

Once Again, What Counts as Art?

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Abstract The question of what art is and why certain objects and events are considered art is examined. In the light of John Searle’s Social Philosophy, a hybrid Institutional-Functionalist explanation of what counts as art is presented. However, Searle’s apparatus applied to the ontology of the work of art is not enough to answer the question of why art has the status it exhibits. The proposal is to trace back the ontology of art to the origins of the dichotomy between freedom and necessity, and more specifically to the notion of “end in itself” presented by Kant, as the status that persons have. Ultimately, the ontology of art emerges as a projection of the status “end in itself”, of personhood, to objects and events.

Keywords Social Ontology · Institutional Theories of Art · John Searle · Kant · Personhood

What are the features that make an object a work of art as opposed to, for example, a tool or food? In the Theory of Art, this question opens a controversial and puzzling debate between Institutionalism and Functionalism.¹ In non-academic and artistic circles, this quandary is manifested in ordinary people’s amazement at how the most random objects and activities can make it to the museum halls. In these pages I propose an approach that departs from both Institutionalism and Functionalism while keeping their more valuable intuitions. I also attempt to bring some insight to the non-specialized reader about people’s common intuitions and reactions towards art. The goal of this paper is understanding what makes artistic objects, art, and what it is that we do when we engage in an artistic action.

¹A summary of this debate can be found in R. Stecker (2000).

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In achieving the aim of this paper, I will apply John Searle's social ontology to art. There have been proposals from the Institutional Theory of Art that move in a direction closely related to the platform that Searle's theory provides.² I will not attempt to address those here or establish a comparison that would require a careful and separate treatment. However, this work is the first attempt to bring Searle's social philosophy to the ontology of art, drawing mainly on two logical features of social entities: the *status function* and the *teleology* of the function.

These notions will allow me to argue that artistic objects are social objects that are constituted as such through a *bracketing of content*, which the application of the *status function* obtains. However, although Searle's social apparatus provides an excellent blueprint to understand how artistic objects are constituted, the logical features of social entities do not determine by themselves the specifics for what kinds of social entities we can create. In other words, we still need to figure out what the *teleology* of the function is. What do we do when we apply a bracketing *status function* to objects and activities to constitute them as artistic? I will argue that we obtain the *personification* of an object. The *teleology* of the art *status function* consists in granting the *persona* status to objects and activities. *Personification* is intended as the conferral of status of personhood on an object that is considered to be art, rather than the attribution of human traits to these same objects. I will refer to Kant's *end in itself* as a notion that clues us into the presence of personhood. This hopefully will be made clear in the following pages, but before arriving at such a conclusion, it is necessary to elucidate and apply the apparatus that Searle devises for the constitution of social reality to the ontology of the work of art. Namely, we need to understand the work of art as the result of the application of certain *status functions*.

Art As a Status Function The proposal relies on the notion of *status function* as presented by John Searle that can be described as:

$$X \text{ counts as } Y \text{ in } C$$

which commonly explains the constitution of social realities, like money, where X is a certain physical entity (a piece of paper), Y represents a status that is conferred upon it (e.g. having the value of 20 dollars), and C is a particular context (the United States of America).³

In the case of art, the *status function* could be understood as: X is a certain physical entity (this piece of marble), Y represents a status that is conferred upon it (e.g. being a work of art), and C is a particular context (the art world today).

In applying this logical form to a work of art, I consider it useful to make a distinction between *content* and *bracketing*. *Content* roughly corresponds to X (the physical entity, in this case a piece of marble) whereas the *bracketing* is the particular type of *status function* (that is Y), which we grant to art. In the ontological structure of

² G. Dickie's institutionalist reformulations have moved in the direction of a rule-based institutional approach (Dickie 1984, 2001). Asa Kasher's (1977) contribution of pragmatic competence as a constitutive system of rules within different institutional levels has also found an application to the *artworld* as a system of rules (Kasher 1990). David Graves (2010) completed this approach by presenting a framework that could nest Dickie's interlocking definitions of art with different institutional sub-systems with varying degree of specificity working in the *artworld*.

³ See J.R. Searle (1995). For some reformulations of his social philosophy see Searle (2010).

the work of art, we can distinguish then between the *content* of the object (prior to or independent of the assignment of function as art), and the assignment of function itself, which requires *bracketing*. These two components can be represented as [C], where “[]” signifies the *bracketing* and “C” the *content*. *Bracketing* consists in putting between parentheses whatever function or ontology an object or activity had previous to the imposition of the art *status function*. The content is the *material existing previous* to the assignment of the *status function*.

