How to Understand the Completion of Art

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Abstract

There are a number of recent discussions of the question of when an artwork is complete. While it's been observed that a work might be complete in one way and not in another, the impact of this observation has been minimal. Discussion has continued as if there is only one real sense of completion that matters. I argue that this is a mistake. Even if there were only one (or one most important) kind of completion, extant theories of completion would be bad candidates for that one kind. The best explanation of the failure of extant theories is that there are really many kinds of completion, many corresponding senses of 'completion', and no kind of artwork completion is objectively more important than any other. We have good reason to think this is the case given the disparate interests we have when we ask completion questions. Once we've realized that those concerns track properties that are often unrelated, the question for theorists to answer becomes, "In how many ways can an artwork be complete?"

1   Introduction

When is an artwork complete?[1] The question has been a topic of recent interest to philosophers and other theorists.[2] They've already rehearsed the importance of the question. Some sense of artwork completion is important for making sense of legislation about the moral rights of artists.[3] A sense of artwork completion also plays an important role in the practice of displaying artworks in galleries and other communal spaces (e.g. concert halls, homes, gardens, or corporate environments). In many cases, if a work is incomplete in some

relevant sense, it's a violation of artistic norms (if not moral or legal norms) to display it. Moreover, as Trogdon and Livingston (2014) point out, many artists seem driven by the goal of completing their works. We should want to know just what it is artists are trying to achieve. Trogdon and Livingston (2014) and Rohrbaugh (2017) also discuss the fact that an artwork can't be unrestrictedly evaluated and appreciated until it's complete, for some sense of completion.[4] Since philosophers of art are already motivated to understand artistic evaluation and appreciation, we should want to understand what sense of completion is relevant. Finally, philosophers of art are also motivated to understand what works of art are, what ontological categories particular works fall under and what important properties they have. But it often seems one cannot answer these questions for a particular artwork unless one knows whether it's complete, for some sense of completion.

There are thus concepts of artwork completion that we employ in our reasoning about the moral and legal rights of artists; the practices of displaying, appreciating, and evaluating art; the artistic process; and the work itself. An important question is whether the concept of artwork completion is the same in each case. Philosophers writing on artwork completion have been ambivalent about this.

On the one hand, they have sometimes recognized that there is more than one way for an artwork to be complete. Consider the opening page of Livingston's inaugurating piece on the topic:

> To say that a work of art is finished can mean at least two very
> different things, depending on whether we are focusing primarily
> on some item's artistic or aesthetic features, or whether attention

is drawn to an aspect of the creative process. (Livingston 1999,

14)

If we're focusing on an object's artistic or aesthetic features, we may (like Beardsley (1982, 55)) come to the conclusion that for an artwork to be finished is for it to be "worthy of standing by itself, as an object of aesthetic enjoyment." This notion of completeness, understood as a normative condition on a work's aesthetic value, Livingston calls "aesthetic completion". He calls the latter kind, the kind having to do less with the work's aesthetic features and more with the creative process, "genetic completion". Livingston posits that both kinds can be present in a work, that neither might be, and that they can come apart, such that a work might be complete in one way but not another.

While much of the subsequent literature has paid obligatory homage to the aesthetic/genetic distinction, the focus and rhetoric of that literature has continually undercut the impact of this observation. The decision of Livingston and others to refer to this second kind of completion as "genetic completion" (or as Gover (2015, 457) calls it "ontic completion") paints the picture that this is the notion of completion that matters for determining whether a work is *really* complete, or for what the work really *is*. This picture is confirmed by the complete uninterest shown in aesthetic completion by those writing on the general topic of artwork completion. Recently, mention of the aesthetic/genetic distinction has altogether dropped out of the literature on the topic.[5]

In this paper, I argue that the tendency of authors to either situate genetic completion as the "true topic" or to leave aesthetic completion out of the discussion altogether is a mistake. This is because the following thesis is true:

Completion Pluralism: There are many kinds of artwork completion, many corresponding senses of 'completion', and no kind of artwork completion is objectively more important than any other.

Completion Pluralism is a meta-thesis. It has the consequence that the question "When is an artwork complete?" is ambiguous. The conditions for completion will vary depending on the kind of completion under consideration. The upshot is that instead of arguing about when a work is *really* complete, we should list the kinds of completion and analyze each kind in turn. Call the denial of Completion Pluralism "Completion Monism". Completion Monism can be understood at least two different ways.

Numerical Completion Monism: There is only one way for an artwork to be complete.

Priority Completion Monism: There is more than one way for an artwork to be complete, but one kind of artwork completion is objectively more important than the others.

A natural way to read the literature on completion so far is that those writing on completion are implicitly assuming Priority Completion Monism. They acknowledge other ways for an artwork to be complete besides whatever way they are trying to identify, but they take there to be some kind of completion that is most important for what an artwork is, and they're engaged in the project of trying to analyze that kind of completion. Regardless, it won't matter exactly what version of Completion Monism others have held, as an argument for Completion Pluralism will count equally against both versions of the view.

