

## Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism and The Production of Negative and Queer Objects

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*Abstract:* Artifacts are mind-dependent objects; they exist by virtue of the intentional activity of their makers, at least according to what philosophers usually defend. Some philosophers consider artifacts to be causally and essentially dependent on the intentions of their original makers—a position that we will call *Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism*. Although this position is very attractive, it suffers from various problems. This paper focuses on a discussion of two of those problems: the possibility of creating negative, and queer objects. The first criticism was originally raised by Evnine (2016) against Thomasson's view, but our aim is to defend this criticism for all *Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism* views, including Evnine's. The second problem is a new issue regarding how easy it would be to create queer kinds of artifacts if we accept *Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism*.

*Keywords:* Artifacts, intention-dependent objects; negative actions; negative objects; negative properties; queer objects.

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## 1. Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism

Ontological questions regarding the nature of artifacts are frequently pondered by contemporary metaphysicians. It is customary to define artifacts as human-made objects, intentionally crafted to fulfil certain purposes or functions (Hilpinen, 1992).<sup>1</sup>

In Section 1, we will present the most extensive view concerning artifacts, which we will call *Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism*, being focused on the Thomasson (2007), Baker (2007), and Evnine (2016) works, and we will introduce a criticism raised by Evnine (2016) regarding some variations of this view. Next, in Section 2, we will explore the problem when extended to Evnine's own view and also to Baker's views varieties of *Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism*. Finally, in Section 3, we will introduce a new criticism of *Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism* in a similar vein to that previously discussed.

We will discuss an important view regarding the essence of artifacts, which argues that the intention of the original makers is an indispensable component of the artifact's nature;<sup>2</sup> we will refer to this as *Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism* (AIE). Various authors subscribe to AIE's view by considering the agent's intention as essential to artifacts. Despite internal differences among AIE views, all of them consider that the intentions play an indispensable role in the nature of the artifacts. All of them consider that without intentional production there are no artifacts because they are intention-dependent objects.

To explain these AIE views we will focus on two important phenomena: the prototype production (which is the first token of a new kind), and the ready-mades (which is the production of a new object without any physical modification of their previous matter). We will focus on the work done by Baker (2000, 2004, 2007), Thomasson (2003a, 2003b 2007, 2009, 2014), and

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<sup>1</sup> Some authors do not accept a clear-cut between natural objects, as organisms, and artifacts. See for example Koslicki (2018, ch.8). For a criticism to substantiality of artificial kind, see Preston (2023).

<sup>2</sup> See Elder (2007) for a view in which artifacts are causally mind-dependent but they are not constitutive mind-dependent. See Preston (2013) for a used-based account of artifacts.

Evnine (2016, 2019, 2022), who are the most prominent Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism proponents.<sup>3</sup>

In order to introduce this type of view, consider the following from Thomasson:

The intention to make something of kind K thus must be based on a declarative intention associating that kind with a number of criteria that would constitute success at creating a K, and involving a number of K-relevant features that the inventor intends to impose on the object in order to succeed at producing a K. This fits in naturally with Hilpinen's emphasis [1992, 641] on the fact that genuine artifacts must have a number of intended properties, thus requiring makers to have a structured intention regarding a number of properties they intend to impose on the object (thus not just a bare intention to create "one of these"). Later makers may acquire the concept K through acquaintance with the initial prototype or with later copies, or they may independently arrive at it, but as long as their intention shares the same content as the original, and they intend to impose the same K-relevant features, they may be said to have the required intention to create a K. (2003b, 597).

The artifacts are considered as entities that are causally and constitutively dependent on the maker's intentions (Thomasson 2007, 53; Baker 2007, 11; Evnine 2016, 69). This is because artifacts are the sort of objects that would not exist without agents with propositional attitudes and the appropriate intentions to produce these objects, since nature does not produce those kinds of objects. Additionally, the essence of artifacts are the intentions of their makers, who stipulate the conditions of existence of the kinds of artifacts and decide which of those characteristics individuate the artificial kinds. Those characteristics could be functional, aesthetic, or structural... All artifacts are created by the imposition of an intention to a piece of

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<sup>3</sup> There are other important works that could be classified as Artifacts' Intention-Essentialists like Dipert (1993), Levinson (2007), Houkes and Vermaas (2010), Pearce (2016), Paek (2023), Juvshik (2021). However, we do not have space to discuss every proposal. We select Baker, Evnine, and Thomasson proposals to our discussion.

matter, on the contrary, a random production without an intended action is just a by-product (Thomasson 2007, 67; Evnine 2022, 6).

This is why proponents of AIE consider that “artifacts are the imposition of the makers mind onto the matter” (Evnine 2016, 70) because the artifacts are the product of the intended actions of their original makers, where the resulting product reflects the intentions of their makers (Baker 2007, 54). AIE views are different in their details, but all of them share the view that intentions are indispensable for the essence of artifacts. Additionally, there are two important phenomena of AIE views that they share, and which will be important to the criticisms of AIE. The AIE proposals will be challenged by the combination of these two important phenomena.

The first concerns the possibility of ready-mades<sup>4</sup>. This refers to the production of a new artifact without the necessity of modifying the pre-existing material from which it is made. The most iconic example of a ready-made object is the case of a coffee table made from driftwood. Imagine that you find a piece of driftwood in the forest that has an appropriate structure to be used as a coffee table. You proceed to take the piece of driftwood home with you in order to produce a coffee table with the piece of driftwood but without modifying it, simply using the object as a coffee table. For AIE views this is a genuine case of an artifact’s production, in which an agent had the appropriate intentions to create a coffee table, then a new artifact comes into existence (i.e., coffee table), which is numerically different from that from which it is made (i.e., piece of driftwood)<sup>5</sup> (Thomasson 2007; Baker 2007 43–44; Evnine 2022, 3).

