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Edited by Dan-Eugen Ratiu and Connell Vaughan

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The Artwork Process and the Theory Spectrum

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ABSTRACT. The paper suggests a notion called ‘the artwork process’ which maps all the phases in the process from an artwork’s initial manufacture to its experience as an artwork by an audience. It examines various definitions of ‘artwork’ that have offered and suggests that they share the common structure of locating artwork ontology at some or other definite phase within the artwork process. One result of this is that there is a common structure of objections to such theories, arising from counter-examples sourced from other phases of the artwork process excluded from the proposed definition, with the consequence that the definition becomes prescriptive towards actual artistic practice. This structure is then used to analyse the ‘performance theory’ of art: It’s suggested that this is the latest in the line of these definitional projects, novel in that it concentrates exclusively on the actions of artists for the source of its definition. The structural analysis is then used to generate two objections to performance theories, arising from phases of the artwork process it excludes. The paper then plots the different proposed definitional projects on the ‘theory spectrum’ according to which phases of the artwork process each proposed definition includes or excludes from its scope. It concludes by suggesting that only a comprehensively contextualist definition which makes reference to all phases of the artwork process can hope to be resistant to this structure of objection and defence. It concludes by speculating on why this might be so and suggesting ‘manifested performance theory’ as a plausible candidate for just such a comprehensively contextualist position.

1. Introduction

The recent history of aesthetics has contained offers of many different characterisations or more formal definitions of what an artwork is, often included within some wider definition or theory of ‘art’. Here is a brief familiar genealogy: Before the mid-twentieth century these proposed

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definitions *usually*² took the form of an artwork being an artefact of a certain *kind* doing a certain *thing* – such as imitating reality, expressing an emotion or mental state, communicating an idea or feeling, providing an aesthetic response, or acting as some sort of symbolic representation.³ Under the pressures of the artistic experiments of Modernism these definitions were nuanced, developed and transformed within theories of ‘art’ so that the artefacts that did this – imitating, expressing, providing aesthetic experience, etc. thing – were made within some sort of *artistic context* or in some precise *sort of way*. So, we have the rise of institutional, contextualist and recursive definitions of ‘art’ which include some reference to an artwork’s context of presentation or provenance. Sometimes, these theories even drop the requirement that an artwork needs to be an artefact which has to function in some way with respect to an audience.⁴ Most recently, the pendulum has swung even further from the audience: In performance theories of art, artefacts are also removed from the substance of the definition of an *artwork*, so that artworks are some sort of action, or achievement, by an agent with the artefact the record, or focus of appreciation, of this achievement.⁵

There’s an internal logic to this story in that these different definitions of ‘art’ and the characterisations of an artwork they contain were each proposed to overcome the difficulties seen to beset earlier attempts. These difficulties arose from objections that standardly demonstrated that each definition or theory of ‘art’ is unnecessary and/or insufficient, in that however ‘artwork’ is defined within each, either an artwork is found that

² ‘Usually’ as some, such as Dewey’s (2009) do not fit this description. The subject of these works was usually ‘aesthetics’ as distinct from ‘artworks’ and the characterisations of ‘art’ they provided were supplemental to their more general aesthetic theory.

³ Representatives of each in the broadest sense are respectively: Plato *Republic*, bk. 10, Tolstoy (1994); Beardsley (1953) *Aesthetics*.

⁴ Such theories, ‘contextualism’ broadly construed, represent the mainstream of current analytical philosophy. The discussion concentrates in filling in how the contextualised object is to be characterised. See Danto (1981) (interpretability); Dickie (1984) (institutional); Levinson (1990) “Defining Art Historically” in *Music, Art & Metaphysics* (historically); Carroll (1988) (identifying individual narratives). Stecker (1997) (historical and functionally)

⁵ See David Davies (2004) for the most comprehensive performance theory thus far presented. Currie (1989) should also be included.

does not do what the definition states the artwork is supposed to do, or a non-artwork is found that *does* do what artworks is supposed to do.