In what follows, I provide two arguments in favor of Completion Pluralism. The first

argument is negative: even if Completion Monism is true the extant views of completion wouldn't be good candidates for the one (or most important) kind of completion. These views fail to capture any satisfactory monistic conception of completion, and the best explanation of this fact is that Completion Pluralism is true. The second argument is positive. We have disparate reasons for caring about artwork completion. Our concerns are moral, legal, social, theoretic, artistic, aesthetic, and ontological. These concerns can come apart, however, and so can the various properties of artworks they track. A work can be intuitively complete according to a sense of completion that tracks one property but not another, and in these cases there's no reason to say that one sense of completion is tracking an objectively more important property. The only good explanation for this is that Completion Pluralism is true.

2 Against Completion Monism

Here I give a negative argument for Completion Pluralism: it is the best explanation for the failure of recent theories of artwork completion. Extant philosophical theories of artwork completion fall into two basic camps, each of which places a psychological constraint on the completion of a work. The first, I'll follow Rohrbaugh (2017) in calling "Psychologism." This is the view that whether an artwork is complete is, in some way to be specified, merely a matter of the artist's psychology. Livingston has articulated various versions of Psychologism (along with co-authors Archer and Trogdon). Gover (2015, 2018) also arguably endorses Psychologism about completion. She distances herself from Livingston by emphasizing the variation in ways artworks come to be completed, the complexity of the phenomenon in question, and the indeterminacy of it. But she can be found speaking

psychologistically in characterizing what she's after. For example, in her considered theory of authorship, Gover (2018, 82) says that we must posit an intentional moment in which the author indexes the work as complete. This moment marks the completion of the first intention necessary to authorship, the intention to make a work of art. The main points of debate for proponents of Psychologism involve whether completion is always determinate; whether it's terminal; and whether it must involve a decision of the artist, a disposition of the artist, or whether the determination of completion can admit of different kinds of psychological states.

The main virtue of Psychologism is the way in which it captures the intuitive sense in which a work can be complete (or not) that's up to the artist(s) to whom the work belongs. Even in the case of the *non-finito*, a genre the name of which tags each token work as incomplete, we can distinguish a completed instance of the genre from an intrinsic duplicate for which the work of the sculptor was merely interrupted.[6] There seem to be complete *non-finiti*: complete incompletes. The hypothesis of Pyschologism is that the sense in which these works are complete is that the author is done with them. The debates between proponents of the view center on the best way to make this precise.

The other extant camp has a sole (published) occupant. Rohrbaugh (2017) holds what I call "Satisfactionism," the view that an artwork is complete iff it is intrinsically such as to have satisfied the artist's creative plan, their intentions in making the work. It thus places a psychological constraint on the completion of the work (viz. the plan of the artist) but stops short of analyzing work completion in terms of artist psychology. Satisfactionism offers two promises: it can explain the same phenomena as Psychologism, and it can do so without running into the same problems. It's worth taking a moment to consider whether Satisfactionism delivers on

these promises.

First, the problems for Psychologism. Rohrbaugh (2017) raises a significant objection. I'll follow Cray (2018) in calling it "Rohrbaugh's Regress." The threat of Rohrbaugh's Regress is that Psychologism gets wrong how artists reason about completion. To see this, first notice that the thesis of Psychologism is generally formed either in terms of judgments or dispositions.[7] Take the judgment version first: this says (roughly) that a work is complete iff the artist(s) of the work make an uncoerced judgment that the work is complete (Cf. Livingston and Archer 2010, 446). Now, consider the artist who wants to know whether their work is complete. Judgment Psychologism tells them that whether the work is complete is a question of whether they've judged it to be complete. So, what they ought to do is introspect and ask, "Have I judged the work to be complete?" But the notion of completeness appears here again, and so what they're really asking is whether they've judged that they've judged the work to be complete. And we're off to the races.

Of course, the proponent of Psychologism might opt for the disposition version. This says (roughly) that a work is complete iff the artist(s) of the work have acquired a completion disposition with respect to their work (Cf. Trogdon and Livingston 2014). The problem with Disposition Psychologism is that it has to be able to distinguish between cases in which artists merely abandon their projects and those in which they really complete them. To make this distinction, Trogdon and Livingston (2014, 228) say that "when an artist has a completion disposition [as opposed to a mere refrainment disposition], she is disposed to refrain from making further changes to the work in virtue of having exercised her capacity to reason about art and its

production in a certain way." As has been identified by both Gover (2015, 458) and Rohrbaugh (2017, 135) talk of "exercising a capacity to reason about art" is just a way of implicitly smuggling in a completion decision. As Gover puts it, "this qualification is just another way of saying that the artist has effectively decided that the work is done." (Gover 2015, 458) In that case, Disposition Psychologism faces Rohrbaugh's Regress all over again.[8]

I think Rohrbaugh's Regress works, but only on the assumption of Completion Monism. That is, the reason Rohrbaugh's Regress works is because both Rohrbaugh and his opponents assume Psychologism is supposed to be giving an analysis of the notion of *real* completion, whatever that is. What Rohrbaugh's Regress shows is that if there were only one (or one most important) kind of artwork completion, Psychologism wouldn't be a good candidate for that one kind. The Completion Pluralist can understand Psychologism differently, though. A work is Psychologistically complete, they might say, just in case the artist of the work makes an uncoerced judgment that the work is complete in some non-Psychologistic way. Rohrbaugh's Regress would never get off the ground.

