

Artworks in Art Museums



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Abstract This essay gives an overview of what is involved in using practices to analyze art in art museums. It begins by discussing the general use of theories of practices in this context, drawing a contrast with actor-network theory. The essay then conceptualizes art and art museums as parts of material arrangements, which people encounter as they carry on certain practices. Topics considered include the polysemy of art works, their contributions to spatiality, the multiple relations that link practices and art works, and the materiality of the works (including the contribution this materiality makes to their identity). A final section examines art works in relation to social change. It argues that, although art works of the sorts found in museums only rarely are directly responsible for social change—art in this regard is a conserving force—, they can importantly contribute indirectly to social change by altering minds.

Keywords Artworks · Museums · Practices · Artworks as material objects · Identity and authenticity of artworks · Artworks and social change

The topic of the present essay is what is involved in approaching contemporary art in art museums through practices. This topic is ultimately motivated by the now pervasive recognition that many features of artworks—like of other entities—depend on the contexts in which artworks occur. The more specific motivation is that in recent years more and more scholars have treated practices as central to the contexts that are pertinent to understanding objects of this or that type. This practice has found its way into studies of contemporary art, art conservation and art museums. For example, van Saaze (2013) claims that objects such as artworks are “constructed” in social practices, but she rues the fact that scholars of art typically overlook practices. Asking what is involved in using practices to analyze art in art museums aims to further this development.

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1 Theories of Practices and Art

Vivian van Saaze advocates a performative approach to artworks and art conservation. According to her approach, conservation is a performance and artworks participate as much as people do in the practices of making and conserving art. Van Saaze draws on Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT), especially its concept of an actant, to conceptualize two things. The first is the participation of artworks in museum practices of collecting and conserving. These artworks and practices mutually shape one another. The second is the practices themselves. Elsewhere I have (e.g., 2002) discussed problems with blanket attributions of agency to nonhumans and noted the absence of any notion of practices in ANT. The closest actor-network theory comes to conceptualizing practices is in highlighting the doings of humans and nonhumans; an ANT practice approach to art and art museums involves following human and nonhuman actors and their doings. This is, however, a rather thin notion of practices. A charitable interpretation is that ANT simply leaves practices unconceptualized. A less charitable reading is that it treats "practices" as just another word for actions or doings, thus with no distinct meaning.

So-called "theories of practices" develop much richer accounts of practices as organized actions. According to this family of accounts, actions are inherently part of larger collections of actions that reflect or realize a common organization. It is this common organization, and the resulting ordering of actions into collections, that differentiates theories of practices from ANT (and from so-called practice-based studies, e.g., Gherardi 2019). Of course, theories of practices differ among themselves about what organizes actions. Bourdieu, for instance, drew together such phenomena as social space, habitus, stakes, strategies and the layouts of settings in conceptualizing what organizes practices. Shove et al. (2012), by contrast, take off from Reckwitz (2002) in holding that blocks of meanings, competences and materials organize practices. My own account claims that practices are organized by rules, pools of understanding and teleoaffective structures.

Another point on which theories of practices diverge is the relationship of material entities to practices. All practice theories recognize the presence of material entities in social life and attend to them both conceptually and in the empirical studies they inform. But a major division among such theories concerns whether material entities are part of practices or instead intimately connected to them. As indicated, for example, Shove et al. treat material entities as one type of element that organizes practices. By contrast, the theories of Bourdieu and myself treat arrangements of material entities as distinct from but intimately connected to practices, constituting settings in which practices proceed.

I will not dwell on these differences in the present context. However, both axes of difference—practice organization and the relationship of materiality to practices—help define what it means to approach art in art museums through practices. Doing this requires recognizing that whatever activities are studied are part of wider arrays of activity organized by common structures: grasping these activities thus requires attention to what organizes them. Approaching art through practices also entails

appreciating the material entities involved with them. Works of art—including musical compositions, videos and time media installations—are material entities (see below). They are, as a result, assimilated into theories of practice according to how such theories conceptualize such entities. On my own account, for example, artworks are treated as components of material arrangements. I hasten to add that the fact that artworks are material entities does not entail that that is *all* they are.

