “the free play of our mental powers triggered by works of art or nature, a free play that even when it involves our cognitive powers cannot be reduced to actual cognition” (Vol 3, 134).

Guyer then meticulously goes through the history of modern aesthetics—from David Hume’s aesthetics to work of contemporary philosophers—demonstrating how some accounts are monistic, wholeheartedly backing one of these models, while some are pluralistic, synthesizing the three models in various ways.

The aesthetic account I am presenting in this chapter takes its lead from those pluralistic accounts. I am in full agreement with Guyer’s sentiments:

... why restrict the proper grounds for the appreciation of art and nature to a single approach, particularly if that is done just to provide a neat demarcation between aesthetic appreciation and the rest of our experience, or just to increase the probability of agreement in taste, when a less restrictive approach will not only provide a fuller explanation of the ways in which art and aesthetic experience have been important to human beings, but also allow ourselves more ways in practice to enjoy art and nature and in which to create art? Why sacrifice the wealth of reality for the poverty of a theory? (*ibid* 133)

Thus, not only do I support *art* pluralism, I also support *aesthetic* pluralism. For the purpose of this chapter I lay out the specifics of the account, hinting at what I believe to be the structural relationships between the different models, but I will not provide a full-blown precisification.

The free play model is the focal point of my account of aesthetic experience, and it is heavily influenced by the work of Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, John Dewey,

and Monroe Beardsley. Generally stated, aesthetic experience of artworks involves an *unbounded consummatory conversation* with the artwork—the conversational content can be cognitive, emotional, perceptual, or any combination thereof—that is not bound by the usual normative, theoretical, or practical constraints that our non-aesthetic experience involves. The result of such an unbounded consummatory conversation may be knowledge, as is touted by the cognitive model, or it may be emotional impact, or perhaps the result is nothing but the experience of the conversation itself. There are three parts of the account that I will now work out in detail: first, the notion of *unboundedness*, second, the notion of a *consummatory* experience, and third, the notion of *conversation*. I will address each of these in turn, demonstrating how they build on one another as the explanation carries on.

## **II. Unbounded**

An *unbounded* experience, on my account, is one without the usual normative, theoretical, and practical constraints. That is, an experience wherein you are allowed to *play* freely with what you understand to be true; your eyes and mind are open to feelings and thoughts that you, during bounded experiences, would experience guilt or believe yourself in err. In the unbounded experience, however, you have the freedom to experience outside of these usual constraints.

My understanding of this notion is borne out of both Kant's notion of the free play of the faculties and Schiller's notion of the play drive. My intention is to explain this notion without the burden of either Kant or Schiller's greater machinery, just as it is not my intent to adopt either philosopher's aesthetic philosophies completely. Thus, my



account is inspired by Kant and Schiller's, though it does not depend on either of their larger philosophical systems nor other conclusions that they come to at any other points in their aesthetic theories.

For Kant, the faculties are in free play when the imagination and the understanding don't exactly play by the rules. Our faculty of imagination brings our perceptions together into an image before they are brought under a concept: "... imagination has to bring the manifold of intuitions into the form of an image" (A120), while our faculty of the understanding brings these images under concepts. Think of it this way: perhaps the imagination has a particular image that *usually* would be brought under the concept "tree," but when in free play, the faculties have the freedom to consider the image under other concepts as well.<sup>14</sup> In an unbounded experience, the image of the tree may lead to the concept "mother," "nature," or "growth" instead. Maybe the image of the tree you are considering is colored an unnaturally bright red; instead of rejecting this image as naturally incorrect, being in an unbounded state, your imagination may bring the image under the cognitive concepts "violence" or "environmental destruction," or perhaps the more perceptual concepts of "striking" or "harmonious." Regardless the mode of the free play, these unbounded experiences allow for new connections and possibilities.<sup>15</sup>

This free play allows for new possibilities in thought that are not allowed by one's particular normative constraints. Perhaps the imagination has an image that would typically be brought under the concept "disgusting," but when in free play, could be

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<sup>14</sup> Note that I am obviously not staying true to Kant's Categories for this exercise but, instead, using concepts more generally understood.

<sup>15</sup> I believe that the unbounded experience is crucial for the experience of metaphor.

brought under other concepts, perhaps making room for other evaluative concepts to seem reasonable. Consider a photograph of a family consisting of two male parents and their two children; perhaps in a bounded experience, someone with homophobic tendencies may bring the image under the concept “homosexual” and then immediately under “disgusting” or “immoral,” while in an unbounded experience, the image may be brought under the concepts “family” or “caring” because of how the individuals are represented. This normative freedom can expand one’s perceptual, cognitive, and normative world in dramatic ways. In this sense, the free play of the faculties allows us to put ourselves in other perceptual, theoretical, normative, and practical shoes.

Schiller’s aesthetic theory was very much influenced by, as well as being a reaction to, the work of Kant. Whereas Kant proposed the *faculties* of the intuition, understanding, and imagination, Schiller discussed the *inner forces* of the sense, form, and play drives. These drives can be seen as lining up—though in the details there are important differences—with Kant’s faculties. The sense and form drives are functions of physical existence and rational nature, respectively. The play drive “is one in which the human sensibility and mind are freed from excessive constraint by both matter and form, and in that strictly negative sense it can be described as a state of play” (Guyer 2014 Vol 1, 491). Drawing on Schiller’s play drive for my notion of an unbounded experience emphasizes the way in which such an experience *frees* us from our otherwise everyday, normal sensual and rational preconceptions.

It is a necessary condition that an aesthetic experience be unbounded. This includes aesthetic experiences of both art and nature. When one visits the Grand Canyon and takes in its immense depth, one is forced into an unbounded experience

where our notion of self is, for example, taken under the concepts “minuscule” and “mortal.” These moments of awe or sublimity are possible only by the free play of our imagination. Aesthetic experience does not occur unless we go into play drive in this unbounded sense.

### III. Consummatory

I am borrowing the term “consummatory” from John Dewey’s early work on aesthetics in his book *Experience and Nature* and his discussion of *an experience* in his later book devoted to art and aesthetics, *Art As Experience*. In the latter text, Dewey provides the following description:

Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living... Oftentimes, however, the experience had is inchoate. Things are experienced but not in such a way that they are composed into *an experience*. There is distraction and dispersion; what we observe and what we think, what we desire and what we get, are at odds with each other... In contrast with such experience, we have *an experience* when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences... Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is *an experience*.  
(36-7)

In *an experience* there is a heightened sense of attention of each aspect of the experience and the experience’s wholeness. The experience does not simply *end*, it is consummate; there is a delineation between *an experience* and the rest of our daily goings-on. Although it is not imperative that one retains an intact memory of *an*

experience, for the sake of description we can think of those memories that stand out to us as unified: “*that* meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship” (*ibid* 38).

One important aspect of Dewey’s account is that this kind of experience is not particular to the perceptual. Because he identifies aesthetic experience with consummatory experiences, the dualism between the aesthetic and the intellectual is eliminated. An aesthetic experience can be perceptual, emotional, intellectual, or any combination thereof. It isn’t the mode of an experience that makes it consummatory—or aesthetic—instead it is the *character* of the experience. It should be noted that in being delineated from the rest of experience it is not meant that *an* experience is no longer relevant to the rest of experience; it is merely marked off in time and space from the rest of experience. A consummatory experience may have long-lasting effects on a person, given the intensity that can accompany them.

Dewey intends his explanation of *an* experience to appeal to intuitions of our own experiences, not our analytic philosophical acumen. Thus, nowhere does he provide a definite definition of consummatory experience and this makes sense in that the concept is meant to be expansive and *lived*. For my own account of consummatory conversation, what matters is the heightened level of attention, sense of unification, diversity of possible content, and delineation from regular experience that such consummatory experiences possess. Although many different kinds of experiences can be consummatory, unbounded experiences—aesthetic experiences—are always consummatory to some degree. This is due to the phenomenological aspects of going into play drive; it isn’t possible to enter into free play without the heightened attention and sense of unification that comes with a consummatory experience.

