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1. Introduction

Questions about the optimal scope of theory and the relevance of practice pervade both philosophy of art and philosophy of science, as we seek to identify, classify, and explain what exists in the artworld and the natural world. Both fields grapple with issues of ontology (e.g., what *is* art? or what *is* an organism?) and epistemology (e.g., how do we know? or who decides?). The occasional intersection of philosophy of science and philosophy of art allows us to glean insights about one from the other. For instance, the search for a comprehensive and unified theory of art has repeatedly come up short; attempts to articulate such a theory have produced oversimplified accounts prone to exception, or exception-less accounts that are so broad, they fail to reliably demarcate art from non-art. Thus, philosophy of science—no stranger to the complexities of classification—may be of service.

In what follows, I will draw a fruitful analogy between the philosophy of science and the philosophy of art: between “species” and “art” as concepts. The analogy is especially helpful because, in both disciplines, our understanding of the concepts is altered once we focus on their roles *in practice*. A turn of our attention from theory to practice motivates concept pluralism, the view that there are multiple legitimate ways to instantiate a particular concept. Having argued for art concept pluralism, I will propose a disjunctive definition of art.

2. Art and Species as Open Concepts

Half a century ago, Morris Weitz (1956), in a classic essay, cast doubt on the possibility of formulating a classical definition of art. A classical definition of art is “a definition in terms of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions” (Longworth and Scarantino, 2010, p. 151). Weitz surveys several definitions and scrutinizes each one to determine whether it successfully demarcates all members of the concept “art” from non-members. No single definition successfully demarcates the concept; for each attempt, there are “instances of art that do not satisfy the proposed definition, or instances of non-art that do satisfy it” (ibid.). Weitz concludes that, “theory—in the requisite classical sense—is *never* forthcoming in aesthetics” (Weitz, 1956, p. 27). This is because the inadequacies of aesthetic theories “reside in a fundamental misconception of art” (ibid.).

According to Weitz, art is an “open concept,” meaning “a situation or case can be imagined or secured which would call for some sort of *decision* on our part to extend the use of the concept to cover this, or to close the concept and invent a new one to deal with the new case and its new property” (Weitz, 1956, p. 31). In other words, art is not a kind whose members are recognized on the basis of empirical verification. Instead, it requires a decision on the part of artists, aestheticians, and critics to expand or restrict the concept of “art.” Because no set of necessary and sufficient conditions can be articulated to satisfy a definition of art, it is an open concept. As such, Weitz says, we ought to abandon the definitional project in philosophy of art: “Aesthetic theory tries to define what cannot be defined in its requisite sense” (Weitz, 1956, p. 28).

Weitz’s argument resembles a movement away from monism in philosophy of science. As philosophers become increasingly pessimistic about the search for fundamental theories of scientific concepts, they are motivated to reject concept monism in favor of concept pluralism. A

famous example of this flavor of pluralism in philosophy of science is the recognition of multiple legitimate species concepts.¹

In pre-evolutionary biology, species were thought to be definable by a set of necessary and sufficient criteria that could comprehensively demarcate the concept. In other words, pre-evolutionary biology relied on monistic conceptual assumptions about what it means to be a species, and how we can pick them out in nature. An organism belonged to a species so long as it possessed that species' essence—a property held by all and only members of the species.

Darwin and Wallace's theory of natural selection challenged the contemporary notion of species, and biological theory was forced to adapt. The concept of descent with modification and the implication of a last universal common ancestor meant that all life on earth is related somewhere along the evolutionary timeline. The "essence" of a species—some individually necessary and jointly sufficient properties unique to all and only members of a given taxon—was no longer viable. Theoreticians began to propose numerous "species concepts" (i.e., criteria to demarcate one species from another) in order to fill the hole that essentialism had left.

But another problem arises: it seems impossible to find a set of criteria for demarcating species that is universally applicable to *all* life on earth, given that nature's forms, while most beautiful, are endlessly diverse. That is, being a reptile is something entirely different than being a bacterium (or a bird, or a fish, or a star-nosed mole) because each taxon is grouped together in

¹ Since preparing this manuscript, I have learned that the analogy is also drawn by Christy Mag Uidhir and P. D. Magnus (2011). However, our proposals differ in a crucial respect. Uidhir and Magnus argue that disjunctive definitions are monistic in nature and, as such, are undesirable. In their view, disjunctive definitions are incompatible with a pluralistic art concept. I disagree. Here, I endorse a disjunctive definition of multiple art concepts.

virtue of different mechanisms. For instance, consider the mechanism central to Ernst Mayr's biological species concept (BSC). The BSC states that a species is a population of interbreeding organisms that is reproductively isolated from other populations of interbreeding organisms (Mayr, 1982). Therefore, according to Mayr's concept, animals can be easily grouped as distinct species. However, the BSC becomes incoherent for bacterial species because bacteria are asexual reproducers. They are not populations of organisms that interbreed. Therefore, the BSC is practically useless when it comes to demarcating species of bacteria.

