

## PART ONE

### Introduction

#### Preface.

In *Subjects and Objects: Art, Essentialism, and Abstraction* I attempted to provide the philosophical groundwork of the question of the limits of Abstraction in art by articulating both what is required to produce an artwork, and what is required for a subject to understand the intended identification of an artwork with an object, including, in each case, any of the more Abstract artworks that is possible to effect.<sup>1</sup> Those things that are essential to effecting the identification of an artwork with an object, and to apprehending that intended identification, are things with which even the most Abstract artwork cannot dispense. To the extent to which these indispensable things can figure in the determination of an object that an artwork is meant to be, or can figure in the identification of an artwork with some object, then they can be understood to be the fundamental ‘material’ of a creative investigation of the limits of Abstraction - an investigation that can be understood to be Essentialist in using only such fundamental material in the determination of its works. Use of the terms ‘Essentialist Abstraction’ and ‘Essentialism’ in *Subjects and Objects* pertains to the previous remarks and to the essential elements of an artistic complex - the existential entity of which apprehension of the identity of an artwork is a constituent, and that is the subject of the second section below of this part of this book. Just as words such as ‘Cubism,’ ‘Minimalism,’ and ‘Conceptual art,’ mark kinds of artistic practice, so are ‘Essentialist Abstraction’ and ‘Essentialism’ used to pertain to the creative undertaking of identifying the limits of artistic Abstraction. Accordingly, I call the work that determines limits of Abstraction through utilizing only essential elements of artistic complexes as the fundamental material in or through the use of which those limits are determined ‘Essentialist Abstraction,’ or simply ‘Essentialism.’

This book is meant to be an artistic and critical complement of *Subjects and Objects* that, as artistic, examines Essentialist artworks that I have produced in which I believe different limits of Abstraction are identified, and that, as critical, considers things of aesthetic, artistic, analytical, and philosophical relevance to the works and those limits. The previous remark requires the following qualification: Given the book format and the reliance of Essentialist Abstraction on language, the examination of Essentialist artworks referred to largely consists of considering the specifications, or what I term *Haecceities*, that I have written that are used to single out the more Abstract objects possible. While the identity of an Essentialist artwork is complex and variable, a token of a *Haecceity* that either forms part of an Essentialist artwork, or that is conceptually, and possibly causally, related to such a work appears as part of a framed perceptual object. A token of a *Haecceity* that forms part of a framed perceptual object may appear in the circular format of certain specifications that can be seen in Part Three below, or the words of a token of a *Haecceity* may be distributed in correlated sets of matrices according to an algorithm that I discovered that solves certain problems that arise perceptually and conceptually in relation to the

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<sup>1</sup> Strayer, Jeffrey *Subjects and Objects: Art, Essentialism, and Abstraction*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill (2007). This work should be consulted by anyone who is interested in the philosophy that pertains to the conceptual groundwork that underlies the creative determination of the limits of Abstraction.

use of visual language on a flat surface.<sup>2</sup> The foregoing things having been noted, the manner of presenting the *Haecceities* in this work that the format of a book requires is not really a problem. This is because the Abstract limits that are possible to identify can be understood in virtue of comprehending specifications in or through which those limits are identified. And once the algorithmic distribution of language in correlated sets of matrices is exhibited, the placement of linear, that is non-circular, language can easily be imagined, and the relation of that language both to a subject comprehending it and to its referent can be understood.

Part One of the book includes six theses of Abstraction, and contains an outline of the idea of Essentialism and the relation of that idea to the notion of an artistic complex and its essential elements. The subject matter of Part Two of the book not only includes a detailed consideration of the use of visual language on a two-dimensional surface, but includes things that must be examined in relation to that use. As indicated, Part Three contains the specifications that I have written as part of the Essentialist enterprise. It also includes an explanation of how the numbering of the *Haecceities* works in relation to the progression of the series, what the complement of a *Haecceity* is, and how language is used in Essentialism. Part Four consists both of general commentary on the *Haecceities*, and an in-depth examination of certain of them, as different limits of Abstraction are identified and contemplated. A glossary is included to assist the reader in comprehending terms that the depth and complexity of the issue of Essentialist Abstraction proves to require.

