

How Statues Speak*

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Abstract

We apply a familiar distinction from philosophy of language to a class of material artifacts that are sometimes said to “speak”: statues. By distinguishing how statues speak at the *locutionary* level versus at the *illocutionary* level, or what they say versus what they do, we obtain the resource for addressing two topics. First, we can explain what makes statues distinct from street art. Second, we can explain why it is mistaken to criticize—or to defend—the continuing presence of statues based only on what they represent. Both explanations are driven by the same core idea: the significance of statues arises primarily from what they do, and not what they say.

We apply a familiar distinction from philosophy of language to a class of material artifacts that are sometimes said to “speak”: statues. By distinguishing how statues speak at the *locutionary* level versus at the *illocutionary* level, or what they say versus what they do, we obtain the resource for addressing two topics. First, we can explain what makes statues distinct from street art. Second, we can explain why it is mistaken to criticize—or to defend—the continuing presence of statues based only on what they represent. Both explanations are driven by the same core idea: the significance of statues arises primarily from what they do, and not what they say.

1. Speech Act Theory

It is commonplace to recognize that politically controversial objects and spaces are speech-like in one sense. For example, debates about Confederate statues in the United States often turn on whether they symbolize hate or heritage. That is, to use J. L. Austin’s (1962) terminology, it is already common to think about the meaning of material artifacts at the *locutionary* level, by attending to their representational contents.

For a while, the speech act theory that Austin pioneered fell out of fashion in mainstream philosophy of language, supplanted by other hermeneutic frameworks. However, thanks to feminist philosophers of language, it has found new uses in the last two decades for analyzing politically controversial speech, such as pornography and hate speech (Saul and Diaz-Leon 2017: sec. 2.1). A central feminist insight is that politically controversial speech must be examined not only for what they say, but also for what they do.

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To use Austin's terminology again, these feminist philosophers of language have proposed to analyze pornography and hate speech at the *illocutionary* level, by attending to their force. For example, Rae Langton (1993) argues that pornography does not merely depict subordination of women in its locutionary content, but also constitutes subordination of women in its illocutionary force (see also Hornsby 1993 and Maitra 2009). Langton claims this is because pornography ranks women as inferior and legitimates discriminatory behavior toward women. Mary Kate McGowan (2004, 2009, 2012) argues that hate speech, such as an utterance of 'whites only' in a restaurant, does not merely depict oppression of non-whites in its locutionary content, but also constitutes oppression in its illocutionary force (see also Tirrell 2012). According to McGowan, this is because the utterance enacts permissibility facts, such as who is permitted to enter a restaurant and who is not. In this way, philosophers like Langton and McGowan argue that pornography and hate speech are objectionable because they are not just representations, but also actions. That is the central insight of speech act theory in the first place: language is not only a medium for many kinds of representation, but "a medium for many kinds of action" (Harris, Fogal, and Moss 2018: 1).

There is a further difference between what an act of speech does and what it *causes*. Langton claims not merely that pornography causes subordination of women via additional downstream acts, but that pornography itself constitutes subordination of women. And McGowan claims not merely that hate speech causes oppression of non-whites via additional downstream acts, but that hate speech itself constitutes oppression of non-whites. That is, to use Austin's terminology once more, these theorists are not focused on analyzing these acts of speech at the *perlocutionary* level, by attending to their effects. They argue that pornography and hate speech are objectionable not only because of their consequences, but because of the actions that they are in themselves.

To illustrate the distinction between these three concepts, consider how an utterance can perform acts of speech at all three levels. When one wrongs another and says 'I am sorry', one does three things. At the locutionary level, one represents their own mental state. At the illocutionary level, one is apologizing. At the perlocutionary level, one is (hopefully) causing the effect of being forgiven. The utterance of 'I am sorry' constitutes an apology in itself; it neither depicts an apology nor causes an apology.