This dilemma (often called the "species problem") represents how concept pluralism has come into vogue in philosophy of biology. As populations in nature are riddled with so much variation that it has proved impossible to articulate a single, unitary species concept, the general biological consensus is that there are *multiple* ways of being a species. That is, to be a species is to be one of several things, such as a population of reproductively isolated interbreeding organisms (Mayr, 1982), the least inclusive taxon of a monophyletic lineage (e.g., Mishler and Brandon, 1987), or a population subject to the same ecological pressures (e.g., Van Valen, 1976), etc. Various formulations of the species concept comprise various criteria—the identity conditions that demarcate one species from another. Nonetheless, each recognized species concept has equal purchase on being a proper "species."

The analogy between philosophy of science and philosophy of art begins to reveal itself when one considers the species problem alongside Weitz's open concept argument. Much like philosophers and a theory of art, biologists have struggled to find a classical definition of species. No single concept (like no single theory of art) has successfully accounted for all and only species members; there are always species members excluded by a definition (e.g., bacteria are left out of the BSC) or non-species members included by a definition (e.g., genus members

are part of the same monophyletic lineage). Therefore, the frustrations that underlie the definitional projects in art and biology are analogous, as are the initial conditions that pave the way for concept pluralism.

Notice, however, that this rejection of monism is not motivated by an abstract analysis of the species concept, but an analysis of the concept in practice. A practical analysis reveals the limitations of a “fundamental” definition of species, and how it is unable to meet the needs of biologists across the board. In other words, the shift toward pluralism follows from a *practice turn*. The “practice turn” in philosophy of science can be understood as “a turn of our attention to scientific action” instead of theory alone; it “highlights the activities that are revealed when we look at the processes and doings of science by scientists and scientific communities...” (Kendig, 2016, p. 3). A practice turn begets pluralism because it reveals how scientists invoke, ignore, and tweak parts of a concept in order to satisfy their epistemic aims. Different aims will mean different formulations of the concept. In sum, the pluralistic ontology of species—the fact that “species” can refer to several different kinds of things—results from the various epistemic demands of biological practice.

At this point, the reader may ask, so what? A practice turn may warrant concept pluralism for species, but why should I expect it to apply to art? Should we expect that the ontology of art, like species, is grounded in the relevant practices? The issue has been taken up by philosophers such as David Davies, Julian Dodd, and Amie Thomasson. In the next section, I consider each of their perspectives in turn.

3. A Practice Turn in Philosophy of Art

David Davies answers our question in the affirmative: “it is our practice that has primacy and that must be foundational for ontological endeavors, because it is our practice that determines what kinds of properties, in general, artworks must have” (Davies, 2009, p. 162). Davies calls this thesis the “pragmatic constraint,” and its proponents “argue that there are no ‘practice-independent grounds,’ other than internal criteria such as consistency, for privileging particular ontologies of art” (Davies, 2009, p. 163). Julian Dodd, on the other hand, does not grant such authority to our artistic practices. It is precisely because of the unscientific means by which we develop the concepts implicit in artistic practices that he deems them unreliable when it comes to questions of ontology (Dodd, 2005). On Dodd’s view, our commonsense notions about the objects of artistic practice are akin to the commonsense notions of folk biology. Without a scientific methodology, one could seem justified in concluding, for example, that whales are fish. But nothing about this pre-scientific taxonomic practice will change the fact that our conclusion—that whales are fish—is plain wrong. There is an objective fact of the matter, whether we are aware of it or not. We will not uncover the ontology of art by analyzing our practices, but through a “quasi-scientific methodology” of metaphysical inquiry, i.e., evaluating competing metaphysical theories as we do scientific hypotheses: with respect to certain virtues such as “explanatory power, simplicity, and integration with the findings of other domains” (Dodd, 2005, p. 1051). As we employ this methodology to scrutinize them, the concepts implicit in our artistic practices (e.g., the nature of this artwork, this art form, or art in general) are as subject to revision as our folk biological concepts.