To my knowledge, very little has been written in a practice theoretical vein about works of art. Bourdieu (e.g., 1990, 1993, 1996) is the only author who has dedicated substantial pages to the subject (see also Schatzki (2014) on art bundles). The below account of analysing contemporary artworks in art museums through practices uses my own ideas about practices. Doing this means, *inter alia*, that the actions and practices that need to be taken into account are performed exclusively by human beings and that artworks are part of wider arrangements of material entities that are closely interwoven with practices. As a result, attention must be paid to relations that hold between artwork-embracing arrangements and relevant practices.

2 Approaching Artworks in Art Museums Through Practices

I indicated above that artworks, as material entities, are part of arrangements, amid which practices proceed. An arrangement of entities is simply a set of interrelated material entities as interrelated. Works of art, as material entities, are inevitably components of arrangements. In a museum, for instance, any artwork is part of an arrangement embracing walls, floors, benches, mountings, bases, air, AC and heating systems, people, clothing, grime on shoes, circulating dust and the like. In the museum courtyard, moreover, a work, often a sculpture, might be part of an arrangement embracing trees, grass, gravel walkways, benches, bushes, bugs and people etc. And in the square facing the museum a work could be linked to expanses of pavement, fountains, stone bases, trees, horses, street vendors and musicians, and the like.

All these arrangements constitute settings in which people act. Artworks are no different from other material entities in this regard. Another way they are no different from many other material entities is that they tend to be parts of arrangements of particular sorts. Hung on walls with accessible spaces in front of them is one such type of arrangement. Standing in a room or erected in an enclosed or semi-enclosed outdoors space with places for sitting and paths for moving are two more. Benches, gravel paths, chairs, lights, information plates, people and animals etc. complete the arrangements.

Museal arrangements that include works of art are entwined with particular practices. Museums, for example, evince practices of curation, conservation and security, which hang together with those of management. These practices link with still others that are relevant to examining art in art museums, for example, practices

of publicity, art appreciation and cleaning. Sometimes, moreover, artworks are created in museums (e.g., the copy of Bruegel's *Beekeepers* chalked on the floor of the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris described in Yaneva 2003), in which case practices overtly concerned with the making of artworks come into view. Additional practices carried on in a museum include those of parenting, gossiping, planning and, at least in movies, espionage. Every practice just mentioned is or can be important to approaching artworks in art museums through practices. Then, there are all the practices focused on art carried on outside art museums in galleries, in public squares, in living rooms, in offices, on sidewalks, in vacant lots and the like. The focus of the present essay, however, is museums alone. In any event, a researcher must have a capacious sense of the range of practices that might be taken account of when approaching art in art museums through practices. This is true even if one's topic is a conceptual issue about the meaning or identity of a work of art (see below).

When they encounter entities, people, generally speaking, are acting. Entities might be gazed at, observed, watched, looked over, listened to, smelled, felt, touched, thought about, imagined and so on. They can also be used, manipulated, held, tossed up and down, passed to others and the like. Activities of these types are also components of practices: in performing them people carry on particular practices. Many such activities, perceptual ones included, also occur as part of multiple practices. Someone, for instance, might look at or watch something while cooking, while carrying on a conversation, while taking a break from work, while thinking absentmindedly, while taking in art, while guarding a museum room, while wondering whether the works in the room were rightly placed and so on. Finally, these acts, in happening as part of particular practices, are subject to the organizations of these practices. These organizations differ. That for the sake of which watching something is acceptable or prescribed differs among surveillance practices at prisons, surveillance practices at museums, flirting practices among co-workers, spectator practices at sporting events and practices of appreciating art in museums.

The practices, in the enactment of which works of art are encountered, are many. People can look at or bump into artworks in art appreciation practices, brush and vacuum them in cleaning practices, appeal to them in parenting practices, notice them during conversations or when engaged in espionage, and so on. What an artwork is encountered as varies among practices and often is tied to the organizations of these practices or the sorts of activities that compose them. A work of art, moreover, is not always encountered *as* a work of art. This typically occurs, of course, when people are appreciating or installing art; in fact, if someone spies a work of art when carrying out some other practice—say, holding a conversation—and begins to consider it as a work of art, she has likely switched (or is wavering) between appreciating art and conversing. Finally, the range of activities in which artworks are encountered as art depends on the particular works involved and can include activities as varied as studying, looking over, walking around, contemplating, picking up, lifting, moving, dusting, drawing, painting, listening, watching and taking in.