While it is already commonplace to recognize that politically controversial objects and spaces are speech-like at the locutionary level, we contend that they should also be recognized to be speech-like at the illocutionary level. That is to say, they are mediums for many kinds of action. It is not unprecedented to compare material artifacts to speech: Jürgen Streeck (1996) says that an arrangement of boxes can constitute an illocutionary act, McGowan (2012) analyzes the illocutionary force of a 'whites only' sign, and Daisy Dixon (2019; in press) argues that visual artworks have illocutionary force in addition to locutionary content. In the opposite direction, Andy Clark (1997: 218) argues that language is "in many ways the ultimate artifact": speech is material-artifact-like because it is a human construction that augments our biological cognitive capacities. Although it may seem surprising to compare wordless

material artifacts to speech, it is worth noting that the common understanding of illocutionary speech acts already admits “the possibility of speech acts being performed wordlessly, as well as speech acts being performed without saying that you are doing so” (Green 2020: sec. 2). Moreover, the development of speech act theory “has always been driven by issues that extend beyond the study of language and communication” (Harris, Fogal, and Moss 2018: 26).

Inspired by feminist philosophers of language, we argue for two more new uses for speech act theory: for understanding the distinction between street art and statues, and for advancing debates about politically controversial statues.

2. Statues Versus Street Art

Street art is not just art in the street. On the most influential account of street art, proposed by Nicholas Alden Riggle, “an artwork is a work of street art if, and only if, its use of the street is internal to its meaning” (Riggle 2010: 246). This definition correctly identifies many instances of art-in-the-street as not-street-art. For example, *Mona Lisa* would not become street art if a thief were to leave it in the street, because the street would not be internal to its meaning. One would not need to account for the painting’s use of the street in order to interpret it. This definition, however, does not correctly identify as not-street-art those artistic statues in the street, for which the street *is*—in some sense—internal to its meaning. We argue that, to do so, we need to use the Austinian distinction between locution and illocution to clarify the exact meaning of “meaning” when we say that the street is internal to the meaning of street art.

Two clarifications are in order before we start. First, the locutionary content of sculptures is much more underspecified than that of ordinary speech (compare Dixon in press). That said, commonsense and art criticism agree that many artworks say, or convey, *something*. This is clearest with obviously propositional artworks, such as novels and some poems. Conversely, theorists, such as Colin Radford (1989) and Jenefer Robinson (1994), commonly assume that pure music expresses emotions or sentiments, instead of expressing propositional content. Sculptures lie somewhere in between novels and pure music. Following Sherri Irvin (2020), we think sculptures, including some abstract ones, express not only emotions but also express meanings—albeit, again, with underspecified content. For the examples of sculpture we discuss, we provisionally attribute some plausible meanings, but we admit that these meaning attributions are simplified and intended to be merely illustrative.

Second, there are two kinds of meaning that artworks have at the locutionary level. These two kinds have analogues in ordinary speech. *Speaker-meaning* is what the speaker means when uttering a sentence, and *sentence-meaning* is what a sentence conventionally means. Suppose you say “Aria is prodigal” and that you mistakenly think “prodigal” is synonymous with “prodigious.” Your utterance’s speaker-meaning is akin to “Aria is impressive”, but its sentence-meaning is akin to “Aria is wasteful”. Likewise, *artist-meaning* is what the artist intends for an artwork to convey, and *artwork-meaning* is what an artwork conventionally means. Suppose you intend to write a novel with a charismatic protagonist but mistakenly make

them behave obnoxiously. Your novel's artist-meaning involves charisma but its artwork-meaning involves obnoxiousness. To be clear, when we talk about the locutionary meanings of statues and street art, we are talking about their artwork-meanings.

Let's now get some examples on the table. For a paradigmatic example of street art, consider Joshua Harris's inflatable bag monsters. The balloon sculptures, placed on a grate above the New York subway, expand and contract as zooming trains produce wind. The artwork comments on the ephemerality of life and also on the dynamicity of urban space. And, especially with the second part, the use of the street is internal to the artwork's meaning.

