From the Author's Perspective

Haecceities: Essentialism, Identity, and Abstraction

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Haecceities: Essentialism, Identity, and Abstraction[1] is both a philosophical and an artistic investigation of the limits of Abstraction in art and the possibilities of 'radical' artistic identity that are determined in the identification of those

limits.[2] These interrelated interests require recognizing philosophically the fundamental conditions of making and apprehending works of art, and then determining artistically how those fundamental conditions can be used to produce radically Abstract works of art. Because any artwork of the more Abstract and radical kinds of art possible must rely on using what is essential to producing and comprehending the intended identity of such a work, a work of art of this kind is called 'Essentialist,' and the body of artworks that constitutes the *Haecceities* series are grouped together under the rubric of 'Essentialism.'

Part One of the book contains theses of Abstraction, the first of which states that the most basic artistic operation – what is required of any artist to produce any 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. It may, for instance, include the realization of the possibility of understanding the intended identity of a work of art as the actualization of that cognitive possibility, as seen in *Haecceity 7.0.0* in Figure 1.[3]

The theses continue by noting that 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.[4] 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 any of the more radical kinds of artwork possible both to use, and with which to experiment, in the determination of its particular identity. That an artwork must have a comprehensible identity means that, given the nature of reality, 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. Examples can be seen in the Figures below. However, a purely perceptual artwork, as perceptual, cannot establish a reductive limit, nor can it constitute any of the more radical kinds of artistic identity that are possible to identify. Instead, language must be used to explore possibilities of identity in relation to extreme Abstraction. The reasons for this are given in the book, and novel possibilities for the use of language, both in relation to perceptual surface and to the conscious mind of a subject attending to language and surface, are identified.

How language is used in Essentialism is based on elements of an 'artistic complex.' An artistic complex is formed whenever a subject attends to a perceptual work of art, such as a painting, and is formed whenever one comprehends the intended identity of any radical work that depends on conception in addition to perception. The latter case includes understanding the language of a perceptual object in attending to that apprehensible entity, as in Figures 1-6. An artistic complex includes the conscious subject, the perceptual object, and her consciousness of the object as constituents. The complex is further qualified by additional things that the book identifies that can be used, in concert

with language, perception, thought, and action, 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.

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 differently radical in being characterized by some of the following deviant possibilities: i.) two different works can be identified with precisely the same object; ii.) 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; iii.) 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; iv.) different objects that the same work can be understood to be may be qualitatively and not just numerically different; v.) it is possible for an artwork to be either nothing or everything, or perhaps both, in addition to being something[5]; vi.) 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 since it would seem to contradict the requirement that every artwork have a comprehensible identity. And yet it may be that we understand its identity to be that which is excluded in understanding the relation of that identity to that understanding. There appears to be more than one way in which this can be done, and an example of such a work is *Haecceity 9.16.1.4* of Figure 2. Many examples of radical works are given in the course of the book, and all of the possibilities noted in i.)-vi.) above are covered.

Essentialism functions by using language in 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 'concipient.' 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 states and events 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 Essentialism, the field of understanding also includes agency, as individual choices relevant to the determination of identity are linked to the primary epistemological acts 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 trigged 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. Some understanding of this can result from attending to the Figures included with this article while recognizing the system of language distribution within them as explained in the endnote to Figure 1.[6] Many examples of works so determined are seen and analyzed.

A large section of the book 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 circular language of *Haecceity 9.0.0* of Figure 3, which, when written linearly with its first seven words repeated, and with its empty parentheses being understood to be consciously replaced with the word *understanding*, reads *this is to be understood to be (   ) what must be understood in order to understand 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.'[7] 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 group of Essentialist artworks that together compose the *Haecceities* series.

Haecceity 9.0.0 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 9.0.0* 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 9.0.0* 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 homogeneous, 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 in the third part of the work. The original perceptual object of any *Haecceity* artwork is only ever part of

the work, and is so with any ideational object singled out by its comprehended language. At the same time, an Essentialist artwork is equally any ideational object that is singled out by its *Haecceity*, and is so in addition to that object's being part of the work with the original perceptual object. That the same thing can be both the whole and a part of the same work at the same time is part of the radical identity of Essentialism.

