

# Artistic Collaboration and the Completion of Works of Art

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*We present an analysis of work completion couched in terms of an effective completion decision identified by its characteristic contents and functions. In our proposal, the artist's completion decision can take a number of distinct forms, including a procedural variety referred to as an 'extended completion decision'. In the second part of this essay, we address ourselves to the question of whether collaborative art-making projects stand as counterexamples to the proposed analysis of work completion.*

It has often been claimed that recognizing the importance of artistic collaboration is an important corrective to the errors of aesthetic individualism.<sup>1</sup> Such a recognition would, presumably, require us to rethink some of our basic assumptions about the creation of art, including ideas about the conditions under which a work of art is completed. If, for example, it is held that the artist's decisions make a difference between something's being a finished work as opposed to an abandoned sketch or work in progress, what form must such decisions take when two or more artists collaborate on a project? How, more generally, might our understanding of completion conditions need to be altered if it is to be applied successfully to various cases of collective art-making?

Although presenting and defending a detailed argument in this vein is not our current errand, a few remarks concerning the broader significance of our topic are in order.<sup>2</sup> While consideration of artistic collaboration is clearly necessary to an adequate, general understanding of work completion, it may also be the case that reflection over the circumstances under which pieces are (and are not) finished can in turn shed light on artistic collaboration, joint authorship, and related attributions pertaining to creativity and responsibility in the arts. Acknowledging that an artist has received significant help from an assistant or team of people can be important for a number of reasons, and it may be helpful to draw a distinction between different kinds of artistic contributions with regard to work completion and other matters. Such distinctions can be overlooked when all artistically significant input is grouped under such broad labels as 'multiple authorship' or 'collective art-making'.

One of our assumptions in this regard is that claims about the artistic qualities and meanings of works of art ideally obey a version of the principle of total evidence, at least

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1 For a start, see Robin Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), pp. 318–321; and for a more recent example, Okwui Enwezor, 'The Production of Social Space as Artwork: Protocols of Community in the Work of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes', in Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (eds), *Collectivism after Modernism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), pp. 223–252.

2 Thanks to the editors of this journal for prompting us to motivate our topic in this manner.

with regard to the evidence pertaining to the properties of the text or other artistic structure. The requisite principle is violated, for example, by a critic who, in arguing for a particular interpretation of a work, simply overlooks or discounts parts of the text that cannot be reconciled with his or her favoured interpretation. The same can be said of the appreciator who bases judgements or readings on a bowdlerized text, a misleading translation, or a mutilated print or copy. An evidentiary principle requiring that all of the relevant evidence be taken into account is important to appreciation for various reasons. One such reason is that some of the qualities that are the focus of appreciation involve part–whole relations, such as coherence and the various stylistic and ideational patterns that contribute to or detract from a work’s coherence. If appreciative projects that focus on these kinds of qualities are to be carried out successfully, it must be possible to determine whether the text, audiovisual display, or other artistic item under scrutiny is integral or not; in other words, whether parts of the text (or other artistic structure) are missing. Whenever the text or artistic structure is not complete, scrutiny of this item should not be taken as adequately revealing part–whole relations within the work.

Cases where questions about the integrity of the artefact are meaningful and can, at least in principle, be answered, are cases where the artist (or collaborating artists) have determined that some item is the definitive and complete artistic artefact. One reason why this is so is that it is only the artist who has the authority to make such a determination: a critic, editor, or appreciator may conjecture, of some text-type, that it is the integral text of some work that is not his or her own, but it is not up to the critic, editor, or appreciator to determine that someone else’s text is definitive and complete (where ‘determine’ is understood as ‘constitute as’ or ‘make it the case’). Determinations of this sort are part of the artist’s or author’s artistic responsibility. Part of the focus of appreciation, or in other words, one topic of artistic (and in some cases, moral) evaluation, is the artist’s exercise of this authority.

In what follows we begin by taking up the question of work completion in general and present a schematic analysis based on cases of individual art-making. Given this proposed analysis of work completion, we move on to ask how it might be extended or altered so as to accommodate the complexities of collaborative projects of different sorts. We identify and illustrate some salient options with reference to actual cases, including several large-scale and successful collaborative projects, including the *Karkhana* paintings created by a team of six Pakistani artists, Carol Archer *et al.*’s *Reciprocal Interference*, the Royal Art Lodge in Winnipeg, and *Underground* by Marlene Dumas *et fille*. In conclusion we make a few remarks about some of the implications for the larger questions about artistry, authorship, and appreciation.

## On Work Completion in General

Although a sweeping scepticism about the very idea of work completion has been voiced by various artists and theorists (and most notoriously by Paul Valéry), this theoretical option stands in sharp contrast to the statements and practices of many artists and critics.<sup>3</sup> In

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3 See Paul Valéry, *Œuvres*, ed. Jean Hytier (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), vol. 2, p. 553.

a great many valuable art-critical and art-historical discourses, as well as in numerous artists' testimonies, the distinction between finished and unfinished works is applied in an unflinching and plausible manner, as when a commentator writes that, 'the painter was hard at work in his studio on *The Raft of the Medusa*, which, as a result of his enforced isolation, he finished in the relatively short period of eighteen months'.<sup>4</sup> Nor is the evidence in support of the distinction purely discursive or a matter of second-order talk. Many actions undertaken with regard to the disposition of art objects are made as a function of beliefs and preferences based upon this distinction. For example, when he had resolved that his work on the canvas was done, Théodore Géricault had *Le Radeau de la Méduse* put on display at the Salon. Although this monumental canvas was highly controversial, there is no evidence that even its harshest critics doubted that the picture had been finished; and as Louis XVIII famously commented to Géricault after carefully examining the picture, 'Monsieur, vous venez de faire un naufrage qui n'est pas un pour vous' [Monsieur, you have made a shipwreck that is not a wreck for you].<sup>5</sup>