For a paradigmatic example of an artistic statue in the street that—we assume—is not street art, consider *Lawrence*, a statue in the Stockade District of Schenectady New York. The statue depicts Lawrence, a member of the Mohawk people and an ally of the colony of Schenectady. It memorializes a 1690 attack by French-Canadian, Mohawk, and Algonquin forces that resulted in the deaths of roughly sixty European colonizers, enslaved African people, and Indigenous people. The use of the street is also—in some sense—internal to this statue's meaning: crucially, it stands on a street where the massacre occurred. However, *Lawrence* is intuitively not street art, even though Riggle's definition says it is.

One might object that *Lawrence* is street art. After all, it was placed in the street for a reason. In response, we note that *Lawrence* is orthodox, government-sponsored, and relatively permanent. Granted, we don't think these qualities automatically preclude the statue from being street art; one may insist it is merely a non-paradigmatic work of street art. Still, these qualities support our intuition that *Lawrence* and many similar site-specific public statues are not works of street art.

Riggle (2010: 253–255) considers a somewhat similar case, *Tilted Arc*, in an attempt to identify what distinguishes street art from other public art. He considers biting the bullet, which means admitting public artworks like *Tilted Arc*—and, by extension, artistic statues like *Lawrence*—into the street art category. He concludes, however, that this is too much metal (or marble, for that matter) to bite. Instead, his preferred response is to say that *Tilted Arc* transforms the street into non-street—a place that is sanctioned by the artworld, no different from a museum (Riggle 2010: 254).

We think that Riggle's solution is less plausible with statues like *Lawrence* than with monumental public artworks like *Tilted Arc*. Though it is prominent, *Lawrence* is much less obtrusive. It rests at the center of a roundabout that sees foot and car-traffic. People still use the place where the statue stands as a street. On Riggle's (2010: 255) own social account of the street, on which a place is a street if it is collectively treated as such, *Lawrence* is in the street.

Instead, we think a better response is to invoke the Austinian distinction between locutionary and illocutionary meaning. To motivate this response, consider the following counterfactual question: what would happen if we were to move a work from the street to the museum? For Harris's inflatable bag monsters, we claim that its locutionary content would change significantly. In the street, it says (roughly) "life is ephemeral, and urban space is dynamic". But in the museum, it would only

say (roughly) “life is ephemeral”. However, for *Lawrence*, we claim that its locutionary content would not change significantly. In the street, it says (roughly) “In 1690 a massacre happened in the Stockade District of Schenectady”. And in the museum, it would say the same, but with less oomph.

That oomph is important, though: the change to the meaning of *Lawrence*, if it were moved from the street to the museum, is with its illocutionary force. In the street, it invites people to reflect on their proximity to where the massacre occurred. This is an action: an invitation. In the museum, it would no longer perform this action, this invitation. More generally, artistic statues in the street use the street to do something, but not to say something. In this way they differ from works of street art. On the flipside, this suggests a tweak to Riggle’s definition of street art: an artwork is a work of street art if, and only if, its use of the street is internal to its *locutionary* meaning.

One might object that any statue in the street, as opposed to in a museum, says something about its content’s importance to the public. On this line, *Lawrence* says in the street not only “In 1690 a massacre happened in the Stockade District of Schenectady”; it says also “And this is important for the public to know.” We think, however, this latter comment is not part of the statue’s content. Although passersby may infer that whoever sanctions *Lawrence* thinks the Schenectady massacre is important for the public to know about, this is not what the statue itself says. Compare a decision by ABC to air a new episode of the show *Abbot Elementary* in primetime on Tuesday at 9pm. This decision signals that the network thinks the episode’s narrative is important, or likely to draw high ratings. Presumably, however, the episode itself does not say this. The episode describes (says) its narrative, but its placement on primetime does not affect what it says about this narrative, or how we should interpret the episode.

One might also object that a shift in the context of utterance, from the street to the museum, surely would affect what *Lawrence* says. One might think the statue behaves like an indexical. Just as the meaning of an utterance of “The pizza is now here” depends on where and when it is said, one might think *Lawrence* would say something different in a museum. To support this, one might claim that people looking at *Lawrence* in a museum would not understand that it says anything about the Schenectady massacre.

