

Book Reviews

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Work and Object, by Peter Lamarque. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 248 pages. Pbk, ISBN 978-0-19-965549-6

The nature of works (of art) and their properties is *the* issue that unifies the many different questions addressed in *Work and Object*. It will be useful to present the view that Lamarque defends in this book by considering how it would apply to a particular work (of art). So consider Gaudí's *Casa Batlló*. The following is a description of the nature of this work of art and its properties according to Lamarque's view.

First of all, Gaudí's *Casa Batlló* is a *work* whereas the collection of glass, wood, iron, ceramics, Montjuic sandstone and the rest of materials that constitute it is a mere real thing or *object*. These two things, work and object, are distinct. They have different essential properties. For instance, while *Casa Batlló* is essentially a building, its constituting material is not. It could have constituted something different instead. And while Gaudí's work is imaginative, fantastical and original, its constituting material is not. Secondly, Gaudí's *Casa Batlló* would not have come into existence if the practice of architecture did not exist in the time of its creation and it would cease to exist if, and when, no one could understand architecture. *Casa Batlló*, like all the other works of art, was created, and hence brought into existence, when Gaudí completed it and decided it was complete under a conception of what had been achieved (i.e. a work of architecture). Thirdly, *Casa Batlló*, that is, the work, rather than its constituting object, is an intentional object whose nature cannot but be what is thought to be by our cultural human community, given that the very existence, nature and survival of *Casa Batlló* essentially depend on the practices and conceptions of that community. For instance, it is not possible for us to discover one day that *Casa Batlló* is not a building. *Casa Batlló*'s existence, though, does not depend on any individual mind. *Casa Batlló* is a real building, not an ideal object. It could exist and survive even if no one were to contem-

plate it, as long as the possibility of an appropriate appreciation of it remained. Fourthly, there is indeed an appropriate appreciation of *Casa Batlló*. For at least some of its properties are objective, even if response-dependent. These are at least its expressive and representational properties, such as *being moving* and *representing sea-life*. These properties depend on responses, but of well-informed specialized perceivers. Its purely evaluative properties such as *being beautiful* may not be objective, though. For they may depend on further specific conditions of its perceivers, well-informed and specialized or not. Fifthly, *Casa Batlló's* vividness, for instance, is one of its aesthetic properties. It is an essential property it has, even if it is relational. On the one hand, vividness is relational in the sense that, as explained above, it depends on the response of a class of connoisseurs. And, hence, it involves a relation between *Casa Batlló* and a response of ideal perceivers. On the other hand, it is essential because nothing could be *Casa Batlló* unless it was vivid. Other aesthetic properties, the purely evaluative in particular, such as *Casa Batlló's* beauty, may not be essential to it, though. Sixthly, *Casa Batlló* is dynamic, but it would not be dynamic, and would not have any other aesthetic property, unless its having those properties made a difference in a correct experience of it. Even an object that were as indiscernible from *Casa Batlló's* constituting object as Danto's indiscernibles are from each other could be non-dynamic, or fail to share any other of its aesthetic properties, and thus, afford different (perhaps even perceptual) experiences. They would *look* different to well-informed appreciators. Knowing that *Casa Batlló* is one of Gaudí's creations, as well as knowing that it belongs to the category of architectural works, as Walton pointed out, is required for its correct appreciation and experience of its aesthetic properties. Seventhly, whereas *Casa Batlló* is a Catalan modernist building, and this is a general style recognized in features such as wavy lines and curved shapes that suggest natural forms, it also exhibits Gaudí's particular style, which is constituted by individual ways of implementing modernism. Gaudí's style is determined by Gaudí's psychological states, but this is not the case for the Catalan modernist general style, which is not based on any individual psychological state or process, but characterized by general features instead. Finally, *Casa Batlló* is emblematic and this property, among others, has been imputed to it through interpreta-

tion. After all, this is a property that *Casa Batlló* did not have since the very beginning, but acquired once it got interpreted.

