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Title	Concept as material: a materialist analysis of the concept in Anglophone Conceptual Art 1965-72
Authors	Thompson, John M.
Publication date	2025
Original Citation	Thompson, J. 2025. Concept as material: a materialist analysis of the concept in Anglophone Conceptual Art 1965-72. PhD Thesis, University College Cork.
Type of publication	Doctoral thesis
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Download date	2026-10-07 10:34:26
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/17969

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Concept as Material: A Materialist Analysis of the Concept in Anglophone Conceptual Art 1965-72

Thesis presented by

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for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University College Cork

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2025

Concept as Material: A Materialist Analysis of the Concept in Anglophone Conceptual Art 1965-72

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Abstract:

This thesis investigates the notion of the concept as material, articulated first by Henry Flynt and later found, in order to be dismissed, in accounts of conceptual art. In scholarship the idea of a concept as material is rejected in favour of accounts which focus on conceptual art as the questioning of what art is (Kosuth) or upon the dematerialisation of the art object thesis (Lippard). While, as Paul Wood notes, it is correct that there was no actual empirical historical link to be found between Flynt's term and the practice of the early conceptual artists, I argue that this notion - the concept as material - should be taken seriously as a tool with which to talk about conceptual art. However, in order to do this the thesis must consist of a series of arguments for the theoretical presuppositions necessary for analysis utilising such a tool. The thesis thus focuses on accounts of materials, materiality and materialization in philosophy, art history and theory in order to ascertain a model capable of speaking of the concept as material. Accounts of the history of thought upon the concept of concept are then given. Here, it is argued that each model of the concept is a valid type of concept and as such that these types of concept can be chosen as a material in art. In specific an analytical model of the concept, where tautological definition plays a prominent role will be seen to be utilised in conceptual art. Other aspects of the materiality of the concept are highlighted utilising Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the concept as event. The thesis further grounds the origin of the concept in the practice of society via the concept of real abstraction. The relation between concept, word and image in conceptual art is then analysed as taking on aspects of the model of the diagram, as contrasted to the ideogram or calligram. Finally, the thesis grapples with the notion of abstraction in the work of conceptual artists, arguing that where we find conceptual artists talking about abstraction or developing their practice based on a move towards a form of greater abstraction we find them grappling with the concept as material. The conclusion sums up the findings of the thesis by including a brief

account of the concept as a material in the style of an entry in a handbook of artists materials.

Acknowledgements

I would like here to acknowledge in the first instance my supervisors Dr. Carlos Garrido Castellano and Dr. Adam Loughnane. Their contributions through discussions and feedback over the last few years have been invaluable to me in developing and articulating my ideas and getting this project across the line. Prof. Paul Hegarty is also to be thanked for helping me to initially start this project and supervising me in the early stage of it.

I would also like to acknowledge discussion with colleagues (and it must be said dear friends) which have proven invaluable to me - Dr. Ruud Burke, together with whom I was able to discuss many texts and topics, not least of which was assiduously tackling Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and Dr. James Mulvey, discussions with whom about Deleuze, and much else besides, have re-energised me at many moments during the PhD process. Thank you, my friends.

For aid in research with regard to art catalogues and other books of relevance to my thesis I would like to acknowledge the helpfulness of the staff at the Crawford College of Art and Design's Library in Cork and the National College of Art and Design's Edward Murphy Library in Dublin.

The support of my parents, Mike and Julie, and my sister, Treacy, has also been key factors in keeping my eyes on the finish line.

The person without whom this thesis would not have been possible, who kept me capable of completing the project when it seemed so distant, is Catherine and I wish to acknowledge that here and send her all my love.

All mistakes are of course mine and mine alone.

Introduction

This thesis is about an idea: the concept as material. It provides a case study of how this idea can be seen to play out in the context of a specific moment in the history of art practice - conceptual art from 1965-1972. It argues for the potential of concepts to be seen as a type of material in art capable of definition in the same manner as paint, wood or stone in a handbook of artist's materials.

The main contribution of this thesis is to think through the notion of the concept as material in a serious way. As outlined below, there have been arguments for why not to take it seriously, however in the current climate, with a resurgence of philosophical and art historical materialisms, the notion takes on a new aspect. The hypothesis that comes from this investigation is that we can understand concepts as materials, and thus as having their own defined material properties, their own materiality so to speak. To speak in this, at first highly paradoxical way, it is necessary, as the first chapter of the thesis outlines, to have recourse to metaphysical descriptions of matter as found in Aristotle. From this investigation we get a materiality tied to a moment of 'thisness' which we will encounter in other guises as the resistance of materials and the moment when materials stop thought. The concept as material and its (sometimes un-) thinkability are thus able to clarify what some of the problems of materialism are and the means of working through them.

What, as we will see below, some see as trite this thesis sees as a problem, one that can be productive if approached in the correct manner. The approach here may seem at first eclectic but in fact has a consistency. That the problem of concept as material occurs in the context of art and consequently, we must argue, of aesthetics is an important aspect of the problem. Speaking about the materiality of the concept will also be a means to talk about the aesthetics of conceptual art and see the aesthetic role that tautologies and abstractions play, how there is a movement within these that can be understood to give off specific aesthetic affects.

This introduction begins by presenting the original articulation of that idea in a piece by Henry Flynt in 1963, mining it for the problematics it puts in play. The introduction then states the speculative rather than empirical nature of the study, how the thesis works in the first instance to forward the theoretical presuppositions needed to investigate such a notion and in the second, to analyse concrete moments when the concept was confronted as a material in the practice of conceptual art. It concludes by offering a breakdown of what is to be found in the five chapters and conclusion.

The Idea: Concept-as-Material

In 1963 the fluxus artist, musician and anti-art activist Henry Flynt submitted the short essay “Concept Art” (July-May 1961) as a contribution to the La Monte Young edited volume of art writings and artworks *Anthology of Chance Operations* (La Monte Young 1963). Other contributors to this Fluxus anthology included such important figures as John Cage, George Brecht, Yoko Ono, Dick Higgins and Terry Riley amongst others. Flynt’s contribution remains the first (theoretical) statement to tie the concept to the artwork as a material.

While he cannot be said to have originated conceptual art in any causal sense, the document is expressive of many of the main themes to emerge from the movement. Further, in its distillation of the concerns of “Concept art” it contains the succinct definition and analogy by which we begin this thesis:

> “Concept art" is first of all an art of which the material is "concepts," as the material of for ex. music is sound. Since "concepts" are closely bound up with language, concept art is a kind of art of which the material is language. That is, unlike for ex. a work of music, in which the music proper (as opposed to notation, analysis, a.s.f.) is just sound, concept art proper will involve language. (Flynt 1963: 31)

The definition is fascinating if also problematic. The declaration that sound is the material of music may strike us as contentious. Surely sound is better thought of as the medium of music? One's medium does not seem to be as set in stone as one's materials. Paint might be one's medium and then one can choose whether to paint on a wall, canvas or paper, use oils, acrylics or watercolours, with a thin brush or a brush for house-painting. The materials used in the creation of the painting will contribute to some degree to that painting's uniqueness or specific difference from other paintings. One does not make a choice about one's medium in the same sense as one does about one's material. Here, maybe we could consider distinct sounds as the material music works with - music could then be taken as the ordering of distinct selections of sounds. The medium is un-malleable, unchanging once set upon in contrast to the malleability of material and the necessity of further material decisions being made in the process. Perhaps, this too is a contentious way of framing the issue.