We disagree for two reasons. First, *Lawrence* has at its base a plaque that provides relevant historical context. Second, and more importantly, we should distinguish the epistemic claim about whether people know what a statue says, from the semantic claim about what it says. Imagine *Lawrence* in a museum without a helpful plaque. Spectators are lost about what it says. And, imagine a tour guide tells them, “This statue was designed to represent Lawrence, a member of the Mohawk people, who defended Schenectady during an attack in 1690.” It would be strange for the museum-goers to say “Oh, well I trust that’s what the sculptor was trying to say, but the statue fails to say that.” Instead, the spectators now appreciate what the statue says. It just wasn’t clear to them before. Contrast this with Harris’ inflatable bag monsters. Imagine they were initially placed in a museum and spectators are lost about their meaning. A tour guide says, “These bag monsters were designed to

comment on the dynamicity of urban space.” Here it would be reasonable for the museum-goer to say “Oh, well I trust that is what the artist was trying to say, but the sculptures fail to say that.” To employ a distinction alluded to above, in this case the bag monsters’ artist-meaning differs from their artwork-meaning. That is, Harris may intend for the bag monsters to comment on the dynamicity of urban space but the sculptures fail to do so in a museum.

The key point here is not unique to *Lawrence*. There are broad social conventions and norms governing sculpture. Orthodox sculptures of people generally don’t need to be close to where those people lived to say things about them. They might say what the sculptor intends to convey more clearly or more powerfully when in proximity to historical events, but they can still say it in a museum. The context of utterance doesn’t control what they say, at least not in the way it does with street art. Of course, there could be statues that need the street to express their meaning. Still, while acknowledging that what counts as street art likely comes in degrees, we maintain that the more a statue needs the street the more we’re inclined to count it as street art.

Other philosophers have proposed different responses to the question of what distinguishes street art from other public art, notably by making aconsentuality, subversiveness, or illegality connected to the essence of street art (Bacharach 2016; Baldini 2016; Chackal 2016). Our response is distinct. We disambiguate the different meanings of “meaning” in the definition of street art, using the Austinian distinction between locutionary content and illocutionary force. In short, while changes in context affect both what works of street art say and do, changes in context affect only what statues do but not what they say. Statues use the street to do something, not to say something; the street is a part of statues’ illocutionary force, not their locutionary content. In addition to augmenting Riggle’s influential account and explaining the difference between artistic statues in the street and street art, we hope that our proposal also encourages new ways to think about the meanings of street art, and about the meanings of statues.

3. Statues Beyond Symbols

As things stand, much of the popular discourse on politically controversial statues appears to be fixed on their representational content. For example, Southern Poverty Law Center’s influential report *Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy* frames the debate in the following way: “We encourage communities across the country to reflect on the true meaning of these symbols and ask the question: *Whose heritage do they truly represent?*” (SPLC 2019). Similarly, the question of whether Confederate statues symbolize “heritage or hate” is nearly ubiquitous in all discussions, from public radio to pedagogical guides (for example: Green 2017; National Civil Rights Museum 2017).

The focus on representational content is also central to the philosophical discourse on politically controversial statues. George Tsai (2016) says that statues that are state-sponsored political symbols “stand for or represent something with political content favored by the state” (Tsai 2016: 321). Joanna Burch-Brown (2017)

and Johannes Schulz (2019) argue that such statues *express* degrading ideology, and Helen Frowe (2019) and Benjamin Cohen Rossi (2020) argue that they *represent* a dishonorable person as honorable. To be fair, the philosophical discourse on politically controversial statues has an equal focus on their harmful effects, especially on the oppressed. Travis Timmerman (2020) argues that they can *cause* psychological suffering, and Johannes Schulz (2019) and Chong-Ming Lim (2020) both argue that they can *undermine* self-respect. In Austinian terms, there is equal attention to how politically controversial statues speak at the locutionary and the perlocutionary levels.