Another reason Psychologism can't be the only (or most important) sense of completion is that it gets certain important cases wrong. One historical example is Schubert's *Symphony No. 8 in B minor*, often referred to merely as the *Unfinished*. Schubert stopped working on the *Unfinished*, and it seems undeniable that he formed a refrainment disposition with respect to the work. For all we know, this refrainment disposition was based in the exercise of Schubert's rational capacities, so that it also counts as a completion disposition. However, we count the *Unfinished* as an archetypical case of an incomplete work. The reason

we are so certain it's incomplete is not because we feel sure about the question of whether Schubert's disposition towards the piece is a completion disposition or a mere refrainment disposition (or whether he decided it was done). The reason is that we know the *Unfinished* is a symphony, and symphonies require a certain structure to be complete. The *Unfinished* thus satisfies the definition of Psychologism for all we know, but it's an incomplete symphony. The kind of completeness we're sure it lacks is not Psychologistic.

Let's return to Satisfactionism. It promised to explain what Psychologism does without suffering the same problems. Recall that Psychologism is meant to explain the intuitive sense in which a work can be complete (or not) that is up to the artist(s) to whom the work belongs. Satisfactionism makes sense of this not by allowing artists to decide when a work is done, but by allowing them to set the parameters for completion according to their plan.

Does Satisfactionism really explain what Psychologism does? Here's one reason to think not: it seems artists can decide to be done with works that don't satisfy their creative intentions. As Trogdon and Livingston (2014, 228) point out, some of the considerations salient to an artist when deciding whether to continue working on an artwork include how much time has passed, how much money has been spent, and what genre one is working in. Whether one is bored of a project, how meaningful it makes one's life, whether there's a due date, whether there's a paycheck to be had, whether there are other more exciting projects on the horizon, and whether an artist is working with people who expect certain results also seem like relevant factors for an artist to consider when deciding whether to stop working on something. In that case, it should be quite a usual occurrence for an artist to stop working on an artwork even though it doesn't perfectly satisfy their plan.

On the whole, I would hazard the guess that cases where an artwork completely satisfies the plan of the artist are in the minority. The threat here is double. First, it seems Satisfactionism and Psychologism will disagree about what works are complete, so Satisfactionism won't actually explain the same intuitive cases of completion that Psychologism does, and Satisfactionism doesn't live up to its promise of successfully accounting for all the intuitive cases of completion that Psychologism does. Second, cases where an artist decides a work is done even though it doesn't satisfy their plan look like counterexamples to Satisfactionism's claim of capturing the one (or the most important) kind of completion. In such cases, the work is intuitively complete, but Satisfactionism seems to have the result that it's incomplete.

The Satisfactionist might claim that what's actually going on when an artist appears to "settle" by publishing a work that doesn't satisfy their plan is that the artist is really altering their plan to fit the present state of the work. In effect, the creative process is one where intentions and work both change until they fit each other. In cases where it appears an artist has completed a work that didn't satisfy their plans, they must have actually altered their plan. Surely, it's true that creative intentions are dynamic and subject to change throughout the creative process. However, if this response is correct then it's in principle impossible to distinguish between the phenomenology of the following two cases:

> 1. Esperanza plans to write an epic, young adult novel about a little girl with magical powers. While still in the process of writing, she decides to publish a short fragment of the longer story she wants to write due to pressure from her publisher to finish.

2. Mirabel plans to write an epic, young adult novel about a little girl with magical powers. In the process of writing she realizes that a short story would better fit the mood and some of the initial content of her story than the longer novel she had originally planned. She publishes a fragment of the story she had originally planned to write as a way of satisfying her altered plan.

Mirabel will experience her artistic plan as changing, and Esperanza won't. In Esperanza's case, she stops working not because of convergence between work and plan, but because of external pressures. The kind of reply being considered on behalf of the Satisfactionist can't capture the important phenomenological difference between these two cases. In particular it can't capture the phenomenon of what it's like to decide an artwork is done even though it doesn't do what you want it to. Now, of course there may be a sense of 'plan' in which Esperanza will experience her plan as changing. After all, she didn't plan on writing a short story, and she did. But the kind of plan that's important for Satisfactionism is an artistic plan, the thing the artist is trying to realize by means of their artistic activity. The fact that Esperanza decides not to work more on her story doesn't mean she didn't have an artistic plan that called for a longer story.