This problem of terminology is nothing new. For the contemporary art historian Petra Lange-Berndt the relationship between mediums and materials in Modernism - that period seen to predate the rupture caused by the movements of the 60's (Fluxus and Conceptual art pivotal among them) - was itself problematic:

> …Greenberg was, like most modernists… not greatly interested in materials, the stuff of this world. Even if he proclaims his investment in the medium, in this neo-platonic tradition the goal is to overcome any remnant of the everyday in order to arrive at pure *form* and transcendence. Material factuality is only a springboard for leaping into abstraction and visuality, realms understood as being less physical, as art historian Hope Mauzerall has phrased it: 'Materiality or matter here is recognized but then cancelled out.' In fact, the legacy of this version of modernism is not a focus on materials, but quite the opposite: their elimination. (Lange-Berndt 2015: 13)

In light of this, Flynt's own problematic terminology has some virtues. Namely, discussing materials instead of mediums. Coming at a time when a transformation into what Rosalind Krauss will later term a "post-medium condition of art" (Krauss 2006: 58-59) was underway, Flynt's analysis is in keeping with the times. In *Aesthetic Theory*,

also written around this moment in the late 60's, Theodor Adorno offers a broad definition of the materials of art, stating they are "… everything that the artists encounter(s) about which they must make a decision." And further, that the "… material is not natural material even if it appears (so) to artists; rather, it is thoroughly historical." (Adorno 1997: 147-8) This broadness of definition however, is also imbued with a function of absolute significance. The materials of art determine the constitution of the work of art; materials embody history and override the conscious intent of the artist and thus art resides in holding firm to a material logic. Perhaps Flynt's article got ahead of itself but was accurate in being ahead of itself. The choice to use a concept in an artwork seems to disturb definitions of medium in the artwork. Could it be that by choosing the concept as a material one makes all mediums into materials? Is the concept itself a medium? Is Greenberg's medium specificity disrupted once the concept enters the orbit of art materials? Judging by later theoretical discussions, such as those around the post-medium condition and the dematerialization of the artwork, it seems as if the concept became the material that dissolves the notion of medium in art altogether.

Flynt's essay makes further claims. Flynt says that concepts are bound closely to language and thus that concept art will be an art primarily concerned with language. Secondly, he states that the relation between a name and a concept is that between a name and its intension (that which the name designates, is its determined content etc.) He claims that there is no objective link between name and intension. Here he can be read to re-affirm the basic distinction between Sign, Signifier and Referent present in Saussurian Semiotics/General Linguistics. (Saussure 1988: 11) Flynt claims two predecessors to 'concept art' that illuminated the category for him. These two predecessors are Structure Art and Mathematics. As an example of Structure art he cites in music the "fugue" and "total (*sic?*) serial music." (Flynt 1963: 31)

Flynt claims that structure art fails and consequently is boring when it tries to be music or something other than what it is (structure). Structure art is based on

knowledge but music is fundamentally not knowledge, or about knowledge communication. In opposition to Structure music Flynt affirms a diversity of musical creations that show “how good real music can get”. He cites the “the Goli Dance of the Baoule; "Cans on Windows" by L.Young; and the contemporary American hit song "Sweets for My Sweets," by the Drifters”. The link between knowledge and concepts is important here as is the split between knowledge and emotions. For Flynt structures, which are fundamentally to be read or analysed for information/knowledge, are concepts.

In highlighting mathematics he makes inflated claims of grandeur referring to his “revolution” in mathematics. This revolution in mathematics consisted of Flynt being fed up with the discovery of theorems and instead turning his hand to the creation of theorems irrespective of whether they are correct or not.

Flynt’s essay ends with the question of why we may think that ‘concept art’ is art at all. For Flynt it is because structure and mathematics, which both give rise to his notion of a ‘concept art’, have been taken as art themselves in some manner. However, in conclusion Flynt then implies that maybe it shouldn’t be referred to as art, that the term art is solely for the arts appealing to the emotions and his practice is some other new endeavour.

In form and content Flynt’s often bizarre essay is indicative of and presages many of the themes of conceptual art. He has it all - Language, Structure (system), paradox, indeterminacy and boredom. As such I take it that the themes and concerns present in Flynt’s essay are the organic subjects of any investigation into conceptual art. This thesis is overarchingly framed by the concerns/problematic of this essay while my entry into the philosophical problems surrounding concepts (their definition, their limit, their origin etc.) begin with concerns that arise in the writings and artworks of key conceptual artists such as Joseph Kosuth, Douglas Huebler, Adrian Piper, Lee Lozano and Sol LeWitt among others. The study has limited itself to discussing, in the main, canonical figures of conceptual art. This choice is based on two reasons: one, the

relatively easier acces to the writings, catalogues and artworks of the aforementioned canonical conceptual artists and two, to underline the point that the concept as material is a notion operative in works of conceptual art that have a greater degree of familiarity within art historical and wider discourses than say less canonical, though no less interesting and worthy of study, works from, for instance, the Global South.

A Series of Questions

A question emerges from the encounter with Flynt's essay, namely, "what does it mean to have a concept as a material (in a work of art)?" This thesis intends to be an answer to this question. This question itself proliferates into a web of philosophic, art historical and aesthetic questions that are the subject of this work.

Listed, the philosophical questions investigated are, "What is a Concept?"; "What is materialism?" or," what kind of materialism can think the concept as material?"; "Who has a concept?"; and "When is the concept?" The art historical questions: "Why the turn to the concept in art in the 1960's?" "And how?" The contemplative aesthetic question, "What are the unique or specific aesthetic or affects of concepts?" and the practical aesthetic question, "How does one work with a concept?

The thesis is divided up and structured so as to deal step by step with aspects of the questions and problems raised by the central question – "What does it mean to have a concept as a material in a work of art?"

Literature Review

The literature engaged with in order to write this thesis comes from two broad domains art and philosophy. It further crosses three domains within art writing - history, criticism and theory - and three approaches within philosophy - analytic, materialist and post-structuralist. Such a wide corpus was implied by the object of this thesis' study - the concept as material.

It was necessary in order for the thesis to proceed out of such a large corpus to lay down limits to the literature dealt with. Owing not least to demands of space and time a selection process to guide through the literature was adopted. This has in general been to focus on earlier thinkers in a field, thus Frege and Wittgenstein, as accounting for the analytic concept rather than later thinkers, such as Quine for instance, who could also have been engaged on the issue. With regard to post-structuralist thinkers the thesis has donated specific focus to Deleuze and Guattari because they give an explicit account of the concept and also offer a critique of what they see as the failures inherent in conceptual art's understanding of the concept.

In terms of philosophy, a synthetic approach was adopted, bringing together analytic, historical materialist and post-structuralist perspectives. The thesis presumes a material malleability to concepts such that they can change in their general characteristics given particular (historical) conditions. To state in brief here something outlined more fully throughout the thesis (in particular in chapter 2), the analytic model of the concept takes on aesthetic dimensions in its deployment by conceptual artists.

The literature on conceptual art itself is in some respects a rather more limited and manageable corpus. Major milestones in the literature can be plotted as follows - the writings of the early conceptualists found in critical art journals and magazines of the time such as *ArtForum* and *Studio International* and artists-led and developed journals such as *0 to 9*, *Art-Language*, and *The Fox* among many other smaller projects. Next, the art catalogues accompanying the early major shows of conceptual art - *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*, *Information*, *January Show*, etc. - offer repositories of artists' statements and early curatorial and critical framings of the practice.