By recognizing that statues are not only speech-like in the representation sense but also speech-like in the action sense, we also hope to advance popular and philosophical debates over politically controversial statues. These debates should not focus only on their locutionary content, but also their illocutionary force. In fact, they should focus more on what statues do, and less on what they say.

The difference between saying and doing is subtle. For example, Rossi classifies a Confederate statue as an *honorable representation* and defines this concept as “any representation of an individual in a public space that depicts that individual as an exemplar of a value or values, such as courage, integrity, or justice” (Rossi 2020: 50). But there is a difference between depicting a person as honorable and honoring that person. As Langton notes in her discussion of pornography, there can be a depiction of subordination of women that does not subordinate women, such as a documentary (Langton 1993: 303). Similarly, satires often criticize the moral perspective that they depict: for example, in *Catch-22*, “the narrator baldly claims that something that is clearly immoral was in fact justified: ‘Clevinger was guilty, of course, or he would not have been accused, and since the only way to prove it was to find him guilty, it was their patriotic duty to do so’ ” (Harold 2007: 149; see also Liao 2013). By the same logic, in a satire there can be a depiction of an individual as honorable that not only does not honor the individual, but criticizes the honoring of that individual. There are other cases besides satire where people depict others as honorable without honoring them. Plausibly, for instance, sometimes in the United States people say that living veterans are honorable without doing enough to genuinely honor them. The crucial issue is not whether a Confederate statue *depicts* a dishonorable person as honorable, but whether a statue in fact *honors* a dishonorable person (Lim 2020; Nili 2020). For example, as Arianne Shahvisi (2021: 460) points out, the issue with the now-toppled Edward Colston statue in Bristol is that it performs the illocutionary act of glorifying the slave trader “as a noble, virtuous and wise person who should be remembered and respected”.

This subtle difference is significant because it impacts the available options for our responses to politically controversial statues. Remember the lesson from distinguishing statues in the street from works of street art: by changing the context, we change what statues do but not what they say. For example, Elizabeth Scarbrough’s (2020) proposal to leave politically controversial statues to ruin does not change their locutionary content, but does change their illocutionary force: a statue that is allowed to ruin can still depict an dishonorable person as honorable, but it will no longer honor that person. Indeed, the recognition that context changes

what statues do but not what they say supports Frowe's contention that "we ought to remove statues from most public spaces [but] we can make principled exceptions for some public museums and galleries" (2019: 5). In the same spirit, Ten-herng Lai's (2020, in press) and Lim's (2020) respective proposals of requiring or permitting vandalism as responses to politically controversial statues can also be understood as ways of changing the context of such statues, and thereby their illocutionary force, without changing their locutionary content. These proposals echo a general point that Jennifer Saul (2006: 236) makes about illocutionary acts: namely, they are "acts that occur in particular contexts, and in different contexts the same sign may be used to perform different acts". These proposals also echo a general point that Dixon (2019: ch. 5) makes about the visual arts, namely that their content and force can also vary by context, via mechanisms such as curation. As such, our responses to politically controversial statues should focus on what they do, and not what they say.

Statues are mediums for different kinds of actions. C. Thi Nguyen (2019) suggests that *The Monument Against Fascism* is a work with which a group *makes a promise* to itself about certain values that are too subtle to be codified. SunInn Yun (2021) suggests that a statue of Chun Doo-hwan in a kneeling position inside a cage is a work that *humiliates* the former South Korean dictator. In addition to the illocutionary acts highlighted by Nguyen and Yun, we want to highlight another kind of thing that statues can do: *give permission*. That is, they can be what McGowan calls *exercitives*, or speech acts that enact permissibility facts.

To illustrate this concept of the exercitive, return to McGowan's example of an owner who puts up a 'whites only' sign in their restaurant in the segregated South (2012: 125–128). This sign does not merely represent the racial composition of the restaurant's clientele, and it does not merely cause non-whites to feel unwelcome at the restaurant, but rather it enacts permissibility facts: namely, the social fact that whites are allowed in the restaurant and non-whites are not. Notice that the speech's context affects its illocutionary force: the same sign in a museum today does not enact the same permissibility facts.