The *bracketing of function*, in conjunction with the *content*, makes it that the *status function* of art is not achieved in the same fashion for every work of art, but is dependent on the kind of preexisting object and activities upon which the bracketing has been imposed. For example, some objects suspend their previous function as an indicator of their artistic function. Duchamp’s *Fountain*, Tracey Emin’s installation sculpture *My Bed*, are not supposed to be used as those objects are generally used (unless we make their new use part of some artistic ritual, in which case we are still marking the objects with non-conventional functions). However, some other art objects may have a previous function that it is not suspended. For example, a Gothic cathedral does not need to close its doors to the faithful to become a work of art. In the case of the *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* by Félix González Torres, the pre-existing function of the work of art was not disabled, since the piece consists of two Ikea clocks next to each other that keep running perfectly in time.⁴ What is it that gets bracketed in this case? These clocks are not in the museum simply to provide time awareness to the possibly oblivious visitors. What differentiates them from regular clocks is nothing physical, but rather the assignment of function that will be reflected on some kind of status indicators (although the artist could always play a joke on the audience and hide the status indicators, as in the case of the fake drinking fountain that will be mentioned later on). Bracketing does not always mean suspending altogether whatever function the object previously possessed.

A third possible case is the one of objects or activities that did not have a previous function. There are cases where the bracketing of the function occurs at the level of the raw materials of the marble, oilcloth, or paint, namely, the bracketing occurred at the level of the brute fact. The raw materials no longer have the status of simply being raw materials; their *status functions* go beyond what they are as brute fact, as paint and oilcloth. The artist is actively painting or sculpting a *Venus*, but in so doing he is also bracketing the raw materials as raw materials. We do not have *just* a piece of marble any longer but a *Venus*, not a group of sentences but a novel.

To understand this point better we must notice that what I refer to as *content* may have a representational aspect [R], namely [C = R], like the words in a theater play, or it may not [C ≠ R] like the marble in the sculpture. The content can be representational in a way that is verbal, pictorial, gestural or auditory like in the words of a novel or a theater play, or the portrait in a painting or photograph, or in dancing or music. In many cases the content includes several of these forms, such as in films. But the content may also be non-representational. In the latter case, the assignment of function is performed on brute facts that have intrinsic physical properties without a representational content (like a rock or raw materials), or on physical features with an assigned function, like tools.

⁴ This example is mentioned by A. Danto (2003).

Usually, there are *status indicators* that signal the representation of the conferral. An interesting example is the case of a drinking fountain that was placed in an art gallery. Andrea Fraser's performance in 1989, 'Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk,' at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, consisted in a 'tour' through the museum where Fraser, dressed as a museum docent, showed visitors the museum masterpieces including a drinking fountain, the bookstore, and the lobby. When the thirsty patrons approached the fountain, they discovered that it was not functional, but rather was also part of the exhibition. It was precisely its cancellation of function that demanded the visitors to switch from the realm of ordinary objects to the realm of artwork. They were required to change the ontological status of the entity they were facing. However, this example shows the relevance of status indicators as way of making public the assignment of the *status function*.

The reason why we need a *status function* indicator is that the assignment of *status function* is symbolic or representational in nature. In other words, there is not anything purely physical that grants the status of being a work of art. The logical structure of such *status functions* as "X counts as Y in context C" means that X counts as Y precisely because it is represented as such. The assignment of function is only possible because we have a basic system of representation and it presupposes language.⁵ In other words, the necessary condition of the *status function* of art is conferred by *representing it as conferred*.

If a *status function* is nothing but a representation, and bracketing is a kind of representation, we may wonder what the difference is between the *content* when it consists in a representation, and the bracketing that is also a representation. For example, the content of some works of art may have a pictorial representation, like Picasso's *Guernica* representing the massacre, or verbal, like the words of Anna Karenina in Tolstoy's novel. What is the relation between representation at the level of content and representation at the level of bracketing? The answer is that the *bracketing* is a second level representation applied on the *content*. Consequently, there seems to be a twofold representational level. The first level, the content, is just the simple representation that any symbolic system possesses. The second level, representing itself as a work of art, means representing the *status function*: X counts as Y in context C where Y is "being an art of work". Therefore we can obtain different layers of function that an artifact can have bracketed in order to exhibit the *status function* proper for a work of art.