Many of the early, as well as later, commentators on conceptual art are conceptual artists themselves. Outside of these we have the art critics, such as Robert Morgan and Lucy Lippard, who offered appraisals and critiques of the movement. Ursula Meyer's *Conceptual Art* of 1972 for Dutton is the first popular survey of the movement

found in English. Interestingly it will not be until the 1990s that there is a return in English to offering a survey of conceptual art with Tony Godfrey and Peter Osborne's essential volumes on the movement in 1998 and 2002 respectively. Godfrey's book on conceptual art (published by Phaidon), similarly to Meyer's 1972 publication, offers a more popular cataloguing of the movement. Godfrey's book notably extends the works spoken about in terms of conceptual art historically to Fluxus and even Situationism and updates to include contemporary post-conceptual practices from the 90s, when he was writing. This certainly provides historical background and context. Utilising the language of Kosuth for a moment we can say that Godfrey very much presents a stylistic conceptual art model. Osborne's large folio book *Conceptual Art* (2002) serves as a major categorizing of the movement. Again, the categorization here is broad in the aid of historical contextualisation though what is important is how the book thematically divides the art into several concerns, a number of which feature at different moments of this thesis i.e. "Instruction, Performance, Documentation", "Process, System, Series", "Word and Sign", "Appropriation, Intervention, Everyday" and "Politics and Ideology." Paul Wood's attempt, also in 2002, at a popular cataloguing of the movement for Tate provides a clear and succinct means of placing conceptual art in the context of problems that had arisen already in modernism early in the 20th century. He also makes use of social context in order to explain why it took until the 1960s for a conceptual art as such to develop.

The 80's and 90s' sees a number of artists' writings collected in separate volumes and the beginnings of a series of retrospective exhibitions on the period of the formation of contemporary art and conceptual art's place in it, most notably perhaps Anne Rorimer and Ann Goldstein's 1995 *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*. It be borne in mind the era of conceptual art was one in which artists were to a great degree their own most noteworthy critics. As Alberro (Rörimer/Alberro 2004) has commented this is not necessarily the case anymore. This adds to the field the

complexity of taking account of the artist's writings about their own art and then their writings about art in general, along with the work itself.

Of special mention in regard to contemporary scholarship on conceptual art is Christian Berger's 20019 collection *Conceptualism and Materiality: Matters of Art and Politics*. This collection unites the contemporary wave of scholarship on materiality (spoken of below) with the topic of conceptual art. This thesis pays special attention to the frame of this collection as a part of its first chapter concerning materialism but to briefly comment the collection can be seen to take the focus on the specific materials conceptual artists engaged to make their work. For instance, Kavior Moon will analyse Michael Asher, Robert Barry and others use of air. While commending the scholarship of this collection this present study wishes to critique the explicit avoidance of tackling the notion of the concept as a material in that volume.

The artist's own literature also attests to the particularity of each artist's understanding of conceptuality and materiality and the relation between the two. The notion then of a theory of this variety must be constructed as a theory that explains how this particularity is produced from some paradigmatic pre-supposed consensus. This pre-supposed consensus is the notion that a concept can be a part of an artwork as something that the conceptual artist must engage at some moment in the process of making and presenting the work. Conceptual artists actually grappled with the qualities of concepts and thought about these specifically in the process of creating their artworks.

The literature on materiality is filled with conflict. As Petra Lange-Berndt outlined in her Whitechapel reader on materiality the art historical literature on materiality differs across linguistic lines, with Anglo-sphere readers utilizing the works of what are termed the new materialists and object-orientated philosophers while French and German language readers engage with literature in Material and production aesthetics. Again this thesis engages with both trying to bolster the proposition of the thesis in order to bolster the argument that the concept is material in conceptual art. Chapter 1 outlines

more fully how more fertile ground is made in relation to either of these streams of research, but in brief the new materialists take on an adversarial role to the topic while Material aesthetics is mined for new ways to speak about specific materials.

It should be noted that in order to frame both the philosophical and artistic discussion of materiality I have utilised Aristotle's articulation of the problem of Matter and materiality via Richard Lee Jnr.'s analysis of it in his *The Thought of Matter* (2015). This work may seem a rather particular choice from the wave of new literature concerned with materiality that arises in the late 2000s and continues into the 2010s. However, it is to be commended as an engagement with some originary metaphysical problems with the notion of matter. It perfectly suits the tasks of this thesis by showing a moment of intersection between conceptuality/conceptualization, matter and materiality. This framing has had the benefit of placing all later statements on materiality in relationship to this nexus. This nexus is a productive one - it implies a necessary temporality to the understanding of the concept of matter via the encounter with materaility.It shows how these notions are still productive for today and it is hoped that the use made of this description of Aristotle here furthers that productive spirit in Lee Jnr.'s text.

The work of Camiel van Winkel (2011) has also been useful as a study of conceptual art coming from the vantage point of the 2010s and contains within it tables offering a ready-to-hand view of which conceptual artists were considered seminal from the start and which only gained greater recognition as time went on. This knowledge has played a role in the selection of artists for chapter 5 where Lee Lozano, a more marginal figure going by exhibition presence, features among three already attested to seminal conceptualists - Joseph Kosuth, Douglas Huebler and Adrian Piper.

Methodology

The subtitle to this thesis - "A Materialist Analysis of the Concept in Conceptual Art 1965-72" - declares its basic methodological position - materialist. This declaration of

materialism however says very little given the contested nature of the term materialism - on which chapter 1 of this thesis provides a more lengthy engagement than what can be elucidated here with regard to the methodology found in the thesis.

The focus of the thesis is a practice, namely conceptual art, and how said practice engages one specific material - the concept. The general stance of the thesis can be defined as practice based materialism, which I take to be a credible candidate for a materialist methodology post-Marx and historical materialism because it has changed the frame of questioning from one of metaphysics to one of social practice. However, and what is laid out as the point of entry in chapter 1, we still require a deep sophisticated engagement with metaphysical materialism to start our analysis of the concept as material. Such an engagement with the metaphysical sense of the concept of Matter, as I argue we find in Aristotle, can furnish us with the requisite pointers for dealing with the problematic of Matter, material and materiality. The problem of the metaphysical concept of Matter remains a presence practice based materialism is ever attempting to resolve.

The method followed in the thesis has thus sought to place artworks within the context of being products of a practice that contains within itself a confrontation or, perhaps better put, an encounter between artist and material (concept). The analysis of artworks has thus consistently aimed to come back down to this point, whether from discussion of formal characteristics or ideological aspects to the work, or other starting points.

Camiel van Winkel and Kamini Vellodi have provided two methodological insights this thesis has aimed to hold close to. Kamini Vellodi's comments to the effect that one cannot have an unphilosophical art history or aesthetics has been very persuasive and it is hoped that this thesis somehow lives up to her proposal that "The most interesting art history has always been philosophical, and always involved aesthetics."(Vellodi 2019: 7)

Similarly, Camiel Van Winkel's comments on method chime with another aspect of the approach undertaken here. Specifically when he notes that:

> Any contemporary writing practice informed by conceptualism… necessarily moves between the separate disciplines of art history, art theory and art criticism. In isolation, the tools of these disciplines risk falling into obsolescence… art history needs to be braced by theoretical and critical elements, just as art theory and criticism need to be backed up by history. Criticism and history should be theorised, history and theory criticised, theory and criticism historicized – and all this in one hybrid discursive operation. The absence of stable notions of artistic quality, historical importance and theoretical validity creates a multi-dimensional space in which the work of art must be moved around until all possible critical configurations have been exhausted. (Van Winkel 2012: 19-20)

Here Van Winkel isolates the important notion that conceptualism itself has had an acknowledged affect upon how we think art history, criticism and aesthetics should be practiced. Not only was it a movement that heralded (along with other contemporaneous phenomena) the post-medium conditions where barriers between artistic disciplines began to dissolve but it also changed how we are to write about art. We need only think of the memoir-art historical-criticism *Six Years…* written by the curator-theorist-writer-critic Lucy Lippard to underscore this point.[1]

The first two chapters of the thesis have also utilised an analysis of a conceptual artwork prior to unfolding the arguments of the chapters. This is done in order to set a work in the reader's mind prior to the theoretical elaboration. Both the works, an instantiation of Kosuth's *Second Investigation* and Mel Ramsden and Ian Burn's *Six Negatives*, utilize the table of categories of *Roget's Thesaurus* as a kind of readymade resource of concepts and conceptual form.