The fourth part of the book consists of detailed analyses of several works of art of the *Haecceities* series, including *Haecceity 1.0.0* of Figures 5A-C and *Haecceity 2.0.3* of Figures 6A-B. 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. Due to their dependence on perception, intention, actions, and understanding, 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.
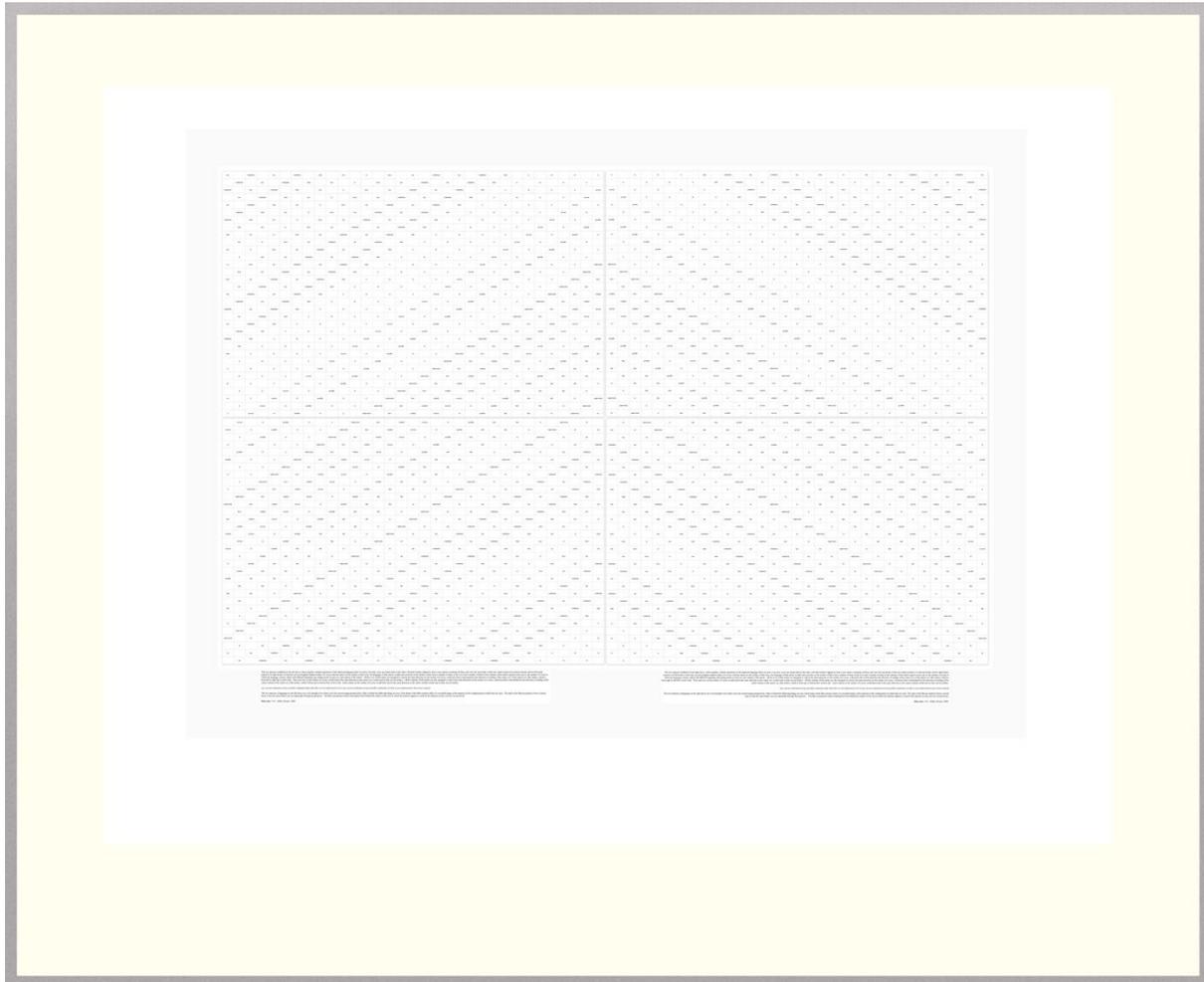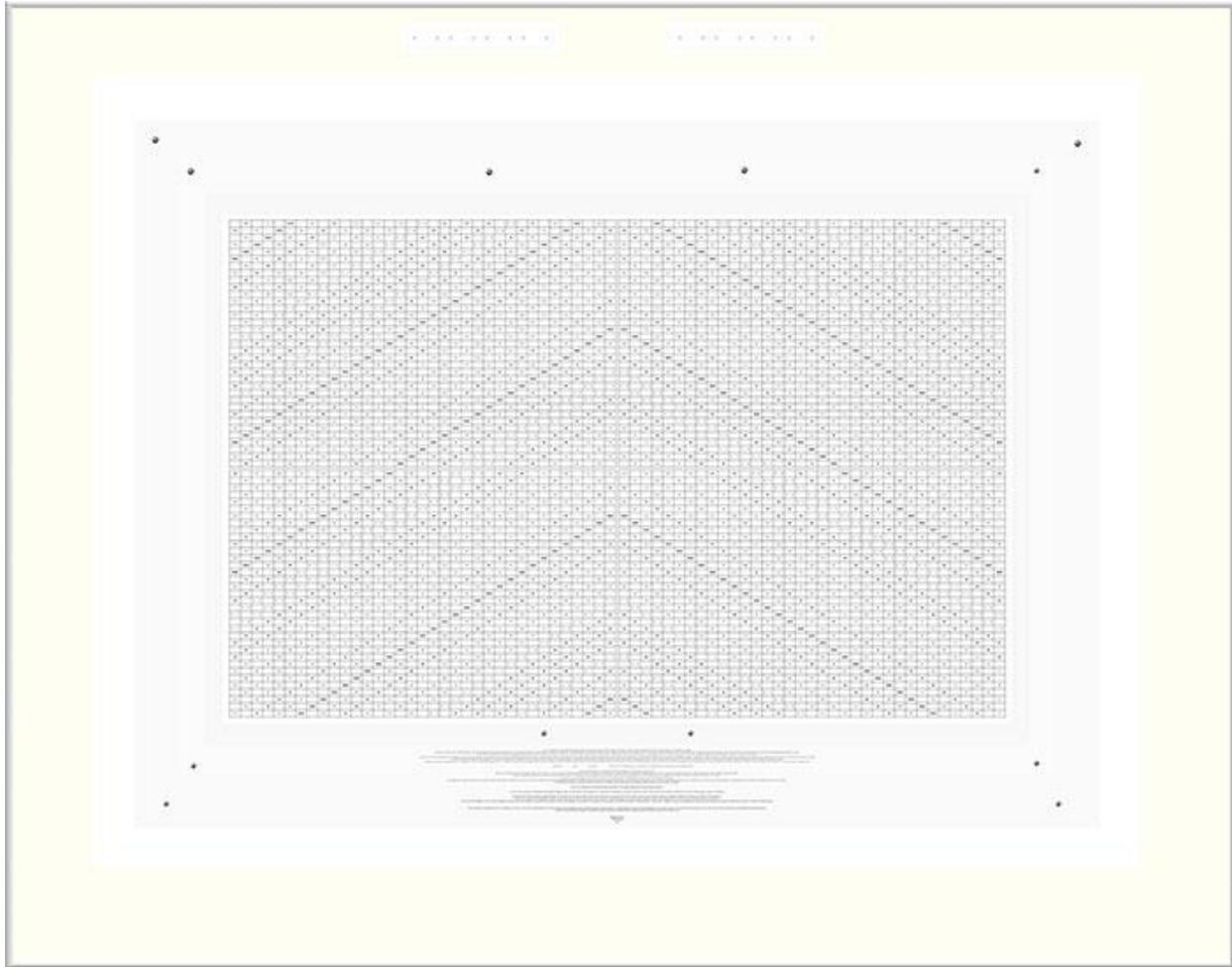
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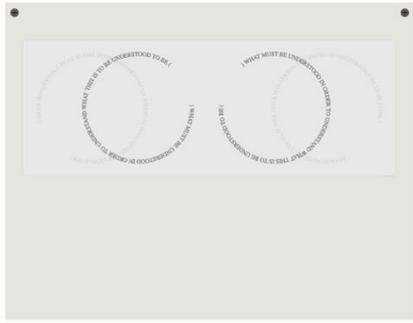
Haecceity 7.0.0, 2009