## IV. Conversation

Whereas unbounded consummatory experiences can engage a person with works of art as well as the natural world, unbounded consummatory conversations are the trademark of experiences of works of art only. This is because works of art are made by other human beings. We are drawn in by trying to understand what the artifact *means* and this desire comes from the often completely unconscious awareness that another human being or group of human beings created the artifact and imbued it with *some* sort of meaning. In contrast, consider the unbounded consummatory experience of the standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon; the experiencer does not try to figure out what the Grand Canyon *means*, instead the experiencer takes in the phenomenological stimuli and dives *inward*, playing with the concept of the self in relation to the larger, greater world around the self, and so on. However, when we are confronted with an artifact we do not immediately turn inward; instead we consider why the artifact is the way it is, what is it meant to do, what does it mean, and so on. The conversation I am pointing at is borne out of this connection with other human beings, regardless of whether or not an intentional connection with the artist is actively present in any way at all.

Thus, my use of the term “conversation” should be understood more broadly than, but closely related to, the everyday notion of having a conversation: the cooperative exchange of thoughts or ideas between two or more parties. In the metaphorical sense, the conversation is strictly between the audience and the work itself. Here the experience of the audience is like one side of a conversation, taking in perceptual and

conceptual clues from the work, responding to them, considering how those same perceptual and conceptual cues address that response, and so on. The experience is one of trying to understand what meaning is being presented while also contributing to the meaning at the same time. This experience can be pleasant, annoying, frustrating, pleasurable, and so on. The experiencer may feel like they *get* the meaning and then continue a conversation with the work about whether or not that meaning is valuable, harmful, legitimate, and so on.

Louise Rosenblatt's transactional reader-response theory provides a helpful starting point for understanding the sort of metaphorical conversation I am introducing. Her theory focuses on literature but can easily be extended to any other form of art. She speaks of *texts* which I take it can mean any sort of work of art. On her theory the meaning of a text is built out of a collaboration between the text itself and the reader:

As we read a text, it acts as a *stimulus* to which we respond in our own personal way. Feelings, associations, and memories occur as we read, and these responses influence the way in which we make sense of the text as we move through it. Literature we've encountered prior to this reading, the sum of our accumulated knowledge and even our current physical condition and mood will influence us as well. At various points while we read, however, the text acts as a *blueprint* that we can use to correct our interpretation when we really it has traveled too far afield of what is written on the page... Thus, the text guides our self-corrective process as we read and will continue to do so after the reading is finished if we go back and reread positions, or the entire text, in order to develop or complete our interpretation. Thus the creation of the poem, the literary work, is a product of the transaction between text and reader, both of which are equally important to the process. (Tyson, 173)

The work of art begins the conversation by stimulating the audience member to feel, think, question, etc., via sensory and conceptual input. Thus, the work of art lays out the—sometimes very broad—boundaries of the conversation. The audience then plays within these boundaries, moving in different directions while continuing to receive feedback from the work regarding those directions. The audience continues to implore the work for clues as to how to move forward, what conclusions to draw, and what questions to ask. Again, all of this work is often being done without explicit use of language—perhaps all of this work exists purely as emotional exchange.

Such a conversation requires more than a passing glance or a moment of distracted auditory attention; these conversations require active participation. It is an exchange because the individual brings to the conversation a set of assumptions, norms, ideals, etc., regarding the world around them and the work of art plays with, tests, and engages the individual in those ways. The work of art *talks back* to the audience by meeting, challenging, or highlighting that set of assumptions. Of course, this conversation is taking place in *play drive* so the experiencer's perceptual, social, theoretical, and other conventions are only taken as considerations and can be reimagined, reconsidered, or completely ignored. Take any two-dimensional representation of anything actually three-dimensional in the real world; if we did not go into some sort of play drive, we couldn't begin to consider the meaning or content of a drawing of, say, two children holding hands because children are three-dimensional entities, not two-dimensional!

This metaphorical conversation is what is phenomenologically primary in aesthetically experiencing a work of art. This sort of conversation occurs when the audience is not attempting to tease out or understand the artist's intended meaning but,

instead, communicates with the work to create meaning. The audience brings a specific set of beliefs, feelings, experiences, social and cultural norms, etc., to the conversation and the work of art instigates an unbounded conversation with that specific set by challenging, agreeing with, or negating that set in a variety of ways. Because the conversation is unbounded, the audience is open to such exchanges in a way they would not regularly be if conversing in a different setting.

If I approach one of my favorite works of art, Matisse's *View of Notre Dame*, a work I have seen in person and in print numerous times, I will pick up the conversation where I left off. That is, I have already spent time talking with it about its many shades of blue and how those shades affect the mood of the abstract landscape—this part of the conversation is mainly perceptual; in this unbounded conversation my perception of the colors are being brought under emotive concepts. These emotive concepts are now an active part of the conversation, a part that the painting has contributed. Given the agreement regarding the emotive content of the conversation, I consider the lines of perspective and the work responds by claiming a sense of distance, which adds to the emotive content we've already discussed. I may begin to have a more direct conversation with Matisse and consider his own thoughts on the landmark building, allowing the previous perceptual and emotional conclusions to permeate the resulting conversation. This latter part of the conversation begins to become less metaphorical, which I will now discuss.

This less metaphorical sort of conversation takes place between the audience and the creator *through* the artwork. All of the perceptual and conceptual cues were put in place by the creator of thing being experienced by the audience, regardless of whether or



not the creator explicitly intended to include those specific perceptual and conceptual cues. In this way, the audience is building the meaning of the work of art in cooperation with the creator. This is not to say that the *goal* of the conversation is for the audience to figure out what the artist consciously intended when they created the work of art. This would be to identify the work of art with the artist's intention, resulting with what Wimsatt and Beardsley call the Intentional Fallacy:

The Intentional Fallacy is a confusion between the [artwork] and its origins, a special case of what is known to philosophers as the Genetic Fallacy. It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological *causes* of the poem and ends in biography and relativism. (31)

The work of art is not identical to the artist's intentions though the creator's intentions did play a role in the creation of the resulting work of art.

The audience might make this conversation with the creator more or less explicit; the more information the audience has about the creator and the creator's intentions, the more likely it is that the audience will engage in the less metaphorical sort of conversation. However, again, the audience does not need to know anything about the creator to engage in a conversation with her. The phenomenological experience in this case will be of one side of a conversation with the work of art, not the creator. Consider works of art in the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas exhibition at the Museum of Metropolitan Art in New York City. Suppose I am visiting and I come upon a large wooden mask created in Gabon sometime during the 19th century. The conversation with the object might revolve around the expression on the mask, why the mask might be used, how the expression affects what the use might be, why certain materials may be

used, how these materials contribute to my perception of the emotion and usage, how and whether gender plays a role in the creation of the mask, etc. This conversation is stimulated by properties of the mask while I process and interpret these properties via my own contemporary American set of assumptions, beliefs, norms, and feelings. I am not conversing with the creator in the less metaphorical sense because I have no real understanding of who that creator is or what their intentions really were when they created the mask. However, I am responding to choices that the creator made and in considering the mask's function and meaning, I am reaching out to converse with that creator, despite our many social, temporal, and historical differences.

As I experience the mask I am in a state of unbounded conversation, as my own set of assumptions must be stretched to even start the conversation in the first place. These kinds of aesthetic experiences are often incredibly fulfilling because of the sense of coming to understand some aspect of the world outside of oneself through the work; all this despite the fact that it seemed from the starting point that you were so far from being able to understand something made by someone so culturally and temporally different than yourself. This outcome is legitimate, regardless of whether or not the emotional, cognitive, or normative conclusion drawn is in line with the intention of the creator.