The production of ready-made objects is linked to another important phenomenon: the prototype production. What happens when there are no precedent tokens of artifacts of a kind? How do we reproduce the established

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<sup>4</sup> Sometimes, it is also called a “found-object,” but that refers to the same sort of object. For criticisms to ready-made objects, see Zimmerman (2002) or Effingham (2010).

<sup>5</sup> There are other iconic examples of ready-made, such as *The Fountain* of Duchamp, where a numerically new artifact comes into existence from a urinal without any physical modification of the previous artifact (Evnine 2013; 2016, 133–39). However, among AIE views, not all of them accept artworks as artifacts because they do not have any proper function associated (Baker 2007).

conditions of existence of the original makers? According to Thomasson, to produce an artifact is to have the largely successful intention of producing an artifact of the relevant kind *K*. Thus, for an agent to produce an artifact, the agent must know what the *K*-relevant features of the kind *K* are that she intends to produce, and then have the intention of producing them (2003b, 592–596). As we have said, these *K*-relevant features may be very different. If there are no previous tokens of a new kind, AIE views have some differences between them. For Thomasson (2007, 60–61), in order to produce a new kind of artifact, we need to fulfil the associated conditions of existence and a successful application of the concept towards a piece of matter. However, according to Baker (2007, 56) and Evnine (2016, 122–124), there is another important requirement: the resulting product of the intentional activity must be capable of performing the associated function of the new kind of artifact. Then, according to AIE, in order to create the first token of a new artifact, all we need is the intentional application of a concept about the conditions of existence (Thomasson 2007), and the resulting product is capable of performing the associated function to the new kind (Baker 2007; Evnine 2016). We also have to take into consideration that there are no restrictions to producing a prototype with a ready-made object.

The main point of AIE's proposals is that, regardless of the fact that an artifact *A* could perform a very different range of functions due to its physical characteristics, the artifact *A* essentially belongs to the kind *K* because it was intentionally produced by the subject *S* to be a *K*. For instance, an ice axe is essentially an ice axe because the maker intended to produce an object of the kind *ice axe*, independently of the fact that the same ice axe may also perform other functions not primarily associated with the kind *ice axe*. For instance, when, on 21 August 1940, Ramon Mercader (a Catalan communist spy) used an ice axe to kill Trotsky, the ice axe was performing the function of a weapon but could also perform others, like *bottle-opener*, etc. In this case, Ramon Mercader did not create a weapon, he simply used an existing object, an ice axe, as another weapon because of the physical characteristics of the ice axe. What makes an artifact primarily belong to a certain artificial kind is having been an intended product of this kind.

### 1.1. *The Negative-Production Problem*

Our aim is to discuss a particular criticism in the debate. The criticism was raised by Evnine (2016) to Thomasson's proposal. The criticism is as follows:

Chairs [in Thomasson's view] exist when people work with certain intentions on appropriate matter not, as I have it, because those people are exercising some creative power to bring chairs into existence thereby, but simply because the conditions contained in the concept obtain. If we define a concept *not-thair* in such a way that it applies just when a person ignores some potential chair-matter and does nothing to it, then we can say that not-thairs exist (and have always existed) in the same way, under conditions that clearly are not genuinely creative in the first-order sense. (2016, 117)

Evnine considers Thomasson's view of artifacts to be overly ontologically permissive. Considering that Thomasson defends an ontological minimalism view of objects, where all that is needed for an object to exist is to apply adequately the concept to a piece of matter (or something else), Evnine criticises Thomasson for portraying the creation of a new object not as the product of a creative act, but merely as a satisfactory application of the concept (2016, 117). Thus, if all that is required to produce objects is to apply the concepts, and if the concept is correctly applied, not-thairs would exist in the world in the same sense that chairs exist. However, although Evnine argues that objects like not-thairs do not exist because they lack a creative act (2016, 117), nevertheless, in Evnine's proposal, artifacts also depend causally and constitutively on the makers' intentions. He contends that the criticism does not apply to him because the production of these things as not-thairs is not a creative action (2016, 117). Evnine mentions the distinction between creative and non-creative processes only to differentiate his proposal from Thomasson's, but he does not explain it at all. In any case, Evnine does not seem satisfied with the existence of artifacts such as not-thairs.

However, Evnine's approach to solving the problem is far from clear. Koslicki (2018, 223) points out that Evnine does not provide good reasons

to dismiss the criticism. Firstly, Koslicki notices that Evnine leaves open the essence of mental states like intentions, which is essential for distinguishing between creative and non-creative intentions. Secondly, he cannot simply appeal to the non-existence of not-thairs to explain how an agent cannot succeed in having a creative intention with not-thairs. Thirdly, he also cannot appeal to the faultiness of the concept of not-thair because he needs to explain what makes a concept faulty. These considerations lead Koslicki to conclude that Evnine cannot explain why the not-thair criticism is not a problem for his proposal regarding the nature of artifacts (2018, 223). Koslicki does not develop this criticism, and our aim will be to discuss in a deeper way this sort of criticism of Evnine's view.