Yet to affirm, *contra* total scepticism about the very idea of a finished work of art, that the finished/unfinished distinction is often applicable and important, does not entail acceptance of some of the stronger theses on the topic. We have in mind, for example, the following two claims:

- (1) bivalence about completion: for all artistic artefacts and performances, the item is either a finished work or not;
- (2) omniscience regarding completion: for all artistic items, it is always possible for us to know whether the item is finished or not.

The latter thesis is obviously confuted by the many cases where the available evidence does not indicate whether we are examining a fragmentary structure of a once-completed work or the rejected remains of some abandoned work-in-progress. Thesis (1) is false if, as we believe is the case, some artistic practices, such as jazz improvisations, are conducted with indifference to the finished/unfinished distinction. Worries about the very pertinence of the idea of 'the completed work' are also telling with regard to many performance works in music and other art forms. Many composers have thought of a score as a provisional device to be altered freely to meet the needs of performances that were to be undertaken in new and diverse circumstances, with little or no emphasis on the idea that these performances should be appreciated as instances of a completed and unchanging work.<sup>6</sup>

With regard to the many cases in which artists are interested in completing a work of art and in presenting it as such, the question that arises is what conditions actually govern work completion. Many philosophers and art theorists have tried to isolate and identify the intrinsic properties of an artistic artefact or performance that constitute it as a finished work of art—such as a particular sort of part-whole coherence, organicity, an inherent,

4 Jonathan Miles, *The Wreck of the Medusa* (New York: Grove, 2008), p. 180.

5 Lorenz E. A. Eitner, *Géricault: His Life and Work* (London: Orbis, 1983), p. 198.

6 Thanks to Giorgio Biancorosso for guidance on this topic.

structural pattern, a basic principle of order or closure, or conformity to generic norms.<sup>7</sup> Yet at least one readily identifiable category of counterexamples indicates that this is the wrong approach to adopt if one's aim is to cover the full range of cases where the question of completion is indeed pertinent. The category we have in mind is the Romantic fragment, a type of completed work of art that includes any artistic structure or performance the intentional design of which mimics another, rather different type of fragment. Unlike the Romantic fragment, which is in fact complete, the latter sort of fragment is but a vestigial part of what was once a larger whole. This contrast between two types of fragments can be illustrated by comparing the fragmentary text of Petronius' *Satyricon*, parts of which have unfortunately gone missing, to the cinematic work, *Fellini-Satyricon* (1969), the gaps in which are clearly an intentional imitation of the Petronius fragment on which the script of this strange film was loosely based. With regard to the fragmentary text by Petronius, it is meaningful to wonder what the missing parts were like. References and citations by other authors prompt and guide conjectures on this topic.<sup>8</sup> Analogous questions and reasoning would be wholly inappropriate with regard to Fellini's film, the extant audiovisual display of which is complete.

On the assumption that Romantic fragments possess one type of completion while lacking another, it would seem helpful to introduce a distinction between different senses of 'completion' in discourse about the arts. To that end, Paisley Livingston has recruited the term 'aesthetic completion' to designate the completeness or wholeness that is intentionally left out of a Romantic fragment or ruin; 'genetic completion', on the other hand, labels the sense in which a Romantic ruin has been duly completed by its maker(s), so that attempts to discover or infer the seemingly missing parts of this sort of artistic vehicle are simply inappropriate.<sup>9</sup> That a Romantic ruin is *aesthetically* incomplete is why it resembles the vestiges of what was once an entire temple or castle; that it is *genetically* complete is why it is usually pointless to ask what it looked like before parts of it were destroyed or went missing.

The expression 'aesthetic completion' arguably signals a notion, or cluster of notions, relevant to art criticism and appreciation, and like all such terms, its application can misfire in particular cases.<sup>10</sup> Several types of error are relevant. An uninformed or overhasty observer might deem a work aesthetically incomplete as a result of a failure to understand the

7 To mention a single example, John Dewey links the completion of a work of art to the artist's 'direct perception' of aesthetic quality: 'The making comes to an end when its result is experienced as good—and that experience comes not by mere intellectual and outside judgment but in direct perception', in *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Co., 1934), p. 49.

8 Edward Courtney, *A Companion to Petronius* (New York: OUP, 2001).

9 Paisley Livingston, 'Counting Fragments, and Frenhofer's Paradox', *BJA*, 39 (1999), pp. 14–23; *Art and Intention: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

10 For example, an author who argues that a particular notion of aesthetic completion, namely, organicity, is the central concept of aesthetics and art appreciation is Harold Osborne, *Theory of Beauty: An Introduction to Aesthetics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952).

unifying patterns that actually give the work a type of organization or design. Another type of error stems from the application of the wrong art category, as when the viewer complains that *Fellini-Satyricon* begins and ends with narrative interruptions and thereby leaves unanswered some obvious questions about the characters' backgrounds and destinies. Categorical errors of this sort are harder to make with regard to genetic completion, though someone might inappropriately ask some jamming musicians whether they had successfully played a finished work or not. Disagreement or doubt about genetic completion more typically stems from faulty evidence, or confusion about what makes a work complete in the genetic sense. Another problem is the conflation of these two senses of completion, as when critics complained that exhibited pictures by Whistler or Monet had not been finished.