A tension has emerged in the project of this PhD. Namely, in what sense is the notion of the concept-as-material meant? This tension became more apparent

[1] Lippard's volume recalls her endeavours as curator and writer during the period of conceptual art. The conceptual style of its compilation consists of chronologically cutting together fragments from her archive on conceptual art to achieve a narrative of the times.

throughout the studies towards this work and in becoming apparent has transformed into a conscious theme the work explores. To explicate further the tension is between a *literal* and an *analogical* understanding of the formula 'concept-as-material.' Thus on the one hand the project may be conceived as adding to any handbook guide to artists materials with an entry on the concept. This can be seen as a more limited frame, merely writing an entry based upon empirical and historical studies of how artists used this material. On the other hand the concept-as-material implies a wider ontological framework, a philosophy which does not separate concept from material, but rather flattens both ideal and matter into one another. This framework would on the surface of it be a kind of monism similar to the new materialists. However, this may risk eliminating the Subject and practice which are argued for in chapter 1.

This tension produced by the term concept as material may have been forewarned in dismissive terms by Terry Smith, who writing in 1973 during his time active with Art & Language, noted that the notion of the concept as a kind of stuff-like material was an 'unbelievably trite' idea. To quote:

> The point of raising presentationalism, however, is to suggest the absurdity of interpreting J.K.'s Protoinvestigations and Investigations as if they were presentations of 'concepts' on analogy to presenting, say, 'finely inflected surfaces' of paint. 'Concepts' as a kind of quasi-'stuff' to be wielded on analogy to composing a painting is unbelievably trite. Yet the fact that this sort of response occurs so persistently indicates a further kind of ambiguity perhaps inherent in the manipulation of physical objects as part of a display situation. If one sets out a display according to some design principles, makes some choices which can be nothing other than 'aesthetic', then responses in terms of presentationalism, or whatever currently favoured artworld theory, will be inevitable. It then becomes debatable as to what extent should these predictable misreadings be anticipated, as to how far one should go in building into one's display defences against them." (Smith 1973: 36, 42)

Thus, Smith would most likely accuse the whole enterprise of this thesis as a misreading. Smith sees the whole notion as purely analogy. This thesis has aimed to

counteract this claim. Perhaps for now it can be responded that the line between a misreading and a reading is sometimes quite blurred and the judgement of which is which is left open to the success of the (mis)reading in bringing up an aspect that once seen retains interest. We will return to Smith's accusation of triteness at other moments in this thesis.

The 'concept' which the thesis has been chasing after and seeking to put in place in order to analyse how it works as a material has been a moving object of study. One thinks one is face-to-face with it but then in its place appears a material other than it, or even a less defined thought than a concept as such. The language of conceptual strategies has been utilised in discussion of conceptual art by scholars because of the difficulty, and possibly even undesirability, of pinning down the concept in conceptual art in a form akin to Henry Flynt or a Handbook of Artists Materials description. One sometimes fears in talking about the concept as material that one is both projecting onto and getting around the back of conceptual artists in a way that reveals unconscious processes that would never be assented to by these artists.

However, when the turn to look at the materiality of conceptual art comes around in scholarship an account of the concept as such is surely required to more fully account for the phenomena of conceptual art and what is specific to it. This is why in looking for the concept as material so much time is donated here to the tautological form of the concept and seeing this form as a transferable aspect of concepts that conceptual art works through.[2] Conceptual artworks, among other things, display the form of

[2] A clarification of terminology between the analytic and the tautologous needs to be made here. Tautology becomes a key reference point for artists of the 60's and thus I have deployed it as a model here. However, some aspects of this term needed to be elucidated. From Frank Stella to Barbara Rose (Rose 1988: 66-67) to Simón Marchán Fiz (Marchán Fiz 1994: 253-4), Benjamin Buchloh (Buchloh 1990: 124) and Joseph Kosuth (Kosuth 1993) (not to mention Ad Reinhardt), tautologies (or in Rose's case self-referentiality) become a conceptual model to read artworks of the period through. Their understanding of tautology revolves around presenting works of art that simply *are what they are*. This attitude of 'it is what it is' (borrowing from Frank Stella's famous remark) is a shared concern among minimalists and conceptualists. It coincides with their anti-image perspective and in that sense raises a concern common to this investigation of the notion of materiality.
The distinction between analytic propositions and tautologies - analytic propositions being true by virtue or their meaning, an issue of semantics, while tautologies are true by virtue of their form, an issue of syntax - is often not acknowledged by these artists and commentators. The tautology is a species of analytic proposition and what Kosuth does when speaking of art as being an analytic proposition is collapse it into

concepts - that is a basic conclusion of this research. This form is distinct from forms operating in other modes of art such as abstract expressionist or neoclassical painting for instance.

Again to clarify the aim and remit of this study - I am not hoping to change the historical record on conceptual art in terms of chronologies or on the question of what is or is not conceptual art. The thesis is in broad concurrence with Charles Harrison's view that conceptual art names a specific art movement dating from 1965-72 that was cosmopolitan in character and came about as a response to the crisis of modernist art making and art criticism. (Harrison/Römer 2004) The only addition being proposed is to say that working with concepts did happen and it implied certain historical pre-conditions that have not been fully developed in previous studies and that the speculative approach of viewing the concept-as-material can actually add to this historical understanding.

A further note needs to be made at the outset to clarify the use of the terms idea, notion and concept that populate this thesis. The thesis operates on the assumption that where a conceptual artist has talked about an idea this is interchangeable with a concept and similarly with the term notion. The exceptions to this are where there is an explicit contrast between idea and concept in an artist' writing as in, most famously, LeWitt's distinction. The notion of *the* concept as material is also purposefully made in contrast to a study of *a* concept as material, i.e. there is a level of generality to this discussion. Some particular concepts are spoken about as examples but all in aid of

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being a tautology. The important aspect to note beyond this, however, is that tautologies in their use by conceptual artists highlight a limit to representation. Thus, when I speak of the tautological form of a concept I am referring to the use of concepts that are true by definition or artworks that mimic that form - see discussion of Victor Burgin's *Photopath* (1967/69) in chapter two - in order to bring up the limits of representation and state the concept as material.

To further elaborate, this focus on tautology is an inheritance from minimalism. In Kosuth's works minimalism acquires a linguistic dimension. This is then noted to be conceptual art. Both minimalism and conceptualism are philosophical art practices in that the statement of the work itself asks us to question what the work is. As Judd's notion of specific objects outlines, we are no longer in the realm of traditional sculpture. However, they are also aesthetic for this precise reason, they try to work in that space prior to recognition. Now minimalist works work in a space prior to conceptual recognition (neither a sculpture or a painting or anything whatsoever) and conceptual artworks bring us instantly into the realm of conceptual recognition while at the same time making that recognition unstable, the immediacy of recognition, by being so blatant, is undermined.

the more general theory. There are obvious limits to any study that aims at a level of generality, by virtue of its aim it has to bypass much illuminating particularity. However, it is hoped that isolating such a general study can at some later stage be integrated into more concrete uses.

Explanation of Thesis Chapters and Structure

The thesis unfolds by examining the theoretical field and presuppositions necessary for the concept-as-material to be proposed as a form of practice.

Chapter one examines the various theoretical discourses in art history and philosophy that can provide aspects of a ground for this study. It examines the scope and limitations in metaphysical materialism and also contemporary materialism while discussing the sense in which materiality has been viewed in art history specifically in recent studies of conceptual art. The chapter argues that we must take account of how to identify the materiality of a work. It argues that one must focus upon the moments where the thought of the work breaks down, where material pierces through form. The difficulty this brings for speaking of the concept as material is raised and engaged with in chapter 2.

Having spoken about materialism, materials and materiality we move in chapter two to discuss the concept. The chapter goes through moments of change in thinking the concept throughout philosophical history. It argues for a typology of concepts, for the idea that each different concept of what a concept is does in fact offer a picture of either a specific type of concept or describe an aspect of how a type of concept works. The three types or models of the concept examined are the representational model, the Fregean and later analytic model and the Deleuzian model of the concept. Some aspects of these types of concepts discussed are representational form, tautological form and concept as event. This chapter also offers a point about the aesthetic aspect of concepts through a reading of Wittgenstein's early model of the concept.