In the next section, we will show that the criticism that Evnine makes of Thomasson, is a problem for his own proposal and other proposals similar to him<sup>6</sup> (e.g., Baker's view). To do this, we will first introduce some ways in which Evnine could consider that the not-thair is a non-creative case, and then we will show why these reasons are not good reasons to block the criticism. Cases like not-thair will be an important problem for these Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism proposals.<sup>7,8</sup>

## 2. Bringing Negative Objects into Existence?

The examples above pose a problem for Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism by introducing controversial objects, such as not-thair, which Evnine discusses. If someone aims to defend an AIE view, they must explain how to

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<sup>6</sup> Evnine does not take in consideration a possible reply that Thomasson is able to give based in her late proposal of artifacts in (2014) where she introduces external restriction to the artifacts' creation based on the public norms of artifact kinds. However, our aim is to show that Evnine and Baker's views have that problem, independently of the Thomasson responses.

<sup>7</sup> See Kornblith (2007), Koslicki (2018, 2023), Eaton (2020) or Solís (2024) for other criticisms to Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism views.

<sup>8</sup> There are other proposals that considers the intentions make an important role on the essence of the artifacts; we cannot discuss all these versions, we will focus just on Thomasson (2003), Baker (2007), and Evnine (2016) views of the Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism.

address these cases, and this is what Evnine attempts to justify. Previously, we mentioned how Koslicki (2018, p. 223) considers that Evnine cannot resolve the not-thair cases. However, we contend that Koslicki's criticism of Evnine's response is not completely accurate. This is because she does not attempt to elucidate why Evnine is saying that there is no creative making in the not-thair case. Our current task will be to present two different possible responses that Evnine could make, based on what his actual proposal says about how new artifacts come into existence. Nevertheless, we will explain why these two possible responses from Evnine are not good enough. We sympathise with Koslicki's goal in criticising Evnine, but we differ in the means.

Let us to introduce two different ways in which Evnine could justify that the not-thair cases do not involve creative intentions:

- (a) **No-Action Strategy:** This case involves not doing something (specifically, ignoring the creation of a chair); it is an absence of an action. To create something, you need to work on the matter, either by making physical changes, or by using ready-mades.
- (b) **No-Kind Strategy:** This case involves only a concept, not a new kind of object. To create a new kind of artifact it is necessary that the maker has in mind the concept of the new kind  $K'$ , imposing it onto some matter, and that the product is something that is able to perform the associated function that the maker establishes in the concept of  $K'$ .

(a) and (b) are two different ways in which Evnine could address the criticism based on his proposal. The first involves his consideration that the creative act—the individual essence of the artifact (2016, p. 109)—comprises two different components: the intention, and the labor. The latter is the work done by the maker on the matter, guided by the intention, to bring the artifact into existence. The labor is an action performed by the maker on the matter (2016, p. 70), and the not-thair case could be interpreted as an absence of labor. (b) is based on his assumptions about prototype production, which involves an agent formulating a new kind of object with certain existence and persistence conditions and an associated function. The first new exemplar of the kind must be able to perform its



associated function (2016, pp. 124-5). Thus, it is not sufficient to have a concept about something. What is needed is something more robust: a new artificial kind.

In order to ease the discussion, we will refer to objects like not-thair as negative objects, and we will define it as:

**Negative Object (NO):** an object which its essence consists in a negative property, such as *not being suitable to sit*, *not being suitable to write*, *not being red*, etc.<sup>9</sup>

In subsequence sections, we will first show why the possibility of negative objects is a problem for Evnine's view, and second, why it is a problem for other views that defend the intentions that figure in the essence of artifacts, as Baker's (2007) view. The main point of the criticism is to show that if we accept AIE views on the nature of artifacts and the phenomena of ready-mades and prototype production, we will arrive at non-desirable creations such as negative and queer artifacts.

### 2.1. Refusing No-Action Strategy: The Case of Negative Actions

We have said that Evnine, and other AIE proponents, could use different ways to block the criticisms of negative objects like not-thair. Let us focus first on the No-Action Strategy. It states that just ignoring some potential chair-matter to be a chair is not an action; there is no labor involved where the maker *works* on the matter. As there is an absence of action, there is no creation. In Evnine's proposal, artifacts like chairs are the product of the imposition of a maker's mind onto the matter (2016, p. 89). The

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<sup>9</sup> A negative object is capable of having positive properties, such as *being red*, *being spherical*, etc. However, its essence is a negative property. Consider that essence is a real definition (in Finean's (1994) sense because not every necessary negative property is essential to an object, e.g. numbers are colourless but this does not mean that numbers are negative objects, because this property is not the essence of the numbers). The real essence of a negative object would be an entity which consist in the negative property such as *not being able to sit* (plus other contingent positive properties). Others define negative objects as consisting of solely negative properties (see Hommen, 2018, 401). It is not our case.

essence of artifacts, such as a chair, is the original creative act that the maker imposes on the matter. This act of creation is divided into two components:<sup>10</sup> the intention of the maker, and the labor through which the maker imposed his intention. The No-Action Strategy suggests that in the not-thair scenario, there is no labor performed by the agent, because the agent is just “*ignoring* some potential chair-matter, and *he does nothing* with it” (2016, 117; my emphasis). Evnine could argue in this scenario, that there is no action involved because there is no labor of imposing an intention into the matter; the agent is simply ignoring a piece of matter and doing nothing with it. We should now consider whether this strategy is a suitable way to argue that the scenario does not involve a creative intention, as Evnine intends to, or if there are good reasons to assert that ignoring can count as a creative action.

Let me introduce a scenario involving different sort of actions that resemble the case of not-thair introduced by Evnine. It is the case of negative actions: On December 1st, 1955, Rosa Louise McCauley (Rosa Parks) returned from work, boarded the usual bus, and chose a seat in the designated area for black people. During the journey, several white people entered the bus, and the bus driver, wanting to ensure the comfort of white passengers, instructed black individuals, including Rosa Parks, to vacate their seats. However, Rosa Parks refused to comply. She intentionally decided not to stand up and remained seated. Subsequently, the bus driver called the police, and the officers arrested Rosa Parks because she refused to stand up.