With regard to the nature of genetic completion, we propose the following general hypothesis: what makes a work complete is first and foremost the artist's decision that it is so. Although this dictum may sound singularly uninformative, we hold that it is the correct point of departure for a fuller account of the conditions on work completion. That account is to be couched in terms of the nature and content of the artist's decision, as well as the role of that decision in the logical analysis of the conditions on work completion.

On the former topic, the problem for a philosophy of art is to say something general yet at least moderately accurate about artists' effective actions (including mental actions) and reasoning with regard to work completion. It will not do, for example, to say that the artist decides a work is finished only if the artist believes that he or she cannot make the work any better. Some artists complete and sell works which they themselves deem inferior to what they could actually create if they did not need to make money. That such products are artistically flawed or inferior does not entail that they are unfinished. Another option is to say that the artist deems a work complete when he or she believes it to be *at least good enough* to suit the artistic purposes on which the artist has settled.<sup>11</sup> This clause is not contradicted by those prevalent cases where the artist is a bit uncertain about just how good a work really is, yet goes ahead and puts it on display as finished because he or she is confident that it is good enough.

In any case, an artist's more or less deliberate decision to stop working on a piece is not enough to grant that piece the status of a finished work. Instead, the artist must, for whatever reason, effectively judge or decide that what he or she has done *is a finished work*. After all, artists sometimes abandon a piece on which they have invested considerable time and energy because they have reluctantly reached the conclusion that it is, for one reason or

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11 Our proposal is close to, yet distinct from, a proposal made by Michael Baxandall, who suggests that when the artist stops working on a piece, it is 'implicit' that the work satisfies the artist to some degree, 'if only as having got to a point where it seems better to leave off and start a new work in which this and that will be better and the lessons learned in a semi-failure will be put to use'; see his *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 66. In our view one disadvantage of this suggestive proposal is that the 'retrospective intention' Baxandall identifies covers cases where the artist sets the piece aside as an unfinished 'semi-failure' as well as cases where the decision is made that it is finished (albeit not, perhaps, as good as possible).

another, flawed and beyond repair. What is cast aside in this manner is not a finished work, but a draft or sketch or first attempt for a work that was never completed. In other cases, something judged incomplete is not abandoned, but set aside as something ‘on reserve’, the thought being that at some future point the artist may find a way to do something interesting with this unfinished item, and perhaps even bring it to completion. In the second half of this paper we will have the occasion to observe that these very distinctions were built into the constitutive rules of a collaborative art project.

An adequate analysis of work completion must take into account the conditions under which completion decisions are made. Three points are salient here. First of all, completion decisions need not be the product of some highly lucid process of conscious deliberation. Spontaneous, intuitive thoughts or decisions can do the trick. Secondly, completion decisions need not be expressed in the form of an explicit declaration to the effect that such-and-such is a completed work of art. Nor is it necessary for the artist to have certain theoretical attitudes or philosophical beliefs about work completion; what matters are artists’ effective, practical decisions with regard to the question of whether further changes to a specific item will be attempted. Publication or public display is not necessary (nor is it sufficient: work-in-progress can be put on display). An artist could privately enjoy the satisfying feeling that a picture is at least good enough as is, deem it finished, and put it away somewhere without ever showing it to anyone; such a work should be classified as finished. Thirdly, there are the social conditions under which the decision is reached. When an artist is influenced by someone’s threats and chooses to release a work as finished in a situation where, in the absence of severe coercion, no such decision would have been made, our condition on work completion is not satisfied: completion decisions, to be genuine and effective, must be uncoerced (at least in a strong sense, that is, where decisions are forced by dire and credible threats).

Turning now to the logical question, so far the description we have provided of completion decisions fails to identify a sufficient condition on work completion. A closer look at the case of *The Raft of the Medusa* can help us see why. If our sources are to be trusted, sometime around July 1819 Géricault deemed this picture finished, so he arranged to have the enormous canvas transported from his studio to the Théâtre Italien (la salle Favart) in the Place Boïeldieu in Paris, where paintings to be exhibited in the Salon were being gathered. Yet when he had studied the canvas standing in the foyer of the theatre, Géricault reconsidered the wisdom of this decision and got back to work, seeking to correct what he had come to perceive as a gap in the lower right-hand corner of the composition.<sup>12</sup> He eventually reached a second completion decision and had the picture exhibited at the

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12 Charles Clément, *Géricault: étude biographique et critique*, 3rd edn (Paris: Didier, 1879), pp. 144–145. More specifically, Clément writes: ‘Il ne perdit pas la tête, s’installa dans le foyer du théâtre, prit pour modèle un de ses amis, M Martigny et, en quelques jours, improvisa l’admirable et pathétique figure couverte d’une draperie blanche qui termine et complète si heureusement ce magnifique ouvrage’ (p. 145). As Clément provides no documentation, we have only his word on these matters. Cf. Lorenz E. A. Eitner, *Géricault’s The Raft of the Medusa* (London: Phaidon, 1972), pp. 38–39.