1. Theses of Abstraction.

- 1.1. Every artwork is an object, where “object” represents the widest and most fundamental term in our lexicon of concepts. Because everything is an object - including things that do not and cannot exist, and yet can be imagined or thought of, singled out linguistically, and talked about - the notion of object lacks ontological commitment. Although that is the case, any object is logically limited according to the laws of objects stated below.

- 1.2. An artist must intentionally single out an object with which an artwork can be understood to be identified, and she must intend that what she has intentionally singled out is to be understood to be a work of art.

- 1.3. It must be possible to understand which object an artwork is meant to be even when the object that the work is meant to be cannot itself be apprehended.

- 1.4. Understanding the identity of any artwork, or understanding with which simple or complex object an artwork is meant to be identified, depends on a public perceptual object.

- 1.5. Apprehension of a public perceptual object on which understanding the intended identity of an artwork depends creates an artistic complex of which the object, the subject, and the subject’s apprehension of the object are necessary constituents. These required ingredients of an artistic complex - the object, the subject, and the subject’s apprehension of the object - are qualified by certain properties, certain relations hold between them, and certain facts pertain to them. These properties, relations, and facts are unavoidable. As such, they can be understood to be essential ‘elements’ of the complex together with the object, the subject, and the subject’s apprehension of the object to which they pertain.

- 1.6. A limit of Abstraction in art must be determined in an object that results from utilizing essential elements of an artistic complex to produce that object, or in an object the identification of an artwork with which is linked to the use of such essential elements in relation

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<sup>2</sup> These problems, and the solution of them, are discussed in depth in Part Two.

to which that identification is effected.

2. The essential elements of an artistic complex.

2.1. Three essential elements of any artistic complex have already been mentioned: a public perceptual object, a subject, and the subject's apprehension of that object. The following things are essential elements of any artistic complex and, as ineliminable from such an entity, will figure in any event of understanding the identity of an artwork. To the extent to which such essential elements can be used artistically in the identification of an artwork with some object, they can be understood to be the essential 'materials' to be used in investigating the limits of Abstraction in art.

2.2. Agency. Because a subject must choose to attend to the perceptual object that forms part of an artistic complex, the subject will be agentially related to that object. The agential relation of subject to object will apply to any aspect of that object that calls for a decision on the part of the subject to attend to it in any manner required to understand its relation to the artwork dependent on it.

2.3. Cause and effect. Any subject who forms part of an artistic complex will have a causal relation to the perceptual object that also forms part of that complex, and the object will in turn have a causal relation to the subject.

2.4. Becoming. Because the identification of any limit of Abstraction depends on an artistic complex; because every artistic complex depends on the fact of apprehension; and because all apprehensions both come to exist and cease to exist in time, the coming and ceasing to exist of both artistic complexes and the events of apprehension on which artistic complexes are dependent will be unavoidable.

2.5. Indexicals. The perceptual object that forms part of an artistic complex will be indexically related to a subject attending to it in virtue of the subject attending to it since any such object will be 'this-here-now' relative to and for that subject. Although an artwork may not be meant to be identified with the perceptual object of an artistic complex, the identification of the work with something other than that perceptual object will depend on language in virtue of which the identification of the work with some other object is effected. Such language will be indexically related to anyone comprehending it in virtue of the subject comprehending it since the language comprehended will be 'this-now' that is comprehended by the subject.

2.6. Epistemological relations of subject to object: knowing which, knowing that, and knowing what.

In attending to any public perceptual object on which the identity of an artwork is dependent, a subject knows *which* object is relevant to that identity; knows *that* he is attending to that object; and knows *what* he is attending to in at least the minimal sense that it falls either under the category of artwork or is conceptually classified as an object relevant to the identity of an artwork, and so whether or not he knows what the object is in the sense of understanding it or being able to interpret it correctly.