Opposite the ontological realist is the “descriptivist,” according to whom “the facts of the matter in the ontology of art are not objective, but determined by the folk-ontological beliefs in our critical and appreciative practice” (Dodd, 2005, p. 1055). Dodd attributes this label to Davies

and his pragmatic constraint, but Davies' commitment to the metaphysical primacy of practice pales in comparison to that of Amie Thomasson. Thomasson criticizes the view that there is more to be learned about the ontological nature of artworks than is read off from the practices in which they are embedded:

An influential paradigm of what it is to acquire knowledge has come from a certain (perhaps naïve) view of how the natural sciences and other empirical investigations work. According to this paradigm—call it the discovery view—the world contains a broad range of fully determinate, mind-independent facts about which everyone may be ignorant or in error, but (some of) which the scientist seeks to discover by substantive empirical investigations.... So, similarly, knowledge claims in the ontology of art are often presented as discoveries of fully determinate, mind-independent facts about the ontological status of works of art of various kinds, about which everyone may be ignorant or in error... whatever its merits as an understanding of scientific or other empirical investigations—thinking of the process of acquiring knowledge about the ontology of art on that model (as, I think, many have been inclined to do) leads us badly astray.

(Thomasson, 2005, p. 221)

In the following passage, Thomasson discusses how we rely on “competent grounders” in order to establish the reference of the terms we aim to define:

...the ontology of the work of art must be something we learn about through conceptual analysis of the associated concepts of people who competently ground (and reground) the reference of terms like ‘symphony’ and ‘painting,’ not something we can seek to *discover* through investigations into mind-independent reality. Moreover, competent grounders *cannot* (as a whole) be massively ignorant of or in error about the ontological nature of

the art-kind they refer to since their concepts are determinative of this. Thus would-be grounders have some forms of epistemic privilege regarding the ontological status of the art-kinds (if any) they refer to that everyone lacks regarding, say the biological nature of whales or the chemical nature of soy protein. (Thomasson, 2005, p. 223)

Thomasson is concerned with the ontology of an artwork kind (e.g., paintings or symphonies). So, too, are Davies and Dodd in the passages above. However, Thomasson's point translates nicely from an ontology of artworks to an ontology of art simpliciter. I expect that we may read these passages with the concept of "art" in mind, as opposed to concepts of artworks or art forms, without obscuring or misrepresenting her position. These passages are especially helpful for our species analogy because they put the ontological status of art in direct opposition to the nature of empirical discoveries. Indeed, Thomasson is right to doubt the "perhaps naïve" view of scientific discovery. However, she may be wrong to suggest that those who ground natural-kind terms lack "some forms of privilege" possessed by those who ground art-kind terms. In other words, the descriptivist position seems to assume that, unlike artworks, there is some objective fact of the matter for natural kinds irrespective of whatever concepts are employed in scientific practice. However, even this assumption is too conservative. While it is true that the content of our scientific concepts is constrained by the natural world in a way that our art concepts are not, it has become increasingly clear in recent decades that how we ground those concepts is interest-specific, and their ontology is entrenched in the nature of the relevant scientific practice. This is certainly the case with species.

Marc Ereshefsky demonstrates how a practice turn undermines the attempt to articulate an objective definition of species (Ereshefsky, 1998). Ereshefsky emphasizes how biologists finesse the species concept in order to meet the needs of their research program. He recognizes

that, for those studying sexually reproductive organisms, “species” will often (but not always) invoke the BSC. At the same time, for microbiologists studying asexually reproductive organisms, “species” must mean something entirely different. It might refer to the least inclusive taxon within a monophyletic lineage. Sometimes, however, due to processes such as gene transfer between members of different species, a genomic analysis will not produce clear monophyletic phylogenies. This is an instructive example of how interest-specific biological kinds can be: in such circumstances where clear phylogenies are not feasible, biologists need *some* species concept for pragmatic purposes. They are not “carving nature at its joints,” nor are they trying to. They need only to provision a concept that is ontologically sturdy *enough* to further their research, i.e., coherent enough to plug into a population genetics model or provide some useful insights into evolutionary histories. Thus, they will sometimes rely on a “phylogenetic species concept,” which combines a conventional threshold of 70% genetic similarity and a “discriminative phenotypic property” (Rosselló-Mora and Amann, 2011, p. 59). In fact, central as it is to biological taxonomy, the species concept is so muddled in microbiology that its practitioners often rely on “operational taxonomic units” instead (e.g., Caron et al., 2009).