Salon. On the highly plausible assumption that Géricault deemed the work good enough to show at the Salon and thought he was done working on it when he had it taken away from his studio, it turns out that his completion decision in this first instance did not suffice for the work to be complete. It would be odd, to say the least, to have to conclude that when he got back to work on *The Raft of the Medusa* in the foyer of the Théâtre Italien what he was really doing was destroying a completed work and using the canvas as material for another, new work to be exposed at the Salon in its place. Instead, what we want to say is that the picture had not really been finished when it was removed from the studio, but was so once the artist finally stopped making changes. Some completion decisions are, then, indecisive. Yet the mere cessation of work in the absence of a completion decision will not suffice either as a sufficient condition on work completion, since that condition is satisfied in cases where the work gets interrupted by illness or an accident and only a fragment is unintentionally left behind.

A possible move here is to say that completion decisions are only sufficient to work completion when they are resolute in some absolute sense: under no circumstances would the artist have made any changes. Yet this clause seems too demanding, and in any case, inapplicable given the impossibility of surveying all of the logically possible circumstances in which the artist's resolve might have been tested. What if the Salon had been delayed, so that Géricault would have had several more occasions to reconsider the picture in the foyer of the theatre, and ample time to undertake at least minor *retouches*?

An alternative, weaker and more applicable notion of the requisite decision is this: given the actual circumstances, the artist refrained from making any further changes and thus did not overturn his or her completion decision. A completion decision is sufficient to make a work complete only when it effectively functions to terminate the creative process and the revisions it entails. An effective completion decision turns out, then, to be a psychological event in which the artist acquires a compound attitude that includes a retrospective assessment or evaluation of the results of prior work—which are deemed at least good enough for the artistic purposes on hand—and the formation of a forwarding-looking intention, namely the intention to refrain from making any further artistically relevant changes to the work. If our evidence is reliable, Géricault's second completion decision was effective in this sense, as once the picture had been exhibited at the Salon, he made no further changes to it, even when it was back in his possession after the Salon. Nor did he choose to make any changes to it prior to its exhibition in London in 1820.<sup>13</sup> Although the point is controversial, it may be correct to say that once a work has been freely (that is, in the absence of severe coercion) and publicly displayed as a finished work, the artist is no longer free to

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13 It follows that the artist's earlier decision that the picture was finished could have been effective in the requisite sense given circumstances where he never saw the picture in the foyer and so did not have this occasion to decide to make changes. Modal intuitions on this sort of thing are notoriously diverse, but I think we want to say that it is true that *The Raft of the Medusa* could have had a compositional gap in the lower right-hand part.



make changes without thereby vitiating a finished work by using it as material for the creation of a new, but related work.<sup>14</sup>

If, as we propose, an effective completion decision, in the specified sense, is sufficient to the completion of a work, the next question is whether it is also a necessary condition. Certain examples motivate an extension of our understanding of the forms such decisions can take, and given such an extension, the necessity and sufficiency of this condition can be defended.

In simple and straightforward cases, the decision takes the following form: surveying a canvas or sculptural object or installation, the artist forms the belief that it is at least good enough for the artistic purposes at hand; no further changes are wanted, and so the artist decides that the work is finished. In various, less ordinary cases, the completion decision has an additional, forward-looking clause. This can take the form of the artist settling on a procedure that will determine when the work is actually finished. In the non-fiction film, *Le mystère Picasso* (dir. Clouzot, 1956), Pablo Picasso is shown working on a drawing that is to be completed within a given time limit. In this contrived situation, the moment at which the drawing will be genetically complete has been agreed upon in advance by the artist, who struggles to achieve a desired form of aesthetic completion within the constraints established by the time limit. Here the relevant completion decision does not take the form of a judgement to the effect that ‘this work is now complete’, but involves instead an ‘extended completion decision’ that takes the form ‘at time *t* the piece will be finished’. In another type of case in which the artist’s completion decision takes an extended form, the process whereby the work becomes complete requires the intervention of more or less foreseeable natural events. Here the extended completion decision takes the form ‘if such-and-such happens to the artefact, the work will be complete’. Examples include process art and earthworks where the artist’s plan covers an envisioned course of events over which he or she does not exercise direct control. For convenience, we can use the expression ‘effective completion decision’ to cover ordinary cases in which the artist decides that something is a finished work and refrains from making further changes, as well as cases where the artist makes what we have called an ‘extended’ completion decision, that is, one in which the artist settles on a procedure that requires some form of external process to occur if the work is to be finished.

Drawing these threads together, our proposed analysis of work completion runs as follows: a work of art is finished if and only if the artist, working in the absence of severe coercion, makes an effective completion decision of the simple or extended form (as discussed above). A decision is effective, we have proposed, whenever the artist does not subsequently override the decision and make or authorize artistic changes incompatible with that prior decision.

With this proposal in view, we are now in a position to consider its applicability to collaborative art-making.

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14 Darren Hudson Hick, ‘When Is a Work of Art Finished?’, *JAC*, 66 (2008), pp. 67–76, and Paisley Livingston, ‘When a Work Is Finished: A Response to Darren Hudson Hick’, *JAC*, 66 (2008), pp. 393–395. Thanks to Rafael De Clercq for helpful questions on this point, especially with regard to the role of coercion.



## Completion Decisions and Artistic Collaboration

Although a comprehensive history of artistic collaboration remains to be written, it is well known that many of the great masterpieces attributed to an individual artist were in fact the products of collaborative effort.<sup>15</sup> Yet the overarching tendency has been to assume that the dominant policy of individual attribution remains justified by the master's superior talent, experience, and hierarchical control of the workshop and of the artistic projects undertaken therein. And if that is correct, then the application of a completion condition based on an individual model would be straightforward: it is the maestro alone who determines when the work is finished.