A work of art can have many meanings. Something's meaning is what it is encountered *as* (in a wide sense of encountering that includes making, understanding, and thinking about something). A work of art can have many meanings because the meanings of material entities, artworks included, depend on the activities and practices in which they are encountered. A particular artwork can be something to identify a museum with in publicity, something to conserve, something to draw, something to gaze and marvel at, something that can keep the kids' attention occupied and so on. An artwork does not cease being an artwork when it assumes these other meanings. What's more, it remains one and the same object regardless of how many things it is encountered as—one and the same work of art regardless of how many (additional) meanings it assumes. It is not the case, as Annemarie Mol (2002) claims about tuberculosis, that a given work of art is as many entities—let alone as many artworks—as there are practices in which it is encountered. Rather, it is one entity with multiple meanings, one of which, i.e., artwork, it retains in at least most practices in which it assumes other meanings. The entity's origin and location help explain how this retention works. Note that a similar structure of core plus additional meanings characterizes entities other than art works, for instance, use objects and even sometimes people.

Like other material entities, furthermore, artworks establish spatialities, as part of material arrangements and in conjunction with practices and what people are up to in carrying the practices on. Spatialities are arrays of places and paths through which people move. A place is a place to X, whereas a path is a way from one place to another. A place from which to view art is an obvious example. Another is the paths people take through museum rooms and courtyards, walking, chatting and looking (cf. Ingold 2000). In helping to establish arrays of places and paths, artworks also help institute locales in the sense of Martin Heidegger's (1971) *Orte*: regions where certain activities and patterns of activity are coordinated with arrangements of material entities and happen at places and along paths that these arrangements help establish. Locales are often given names such as street corner, subway car, boardroom, public square, museum gallery, meeting room; the presence of art in them is sometimes enshrined in their names, e.g., the Botticelli Room. Locales also constitute delimited or relatively delimited settings for action. Note that art is typically found in locales and rarely in landscapes, which are expansive visual portions of the world falling away from people (see Schatzki 2010).

Artworks tend to be components of locales of particular types, for example, museums (galleries, offices, function rooms, vacant lots, private homes etc.). Specific constellations of practices and arrangements mark these locales. Yaneva (2003, p. 117) distinguishes between the museum as site and as setting. I am not sure what she means by this distinction in the context of her actor-network analysis of the museum as “a messy world composed of heterogeneous actors with a variable ontology” (*ibid*). I will appropriate, however, the distinction as follows: the museum as site is a constellation of interrelated practices and arrangements as part of which particular events and processes pertaining to art occur, for example, appreciation, curation and conservation. The museum as setting denotes the material arrangements that compose this constellation and the fact that these arrangements constitute

settings in which people act and carry on practices. All social formations but the simplest, including museums, are both site and setting: the constellation of practices and arrangements that composes a social formation encompasses social processes, and its constituent material arrangements form settings in which participants enact these practices. Note, incidentally, that Latour and Yaneva's (2008, p. 88) conception of the museum as an ecology in effect treats the museum as just a setting (though it construes the components of this setting as actants).

I mentioned above that practices interweave with arrangements. Exploring this interweaving reveals several notable features of artworks in museums. My comments will concentrate on five types of relation between practices and arrangements: causality, prefiguration, constitution, anchoring/institution and intelligibility.

Causal relations go from practices and the activities that compose them to arrangements and the material entities that compose them—and vice versa. People, for instance, *intervene* into the world, effecting changes there. They set up art installations, clean them, damage them, steal them, cordon them off, build structures that house them and so on. Conversely, material objects, events and processes *induce* people to perform actions. Artworks induce activities such as scrutinizing, looking at, looking over, listening, touching, sighing, admiring, whispering, criticizing, shouting, pausing, hurrying and pondering. Indeed, museums are set up so that these reactions, which modern educated people must consider valuable, can occur; this is why museums typically incorporate generous spaces, spread artworks out, and make them easily accessible experientially. To be sure, intervening in the world and inducing action are different forms of causality. Nonetheless, they are both ways in which entities bear responsibility (see Heidegger 1977) for events and changes in the world.