My goal with this analogy is to demonstrate that Thomasson’s picture of practice-sensitive ontology is a more accurate reflection of the messy, pragmatic realities of scientific methodology than Dodd’s discovery view. To depict scientific discovery as something that gets at an “objective” and “mind-independent” reality fatally ignores the various ways in which scientists, through their research interests, ground the concepts that layfolk assume are fundamental. Although nature can “push back” on a concept and render it unsuccessful (e.g., if I were to assert that a species is a group of animals that feed at the same time of day, my concept would be nearly useless), biologists play an undeniable role in the features they choose to

emphasize in their species concepts. These decisions are informed by how integral the relevant features are to their research practices—the organisms they study, the questions they aim to answer, and the models they build to answer them. Any efforts to identify the one, true nature of the species concept will be in vain. As such, we similarly look to “competent grounders” who, as Thomasson says, have a degree of epistemic privilege regarding the ontological status of (at least some) natural kinds. Consider Philip Kitcher’s “cynical” species concept: “Species are those groups of organisms which are recognized as species by competent taxonomists” (Kitcher, 1984, p. 308). It is a sentiment shared by Darwin: “I mean by species, those collections of individuals, which have been so designated by naturalists” (see Stauffer, 1975, p. 98). Albeit a bit tongue-in-cheek, these testimonies support my argument for a practice turn. If the scientific consensus is that answers to questions such as “what is a species?”—questions whose answers seem *prima facie* objective and discoverable through scientific methodology—rely, to some extent, on the messy and interest-oriented practices of scientists, then an ontology of art will depend as much, if not more, on the relevant interests of practitioners. Moreover, this conceptual sensitivity to the aims of a given practice is not at all incompatible with Dodd’s quasi-scientific methodology. Practical utility is a virtue that should not be ignored in one’s evaluation.

Therefore, if scientific discovery is the gold standard for Dodd, and even scientific discovery is contingent, in part, on the ad hoc concepts employed in the relevant practices, then Davies’ and Thomasson’s descriptivism emerges the victor: the ontological nature of art is described by artistic practices and reflected in the concepts implicit in those practices. I will say more about what it means for a concept to be “implicit in a practice” in the next section, but for now, I hope to have shown that a practice turn in the philosophy of art is warranted.

4. From Practice to Pluralism

The next step—from a practice turn to concept pluralism—easily follows. People engage in various artistic practices. Those practices range from creation, reappropriation, criticizing, and consuming, to name a few. More specifically, artistic practices might include a first attempt at a landscape painting, curating an exhibit at a local gallery, or tilting your head in confusion at a piece that does not seem to belong. Implicit in each of these activities is a concept of art—an understanding of what art *is*—and the nature of the resulting object, its status as an art object, is determined by that concept. Two such concepts (for which I borrow Stephen Davies’ terminology) are often discussed: functional art and procedural art (Davies, 1990).

According to a functionalist definition, art is that which is intended to fulfill some designated function. Art achieves aesthetic excellence or incites an aesthetic experience. Art is representational and aims to achieve verisimilitude. Art aims to pose an intellectual, social, or moral challenge. Art aims to elicit emotion, either through evocative images or significant form. Consider, for example, the Formalist theory as Morris Weitz puts it: “The nature of art, what it *really* is, so [the] theory goes, is a unique combination of certain elements (the specifiable plastic ones) in their relations. Anything which is art is an instance of significant form; and anything which is not art has no such form” (Weitz, 1956, p. 28). Here, the centerpiece of the definition is an instance of significant form. If we turn our attention to practice, we will find that this definition captures an art concept held by *some* practitioners who create a piece with the intention of fulfilling a particular function. For other practitioners, significant form may only be a minor consideration, if it is considered at all. Next, consider the Emotionalist theory as Weitz considers it: “the requisite defining property is not significant form but rather the expression of emotion in some sensuous public medium” (ibid.). Here, the centerpiece of the definition is an

intended expression of emotion. If we turn our attention to practice, we will also find that the Emotionalist definition captures an art concept held by *some* practitioners, yet for other practitioners, expression of emotion may only be a minor consideration, if it is considered at all.

According to a proceduralist definition, art is that which participates in the right procedures. Art is what we go to the concert hall or museum to consume. Art is what is written about by art critics. Art is that which is sold at Sotheby's or Christie's. Consider the Institutional theory, originated by Arthur Danto and most prominently defended by George Dickie: "A work of art in the descriptive sense is (1) an artifact (2) upon which some society or some sub-group of a society has conferred the status of candidate for appreciation" (Dickie, 1969, p. 254). Here, the centerpiece of the definition is the procedural act of situating an object within the artworld, thereby rendering it a candidate for appreciation. If we turn our attention to the relevant practices, we will find that the procedural concept plays a vital role in the work of *some* practitioners in *some* contexts. This particular definition accommodates famously "hard cases," such as the Dada ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp or the Brillo boxes of Andy Warhol. These pieces are not easily incorporated by many other definitions. The Institutional theory describes a different kind of art concept—a concept implicit in the artworld practices (e.g., curating, housing traditional and revolutionary pieces alongside one another, juxtaposing, etc.) required to understand many avant-garde pieces *as art*. Yet for some practitioners (e.g., folk artists, hobby artists), the candidacy for appreciation in the artworld may be a minor consideration, if it is considered at all.