2. The Artwork Process

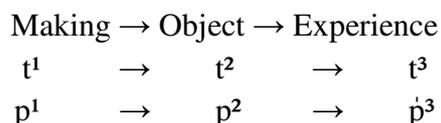
I now want to introduce an idea I call “the Artwork Process”. This idea applies to all and each individual artwork, albeit in different ways. It sets out the process of making artworks in a way that is somewhat analogous to the business tool of 'process mapping': That is, a technique in which the temporal or procedural stages of a process are set out, so that it's clear that the later phases cannot occur without the earlier phases having occurred. The '*artwork* process' is broadly, that idea applied to artworks. Here is a set out in a simplified fashion:

Phase 1: The process of making an artwork:

Phase 2: The Artwork Object itself;

Phase 3: The audience experience of the artwork as such.

These 3 (broad) phases stand in temporal (t) and procedural (p) relation to each other so that:



So, if we think about *any* artwork we can, in principle, identify the process(es) by which each is made and comes to be recognised as an artwork. This process characterises *all* the phases between an artwork's initial manufacture to it being experienced as an accepted and identified artwork by an audience. Broadly, there are three main phases to this process standing in temporal and procedural relation to each other; (i) its manufacture, (ii) its standing as a completed object and (iii) its being accepted and identified as an artwork.

Artworks within different forms and different artworks within each form will manifest these three phases of the artwork process differently. The nature of making, the results of that making and the kind of appreciation of a work will differ between works in different art forms - paintings, sculptures or conceptual works. Indeed, for some artworks in newer art forms with more fluid conventions, or which are combines of elements from different forms or genres combined into a 'piece', *what* is manifested at each phase of the process may be a matter of debate. For some conceptual artworks for instance, a physical artefact may be documentation about the artwork, with the artwork itself being a set of specifications or conditions that need to be met. For performance artworks, the completed work may be an event that is experienced by its audience *as* it is being made. However, each remain just different ways of producing artworks – even conceptual or performance artworks are made, have existence conditions and can be appreciated by an audience as a particular work.

The artwork process claims no more than that the process applies similarly to each artwork – it says nothing, and need say nothing about *how* it applies to any particular work or class of works – that's a matter for more detailed investigation. We should then note, that the artwork process does *not* either offer or presuppose one kind of definition of 'artwork' or offer an ontology of artworks. So, for the artwork process, the input is the activity of the author(s), whatever that is, and the output is the thing the audience gets (whatever that is).

The artwork process can be used as a tool to do two things: Firstly, as a tool to map the terrain of the definitional project (and any associated ontology of artworks associated with, or consequent on, that definitional project) and set out the relationships and commonalities between different proposed definitions, and secondly, to use the results of this mapping to suggest what sort of position might be able to deal with the (structurally similar) problems that beset these other proposed definitions.

So, on the first point, if the different characterisations of an artwork within the different definitions of 'art' are aligned with the artwork process then we can see that these are those theories that approach the subject from the audience's perspective tend to characterise artworks solely in terms of

the *experience* or appreciation of a completed artefact and which tend to ignore its *manufacture*. These theories will tend to have an explicitly *aesthetic* and *perceptual* aspect, usually tied to audience appreciation of a completed artefact, usually assumed to be ready for appreciation.

Then there are those theories that characterise artworks as being some kind of artefact with certain properties doing some kind of thing: These theories concentrate on the properties of objects (broadly speaking) and their ability to generate aesthetic experiences, or to have resulted from a (perhaps specified kind of) intentional making. Lastly there are those theories that characterise artworks exclusively in terms of the activities involved in *making* artworks. These theories will tend to ignore aesthetic concerns and focus instead on an agent's intentions or contextually explained actions when making some artefact.

Aside from these come the various hybrid definitions in which different aspects of these positions are variously conjoined with characterisations of artefacts as produced by agents or as experienced by audiences.

My first claim then is that each of these theories can be mapped on to the artwork process to show that each concentrates exclusively on *some* part, or parts, of the process at the expense of other parts. So, although they appear superficially different, each can be structurally described as sharing common features using the framework of the artwork process. One phase of the artwork process, or some sub-set of phases within the total process is deemed *sufficient* to define 'artwork'.