In the Rosa Parks scenario, how many actions did she take on the bus? She made physical movements such as getting on the bus and sitting on a bus seat. However, what happened when she refused to stand up from her bus seat? Can we say that she performed an action of *not doing something*? Or can we say that she was not engaging in an action; that her refusal was just a mere occurrence?

Some authors consider that cases such as that of Rosa Parks reveal genuine actions that have not received much attention: negative actions, which are “exercises of agency that seem to consist primarily in an agent

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<sup>10</sup> He notices that this distinction may just be a conceptual or ontological one, but he does not pretend to discuss it (2016, 70).

not doing a certain thing” (Payton, 2021, 2). Those who defend the existence of negative actions such as omissions or refusals, consider these actions to exist alongside positive actions. We will call them Negative Actions Realists (NAR). They aim to defend the existence of negative actions because they are causally efficacious (Bernstein, 2015, 212–215; Payton, 2018, pp. 95–100; Palmer, 2020, 744). For example, Rosa Parks’ refusal to stand up caused her arrest and trial (if she had not been physically able to stand up, she would not have been arrested and judged). NAR also seeks to rationalise the agent’s behaviour when performing the omission (Payton, 2018, 89). For instance, what explains Rosa Parks’ refusal to stand up when the bus driver notified her is that she intends *not to stand up*. NAR argues that negative actions have a structure very similar to uncontroversial entities, such as positive actions (Payton, 2018; 2021) or material objects (Palmer, 2020). Just as a lump of clay constitutes a statue, Palmer argues that a positive action constitutes the negative action (2020, 741–743).

For Negative Actions Realists, negative actions are considered a subset of actions and have the same level of reality as positive actions. Both positive and negative actions exist in the world and are determined by the intentions—whether positive or negative—that agents have. By regarding negative actions as real phenomena in the world, we can more accurately formulate our criticism of Artifacts’ Intention-Essentialism.

Let us consider that negative actions are real actions, following the reasoning of Negative Actions Realists. How does this affect Evnine’s resistance to the not-thair case, considering the explanation in (a) about why the not-thair case does not count as being creative? (a) suggests that in the not-thair case, the agent is merely omitting something, and that she is not doing anything by omitting to do something. However, if we accept NAR, when the agent omits to do something, it is not an absence of an action; it is an action, just like a positive action. Evnine cannot then argue that in this scenario there is no labor because there is no action. In fact, there is an action, which is a negative action to *not doing something*. He cannot then argue that this scenario is not creative because there are not actions. The agent is doing something (i.e., not doing something else).

### 2.1.1. Considering Possible Replies

It is possible that Evnine may not be persuaded about the parallels between what the agent does in the scenario of not-thair, and the cases of negative actions such as Rosa Parks not standing up. There are different ways in which Evnine can refuse to accept that his view implies the existence of not-thair: (i) to ignore is not necessarily intentional, or (ii) negative actions are not creative.

In (i) he could say that ignoring is not necessarily an intentional activity because there are cases in which we say that a person is ignoring something, but merely because the person does not know about it. Allow me to share some comments about this.

First, the scenario introduced by Evnine has a particular goal: to serve as a criticism of Thomasson's view on the essence of artifacts. The main point is that for Thomasson, the essence of an artifact is the intentional application of a concept to a particular quantity of matter. Given this, Evnine considers that we can create concepts, the result of which is an application-concept that is a very rare entity such as a not-x. The main point is that if the Thomasson view is committed to an intentional application of the concept by the agent involved in the production of the artifact, then the main action of the stipulated concept cannot be unknown to the agent involved. Thus, 'ignoring' is an intentional activity in the not-thair scenario if it is to be a criticism of Thomasson's view. We must be aware that Thomasson is defending a view in which the essence of an artifact is the intentional activity of the original maker that applies concepts adequately, and Evnine is criticising Thomasson's view because he considers that she is overly liberal about the sufficiency of the intentional activity. By that reason, if the scenario that Evnine presents there are not intentional activity by the agent involved then it would not be a counterexample to Thomasson. If we read "ignoring" as unintentional activity, then Thomasson can refute the criticism by saying that it is not a case of artifact creation because unintended products of human activity are not artifacts.

Secondly, Evnine does not pay much attention to explaining what "ignoring" is in the scenario that he presents. Thus, we must understand "ignore" in the ordinary and standard sense, which is an intentional activity. For example, consider the definition of "to ignore" provided by the Oxford

English Dictionary: “To refuse to acknowledge (a person or thing); to disregard intentionally” (2023). Evnine does not propose a revisionary sense of “ignoring”. It seems, then, that we should assume that what Evnine is referring to as “ignoring” is its ordinary meaning.

Regarding (ii), he could accept the existence of negative actions, and that in the not-thair scenario there is a negative action involved (i.e., to ignore the creation of a chair), even though this action is not a creative one. He could argue that creative acts necessarily involve an intention and a labor, but it is not the case that whenever you have an intention and a labor, this entails a creative act; negative actions cannot serve as creative acts. Let me say why (ii) it is not a good defence either.

Firstly, it would be an odd strategy because when Evnine discuss the creative acts he does not define what it is to be creative and what it is to not be creative; he just says that “the action of making whereby mind is imposed on matter is both *necessary* and *sufficient* for determining the individual essence of an artifact” (2019, 203; my emphasis). The intention and the labor are sufficient to determine the creative act of the agent who tries to produce an artifact. Evnine cannot appeal by saying that negative actions are different to positive actions because only the latter are creative; he does not have independent reasons for this conclusion.