Rohrbaugh may have a story to tell about cases where artists finish works that don't satisfy their plans.[9] Rohrbaugh's account is that a work is complete just in case there is a kind of fit between work and plan, where the artist's plan is constituted by their intentions to bring about a work with certain features. But Rohrbaugh also mentions a "broader" notion, viz. that of a "practical state" guiding an artist in their creative endeavors. (Rohrbaugh 2017, 136) Thus, Rohrbaugh actually entertains a *pair* of questions as central to the Satisfactionist theory

of completion:

> How well does the work in progress reflect [the artist's] plan? Or, more generally, does the work in progress satisfy the condition imposed by the content of the guiding practical state? (Rohrbaugh 2017, 136)

One question here is what the guiding practical state is. Depending on the answer, it might be that we have two versions of Satisfactionism lurking. It's clear that Rohrbaugh doesn't take that to be the case, as in a later discussion note he says that the version of Satisfactionism given in terms of the artist's plan is just a more colloquial way of putting what he says about a guiding practical state. (Rohrbaugh 2018, 105) Unfortunately, Rohrbaugh leaves the notion of a guiding practical state (intentionally, I take it) unclear. Here's what I think the view amounts to. Since in reality plans are messy, we can conceive of them as consisting of intentions, desires, fears, impulses, obsessions, and a variety of other (cognitive and noncognitive) states, some of which will count as *guiding* the work, perhaps in virtue of their possessing a majority (or even a trumping) influence on the outcome of the artist's process.

In that case, Rohrbaugh might respond to the case presented above by claiming that if Esperanza caved to her publisher then her guiding practical state must have been something that led her to do so (e.g. a desire to please the publisher or a fear that she might not find further work). But then there *is* a kind of fit between the work and the guiding practical state when she alters her work to fit it, and the work *is* complete, even if there is a sense in which it doesn't do what Esperanza wants it to. In that case, the Satisfactionist can account for cases where a work is finished even though the author is not satisfied with it, as long as it satisfies the guiding practical state. Call this version of Satisfactionism GPS-Satisfactionism for

"guiding practical state Satisfactionism."

I see two problems with GPS-Satisfactionism. First, it threatens to trivialize the phenomenology of dissatisfaction. GPS-Satisfactionism analyzes *any* case where an artist decides a work is done as a case where the work satisfies the guiding practical state (or at least where the artist thinks it does). But then the only room remaining for the artist to feel dissatisfied with their work is if there is internal conflict between the content of the guiding practical state and some other practical states of the artist. Surely, though, it's possible for an artist to be internally unconflicted, to end their work on an artwork, and for that artwork not to do what they wanted it to. GPS-Satisfactionism has the result that this is impossible.

The other problem with GPS-Satisfactionism as we've been thinking about it is that it seems to trivialize the difference between artistic and non-artistic practical states. Rohrbaugh introduces the twin notions of an artistic plan and a guiding practical state with two questions: "What is the artist trying to do? Or, more broadly, what practical state is guiding the agent in his or her creative efforts and what is the content of that state?" (Rohrbaugh 2017, 136) The plan, as an *artistic* plan, is supposed to be the result the artist is trying to bring about qua artist. The guiding practical state is whatever is principally guiding the creative efforts of the artist. It seems Rohrbaugh wants to run these questions together as pursuing a single target, but the problem is that their targets can diverge in principle. For example, consider a case where an artist is trying to paint caricatures on a crowded street to make money. The artistic plan of each caricature will have something to do with simultaneous replication and exaggeration of the facial features (and some other significant features) of the subject. The guiding practical state of the artist, we can stipulate, is the desire to make money. Which one sets the standard

for determining whether a work is complete, the plan or the guiding practical state? It seems there really ought to be two versions of Satisfactionism after all, then, each with a different answer to the question at hand. Call them "GPS-Satisfactionism" and "Plan-Satisfactionism".

The Satisfactionist faces a dilemma, then. Either they embrace GPS-Satisfactionism or Plan-Satisfactionism. GPS-Satisfactionism trivializes the phenomenology of artist dissatisfaction, and it makes artwork completion relative to non-artistic ends. GPS-Satisfactionism has a way of replying to the Esperanza/Mirabel case, but at a very high theoretical cost. Plan-Satisfactionism, on the other hand, has no way of responding to the Esperanza/Mirabel case. It seems that Satisfactionism doesn't really explain what Psychologism does, then. This isn't too surprising. Psychologism aims to give us an account of when an artist has stopped working on something. Satisfactionism aims to give us an account of when a work does what an artist wants it to.

Satisfactionism's promise was also premised partly on the claim that it doesn't suffer the same problems as Psychologism. Cray (2018) has challenged that idea. Cray's challenge starts from the observation (made by Rohrbaugh) that plans change and develop. If an artist working on a particular artwork entertains a succession of plans, which plan is the one the work must satisfy to be complete (and why that one)? Suppose, for example, an artist happens to satisfy the plan p they are entertaining at a given moment t. But suppose the artist also realizes at t that they don't actually prefer p and so they continue to work, altering their plan and altering the artwork accordingly. Will we judge that the work was completed at t? Unlikely. On account of scenarios like this, Cray thinks it necessary to give conditions for plan completion. However, Cray takes it that any such conditions will be psychologistic, and

thus leave the account of plan completion open to Rohrbaugh's Regress. In that case, an essential component of Satisfactionism (the notion of *plan*) would open the view up to the same kind of problem besetting Psychologism.