This similar structural description derives from the fact that although each of these theories implicitly recognises the entire artwork process, each also explicitly relegates some parts of the process as inessential, or unimportant to the definition of 'artwork' offered. These parts, are then *excluded* from that explicit definition.

Consequently, there is also a structural similarity in how theories deal with *objections* to the proposed sufficiency of their account. So, objections raised about the *sufficiency* of any proposed definitions came from artworks plausibly claimed to necessarily require input from *other* excluded phases of the artwork process in order to be artworks.

For example, theories such as mimetic, symbolic form or expression theories, isolate the scope of the definition to the properties of the *made artefact* and (possibly) its impact (broadly speaking) on an audience. Objections to their sufficiency, therefore come from the making and the experience phases of the artwork process: That is, from non-art making actions that result in an appropriate object, or artworks that are not identifiable as such from the object of perception considered in isolation: Modernism produced artworks that were perceptually indiscernible from non-artworks. Philosophy then decided that non-perceptual factors were needed to differentiate artworks from non-artworks and that this needed to be reflected within theories or definitions of 'art'. This produces objections to the earlier theories.⁶

These objections then prompted the defence (ultimately unsuccessful, I'd say) of the theory either becoming extensionally prescriptive towards identified examples from art history so that for each kind of theory, a category of pseudo-artworks is created – things that may appear to be artworks, are treated as if they're artworks, but which actually given the terms of the theory, are not artworks (such as aesthetic based theories denying that readymades can 'really' be art); or of dismissing aspects of provenance and relational properties apparently necessary to an artwork's existence, as only art historically relevant - facts about the *artist* rather than the *artwork*.⁷ The form this defence takes is to ring-fence as sufficient the appropriately described phase of the artwork process, and to identify troubles thrown from elsewhere on the artwork process as in some way *epistemological or qualitative* but not *definitional* in order to preserve the proposed definition.⁸

Setting this out structurally shows that there an obvious immediate response to this problem of the sufficiency of *any* one traditional position within the genealogy of theories. That response has been to simply to *move*

⁶ The locus classicus for this approach is Danto (1964) & (1981).

⁷ For defences of maintaining a distinction between facts about a work and facts about an artist see for instance, Hanfling (1992); Lessing (2002). A summation of the earlier aesthetically focussed responses to contextualist definitions is given in Levinson (1990, p.38).

⁸ For an example of this see the discussion of Performance Theories below.

the definition of what an artwork is to a *different* phase of the artwork process to try a definition there. This tactical response has consequential effects: To take one example, if definition in terms of an uncontextualised object is now hopeless, then we can downplay the role of the aesthetic, so that *it* then becomes an *qualitative*, rather than *definitional*, feature of artworks. Then aesthetic questions get asked of artworks separately from classificatory questions, and we can search for the definition of 'artwork' elsewhere.

Indeed, for some, the aesthetic, once revealed as unnecessary to an artwork's status, can even be regarded as irrelevant to that status. As an example of this kind of move, consider Binkley's writings (1976 & 1977),⁹ which although explicitly not providing a definition (he's a non-essentialist), state that artworks are 'pieces' that have been indexed subject to the specifying actions of an artist where this specification (i) ranges over anything the artist chooses and (ii) functions to index an object as an artwork. For Binkley-type theories there is *no* role for the reception of the object – the ontologically relevant relationship exists between the act of an agent and an object, with success or failure criteria for making an artwork being determined exclusively by the agent. His account thus stands emblematic of this structural move of re-locating the account of 'artwork' to a different discrete sub-section of the artwork process and defining artworks exclusively there.

This structural analysis shows why such accounts are themselves also susceptible to the same kinds of objections as those they attempted to replace. Just as we can object to the artefact and aesthetic based theories in terms of how an artwork is *made*, we can object to indexing-type theories on the basis of *audience experience*: So, because at theoretical level, the idea of indexing may not allow failure, the theory is forced to become extensionally prescriptive towards actual art history because we think (a) such failure is *possible* and (b) has been *actual*; Or we effectively expand this second point about actual failure and take the necessity and sufficiency route to objections by highlighting artefacts that are not artworks *despite* indexing,

⁹ See Binkley, (1976) & (1977).

or in which an artwork would seem not to have been the subject of indexing.