The reason why all these layers of function occur lies on the *iteration* of the function that Searle notices: "We can impose *status functions* on entities that have already had *status functions* imposed on them. In such cases the X term at a higher level can be a Y term from an earlier level."⁶ The assignment of function does not work at the same level, but rather on an iterated scale. It is not the case that when I am painting a picture I am canceling my own action of painting, which would be contradictory. I am assigning a function to the materials that I am using by way of bracketing their function as mere paint oils. For that reason, the bracketing of the function is not self-annihilating – it is not the case that assigning an artistic function consists in canceling it –. This has at least three important corollaries.

⁵ For the role of language in the constitution of social objects, see Chapter 3 of J.R. Searle (1995).

⁶ Ibid.

First, distinguishing between *content* and *bracketing* helps us to understand that art does not consist in merely representation even if it may have a representational level. If representation were sufficient for the *status function* of art, we would not have a way to distinguish art from any kind of representational system including language, sign posts, and signals. For that reason, what the painting represents does not constitute the painting as a work of art. In the case of photography, for example, the mere representational nature of certain pictures was not considered per se a work of art, until photography itself became an art form (and some photographs today are not considered art nor are they intended to be).

Second, the *content* is maintained when the object receives its *status function* as art. Bracketing does not empty the object of content. It does not render the work of art useless, nor does it annihilate its communicative contents or preclude a variety of purposes. Specifically, bracketing the function does not confine artistic production to the avant-garde ideal of art for art's sake. In our definition of art, we cannot leave out those works of art that have been made for the purpose of conveying social ideas or even achieving political change. In this sense, we could understand bracketing more in the Hegelian dialectic sense of *Aufhebung* (“sublation”), which signifies “to cancel” and “to keep” simultaneously in an “out/up-lifting” action. If something counts as “A,” then bracketing its function and saying “¬ A” (that is, negating “A”) still maintains the content of “A.”⁷ Otherwise from a simple, non-dialectic negation of A, we would simply obtain nothing. This point is based on the evident fact that there are artistic objects that serve a multitude of purposes while retaining their artistic status. The condition of possibility for bracketing the function of an object without annihilating its content (be it symbolic, practical, or natural) is based on the very structure of the assignment of function that allows for layers of function based on *iteration* as already mentioned.⁸ Third, from this iteration of the *status function* we can understand not only how works of art are created but also how a whole world of art comes into existence. Searle has pointed to the interdependence of iterated structures operating through time and forming interlocking systems: “I have *money* in my *bank account* that I *spend* by *writing a check to pay my state* and federal taxes as a citizen of the United States as well as a long-term *resident* and an *employee* of the *state of California*. All the italicized expressions in the previous sentence express institutional concepts, and the facts reported all presuppose systems of constitutive rules operating through time.”⁹ In the same fashion we could say that: “I place this *work of art* in a *museum* because it was produced by an *artist* who was recognized as such by the *art world*, and it will be safely kept on an *art stand* so that it can be *appreciated* by *audiences*, and foster *cultural bonds* and communication through the ongoing *interpretation* by *art critics* and in *magazines, academic circles, and the mass media.*”

⁷ *Aufheben* is also commonly used in German as “to pick up”. ‘Hegel may be said to visualize how something is picked up in order that it may no longer be *there* just the way it was, although, it is not cancelled altogether but lifted up to be kept on a different level’ in Walter Kaufmann (1966, 144).

⁸ For the iteration of *status functions*, see Chapter 3 of J.R. Searle (1995).

⁹ *Ibid.* It is in this context that we can understand why G. Dickie had to embrace the circularity nested in the definition of art as he presented in the *Art Circle*. For an explanation of the inevitability of this circularity see Asa Kasher (1990).