Politically controversial statues can also enact permissibility facts. For example, in representing a person as honorable, a statue can thereby proscribe disrespectful behaviors, such as vandalism. Importantly, it can do so independent of its actual effects. A 'whites only' sign in a restaurant in the segregated South enacts its permissibility facts regarding who is allowed in the establishment, whether or not there are in fact non-whites in the restaurant. Similarly, a statue enacts its permissibility facts regarding which behaviors are allowed toward the statue, whether or not there is in fact vandalism of the statue. We suspect also that Confederate statues enact permissibility facts that go beyond the statues themselves. Arguably, a Confederate statue proscribes—at least in its presence—characterizing the Civil War as being primarily about slavery, or criticizing the military generals and soldiers who primarily fought for the preservation of slavery.

As McGowan (2009) argues, exercitives become *oppressive speech* when they constitute, not merely cause, oppression in their enactment of permissibility facts. Again, a 'whites only' sign in their restaurant in the segregated South is an example of such oppressive speech. And since McGowan (2012) argues that hate speech also

enacts oppressive permissibility facts, it too can be considered oppressive speech. Given Lai's (2020) suggestion that certain politically controversial statues are comparable to hate speech, we contend that such objects and spaces can also constitute, and not merely cause, oppression in their enactments of permissibility facts. That is, politically controversial statues can be *oppressive things*, or objects and spaces that materialize oppression (Liao & Huebner 2021).

The Austinian distinction between locutionary and illocutionary meaning has proved useful for advancing social debates on politically controversial statues beyond their symbolic representations. The shift of focus from locution to illocution also calls for wider shifts in our thinking about politically controversial statues. Debates about the meaning of politically controversial statues are often grounded in the past. For example, in debates about Confederate statues, there are arguments that turn on the actions, characters, and legacies of those who are memorialized by the statues, and arguments that turn on the political motivations of those who erected the statues. By contrast, the shift of focus from *what statues say* to *what statues do* encourages a reorientation from the past to the future (compare Rini 2015). After all, if we decide to, we must live with these politically controversial statues for years to come. Arguments should turn on the illocutionary forces of these statues: whether they honor the dishonorable, promise ourselves the right sort of values, or—we argue—enact oppressive permissibility facts about behaviors around or toward the statues themselves. In turn, responses to politically controversial statues should not focus on changing what they say, but changing what they do.

4. Speech Act Theory, Again

Our core idea is that statues can be examined at *representation-*, *action-*, and *consequence-*theoretic levels—corresponding to the Austinian distinction between locution, illocution, and perlocution—and that, in particular, attention to the action-theoretical level enables us to understand the distinction between street art and statues, and to advance debates about politically controversial statues. That said, the details of our proposal are spiritually Austinian in other ways, and a further exploration of those details helps to bring out unique aspects of our proposal, compared to nearby ones in the philosophical literature.

Daniel W. Harris, Daniel Fogal, and Matt Moss (2018: 2–14) survey the contemporary landscape of speech act theories. An important distinction concerns the fundamental ingredient of illocutionary acts. *Psychological* theories, pioneered by H. P. Grice, find them in the psychological domain. Intentionalism, including Grice's own account, grounds the properties of illocutionary acts in the psychological states that they are intended to produce in the hearer. Expressivism grounds the properties of illocutionary acts in the psychological states of the speaker that they express. In contrast, *social* theories, pioneered by Austin, find them in the social domain. Conventionalism, including Austin's own account, grounds the properties of illocutionary acts in social or linguistic conventions. Normativism, as exemplified by many contemporary feminist philosophers of language, grounds the properties of illocutionary acts in social norms. By taking Austin rather than Grice as

our guiding spirit, we align our analyses of statues to social theories of speech acts. As such, when we examine what statues do, we focus on their social conventional and normative roles and not the psychological states of their artists or audiences.