Chapter three zooms out to examine again the types of concepts conceptual art utilizes using a broadly historical materialist framework. It is a discussion that begins with look at Buchloh's ‘aesthetics of administration’ thesis. It then zooms out to discuss the notion of the ideological concept and how conceptual artists worked with concepts they identified specifically as ideological. The third and final section of this chapter places conceptual art in the context of the thesis of real abstraction developed out of Marx by Alfred Sohn-Rethel as a means to understand how the form of concepts arises out of the social practice of exchange. The chapter argues that taking a historical materialist frame further than that deployed by Buchloh in the aesthetics of administration thesis, by utilising the theory of real abstraction, allows us to speak directly about the unique formal features of concepts and how they, as a material, crystallise aspects of certain social forms.

Chapter four examines the relation between words, images and concepts in conceptual art. It does this by placing the relationship between the three in conceptual art into the larger context of experimental twentieth century art practices which aimed to bring the relation between the three together in new ways. The ways or models of word, image, concept interaction that I use in a mode of contrast and comparison to one another are the ideogrammatic, the calligrammatic and the diagrammatic. It argues that conceptual art’s model of relating these three points has most in common with a diagrammatic model of interaction.

The final chapter makes an argument for reading certain developments in the practice of four conceptual artists - Joseph Kosuth, Douglas Huebler, Lee Lozano and Adrian Piper - as displaying the artist grappling with the concept as material. It finds this grappling with the concept as material takes place especially around the notion of abstraction and the abstract qualities of concepts. It argues that each artist developed their own ways of understanding abstraction and that this was their technique for making works that utilised concepts as materials.

The work's short conclusion returns back to a point made in this introduction concerning the possibility of the concept being included in a kind of handbook of art materials. A possible entry for this imagined handbook is presented in light of the discussion of the five chapters as the concluding product of the thesis and its contribution to knowledge.

CHAPTER 1

Matter, Materialism and Materiality in Philosophy, Art History and Conceptual Art

Introduction

Beginning with a discussion of a concrete work of conceptual art, Kosuth's *Class 4. Matter 1. Matter in General (Art as Idea as Idea)* (1968), this chapter analyses what materialism is taken to be in both philosophy and the history of art. It utilizes both historical and contemporary discussions on the issue to do so. The main argument is that the way in which the triad of matter, materiality and materialism have been theorised in the history of philosophy and art historical investigations set up a framework to analyse the concept as material. This chapter, and chapter 2, outline, from different starting points, the theoretical presuppositions necessary to think of the concept as material. The end product of the investigation in this chapter is that the moment when thought breaks down is the moment when the materiality of matter comes into view. To understand the concept as material we will thus have to think about it in relation to this moment in the later chapters of this thesis.

To get to this conclusion we will have to follow a few of the paradoxes that the notion of matter and materiality give rise to. The problem of Matter in Aristotle, materialism's shifting of gears from a metaphysical to a practical mode and the questions raised by the contemporary 'Material Turn' are all analysed as part of this pursuit. The discourse on materiality in art history is analysed as a necessary fleshing out of these philosophical debates. Throughout, conceptual art is actively read to engage and crystalise the problems and debates held in this theoretical history. Finally, the question of conceptual art and the dematerialization of art thesis is engaged at the end in light of the problems the chapter raises.

In terms of structure the chapter has a tripartite division. In part 1 I look at the use of matter, materiality and materialism within philosophy, highlighting a number of tensions that will re-emerge in part 2 where we come to the art historical use of such terms.

Thirdly, I look at the unique ways in which conceptual art – in terms of its works, its artists and its theoreticians/critics – deconstructed these terms, paying specific attention to the topic of dematerialisation of art, a thesis synonymous with conceptual art. The selection criteria for this discussion proceeds from trying to put in place the concerns of materialists, and themes within materialism that are most applicable to the concerns at work in conceptual art. Thus, I outline a number of paradoxes and loose ends of materialism, unresolved problems and problems to be re-worked, but this does not mean they are exhaustive. Rather the discussion is towards supplying the reader with the sketch of a historical and conceptual context for later discussions of conceptual artists' use of concepts as materials. The second chapter of this thesis follows a similar formula. In order to better show how I mix together art historical and philosophical discourses in the latter chapters of this thesis I have reasoned that showing the parts separate in the early chapters may aid the reader in following what parts of the different disciplines I am pulling together.

All this presentation of viewpoints concerning materialism and materiality is made to bolster the fundamental argument of this chapter that in taking account of how to identify the materiality at play in an artwork we must focus upon the moments where the thought of the work breaks down, where material pierces through form. This will set us up to encounter notions of the concept in chapter two and how the concept can be understood as material in later chapters. Thus, in what follows, I isolate a constitutive problem in the concept of materiality that arises in metaphysical discourse and see how this problem leads to a number of different resolutions. There is a difference but also an overlap between the philosophical concept of materialism and the art historical focus on materiality. I wish to take advantage of this overlap to draw the two disciplines into dialogue, however, where warranted, I note possible divergences.

After presenting the broader metaphysical framing of the question I am better able to articulate the move I am making in this analysis, namely the move to view the concept as a material. Pre-empting somewhat the metaphysics of form and matter that

will be presented below one can propose the analogy that what I am doing is a speculative attempt to move the concept from the ‘Form’ box to the ‘Matter’ box of metaphysical categories and catalogue its results. Rather, it is not merely my speculative attempt but I argue one played out in the actual practice of conceptual art.

In summary, the following chapter pieces together a way of speaking about matter, materiality and materialism that aids the understanding of the role of the concept this thesis argues, in this specific instance, is a material in conceptual art. It thus crosses much terrain where we speak of the otherness of matter to thought, the resistance of materiality to the image, the centrality of practice to materialism and the accounts of materiality in conceptual art that the dematerialization thesis gives us.