The reader may notice that one venerable concept remains unacknowledged thus far in my treatment: a historical concept, perhaps most famously articulated by Jerrold Levinson (1979). According to Levinson's "intentional-historical" definition, "a work of art is a thing

intended for regard-as-a-work-of-art: regard in any ways works of art existing prior to it have been correctly regarded” (Levinson, 1979, p. 234). This definition was initially presented as an alternative to Institutionalism, intended to resolve the problems it introduced. For instance, one virtue of the intentional-historical definition is its ability to accommodate “private, isolated art which is constituted as art in the mind of the artist—and on no one’s behalf but [their] own and that of *potential* experiences of it” (Levinson, 1979, p. 233). It allows that something can exist in “perfect mutual oblivion” with the artworld and still be a legitimate instance of art. This virtue, among many others, is an unmistakable contribution of the intentional-historical definition. It offers explanatory value in that it explains why many of the traditions of the artworld exist as they do. It tells us why so many pieces of art are paintings, sculptures, symphonies, etc. It tells us why art takes the form or medium that it often takes, but it does not provide us with all the conceptual tools we need to understand what art is.

The intentional-historical definition fails to accommodate *all* recognized instances of art for the same reason that simple functionalist definitions fail: it undermines relevant artworld practices that are necessary to baptize the contributions of artistic revolutions. As with many attempts at a unifying definition of art, the avant-garde “hard cases” are the thread that unravels the tapestry. Levinson himself acknowledges the nontrivial issue that the *point* of avant-garde and revolutionary art is that it is *not* regarded as art has been regarded. He proposes two possible solutions—either liberalizing the relevant notion of intent (e.g., intent for regard as art has been regarded *or* in contrast to how art has been regarded) or allowing for disingenuous intentions to qualify (e.g., smuggling in a new kind of regard under the guise of a historical regard). Daniel Wilson (2015) has compellingly argued that these proposals are unsatisfactory. An artwork that is intended by its creator or proprietor for a completely original kind of regard is better explained

with a procedural concept than an intentional-historical concept; as such, the former concept cannot be dismissed altogether. In offering itself as an alternative to Institutionalism, Levinson's definition scraps the virtues of Institutionalism and introduces several problems of its own. Thus, I agree with Levinson that intention matters, not fortuitous possession of a certain property.² I also agree that, since intention matters, art does not always *need* an artworld. However, I am unconvinced that intent for this special kind of regard is itself sufficient to explain why each and every object is or is not an artwork.

However, just because Levinson's definition fails to accommodate all instances of art does not mean it fails to successfully capture most instances of art. As I mentioned above, it is a legitimate artistic practice to intend something for regard as past art has been regarded. In many cases, functional art and intentional-historical art will overlap, and in those cases, the intended function of the artwork is ontologically prior to its intended regard. Fine wine is not classified as such because it is intended for a certain kind of regard, a specific way of "taking" the wine (i.e., with aerated sips, an exhale through the nose, etc.). It is intended for a certain kind of regard so that we are well poised to appreciate its gustatory function, and it is *the function* that merits its status as fine wine. The same is true for many works of art: they are intended by their proprietors for a certain regard *so that* we may position ourselves to appreciate their intended functions. For

² The intentional aspect of art protects our concepts from including objects that accidentally perform an artistic function or are accidentally regarded as art has been regarded. For instance, lullabies may evoke emotion, or religious rituals may be regarded with a sense of openness and attention to visual detail. But, pace Tolstoy, neither of these count as art, because artistic function or artistic regard are not the intentions of the creator. The intended function of a lullaby is to lull you to sleep, and the intended regard for a religious ritual is the reverence that one's deity is due. Thanks to an anonymous referee for prompting this clarification.

instance, consider Levinson's vignette of the person who does not possess an art concept or knowledge of an artworld. He arranges colored stones in an aesthetically pleasing pattern. He pauses to enjoy and meditate on the experience. According to an intentional-historical concept, he has created art because he has intended his stones for an artistic regard, but it is the function— aesthetic pleasure—that is central to his practice. However, this is not always the case! We can easily imagine an artist who paints or sculpts or composes a piece with no function in mind. Or perhaps they have a function in mind, but it is not meant to shine through in the piece. In both cases, the artist leaves it to the audience to determine what the piece “means.” It is “open to interpretation,” and whatever experience the viewer or listener has with the piece is an accurate and complete understanding of it. In such cases, the defining feature is the artist's intent for a certain regard.