As an example of this line of thought, consider Benvenuto Cellini's account of the making of his *Perseus*. Cellini allows us to observe that this was a collaborative project, for he refers to 'ten or more' assistants at work on the sculpture, including bronze-founders, craftsmen, labourers, and the men from his own workshop.<sup>16</sup> Yet Cellini's narrative famously places the greatest emphasis on his own talent and energetic efforts. He tells us how he has given his assistants detailed instructions about what to do, including the 'special orders' (*ordine*) addressed to an apprentice who had been in his training for quite some time: "Now look, my dear Bernardino," I said, "do exactly as I've shown you." Cellini falls ill and takes to his bed, but things go so badly in his absence that the master is compelled to rush back to his workshop to help out 'his ignorant assistants'. Cellini rounds off his account of the completion of the masterpiece by informing us that when the mould was removed, he was astonished to find that, while there was no metal at all left in the channels, the statue was complete. This result, he adds, was so 'amazing that it seemed a certain miracle, with everything controlled and arranged by God [veramente guidata et maneggiata da Iddio]'

Unlike Cellini, some artists who have enjoyed hierarchical command in the execution of a particular artistic project have been willing to praise the artistic contributions of collaborators whose assistance was of a lesser order than that provided by the Divine Artist, the thought being that, even when the ultimate authority and responsibility belongs to a single, dominant, and controlling artistic figure, this need not preclude recognition of the artistically significant contributions made by assistants and other collaborators. Such would be the case when a cinematic *auteur*, who has enjoyed a high degree of artistic freedom and control in the conception and production of a film, nonetheless acknowledges the innovative and valuable work done by a cinematographer, editor, or actor. The Danish director Jørgen

15 See, for example, Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), and Thomas Crow, *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995). For various perspectives on artistic collaboration, see the essays gathered in a special issue of *Third Text*, 18(6) (2004).

16 Benvenuto Cellini, *Vita di Benvenuto Cellini*, LXXVIII, [http://www.liberliber.it/biblioteca/c/cellini/la\\_vita/pdf/la\\_vit\\_p.pdf](http://www.liberliber.it/biblioteca/c/cellini/la_vita/pdf/la_vit_p.pdf) (accessed 26 January 2010), trans. *Life of Benvenuto Cellini*, in Martin Gayford and Karen Wright (eds), *The Penguin Book of Art Writing* (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 329–333.

Leth, for example, lauds the improvisatory talent of Claus Nissen in Leth's short film, *Det perfekte Menneske* [*The Perfect Human*] (Denmark, 1967). Yet it could be misleading to draw the conclusion that Nissen thereby functioned as the film's author, if only because Nissen was not responsible for determining which shots, amongst the various takes in which his genial antics were depicted, would be used in the final film. Also, the actor had no decisive say in determining whether and when the film was completed. Given that it was the writer/director, Leth, who was alone in the position to make the decisive judgement indicative of genetic completion, the fact of artistic collaboration in cases of this sort in no way vitiates the proposed analysis of work completion.

Such is the pattern in many instances of hierarchically organized artistic collaboration, where completion decisions figure prominently amongst the functions performed by the superior and controlling figure within the division of labour. This very general point finds some support, for example, in John Seyller's informative survey of the organization of the *kitabkhana* (literally 'book-house' in Urdu) in the Mughal Empire in its 'classic' period (roughly 1555–1707). The largest known painting workshop in this context was that of the imperial court, which by the year 1600 employed some 130 painters whose efforts were governed by an elaborate division of labour. While other royal workshops devoted to the creation of illustrated books were smaller, and the division of labour within them admitted of significant variations, there was typically a single, overall supervisor or *nazim* answering directly to the royal patron. Seyller informs us that this was someone 'who rose to this position by virtue of his manifold skills in poetry, calligraphy, painting, and other arts of the book'.<sup>17</sup> Next in the chain of command was the *darogha* or deputy librarian, whose chief function was managing the various calligraphers, painters, and bookbinders. The artists working under this figure's supervision were assigned specific tasks, such as design of a particular illustration, the colouring in of forms, or the painting of the faces of the major figures, such as the emperor. The artist was also given fairly explicit guidelines regarding the amount of time in which he was expected to bring his part of the creative work to completion. It is plausible to conjecture that the individual artists working within these constraints had to make provisional judgements with regard to their completion of the specific tasks with which they had been charged. Such decisions were then subject to approval by the *nazim* prior to the work as a whole being submitted to the royal patron as a finished book. Seyller's description of these workshops and their productions, however, does not support the thesis that this elaborate mode of 'bureaucratic' organization eliminated all forms of individual attribution. One of the royal patrons is said to have boasted of his ability to identify the work of particular artists in the depiction of the parts of a single face. The appreciation of the individual artist's skill or fastidiousness, however, did not extend to anything like a recognition of a specific artist's personal vision. It is clear that completion depended on the hierarchical superior's judgement that the overall production met the standards, stylistic and otherwise, of the specific project and workshop, or more

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17 John Seyller, 'Painting Workshops in Mughal India', in Hammad Nasar with Anita Dawood-Nasar (eds), *Karkhana: A Contemporary Collaboration*, (London: The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum and Green Cardamom, 2005), pp. 12–17, at p. 17.