2.7. Logical relations of objects and consciousness. As a subject forms part of an artistic complex, all objects will divide into those of which she is then aware and those of which she is not then aware, and any or every object of either of these classes will or will not be that which all or part of an artwork is to be understood to be.

2.8. Apprehension and reapprehension. An object on which the identity of an artwork is dependent may be designed to exist perceptually unchanged across diverse spaces and times, or to be repeated in the same or a different place or places at different times. An object on which

the identity of an artwork is dependent must be apprehensible, and an object of either kind of the preceding objects may be apprehended and reapprehended.

2.9. Identity and difference. Any artwork of any kind of artwork is an object, and every object is logically limited, and thus is a logically particular object, according to the following 'laws of objects:' any object  $x$  has the property of being  $x$ ; any object  $x$  that has the property of being  $x$  is identical to, or is the selfsame object as, the object that has that property; nothing both has and lacks (or lacks and has) the property of being  $x$ ; and any object  $y$  that lacks the property of being  $x$  is different from any object that has that property.

2.10. Parts and wholes. If the perceptual object on which the identity of an artwork is dependent is complex, then the part-whole relation will apply to the relation of the parts of that object to the object that the parts compose. However, the part-whole relation will pertain in any case to the relation of each constituent of an artistic complex to the complex of which it is a constituent.

2.11. Space and time. Even a simple perceptual object will be embedded spatially in the space in which it is perceived, and the apprehension on which an artistic complex depends is temporal.

2.12. Continuity and discontinuity and recurrence and non-recurrence. Both any perceptual object on which the identity of an artwork is dependent and any object that an artwork is meant to be will be continuous or discontinuous and either recurrent or non-recurrent.

3. The idea of Essentialism or Essentialist Abstraction.

3.1. Perceptual and conceptual awareness. As every artwork depends on a public perceptual object, perception is an indispensable element of any artistic complex. However, as the object that an artwork is meant to be need not itself be perceptual, an event of perception that forms part of an artistic complex need not be passively linked to the identification of the work with a perceptual object, as is customarily the case with perceptual artworks. Rather, perception can either be made to play a supporting role as a presupposition of apprehending that a non-perceptual object is meant to be an artwork, or it may be meant to play a more constructive role in determining what the work is meant to be if what the work is meant to be is tied specifically either to a particular event of perception or to a kind of event of perception. If the former is the case, then conception or cognitive awareness may be used actively to produce as it understands what the work that is dependent on it is meant to be. If the latter is the case, then perception must combine with conception or cognitive awareness in apprehending the identity of the work, as these different kinds of awareness combine to produce the object that the work is meant to be. Either of these latter kinds of use of perception and conception may form part of Essentialist Abstraction.

3.2. Agency. If a subject's agential relation to the perceptual object of an artistic complex can be extended beyond that complex to the artwork itself to which the complex pertains - in either relating directly to the origination of the artwork or in affecting it in some way - then the customary separation between a work of art and the agency of a subject attending to it can be reduced or eliminated. Such reduction or elimination as intentionally addressed in either manner noted would fit the purposes of Essentialism.

3.3. Cause and effect. Any subject who forms part of an artistic complex will have a causal relation to the perceptual object that also forms part of that complex, and the object will in turn have a causal relation to the subject. Causal relations that hold between subjects and objects are of three broad sorts pertaining to the notions of modification, origination, or termination:

either an object in some way changes a subject, a subject in some way changes an object, or an object originates or results from an action or actions of a subject, or is terminated due to an action or actions of a subject. At the very minimum, the subject will effect a Cambridge change in the perceptual object of that complex in virtue of forming part of an artistic complex at a particular time, and the object will effect the same kind of change in the subject.<sup>3</sup> Because the kind of change effected by the relations of subject to object and object to subject noted is unavoidable, Essentialist Abstraction must consider the use of such minimal change in the determination of its objects. In addition, the origination or termination of something can be what a work of art is meant to be, or either or both can be a means by which an artwork is determined.