To reiterate, a non-metaphorical conversation may be completely implicit, the viewer never explicitly asking "What are you trying to say to me, creator?" However, we interact with a work of art in order to *understand* it, react to it, and to take something away from the experience. We understand, perhaps implicitly, that the work of art was made by another human being and we strive to understand why the work of art was

created; it is part of our curious nature. The more that a person knows about the artist who created the work of art, the more non-metaphorical the conversation may become. In fact, it is completely possible that you can experience a work of art non-aesthetically because you are no longer engaged in an unbounded conversation with the work. This happens when you are considering the work descriptively, no longer seeking out perceptual, cognitive, or normative clues. Rosenblatt describes this latter mode as *efferent* instead of *aesthetic*. In efferent mode “we focus just on the information contained in the text, as if it were a storehouse of facts and ideas that we could carry away with us” (Tyson, 173). Once we are trying to read the text as the product of the artists intention, without bringing ourselves into the conversation, we are not longer having an aesthetic conversation. Of course, there is a great bit of gradation between the aesthetic and efferent modes when experiencing a work of art. Often times, we find ourselves somewhere in the middle, attempting to read the work of art for the artist’s intention while also allowing our own set of assumptions, beliefs, feelings, etc., to unboundedly converse with the work itself.

Although the non-metaphorical aspect of this conversation often seems to be the touted goal of experiencing art—demonstrated by art education primarily focusing on art *history* and not art *experience*—the metaphorical conversation with the work is the unbounded consummatory means to the non-metaphorical end and importantly valuable for its own sake. It is important for audience members to recognize that it is possible to begin a conversation with a work of art without any knowledge of the creator’s intentions, biography, historical position, etc. The position of the audience member is one of equal participation with the work of art itself, and the work is a

product of the creator. Thus, the creator is always part of the conversation in an important sense. We arrive to a work of art with our own emotional, perceptual, political, cultural, normative, cognitive—amongst numerous other kinds of assumptions in the state of free play. This conversation may occur without the exchange of thoughts or ideas via spoken or written language. The content of such a conversation need not be conceptual at all; it could involve perceiving the composition of a drawing, finding it perceptually engaging, and then continuing to *further* engage with the work perceptually by investigating the composition in more depth. The result of these conversations may highlight feelings or beliefs we have that we were not aware of, they may change our beliefs or question cultural norms that we have always accepted. For all of these reasons, unbounded conversations are valuable, powerful, and important.

## **V. Putting it All Together**

Unbounded consummatory experiences nourish the aspects of our human nature that lead us to want to understand and communicate with other human beings, despite the differences that may, in a bounded sense, define us. An individual lets go of their normal perceptual, theoretical, normative, and practical beliefs in an exchange with the artwork, and—whether intentionally or not—in so doing has a conversation with the creator of the work. We allow the artwork to provide stimuli that we engage with in free play, allowing ourselves to address the contradictions that live within us and within our societies without the fear of being *wrong* or being *bad* that follow us throughout our non-play daily lives. I believe Fredrich Schiller, in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* is speaking to the importance of this kind of free play:

If we are to become compassionate, helpful, effective human beings, feeling and character must unite, even as wide-open senses must combine with vigor of intellect if we are to acquire experience. How can we, however laudable our precepts, how can we be just, kindly, and human toward others, if we lack the power of receiving into ourselves, faithfully and truly, natures unlike ours, of feeling our way into the situation of others, of making other people's feelings our own? (89 n.3)

Unbounded consummatory conversations allow us to both engage with other cultures, other individuals, and other parts of ourselves that we do not let out for one reason or another. These conversations lead to the compassionate, helpful, effective nature that Schiller speaks of in his *Letters*. These experiences challenge and satisfy our curiosity and, not at all unimportantly, provide an outlet for artists to create works of art that instigate these very conversations. It is for these reasons that aesthetic experiences of art have been, and are still today, imbued with value in our societies. This is why we have museums for art of different cultures, from the past, and from innovate contemporary artists as well. Engaging in conversation with works of art of all different sorts expands our ability to see the world from different perspectives and questioning our own assumptions.

What is the definition of art on this account? On my conversational account, artworks are those things created by an individual—or group of individuals—that instigate unbounded consummatory conversations. This definition allows many more things into the extension of art than the historical and institutional definitions are comfortable with. This is because this account does not require the creator of a work of art to have intended the thing to instigate unbounded consummatory conversations.

Because of this, it seems like it could be said that *any and every artifact* should be deemed works of art on this definition. This is not so, however. Only things artifacts that *have* instigated aesthetic conversations. This doesn't include anything with only the *potential* to instigate aesthetic conversations. The requirement is that the work produce particular attitudes in a person; it may be the case that the person who created the work is the only person to have the right attitude of that thing. Regardless, works of art are those things that *do* instigate perceptually/emotional/conceptually unbounded conversations that are highly attended to, unified, and demarcated from the rest of experiences for these reasons.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This aesthetic account, like those that have come before it, differ from the institutional and historical accounts in several important ways. Whether or not something is a work of art on the aesthetic account depends on whether or not that the thing has *functioned* properly as a work of art; that is, it depends on whether or not thing instigates aesthetic conversation. On the institutional account something is a work of art if someone with the relevant status gives the work a stamp of approval; this does not have to do with whether the thing *functions* a certain way at all. On the intentional-historical account that I will focus on in the next and final chapter, something is a work of art if it was created with the right kind of intention, not whether or not it fulfills a certain function.

# Chapter Four: Focal-Looping Art Pluralism

## I. Introduction

My goal with this paper is to precisify art pluralism. To this end, I assume that arguments for art pluralism are successful; that is, although each individual account of art found in the philosophical literature fails as *the* successful definition of art, each account is importantly legitimate. They are considered legitimate because each account meets some important desiderata regarding the nature of art, although they cannot—again, individually—meet each of the desideratum. Although the individual definitions fail, a *theory* of art that meets each of the desideratum is not simply attainable, but provided in this paper. I provide a theory of art that demonstrates how the three main accounts of art—institutional, historical, and aesthetic—are structurally related and dependent on one another. These structural relations and dependencies reveal the particular pluralistic complexity of art.

There are four desiderata that a definition or theory of art must meet to be considered satisfactory. Each desideratum can be thought of as a question about art; thus, a definition or theory of art must be able to answer all four questions. The individual accounts of art are unable to answer all of these questions but they each provide helpful answers to *some* of the questions. My theory demonstrates how all three accounts, structurally dependent on one another, provide satisfactory answers to all four questions. The first question is *normative*: Why is art important, or why do we care about it? The second is *extensional*: What is in the extension of art and what is not? The

third is *essential*: Why is it that those particular things makes it into the extension of art, and others do not? The fourth is *epistemological*: How do we know what is art and what is not? Note that definitions in general do not necessarily need to address all four of these questions, specifically the normative question; however, because art is a social kind it only came into being because it is necessarily valuable. Although the individual accounts of art do not answer *all* of the questions, they each provide answers to some of those questions; working together, they answer all four.

The theory that demonstrates how they all work together is *focal-looping pluralism*. One account is focal while the other accounts are looping; these looping accounts depend on the focal account for theoretical or normative explanatory power, while also providing explanations of how that theoretical or normative focal point may change over time. I have appropriated the notion of “looping” from the work of Ian Hacking and my intent is to use the term in a similar manner, as I go on to explain in greater detail.

I will begin by discussing how each of the three main accounts of art presented in the philosophical literature—institutional, historical, and aesthetic—succeed or fail in meeting the desiderata. My argument for focal-looping art pluralism emerges from the weaving together of the accounts on the basis of their respective successes and failures. The result is a *theory* of art built out of multiple definitions; each account provides a definition that is unsuccessful in capturing the nature of art on its own yet plays an invaluable role in this theory of art.

Although there are several possible ways to work out the details of each three main accounts, I will be working with what I take to be the best representatives of each. I will explain the institutional account with the work of George Dickie and the historical



account with the work of Jerrold Levinson. While my explanation of the aesthetic account provided in the previous chapter does not follow any one account completely, it is most heavily dependent on the work of John Dewey and Friedrich Schiller, while also being influenced by aspects of Immanuel Kant's aesthetic theory. The work of these philosophers has stood the test of time insofar as their work is still seriously discussed and debated to this day.