So, simply moving from one part of the process to another just means that objections emerge from the phases of the artwork process *not* included within the definition. Structurally, it changes nothing - a different category of pseudo-artworks, specific to this definition, is once more created. Author-focussed indexing-type positions and spectator-focussed aesthetically based reception positions are *similar* theories with *similar* problems in terms of how each relate to the artwork process. The question is whether we can move beyond these competing attempts to a position where these structures of objections can no longer be made.

3. Performance Theories

It is against this structural background that I wish to consider 'performance theories' of art (articulated most forcibly and eloquently by Greg Currie (1989) and David Davies (2004)). These have been considered a massively revisionary approach to the project of defining artworks since they identify the artwork exclusively with the *actions* of artists. Can they provide a way out of this structure of argumentation?

Alas, no. Against the background of the artwork process, performance theories stand revealed as another alternative traditional theory, exactly modelling earlier attempts in terms of taking a discrete sub-section of the artwork process as the *exclusive* location sufficient to provide a definition of an artwork and relegating the other phases from its definitional project. 'Performance theories' have simply moved that exclusive location to another, previously unproposed, part of the artwork process.

This is not to denigrate them, but it does show that performance theories are structurally part of the *same* project - of where to exclusively locate the definition of an artwork within the artwork process - as the aesthetic and object based theories that came before. Where they do innovate of course, is by for the first time suggesting effectively removing the artefact or object from the definitional project. The difference to the already established Binkley-type indexing accounts is that in those the indexing was the making but the artefact or object itself remained the

artwork. Whereas performance theories identify the actions as the artwork itself.

Now, with this characterisation in mind, it is easy to locate the potential source of objections to performance theories. Since the theory defines an artwork with the actions of an author manufacturing an object, challenges will originate from the phases of the artwork process that this excludes – broadly speaking objects and their reception.

Just as exclusively aesthetically based theories are attacked for ignoring the contribution of how artworks are made, the performance theory is susceptible to attack for ignoring the contribution of artefacts as objects of experience, interpretation or criticism to a definition of artworks. This provides a guide for where within the artwork process we can find potential objections and what kind of objections those might be.

Here, I mention briefly two such objections: The first concerns lost or destroyed artefacts and the second situations in which an artist goes through the performance of making (and thereby makes an artwork), but where nothing to experience, (in the broadest sense) results.

Lost and/or destroyed artefacts are a problem for performance theories, since, as these theories identify the artwork exclusively with an artist's *actions*, the result of those actions is not itself the artwork – Davies (2004, pp. 50-74), for example, calls objects 'the focus of appreciation' of an artist's achievement. So, when the artist stops working, the ontological work is done and the work of criticism and appreciation begins. The first problem is that if the artefacts themselves are not a necessary part of the artwork then every painting in every gallery can be burned to a pile of inappreciable cinders without losing or destroying a single artwork. As a corollary, artworks that we think no longer exist, where the artefact has been lost or destroyed, are, on the terms of performance theories, revealed as not in fact lost, since we know that they *were* made, and their making was what constituted those artworks. It is comfort then, to know that Aristotle's *On Comedy*, or that Titian's *Battle of Spoleto* are not lost but only that the focus of our appreciation has gone.

The second objection is the converse of the first. This is, to use

Davies' (2004) terminology¹⁰, (for shorthand): The articulated artistic statement that is presumably made but never articulated – this is when an artist performs all her actions that, on the performance theory's terms, *could* constitute her artistic statement and so makes an artwork, but where *nothing to experience issues from that work*. For Davis' (2004) original formulation, this means there is no articulation of an artistic statement in a vehicular medium. In these circumstances, since the artwork *is* the performance of the artist, an artwork *is* made. It can't also require that as well as the performance itself, its expression in a vehicular medium is also necessary, since this will stop the theory being a pure performance theory. Moreover, there would appear to be no criterion by which a pure performance theorist can differentiate these undoubtedly different situations, since they all, on the terms of the performance theory, have the same evidence base. For the performance theorist, these works, along with destroyed artefacts, occupy a category of inappreciable yet existing, artworks. We can question the point of this category and ask how it is different from the category of non-existing artworks.¹¹ This is the weak point of performance theories identified through the analysis of its structure in respect of the artwork process.