A second relation between practices and arrangements is prefiguration. Prefiguration is the difference that the present makes to the future. This difference is often conceptualized as enablement and constraint, or the delimitation of possibilities. It actually embraces more. For the present does not just circumscribe what, going forward, is and is not possible, that is, feasible or infeasible. It also qualifies possible ways of continuing as easier or harder, shorter or longer, cheaper or more expensive, more or less time consuming, conforming or daring, permitted or proscribed, and so on in registers that matter or are relevant to people. How feasible actions stack up on these registers differentiates them and determines what people are likely to do. It is clear that material arrangements prefigure people's activities and the practices they carry on. A cell phone, for instance, radically affects the salencies of different ways of catching up with friends and, as a result, how people likely do so. Similarly, exhibitions of artworks prefigure what teachers, conservators and lovers of art etc. do. Contemporary installation art illustrates this idea well. Art conservators who are responsible for installation pieces today face an array of salient ways of acting different from the one facing conservators who are responsible for old masters. The differences are tied to differences in the artworks involved and in the dilemmas they raise relative to the ends of art conservation practices. Thrown into and projecting different, differently qualified possible actions, what these conservators do can easily differ from what their more traditional colleagues do.

The third type of relation between practices and arrangements is constitution. What I mean by “constitution” is particular material entities or arrangements thereof being essential to particular practices or, vice versa, particular practices being essential to particular entities or arrangements. Horses and horseshoes, for instance, are essential to horseshoeing, just as metal forging practices are essential to horseshoes. As this example suggests, essentiality is not necessity in any strong sense of the term, for example, “required in all possible worlds.” It instead amounts to something like “required in the historical circumstances” or “required as things stand or for the time being.” In this sense, artworks are essential to practices of art appreciation or art conservation. Note that this proposition, possibly despite appearances, is not a matter of definition. People *could* scrutinize, look over, watch, stroll around, maintain and repair, say, refrigerators in the ways they do works of art. Indeed, they do some of these things when purchasing a fridge. But vis-à-vis artworks these activities compose regular practices, whereas vis-à-vis appliances they are more sporadic and fragmented. Note, further, that this difference between artworks and appliances might not arise from features of these entities taken by themselves. It could instead reflect the arrangements and bundles that these entities are components of. If a refrigerator is put in a museum gallery, visitors, or at least many visitors, will act towards it as they more unthinkingly do towards artworks and even have accompanying “aesthetic experiences.” Of course, the arrangements of museums, galleries and homes are not needed for art appreciation practices to occur; an artwork installed on the side of a building or on a busy sidewalk is also likely to induce acts of appreciation. At the same time, I wonder whether artworks can exist in the absence of practices of art appreciation. In any event, a museum constellation evinces a variety of constitutional relations, though some of its bundles—for example, those involving parenting practices—probably lack these.

A fourth relation is anchoring and instituting. I have already discussed this phenomenon. It is material entities and arrangements, in conjunction with practices, anchoring places, and paths for activity and instituting locales. Museum constellations provide clairvoyant examples of this relation. The Botticelli and *One Candle* galleries, the sculpture garden, the gift shop, the entrance and the café—these are all locales, encompassing arrays of places and paths established by the material arrangements that compose them in conjunction with the practices interwoven with these arrangements.

The final relation I will discuss is intelligibility. This relation concerns how entities acquire meaning through bundles. As discussed, a material entity can be many things. A shell, for instance, can be a paperweight. It acquires this meaning, moreover, in certain bundles, for instance, those of curio production or those carried on in home offices, and it can retain this meaning in further bundles, including those of gifting and selling/buying. A shell can also be a weapon or an object of great monetary worth, again, in, or on the background of, certain practices. Of course, a shell’s meaning as shell likewise ultimately derives from certain practices, namely, those of biology or those pursued on visits to seashores. Even its meaning as material entity depends on practices, in this case, on the broad range of practices in which it is or can be encountered and dealt with as such an entity. Similarly, an artwork acquires

the meaning, artwork, in certain practices, for instance, those of art production, art appreciation, criticism, and the selling and purchasing of art. And once acquired, this meaning can stay with the object as it enters different bundles, for example, those located at corporate offices. Parallel remarks can be made about art museums. A particular built edifice is an art museum, or a museum building, by virtue of practices in which it is encountered and dealt with as a structure that houses or is supposed to house art. Such practices include those of construction, city planning, municipal or state policy-making and budget appropriation, publicity, art curation and management, art appreciation, and so on. The meaning is mobile, too, in the sense that if, say, a city resident taking a visitor on a tour of the city points and says, “That’s the museum,” the use of the word “museum” in the practices the resident and guests are carrying on picks out the place that houses art, that was approved, planned and constructed, that people visit to see art, and whose staff members diligently display and maintain artworks.