As we could appreciate from this example, Lamarque argues that works (of art) are cultural intentional objects. In general, he characterizes works (of art) as having the following features: (a) they are real but distinct from the mere real things or objects that constitute them (*realism*); (b) their identity and survival conditions essentially depend on artistic practices and conceptions (or at least on appropriate reception conditions), though not on any individual mind (*non-idealism*); (c) they are created; (d) they are intentional objects in the sense that their nature *is* what is *thought* to be; (e) some of their properties are imputed by interpretation (*imputationalism*); (f) at least some of their properties are objective, depending on the responses of a class of ideal perceivers (*normativity*); (g) at least some of their aesthetic properties (if they have any) are essential, even if relational (*aesthetic essentialism*); (h) they have general as well as individual styles: their general style is well-captured by some of its characteristic features (*feature-based definition of style*), whereas their individual style is determined by the artist's individual ways of creating them and her psychological states and processes (*act-based definition of style*); and (i) they have different aesthetic properties only insofar as they afford experiential differences (*aesthetic empiricism*). In sum, this is what, according to Lamarque, characterizes works, both works of art and works which would not qualify as art.

As much as I share many of Lamarque's intuitions and I am very much sympathetic to the central tenets of this view, there are certain points in the book that did not convince me. Although there are many interesting issues I would like to comment on, I shall focus and structure my critical comments around two pervasive issues: what strikes me as a lack of a clear distinction between metaphysics and epistemology, and a lack of a consistent application of the distinction between work and object.

Starting with the first of these two issues, there are several ideas in the book which I think arise from not clearly distinguishing between metaphysics and epistemology. I will mention here just some of them. For instance, at some point in the book (p. 7) Lamarque discusses the question of the possible arbitrariness of ontology and easily concludes that ontology is arbitrary just on the basis of the

difficulties typically found in reaching a decision about what the best ontological theory is. This is to illegitimately get a metaphysical conclusion from epistemological premises. Clearly, the fact that it is hard to *know* what there is does not entail that there is no fact of the matter about what there is. Of course, this is compatible with some inescapable arbitrariness in the process of theory building. The theorist needs to make certain decisions that are arbitrary to some extent at some points in that process. But this arbitrariness is ultimately neutralized, when the theory faces its final test against the relevant data. Another example of unclarity about the distinction between metaphysics and epistemology is Lamarque's argument to the effect that aesthetics, unlike science and philosophy, cannot clash with common sense beliefs about works (of art). On his view, common sense beliefs about (art)works cannot be wrong precisely because a work (of art)'s origin, identity and survival *metaphysically* depend on human practices and conceptions. However, metaphysical dependence does not warrant epistemic infallibility. Not even if the dependence in question is on something related to epistemology, such as humans' conceptions. That works (of art) metaphysically depend on human practices and conceptions does not entail that humans cannot get them wrong. In this case, what we have is an illegitimate inference from a metaphysical premise to an epistemic conclusion. A third interesting case is provided by Lamarque's use of the Prehistoric cave paintings (p. 70, 115) as a clear example of his thesis that not only a work's creation and identity, but also its survival, depend on human practices and conceptions. Prehistoric cave paintings, he argues, are no work (of art), even if perhaps they once were, because we lack the appropriate knowledge required for a correct appreciation of them and this knowledge, it seems, can no longer be recovered. However, without further reasons I also fail to see this as a legitimate inference. My own intuition is that Lamarque's view is right with respect to the creation and identity of works (of art), that is, I think these do depend on the existence of human practices and conceptions, but not with respect to their survival. As the realist that I am, I can perfectly conceive of the survival of a work (of art) that is epistemically lost, and I have not found any other argument in the book for thinking otherwise. Lamarque assimilates survival conditions of works (of art) to those of things like legal facts and screwdrivers. But whereas