## **II. The Institutional Account of Art**

In the most general sense, the institutional account of art can be described in the following manner: something is a work of art if and only if it plays the proper role within the art institution. There are several ways to work out what "playing the proper role" means, as well as what is meant by "art institution". Institutional accounts of art were, arguably, borne out of philosophers of art being influenced by the work of Wittgenstein and the positivists of their day; starting in the 1950s, the leading idea being that public discourse regarding private experience is an impossibility. This assumption led to the rejection of traditional aesthetic theories, given that they rely heavily on discourse regarding private experiences. At this same time, the Western artworld also saw an explosion of new mediums—installation, found object, conceptual, sound, etc.—that challenged the traditional understanding of art as *aesthetic*. The basic idea is that works of art do not have any intrinsic qualities that provide their art-essence; rather, being a work of art is best understood as a particular relationship between an artifact and specific sorts of individuals and intuitions. Why is that can of soda on a pedestal

considered a work of art? Well, on the institutional account, someone in the artworld—the artist, a curator, etc.—dubbed it thus and so it is.

The nascent phase of the institutional account began in the 1950s in response to Morris Weitz's argument against the definability of art in his paper "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," and it made its way towards perspicuity with Arthur Danto's 1964 "The Artworld" and George Dickie's work in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Danto's essay introduced the notion of *the artworld* as the context required for a thing to be a work of art, but it was Dickie who went on to accept and defend a proper institutional account of art. For these reasons, I will take Dickie's work to be representative of the institutional account. Dickie worked out the above-mentioned general definition in two different, but related, ways. His first account was developed in those papers and of the 1960s and his 1974 book *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis*; the second account was developed in his 1984 book *The Art Circle: A Theory of Art*.

Dickie took himself to be providing a *classificatory* account of art—one that can be used to classify things into the categories 'art' and 'non-art.' In this way, the goal of his account is purely extensional; the guiding belief here is that finding the intension of art is just way too difficult—if not impossible. Dickie puts it this way in his 2004 paper "Defining Art: Extension & Intension":

Intensional access to "art" is obviously much more difficult than to "bachelor," and it is clearly much more controversial. We do not seem to need to apply what may be called "the extensional approach" to "bachelor," but perhaps the difficulty and controversy involved with "art" can be avoided by using the extensional approach with it. (54-55)

Dickie took it that if we considered the institutional setting surrounding art that we will find the desired extension; his goal, then, was for his definition to answer the *extension* question. The answer to the question ‘What is in the extension of art and what is not?’ is a byproduct of a specific sort of social institution, the artworld. The difficulty then becomes explaining the boundaries and details of this social institution. Dickie understands the artworld to consist of the relevant social systems like museums, schools, publications, galleries, and the individuals that make up and propagate these systems. With that understanding he provides the following definition in *Art and the Aesthetic*:

A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2) a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld).  
(34)

It is important that ‘appreciation’ is not simply aesthetic appreciation, or a specific kind of aesthetic appreciation. Instead he says, “All that is meant by ‘appreciation’ in the definition is something like ‘in experiencing the qualities of a thing one finds them worthy or valuable,’ and this meaning applies quite generally both inside and outside the domain of art...” (*ibid* 40). When this conferred status occurs within the domain of art, we have a work of art.

Many critiques of this definition have been launched against this account over the years. Firstly, what does it take to confer in this manner? Who, exactly, has the power to confer this status? The artworld is more of an informal social institution than, say, the judicial branch of our government. There are clear rules for becoming a judge that are

agreed upon and utilized in *every* instance such that those individuals are given the power to act on behalf of the judicial branch of government. However, the artworld does not have anything at all like clear rules for what it takes to have the power to act on behalf of the artworld. There are certainly several roles that we might all agree fall into this category—curator, represented artist, respected art publication—but there is no formalized process for *why* these particular roles lead to that sort of power. These critiques raise significant doubts that the institutional account can adequately answer the extension question, as Dickie hoped. Without an understanding of what the institution at the heart of the definition is, or how the art-status is conferred, how can the extension of art be delineated?

If there were formalized rules, then it would be significantly easier to figure out what does and does not count as a work of art. However, without these rules the institutional account cannot succeed in answering the question Dickie hoped to address. Trying to come up with any rules for the informal social institution of art is also difficult. If we limit it to individuals who have attended art schools, museum and gallery curators, and respected art publications, we have shut down the possibility that art can be made by outsiders. This is not an acceptable outcome for an account of art; firstly, it is incredibly elitist and, secondly, there are many *outsider* artists whose should be considered *art* whether or not it is ever dubbed so by the institution. If we attempt to account for the outsider cases, it is not too difficult to extend this definition so that *anyone* can have the power to act on behalf of the artworld. If that is the case, then anyone can confer the requisite status on *anything* and it will be a work of art. At this

point, our usage of the word “art” becomes meaningless, as nothing of any import distinguishes works of art from other things in the world.

Given that the artworld is not a rigid institution and does not have specific rules for becoming an art-conferrer, consider Richard Wolheim's Euthyphro problem for the institutional account in his essay “The Institutional Theory of Art”:

The crucial question to ask of the definition is this: is it to be presumed that those who confer status upon some artifact do so for good reasons, or is there no such presumption? Might they have no reason, or bad reasons, and yet their action be efficacious given that they themselves have the right status — that is, they represent the artworld? (160)

If the representatives have good reasons for the conferral, what kinds of reasons count as *good* reasons? The good reason cannot be that the conferrer has the proper status because we do not have a rigid institutional system for deciding who has that proper status. It would be different if art conferrer status was like that of being a cardinal in the Catholic church. The Cardinals do not need any specific good reasons for electing the Pope when the seat is vacant—although we certainly hope they do have good reasons for their selection! The person that the Cardinals elect is the Pope *because* the Cardinals elected him. That is a good enough reason. However, this is not the case with the artworld and the conferrer's.

Thus, there are either good or no reasons for conferring art status on an artifact. If there are good reasons, we need to consider *what* those good reasons are and take that as important evidence for the basis of an account of art. However, if there are no good reasons for conferral, then what makes the theory a theory of *art* at all? In other words,

either works of art have some property or cause certain attitudes that are picked out for conferral or there isn't anything beyond connection to the artworld beyond those reasons... but that characterization assumes some coherence of our understanding of the *artworld* in the first place.

In an attempt to address these and other problems with his initial definition, Dickie revised his institutional account in *The Art Circle* by providing a list of five definitions that he believes, jointly, better capture his view:

1. An artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art.
2. A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.
3. A public is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them.
4. The artworld is the totality of all artworld systems.
5. An artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public.

You can see that the main goal of his revision is to make precise the concepts introduced in his first definition, while backing away from the notions of 'conferral' and 'appreciation.' Although this new definition escapes using these terms, we will find that if it is to succeed in the end it must rely on a more formalized notion of conferral just as the original definition did.

The problem here is circularity. Dickie himself admits this but claims that the circularity is not vicious. Let's consider the circularity and decide for ourselves whether or not it is viciously so. We begin with the definition of a work of art, which depends on the definition of "artworld public." Given definition 3, a particular public is a set of

persons with some particular knowledge set that gives them particular access. An artwork public, then, will be a set of persons the members of which are prepared to understand when a work of art is being presented to them. But this definition relies on some already understood notion of a work of art: circularity. Or we can assume that the artworld public is the set of persons the members of which understand a work of art to be something made by an artist; if we take this step, the circularity is no longer a problem. However, this step also requires us to consider the definition of “artist”, which, by the first definition, relies on the definition of a “work of art” and the circularity becomes inevitable yet again.

These definitions do not provide us with an explanation of what is art and what is not art without some explanation of what a work of art is in the first place. Individuals with a previous conception of art could build the extension of *art* from that previous knowledge. Perhaps that, in itself, is useful. Dickie himself claims that philosophical definitions only “make clear to us in a self-conscious and explicit way what we already in some sense know” (*ibid* 72). In this way, the account may provide an answer to the epistemological question, if not the extensional one. We take a prior understanding of what art is and run with Dicke’s set of definitions.