I emphasize that the approach to artworks in art museums outlined here treats these entities as material entities. A material entity is something with a physical-chemical composition. Like museums, artworks—even graphical works and virtual collections available only online—are material objects. In fact, artworks and museums are encountered and dealt with *as* material entities in a wide range of practices—of appreciation, installation, cleaning, conservation, perambulation and the like. However, being material does not make everything about something material. What I mean is that events and processes of nonmaterial sorts can and do befall material entities. Events and processes are material when they occur to entities due to these entities’ physical-chemical composition. An example is gravitational attraction and falling, which happen to material entities, including artworks, due to their physical-chemical composition. Many events and processes are not material in this sense. If I pick up a shell off my desk and give it to someone as a gift, the event of gifting is social, not material, even though it involves material objects and states of affairs, for example, the shell and its movement in space. A wide range of nonmaterial events and processes, including performances of actions, befall the material arrangements—including the human bodies and art works—amid which practices are plied. This fact, however, does not impugn the material character of these arrangements. Indeed, materiality lends solidity and stability to bundles and social states of affairs (see Olsen 2010), and chances are that the vast bulk of nonmaterial events and processes would not occur if arrangements were not material. This is true, for example, of most performances of action. If artworks and museums (as well as humans) were not material entities, it would be hard to appreciate, visit, clean, display or maintain them, or even to be concerned with the nature of their identity or authenticity.

Materiality is also intimately connected to the identity (and authenticity) of artworks (cf. Laurensen 2006). Identity is not the same as meaning. Whereas meaning is what something is encountered as, identity is an entity, say, a work of art, being the same entity over time. Identity establishes that there is a single, selfsame entity, which can have multiple meanings. As a general proposition, the identity of any material entity lies in its material persistence. For centuries,

moreover, the material persistence of works of art filled out how people understood the identities of these works. Since, however, the beginning of what Walter Benjamin (1968) called the age of technical, or material, reproduction, criticisms of this idea have mounted. It is even sometimes said that the reproducibility of written works such as musical compositions, poems and plays, like the eventual character of musical and theatrical performances, should have problematized the idea earlier. In any event, today certain installation pieces again put pressure on the idea (see, e.g., Laurenson 2006 and van Saaze 2013). In my opinion, however, these developments do not challenge the basic idea that the identity of a work of art is tied to materiality. They simply broaden the range of material states of affairs relevant to identity beyond persistence to include derivability. The production of an artwork still involves a material Ur-work of some sort that is central to the identity (and authenticity) of the work. This holds not just of paintings and sculptures, but also of photographs, movies, videos and poems as well as works of music, theatre and dance. Even the advent of digital production has not fundamentally altered the situation since the initial production of a work on a particular digital device or network of devices can be taken as the original work that other versions copy or reproduce. In short, the identity of a material entity, including a work of art, lies in its material heritage—regardless of the arrangements the entity is part of, the practices in which it is encountered, and the chains of activity and material events and processes that arise from it.

This way of looking at the identity of artworks is temporal and causal in character. It ties the identity of an artwork to either the persistence of or the causal derivation of copies, versions, and descendants from an original product. The derivation can be effected through different processes, including writing by hand, making copies with a printing press, taking pictures, seeing and subsequently recreating, mechanically reproducing, digitally proliferating, or replacing worn, broken or missing parts. The questions that arise concern such matters as the fidelity of copies or processes of reproduction, the ease of producing copies or versions, and the extent of replacement as well as the significance of replaced components: if *One Candle* (see van Saaze 2013) could not have been easily, and in principle more or less perfectly, duplicated, the issue of how many One Candles there are would not have arisen. For the same reasons, the question of whether a copy of the *Mona Lisa* drawn by an artist visiting the Louvre is the *Mona Lisa* does not arise. The materiality of the original work—the first *One Candle* or the *Mona Lisa*—is essential to its being an entity that can be the starting point of subsequent series of events and processes. Indeed, materiality is crucial to identity regardless of how conceptual a work of art is or how much its identity seems to lie in something other than material heritage. Consider, for instance, the digital copying of a movie in the form of DVDs. The original product—ultimately, a gigantic series of 1s and 0s realized as a distribution of atoms—is subject to a causal copying process that results in further distributions of atoms realizing the same series. It is (1) the material distinctness of each of the multiple molecular arrangements that ensures that there are different DVDs and (2) the convertibility of these arrangements into perceptually the same images and sounds that qualifies them as copies of the same movie.