However, concluding the wrongness of performance theories from these thoughts would be false, since for performance theories, because artworks are a different kind of thing - actions, or action types¹² - they are made and lost under different circumstances. Indeed, on the terms of the performance theory, because paintings, books etc. are *records* of the performances of actions by artists, it might be said that *all* artworks are lost

¹⁰ See Davies (2004 – 'artistic statement' 52-54, its relation to vehicular medium 52-62, and defined, 59).

¹¹ There are consequent problems for the performance theory, perhaps most pressing for conceptual art cases, which similarly target its failure to provide a criterion for differentiating between scenarios. The first is that if there is no objective product to my making actions, how and why does this differ from me simply doing things and not thereby making an artwork? The second is that the performance theory provides no criterion through which to discern successful from unsuccessful attempts to make an artwork. Moreover, if no artefact is produced as a focus of appreciation, what is the basis for the difference between you reporting me performing these actions, and you reporting that I have made an artwork? Without any resulting artefact, then the artwork cannot be spoken about *without* speaking about me and my actions. Work has become authorship.

¹² For Currie, for instance, artworks are 'action types'.

once that performance is complete.¹³

Yet, in a sense, the precise force of these *particular* objections do not matter – what it demonstrates is that the sorts of objection that will be formed against the performance theory are determined by how its definition is focussed exclusively on one part of the artwork process. These problems arise broadly from its definitional unhooking of the artist's actions from the result of those actions.

Similarly, for its defences against those objections: These will be structurally similar to those of other traditional theories. So, the performance theorist will say that as long as an artistic statement is articulated an artwork is made, and so these are not problems really – by demanding an object I've shifted away from artworks, (which are art related performative actions or action types), to talk about what I'd need for appreciation (i.e. objects). So, what I've done is highlighted odd situations within the performance theory of inappreciable yet existing, artworks, so this is an epistemological problem of art appreciation. Performance theories stand revealed then as mirror images of aesthetic empiricism.

So, despite providing a very uncomfortable fit to our intuitions, to argue simply that performance theories cut across our existing classifications is to assume an ontology that it does not accept. These objections, do however force the question of the *point* of the performance theory, since they raise severe doubts about what is *valued* in artworks. It presumably would be common ground that it's of immense regret that the artefacts are lost and destroyed – and, whilst what remains - our knowledge of the artist's achievement - is undoubtedly of value – it's of less value to us, separated in time and space, than the result of their labours: Or perhaps these arguments point to a wider suggestion that it is an aim for any theory of art to be able to reflect the current sources of art's value in human culture – which, I think currently include objects that can be appreciated separately to consideration of the actions that went into making them.

¹³ The fact I am unclear how actions or action types can be lost may be a consequent problem for performance theories, since it becomes hard to make sense of the whole category of 'lost artworks'.

4. Contextualism & the Theory Spectrum

Now, in order to use the artwork process and to think more about this definitional project and ask whether we can move beyond these competing attempts, to a position where these challenges can no longer be made, I want to introduce another notion: The 'theory spectrum'. The theory spectrum is basically a map of which part(s) of the artwork process a particular definition homes in on. Each theory can be positioned within the theory spectrum according to what is *included* with the definition of 'artwork' and what is *excluded*. What is considered sufficient for a definition and what parts it does not. This can be set out in the following diagram:

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Artwork Process Stage | | |
| <i>Making</i> | <i>Object</i> | <i>Experience</i> |
| Theory Type | | |
| <i>Performance Theories</i> | <i>Artefact Property Theories</i> | <i>Aesthetic Response Theories</i> |
| Hybrid Theories | | |
| <i>Making and Object</i> | | <i>Object and Reception</i> |
| (Complex) Contextualism | | |

At one extreme the performance theories concentrate attention on *process*, to the exclusion of *objects* and *audiences*. They are then extremely amenable to those *making* artworks. At the other extreme there are aesthetically based theories concentrating their attention on perceptual objects. These are extremely amenable to those seeking to *enjoy or understand* artworks. Performance theories have great success in dealing

with the variety of ways in artworks can be made in a post-medium artworld but can produce extremely counter-intuitive results when applied to appreciating artworks from the past. Aesthetic theories are good at explaining the point and value of encountering all and any art but hopeless when presented with the recent and contemporary artistic practice. In the middle of this spectrum are the object based theories, on attack from each side by somehow indiscernible non-artwork counterparts, either not sharing a required property, or not being made in the same appropriate way.

