

## Précis of *Haecceities: Essentialism, Identity, and Abstraction*

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After reviewing the fundamental conditions of making and apprehending works of art, identified in my earlier work *Subjects and Objects*, *Haecceities* considers ways in which the more abstract and radical works of art can be produced. The fundamental conditions noted include recognizing that the most basic artistic operation – what is required of every work of art of any kind of work – is singling something out. This requirement of conceptual delineation includes, but need not be limited to, more conventional methods of making art, such as painting or sculpting something into existence. What is singled out is an object, of some kind of object, and where the term ‘object’ must be used in the widest possible philosophical sense, so that anything of any kind of thing is an object. (The notion of *object* is equivalent to the notions of *thing* and *entity*, but is used both for its historical relation to art, and because talking about an object of thought being a work of art, which is possible, seems more conceptually apposite than speaking of a thing or entity of thought.) The object that an artwork is intended to be need not be physical, perceptual, or even apprehensible, in any conventional sense of apprehension normally associated with works of art in art history. However, any artwork of any kind of artwork must have a particular identity; the identity of a work must be intended by the artist whose work it is; and that intended identity must be theoretically comprehensible to everyone, and not just the artist. This at least must be the case for any artwork that would enter art history. That requirement not only establishes the context of interest of the thoughts of this work, but presupposes a number of necessary conditions that it may be possible for the more radical kind of artworks to use in the determination of their particular identities. That an artwork must have a comprehensible identity means that it must either be understood to be a particular perceptual object, as in a conventional painting, or it must rely on such an entity to function as the means by which the intended identity of a work can be understood. Reasons why the more radical kinds of artwork that can be produced require the use of language to make their intended identities comprehensible are given. And novel possibilities for the use of language, both in relation to a perceptual surface and to the conscious mind of a subject attending to language and surface, are identified.

When a conscious subject attends to the perceptual object on which the particular identity of a work depends, it creates an ‘artistic complex’ that includes the subject, the object, and her consciousness of the object as constituents. The complex is further qualified by additional things that this work identifies that can be used, in concert with language and consciousness, as ‘material’ for constructing the more radical artworks that it is possible to produce. Although some may be addressed explicitly as others function implicitly, all of the

elements of an artistic complex are ineliminable. Because the more radical artworks possible reflect essential conditions of making and apprehending works of art, and because they reflect, as they use, ineliminable elements of artistic complexes, I call such works works of ‘Essentialism.’ Calling an Essentialist artwork ‘radical’ reflects its being based on the fundamental requirements of making and apprehending art, as well as its use of elements of an artistic complex in the determination of its identity. Essentialist artworks are additionally radical in being characterized by some of the following deviant possibilities: two different works can be identified with precisely the same object; the same work can be identified with two or more different objects, either at the same or different times, depending on its relation to the understanding of the language on which it depends; different objects that the same work is to be understood to be can be determined in relation to the same or different subjects, depending on the nature of the work and its relation to language and its comprehension; different objects that the same work can be understood to be may be qualitatively and not just numerically different; it is possible for an artwork to be either nothing or everything, or perhaps both, in addition to being something; it is possible for an artwork to be something that cannot be understood that is nevertheless understood to depend on understanding for it to be something that cannot be understood. Such a paradoxical outcome establishes what is perhaps the most radical kind of radical artwork. Many examples of radical works are given in the course of the book.

Essentialism functions by using language in particular ways that address both the surface on which it appears, and the perception, conception, and comprehension of the subject attending to the language in relation to that surface. Because the identity of an Essentialist artwork depends on conception in addition to perception, the conscious subject of an artistic complex is called a ‘conciipient.’ The kinds of novel use of language seen in this work illustrate that the space of the perceptual object of an artistic complex extends beyond perception to engage the rational and deliberative processes of conceptual thought. Accordingly, the relevant artistic space in Essentialism is called a ‘space of apprehension’ to reflect the importance of the kinds of process noted to the comprehension, and even factual determination, of artwork identity. Because of the importance of cognitive processes to Essentialist identity, the conscious subject in an artistic complex provides a ‘field of understanding’ that the manipulated perceptual and conceptual properties of the space of apprehension can be used to address. The principal constituents of the field of understanding pertinent to Essentialism are perception, conception, and recollection. For the purposes of this work, the field of understanding also includes agency, as individual choices relevant to the determination of identity are linked to the primary epistemological processes listed in the previous sentence. Kinds of intended interaction of elements of the space of apprehension and the field of understanding are used artistically in the pursuit of the limits of artistic reductionism and the identification of different kinds of radical identity. Accordingly, novel sorts of deviant artistic identity, such as those stated above, can be triggered by the apprehension of manipulated perceptuo-linguistic properties of the space of apprehension of the perceptual object that are designed to engage that apprehension as it includes events in the

field of understanding – including ones of conception and recollection in addition to perception – provided by the subject attending to the object. Many examples of works so determined are seen and analyzed.