3 Artworks and Social Change

A recent book of mine (Schatzki 2019) explores the contribution of the material world to social change. This contribution is substantial, far greater than is sometimes supposed. In fact, I argue, material entities events and processes constitute one of two major dynamos in social life; the other is chains of activity. The remainder of this essay explores the contributions that artworks make to social change. Their *direct* contribution, I aver, is miniscule. Indeed, art is in this regard a conserving force in society. At the same time, works of art make important *indirect* contributions to change.

Before explaining this, I should state that by “change” I mean significant difference. Some theorists equate change with difference simpliciter. This equation implies that because any event, and even more any process, introduces infinitely many differences into the world, any event or process is responsible for infinitely many changes there. This way of thinking makes it hard to see how anything persists, a dilemma similar to the one Heraclitus created in claiming that no one can step in the same river twice. Persistence, furthermore, is not the absence of difference: nothing persists—remains the same entity—over time without evincing differences (necessarily with earlier states of itself). In particular, all artworks become different over time: paint deteriorates and discolours, hewn stone deteriorates, equipment breaks down and is repaired or replaced, and objects are dropped or knocked over and damaged. But an artwork, despite becoming different, can remain the same work. This suggests that difference cannot simply be equated with change. My intuition is that differences amount to changes only when they are significant, and that whether or not differences are significant depends on what follows from them, what they are juxtaposed with, and who is judging the matter. Incidentally, it follows from the proposition that an artwork can persist despite becoming different that the identity of any work—like that of any material entity—encompasses material differences. Indeed, identity is always identity through difference. This proposition holds equally of a singular work like the *Mona Lisa*, a time media installation or installation piece such as Nam June Paik’s *Untitled* (see Domínguez Rubio 2014), and a work such as *One Candle*, copies or versions of which proliferate. The idea of identity over difference also dovetails well with the idea that artworks can have trajectories (van de Vall et al. 2011) or careers (van Saaze 2013). For the idea of a trajectory or career presumes that the same entity exists over time: the fact that an entity has a trajectory or a career indicates that *it* has become different.

I should also say a word about what *social* changes are. Social changes are by definition changes in social phenomena. Social phenomena, moreover, consist in slices and aspects of bundled practices and material arrangements, including constellations thereof (see Schatzki 2002). This analysis implies that social changes, changes in social phenomena, consist in changes to (slices and aspects of) bundles and constellations. Changes in art conservation, for example, consist in changes to the practice-arrangement bundles that art conservation practices are part of, thus, changes in these practices, including in the activities, ends, understandings, tasks

and emotions that compose them; changes in the material arrangements to which these practices are bundled, including in the artworks that compose them; and changes in relations between these practices and material arrangements and among these practice-arrangement bundles. Any social change likely embraces a myriad of changes of these sorts.

There are four basic ways the material world can bear responsibility for differences in social life and, thus, for social changes. To begin with, material events and processes can bring about differences and changes, that is, make them happen. Earthquakes, for instance, can wreak destruction on human lives and abodes: they bring about these destructive changes. Wind and rain, moreover, can wear down built structures, just as solar flares can interrupt communications. And infection can spread through a body and cause, that is, bring about disease or even death, just as contamination can ruin stored grain in a barn or granary. Being responsible for changes by bringing them about tallies with what many people think of as causality: states of affairs being made to happen independent of human activity. When the material world makes things happen in social life, the results can be destructive or worse. This is why human beings are forever constructing material structures to block or mitigate such effects.

The second sort of responsibility that the material world can bear for differences and changes in social life is to induce changes in activity, and thus in practices and bundles. Material entities, events and processes can induce all sorts of changes in activity. For example, earthquakes, infection, contamination, weathering and solar flares do not simply bring about changes; they also induce people to change how they act, including which material entities and arrangements thereof they fashion. More generally, over the course of any day almost anyone responds to numerous material events and processes. When a whistling tea kettle induces someone to pick up the kettle and fill her mug with hot water, a material process has led to performances of particular actions. Similarly, when a monumental art installation causes someone to open his eyes wide in amazement, the installation has induced a particular behaviour. In this way, the material world bears massive responsibility for social changes. All sorts of significant differences in social life arise from people's reactions to material entities, events and processes.