Mapped this way, it's obvious that there is an alternative to the traditional one (or two) phase approach: To reject the structure of theory that ring-fences phases or parts of the artwork process as the exclusive location of a sufficient artwork definition and to instead *extend* the definition of artwork throughout the artwork process to include *all* of its phases within its scope.

My claim then is that a definition of 'artwork' can only hope to be free from these structures of argumentation if it includes within its compass the whole artwork process - from the moment of the artist's initial inspiration to the experience of the audience consciously appreciating the completed artwork: The history of production of the artwork, the work itself and its appreciation are each and all *necessary* components in a definition or underpinning ontology of 'artwork'. Such theories will reach out to position themselves across *all* the theory spectrum, overlapping with the positions of all the traditional theories discussed thus far. My claim then is that the ability of such positions to be immune from the structures of argumentation that any traditional theory is prey to is a *prima facie* compelling reason (at the very least at a pragmatic level) to prefer process-wide theories. Beneath this however, I also think that this methodological point suggests that being immune to similar structures of argumentation points to the fact that a process-wide theory is actually providing a better kind of attempted definition of 'artwork' – one that will be extensionally adequate in the face of past, contemporary and future artistic practise.

In talking of such process-wide theories, I am talking of course, about any form of contextualism that can meet these requirements. Some forms of contextualism can potentially reach across each different part of

the artwork process and include them all: (i.e. $t^1 - t^3$ and $p^1 - p^3$) within a proposed definition of 'artwork'. These kinds of contextualist account also reach out across the theory spectrum to incorporate the reach of all traditional t^n or p^n focussed accounts (either concentrating on a single phase or hybrid).

These positions, increasingly baroque in their formulations – recursive, conjunctive, disjunctive, clustering etc. – still face the same type of challenge to their necessity and sufficiency as the others. However, because they reach out across the artwork process, these challenges are themselves more baroque, but no less relevant for that. Thus, for recursive theories there are the problems of first art, for institutional theories the problem of the romantic artist and for recursive historical theories the problems of alien art.¹⁴ These are well established questions and I will not go into them here. However, contextualist accounts are crucially different in that they can, because they do not *exclude* any phase of the artwork process from the definition, tweak their accounts in order to accommodate these baroque objections, (if necessary by fiat, or ideas such as co-option) without also having to become prescriptive towards the extension of art or actual artistic practise or indeed sacrificing whatever intuitive, or pre-theoretical fit they have to how we think about and what we value in artworks.

Indeed, it may be a tacit acknowledgement of this re-tweaking potential that underpins the attraction of cluster theories,¹⁵ as a cluster can contain elements ranging across the entire artwork process and can, if structured appropriately, permit the inclusion of additional sufficient reasons to make something an artwork from anywhere within that process.¹⁶ However, I don't think an explicitly non-essentialist cluster theory is required, since I think it's arguable that a disjunctive definition can always more rigorously do the work that a cluster theory can do.

To conclude, my claim is that if you are in any way invested in the

¹⁴ For these theories and their problems see respectively: Levinson, (1990); Stephen Davies (1991); Dickie (1984); Beardsley (1983); Carney (1984); Currie (1993); Stecker, (1997).

¹⁵ For cluster theories see Weitz (1956); Wollheim (1980); Adajian (2003); Davies, Stephen (2004); Gaut (2005).

¹⁶ This is a claim Gaut makes especially for his formulation.

overall project of defining 'artwork' then the ideas of the artwork process and the theory spectrum set the structural framework for that project – and my specific claim here is that if you define anywhere within that process you have to define everywhere throughout that process.