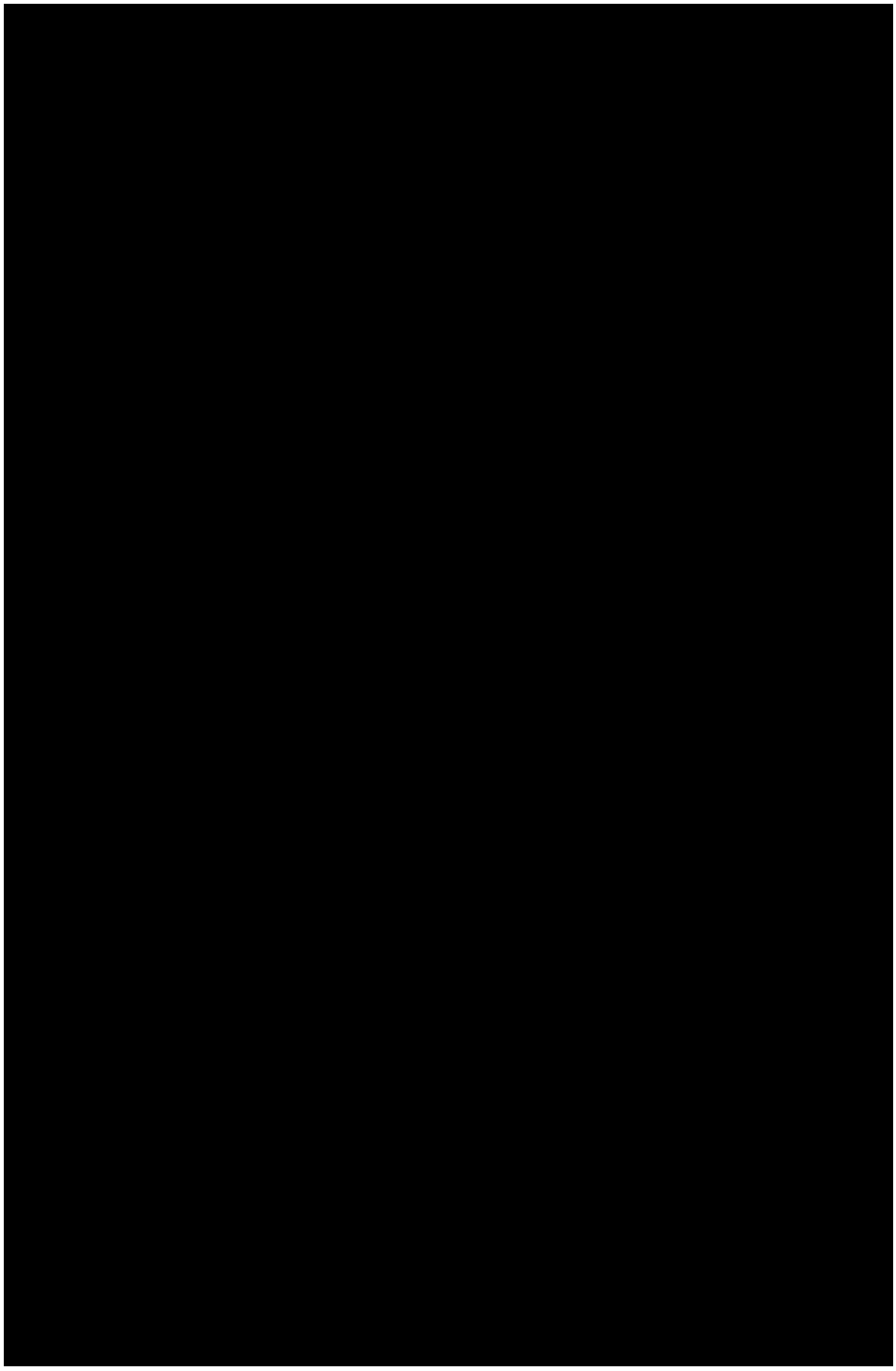

Fig. 1 Joseph Kosuth, Photograph for presentation of *Matter in General (Art as Idea as Idea)* (1968)

Class 4. Matter 1. Matter in general

A section of New Mexico highway, U.S., 1969: The drivers and passengers of vehicles zooming down the highway look out their window to see a white billboard. Written on it in large black type:

"I. MATTER IN GENERAL
374. UNIVERSE
375. MATERIALITY
376. IMMATERIALITY
377. MATERIALS
378. CHEMICALS
379. OILS, LUBRICANTS
380. RESINS"

A puzzling proposition that leads to a sense of bemusement, maybe even anger, among the vehicle's occupants.

Kosuth's presentation of *Class 4. Matter 1. Matter in general (Art as Idea as Idea)* (1968) involved the artist buying advertising space on inter-state highway billboards in New Mexico upon which he displayed categorized listings of different materials coming under the heading of 'Matter-in-General.' This heading itself branches down into subheadings of listed items from number 374 'Universe' to 380 'Resins'.

The use of the billboard features as part of the larger series of works Kosuth was making entitled *Art as Idea as Idea* itself part of his *Second Investigation* (1968-74). These works made extensive use of dictionary definitions of specific words the artist wished to investigate as propositions for artworks. Conceptually what is brought forward in this piece is a leveling of the different terms. Under the large heading – 'Matter-in-General' we find catalogued the universe, immateriality, resins and

lubricants. Here, the earthly and the cosmic inhabit the same space when thought under the rubric of ‘matter in general.’

Following one after the other we can let our mind notice a process at play. Perhaps we can offer a preliminary narration of the ‘theory‘ at work/working in this artwork. The universe gives way to the stuffness of what inhabits it – materiality. This is then negated – immateriality. Then we get our general noun (our species) then a further specification to a type of material (a material noun designating a substance) – chemicals – here we change plane to a formation of chemicals – ‘oils, lubricants.’ Then we end, remaining on the same level but moving sideways to a more ‘hardened’ and/or viscous substance– resin. Note also that the listed items from 377 to 380 are all in the plural, this avoids mixing up 377 and 378 with their adjectival form and signals the generality of these headings themselves – there are further specific types of materials, oils and resins, etc.

Something jars when we read the numbers running from ‘374’ to ‘380’, the prefix on each entry. We have started into a series already underway. Something came before the ‘universe’, entries 1 to 373. The pattern we have isolated, how each term flows onto the next becomes unsettled. For one, we have to project the series pattern backwards. A further question, does this series finish? Is it finished at resins – the last material? Do we push the pattern forward? The missing entries – 1-373 – seem to create a space large enough to undermine the coherence of any pattern in the sample we are given.

The billboard presents a category via the act of listing. This act of listing and classification is similar to the one Foucault remarks upon at the beginning of the *Order of Things*, in description of an encounter with Jorge Luis Borges’ 1942 essay “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins” and its famous (and fictitious) description of an ancient Chinese encyclopaedia, the “Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge.” (Foucault 2002: xvi-xviii) In Borges’ story that so fascinates Foucault, the compilers of an encyclopaedia have found a way to organise all the creatures found in the world. They come up with a taxonomy of 14 categories detailed in this encyclopaedia.

Included in this taxonomy are types such as, “those belonging to the Emperor”, “embalmed ones”, “trained ones”, “suckling pigs”, “mermaids (or sirens)”, “fabled ones”, “stray dogs”, “those included in this classification”, “those that tremble as if they were mad”, “innumerable ones”, “those that from afar look like flies”, “and “et cetera”, etc. Something jars with us here again, something is revealed to our thought in the categories animals are divided into and their relation to one another. As Foucault remarks: “What transgresses the boundaries of all imagination, of all possible thought, is simply that alphabetical series (a,b,c,d) which links each of those categories to all the others.” (Foucault 2002: xvii) The list contains and is already a form of thought. What we can take away from Foucault’s description here is that these listings presume a certain space of knowledge, an apriori shape to what knowledge is like, as well as the fact that these acts are material. They instantiate that picture of knowledge.

The listing and categorization at play here are also processes of compilation and striation. The simple act of letting one term fall under another opens up a way of thinking, an avenue into a concept. The categorization, the ordering, itself thinks, or rather is itself a form of pre-thought. The thinking that takes place before conscious human thought approaches it. The problem is that here it looks like, as in Borges encyclopaedia, we do not gain any knowledge. However, if we look to how the work undoes its concept – how *Class 4. Matter 1. Matter in general (Art as Idea as Idea)* undoes ‘Matter’ – we can maybe begin to see that the work itself grapples with the constitutive problems of its concept (‘Matter-in-general’).

The (incomplete) picture of matter the work provides speaks to the philosophical history of materialism, one where the concept of matter has proven to be a problematic unruly notion. In this work the concept of ‘Matter-in-General’ itself undermines the notion of categorization. This is where the tension in the relation of conceptual art to materialism resides. The use of concepts in artworks ends in placing the concept prior to all other materials in order for the work to be grasped, yet what the work itself speaks about is matter as such.

I - The Problem of Matter in Philosophy

Matter-in-General

When we talk about materialism in philosophy there are a number of avenues we can follow. We could, for instance, decide to foreground metaphysical questions with regard to the term 'Matter', or we could look to the scientific/mechanical materialist philosophies of the radical enlightenment (La Mettrie, Holbach, Helvetius) or perhaps settle into a Marxist perspective and talk about the social conditions of philosophy (how the mode of production leads to specific thought-forms).[3] In a way all these discussions are important (and we shall return to them shortly), however, in order to begin in dialogue with conceptual art let us return to those tensions at play in our preamble discussing Joseph Kosuth's billboard and pick our lines of entry up from there.

This large heading 'Matter-in-General'? What is it?