Positive and Negative Aspects of Necessary Conditions Thus far, I have marked *bracketing* of the *content* as the necessary condition for art. But the necessary condition has a negative aspect that comes with the bracketing, and a positive aspect comes with the content. In a given work of art, the necessary negative condition of the bracketing is what every work of art shares with other works of art. But that bracketing is realized differently in each work of art depending of its content. In other words, the *content* may vary for each work of art. The content provides a work of art's unique contribution (as long as it remains in conjunction with the bracketing). The positive necessary conditions can be understood in a cluster concept fashion: the work of art does not need to have them all; but they are disjunctively necessary in conjunction with the bracketing of function.¹⁰

Contemporary art has systematically challenged the *positive content conditions* to get down to the *negative* one of *bracketing*. John Cage's "4'33"" is an example that illustrates this point quite well. The time "4'33"" works in that composition as a frame, as a status indicator for a work of art, and whatever happens during that time will give us a different content. In a way, Cage is emptying out any positive content conditions to make more salient the negative one as a sole source for creating *content*: a frame of silence can harbor the improvisation of any noise that may happen during that time. Any *content* will make the composition excel. On the other hand, traditional theories of art, such as aesthetic ones, seem to focus on the realization of positive content conditions. But the articulation of the negative and positive condition is key: the traditional features of the work of art must be simultaneously accompanied by the bracketing of content for something to be a work of art. In other words, the positive content conditions presuppose the negative bracketing condition.

The bracketing extracts artistic objects from the quotidian world, while the positive content condition of the *status function* renders art suitable to serve other goals like entertainment, healing, religious worship, political or social claims, moral education, understanding of the self, or any other goal that functional definitions have put forward. The positive content conditions have the status of "by means of" conditions in relation to the bracketing the function.

In summary, it is possible to nest positive content conditions in a work of art only if the negative necessary condition – the bracketing of content – is successful. These secondary *status functions* count as positive content conditions, provided they are embedded with the negative necessary condition of the cancellation of function. This gives us the following structure:

Positive	E.g. : Expressing Emotion, or Communicate
Negative	Bracketing the Function of being just an Object

One consequence of this proposal is that we obtain a rationale for both the classification and evaluation of works of art. In relation to evaluation, even if it is possible to nest content conditions in the cancellation of function, not every *content* will be equally successful. Here we can apply many of the functionalist intuitions. Bracketing is descriptive of what counts as a work of art and possesses the appropriate status indicators; more so, it is a negative necessary condition for what counts as a work of art. But it is not evaluative, and is not a sufficient condition for something being a good work of art. While the intrinsic properties are not fully constitutive of what counts as art

¹⁰ I follow here Berys Gaut's proposal (2000) for the cluster definition of art.

in the art world, they are evaluative: they are relevant to what counts as good or bad art. This approach is a midpoint between the functional and the institutional understanding of intrinsic properties. These intrinsic properties are not constitutive, as functionalists say, but intrinsic properties do have a voice in stating conditions for art. In the case of the aesthetic experience, however, intrinsic properties are partly constitutive for the experience, since they usually have a causal relation to the subject's perception and are mediated by the perceptive sensibility of the agent.

With this apparatus more questions arise: Some art fields seem problematic (such as musical compositions, theatrical plays, and films) since they cannot be properly called "objects." What are the limits of the object that is canceled in the case of occurrences and performance art? What has been canceled in those cases? We could further ask if there other cases where the conferral of a function consists in bracketing. In a trivial way, we could say that any social object is constituted by bracketing whatever function or content it previously had in order to become something else. If so, what is the difference as regards the work of art? In order to better deal with these questions, we need to investigate the *teleology* for the creation of art. For most social objects, we confer a *status function*, forget about what the content, X, was about (the piece of paper in the case of the dollar bill), and we just move on to use it in its new ontology. In the case of art, the *bracketing*, suspending the previous ontology, is somehow retained and highlighted. Bracketing in the case of art is more than conferring a new status by overriding the previous one. The movement of the Hegelian dialectic of negating but maintaining something mentioned earlier should be recalled here. Moreover, that retention, in the case of artistic objects, brings attention upon themselves, creating an *end in itself* character, which, as I mentioned at the beginning, and will elaborate on in the next section, is a projection of personhood into objects. Bracketing, in the case of art, is all that is relevant as a way of bringing attention upon the object being an object, and simultaneously acquiring a personhood status. It is precisely that contrast, that this X is an object (or activity), and that nonetheless is receiving a persona status (Y) by way of bracketing, that we find striking in an artistic object (regardless of its merits in aesthetic quality).

Summarizing, the conferral of *status function* as bracketing is the conceptual tool that establishes conditions for something to count as art. However, it is the *teleology* of the *status function*, the purpose of applying this *bracketing*, that can grant sufficient conditions for classification as a work of art, and that *status function* consists in granting *the status persona* to an object.