3.4. Becoming. The Essentialist investigation of the use of becoming will recognize points 2.2 and 2.3 in addition to 2.4 and will include exploring how the origination and/or termination of certain objects, and how the coming and/or ceasing to exist of certain apprehensions of certain objects, can be made either to be all or part of a work, or can figure in determining what the artist intends the work to be, as either kind of origination or termination is linked to an action or actions of a subject forming part of an artistic complex in which either kind of becoming is identified by that subject.

3.5. Indexicals. As earlier indicated, not only will a subject who forms part of an artistic complex be indexically related to the perceptual object of the complex, but the language on which the identification of the limits of Abstraction depends will be indexically related to anyone comprehending it. Essentialist Abstraction must then identify ways in which indexical relations of subject and objects can be used in the determination of the object with which the work is meant to be identified.

3.6. Epistemological relations of subject to object: knowing which, knowing that, and knowing what. To the primitive intellectual act of singling out an object in awareness, the primitive epistemological relation of 'knowing that' the object is singled out corresponds. As a subject attends to the object to which he knows he must attend to apprehend the identity of an artwork, he is aware that he is attending to that object. Knowing which and knowing that are therefore coexistent properties of the subject portion of any artistic complex. 'Knowing what' an object is, in the basic sense, means recognizing or being able to state what kind or kinds of thing the object is, and, in the more sophisticated sense, means understanding or being able to interpret the object. Whatever its level of sophistication, knowing what will be a property of the subject who forms part of an artistic complex in addition to knowing which and knowing that. Because interpretation is required for understanding and appreciating artworks, the Essentialist may explore ways in which interpretation can be made to determine in part an object with which an artwork or one of its parts is meant to be identified. Knowing what will be more Essentialist to the extent to which it concerns knowing which, knowing that, and other aspects of artistic complexes that are ineliminable.

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<sup>3</sup> A 'Cambridge change' occurs in an object  $x$  when a statement made about  $x$ 's having some property  $P$  is either true at  $t_1$  and false at  $t_2$  or false at  $t_1$  and true at  $t_2$ , and whatever the nature of  $P$ , and so whether or not the change is perceptible or substantial. If  $x$  is the perceptual object of an artistic complex,  $s$  is the subject of the complex, and  $P$  is the property that  $x$  has of being perceived by  $s$ , then a Cambridge change occurs in  $x$  when it is true that  $x$  has the property  $P$  at  $t_1$  and it is false that  $x$  has the property  $P$  at  $t_2$ , or it is false that  $x$  has the property  $P$  at  $t_1$  and true that  $x$  has the property  $P$  at  $t_2$ . If  $P$  is the property that  $s$  has of perceiving  $x$ , then a Cambridge change occurs in  $s$  when it is true that  $s$  has the property  $P$  at  $t_1$  and it is false that  $s$  has the property  $P$  at  $t_2$ , or it is false that  $s$  has the property  $P$  at  $t_1$  and true that  $s$  has the property  $P$  at  $t_2$ .

3.7. Logical relations of objects and consciousness. As the logical relations of objects and consciousness noted in section 2.7 above are unavoidable; as all or part of an artwork may be meant to be either an object of which a subject can be aware or an object of which a subject cannot be aware; and as either kind of object may constitute a limit of Abstraction, Essentialism must explore the relation of objects to the conscious subject who forms part of an artistic complex, and must find ways to utilize either kind of object in the pursuit of its goal. Further, any apprehensible object that all or part of an artwork is meant to be either will or will not be dependent on either a particular event of apprehending that object or on some or any event or events of a certain kind or kinds of event of apprehending it. And any object that all or part of an artwork is meant to be that cannot itself be apprehended either will or will not be dependent on either a particular event or on some or any event or events of a certain kind or kinds of event of apprehending the intended identification of all or part of the artwork with that object. Because both events of apprehending objects with which artworks are meant to be identified and events of apprehending the intended identification of artworks with particular objects can have different forms in addition to being of different kinds, Essentialism will have to explore the use of different kinds and forms of apprehension in the determination of its objects.<sup>4</sup>