Therefore, I endorse a pluralistic framework that includes, but is not limited to, three art concepts: the functional, the procedural, and the intentional-historical. Art is all these things, falling under one or multiple definitions. Most importantly, notice what is central to each: the *practices* of intending an artistic function, a certain kind of regard, or participation in an artistic procedure. When we engage in these practices, we have different art concepts in mind, yet no concept is more correct than the other, nor does one offer a more “objective” picture of art's ontology. Instead, each concept captures legitimate and ineliminable aspects of artistic practices. As such, a practice turn begets art concept pluralism: art objects are the objects that result from certain practices, and the concepts implicit in those practices tell us why the objects *are art*.

Granted, functional, procedural, and intentional-historical art concepts will splinter into many more specific or refined art concepts. That is expected. I do not argue for any specific subsets of concepts; the examples mentioned above suffice to demonstrate the kinds of concepts

one might defend. The relevant contribution this paper aims to make is in its acknowledgment of multiple art concepts, functional, procedural, and historical in nature, that are revealed in different practices. It is through an analysis of our practices, not an analysis of art in the abstract, that we appreciate, as Robert Stecker (2000, p. 48) writes, “the ineliminability of reference to function and history, the importance of both intention and institution.” The artist who aims to use a sensuous medium to perform an aesthetic function or elicit an emotion has a different art concept in mind, perhaps, than the curator selecting challenging pieces for an upcoming exhibit. Whereas Thomasson, Davies, and Dodd disagree on whether our practices describe what it means to be a certain *kind* of artwork, I submit that we may employ the same descriptivist insights to understand what it means to be an artwork simpliciter. Our artistic practices describe, and thereby verify, what it means for something to be “art.”

Furthermore, we already operate with a tacit plurality of concepts in mind. Case in point: new definitions spring up and do a considerable amount of heavy lifting, but they struggle to accommodate revolutionary art, or private art, etc. So why not just draw the line? Why not say, “This definition is correct, and the curators (or layfolk or ostensible artists) are simply mistaken.” Why is that option so unthinkable for so many philosophers, and why do they proceed to *weaken* their theories, in the sense that they relax their identity conditions and thus render them susceptible to new objections, in order to accommodate such cases (e.g., the case of Levinson and his notions of liberal and disingenuous intent)? It is because they, too, recognize a plurality of art concepts—perhaps tacitly—yet try to manipulate a monistic theory such that it can unify all concepts under a single definition. This is the value of a pluralistic framework: it makes a single definition possible, but with some conditions: the definition must be disjunctive, it must be

a disjunction of concepts, and the constitutive concepts must be sensitive to the relevant artistic practices.

5. Disjunctive Definitions

I argued in the previous section that each concept, when interpreted as the *single* or *fundamental* art concept, is insufficient to accommodate all recognized instances of art, and this is because they prioritize one artistic practice at the expense of several others. The practice of intending an aesthetic, communicative, or evocative function does not explain the legitimacy of some artworks as well as their participation in artworld procedures. Likewise, participation in the artworld does not explain the legitimacy of some artworks as well as the proprietor's intention for an artistic regard. When we take this pluralistic framework seriously—when we recognize the need for multiple art concepts to make sense of all artworks—a disjunctive definition follows:

$$\text{Art} \leftrightarrow (F \vee P \vee H \dots \text{etc.})$$

Let F, P, and H represent art concepts that are implicit in artistic practices. We can supplant F with functional theories such as Formalism or Emotionalism, P with procedural theories such as Danto's and Dickie's Institutionalism, and H with intentional-historical theories such as Levinson's. So long as a disjunction is affirmed (i.e., so long as one of these concepts reflects the primary intention of a practitioner who creates or reappropriates a candidate artwork), we can say the candidate is a member of the category "art."

Disjunctive definitions abound in the literature. There is nothing especially novel about my proposal that a pluralistic framework amounts, linguistically, to a disjunctive definition of art. The contribution I aim to make is this: concepts that become the disjuncts of a disjunctive definition must reflect the practices necessary to make sense of a given work as an artwork. It is

for this reason that many, if not all, disjunctive definitions proposed thus far will fail to capture our intuitions about what counts as art. Consider, for instance, a disjunctive definition proposed by Dominic McIver Lopes (2008, p. 109):

item x is a work of art if and only if x is a work in activity P and P is one of the arts.