A large section of the work is devoted to different kinds of artistic identity, and to kinds of artistic object that now have to be recognized given various works of Essentialist art. In particular, every Essentialist artwork is an ‘ideational’ object of some kind of ideational object. An object is ideational when its being understood to be a work of art depends on understanding language that specifies the object in relation to that understanding. An example is the language *understanding that understanding what this is to be understood to be is what this is to be understood to be is what this is to be understood to be*. Such language, in being used to single out or specify an object that a work is meant to be, is called a ‘specification.’ To reflect the fact of each artwork’s particular identity, and the thisness associated with that particularity, I call the specifications of Essentialism *Haecceities*, and each artwork that is determined in relation to understanding an Essentialist specification is called a *Haecceity*, and is given a unique number that reflects its position within the Essentialist artworks that together compose the *Haecceities* series. For instance, the italicized specification seen in this paragraph is *Haecceity 9.1.1* which is also the title of the artwork of that specification.

*Haecceity 9.1.1* is an example of an artwork that can be understood to be identified with different ideational objects – in this case different acts and states of understanding that are singled out by the language understood – that are either ideational in relation to the same or different concipients. This is an example of a work that can be identified with ideational objects that are ‘disseminated’ in relation to a single concipient, and that can also be ‘distributed’ in relation to two or more concipients. Objects that were ideational in the past may yet answer to the same specification in the present, as understood by the same or different concipient, depending on the wording of the specification and how it can be interpreted. For instance, any past understanding of *Haecceity 9.1.1* can be understood to be singled out by that *Haecceity* when it is understood in the present, and whether by the same or different person. Any past understanding  $u_1$  can be understood to be singled out by *Haecceity 9.1.1* in addition to a present event  $u_2$  of understanding that specification. When  $u_1$  and  $u_2$  belong to the history of awareness of the same concipient, then  $u_1$  and  $u_2$  are objects that answer to the *Haecceity*, each is equally the artwork of that *Haecceity*, and that work of art has a disseminated identity. When  $u_1$  and  $u_2$  belong to the different histories of awareness of different concipients, then  $u_1$  and  $u_2$  are ideational objects that are distributed in relation to different subjects. Each object that answers to the *Haecceity*, however, is equally the work of art of that *Haecceity*. It is important though to understand that no past ideational object is an Essentialist work of art unless the specification by which it is singled out is understood in the present, and hence answers to the specification with at least on present ideational object. Every Essentialist artwork depends on understanding language in the present, and nothing is an Essentialist work of art apart from that kind of current understanding. Disseminated and distributed objects can be heterogeneous or homogenous, and can be

synchronic or diachronic. How these things are determined, and their importance to Essentialist abstraction and its pursuit of radical identity, are carefully considered.

The fourth part of the book consists of detailed analyses of several works of art of the *Haecceities* series. The kinds of philosophical and artistic challenge that such radical works raise are carefully considered, as is the sort of sophisticated aesthetic that characterizes complex and interactive works of this kind.

The work concludes with two appendices. The first defends the view that any event of understanding, including an event of understanding the intended identity of any work of art, including an Essentialist work of art, is punctiform, and is so even if other events on which the event of understanding relies to occur have durations. The second argues that objects of different kinds of object can be understood to be conceptually stratified, or to reside at different hierarchical levels. Thus cultural objects, including works of art, do not exist on the same level as the physical objects on which they depend. Objects at the same level can be understood to have ‘horizontal’ relations to one another, while objects on different levels, including cultural objects and artworks, are ‘vertically’ related to the lower-level physical objects that they presuppose. There is more than one vertically related level of cultural objects and works of art, so that one cultural object or artwork may depend on another cultural object at a level beneath it in addition to the foundational metaphysical object on which it depends on the lowest level. For instance, the urinal that Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* was to be understood to be was itself a cultural object. Thus *Fountain* depended for its identity as an artwork on that lower-level cultural object in addition to depending on the cluster of atomic physical entities that together composed that urinal. It is necessary to recognize that objects reside at different levels so that the same thing, such as a perceptual artwork and the cluster of atomic entities of which it is physically composed, have different haecceities. For instance, the physical object, as physical, on which the urinal depended to be physical had its particular identity as a particular physical object; the urinal had its particular identity, qua cultural, as a particular cultural object; and *Fountain* had its particular identity as a particular work of art. The physical object existed at the first level – the metaphysical level – of objects; the urinal existed at the second level of objects, which is also the first level of cultural objects; and *Fountain* existed at the third level of objects, which is also the second level of cultural objects.

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