The institutional account could then be considered an epistemological tool. In fact, many individuals use some sort of institutional account to build their own knowledge of what is and what is not art. Even though someone might not understand *why* the square canvas completely covered in orange paint is a work of art, they use the institutional account in determining that it *is* a work of art because a museum has presented it as such. As I discuss much later in the paper, working under *only* the assumption of the

institutional account when experiencing works of art is incredibly problematic.

Regardless, the institutional account does seem to get *something* right in addressing the epistemological question. It will require the help of other accounts to provide a truly satisfactory answer, however. And it will certainly require other accounts to provide answer to the value, extensional, and essential questions.

### **III. The Historical Account of Art**

If you claim that artworks are those things that have been dubbed to be artworks by art history, or are related to past things dubbed to be art by art history, then you are giving “art history” the same status that the institutional account gives to the artworld.

Arguably the most successful version of the historical account is the intentional-historical account given by Jerrold Levinson.

His historical account takes its lead from the institutional account. He agrees that there isn't any aesthetic or intrinsic quality that makes something a work of art.

However, he finds fault with the institutional account's requirements of the social institution of art and the conferral process. Here is how he suggests altering the intentional account to better capture the nature of art in his paper “Defining Art Historically”:

I propose to construe this relation solely in terms of the intention of an independent individual (or individuals)—as opposed to an overt act (that of conferring the status of a candidate for appreciation) performed in an institutional setting constituted by many individuals—where the intention makes reference (either transparently or opaquely) to the history of art (what art has been) as opposed to that murky and somewhat exclusive institution, the artworld.



The core of my proposal will be an account of what it is to regard-as-a-work-of-art, an account that gives this an essential historicity. It is this which will do the work in my theory which the notion of artworld is supposed to do in the institutional theory. (4)

The intuitive idea here is that something is a work of art if, when it was made—here “made” should be understood as broadly defined—the individual intended it to be regarded as a work of art in a way the history of art has regarded things as works of art. This shift moves the focal point from the conferral by the artworld institution to the intention of an individual artist without setting up specific constraints on what it means to be an artist. No matter whether or not you are a member of, or related to, the artworld—regardless of how one defines it—in some way, if you make something and you intend that thing to be regarded in the same way that art objects have been regarded in the past, then you’ve made a work of art. However, if I make a painting but intend for it to be used as building insulation, on this account, my painting is not a work of art. To understand Levinson’s definition, we must understand what he means by having the intention for something to be regarded-as-a-work-of-art.

Levinson himself is explicit that this account of art does not result in “analyzing art completely in non-art terms” (*ibid* 7). Instead, he claims that we are explaining what it is to be art with the totality of things that are already taken to be *unproblematically* art. Thus, we can start with what we know to be considered art right now and what we know to be considered art in the past and work backwards. We see this at play when he describes his basic account as follows:

X is an artwork at time  $t \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} X$  is an object of which it is true that at  $t$  some person or persons, having the appropriate proprietary right over X, nonpassingly intends (or intended) X for regard-as-a-work-of-art—i.e., regard in any way (or ways) in which objects in the extension of ‘artwork’ prior to  $t$  are or were correctly (or standardly) regarded. (*ibid* 12)

Something is regarded-as-a-work-of-art at some particular point in time if it has similar properties to the things that are widely recognized to be works of art up until that particular point in time. This is why paintings and sculpture are so easily understood to be works of art; paintings and sculpture have been regarded-as-works-of-art throughout all of what we know to be art history up till this particular point in time. This also explains why a work of art like Duchamp’s *Fountain* would not be considered a work of art in the 1700s but nowadays it is one of the most iconic of artworks.

Now onto intention: Levinson distinguishes three kinds of art intention: specific art-conscious, non-specific art-conscious, and art-unconscious. The first takes place when, say, I intend to create a *minimalist* sculpture. In this case I have a very specific intention for my work of art; I want it to be regarded as other minimalist sculptures are regarded, which includes engaging with the dialogue and terminology that makes up the minimalist canon. Having a non-specific art-conscious intention involves making something that you intend to be treated as art, in a general sense. Perhaps you want it to be hung or placed in a museum and viewed by museum-goers, or perhaps you want others to think of it as *beautiful* or *moving*, as these are some familiar ways that artworks are treated. This kind of intention is possible for someone with some level of familiarity with art history and what kinds of things art history regards-as-works-of-art.

The final sort of intention is possible for someone without that familiarity with the history of art. This art-unconscious intention is, in my mind, a bit difficult to explain so I will let Levinson explain for himself:

... intending for regard in some specific way  $\phi$  characterized in terms of intrinsic features, where  $\phi$  is *in fact* a way in which some past artworks have been correctly regarded, though this fact is not known to the intender. An example of this might be intending for listening to with attention to timbre. (*ibid* 11)

This kind of intention is meant to capture the possibility of outsider artists, something that the institutional art account could not explain. Really, this sort of intention is meant to capture a very extreme sort of outsider artist, one without any familiarity at all with accepted works of art. One of the most famous accepted examples of an outsider artist is Henry Darger, an American hospital custodian born in 1882 who spent six decades creating a 15-volume illustrated book called *In the Realms of the Unreal*. He was not trained as an artist, never showed his work, and his work was not discovered until after he died in 1973. He is considered an outsider artist because he existed outside the established art scene and suffered from mental illness. Despite these qualities, however, he had interaction with art history through his life as he lived in a major US city, Chicago, and was a devout Catholic. Thus, on Levinson's account his magnum opus can be thought of as being borne from non-specific art-conscious intention; that is, he was familiar with what a work of art is regarded as in some way, shape, or form.

Unconscious art-intention, however, leads to a much more dramatic sort of outsider artist. In his paper, Levinson he says that this third kind of intention

... allows for art makers ignorant of all artworks, all art activities, and all institutions of art. Such persons can be seen to make art if they intend their objects for regard in ways that *happen to be*, unbeknown to them, in the repertory of aesthetic regards established at that time. In such a case there is the requisite link to the prior history of art, but it is one such art makers are unaware of, though they have in fact forged it. (*ibid* 11)

It seems that such an outsider artist would have to be shielded from any cultural input whatsoever to really fit this definition, but suppose we can imagine such an individual. Levinson proposes such an individual in the “farmer’s wife at a Nebraska county fair who sets an assemblage of egg shells and white glue down on the corner of a table for folks to look at” (*ibid* 5). Needless to say this example is problematic, but his thought is that “she and the artworld exist in perfect mutual oblivion” (*ibid* 5). Whether or not such oblivion is possible, how is it that such unconscious art-intention can still lead to the creation of a work of art?

The idea is that such an individual intends for the work to have certain properties and those properties *happen* to line up with properties that historical works of art also have. A similar example: imagine I make a recipe because I am trying to create a particular flavor profile. I throw together a bunch of spices and create a dish. Unbeknownst to me this is exactly the recipe for a specific kind of Indian curry. I didn’t intend to make a curry; I intended to make a dish with a specific flavor profile. In the end, it could be said that I have, in fact, created a curry because that specific flavor profile *happens to be* that of a famous Indian curry.<sup>16</sup> The intention of the unconscious-

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<sup>16</sup> Thanks to Sally Haslanger for this helpful example.

artist hooks up to legitimate art-properties and because of this, the result of this intention is a work of art.

If we assume that the previous explanation is unproblematic, Levinson's account leads us to a pretty attractive answer to the extensional and epistemological questions. The extension is delimited by the recursive definition and we are able to know what is and what is not art by analyzing those things that are unproblematically regarded-as-works-of-art to determine what the relevant art properties are, then utilize this data when considering whether something is a work of art or not. If the work in question has the relevant properties and was created by someone familiar with art history, we can assume that their intention was for the work to be regarded-as-a-work-of-art. If it was created by someone not familiar with art history, we can give them the benefit of the doubt and assume that they created the work with an intention rooted in those art-relevant properties; thus, we can claim that the work was to be regarded-as-a-work-of-art. This gives us a way of knowing whether or not something is a work of art.

Levinson's account does run into some problems. Two major issues arise when we consider, first, the existence of the ur-arts—those artworks that we must stipulate for his recursive definition to be successful—and, second, the unconscious art-intention with more scrutiny. As I go on to explain, this latter issue points to why the historical account cannot answer the value question.