Secondly, he cannot just say that negative actions are not creative because there is an absence of a definition of creativity; he cannot justify which actions are creative or not if he does not explain what creativity is. When Evnine is referring to creative acts, he is considering it with a *generative power*, in which something new comes into existence. Nonetheless, saying that creative acts are generative, do not exclude why a negative action are not generative. However, let us to consider what happens if we take into consideration the different existent definitions of *creativity* in the specific literature.<sup>11</sup>

Let us start by considering the Valuable View, in which creativity is associated with the notion of *genius*, as when Kant defines the artistic genius as someone that produces things which are original and exemplary (2000, 182–197). To be creative is to be valuable in some sense (Klausen,

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<sup>11</sup> We will not enter into a full discussion of all the proposals of creativity; we will just present them. For more detail, see Paul and Stokes (2023).

2010). Evnine does not seem to be working with this view because, in his view, to say that an artifact is not valuable does not mean that the object is not a product of a creative act. For example, he distinguishes between valuable and ordinary artifacts. In the case of valuable objects, he argues that objects that result from artisanal production are valuable because they are the unique product of a singular act of creation. In the case of ordinary objects (non-valuable), he includes mass-production artifacts like thumbtacks, where many thumbtacks can result from a singular creative act (2019, 199). There are ontological differences between the two because artisanal artifacts have individual essences, whereas mass-production artifacts have only collective essence. However, both involve creative acts in which something numerically new emerged (2016, 100; 2019, 209).

Consider, then, the Surprise View (Boden, 2010) in which creativity occurs when the maker intends that his product is to be surprising: not that the product per se is surprising, but the maker in the process of production tends it to be surprising when he creates something new. Regarding Evnine's view that there is no importance about the surprise in any sense, cases of mass-production involve creative acts, and they do not seem focused on anything surprising; the worker in the factory is just making repetitive bodily movements to produce pre-established things (2016, 97–103).

Moving onto other views, consider the Originality View (Kronfeldner, 2009), in which creativity involves some original process of making. Evnine does not subscribe to this view because if we consider the creation of a table, it is not necessary that the agent produce the artifact through an original process of making in order for his action being creative. For the act of the creation of a table, it is sufficient that the agent has in mind the concept of table-kind, having the intention of produce it by working adequately on the matter. Originality is not necessary in the process of making.

If we consider the Spontaneity View (Kronfeldner, 2009), in which creativity involves unintentional activity, this sort of view cannot be what Evnine has in mind when he talks about creative acts because the most important element in his view is that the artifacts are the imposition of a maker's mind onto matter through an intentional activity.

Nonetheless, there is a more attractive view of creativity which has many supporters who fit with Evnine's view: the Agency View (Carruthers,

2006; Gaut, 2018; Kieran, 2014; Stokes, 2014). According to this view, the creative process must involve the intentional activity of the agent. For other views, it is possible that something counts as creative without the intentional intervention of an agent, and these authors consider the intentional activity of agents as indispensable. This view fits with Evnine's explanation about creative acts, which always involve an intention, and an action guided by this intention, to create this sort of object. This is because, for Evnine, artifacts are ideal objects because they are the imposition of a maker's mind onto matter (2016, 69)

Although Evnine could argue that he accepts the existence of negative actions in the not-thair scenario, but also that they are not creative, this is not a sound strategy because he has never explained what creativity is for him. If we consider the available literature regarding the debate of creativity, the only view that fits with his proposal is the Agency View, which considers that creativity is the intentional activity of the agent, and thus, negative actions, in virtue of being intentional, would count as genuinely creative. In this case, Evnine's reply is not a good one.

Thus, a No-Action Strategy does not seem to be the best way to argue that the not-thair case does not apply to Evnine's proposal. Let us consider whether a No-Kind Strategy is a better option.

## *2.2. Refusing No-Kind Strategy: Turning Not-Chair into Existence*

Let us to focus on the second option, the No-Kind Strategy. We can now argue that this strategy is also flawed and that Evnine's view entails the possibility of the production of negative objects. We defined a negative object as:

**Negative Object (NO):** an object in which its essence consists in a negative property, as *not being suitable for sitting, not being suitable for writing, not being red*, etc.

With this definition of what a negative object is, we will show why Evnine's view entails the existence of these objects, and why these objects are undesirable in the ontology.

First, remember what the No-Kind Strategy says: the not-thair case is just a case about the stipulation of a concept which applies in certain circumstances. The scenario described does not challenge Evnine's proposal because it does not involve the introduction of a new kind of artifact. The not-thair is not a novel prototype with an associated function. To count as a real creation, we need a kind of object with an associated function that at least, in the first instance of the new kind, is able to perform the function (Evnine 2016: 123–124) (albeit if in the later instances it cannot perform the function. If the maker intentionally tries to create this kind of object, the resulting object will be an exemplification of the kind; a broken *K* is still a *K*) (Evnine, 2016, 127). Thus, the not-thair is not a problem for Evnine's AIE view because the application of concepts is not sufficient for the artifact's production; we need something additional.

AIE views have a way to resist that the not-thair case can be a problem to their proposals, but this is only because not-thair is defined as being a concept that applies under certain circumstances. However, we will consider another case that is very similar and is inspired by the not-thair example,<sup>12</sup> but one which implies a kind of artifact, not just a concept. Assuming Evnine's view about the prototype, we will show that nothing prevents this kind of controversial creation.