generally, that it attained a level of quality which would ‘reflect the patron to his best advantage’.<sup>18</sup>

Many twentieth-century and contemporary collaborative projects stand in sharp contrast to such hierarchical models. An early example, which has served as a template and inspiration for a number of related experiments, is the Surrealist practice known as *le cadavre exquis*.<sup>19</sup> As is well known, here the contributions made by participating artists fall within an agreed-upon scheme that precludes each individual from seeing the results of previous contributions. The work is finished when the last artist in the series has done his or her bit. While in various respects the practice of *le cadavre exquis* represents a radical departure from traditional models of both individual and collaborative art-making, when it comes to work completion, the process corresponds quite well to what was referred to above as the ‘extended completion decision’. In agreeing to participate in the project, the individual artist agrees to abide by its constitutive rules, which include a method for determining when the art-making process will terminate. Just as artists such as Marcel Duchamp and John Cage adopted art-making procedures incorporating elements of chance into the making of certain works, so does the artist engaging in the collective production of a *cadavre exquis* consent to the idea that the artistic qualities of the work will emerge from the unforeseeable contributions to be made by other artists.

It may be objected, however, that in extended completion decisions of this sort, what is severed is the postulated link between a decision constitutive of genetic completion and a judgement that the results are at least good enough for the artistic purposes at hand. While it is true that the last artist participating in a *cadavre exquis* must, like the other artists, form a judgement as to when his or her part of the work is good enough and thus finished, this judgement cannot provide or be based on an assessment of the overall features of the work, since the rules of the game make these inaccessible to the artist at the time of the decision. How, one may wonder, could any artist reasonably frame and commit to a judgement to the effect that a given artistic result is good enough in the absence of any acquaintance with this very result? The answer is that, in this sort of ‘democratic’ art-making, what the artist commits to as being good enough is, quite simply, *whatever work results from the procedure*. The artist’s motivation and rationale for making such a commitment to the procedure may have various bases, such as prior acquaintance with (and confidence in) the artistic inclinations and dispositions of the other participants, and allegiance to more general evaluative tenets and related goals. In the case of Surrealist experimentation, the goal of producing works bearing the qualities associated with aesthetic completion and artistic perfection was programmatically (if not always in practice) abandoned in favour of ambitions linked to the

18 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

19 For a discussion of several collaborative projects based on *le cadavre exquis*, see Jessica Hough, ‘The Spirit of Improvisation’, in Nasar with Dawood-Nasar, *Karkhana*, pp. 18–25; Hough mentions, for example, a 1993 show in New York exhibiting some 600 drawings by more than a thousand artists. For the catalogue, see Jane Philbrick (ed.), *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis* (New York: Drawing Center, 1993).

liberation, through spontaneous expression, of repressed drives and impulses. The procedure constitutive of a *cadavre exquis* (and which generated this strange label for this very game) is prized as a means to the latter end.

Yet it would be a mistake to describe this or any other viable art-making scheme as a regime of perfect freedom, bereft of plans or means–end reasoning co-ordinating the activities of one or more artists. It is clear that the viability of *le cadavre exquis* and related practices depends upon the successful following of constitutive rules that are explicitly stated and agreed upon by the participants. Such rules or plans pertain to the type of work (or group of related works) to be made (for example, picture, poem), the materials or media to be used, and more specific indications, such as the order in which specific artists will partake in the task. However, these explicit rules are only one source of the shared plans that effectively co-ordinate the collective activity. With regard to views on work completion as well as any number of other artistically relevant matters, a group of artists can share art-making plans and dispositions without having made them the object of an explicit agreement on a given collaborative occasion. For example, a group of artists may belong to the same tradition, movement or trend, have learnt the same skills and conventions, have gone to the same art school, or have reciprocally influenced each other in many hours of friendly interaction. Tacit dispositions and plans, attributable to such shared experiences, may carry over into the collaborative activities in which that group chooses to engage, supplementing a project's explicit, constitutive rules, including those pertaining to the judgements and procedural devices involved in completion decisions.

An example of a project that allows us to illustrate and extend this point is the *Karkhana* collaboration. Twelve pictures (first exhibited in the UK in 2003–4) were created by a team of six contemporary artists who shared a common training in miniature painting at Lahore's National College of the Arts. While the initial idea for the project was Muhammad Imran Qureshi's, his proposal was further developed through discussions that occurred during a collaborative art workshop entitled the *Darmiyan [In Between]*, which took place in Lahore in October 2001.

Having agreed on a set of procedures, the six artists in turn worked on each of twelve paintings in the series, and this in the absence of any explicitly agreed upon plan for the images' content, themes, or style. As the artists in question were living in Lahore, Melbourne, Jhelum, New York, and Chicago, each picture-in-progress was shipped to the next artist in the sequence, it being the responsibility of the last artist in line to complete the work. Unlike a pure *cadavre exquis* exercise, in this (and other) contemporary collaborative projects (such as the Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Francesco Clemente project organized by the art dealer Bruno Bischofberger in 1984), each artist who takes up a piece that has already been worked on by another collaborator is able to assess and respond to what has already been done, and may choose to develop or diverge from whatever overall design or tendency is discerned in the work in progress. In the case of the *Karkhana* project, the cumulative results of this seemingly disjointed artistic process had a strong cogency due to the artists' shared backgrounds and thematic, political, and stylistic predilections. Coherence may also have been enhanced by adherence to one substantive rule appended to the collaborative procedures. This rule specifies that each artist should 'manifest sensitivity

to the integrity and soul of the work that had arrived in the mail'.<sup>20</sup> While such a rule is admittedly vague, it suffices to discourage contributions that take the form of Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing* of 1953, the title of which provides a literal description of the operation one artist performed, or more accurately, attempted to perform, on another artist's previously completed work.<sup>21</sup>