His basic definition bottoms out with what he calls the ur-arts. His account needs these ur-artworks to make any sense at all. There had to be *some artworks* that started this snowballing effect. This is where his recursive definition comes into play. The initial step says that, “objects of the ur-arts are artworks at  $t$  (and thereafter)” (*ibid* 19) and the

recursive step says that given that  $X$  is an artwork prior to  $t$ , then  $Y$  is an artwork at  $t$  if the basic account holds for  $Y$ . This definition, given our assumption of the ur-arts, could provide us with an answer to the extensional question. Success!

Now, given the nature of recursive definition, we have stipulated the existence of these ur-arts, just as we stipulate the existence of the number one to get the recursive definition of the natural numbers going. The problem isn't that we are stipulating the existence of the ur-arts, it is that they aren't playing the right role in the recursive definition. The ur-arts are actually defined by what we, now, understand to be works of art. The recursive definition is actually going in the opposite direction. With the case of the natural numbers we know what we are assuming when we assume that the number one is in the natural numbers. But with the ur-arts we do not know what we are assuming at all; we can only imagine what the ur-arts might be by going backwards in history, starting from where we are right now. Thus, the problem with the definition is not that we are stipulating the existence of the ur-arts but that this stipulation of the base case is based on our understanding of the supposed induction cases.

The second problem for Levinson's account is the existence of unconscious-art intentional artworks. As already discussed, Levinson uses this sort of intention to explain how, on his account, someone *outside* the artworld can still create works of art. His explanation is odd, however, because the intention of the artist is in no *direct* way connected to the history of art; it is, instead, sort of lucky that the artist's intentions happened to line up with historically accepted examples of art. The connection to the history of art is the connection at the very heart of Levinson's account. He needs this sort of intention to move away from the faults of the institutional account, but he then

stretches the notion of intention beyond acceptable intuition to account for art-unconscious art.

In the unconscious art case it isn't the intention that really matters, it's the actual content of the intention—to instigate certain attitudes in an audience—that determine whether a thing is or is not a work of art. That is, it wasn't the farmer's wife's *intention* but rather that she had intended the display to evoke a certain attitude that she believed others would enjoy. The intention isn't hooked up to art history, the attitudes are. If this is the case, then the *intentional* in the intentional-historical account comes into question.

This brings us to another Euthyphro problem, similar to the one that arose with the institutional account. Are there good reasons for certain attitudes becoming art historically relevant attitudes or not? If there are good reasons, then perhaps it isn't simply because those attitudes are art historically relevant but because there is something *special* about those attitudes that have led to a cultural institution being built up around them. If there aren't any good reasons for those certain attitudes to become art historically relevant, then what makes these attitudes *art* historical properties in the first place? In other words, either historically relevant works of art share attitudes because they are *art attitudes* and not *art historical attitudes*, or there isn't anything that really distinguishes these attitudes from other historical properties at all.

Now that we've considered the historical account and some potential problems for it, we can assess which of the four important questions it can answer. Firstly, the Euthyphro problem just raised demonstrates why the value question is left unanswered. Levinson himself acknowledges this problem, amongst others, in his paper "Refining Art

Historically.” He considers that the value of art is implicit in his definition and questions “whether this implicit supposition needs or merits explicit mention in a definition of art” (*ibid* 55). Here Levinson is admitting that his definition of art may provide satisfactory in one sense but that it is too much to ask that it answer *all* important questions regarding the nature of art. In fact, in defending this part of his definition he puts forth a similar definition/theory distinction to the one I am assuming in this paper:

We must distinguish between demands reasonably made of (a) a general theory of art, and demands reasonably made of (b) a basic definition of art. We cannot hold (b) to account for all that we would hold (a) to account for. A more appropriate wider demand on (b), beyond adequacy and insight on its own terms, is only that it be *satisfyingly integratable* into (a), when and where it develops. (*ibid* 54)

In his book *Definitions of Art*, Stephen Davies discusses institutional and historical accounts of art and, in fact, he himself argues for a sort of institutional definition. Yet he does not shy away from pointing out that there are, in fact, many questions left unanswered even when one accepts such a definition:

Probably most people look to a definition of art in the hope of finding an account of the value and importance of art... Suppose that the institutional [or historical] theory is correct in its account of the definition of art. This will not mean that the theory is ultimately without interest or importance. It will show, however, that not too much should be expected from the enterprise of definition, and that more fertile areas for inquiry lie elsewhere... That there is more to philosophical aesthetics and to art than could be captured by the institutional theory might indicate only that there is more to aesthetics than the determination of a definition of art. (46)



Here we have a philosopher who argues for an institutional definition admitting—or perhaps it is more fair to say that he is acknowledging—that these accounts cannot answer questions about the value of art for the individual or for societies, nor can they address the importance of art institutions or art history. Although both Levinson’s papers and Davies’ book were written over two decades ago, it is fair to say that they are both pointing us towards the idea that art is a complex kind that cannot be explained satisfactorily with one definition alone.

One question that the historical account can potentially help us answer is the extensional question. If we take all of those things that have been regarded-as-works-of-art art history—not decided as such by the institution of art history—we have a class of artifacts that capture all desirable cases. The problem is that the account does *not* answer the essential question; it does not explain *why* it is that these particular things are in that extension. This is because what it means to be “regarded-as-a-work-of-art” doesn’t do much work beyond providing that extension. This also comes out of the Euythro problem. There needs to be *something* beyond historicity if we are to answer why it is that those particular things make it into the extension of art and others do not.

It is in this way that the historical account answers the extensional question but not the essential question. Consider an analogy with color: it is possible to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for the color blue which will involve light with a wavelength between 450 and 495 nanometres. This may provide the extension for the color but does not necessarily provide the essence of the color because to provide the essence would involve phenomenological or neurological explanations as well.

If we had a deeper understanding of what “regarded-as-a-work-of-art” means, then we would have answers to both the extensional and essential questions. This deeper understanding will come about with focal-looping art pluralism. Finally, the historical account does help us answer the epistemological question. Given familiarity with what it means to be “regarded-as-a-work-of-art” an individual can draw on this familiarity and the historical definition to assess whether or not something is a work of art or not.

The historical account does a better job at answering the questions than the institutional account does in that it provides us with a way of describing the class of all works of art; however, it does not tell us why that class is the class of artworks and it also does not tell us why the class of artworks is as important as we all believe it to be.

#### **IV. The Aesthetic Account of Art**

How does the conversation account described in the third chapter help us answer the four important questions? It provides us with a satisfying answer to the value question, as was just discussed in the last chapter in some detail. Aesthetic conversations provide a space for individuals to feel and think freely about themselves, their own culture, other cultures, and much more. This is because this conversation happens while in play drive, to again use Schiller’s terminology.

However, the conversation account gives us an odd answer to the extensional question: art is all of those artifacts that have instigated aesthetic conversation. It could be argued that this provides too broad of an extension, or that the definition is simply too vague. This has been one criticism of aesthetic accounts of art in the past: the notion of aesthetic function is too vague to capture the extension of art that intuition

demands.<sup>17</sup> Also, it seems like it may let in *more* than intuition would maybe allow: perhaps works of philosophy could fit into this definition, or works of advertising. However, it is important to note that the argument that aesthetic theories are too limiting does not apply to this particular aesthetic account. My account can accept works of conceptual art just as it can accept the traditional arts because the consummatory experience does not rule out conceptual or intellectual content.

Most importantly, this account doesn't help us at all with the epistemological question. How are we to know whether or not an artifact is has instigated an unbounded consummatory conversation unless we, ourselves, engage with it? And isn't it possible that many artifacts will instigate conversations with some individuals and not others? It may provide us with a subjective answer to the epistemological question, but this is not the question we are seeking an answer to.

Finally, we can consider the essential question. On its own, the aesthetic account doesn't provide a satisfactory answer because it provides a necessary though not sufficient condition for being in the extension, though in combination with the other accounts we find that it provides the core aspect of the answer to the essential question. Again, because we have assumed art pluralism, we don't expect any one account to meet all four demands completely. Instead, in the next section we will see how all three accounts, when considered in a structured relation to one another, provide us with an explanatorily satisfactory theory of art.