The relationship between kinds, prototypes, and functions in Evnine's view is important. To solve the problem of shared functions among different kinds of artifacts (2016, 123–124), an artifact's kind is not determined by what it is actually able to do, but by what it is supposed to do (2016, 220). Remember the ice axe, which could be used as a weapon but in fact was not a weapon. This artifact belongs primarily to the kind *ice axe*, with the associated function of 'allowing climbers to fix themselves onto the ice', etc. Evnine considers that an artifact is what it is supposed to do, independently of whether the object can perform the function associated with its kind. A knife is still a knife if it is broken, but it is produced with the intention to be a knife (2016, 120). However, considering the case of a prototype—the introduction of a new kind of artifact—what we need is that the original maker defines the associated function that the new object will have, and

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<sup>12</sup> We may consider the cases as analogous, but this could be questioned. In any case, the newly introduced case is very similar and is inspired by the not-thair.



assuming a more objective criterion, the resulting product must be able to perform the function associated with its kind (2016, 126). Different kinds of artifact have different functions associated with them, determined by their original authors and their subsequent makers; to bring into existence new tokens they must intentionally produce them to perform the associated function of the kind.

With this information, we will consider that Evnine's view is overly liberal with his considerations about the nature of artifacts, and his conception opens the door to the production of controversial entities. We will consider a similar case to a not-chair scenario, but which implies a new kind of artifact. Consider the new kind of artifact:

*Not-chair* =<sub>df</sub> it is a kind *K* that has the associated function of *not being suitable for sitting*.

This not-chair is a new kind of artifact that has the associated, or proper, function of not being suitable to sit on. We have previously defined a negative object as a kind of object whose essence is a negative property. The not-chair would be an exemplification of a negative object. Now, consider that until this moment, nobody had the intention to produce a not-chair. However, imagine that at this moment an agent *A* now has the intention of producing an object of the kind *not-chair*. It will be a novel prototype; the first instance of a new kind of artifact. As an artisan, *A* knows the kind of object that she desires to produce. She selects some raw materials and she works on the matter, guided by the intention to produce a token of the kind *not-chair*, which will be an artifact which will be impossible to sit on. If, at the end of her work on the matter, the resulting entity is something on which it will be impossible to sit (in virtue of the matter selected, or the arrangement of the material parts, etc.), then it seems that she has been successful in the creation of the negative object *not-chair*. This is a problem for Evnine's view because the process of creation seems to be the imposition of the maker's mind onto the matter, and subsequently, the imposition of the kind not-chair into some matter. The demand for a novel prototype of being capable of performing the associated function is thus achieved.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Note that in the definition of not-chair as a concept, the production of the *not-chair* was necessarily by ready-mades; the agent just omitted to produce a chair.

Therefore, Evnine's view entails the possibility of producing negative objects such as not-chairs. This illustrates that Evnine's view attributes a significant amount of power to the maker in order to produce a new artifact. There is no specific limitation to creativity; negative objects could also be brought into existence if someone desires it and acts accordingly.

### 2.2.1. Considering A Possible Reply

Nonetheless, it is possible that Evnine does not see this as a substantive criticism of his proposal. He could reply by saying that the ontology contains more objects than we usually acknowledge, and that makers have the capacity to produce artifacts of a very wide variety. He can "bite the bullet" and say: there are chairs, and not-chairs—or there could be in our ontology—all of which are intentional productions of makers with associated functions, and that is what artifacts are.

Let me make some comments about this sort of defence. (i) it would go against the grain of their realistic budgets<sup>14</sup>, and it would entail a revisionary ontology; he is just posing the existence of negative artifacts before showing that his view entails them; he would be inflating the ontology unnecessarily. (ii) it needs the existence of negative properties that do not exist (Armstrong, 1978, 1989; Strawson, 1974; Vallée, 2004), or they do not have the same degree of existence as positive properties (Zangwill, 2011).

Let us consider (i). If Evnine's view accepts that there are, or could be, artifacts which are negative objects because they could be an intentional production with an associated function, then he has just given an answer to the problem that contradicts his meta-ontological framework to construe

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Now, in the definition of not-chair that we propose, the not-chair production could be modelling the matter in some way (by performing positive actions) or by ready-mades or found-objects by referring to an already created artifact or a natural object, which would have available a physical structure to *not being suitable for sitting*, and referring intentionally to this object by saying that it will be a not-chair (as in the case where a coffee table is created from a piece of driftwood).

<sup>14</sup> Evnine could adopt a permissivists account of objects, but in fact he is not a permissivist, because he denies it (2016, 195–201). He tries to defend a view between permissivism and nihilism, proximate to commonsense account (2016, 14).

a position between permissivism (2016, 14) and nihilism which highly counterintuitive implications. We do not ordinarily accept that there are such artifacts as not-chairs just because someone wants to make something on which it is not suitable to sit. If Evnine intends to accept that negative objects exist as well as ordinary objects, he would be inflating the ontology unnecessarily. There will be in the world a plethora of objects that we do not know exist. We could say that he would be multiplying entities without necessity; with the existence of negative objects, he would be violating Ockham's Razor.