This definition “passes the buck” from a theory of “art” to a theory of “the arts.” For instance, if we want to know whether a certain hard case is a work of art, we need look no further than to the theory or theories of the candidate arts that could accommodate it. If we want to know whether Duchamp’s *Fountain* is an artwork, we simply need to decide whether it is a piece of ceramics, as ceramics is an art. Thus, we look to the relevant theories of the arts to make decisions about hard cases; the status of easy cases is simply decided by their membership in a recognized art form. So, according to Lopes’ definition, a work of art is either a work of painting, photography, ceramics, dance, symphony, etc. Kazimir Malevich’s “Black Square” is a work of art because it is a painting. Shelby Lee Adams’ portraits of Appalachian life are works of art because they are photographs. This disjunctive definition will clearly help us, in most cases, to separate art from non-art in Kennick’s warehouse (Kennick, 1958, p. 321).

But Lopes’ solution is merely a shorthand. As we explore more hard cases, we see that a definition of art is indispensable, despite whatever convenience is afforded by passing the buck. “Black Square” is a product of the arts, but what about a painted sign in a store window? A photographed portrait is a product of the arts, but what about a mugshot? Lopes considers a similar puzzle: if *Fountain* is a piece of ceramics, and many other recognized artworks are pieces of ceramics, then is the coffee mug on my desk a work of art? Lopes says it is not, but *why* not? This is a question that his theory of the individual arts cannot answer; instead, he must appeal to an art concept that is embedded in artistic practices (Lopes, 2014, p. 148). According to Lopes,

what separates a piece of *bizen-yaki* from my coffee mug is that the former is a product of (and a participant in) “appreciative practices” (ibid.). Once we flesh out the relevant appreciative practices, they will amount to something like this: a work of *bizen-yaki* and Duchamp’s *Fountain* are artworks because their proprietors intend them as candidates for appreciation by participating in artworld procedures. Presumably, if I were to show my coffee-stained mug in a local exhibit, this act would satisfy the relevant appreciative practice, and its relocation from my desk to the gallery would deem it a member of the ceramic arts. In other words, while Lopes’ disjunctive definition is often a helpful shorthand, it does not obviate the need for a definition of art. Why not? Because, according to Lopes, determining what is or is not a member of an individual art depends first and foremost on an analysis of the appreciative practices that delineate art from non-art, i.e., the criteria for being counted as art. It is for this reason that artistic practices and intentions, not art forms, are central to my proposed disjunctive definition. When hard cases stump a theory of an individual art, a plurality of art concepts defined by the relevant appreciative practices will come to the rescue. In other words, the “buck passing theory of art” passes the buck right back.

It is for a similar reason that other disjunctive definitions miss the mark to varying degrees. For instance, Francis Longworth and Andrea Scarantino (2010) propose a “Disjunctive Theory of Art,” a reformulation of Berys Gaut’s (2000) cluster concept. Theirs is a disjunction of “minimally sufficient conditions.” A candidate member of the category “art” must satisfy one of the minimally sufficient conditions (i.e., one of the disjuncts), which are subsets of Gaut’s “criterial properties” of art. However, one of Gaut’s criterial properties, and a minimally sufficient condition for Longworth and Scarantino’s definition, is “belonging to an established artistic form” (Longworth and Scarantino, 2010, p. 155). In other words, if a candidate artwork

satisfies this disjunct, it is indeed a work of art. But mugshots are photographs and coffee mugs are ceramics, and both of the latter are established artistic forms. Thus, the problem for Lopes' definition persists for Longworth and Scarantino: we need a definition of art in order to determine whether a candidate artwork belongs to an established artistic form. It also persists for Stephen Davies' (2015, p. 377) "hybrid" definition:

something is art (a) if it shows excellence of skill and achievement in realizing significant aesthetic goals, and either doing so is its primary, identifying function or doing so makes a vital contribution to the realization of its primary, identifying function, or (b) it falls under an art genre or art form established and publicly recognized within an art tradition, or (c) if it is intended by its maker/presenter to be an art and its maker/presenter does what is necessary and appropriate to realizing that intention.

This definition, like Longworth and Scarantino's, is successful in many regards. It captures the functional practices (i.e., aesthetic goals, primary functions) that explain some art with (a), and it captures the procedural and intentional-historical practices (i.e., intending it to be an art, doing what is necessary to realize that intention) that explain some art with (c). However, satisfying (b) is insufficient to render something an artwork, because doing so requires a theory of art. In order to avoid vicious circularity, Davies' definition would benefit from omitting (b) and relying solely on the functional, procedural, and historical practices that are captured in (a) and (c). Finally, the same issue befalls Robert Stecker's (2000, p. 47) "dual track" definition:

something is an artwork at a time t , just in case either it is in a central art form at t and is intended to fulfill a properly specified function of that form, or it is an artifact that fulfills a properly specified function of art with excellence, whether or not it is in a central art form and whether or not it was intended to fulfill such a function.