The Teleology of the Status Function All *status functions* are understood within certain teleology. That means that all functions, even *status functions*, are imposed relative to certain purposes. To make this point more explicit, we could modify Searle's notation for *status functions* and rewrite:

X counts as Y in context C for the purposes of Z

This formulation is, to a certain extent, unnecessary and redundant because any function (Y) possesses an already built in teleology. The only reason why we need to make it explicit in the case of works of art is the following. In the case of money, we usually do not question what money is. But a theory of art questions what Y (art in this

case) is in the first place, and for that reason the teleology of the function needs to be fully explicit. For this reason, we have to address the purpose of the bracketing of content.

It is not enough to indicate that the *status function* of art brackets an object or an activity. What is it that we do by bracketing objects and assigning disjunctively positive content conditions? If we say that we bracket any current *status function* the object possesses with the purpose of producing an “artistic object,” we are back to square one, since we are not saying what “artistic” means. And if we simply leave the disjunctively content conditions as to what constitutes the teleology of the *status function* (e.g. what we bracket the object for), then we do not obtain a unitary understanding of art. We could say that in one case we bracket the content to represent something, in another to express an emotion, in another to file a social complaint. But if that is the case, what is the difference between a work of art and a flag, or crying, or a protest? We also need to know if art is the only case in which bracketing occurs. Why do we bracket the content? What is the teleology of the work of art?

It is only by answering this question (what is the point of bracketing the function) that we can distinguish art from other objects that also get their content bracketed. In a trivial way, any socially constructed object shows a bracketing of function in order to be constituted as something else. As Searle presents, a dollar bill “ceases” to be just a green colored paper in order to represent a monetary value that goes beyond its physical properties. However, the kind of bracketing that we are considering is one that brings attention upon the objects themselves as “just objects” so to speak. When a certain piece of paper receives the *status function* of money, it is not meant to draw attention upon itself as money, but to simply be used as such. Obviously there is a level at which the status indicators (the kind of paper, the printing) are revealing and representing that it is money, but such representation is subordinated to what the money is for, its use.

It is not easy to find objects that exhibit a bracketing of content similar to the one that works of art possess, where bracketing produces a sort of momentary suspension of purposiveness. I think that two close cases are garbage and infant toys. In the case of garbage, bracketing is more like complete cancellation, to the point that bracketing leads to discarding the object. Obviously, that is not the case for the work of art which, normally, receives an appraisal higher than regular objects (albeit, there have been cases of exhibitions where the audience was supposed to destroy the works of art). The *status function* that garbage receives then is precisely opposite to the one that the work of art acquires.

The other example is infant toys. When we show a newborn a monkey rattle, what matters is not what it is – it could be any object –, but *that it is* an object. At this developmental stage, the newborn may not clearly distinguish one object from another. The bracketing here is not one of canceling the object as an object, as in the case of garbage, but rather of what the object represents, in order to be shown to the child as just an object, creating some sort of self-referentiality. Here we do not have content and bracketing as in art; here the content is [0]. However, that is not exactly what we do with works of art. The

work of art does not appeal to us as a mere object, although many times we may feel clueless in an exhibition as to what is there in front of us, almost like the infant facing the monkey rattle. We feel that we do not know anything about the object we are facing other than that it is art. But that is precisely the difference with pure objects. Trying to figure out the *content* conditions of the work of art and their representational aspects is relevant. This is the case even if those conditions and aspects are randomized, such as in Cage's composition, or even if we do not understand them at the moment.

More importantly, what appears in front of us in the case of the work of art is not a pure object, and this is what takes us to a third group of entities that exhibit bracketing of function: people. Of course, people perform multiple roles: they are parents, plumbers, and doctors. People may serve a purpose for their own survival and that of the species, but they are also what Kant called an "end in itself." According to Kant: "The rational being, is by its nature an end and thus as an end in itself, must serve in every maxim as the condition restricting all merely relative and arbitrary ends."¹¹ As an end in itself, the rational being is the basis of all maxims of action and can assume a multitude of roles, but he "must be treated never as a mere means but as the supreme limiting condition in the use of all means, i.e., as an end at the same time."¹² My proposal is that the bracketing that we obtain through the application of a *status function* in the case of works of art is a projection into objects and activities of this *end in themselves* character that we find in people. Being an *end in itself* could be considered a property, although certainly not the defining one, that accompanies personhood. Kant cleverly noticed this feature and made it the pivotal center of his ethics. As anecdotal evidence,¹³ there is a resemblance in the ways in which Kant talks about both, rational beings and works of art. Kant defines the work of fine art (*schöne Kunst*) as "a mode of representation which is purposive of itself (*für sich selbst zweckmassig*), and which, although devoid of a purpose, has the effect of advancing the culture of the mental powers in the interests of social communication."¹⁴ For Kant the work of art "must always have an evident intrinsic worth (*eine Würde an sich*)" that demands seriousness in its presentation.¹⁵ Intrinsic worth, also understood as dignity, confers a value that resides "not in the effects which result from them, not in the advantage or profit they produce, but in the attitudes of mind – that is, in the maxims of the will– which are ready in this way to manifest