(ii), if we consider the existence of negative objects (e.g., not-chairs) which have a negative property (not being suitable to be sat on) as their essence, then we have to assume that there are negative properties in the world and that they have, at least, the same degree of existence as positive properties that define the essence of other uncontroversial objects, such as chairs. However, if we take into consideration the literature about the existence of negative properties, the standard view considers that they do not exist, which is defended by Strawson (1974), Armstrong (1978, 1989), and Vallée (2004). Moreover, for those who accept the existence of negative properties in the world, these properties do not have the same causal and determinative power that positive properties have (Zangwill, 2011). An object can have negative properties; for example, a blue chair can have the negative property of *not being orange*. However, negative properties are always predicated on a positive property; they do not have determinative power for individuated entities in the world (Zangwill, 2011). Therefore, as negative properties lack causal and determinative power, they do not seem good candidates for being the essence of artifacts like not-chairs. In Evnine's view, by biting the bullet with negative objects, we would want to say that not-chairs exist as well as chairs. However, as said negative properties do not exist in the same degree of reality as positive properties, negative objects, in the best case, do not exist in the same way as positive objects. Perhaps Evnine could solve this problem by explaining why negative properties exist in the same way that positive properties do. However, he does not explain this in any sense; the onus to explain is his. Currently, his view contains no explanation about the existence of negative properties. Thus, following the standard view in which these properties do not exist (Strawson

(1974); Armstrong (1978; 1989), Vallée (2004))—or at least do not exist with the same determinative power (Zangwill (2011))—negative objects like not-chair would be a problem because they would entail the existence of negative properties.

Evnine can bite the bullet with the existence of not-chairs, but if he did that, it will be a strategy that will contradict his ontological project with no independent justification, because they would be inflating the ontology without necessity, with counter-intuitive implications for ordinary experience, and without further support for the existence of negative properties associated with these kinds of objects.

### *2.3. A Coda: Expanding The Problem Baker's Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism*

In the previous sections, we discussed the Negative-Production Problem directed at the Evnine view. We will now explain why this problem is not exclusive to Evnine and Thomasson's views but is also a problem for another important variety of Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism.

Consider now Baker's view. She also defends the Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism, but unlike Thomasson, she considers that all artifacts have proper functions in virtue of the kind that they belong to; this is what makes an entity an artifact. Her view is usually seen as focusing only on technical artifacts: artifacts with proper functions (Baker, 2007, 49–51). As we have said, she accepts the possibility of ready-mades—those new artifacts that are created without modifying the pre-existing material from which they were made (2007, 43–44)—and also that for prototypes, what we need is that the resulting product reflects the intentions of their makers (2007, 54). Giving that her proposal is more restrictive than Thomasson's view because it adds an additional requirement to the intentional activity of the maker (i.e., the resulting object is able to perform its proper function), then we could say that she would deny that the not-thair scenario was a problem for her. This is because, using the No-Kind Strategy, she could say that the scenario only involves a new concept, but this concept does not have a proper function. Thus, the resulting product does not fulfil the conditions of a new kind of artifact.

Nevertheless, if she uses this sort of defence, she will run into the same problem that we previously presented with Evnine's view. Since her proposal gives too much power to the makers for the production of new artifacts, and if we consider the new artifact's kind as not-chair, she will be forced to accept their existence. Remember the not-chair case: the not-chair has the proper function of *not being suitable for sitting*. If there is a maker with the intention of producing a not-chair through a not-chair favourable circumstance—the maker chooses the appropriate matter, works on it intentionally, and the resulting product satisfies the maker's intentions because the resulting product is an artifact which is *not suitable for sitting* due to the materials used, the structure of the materials... then there would be not-chairs in our ontology, which is an undesirable consequence for the reasons we previously mentioned.

Therefore, scenarios such as not-thair, presented by Evnine, or a similar one that we presented on the *not-chair*, reveal a problem for the Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism because their proposals entail the possibility of the existence of these negative objects because the existence of these kinds of objects contradicts their ontological projects that pretends to preserve the commonsense view (Evnine 2016, 14; Baker 2007, 5–7, 25–26, 98)<sup>15</sup> (in the case of Evnine and Baker's views).<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Further Queer Objects Coming into Existence

We have seen how AIE views on the nature of artifacts are problematic because it would be possible to produce artifacts that would belong to an undesirable category of negative object, just as long as the original makers had the intention to produce such things. There is nothing in their proposals

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<sup>15</sup> In the case of Thomasson's view this might not be seen as a problem in virtue of their meta-ontological permissivists considerations of easy ontology (2009). However, Evnine made this sort of criticism in virtue of the consideration that these objects would be so much controversial (2016, 117). In any case, our criticism is directed to Evnine (2016) and Baker (2007) AIE's views.

<sup>16</sup> Notice that in the original criticisms, in Evnine (2016) to Thomasson's view, (and in Koslicki (2018) to Evnine's view) involves ready-mades' cases, but the discussion of the case that we are offering ready-mades are not necessary but also involves these cases.

to stop this sort of production. Moreover, they do not seem to be in a good position to bite the bullet, for all the counterintuitive implications that this might have. We will now introduce another criticism to AIE that is similar to those previously discussed.

According to AIE, for the production of new kinds of objects it is sufficient to define (i) the condition of existence, (ii) the function associated with it, and (iii) the prototype that exemplifies (i) and (ii). Given that, consider the following kinds of artifacts:

*Chairtable* =<sub>df</sub> it is an intentional production that results in a material thing with some physical properties which can perform the function of *being able to be sat on* (what a chair is) **and** *to put things on* (what a table is).

*ChairOR* =<sub>df</sub> it is an intentional production that results in a material thing with certain physical properties that performs the function of a chair **or** the function of *x* (e.g., a computer), and the resulting material object performs the function of a chair.

These kinds of artifacts show that we can define a kind of artifact as having randomly complex properties, such as conjunctive or disjunctive properties. Thus, if a maker has these kinds in mind in order to produce an artifact, and the product of her activity is a material artifact that can perform the randomly associated complex function, then this kind of artifact would come into existence. For example, in the case of a *chairtable*, the kind involves a conjunction, where the resulting object must perform the two functions involved in virtue of the truth-conditions of the conjunction. A maker can then create an object that is qualitatively the same as a chair and can perform the functions of sitting on and *putting things on* because the chair, through its physical properties, serves both functions.