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<sup>17</sup> See the fourth chapter of Noel Carroll's *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* for several iterations of this argument.

## V. Focal-Looping Art Pluralism

As I have discussed throughout the first chapters of this dissertation, concluding that a kind is pluralistic is not explanatorily satisfactory. There are many different ways that a pluralistic kind can be structured and we must precisify the pluralism if we are to fully explain and understand the nature of a kind.

One type of pluralism I presented in the second chapter is hierarchical pluralism. This type of pluralism is exemplified by the kind species. Just to recap: There are over twenty legitimate species accounts that divvy up the organic world in different ways. Understood as complexly related to one another, these many accounts display a hierarchical structure. One of the accounts—the evolutionary account—serves as the focal point that all of the other accounts depend on theoretically. This account states that any a species is a historical lineage based on some evolutionary relevant distinction. The numerous other accounts—biological, phenetic, ecological, and so on—are core-dependent on the evolutionary account but they also provide the many relevant evolutionary distinctions that are then utilized to provide the application means necessary for real research. In this way, the evolutionary account depends on the other accounts explanatorily. The pluralism is hierarchical because there is one account that all of the rest are core-dependent on—this account can be considered *primary*. The primary account depends on the other accounts for applicability but does not necessarily depend on any *one* of those secondary accounts. In this way, the kind species takes on a tiered, hierarchical pluralistic structure.

The hierarchical pluralistic structure helps us answer the four important questions for species. The evolutionary account answers the extensional and essential questions, while the secondary accounts answer the epistemological question. Note that a theory doesn't necessarily need to answer the value question for a kind like species because it is not a social kind. The evolutionary account delineates the metaphysical boundaries of the extension while also explaining that delineation. Lastly, in order for us to know what is or what is not a species, we must work with one of the evolutionary distinctions. Considering how we answer the four important questions brings out the hierarchical structure at play. One account does most of the explanatory work while the rest of the accounts help answer only the epistemological question.

The complexity of art does not share this simple hierarchical structure. There is a focal account, though for art it is a *normative* focal point: the aesthetic account. The remaining accounts are not different ways of *applying* the normative focal point, however. To answer the remaining three questions, all three accounts actively work together; I will call this particular kind of working together *focal-looping*. The historical and institutional accounts are core-dependent on the aesthetic account while the aesthetic account depends on these other accounts in a very particular way that I call looping-dependence. To go any further in explaining explanatory-looping and focal looping pluralism, I need to explain how Ian Hacking uses the term "looping" in his work.

*The looping effect* is an important aspect of his account of human kinds. Hacking has studied a number of these human kinds in his work, including schizophrenia,

autism, child abuse, among others.<sup>18</sup> These kinds are human kinds because they play very important roles in our actual lives as we theorize about them, make laws regarding them, and treat people according to our understanding of them.

By human kinds I mean kinds about which we would like to have systematic, general, and accurate knowledge; classifications that could be used to formulate general truths about people; generalizations sufficiently strong that they seem like laws about people, their actions, or their sentiments. We want laws precise enough to predict what individuals will do, or how they will respond to attempts to help them or to modify their behaviour. (Hacking 1995, 352)

We want the right classification—the correct sorting of child abuse or teen-age pregnancy—so that confronted by abusive parents or pregnant teenagers we can embark on a course of action that will change them for the better and will prevent others from joining their ranks. We do not want to know the ‘structure’ of teen-age pregnancy in the fascinating but abstract way in which we want to know the structure of kinship among a certain people, or the structure of the modal auxiliaries in their language. We want principles according to which we can interfere, intervene, help, and improve. (*ibid* 361)

Human kinds are important because they build up the reality we live within, how we see ourselves, how we treat other people, and how we structure our societies. Thus, there is initially a noticeable difference from the *natural* kinds that are often discussed in the philosophical literature. I acknowledge that on some readings, this explanation of human kind is not in tension with the notion of natural kind. I am, and I believe Hacking goes to great length to explain that he is, referring to those kinds studied in the sciences.

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<sup>18</sup> Not all human kinds carry the negative stigma that these examples do; though charged examples such as these ones present clear cases of looping.

To make the human/natural kind distinction perhaps more palatable, Hacking introduces another distinction, that between indifferent and interactive kinds. The nature of indifferent kinds does not rely on, in any way, our theorizing about them; that is, “[t]he classification ‘quark’ is indifferent in the sense that calling a quark a quark makes no difference to the quark” (*ibid* 105). On the other hand, interactive kinds are effected by our theorizing about, and interaction with, them: “That is, new knowledge about ‘the criminal’ or ‘the homosexual’ becomes known to the the people classified, changes the way these individuals behave, and loops back to force changes in the classifications and knowledge about them” (*ibid* 105). Here we see how *looping* comes into play:

Looping effects are everywhere. Think of what the category of genius did to those Romantics who saw themselves as geniuses, and what their behavior did in turn to the category of genius itself. Think about the transformations effected by the notions of fat, overweight, anorexic. If someone talks about the social construction of genius or anorexia, they are likely talking about the idea, the individuals falling under the idea, the interaction between the idea and the people, and the manifold of social practices and institutions that these interactions involve: the matrix, in short. (Hacking 1999, 34)

It is in part because of the value-laden nature of human kinds that looping effects are so abundant. We view different human kinds as good, bad, evil, pitiful and so on. As the human kind labels are applied, those individuals affected by the label may act in ways that change how we come to view the normative status of that kind. On the other hand, quarks aren't good or bad. They just are.

Art is an interactive kind because what sorts of things can instigate an aesthetic experience changes over time due to the thoughts and actions of human beings. Artists push the boundaries of what is acceptable and open the public's eyes to aesthetic conversations once considered absurd or meaningless. Although the aesthetic account is core, the historical and institutional accounts explain how the content of aesthetic conversations has changed over time. As artists begin to work in a new medium and these works become accepted by the institution of art and understood by the history of art as legitimate, the realm of possible aesthetic conversations changes.

In his book *Cultural Software: A Theory of Ideology*, J.M. Balkin points to what I have been dubbing the looping effect:

Consider the example of music. Before culture there are no electric guitars, violins, or orchestras. There is no art of orchestration, no sonata-allegro form, no idea of jazz or the blues. There is only the human delight in producing and listening to interesting and beautiful sounds. Throughout human history people develop different ways of making and organizing sounds, which they test against their developing sense of beauty and interest. Their sense of the beautiful and interesting in turn is developed through exposure to and use of the cultural tools available to them within their culture... Culture does not merely enable us to make increasingly finer distinctions; it also enables us to create new possibilities for musical enjoyment and musical evaluation by creating new types of instruments, new forms of musical expression, and new musical compositions. These cultural constructions are passed on and modified from generation to generation. (27–28)

As we have aesthetic conversations, these experiences influence the kinds of artworks that artists go on to make. These works push the boundaries of what is deemed



acceptable and these once-edgy works of art become acceptable consummatory conversational partners. At any moment in time and within a particular cultural milieu, only certain artifacts will instigate aesthetic conversations because of the historical and institutional constraints placed on the individual at the time of conversation. These constraints are necessary and affect what ends up in the extension of art and what does not. Thus art does require historicity and institutionality but these accounts rely on the fundamental core of aesthetic experience to move forward at all.

How, then does this looping-dependence help us answer the remaining three questions? Let's start with the extensional question. The aesthetic account, on its own, provides us with an overly inclusive extension; any artifact whatsoever that may possibly instigate an unbounded, consummatory conversation will end up in that extension. We want the extension of art to capture those things that have been created with the intention of instigating those conversations, even if the intention was not explicit. The historical account, core-dependent on the aesthetic account, can give us our desired extension. Let's take Levinson's definition and replace "regard-as-a-work-of-art" with "instigate consummatory conversations":

X is an artwork at time  $t \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} X$  is an object of which it is true that at  $t$  some person or persons, having the appropriate proprietary right over X, nonpassingly intends (or intended) X to instigate consummatory conversations.