Again, Stecker successfully captures the functional intentions that explain some art. However, we need a disjunctive definition that does not recognize membership within an individual art form as a sufficient condition for being art, because a theory of an individual art form requires a theory of art. Additionally, this definition ignores the relevant institutional practices that are necessary for some artworks to fulfill their specified function (e.g., if “challenge what it means to be art” is a specified artistic function, a readymade cannot do this until it is situated within the artworld).

In sum, I propose that x is a work of art if it is accommodated by a functional, procedural, or intentional-historical art concept—i.e., x is a work of art if (a) it is intended by its proprietor to fulfill some artistic function, (b) it is deemed a candidate for appreciation by members of the artworld, (c) it is intended by its proprietor for regard as past art has been regarded, or (d) it satisfies any combination of (a), (b), and (c). Each disjunct (a-d) is individually sufficient and no disjunct is individually necessary.

Of course, this definition begets the question of conceptual authority: Who determines whether an intended function is an artistic function, or an intended regard is an artistic regard? Who or what make up the artworld? In other words, who decides which artistic practices are relevant to our definition? I can begin to sketch an answer by invoking Stecker (2000, p. 55): each person possesses their own art concept. Likewise, each person will have their own intuitions about who or what grounds a practice as an artistic practice. What we aim to capture with a definition is an overlapping consensus of these intuitions. Most will agree on the authority of the curator to say my coffee cup is art by displaying it in the museum, but few will agree on my authority if I smuggle it in. Similarly, most will agree that some function is an artistic function if a large population of art makers employ it, but few will agree if it is only employed by a handful.

Just as Darwin and Kitcher look to the expertise of “competent taxonomists” to identify the relevant features of a species concept, Thomasson looks to “competent grounders” to identify the relevant features of art concepts. Granted, she notes that, “since facts about the ontology of the work of art are determined by human conceptions, the resulting facts are, as we might say, ontologically shallow” (2005, p. 228). In other words, one individual may declare that some function of her piece counts as an artistic function, that the intended regard for this piece is an artistic regard, or that the context in which she displays her new piece counts as the artworld. In making these claims, she is infallible in one sense and fallible in another. She is infallible in the sense that—so long as she is sincere—her propositions about art are “ontologically shallow;” there are no objective facts against which we can evaluate her claims. However, she is fallible in the sense that her claims may not reflect the understanding of people who participate in (or analyze) artistic practices. I am interested in the latter sense, and it is this sense that will constrain the kinds of concepts that are recognized by a practice-sensitive pluralism. To understand whether an art concept is a viable art concept, we need to determine whether the relevant practices are recognized artistic practices. To determine whether a practice is a recognized artistic practice, we look to the “competent grounders” of such terms: art makers, art historians, art educators, art critics, etc. It is on these grounds that a constructivist interpretation of art may still resist the artist who says that everything is art, so everything is an art function and every world is an artworld. They are not wrong because their statement is objectively truth-apt. They are wrong insofar as their statement is unhelpful and uninformative.

6. Concluding Remarks

Consider Ereshefsky a final time: “Though ‘species’ has outlived its theoretical life, practical considerations keep it alive. What those considerations are and how they outweigh theoretical ones deserves further study. Pragmatics aside, there is still an ontological problem concerning the reality of the species category” (1998, p. 118). Replace “species” with “art,” and you have the gist of the view I defend here. A single comprehensive theory of art is not forthcoming, and it lacks ontological import. With that said, it is not undefinable. We can formulate a disjunctive definition of art that accounts for each of its concepts. However, in doing so, we must recognize that each concept is grounded by different practices and, as a result, sometimes refers to different things. Kendall Walton says of art what Ereshefsky says of species:

It is not at all clear that these words – ‘What is art?’ – express anything like a single question, to which competing answers are given, or whether philosophers proposing answers are even engaged in the same debate.... The sheer variety of proposed definitions should give us pause. One cannot help wondering whether there is any sense in which they are attempts to ... clarify the same cultural practices, or address the same issue. (2007, p. 14)

In other words, the conceptual maneuvers I have proposed here—a practice turn, a pluralistic framework, and an ensuing disjunctive definition—are not only warranted, but necessary. As with species, they help us salvage the definitional project while reconciling it with insights from Thomasson, Walton, and Weitz: there is an ontological problem concerning the reality of “art.”

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