Viewed through this structural framework, what is required is a definition of 'artwork', that is complexly contextualist, in that its formulation reaches out to include necessarily *all* phases of the artwork process from maker to spectator.¹⁷ Thus the various conjunctive, disjunctive and ever more complex definitions, or cluster accounts often criticised for being amenable only to philosophers rather than practitioners, may be what's philosophically required to capture this complex practice¹⁸. All other theories that *exclude* some part of the artwork process, no matter which, are *bound* to fail, since they will be susceptible to counter-examples that undermine their sufficiency. They simply are not able to capture some part of the artwork process in its lived and enjoyed actual complexity.

We might ask why this might be so – what is so special about artworks that they are like this and need to be defined in terms of their whole process of manufacture? I think the answer lies in history: The grouping together of various different creative practices that produce cultural artefacts under the designation 'art' has led to an ontological variety within artworks of the different art forms and even within the same form – artworks then, can perhaps be any of material objects, events, abstract structures and continuants. So, 'artwork' as a term is best viewed as an umbrella term, collecting together various different individual practices that issue in productions with different ontologies. Additionally, within the umbrella term 'artwork' we not only have this ontological variety but also a developmental history in terms of activities that can be grouped under the umbrella term 'artwork'. In trying to define 'artwork' then, we are trying to define, under a single concept, a group of things with different ontologies and existence and individuation conditions. This means that a search for

¹⁷ That's not to say that it need to include all the sub-parts within each section; i.e. about intentional making, or type of intention etc. This is where the squabbles of the fruitful present, and the successful future, lie.

¹⁸ Stecker (2000, pp.45-64) makes this claim.

what they might have in common has to come from how they relate to the concept under which they are made e.g. 'art', rather than anything arising from the particular ontology of any one art form.

Given this, the process approach provides the best chance of providing a definitional framework that can apply to *all* artworks irrespective of the differences between art forms and individual artworks and which can cope with the developmental history of art as it has unfolded in the past and will unfold in the future: Whatever and however artworks have been, or will be made, they can be mapped onto the artwork process.

Very tentatively, I would suggest something that could be called 'manifested performance theory' as a plausible whole-process theory (others are available of course!).¹⁹ This would be a position in which (1) the achievement of an artist in making an artwork, as an item within an historically evolving and ongoing cultural practice is recognised, but where (2) there is a requirement that this achievement is manifested within an artefact²⁰ that has determinate existence and individuation conditions separate to that artist's actions, and which (3) permit an audience to meaningfully view that object as an item within that evolving cultural practice. This kind of theory has necessary requirements that bear on maker, artefact and audience as equal component parts of its whole. Additional requirements might impact on the precise formulation of each part of this definition.

In building this kind of definition, elements of the partial definitions of 'artwork' discussed above can be retained. These elements, abstracted from their definitional role, might nevertheless, when built upon the foundation of a bare process-wide *definition* of artwork, provide the first steps in a more substantial *theory* of artwork providing insight into the value of artworks, and indeed art. The way this complexly contextualist definition gets formulated will determine precisely *what* in each phase of the artwork

¹⁹ This may actually, on some readings of the theory, be the performance theory. However, I'm clear that it's not the performance theory since it has necessary requirements for maker, for artefact and for audience as component parts.

²⁰ 'Artefact' here is to be construed widely, meaning 'cultural artefact' and to include physical things, specifications of conditions, processes, events, etc.

process becomes definitional and what qualitative – but *something* has to be there from each phase.

So, for instance Levinson's (1990) and Davies' (2004) positions, can be seen within this structural framework as attempts to build up a characterisation of what's needed in an account of phase 1 of the artwork process. Complex contextualism doesn't *require* this, but does require that there be something there. Given this framework the debate becomes whether what is offered as accounts of each phase of the process is accurate and/or works as part of a wider process-wide account.