The historical account depends on the aesthetic account for normative substance and the aesthetic account depends on the historical account to delineate the desired extension. The looping effect is at work here because what makes its way into the

extension at any point in time is dependent on what is in the extension and how artists, critics, and audience members respond to that extension.

This same looping relationship between the aesthetic and historical accounts is at the heart of answering the essential question. *Why* is it that something is in the extension of art? That thing was created with the intention of instigating an aesthetic conversation; the intention came from a particular cultural and time. The possibility and content of an aesthetic experiences is steeped in a cultural and historical dialog. The kinds of artifacts that stimulate consummatory conversations and the content of these conversations is heavily reliant upon what has come before. Just as Duchamp's *Fountain* wouldn't have been sculpture in the 1700s, purely conceptual art would also not have been considered art in the 1700s because individuals would not even consider the explicitly cognitive content as possible conversational material. The fact that art is inherently conversational leads us to this point as well; as artists communicate with artworks of the past, they expand the possibilities for what can count as art and what kinds of conversations are permissible to have with works of art.

Lastly, the aesthetic and institutional accounts, together, help us answer the epistemological question. How do we know what is and what is not art? Besides experiencing the work for ourselves, the only means we have of approaching the extension of art is through a system of documented unbounded consummatory conversations. Here what counts as "the institution of art" does not necessarily need to be rigidly carved out; we are not answering the extensional or essential questions here. That is, we can't know all of the things that have instigated these kinds of conversations but we have access to some of these things via the institution of art. Here I am taking

what we typically mean by *the history of art* to count as an art institution. The difference between the institutional account and the historical account is that the institutional account acts as a *tool* in documenting and presenting those things that are well known for instigating aesthetic conversations. The historical account, on the other hand, provides us with part of the essence of what art is.

Of course, our epistemological access does not grant us knowledge of the *whole* extension of art as many aesthetic experiences will go undocumented by art history. However, the history and institution of art provides us with accessible tools that guide and inform our own experiences of art. Here we see the looping effect at work because what we *know* to be art affects the art that is made in the future and the kind of aesthetic conversations that will be instigated.

## **VI. Conclusion**

None of the individual accounts of art are able to answer all four questions. Together, however, they provide satisfactory answers to all of them. The value question is answered by the aesthetic account, the extensional and essential questions are answered by the aesthetic and historical accounts, and the epistemological question is answered by the institutional accounts. Each one of these answers requires even further inquiry and explanation, work that I will undertake outside the temporal confines of this dissertation.

If it hasn't been evident by this point, I want to emphasize that one of my main goals with this dissertation project was to bring aesthetic experience back into play while acknowledging the importance of the institution and art history in any

theory of art. The problem with holding only one of these two latter accounts is that the experience of art fades into the background, despite the aesthetic account providing the point of art's value in our lives. Once we move away from the value of art in our theorizing, we can be thought of as simply classifying the world into art and non-art without real reason.

The difference between associating art with an institution or a history and associating it with an individual's experience also affects the real experiences of individuals. Many individuals think of art as *the stuff in museums* or *the stuff artists make*, not stuff they can interact with in a meaningful, valuable way. Even though it has been stated that aesthetics is to art as ornithology is to birds, I believe that in removing the aesthetic from our theories of art has a trickle-down effect. We need to reconsider how we, ourselves, interact with works of art, as well as reconsider how we teach others about the nature of art.

# Chapter Five: Conclusion

This dissertation project was jump-started by Christy Mag Uidhir and P.D. Magnus 2011 paper titled “Art Concept Pluralism” and I have continued to use the term “pluralism” throughout the dissertation despite the fact that I directly question its informativeness in the second chapter. In this final conclusion, I address the problematic nature of using “pluralism” to describe the theory I defend in the previous chapter and argue that we should understand both art and species to be *complex* rather than *pluralistic*. Thus, in the end I have precisified pluralism away.

Pluralism insinuates a system or condition in which two or more principles coexist. Religious pluralism in a society is an attitude or policy regarding the heterogeneous coexistence of heterogeneity of religious belief systems. Cultural pluralism occurs when smaller groups within a larger society preserve their unique cultural identities and these identities are accepted and consistent with the laws and values of that larger society. Value pluralism is the idea that there are several values—ethical, moral, or otherwise—which are equally correct and fundamental, while possibly remaining in conflict with each other. Art pluralism presented an exciting prospect because of the possibility of reconciling the multiple definitions of art discussed throughout this dissertation. Each of these definitions get at *something* important about the nature of art, and art pluralism allows us to acknowledge the pros of each of them while also allowing for them to *coexist*. These are the intuitions behind both art pluralism and species pluralism.

The issue I raise at the beginning of the first chapter, which also acts as fodder for the content of the second chapter, is whether or not the multiple coexisting definitions of art are unified in some way or if they are completely distinct. This is the question of whether or not any pluralism beyond eliminative pluralism can actually exist. If the multiple definitions or accounts are not unified in any important sense, then they are completely distinct and the meaning of the overarching term that unifies them is purely disjunctive; it points at those multiple definitions or accounts without providing any unifying meaning between those definitions or accounts. If there is unification, however, how are we to understand this kind as pluralistic in the end? Unification, after all, is really the mark of a monistic kind.

In the second chapter I introduced the notion of a complex kind to make room for the possibility of a sort of complex unification that lies between purely monistic and eliminative-pluralistic. The distinction between simple and complex kinds is based on those kinds that are satisfactorily explained with one account—simple—and those that require structural dependencies between more than one account to achieve explanatory satisfaction. However, this simple/complex distinction does not necessarily map onto the monist/pluralist distinction. It is possible for a monistic kind to be complex and a pluralistic kind to be simple. Consider any eliminatively pluralistic kind; what unifies those multiple accounts is the simple disjunction of those accounts. This does not result in a complex kind at all. The important distinction that lies at the heart of this investigation can be considered that of simply unified monistic kinds and complexly unified monist kinds. Bringing in varieties of pluralism allows for what I have taken to be an important move away from simple monistic kinds.

The sort of pluralism I discussed when presenting hierarchical species pluralism as presented by biologist Richard Mayden relies on a sort of ambiguity in the term “pluralism”. The idea is that the nature of the unification itself is built out of more than one account. Mayden explains this in his own terms in his paper “A Hierarchy of Species Concepts: the denouement in the saga of the species problem”:

When the [evolutionary species concept] is the most appropriate primary concept, it requires bridging concepts permitting us to recognize entities compatible with its intentions. To implement fully the [evolutionary species concept] we must supplement it with more operational, accessory notions of biological diversity — secondary concepts. (419)

Here the “primary concept” is what theoretically unifies the kind species while the “secondary concepts” provide an important role in understanding the nature of that theoretical unification. Without those secondary concepts, the unification is not fully explained. Thus, there is an overall unification for the kind species but this unification is complex. Again, the term “pluralism” here is being used in an attempt to distance this from simple monistic kinds.

In the third and fourth chapters, I present a theory of art that is normatively unified by the aesthetic conversation account while the historical and institutional accounts explain how the content and form of aesthetic conversations necessarily changes over time via the process of looping. Here the aesthetic conversation account does similar work to that of the evolutionary species account in being the “primary account” while the historical and institutional play a secondary but interrelated role.

In the end, then, I am arguing for a theory of art that results in a unified kind, not an eliminatively pluralistic disjunction of multiple distinct accounts. The goal of this dissertation has been to investigate the viability of art pluralism and precisifying that pluralism has been part of this process. In an important sense I have precisified pluralism out of my explanation of art altogether—the result is that art is a monistic complexly-unified kind. The work that I have done demonstrates that the art accounts that have been viewed as problematic on their own do in fact point to fundamental aspects of the nature of art; we just needed to go farther in our investigation and elucidation to understand that they are working *together* in an interdependent manner, resulting in a complex whole. The complexity of the nature of art should not come as a surprise, nor should the fact that there is much more explanation required to achieve a fully satisfactory theory of art.



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