Grice's starting point is cooperative communicative speech, whereas Austin's starting point is ritualized or institutionalized speech. The Austinian approach has two key features. First, social theories can make more sense of speech acts that do things beyond communication, such as officiating a marriage ceremony or christening a ship (Austin 1962: 5; see also Harris, Fogal, and Moss 2018: 2). For example, whether a speaker succeeds in marrying a couple depends not only on the psychological states of the speaker and the hearers, but on social conditions such as whether the speaker is in a position to marry a couple and whether the couple are in a position to be married. Second, social theories can arguably make more sense of non-cooperative discourse, such as false confessions extracted via coercion or political propaganda that bypass interlocutors' consent (Harris, Fogal, and Moss 2018: 29). For example, coerced confession and mandatory self-disclosure are speech acts that are produced against the speaker's psychological states, but under social conditions that are set up and exploited by interrogating hearers (McKinney 2016). Both key features set us apart from other theorists who have specifically compared statue to speech.

Lai (2020) compares politically controversial statues to hate speech on a broadly Gricean framework, centered around presupposition accommodation, and proposes vandalism of statues as counter-speech. Similarly, Shahvisi (2021) compares the speech acts that racist and colonialist statues perform to that of slurs. Although Shahvisi's framework is Austinian, its focus is still on communicative things these statues do, such as "convey[ing] particular messages" (Shahvisi 2021: 459). Unlike Shahvisi and Lai, we argue that statues do non-communicative things too. Importantly, we argue that statues set permissions and prohibitions for thoughts and behaviors. Although these exercitives—which are of the subtle variety that McGowan (2004, 2012) calls conversational or covert exercitives—are not as ritualized as speech acts of marrying and christening, they also depend on social conditions. For example, whether Confederate statues proscribe characterizing the Civil War as being primarily about slavery depends not only on the psychological states of the artists or the audiences, but on social conditions such as norms governing appropriate responses to statues in general. The distinction between communicative and non-communicative speech is especially relevant to debates about appropriate responses to politically controversial statues. Many people are, by default, against the removal of artworks, including politically controversial statues, because they believe that doing so violates the artists' freedom of expression, especially given the nuance that is typical of artistic intentions (Dixon in press). However, the right of free speech is only committed to protecting communicative, but not non-communicative, illocutionary acts (Maitra 2009). Adjudicating which illocutionary acts take place invites more attention to social conditions than to psychological states, such as artistic intentions.

Geoffrey Scarre (2020) also analyzes statues at the illocutionary and perlocutionary levels, using the Austinian distinction, but focuses primarily on

illocutionary “intents” or “aims”, as opposed to the acts themselves. Unlike Shahvisi and us, Scarre does not focus on the illocutionary acts of politically controversial statues. More importantly, different from Scarre, our focus is not on intention or expression, but convention or norm. Politically controversial statues often do things non-cooperatively. For example, under certain social conditions, Confederate statues can still proscribe characterizing the Civil War as being primarily about slavery, even when audiences are passively unaware or actively resistant. And this can still be the case even when artists lack the relevant intentions, as long as the social conditions are set up to extract such unwitting speech.

Our discussion of street art also relies on the social realm more than the psychological. In arguing that certain site-specific statues may say the same thing in the museum as they say in the street, we rely on a notion of artwork-meaning. Artwork-meaning is socially constructed. Due to social conventions pertaining to orthodox sculptures, *Lawrence’s* artwork-meaning is about events in Schenectady, whether it is in a museum or on the street. Conversely, the artwork-meaning of genuine street art changes from the street to the museum. If we relied instead on *artist-meaning*—on what the artist intends for their artwork to say, independent of social convention—this distinction would dissolve. After all, an artist may *intend* for an artwork to express in a museum whatever they desire.

To be clear, we find value too in other philosophers’ analyses of the meanings of statues, and of artworks more generally. We do not think that only social theories of speech acts can offer an illuminating perspective. However, in articulating the aspects in which our proposal is spiritually Austinian, we hope to have underscored our distinctive contributions toward a greater understanding of how statues speak.

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