Rohrbaugh agrees this would be a bad consequence for his view, but he doesn't think Satisfactionism must suffer it. He says he's "tempted to say there is no such case as what [Cray] describes." (Rohrbaugh 2018, 107) Instead, Rohrbaugh guesses we are conceiving loosely of a case where someone satisfies a large part of their plan but not all of it (so there is no convergence) and they don't like the result. Rohrbaugh does acknowledge the possibility of cases in which there really is convergence between plan and work. For such cases, if the artist decides to change their plan and alter the work, Rohrbaugh prefers to describe them as cases of "change in an already completed work." (Rohrbaugh 2018, 106)

Of course, it's natural (although not uncontested) to think that sometimes an artist completes a work (for some sense of 'complete') and later changes it. However, Rohrbaugh seems to bite the bullet in leaving no room for cases like those described by Cray, those in which an artist really does satisfy their plan, immediately regrets it, and opts to alter the plan and keep going.

One option that's open to Rohrbaugh here is to deny that completion is terminal, i.e. to allow that a work can go from being complete to incomplete.[10] This version of Satisfactionism would define completeness for both plans and works relative to each other. For any plan p and any artwork a, and for any time t_1, if p and a converge at t_1, then p and a are complete at t_1; and for any time t_2, if p and a fail to converge at t_2, then p and a are incomplete at t_2. The problem with such a view is that it would have troubling practical and

theoretical ramifications. For example, a decision about whether to display a work that turned on its completion status would be almost impossible to make. Likewise, if the completion-status of the work determines what it is, then a work's nature would be malleable and highly unstable. This is, of course, assuming Completion Monism. On Completion Pluralism, it's not particularly problematic for Satisfactionism to posit a non-terminal kind of completion, so long as some other kind of completion makes sense of cases where completion must be terminal.

Assuming Rohrbaugh doesn't opt for the non-terminal variety of Satisfactionism, I think Cray's argument sticks. There's no good reason to deny the possibility that an artist's plan and work converge and they immediately regret the convergence. One way the artist might respond to this is by throwing the work in the trash heap. Gover (2018, 42-48) considers such cases, in which an artist completes an artwork but declines to ratify it, thereby neglecting to admit the work to their corpus. Another way for the artist to respond, of course is to change the plan, and change the work. In a case where the artist's effort is continuous, it would be a strained interpretation of their activity to hold that the artist is now only making changes to their previously finished work. Instead, it's much more natural to acknowledge that the work is incomplete as long as the plan is subject to change and the work is ongoing. But in that case, an account of plan completion is needed that doesn't relativize it to convergence with the work, and Rohrbaugh's Regress raises its head again. Once again, this problem presents itself only because of the assumed meta-thesis of Completion Monism. There is nothing obviously objectionable (from the Pluralist point of view) about the idea that a work is completed (in the sense Satisfactionism identifies) every time there is a convergence between

work and plan.

A final problem for the Satisfactionist has to do with what are commonly referred to as completions of artworks. Here is a somewhat common phenomenon: an artist begins an artwork, progresses it to a fairly advanced state, and is suddenly prevented from working on it anymore. Call these cases of unintended incompletion. Maybe the artist dies, maybe the work is stolen from them, or maybe they are rendered incapable of working altogether. Sometimes in cases of unintended incompletion, another artist completes the work at a later time. Christopher Tolkien and Guy Gavriel Kay completed J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*. Max Brod completed a number of Franz Kafka's incomplete works. Elsa Respighi completed Ottorino Respighi's opera *Lucrezia*.[11]

It's surprising, from the point of view of Satisfactionism, that one artist could complete another artist's work. That's because if the original artist is dead then the completing artist often won't have any access to the creative intentions of the original artist besides through the unfinished work itself.[12] (This is especially obvious in cases where the completing artist has no personal relationship with the original artist, as when Barry Cooper completed Beethoven's *Symphony No. 10*.) But it seems that later completions are rather common in cases of unintended incompletion. This is hard to explain if Satisfactionism is our only account of completion.

Even worse for Satisfactionism: sometimes in cases of unintended incompletion the incomplete work receives multiple completions. For example, Modest Mussorgsky's opera *Khovanshchina* was completed separately by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Maurice Ravel and Igor Stravinsky working together, and Dimitri Shostakovich. Anton Bruckner's *Symphony No.*

9 has received no fewer than 10 completions.

What should the Satisfactionist say about such cases? Rimsky-Korsakov's completion of *Khovanshchina* is aesthetically distinct from Shostakovich's completion; they have different scores, they sound differently, and proper performances of each will leave audiences with divergent impressions as to their meaning. It seems thus that at most one of them could *really* be a completion assuming the truth of Satisfactionism.

There are a number of options for the Satisfactionist. One option is to say that none of the so-called completions is really a completion of the incomplete work. The work remains incomplete. The so-called completions are distinct works based on the original, incomplete work. However, this way of describing things undercuts the sense that completions somehow fulfill the promise of the original work, even if they do so in disparate ways.

Another option is to claim that all the so-called completions genuinely complete the work. To make sense of this, the Satisfactionist will have to distinguish each completion as a distinct, co-authored work. Each of the co-authored works would share an author and, perhaps, a proper part (depending on how one is conceiving of the metaphysics of the work-type in question). This way of describing things undercuts the sense that these are completions of the *original* artist's work, and not merely co-authored works. In these cases, the original author's plan seems to be the only one that matters, and the completer works only to serve that plan as best they can.