A reply to this problem, that may aid us here, comes early in the story of the history of philosophy with Aristotle. Matter can be seen as one of the four causes of things. The four causes being – efficient cause, a thing is because of its maker; formal, the form in which the thing is is the cause of the thing being that thing; teleological, the thing comes to what it is in order to fulfil its function or purpose; and material, a thing is because of what it is made of. However, as Aristotle recognises the material cause is uniquely distinct from the other three causes by concerning itself not with the *why* of the thing but rather with the *that* of the thing. (Lee Jr 2016: 21) Matter designates that by which a thing is seen to be a *that* thing, it is thus we speak of a material cause of things. (Aristotle 2004: 115 and 208) It is a principle of their individuation. This chair or that one? They may look the same but as separately individuated things they are materially different.

[3] The latter of these options is in fact utilised in chapter 3 of this thesis.

The difference between individual things, as distinct from that between species or types of things, relies on some material difference, a difference in the literal stuff that they are made of. There can be two bronze statues of the same form, that have the same function, and be made by the same creator, but what distinguishes them is the bronze in each which differs from the other, they are not exactly materially the same even if they are of the same type of material.[4] Despite these characteristics Matter remains somewhat of a problem for Aristotle.

Aristotle does not construct his theory of matter out of nowhere, rather he constructs it, and its proper place in a philosophical system, via three lines of critique set against Thales and the pre-Socratics, Plato and the Sophists. Firstly, there is a critique of Thales' theory of matter as water as primary substance, secondly, there is a critique of Plato's theory of matter as passively subservient to ideal forms, and thirdly, we have a critique of the Sophists' focus on the particularity or materiality of accidental features.

Thales is considered the first philosopher in the 'Western tradition' because he asks a specific type of question. He asked what is the cause of all that is? He was not content to simply think of all that was present to him as being sufficient but rather sought to answer why what was present to him was present. His answer was that underlying the perceptible forms is one substance – that of water. The actual answer given is secondary to the fact that this mode of questioning was launched. The pre-Socratics focus on identifying a primary substance of reality resulted in describing what the world was made of with speculations derivative of real world materials, or selected from the perceptible world of materials or elements. (Guthrie 1967: 25) They have thus under certain readings been counted as early materialists. (Lange 1925, Novack 1965, Dolar 2020) A substance, in technical terms something existing independent of anything else (non-derived), is identified in each of them with

[4] For a full account of individuation we would have to include a discussion of the role of space and time in this process.

something basically physical and outside of rationality whether it be water for Thales, fire for Heraclitus, or air for Anaximenes.

Anaximander provides a break that is important here when he chooses the notion of *apeiron* as primary stuff. With the notion of *aperion* we get the idea of a state of matter prior to the states in which we come across it. As Guthrie states:

> …he imagined the first state of matter to be an undifferentiated mass of enormous extent, in which the antagonistic element or their properties were not yet distinct, though it contained them as it were in a latent of potential form, a complete fusion. (Guthrie 1967: 27)

Later pre-Socratics such as Empedocles believed not in one material but in a mix, using the analogy of the artist mixing pigments. He held that the things of the world were a mix of the four primary elements. (Lejewski 1965) The varying degree of the amount in each mixture is what is capable of giving rise to the innumerable diversity of things in the world. By stating that they are made from the primary matter however he is also stating implicitly that matter already contains its form. This is something rejected by Aristotle. It is why he calls matter a potentiality but not an actuality - it requires a Form to be actualized.

Plato held a view of matter as passive and receiving Form. One way in which Plato illustrates his notion of matter is in the scene in *The Sophist* where Socrates speaks of the fight between the Giants and the Gods. The giants are those who hold that only what can be seen and touched is real, while the gods retort that it is in fact the intelligible incorporeal forms which are truly real, the rest is just a flow of becoming with no stability.[5] Later commentators have noticed that these positions can be mapped

[5] Here is the relevant passage from *The Sophist* detailing Plato's views:
"- Why, this dispute about reality is a sort of Battle of Gods and Giants. One side drags everything down to earth, literally laying hands on rocks and trees, arguing that only what can be felt and touched is real, defining reality as body, and if anyone says that something without body is real, they treat him with contempt and will not listen to another word."
"- Yes, they are clever fellows; I've met a lot of them."
"- So their opponents in the height of the unseen defend their position with great skill, maintaining forcibly that true existence consists in certain intelligible, incorporeal forms, describing the so-called

onto the distinction between idealists (gods) and materialists (giants), the former reaches for ideal forms and the heavens, the latter for the stuff of this earth, water, fire, stone etc. (Novack 1965: 220) This is a prescient point for the history of materialism – its history is intimately tied to that 'terrific battle always going on' between its positions and those of the idealists.[6] Aristotle rejects the transcendent realm of Forms proposed by Plato and as such gives more importance to the notion of matter within his system.

For Aristotle, the Sophists stand out by trying to found a science of the accidental. They focus on accidental features as key to the being of the thing. For Aristotle, this will always come up short because there is no common measure of this (Aristotle 2004: 160) What Aristotle is pre-figuring in his critique of the Sophists is the seeming necessary limitations to the knowledge of matter based on the qualities of materiality itself – its utter particularity and contingency. Matter at its most material, if we can phrase it that way, is singular, it has the sense of being by itself.[7]

While it can be hard to discern what precisely Aristotle's position regards matter was (owing to the nature of the composition of the *Metaphysics* - essentially a series of notes for lectures that may or may not have been intended as a book study of the topic) scholars have nonetheless noted the problem of the indeterminacy of matter as a theme in Aristotle.[8] (Lee Jr 2016) Some give it an ontological significance, others a logical one. (Lubkowicz 1965: 96) At one moment in the *Metaphysics* while trying to define Matter Aristotle states:

> I call "matter" that which of itself is neither a something nor a this-much nor assigned to any other of the categories by which being is determined. For there is something to which each of

truth of the others as a mere flowing sort of becoming, not reality at all, and smashing their so-called bodies to pieces, On this issue there is a terrific battle always going on." (quoted in Novack 1965: 220)

[6] Plato's views on matter also hit up off his aesthetic views. Consider, for instance, the famous passages against artists in *The Republic*, where their work is denigrated for working with the copy at a greater remove from the actual form.

[7] There is a possibility of speaking about the accidental as not concerning matter but rather circumstantial features of a thing but we shall bypass this debate here.

[8] Collingwood talks about the scattered nature of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in his own book titled *Metaphysics*.

> these is predicated, whose *einai* differs from that of each of the predicates (for the predicates other than substance are predicated of substance, while the latter is predicated of matter). Therefore, the ultimate (namely, subject) is of itself neither a something nor a this-much nor any other of these (namely, of the determinations of being); nor yet is it their negations, for these also will belong to it by accident. (1029a 20-26) (in *Metaphysics zeta*) (translation quoted from Lubkowicz 1965: 97)

Again, Aristotle re-articulates that matter is connected to the fact *that* a thing is rather than to the essential determination of *what* that thing is. Here Aristotle is hitting upon a further problem of matter, the problem of thinking matter as such. Aristotle needs to focus on thinking matter-as-such because he wants to find out whether it can be a reliable candidate to be substance. However, in order to be substance the thing must be capable of being thought separate to the particular instantiation. This seems to be problematic in relation to matter. As Lee Jr. explains:

> …whenever we turn our thought to matter, what emerges is not matter in its materiality, but a form. The matter of the statue is bronze, that is something that we grasp in its what-it-was-being. As soon as the form emerges under our thoughtful gaze, the bronze as matter slips away. However, even while we grasp the form "bronze," we also recognize that it has its own matter. As we turn our attention to the copper and tin, we repeat the same problem again. There is always a function of matter, which I have been calling materiality, that is other than the form and is, consequently, not grasped when one grasps the form of the matter of a given particular thing. The very indication that there is matter begins this analytic process that, if it goes without end, will not make matter unknowable but will also call into question the very notion of form. (Lee Jr. 2016: 24)

Matter is then also, when one continues to think about it, not purely actual but rather always potential for we do not have any bronze or any wood away from its encapsulation in a specific form, thus despite being the source of actual differentiating of one individual thing from another thing of which it shares the same Form it is also when envisioned 'by itself', as it were, indeterminate potential. Thus, on one level,

‘Matter’ is the most concrete, at another a pure abstraction. Its status as a pure abstraction is not just guaranteed by the fact we think it, and all our thoughts and concepts are abstract in this way, but because it is the concept which designates non-conceptuality, the particular differentiating feature that cannot be thought.