It may be worth underscoring the fact that the *Karkhana* procedure diverges significantly from *le cadavre exquis* in that it bestows on one of the participating artists the power and responsibility of making a decision about the completion of the work as a whole; in the absence of the substantive rule just mentioned, this final artist in the series could, in principle, choose to finish the work in a way that would cancel or subvert the other artists' prior efforts. The substantive rule, however, instructs the finishing artist to do no such thing. Salima Hashmi provides an insider's account of how each of the twelve works in the *Karkhana* series developed as they passed through the hands of each of the six collaborators. In collaborative works that proceed by means of a process of incremental progression, it might be supposed that the roles of 'initiator' and 'completer' have a disproportionate importance with regard to the final outcome. In the *Karkhana* project, however, the role of initiator was distributed equally amongst the collaborating artists, each being responsible for starting two works. As one might expect, these panels contained signs of the styles and thematic concerns of those individuals from the outset. *Karkhana* 1 and 2, for example, were initiated by Muhammad Imran Qureshi. Both works include diagrammatic elements—a missile template and a pattern from a tailor's manual—that are readily associated with Qureshi's individual work.<sup>22</sup> In a similar fashion the work of the 'completer'—a role that was also equally distributed between the six artists—was often stylistically recognizable as belonging to the artist in question. For instance, the block-printed borders used by Talha Rathore to finish *Karkhana* 1 and 2 may be also seen in *Karkhana* 11 and 12, pieces that Rathore initiated. Hashmi notes that the use of such techniques is habitual for this artist. The documentation of the six-stage process through which the *Karkhana* works were completed reveals that each proceeded incrementally. There were no cases in which the final touches on a work radically altered it in such a way as to call into question the shared authorship of the piece. In saying this, however, our intention is not to claim that the production of these works presents an idealized model of co-operation. Hashmi points out that while Muhammad Imran Qureshi was the 'instigator rather than the guru', he was still 'the first among equals'. As the project proceeded, she writes, those among the group 'who "dared" took turns at leadership' with the 'strongest interventions' coming from Nusra Latif Qureshi, 'who emphatically removed and re-phrased parts of Hasnat Mehmood's

20 Salima Hashmi, 'Journey's End: The Making of *Karkhana*', in Nasar with Dawood-Nasar, *Karkhana*, pp. 42–47, at p. 44.

21 For background, see Vincent Katz, 'A Genteel Iconoclasm', <http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue8/erasuregenteel.htm> (accessed 2 February 2010).

22 For reproductions, see Hashmi, 'Journey's End', pp. 55, 59.

handiwork'.<sup>23</sup> Other such 'imbalances' are identified in Hashmi's account. For example, Muhammad Imran Qureshi is singled out as having worked in a deliberately 'low key manner because of his desire to avoid "crowding out" the voices of others'.<sup>24</sup> Despite differences between the respective inputs of each collaborating artist to each piece in the *Karkhana* series—differences that may be attributable to level of experience, age, personality, group dynamics, and sundry other factors—the manner in which these works were finished conforms to the proposed model of effective completion decisions.

In some of the contemporary variants on *le cadavre exquis* and related collaborative procedures, the constitutive rules of the project have been devised with an eye to providing additional devices with which to supplement the procedure of an extended completion decision. While the successful following of such a procedure suffices to determine that work on an image, text, or other artistic vehicle or structure is complete, it is possible to complicate further the collective 'stopping rule' by adding another step, such as a process of collective deliberation terminating in a decision as to which, if any, of the items resulting from the first stage should be retained and presented as works completed by the group as a whole. Such a procedure was adopted, for example, in a series of interrelated collaborative projects undertaken by Carol Archer, in which she co-created works with each of five different artists.

Archer's overarching project bore the Bergson-inspired title, *Reciprocal Interference*, and was organized around a cluster of constitutive rules providing the participants with shared plans and intentions.<sup>25</sup> One of the rules precluded the collaborators from engaging in verbal discussion of the subjects, titles, and other features of the works they were making. However, a few formal and material parameters, such as the dimension of each picture, were established explicitly in advance. In some of the dyadic collaborations belonging to *Reciprocal Interference*, a first-stage stopping rule was that it was the artist who originated a particular picture who would be charged with determining when the open-ended series of revisions should be terminated. In other cases, this initial stopping rule was inverted, it being the task of the second artist who worked on a piece to make a provisional completion decision. As previously indicated, in all cases, the output of these stopping rules was to be subject to another stage. Namely, before the determination of final completion and potential public exhibition, each pair of artists discussed the question as to which of the pictures were to be deemed completed and worthy of exhibition, arriving at a joint decision on this score.