it is clear that the legality of same-sex marriage in Spain, for instance, would not survive the disappearance of the Spanish legal system, it is not that screwdrivers, or other artifacts, would not survive the disappearance of those who may use them, or that works (of art) would not survive the disappearance of those who may appreciate them. Further argument is needed. Finally, I would like to mention what I think is an ambivalent use of the word 'identity' throughout the book. This word seems to be used epistemically, while discussing metaphysical issues in which it should be used and understood metaphysically instead. An example of this, I think, is at those points in which Lamarque considers, somehow or other, Kripke's metaphysical thesis of the essentiality of origin in its application to works (of art). Like when he argues (p. 72) that the origin of certain works is not essential to their *identity*. According to Lamarque, origin is not essential to (the identity of) all works because knowledge of their origin is not required for a correct appreciation of all of them. Jingles, minor pop songs and football chants are among the examples he provides of works whose origin is not essential. But one thing is that knowledge of the origin of something is irrelevant to its appreciation, and yet another that its origin does not determine its identity *metaphysically*. Something similar happens in the book's discussion of the possibility of the so-called 'referential forgery of allographic arts' (p. 83). Metaphysical origin-related conclusions about the *identity* of physical tokens of literary and musical works (of art) seem to be derived from questions about their value and importance. It is precisely because the provenance of type-instantiating text-tokens has little value that a scenario like the one that Lamarque discusses of the multiple production of type-instantiating text-tokens of White's poem and Black's (identically worded) poem is possible. In this scenario intentions, or external factors, determining provenance are rather weak and this is what makes it less determinate. That a text-token may be read as different works (of art) and that how to read it may be decided by the reader (because nothing really hinges on this) does not mean that provenance does not determine what work (of art) the text-token is a copy of. The fact that provenance of particular tokens is important for the appreciation of paintings and sculptures and not for the appreciation of literary works has to do with the fact that paintings and sculptures (or their constituting objects) are physical

particulars too, whereas literary works (and the objects that constitute them) are types rather than physical text-tokens. The physical text-tokens that we usually use are mere means to access the work (of art), and even the object that constitutes it. If this is right, none of this shows that provenance does not determine (the identity of) a work (or a token) in the metaphysical sense. And neither it shows that referential forgery of non-particular musical and literary works (of art) is not possible. Even if provenance is less important in the case of type-instantiating tokens, and the scenario considered is one in which provenance of the relevant tokens is complex, referential forgery may still be possible by producing a type-instantiating token of a work X while presenting it as a type-instantiating token of a different work Y, in the way that Levinson argues. Again, of course, referential forgery of allographic arts does not matter much, and this is what makes it special in the sense of less interesting. Here again Lamarque does not seem to distinguish between the nature of something and (the importance it has on) how it is taken to be.

I shall now move on to the second issue I announced above, that is, the lack of a serious and consistent application of the distinction between work and object. One instance of that is in Lamarque's recurrent use of the obscure and controversial *qua*-talk. On the one hand, taking the distinction between work and object seriously makes this *qua*-talk unnecessary. This is because for every work (of art) there are two things with different properties: i.e. the work itself and the object that constitutes it. So it is superfluous to talk of works or objects *qua* works or *qua* objects, or of them *under certain descriptions*. On the other hand, I think that all of this *qua*-talk has already been justifiably discredited, at least in certain philosophical contexts. Things have properties *simpliciter*, not *qua* anything else or *under certain descriptions*. Take the Superman story (discussed by Lamarque in p. 62), and consider it as if it were factual rather than fictional. Many of us agree in that, for instance, Lois Lane believes that Superman is sexy whereas she does not believe that Clark Kent is sexy. However, as any of the main theories of propositional attitudes and their ascriptions would show, this does not mean that Superman has a property (i.e. *being believed by Lois Lane to be sexy*) that Clark Kent does not have. This would not make sense. There is only one individual, Superman *is* Clark Kent. And so, it is this

individual, call him 'Superman' or 'Clark Kent', who has that property. This is wholly compatible with the truth of the belief reports mentioned above, as long-standing work on propositional attitudes attributions has clarified. Likewise, it does not make sense to say that Superman *qua* the superhero (or *under the description of the superhero*) can fly whereas Superman *qua* the reporter (or *under the description of the reporter*) cannot fly (even if Superman only flies when dressed-up as a superhero). The case of Jones, the mayor, is analogous (p. 48). As a mayor, Jones has some office-related duties that he also has as a man while being a mayor. One thing is to think of Jones *qua* mayor in the sense of considering Jones as a mayor and yet another to metaphysically distinguish Jones-the-mayor (or Jones *qua* mayor) and Jones-the-man (or Jones *qua* man). There are no two such things with different properties, and no single thing with different properties either. In any case, as I said above, all of this talk is unnecessary because, unlike these two cases, the case of works (of art) do involve two different things with different properties. We only need to take the distinction between work and object seriously. The distinction between person and role (p. 106) does not parallel the distinction between work and object either. Against what Lamarque claims, it is not true that *the British monarch is head of the state* is a necessary truth. This is not an essentialist claim that rests on an implicit *qua* operator qualifying the subject term, in the sense that it is only *qua* monarch that the British monarch is head of the state. Instead, what would be a necessary truth, if certain British political facts could not change, is that *whoever, if any, is ever the British monarch is head of the state*. The role of being the British monarch is not itself any head of the state, but any person who ever occupies this role contingently may be. A final example of this kind of controversial talk that I shall mention occurs in discussing style. Lamarque talks of stylistic properties under an act-based definition as properties that acts have only *under a description*. As an example he mentions that a certain kind of movement would be graceful (in style) if it were a *dancing* movement, whereas it would be ungainly (in style) if it were a *running* movement (p. 141). He seems to be thinking about properties that acts have in virtue of their being the things they are (or in virtue of belonging to the categories they belong). A dancing movement that is graceful is a dancing movement, not a running movement, and it is graceful regardless of