Figure 1.[8]

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Haecceity 9.16.1.4, 2008

Figure 2.

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Haecceity 9.0.0, 2005

Figure 3.

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Haecceity 3.25.4, 2016

Figure 4.

Haecceity 1.0.0, 2009

Figure 5A.

Haecceity 1.0.0, 2009

Figure 5B.

Haecceity 1.0.0, 2009

Figure 5C.

this here now[9]
Haecceity 2.0.3, 2013
Figure 6A.

this here now
Haecceity 2.0.3, 2013
Figure 6B.

[1] Brill (2017). http://www.brill.com/products/book/haecceities-essentialism-identity-and-abstraction.

[2] The terms 'Abstract' and 'Abstraction' are capitalized both to distinguish the artworks to which they apply from objects that are abstract in being spaceless and timeless, and to link the nature of their Abstraction to using, in various ways, the necessary conditions of making and apprehending works of art to produce works of art that reflect the use of those conditions. And as an Abstract artwork can be abstract, it is worthwhile to use the upper and lower cases to distinguish them. Examples of such works appear in the book. Use of the term 'radical' to qualify identity is explained in the body of this article.

[3] The language of a linear Essentialist artwork appears beneath the reproduction of the perceptual object in which that language figures as repeated vertical and horizontal tokens in pairs of algorithmically correlated matrices, as seen in Figure 1, and as explained in note 7 below. The language singles out, or specifies, something that all or part of the artwork can be understood to be. Such specifying language, because of its relation to thisness and particular identity, is called a *Haecceity*.

[4] 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.

[5] This maintained to be the case for *Haecceity 1.0.0*, seen in Figures 5A-5C, in the analysis of it on pp. 340-364 of the book.

[6] Additional works can be seen at my website at www.JeffreyStrayer.com.

[7] A specification, such as *Haecceity 9.0.0*, that contains one or more pairs of parentheses that represent a word or words omitted whose identity must be inferred is called a 'deductive specification.' When a pair of parentheses can be understood to be replaced with more than one word, then such language is termed a 'variable-deductive specification.' Language called 'supporting language' is included in either kind of deductive specification to enable the missing word or words to be understood. The supporting language of *Haecceity 9.0.0* can be seen at http://www.jeffreystrayer.com/sequences/Haecceities/9.0.0/images/gallery/9.0.0/Haecceity9.0.0Language.pdf.

[8] The language of specification that appears in linear *Haecceity* artworks is distributed evenly in correlated pairs of matrices – the two on the left in this Figure are correlated with one another, as are the two on the right – according to an algorithm that I discovered that has the following effects. Were a transparency of one matrix of a pair of correlated matrices placed over the other in alignment, the language that they contain would read correctly in the resulting matrix the number of times vertically equal to the number of words of which the specification consists, and would also read horizontally the number of times equal to the number of words of which the specification consists. Thus *Haecceity 7.0.0* consists of 33 words. That means that the language of that *Haecceity* reads correctly in the columns of a combined matrix 33 times, and correctly in the rows of that matrix 33 times, or 66 times in the matrix in all, albeit with different beginning and ending points for each token of the specification in each row and column. (The functioning of the algorithm is such that a pair of correlated matrices is a torus.) The same thing happens with the correlated pair of matrices on the right, and so the language of Figure 1 reads correctly 132 times in all, and does so as it solves the four problems of number, distribution, figure and ground, and asymmetry that come with the use of written language on a two-dimensional surface. How these things came about, as well as their relevance to

Essentialism, are carefully considered in the second part of the book. How these four problems can be solved by using circular language are also considered there, an illustration of which appears in Figure 3.

[9] The specification *this here now* is algorithmically distributed in four pairs of correlated matrices that cover all of the ways in which language can be written in matrices to read correctly on a flat surface: left-to-right and top-to-bottom; right-to-left and top-to-bottom; left-to-right and bottom-to-top; and right-to-left and bottom-to-top. See http://www.jeffreystrayer.com/sequences/sequence-2.php, and click on the image of the white paper in the top photograph to see how this fractured language appears on the white removable sheets that can be discerned in Figures 6A and 6B.