In the case of *chairOR*, the kind involved is a disjunction in which the truth-conditions are sufficient for one of the disjuncts to be true. Then, if the maker has in mind to produce an artifact that performs the function of a chair or a computer, and she produces an indistinguishable material object as a chair, she will be producing a *chairOR*, not a chair. This is because the product of her intentional activity has the function of a chair or a computer. By the truth-condition of disjunctions, it is true if at least one of the

disjuncts is true. If the product of her activity performs one of the functions of the disjunct (i.e., chair-function), then the artifact is a *chairOR*, not a chair, although they are qualitatively indistinguishable.

However, are there actually artifacts in the world like *chairtables* or *chairOR*? Ordinarily, we would say that there are no such kinds of objects. AIE views open up the possibility of inflating the ontology just by subjective considerations. All that we need to create new artifacts in the world is to invent a kind, produce it intentionally, and have the resulting object perform the random function attributed to it. AIE views are too liberal regarding artifact production. Perhaps the conditions they establish for producing artifacts are necessary, given intentional production, but they obviously are not sufficient, as seen in the different examples that we gave. We need a more restrictive, realistic, and objective proposal on what artifacts are.

Considering the cases presented as *chairtable* or *chairOR*, they show that by assuming Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism, it would be possible to produce objects that are qualitatively indistinguishable from an ordinary chair (colour, shape, structure, etc.), but that they would be essentially different from an ordinary chair simply because the content of the original maker's intentions was different. There would be nothing different *in* the object if we were to consider a *chair* and a *chairOR*, but they would be essentially different artifacts; they would belong to different artificial kinds. Note that the cases presented are not different ways of talking about artifacts like chairs. What they show is that just by subjective considerations of introducing new queer kinds of objects, it would be possible to create objects that are qualitatively identical to ordinary kinds of artifacts, but they would be essentially different just by the subjective considerations due to the content of the intentions of their makers. Ontological questions about artifacts could depend on queer subjective considerations.

Again, the problem with these kinds of objects is similar to the previous criticism of the production of negative objects. If AIE views bite the bullet on the creation of queer objects, as previously mentioned, then they would be inflating the ontology of objects without further justification. Their assumption is completely *ad hoc*, and highly counterintuitive since we do not recognise these kinds of objects in our ordinary experience or taxonomy. By accepting the AIE view, there may be a possible identification problem: an

agent faced with a piece of matter that seems qualitatively indistinguishable from a chair, could be completely mistaken about what kind of object it is, because if the original maker of that object had the intention to produce a *chairOR* that is qualitatively indistinguishable from a chair, there is no way for other agents to identify what kind of artifact the resulting object is. With the AIE view, we would have an ontology in which, for qualitatively indistinguishable objects which are internationally produced, one is a chair, and the other is a chair-wherever. Again, AIE's view would be violating Ockham's Razor by multiplying entities without necessity. *Chairtable* and *chairOR* would be qualitatively indistinguishable from ordinary chairs, then it seems that we do not need those kinds of objects in our ontology; it is enough to have chairs.

#### 4. Implications and Future Directions

The Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism is the most extensive and important view about the essence of artifacts. Although it has multiple advantages, it suffers from various criticisms. In this work, we have seen two new criticisms for this sort of view. The first criticism is based on a previously existing one that was directed to an Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism view—Thomassons' view—and following Koslicki's scepticism about whether this criticism also applies to Evnine's view, we have extended the criticism in a more sophisticated way to Evnine and other Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism points of view. Our criticism shows how Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism entails the existence of negative objects, and how all attempts to block this criticism are unsatisfactory. The second criticism is new and follows the line of reasoning of the previous one, which is that Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism could entail the existence of queer kinds of objects such as kinds with conjunctions or disjunctions. Based on the considerations for the prototype productions of Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism, these kinds of queer objects could exist if an agent has the intention to produce them. Both criticisms show how easily it is to create undesirable kinds of objects, such as negative and queer ones would be produced if we accept Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism; our ontology would be inflated unnecessarily just by subjective considerations. We should, therefore, reject Artifacts' Intention-



Essentialism and move towards other proposals that do not give that much power to individual agents in the production of artifacts.

We consider this could suggest two possible alternatives: (a) abandoning the framework of AIE and building a proposal in which artifacts do not essentially depend on their makers' intentions or (b) reducing the ontological implications of individual makers by accepting a limited framework of the AIE. Option (a) is suggested by Koslicki and Massin (2025), they focus on giving greater importance to the capacities of artifacts. Option (b) could be an interesting way to explore the essence of artifacts, in which they do not depend only on individual intentions but shared intentions of social communities, where artifacts' existence may not be akin to other objects, such as organisms.

However, both options must face significant challenges. These two options propose revisionary approaches to how we ordinarily conceive the existence of artifacts. Option (a) prioritises *functionality* or *capacities* over makers' intentions, which could be seen as contrary to the usual talk about artifacts. Option (b) reduces the role of individual makers' intentions and gives greater status to the shared intentions of communities, perhaps through *recognition* or *acceptance*.

At the same time, it remains unclear whether options (a) and (b) would entail the same, or even greater, criticisms for Artifacts' Intention-Essentialism. Nonetheless, AIE has different significant problems that suggest the move to explore alternative ontological proposals that reduce the ontological power of the individual makers. Those could be represented by focusing the essence on the *capacities* or *functions* of the artifacts or focusing the essence on the *recognition* or *acceptance* of a social community, in any case further investigation would be necessary to evaluate these possible ontological routes.<sup>17</sup>

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