The third sort of responsibility that the material world can bear for social differences and changes is mediating the chains of activity that, in criss-crossing bundles and constellations, constitute and lead to social changes. I mentioned above that chains of activity constitute the second chief dynamo in social life. A chain of activities is series of activities, each of which responds to the previous member or to a change that the previous member brought about. Material entities, events and processes regularly mediate such chains. If someone switches on a monitor and others gather to watch something on Apple TV, chains that envelop the activities of turning on the monitor and watching it are mediated by the flow of electricity and the functioning of the monitor, together with the flow of text and images across it. Monitors and screens likewise mediate chains encompassing people verbally reacting to one another when they converse over Zoom. Similarly, when an artwork in a museum gallery induces a wide-eyed response, a chain encompassing the

installation of the work and the reaction is mediated by, among other things, the work itself. A little imagination quickly reveals just how extensively the material world mediates chains of action. Given the immense responsibility that such chains bear for social changes, this is a very significant contribution that the material world makes to social change.

The final way in which the material world bears responsibility for social differences and changes is by prefiguring activities that constitute, bring about or lead to changes. For present purposes, the overall difference that prefiguration makes to activity can be specified as the making more or making less likely of possible actions, through the synthesis of the multiple salencies that possible actions bear given (aspects of) the present state of the world. This type of responsibility for events and processes differs greatly from the other types discussed. It is neither a bringing about, an inducing, nor a facilitation of actions and material events/processes. It is more like a labile medium in which these actions and occurrences happen and form series, thereby shifting the medium. In a museum, for example, works of art prefigure people's paths through the building and, thus, where they act and what their activities bring about or induce.

Works of art do not bring about much social change. Although they might be dynamic in the sense of self-moving or -energizing (though maybe only after being plugged in), they do not, like humans, intervene in practices and bundles and alter them. Nor do they befall, infiltrate or irrupt into social life. At the same time, artworks clearly bear responsibility for differences and, possibly thus for changes, in the other three ways described: they induce actions, mediate chains of action and prefigure what people do. How much they accomplish these depends on circumstances and varies from case to case. Generally speaking, however, the differences that artworks bear responsibility for are small and insignificant. Not much real social change directly results from the presence of art in our lives.

In a most interesting article, Fernando Domínguez Rubio describes what he claims is "the active and causally-effective" role that artworks play "in the production and sustenance of cultural forms and meanings" (Domínguez Rubio 2014, p. 620). He observes that the introduction of certain installation or media works in museums has undercut standardized ways museum employees deal with works of art (e.g., classify, maintain, install and view them). Thereby, it has shifted the relative positions of curators and conservators in museum divisions of labour and, in this sense, been responsible for an "unfolding of different institutional and organization forms" (2014, p. 620). In resisting standard practices, boundaries and meanings, these works qualify as what Domínguez Rubio calls "unruly objects." He opposes unruly objects to docile ones: objects, including artworks, that because they can be handled in standard ways do not lead to changed practices and changed institutional or organizational forms.

The differences Domínguez Rubio describes clearly amount to changes in the lives of museum employees. They are not likely, however, to qualify as changes in any other regard. It is not clear, consequently, that the particular MoMA case Domínguez Rubio describes (involving Nam June Paik's *Untitled*) instances social change or simply certain practices becoming different. Even though the altered

division of labour spread to museum bundles beyond MoMA, it is not obvious that museal institutional and organizational forms before and after the spread were much different and that the differences therefore qualify as social change. Artworks are certainly responsible for all sorts of difference: how, for instance, curators, conservators or consumers of art act towards artworks differs according to the type of artwork involved. What's more, limited differences, or differences confined to smallish constellations such as museums, can accumulate and eventuate in change. But the truth is that artworks rarely lead to significant changes in bundles and constellations. Only to a limited extent do the "physical properties of artworks. . .shape the ways in which organizational and institutional dynamics within the museum unfolds over time. . ." (ibid.).