¹¹ Kant 1984.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ 'Kant never raises this possibility explicitly. But there is evidence that he may well have been attracted to an analogy between works of art and persons which would, if sufficiently articulated, provide a way of describing the former as participating in the moral status of the latter.' In C. Haskins (1989, 50). Whether it is an accurate historical interpretation of Kant's theory of art is not the problem I am addressing here. However, this is an intuition that can help us understand the *status function* that works of art acquire. Haskins' reading of Kant asserts that works of art could be viewed as though "they were persons exhibiting the kind of moral autonomy Kant elsewhere (and without qualification) attributes to wills or persons and to ends in themselves" (ibid.).

¹⁴ I. Kant (2008) "Critique of Aesthetic Judgement" 44: 306. Notice that I am following Haskins translation of *für sich selbst zweckmassig* as "purposive for itself."

¹⁵ Ibid. 54:336.

themselves in action even if they are not favored by success.”¹⁶ Using our terminology, the bracketing of content in artistic objects presents objects as though they were ends in themselves, which Kant refers to as *objective ends*.¹⁷ Therefore, the work of art has an intrinsic value regardless of its quality (which in some cases may be context dependent). Haskins also notices that Kant sometimes speaks of works of art “as if they adopted a stance toward us which is like the stance of respect we adopt toward one another when relating to one another as persons.”¹⁸ He even goes as far as to say that “Kant seems to hint that works of art treat us in a way that metaphorically resembles how persons ought to treat one another: as ends in themselves, or, as he puts it in the *Groundwork*, as ‘objective ends’.”¹⁹ In “respecting” us as persons possessed of intrinsic worth, the work of art shows itself to be such a being as well.

This discussion on the Kantian understanding of art may help us to elucidate the *status function* of art. For Kant, an *end in itself* is never a means for something else. That is the status people have, according to Kant, and, as Haskins points out, the status projected on a work of art. I am borrowing this point from Haskins’s interpretation of Kant because the kind of social explanation that Searle proposes cannot be fully applied to the case of art without determining the specificity of the *status function*. Searle himself has noticed a kind of *status function* that works for its own sake, and that is honor. Examples of honor are victory and defeat in games, and institutional forms of public respect and disgrace. What is common to these cases is that “their statuses are valued for their own sake, rather than just for their further consequences.”²⁰ Searle does not apply this status to art, however, and we may question whether honor is a primitive or a derivative, which precisely stems from the fact that people are “ends in themselves”. Because the action of a person is valued, honor supervenes. Also, honor does not possess the characteristics of being an *end in itself* that, if used as a means, would violate the categorical imperative. We could think of examples in which honor could be turned into something other than an end in itself without violating any categorical imperative.²¹

Kant’s intuition gives us the *teleology* of the *status function*. Bracketing an object (or activity) amounts to considering the object an *end in itself*. Being an *end in itself* epistemically clues us into that persona status even if being an *end in itself* solely is not defining of personhood. If that is the case, the assignment of function of the work of art would be the bracketing of an object for the purposes of personification (*prosopopeia*), of acquiring the personhood status.

People are not defined in terms of functions, although they can take on roles that have the “ends in themselves” as a limiting condition. It is the maxim *end in itself* that should regulate any other assignment of roles. But objects (and activities) are not ends

¹⁶ I. Kant (1964) *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 435.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ C. Haskins (1989, 50).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* See *Groundwork*, Ak. 428.

²⁰ J.R. Searle (1995).