the description under which it is considered, even if its gracefulness depends on its being the thing it is: that is, a dancing rather than a running movement. The same applies to running movements and their styles. Well understood, this seems to amount to nothing more than Walton's well-known point as applied to the case of style: that is, that the aesthetic properties that something has depend on the category it belongs to.

There are many other interesting issues that Lamarque addresses in *Work and Object* that I would love to but cannot discuss within the limits of this review, such as his defense of imputationalism and his conception of fictional characters as interest-relative types. But I would not like to finish without dedicating a few lines to Lamarque's appealing thoughts on conceptual art in the last chapter of the book. According to Lamarque, urinals, Brillo boxes and the like could only constitute works (of art), even if works of *conceptual* art, as long as the artist manages to create something different from them. And this happens just in case there's something other than the ordinary object that according to Lamarque invites a kind of perception, which makes salient particular aspects and suggests significance for them. That extra thing materially constituted by these ordinary things is the work. That work is not just ideas, a physical medium acting as a vehicle for the transmission of ideas is an important part of works of conceptual art too. The ideas must inform the perception of these works. Perceiving that vehicle, or a copy of it in the case of works that are types rather than particulars, seems crucial for a correct appreciation of the work. For there are correct and incorrect ways of responding to a work of this kind too. In conceptual art, subjective responses are correct, while the search for any single or true interpretation is not. After all, works of conceptual art are intended to generate reflections on ideas.¹

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Art and Art-Attempts, by Christy Mag Uidhir. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, 222 pages.

What do Ovid, Dante, Petrarch, Camões, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Caravaggio, Velázquez, Rembrandt, Bach, Goya, Mozart, Beethoven, Turner, Hugo, Tolstoy, Eliot, Pessoa, among others, have in common? One answer is simple: they all have been the creators of great works of art. But what makes something a work of art? What is art? Here the puzzles begin and the philosophy of art attempts to answer these and related questions. The meta-philosophy of art seeks to provide a framework in which these questions can be addressed.

In *Art and Art-Attempts*, Christy Mag Uidhir aims at providing such framework. He begins with the assumption that art is “intention-dependent” and he investigates “what follows from taking intention-dependence seriously as a substantive necessary condition for being art” (p. 6). This he calls the ‘Attempt Theory of Art’. As he warns the reader, the Attempt Theory of Art “is *not* itself a theory of art” (p. 6), but what we might call a meta-theory: it focuses on what a theory of art must be, minimally, to be viable as such. The purpose is not to enquire into the nature of art, but to provide “something even better: a unified, systematic, and productive framework for philosophical enquiry into art” (p. 209).

The first chapter is crucial and it deals with “art and failed art”. Mag Uidhir never spells out the conditions for something being art (he begins by professing ignorance about this) but he claims that “the way in which [a] thing comes to satisfy the conditions for being art (whatever those may be) must be the product of intentional action” (p. 23). (He purports to begin with an assumption that is uncontroversial.) Here he gives an example that shows that his Attempt Theory, rather than being unanimously accepted as he claims, is quite controversial. He asks us to imagine that he attempts to paint a realist portrait of his aunt Teresa. Since he is an “inept painter” and the result does not resemble his aunt “in the slightest”, he fails to produce a portrait of his aunt Teresa. With this everyone agrees.