An example of a collective art-making in which recourse to explicitly pre-established rules and procedures played a far less important role is provided by the work of the Royal Art Lodge, which began in Winnipeg in 1996. Comprised of a number of students

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23 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

25 For background, see Carol Archer, 'Out of Thin Air: Collaborative and Solo Works', in *Out of Thin Air* (Hong Kong: Lingnan University, 2010), pp. 2–4.

who had studied together at the University of Manitoba, this group of friends (and in some cases, relatives) gathered regularly to participate in collaborative drawing and painting without the guidance of rules determining who would make changes to a particular picture at any given stage in the process. As Ali Davey describes the arrangement, ‘At the end of each session, the artists would evaluate the drawings, placing the most successful works in a “sun” suitcase, while the less successful works were relegated to a “sad cloud” suitcase or worse, a “to be destroyed” suitcase.’<sup>26</sup> Presumably the success of this group’s collective work depended largely on the shared attitudes and interests that made it possible for key artistic decisions, including decisions about which works were good enough to be deemed finished and worthy of exhibition, to be settled through a spontaneous process of consensus formation through face-to-face conversational interaction. This sort of ‘jamming’ may be contrasted to the stepwise or ‘incremental’ procedures adopted in other modes of collaboration, where verbal exchanges about the ongoing work are minimized or even prohibited.

It is uncontroversial to observe that many of the contemporary modes of collaboration find a basic orientation in a rejection of the tradition of hierarchically organized art-making based on the talent and reputation of an individual master. In opposition to this model, many contemporary artists espouse and promote an essentially egalitarian or democratic ethos. One manifestation of the latter is the prevalent tendency to favour artistic decisions based on egalitarian procedures, as opposed to substantive, reason-based decisions held to be informed by superior expertise and discernment. One extension of this egalitarian impulse takes the form of including the participation of agents who clearly lack the kind of training and background that would qualify them as equals in terms of artistic competence and judgement. An example is provided by a series of works done by Marlene Dumas, a South African artist based in the Netherlands, in conjunction with her five-year-old daughter. The series, which bears the overall title *Underground* (1994–5), is a mixed-media work on paper consisting of twenty-eight unframed panels, each depicting a close-up representation of a face, arranged in a grid on the gallery wall. Almost all of the panels contain the traces of two radically different styles of mark-making: a bold rainbow-coloured palette (added by the child) jars against, and partially obscures, the mother’s restrained black-and-white ink painting.<sup>27</sup>

While the collaborative works produced in this manner are artistically successful, there was clearly a limit to the egalitarian nature of the process, especially with regard to the question of work completion. It was the mother, already an established professional artist, who initiated the process by letting her daughter ‘attack’ some of her pictures, and it was

26 Ali Davey, ‘Playful Insights’, in Marcel Dzama, Neil Farber, and Michael Dumontier (eds), *Serpentine Musings* (Dublin: Douglas Hyde Gallery, 2005), unpaginated.

27 For a more detailed discussion of this project, see Carol Archer, ‘Gifts and Transgressions: Marlene Dumas’ *Underground*, *Crossings*, No 8 (2007), pp. 77–100.



the mother who eventually decided which of the results should be recruited as finished works worthy of exposition as part of a collection of twenty-eight panels.

In sum, while the innovative rules and procedures of contemporary collective art-making involve interesting variations and twists that constrain and thereby enhance creative activity, we have yet to find a species of collaborative art-making that constitutes a telling counterexample to the proposed analysis of work completion with its disjunctive ‘effective completion decision’ condition. It does turn out, however, that in many contemporary collaborative projects, a great deal of emphasis is placed on the procedures involved in what we have called an ‘extended’ completion decision. Yet mixed, as opposed to purely procedural methods, are most prevalent—and, we might conjecture, most likely to be artistically successful.

At the outset of this paper, we broached the possibility that consideration of the problem of work completion in relation to artistic collaboration could shed some light on larger issues pertaining to authorship and the attribution of artistic and other kinds of responsibility in the arts. We shall conclude with some brief and tentative remarks on this large and difficult topic. More specifically, we address ourselves to the question of whether the proposed analysis of completion conditions significantly constrains decisions about who is to be counted amongst the authors of a collective work.

Authorship, we take it, involves artistic (and potentially moral) responsibility for the work, which entails a sufficient degree of control of the actual making of the artistic item.<sup>28</sup> Control, here, requires the performing of intentional actions and the absence of severe coercion. In many (but not all) cases of art-making, authorship also involves the expression of attitudes, such as satirical or political perspectives, or evaluative judgements, for instance, of the traits exemplified by characters in a work of fiction.

Our proposal is that the making of the effective completion decision in one of its forms is a necessary condition on authorship. While it may be possible for someone to be one of the joint creators of a completed work without having personally made a decision as to when it is finished, a necessary condition on authorship in such a case would be participation in the prior decision whereby a completion procedure for that work was settled upon. Having participated in the formation of the joint intention, in the absence of any subsequent opting-out on the part of the individual artists, suffices for participation in the artistic responsibility for the work’s completion.<sup>29</sup> Persons whose participation in a particular project is limited to more or less helpful contributions offered to someone whose decisions initiate, control, and terminate the art-making process are implausible candidates for

28 For a more detailed discussion of this conception of authorship, see Paisley Livingston, *Cinema, Philosophy, Bergman: On Film as Philosophy* (OUP, 2009), ch. 3.

29 For background on this sort of attribution of responsibility in the case of moral considerations, see Seumas Miller, ‘Collective Moral Responsibility: An Individualist Account’, in Peter A. French and Howard K. Wettstein (eds), *Shared Intentions and Collective Responsibility. Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 30 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 176–193.

authorship in that project, on the assumption, that is, that authorship is associated with sufficient control over the making of the work.<sup>30</sup>

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