However, that's not to say that all forms of complex contextualism are as good as each other. One form of complex contextualism is simply to weld the performance, expression and aesthetic positions together in as full-bodes a form of each is possible. This would be a very thick definition of 'artwork' and will as such emerge as extremely prescriptive towards the current extension of art, requiring an artwork to overcome three individually robust and necessary hurdles in order to be an artwork. This is caused by this theory's attempt to pack too much content into its requirements of each phase of the art work process. This should be seen as a practical demerit in any offered version of complex contextualism. However, it is open to us to see this prescriptiveness and attempt to cure it through re-tweaking our complexly contextualist account so that we move some requirements from the definitional to the epistemological whilst retaining coverage of all phases of the artwork process.²¹ The effect of this of course, (especially if repeated in the face of multiple challenges against this offered definition) is to make the content of the definition thinner, whilst elevating the possibility of a progressively thicker and thicker theory of how we experience and judge the quality of artworks.

So, why manifested performance theory? For me, it's because it's the kind of theory that results from this weeding and refining and focussing of the varieties of complex contextualism. This would be a position in which

²¹ This mirrors the above mentioned tactic adopted by the various competing traditional 'one-phase' theories which moved problematic features from the definitional to the qualitative. Now, however, there's a requirement that each phase retains at least a toehold in the definitional, for the sufficiency of the entire project.

the performance theory's concentration on the value artworks have in representing the achievement of an artist; the historical and recursive theories' insight that art has a developmental history as a concept as well as a narrative of individual artworks; and the ability of aesthetic theories to explain why we value experiencing artworks rather than just reading art criticism or the biographies of artists, could all be incorporated.

Additional requirements might impact on the precise formulation of each part of this definition. For instance, independent conditions relating to the *kinds* of artefacts that can be produced as artworks, and the properties that artefacts within those kinds might have might have, may also obtain. There might be requirements about the *types* of work an artist can, or must, do – perhaps related to particular circumstances of author, material and action - in order to produce an artefact that meets those conditions: There might be requirements on the artefacts and on the audience that determine the circumstances under which we make mistakes about artworks and whether our response to artefacts as artworks can be correct. Finally, *how* we characterise our artworks might determine the nature of these mistakes – for instance, the properties we attribute to the actions of an artist may be incompatible with the properties of the artefact he makes, and we will need a way to decide these cases.²² However, it may be that beyond and beneath these we cannot safely go.

Yet, it's here I think, that fruitful philosophical work can be found – by investigating these and other consequences for the projects of defining 'artwork', or providing a substantial theory of 'art' - using the tools of the artwork process and the theory spectrum.²³

5. Coda

It might be, if you think the entire definitional project as wholly wrong-

²² I am grateful to Derek Matravers for highlighting this issue.

²³ A much earlier and substantially different version of this paper benefited from the comments of Derek Matravers & the attendees of the Graduate Aesthetics conference, University of Southampton, September 2007. An abridged version of this paper benefited enormously from comments of attendees of the European Society for Aesthetics conference in Berlin 2017.

headed, that the ideas of the artwork process and theory spectrum can be recast as tools in an epistemological project.

The artwork process and theory spectrum approach can also provide a framework within which other substantial questions about art and individual artworks can be approached. For instance, in those instances where we are perhaps unsure of what the artwork is - an event, a physical object, an installation, a set of conditions etc. - we can use the artwork process to try to locate the most plausible candidate for that artwork's ontology and ask 'If the artwork is like this, then what is phase (i) and what is phase (iii)? We can then choose, comparing the possibilities for the option that gives maximal coherence. The idea of the artwork process can provide a rationale for obtaining the most rationally compelling answer in each case.

Additionally, these ideas might shed light on what commitments we need in order to *know* that something is an artwork. One potential way of viewing such a project might be to suggest that in order to be correct in an identification of an artwork at phase 3 of the process, one has to have appropriately acquired knowledge of whether and if so how that putative artwork when through phases 1 and 2 of the process. As with ontology, if you want to know at all, you have to have knowledge from all phases of the artwork process. However, it's important to remember that these tools will not contribute to the epistemological project of what counts as appropriate methods of *gaining knowledge* about artworks, but rather about the *body of knowledge* that is required in order to securely identify something as an artwork – we need to know about how it was made, what sort of thing it is, and how it is meant to be used once made.²⁴

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²⁴ I am grateful to James Hamilton for prompting this discussion.

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