Similarly, Yaneva (2003) goes too far in saying that each installation or creation of a work of art in a museum changes the museum (and those installing or creating it). It is true that whenever a work of art is installed or produced in a museum the museum, strictly speaking, becomes different. In most cases, however, the difference is miniscule. In these cases, it is pedantic and not even true to claim that the installation or creation of a work of art changes the museum or those installing or creating it. Change occurs only if, say, the monumentality of an artwork secures the museum's fame for years or if an installation requires a large-scale rearrangement of works in the museum. A museum changes with the installation or creation of an artwork only if there is something unusual, monumental, or lasting about the work involved or its repercussions for the museum and its public. The acquisition of the *No Ghost Just a Shell* collection by the van Abbemuseum in the Netherlands is probably an example (see van Saaze 2013).

Material entities regularly bear partial responsibility for changes in a host of ways that works of art generally do not. Food, biological agents, weapons, fire and the like effect changes by acting on human bodies. Artworks, by contrast, do not generally achieve this; an exception might be some works that incorporate human bodies, for example, via tattoos. Similarly, artworks do not often contribute to changes by connecting arrangements in the ways that electricity, communication systems, bridges, mountain passes and rivers do. And, as suggested, artworks do not intervene into and destroy bundles as earthquakes, storms, invading armies, fire, gas leaks and the like do. Nor do artworks mimic bodies and technological set-ups in opening bundles to material or biological flows; indeed, in this regard works of art are relatively inert. Technology, too, alters practices and bundles in ways unmatched by works of art. Phones, computers, cars, planes, atomic bombs and the like have instigated social changes that affect most lives, and not just in the more developed world. Nothing like this can be said about works of art. Nor do artworks pose logistical issues of the magnitude that coping with material space raises (e.g., distance) or exert the lasting impacts on bundles and constellations that material spaces exert (e.g., the locations of cities). In being incorporated into museums and private collections, finally, works of art end up being much less mobile than such material entities as money, documents, bodies, cars, skateboards and organisms. As a result, they fail to effect the sort of dispersed connectivity that such entities can achieve.

These matters are obvious. What they indicate, however, is that works of art bear relatively little responsibility for changes in social life. Maybe, however, no one has ever claimed that they do. Still, it is striking that this could be true of such a prominent category of material object. This situation suggests that art is largely a conserving force in society (I do not write “conservative” for reasons that will be soon be clear). That is, bundles that include artworks among their components are relatively stable and are not the source of chains of action or material events and processes that are responsible for change. Consequently, I affirm Domínguez Rubio’s characterization of museums as “objectification machines” (2014, p. 620) that seek to stabilize artworks materially and conceptually. Indeed, the success of museums in this regard might be part of the story about why artworks bear relatively little responsibility for social changes.

At the same time, works of art do bear responsibility for changes of two sorts, both of which can or do bear indirect responsibility for social changes (i.e., changes in bundles and constellations). The first is changes in cultural forms. Works of art undoubtedly bear significant responsibility for cultural changes, for instance, evolutions in art. In this regard, Domínguez Rubio is right that works of art play a causally-effective role in the production and maintenance of *cultural* forms and meanings—it is just that they do not play this role vis-à-vis social forms. Changes in cultural forms, however, only occasionally bear responsibility for social changes.

Works of art, moreover, can affect people’s thoughts, perceptions and motivations and in this way indirectly bear responsibility for social changes. Artworks can have this effect in many ways. They portray, reveal, and thereby call attention to social states of affair; they make people realize things or become pensive, contemplative or angry; they hold up people’s lives and induce them to confront themselves; they articulate and instigate thought; they teach people to look at things more closely; they overtly protest particular states of affairs; and in their inventiveness and capacity to shock they can make people understand that difference and change are real and viable. As Adorno (1998) suggested, artworks raise the utopian possibility of the end of suffering. In these and other ways, works of art make people more open to and interested in social change and even point towards the directions it should take. As a result, artworks join other artistic forms such as literature, cinema, drama, poetry, dance and even musical composition in indirectly bearing responsibility for social change. I hasten to add that indirect responsibility for social changes does not imply insignificant responsibility. On the contrary: shaping thought and action can be the start of significant change. Not surprisingly, consequently, repressive governments have long suppressed art.

Curators and conservators are keepers of objectification and stability. Curators organize the objectified forms that contribute to stabilization, while conservators maintain them. Their efforts thereby secure museums as sites of objectification and social persistence. At the same time, curators and conservators organize as well as preserve past cultural upheavals and stand watch over intellectual and personal shock, provocation, mirroring, attention-focusing and protest. They can concentrate, however, on their jobs. Artworks, together with practices of art appreciation, take care of the rest.

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