The last option for the Satisfactionist is to say that only one at most (and perhaps none) of a set of so-called completions is actually a completion of the original work. Since completers do seem to work to serve the plan of the original author, it seems only one person

at most could've achieved that. The obvious problem with this is that we tend to count many adequate attempts at completion as legitimate completions. Once again, this decision only arises for the Satisfactionist assuming they endorse Completion Monism. The Completion Pluralist can understand cases of posthumous completion using a distinct notion of completion: all so-called completions genuinely complete the work as versions of it that are complete according to the art-kind to which it belongs. The fact that the completers often don't have access to the original artistic plan for the work doesn't prevent them from making a version of it that's complete according to the salient kind.

In looking closely at both Psychologism and Satisfactionism, we've uncovered problems for both views. Assuming Completion Monism, neither view seems like a promising candidate for the one kind (or the most important kind) of artwork completion. The best explanation for this is that Completion Pluralism is true. After all, as I pointed out in each case, the problems that seem to beset both views are predicated on Completion Monism as an underlying assumption. If Completion Pluralism is adopted instead, the general objections to Psychologism and Satisfactionism lose their power. Moreover, both views are getting at something intuitive about completion. Sometimes, when we ask whether a work is complete, we're likely to be interested in one or both of the questions, "Is the artist done with it?" and "Does it do what the artist wants it to?" There can be better or worse accounts of when a work actually satisfies these intuitive criteria (as there are, for example, competing accounts of Psychologism), but adopting Completion Pluralism allows us to treat both questions as legitimate.

3   In Favor of Completion Pluralism

The foregoing negative argument had the primary aim of undercutting support for Completion Monism. Here I'll provide a distinct, positive argument for thinking Completion Pluralism is true. As I've already stressed, we have a variety of reasons for caring about artwork completion. We want to make sense of moral, legal, social, artistic, aesthetic, and ontological features of artworks and of our social practices of art

These phenomena we want to explain are not always compresent, however. A work can be intuitively complete according to a sense of completion that tracks one property but not another. Take an example. A curator for a museum has been waiting for months for an artist to complete a particular installment. The curator stops by the installment during her lunch break one day and asks an assistant, "Is it finished yet?" In this case, what the curator is interested in, we can presume, is whether the artist is done working on the installation. It doesn't particularly matter for the curator's interests whether the piece satisfies the artist's plan, whether the installment is as aesthetically revelatory as it could be, or even what the thing itself is. On the other hand, suppose the artist takes a step back and asks herself, "Is it finished?" Rohrbaugh's Regress should have us convinced the artist is not interested in the question of whether she herself is done working. Rather, she is asking herself something about the work. Suppose the artist decides it's finished and ratifies it as her own, allowing the plans for its display to move forward. Imagine now an audience member, viewing the work after its eventual date of revelation, unsure of the norms appropriate to the genre in which the artist is working and looking at the seemingly randomly placed materials that make up the installation.

This person asks his friend, "Is it finished?" The audience member, we can imagine, is wondering whether what he's looking at is a complete instance of the kind of thing the artist was attempting to make. It may look to him like an incomplete statue or some kind of half-finished architecture, and his question is in part an attempt to navigate the question of whether it's an incomplete instance of one art-kind or a complete instance of another.

There isn't a single, overriding concern we have when we're inquiring into the nature of artwork completion or the question of whether some particular work is complete. Likewise, there isn't a single property of artworks that all our completion-concerns track. Moreover, the properties our completion concerns track can be instantiated either together or separately, so that depending on the context people will be inclined to call a work complete (or incomplete) if it satisfies (or fails to satisfy) only some of the many properties we associate with completeness (as for example with the *non-finiti* discussed earlier).

All this is the case only if one of two alternatives obtains: Either Completion Monism is true and our concerns about artwork completion don't track the truth about completion, or Completion Pluralism is true. We should be skeptical that our concerns about artwork completion fail to track the truth about completion, though. After all, artwork completion is a socially constructed phenomenon. Whatever theory of completion turns out to be correct, it is certainly the case that the facts about completion are set by our artistic practices of creating, displaying, exchanging, and regarding art (among other things). A theory of artwork completion ought to obey a pragmatic constraint, then, a constraint on theorizing that doesn't allow for us to be massively wrong about what it is for an artwork to be complete.[13] Of course it might be that we come to discover some things about artwork completion that we hadn't

noticed (e.g. maybe we haven't noticed our concept of completion is pluralistic), but if our concerns about artwork completion have nothing to do with when a work is actually complete, then we have no hope of discovering the truth about completion. Since we clearly do have some handle on when a work is complete, we ought to reject the first disjunct above and conclude that Completion Pluralism is true.