²¹ We can question if other entities, like pets, exhibit an *end in itself* status, and that we do not regard as works of art. However, the proposal is not that everything that exhibits an “end in itself character” is a work of art, but that when we grant the artistic status we project into objects and activities (not living things or even people) the status *persona*.

in themselves, and thus require the bracketing of their status as objects for the purpose of granting a *persona* like status. The iteration of the structure “X counts as Y in C” means that we can impose *status functions* on entities that have already had *status functions* imposed on them. Now we can say that in the case of art, this iteration of assignment of function means that we can impose a *persona* like status on an entity that previously possessed an object status. Thus, Duchamp’s *Fountain* counts as art because it counts as a personified object. Obviously this does not mean that the *Fountain* has grown two cute eyes, tiny arms, and skinny legs. What is transferred is the category of the *status function* of *end in itself*. In some cases, canceling the function that the object previously had (if it had any at all) is the status indicator that performs and signifies that the object is not to be considered a mundane object anymore, but rather one that has acquired the dignity of a pseudo-person. In other cases, the normal function of the object is maintained, and what is canceled is its aspect of merely being an object: the two Ikea clocks are now to be respected in a different way even though they still properly keep time. This makes clear that the function that is bracketed is the function of just being an object. The way we achieve this may vary, but it is acquired through some status indicator that brackets part or the entire object. Personification does not come from just one negative necessary condition; there are many ways it can be attained through different positive content conditions.

Using the Kant/Haskins understanding of art helps us to see that the bracketing of function has an ontological side: it is a projection onto objects of an *end in itself* value. In that sense, the paradox, or perhaps drama, of the work of art is that it is an object – a social object with a conferred function – but it does not want to function as an object. We look at the work of art as if it always had something else to tell us. The work of art does not want to be a bottle opener, used and put away, nor even an interesting car engine that can be examined, or a mind twister that can entertain us for a while. The work of art seems to demand leaving aside the mechanistic laws of physics to follow the unpredictable routes of freedom and personality.²² This insight about the work of art mimicking people suits our way of talking about art. We call an artist a creator. We understand the work of art as a creation, a word with close resonances to the word creature. We conceive of the artistic creation as a gestational state and the work of art in progress as a creature in an embryonic phase. In contrast, we never consider people to be works of art unless speaking metaphorically or because we are talking of the actual representation of a person, which is nothing but an object.

To further illustrate that the *status function* of art is that of a pseudo person, let us go back to the positive and negative necessary condition for the work of art. The conjunction of negative and positive conditions as a whole contributes to creating a unique individual. The negative conditions (the bracketing), in the case of artistic objects, present the work of art as an end in itself, as a pseudo person. In that sense, works of art, like people, by their *status functions* that bracket any other function, have a dignity regardless of their properties. Hitler and Gandhi are both humans, regardless of their actions and qualities. Such is the case with many works of art, and may be the reason why we do not tidy up Emin’s *My Bed*, even if some people do not consider it artwork. Destroying or altering a work of art, even if it is considered unworthy,

²² This talk about art’s “desires” and “wants” does not entail that the work of art possesses any intrinsic intentionality, but only that people’s intention underlying the creation of the work of art attributes an ontological status that surpasses its normal or associated function.

amounts to violating its certain dignity. From the evaluative point of view, people can present varied positive content conditions in a cluster like fashion. Works of art, like people, can excel in many different ways.

To summarize this paper's proposal, the distinction between *bracketing* and *content* may provide necessary conditions for the work of art. However, it is the teleology of the function (what do we do this for?), that gives us the kind of status that works of art have. It is a status that historically was invented by us at a precise historical era. It is not a coincidence that the birth of the idea of Fine Arts happened around the time when philosophy became deeply concerned with how to reconcile the deterministic world of nature with the unpredictable autonomy of the subject. The personification of the work of art is the triumph of this human concern over nature's mechanicism, since the artist and the audience are able to grant to an object whose raw materials obey the laws of physics what Modern Philosophy called the free life of the spirit. When we try to understand what the ontology of art is, we may have to bear in mind this projection of personhood in things that do not bear this trait in reality. The beginning of art lies in a metaphorical projection. The status of pseudo-person is the *status function* imposed in artistic objects and activities, and in order to achieve this status, bracketing whatever ontological status the object had before while upholding its characteristic content and elevating it to an *end in itself* is a necessary condition. Granting the *persona* status is a sufficient condition for art, it is what we more or less unconsciously do when we proclaim that something is artistic, but to achieve so the bracketing of content must be embedded in it.

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