3.8. Apprehension and reapprehension. Essentialism needs to recognize the history of actual apprehensions and the possibility of subsequent apprehensions either of a stable perceptual object on which an artwork depends, or of a recurrent perceptual object that is repeated in the same or a different place or places at different times. It must do so as any apprehension of either kind of object qualifies either the history of awareness of a single individual or any number of individuals. The recognition that something now apprehended was previously apprehended depends on memory, and the recognition that something now apprehended might again be apprehended is linked to the anticipation of a future time beyond the present. Memory and anticipation then figure in the relevance of apprehension and reapprehension to Essentialism. The temporal relation of an event of reapprehension to a past or present apprehension can be considered by Essentialism, as can both any causal relation that may hold between them and the extent to which the apprehending events are similar or different.

3.9. Identity and difference. The basic logical relations of identity and difference outlined in section 2.9 above are ineluctable, and apply to each constituent of an artistic complex both in their relation to one another and to each thing that is not a member of the complex. Essentialism then needs to look at ways in which the primitive particular identity of an object that an artwork is meant to be, and its difference from every object that lacks that identity, can be effected in relation to ineliminable ingredients of an artistic complex.

3.10. Parts and wholes. Essentialist Abstraction depends on the use of visual language to address as it utilizes ineliminable elements of artistic complexes. Because the words of any such piece of language will have visible and linguistic compositional relations to the language that they compose; because these words will have visible compositional relations to the perceptual object of which they form part; because language can be used to single out objects with which parts of an artwork are meant to be identified; and because certain properties of a subject - including consciousness and agency - can be used to effect the part-whole relation, Essentialism

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<sup>4</sup> The form of a conscious event is determined by whether it is Intentional or non-Intentional, reflexive, irreflexive, or areflexive, monadic or polyadic, and first order or higher order. See Part Three, Division II, section 4 of *Subjects and Objects*.

will have to examine that relation in the determination of its objects.

3.11. Space and time. The visual language on which identifying the limits of Abstraction depends is spatial, and the awareness and agency on which every artistic complex depends are temporal. Accordingly, the Essentialist will have to take both space and time into consideration, even though an artwork need not itself be either temporal or spatio-temporal.

3.12. Continuity and discontinuity and recurrence and non-recurrence. Because the perceptual object on which the identity of an artwork is dependent may be continuous or discontinuous, Essentialism will have to take the possible continuity or discontinuity of such an object into consideration. An event of apprehending such an object will be continuous for a time and ultimately discontinuous, and the possible pertinence of the continuity and discontinuity of such an event to Essentialism must be considered. Because the perceptual object on which the identity of an artwork is dependent may or may not be designed to recur, the relevance to Essentialism of recurrence or non-recurrence will have to be investigated, as will the possible utility to Essentialism of the recurrence or non-recurrence of any relevant states or events of apprehension.

3.13. Aesthetically essential properties.

Any property that is aesthetically essential for Essentialism will be determined in relation to some thing or things that is essential to artistic complexes. As certain of these things are perceptual and others are conceptual, the aesthetic of Essentialist Abstraction will be complicated, and will have both a perceptual and a conceptual aspect.

The remarks of the preceding sections two through four are skeletal in nature. For a thorough consideration of an artistic complex, and the philosophical grounding of the issue of Abstraction, see *Subjects and Objects*. How Essentialism can deal with the preceding points of this third section in its pursuit of the limits of Abstraction is the subject of the remainder of this book.