One potential objection to this line of argument: there's clearly *something* the curator, artist, and museum-goer are all talking about when they're talking about completion. Completion Pluralism seems to have the consequence that they're just talking past each other. I agree this would be bad. We need an explanation of why all these kinds of completion count as kinds of completion. While I don't have space to give a detailed theory of the unity the kinds of completion, my suggestion is that every kind of completion highlights for us a way in which an artwork attains some stability or equipoise, a resistance to change because of a condition that's been met. Psychologism identifies a condition for a stable end to the project of which the artwork is the output. Satisfactionism identifies a condition for equipoise in the intrinsic state of the work (viz. the work's meeting the plan). In each case, I posit that a kind of completion will strike us as intuitively so only if it has identified a condition for some form of stability in the work. As there are many dimensions along which a work can attain stability, there are many ways it can be complete.

4 Putting Pluralism to Work

In the remainder of this paper, I apply the thesis of Completion Pluralism. To do so, I identify what I take to be four intuitive kinds of artwork completion and show how each

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addresses a distinct concern we sometimes have when we ask whether a work is complete. Additionally, I show how each kind of completion can be present in the absence of some other intuitive kinds of completion.

We've already identified aesthetic completion above as an intuitive kind of completion an artwork can have when it's "worthy of standing by itself, as an object of aesthetic enjoyment." (Beardsley 1982, 55) Others have interpreted Beardsley as claiming that all artists are trying to make aesthetically complete works.[14] While that seems a tad strong, surely it seems right that at least some artists are going for this. Thus, when an artist is trying to complete their work, a good candidate for what at least some have in mind is aesthetic completion. After all, we know from our discussion of Rohrbaugh's Regress that psychologistic completion is not the right kind of completion to identify what artists are after. Satisfactionism may seem like a good candidate for what artists are after. Naturally, we might think, artists want their works to satisfy their plans. We should be circumspect about this line of thought, though. Artists very rightly are sometimes worried about whether their plan will be the best thing for the work. Rather than getting what one wants, then, a mature artist may wish merely that the work be a worthy object of appreciation, whether or not it satisfies their plan.

Sure enough, this just may come about even while the work remains incomplete in other ways. For example, suppose the work attains aesthetic completion even as the artist is still working on it. It's not psychologistically complete, since the artist isn't done. There isn't convergence between work and plan, we can assume, as evidenced by the artist's continuing to work.

Psychologistic completion is, intuitively, the kind of completion a work has when the artist is done with it. While it doesn't seem to be a primary concern of artists, it certainly seems to be a concern of art curators and audiences. Psychologistic completion can clearly obtain in the absence of aesthetic completion. I've argued above that psychologistic completion can obtain without convergence between work and plan (or vice versa) as well, in the Esperanza/Mirabel case and case of the artist who changed their plan upon achieving it.

Satisfactionism identifies another kind of completion, "satisfactory completion," that certainly seems like a relevant concern for those appreciating and evaluating art. Part of the evaluation of art is the evaluation of the artist, and one wants to know that the work is a proper window into the artist's intentions. This is the case only if it does what the artist wants it to, i.e. if there's convergence between work and plan. This can come about, however, in works that are aesthetically incomplete, and even as the artist is still laboring. Thus, satisfactory completion can obtain in absence of aesthetic or psychologistic completion.

It's worth identifying one more kind of completion to show that the extant theories don't exhaust the kinds of completion a Completion Pluralist might posit. Return to the case of Schubert's *Symphony No. 8 in B minor*, i.e. the *Unfinished*. Recall that, in fact, Schubert never finished the *Unfinished*. Let's stipulate that Schubert formed a completion disposition with respect to the *Unfinished*, based on the exercise of his rational faculties. Moreover, let's stipulate (so that it doesn't matter whether our scenario is true or merely imagined) that Schubert's plan for the *Unfinished* was satisfied. Clearly the *Unfinished* is also worthy of standing by itself, as an object of aesthetic enjoyment. In the scenario we're considering, the *Unfinished* satisfies the definitions for artwork completion for each of the kinds explored thus

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far. In such a scenario it would be aesthetically, psychologically, and satisfactorily complete. But it still seems that people would think it incomplete in an important sense. What sense is that?

I think the relevant sense in which the *Unfinished* would be incomplete in this scenario is relative to kind. The *Unfinished* is a symphony. Symphonies are supposed to have a particular structure, involving (minimally) a certain number of movements. Thus, even if a composer composes a piece of music that is aesthetically, psychologically, and satisfactorily complete, this is not sufficient to make the piece a complete symphony. I identify a fourth kind of artwork completion I call "kind-relative completion." For any object x and any artistic kind K, x is complete relative to kind K iff x is a K, but x is lacking some property F that is normative within K. The notion of a property's being "normative within" a kind I take from Dodd (2007, 32-3), who makes a distinction between types that do and types that do not admit of improperly formed tokens. The former kind he follows Wolterstorff (1980) in calling "norm-types". Some examples of norm-types include musical works, novels, and words. What it is to be a properly formed token is determined by the properties that are normative within the type, none of which a properly formed token lacks. My notion of kind-relative completion thus relies on the idea that art-kinds are like norm-types: there can be artworks that are members of the kind even though they lack some property that is constitutive of what it is to be a properly formed member of the kind.

By identifying this fourth intuitive sense of artwork completion I take myself to have further demonstrated the promise of Completion Pluralism for opening up new

horizons in research on artwork completion.[15] The case of the *Unfinished* shows that kind-relative completion is of legitimate interest and that a work can be kind-relative incomplete even if complete in many other ways.

5   Conclusion

The recent thread of literature on artwork completion began with an observation about two kinds of completion. I've argued that the significance of that observation has been entirely overlooked. Proceeding on the (either explicit or operational) assumption of Completion Monism has led to debates that are leading the wrong direction because there is no single real kind of completion. A work might be worthy of standing on its own as an object of aesthetic enjoyment. It might have satisfied the artist's plan. The artist might be done with it. It might or might not be a properly formed member of its kind. These (and perhaps other) notions can use theoretical refining, so that there are certainly best versions of Psychologism, Satisfactionism and of other kinds of completion. The way forward for understanding completion lies at least in part in taking on the project of discovering the many kinds of completion and the ways they can be instantiated either together or apart.

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[2] For a volume containing some recent sociological discussion, see Becker et al. (2006). For the philosophical literature, see Beardsley (1982), Cray (2018), Gover (2011, 2015, 2018), Hick (2008a, 2008b), Livingston (1999, 2005, 2008), Livingston and Archer (2010), Rohrbaugh (2017, 2018), and Trogdon and Livingston (2014, 2015).

[3] Trogdon and Livingston (2014, 225) claim the "legal category of derivative works depends on the category of previously completed works, those on which derivative works are based." Gover (2018, 45-46) corrects this though:

> US copyright law says that the work must be fixed in a tangible medium, but it
> does not say that the work has to be complete in any absolute sense.

See Gover (2011, 2018) for discussion of legal cases where artists cite lack of completion of a work as sufficient reason for suit against a museum for displaying the work. While Gover is clear to point out that the legal and moral rights of the artist in these cases don't depend on the completion of the work, the completion status of the work is cited by the artists and others as morally and legally relevant. Moreover, it's not implausible for a Completion Pluralist to understand the notion of *fixation* as itself a kind of completion. Since nothing in my arguments turn on this, I won't emphasize these points in what follows.

[4] Of course, we can evaluate and appreciate unfinished works. The point is that there is a sense in which we must hold something back in these activities until the artist finishes their work and puts it out for the full scrutiny of the public. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

[5] The later Livingston (in Livingston and Trogdon (2014)) leaves the distinction out. Rohrbaugh (2017, 132) says that setting aside aesthetic completion "allows us to focus on our true topic." Gover (2018) discusses artwork completion at length, treating it as a single monadic (if vague) property of artworks and never mentioning aesthetic completion.

[6] *Non-finiti* are cases of artworks that are intentionally designed to appear as incomplete parts of other wholes, such as other artworks or bodies. A typical *non-finito* might be a sculpture of an arm alone, or a sculpture of a person that appears to have been abandoned. A number of historical cases of *non-finiti* are discussed in Becker et al. (2006).

[7] Cray (2018) also distinguishes between cognitive and non-cognitive versions of Judgment Psychologism. I don't think this complication changes anything that follows, so I omit it.

[8] It's worth pointing out here that regardless of whether this argument succeeds, the point that inspires it is surely correct. Namely, if an artist wants to know whether their work is done, in at least some cases they must do more than merely introspect.

[9] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me.

[10] Hick (2008, 71), Gover (2015, 459) and Trogdon and Livingston (2015, 461) discuss reasons for and against adopting a terminal view of completion. Hick and Trogdon and Livingston opt for a terminal view. Gover argues that completion needn't be terminal on Psychologism.

[11] For more on these cases, see http://www.tolkienlibrary.com/reviews/silmarillion.htm, Kafka (1988), Diamant (2003), and http://www.musicweb-international.com/respighi/lucrezia.htm.

[12] Although there are notable cases in which completions proceed on the basis of notes, explicitly for the purpose of trying to complete the work in a way that satisfies the artist's plan. For example, Christopher Tolkien has published and is still publishing unfinished works of J.R.R. Tolkien using the latter's notes to guide his writing decision. Similarly, Robert Jordan left meticulous notes for the completion of his *Wheel of Time* series when he learned of his impending death, which were used to great effect by Brandon Sanderson. Thanks to Timothy Juvshik for these examples.

[13] For work on the pragmatic constraint in meta-ontology of art, see Davies (2017), Dodd (2012, 2013), Irvin (2008), Kania (2008), Rohrbaugh (2012), and Thomasson (2005, 2006).

[14] See, for example, Hick (2008, 67-8).

[15] Here are two more plausible suggestions for kinds of artwork completion. First, take Gover's (2018) notion of ratification. Gover distinguishes between the moment in which an artist completes their work and the moment in which they ratify it as their own. We might identify ratification as a distinct form of completion, given that if the artist never ratifies a work as their own it seems forever incomplete as a project. Second, consider the notion of material stability: an artwork may be aesthetically, psychologistically, and satisfactorily complete, and yet it still need some work to make it *last*. It is plausibly materially incomplete then, and we can distinguish conditions for material completion of works that require stability of their material state over time to retain their meaning. I thank two anonymous reviewers from this journal for these suggestions and regret that I am unable to explore these points further in the main text for want of space.