Matter does not belong to any of the categories by which being is determined. Thus it seems to play a secondary role in Aristotle’s philosophy. However, as Lee Jnr notes, there is productiveness to the paradox that revolves around thinking matter as underlying stuff. It cannot be thought away from its instantiation in some particular *this* thing. Lee Jr. concludes that “this is nothing less than the errancy that belongs to the thinking of matter.” (Lee Jr. 2016: 33)

Our key points to be extracted from this are, a) there is no such thing as matter as ultimate substance/no clear definitional concept of matter-in-general is possible b) No science of the accidental is possible, c) Matter can be seen as the cause of the differentiation between individuals of the same species/type, the individuation of things has to do with the fact that they are not made of the completely same stuff, d) Matter is dynamic.

Matter, or material cause, provides a reason for the *that there is* of a thing, however it does not account for the *why* in Aristotle’s estimation. (Lee Jr. 2016: 13) In order to understand the materially given thing we have to move away from its materiality as given and account for its coming to be. To think materiality is thus problematic, one, on account of trying to grasp in concept what is non-conceptual and two, on account of being immediately *what is* but not accounting in that immediacy for the *why* of its being. The first problem has us come up against an inner limitation of concepts, on the second we come up against a limitation of materiality (that *what is* is incapable of offering an immediate account of itself but must be articulated via a detour of theory).[9]

[9] The ambiguity of Aristotle’s description of matter in his metaphysics has been read as an especially powerful ambiguity by Ernst Bloch who argues that the concept opens up a terrain for a struggle between idealist and materialist struggle over its interpretation. Bloch’s argument is that by making Matter into something productive and dynamic Aristotle opens up the possibility of a dynamic materialist philosophy. However, Bloch notes this possibility was not taken up in Western Medieval Scholasticism

Here in Aristotle we have a few basic coordinates laid out – the notion of matter being insufficient in and of itself to explain the world; a pre-emptive critique of materialism; and, the most importantly for thinking the concept as material the *unthinkability* of materiality (owing to its being unfit as the object for any science – it is too contingent).[10] Kosuth's Matter-in-General turns out to be not just problematic as it is presented on the billboard, with its incomprehensible category, but actually in its very concept 'Matter-in-General' becomes a problem rather than an ontologically clear category, something we cannot speak about as existing without coming up against the limits of the methods of our thought. This *coming up against the limits* is, as we are

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and instead was only preserved as a form of what he calls, 'left Aristotleanism' in the philosophies of Avicenna and Averroes. (Bloch 2018)

[10] The use of Aristotle here is as an avenue into the connection between the problem of Matter in metaphysical discourse and the more everyday notions of materials and their materiality. Some may find this link contentious. However, I argue that the important problem in the metaphysical concept of matter is that it implies something that is non-thought and which we must encounter as a 'thisness' set against our conceptual notions about that which we confront. Matter is the avenue in because it is not given to thought in the same way as other metaphysical notions of form or essence are. The chain of connections I am making can be articulated as the proposition that to know Matter is to encounter materiality and consequently in practice to learn to use materials. Everything hinges on the moment of materiality in this account.

Further to this separating out what is being attempted in this thesis from some alternative approaches may be helpful. The materialism that is being developed here is one that is centred on practice and an encounter of a subject with something that confronts it as an externality with a moment analogous to the moment of 'thisness' of materiality in Aristotle. What differentiates this materialism from realism? Why assert the materiality rather than the reality of the concept?

Firstly, the materialism I use has to be distinguished from physicalism - the assertion that concepts are spatio-temporal objects made of atoms is not the claim I am making. That claim has very little to do with the kind of materiality that is relevant to art historical study. For instance there is not much that a physicalist approach could add to talking about paintings or that paintings could add to a physicalist approach. It is likewise with the case of conceptual art - physicalism neither illuminates or is illuminated itself by the encounter with conceptual art. On the other hand, bringing together conceptual art and materialism, in what is at first an abstract and indeterminate encounter (which materialism?, what conceptual art?), produces something beneficial to both. Namely, it helps the moment of materiality be isolated via a comparison of art historical and philosophical discourses and helps to isolate an important aspect of conceptual art and how it can be seen to operate with this moment present just as it has in art prior to conceptual art. From this the analysis can illuminate the concept as material and the consequent demands this places upon the artist.

Secondly, and flowing from this, while I am asserting the external reality of the concept, via being embedded in social practices and present as an external socio-historical product, realism does not accomplish the task as its concerns are more metaphysical than the present concerns which are metaphysical only insofar as historical practice is seen as a metaphysical foundation.

Lastly, the materiality of the concept has validity over the reality of the concept as a descriptor because it focuses on the way in which a subject has to work with this particular quality. Asserting the reality of the concept does not stress the encounter which makes a demand on the artist. The contrast drawn between image and materiality does not ring through with the terminology of reality where both image and support both have a reality.

about to outline, generative. Two shifts in thinking materialism that emerge from its history can be argued to be logical implications of the prior instability of this category - shifts to practice based models of materialism and materialism as being an epistemological as much as a metaphysical problem.

Two Shifts in the History of Materialism: Practice and Epistemology

As a philosophical term 'materialism' may only be coined in the 18th century but there are many moments prior to this that define the history of materialism in philosophy. (Wolfe 2016: 2; Dolar 2020) From ancient Greek materialism (atomism) to Lucretius, from an Avicennean materialism coming out of Aristotelianism in the middle ages to materialism as Renaissance humanism, French Enlightenment Materialism to 19th century materialism – mechanical, positivist and Marxist – and beyond (with more besides) materialism has a long and diverse history. Aristotle is considered more of an idealist in accounts of the history of materialism (Lange 1925: 78) though his philosophy is technically a hylomorphism that is a type of matter-and-form approach, precisely because it articulates the problem of matter and materiality.[11] We begin specifically with a thinker who is not considered a full materialist for a purpose. Namely, that Aristotle has his reasons for not being a pure materialist (or atomist as was the materialism of the time) and that reason is linked to the above articulated insufficiency and indeterminate nature of the category of matter. Now we can proceed to how Aristotle's problem is generative and can be seen in relation to two shifts in two crucial ways for later materialisms, all of which are relevant to our purposes here of investigating what may materiality be in order that it could constitute the materiality of the concept as material.

To continue, Aristotle's quest is ontological, i.e. its focus is on Being and the place of the substance matter in that. The ontological questions concerning matter have led to

[11] This issue of placing Aristotle within this divide all comes down to framing and who he is being discussed in relation to - set against Democritus he is more of an idealist, placed against Plato he is leaning towards materialism.

great debates throughout the history of philosophy and are one way, through the paradigm of an idealist-materialist split, that the history of philosophy has been understood. Materialists, we are told, claim that all that *is* is matter, idealists hold an opposite thesis, that what fundamentally *is* is idea or ideal forms of some kind. This is a blunt tool, and even a broken tool, to bring to the history of philosophy for if the claim is meant to cover all there is then each side of the debate merely mirrors each other and the question is one of semantics. However, it does highlight something, namely that the dividing line between who is an idealist and who is a materialist, in this schema, has to do with ontology. In order to understand the new materialist turn of the 21st century which can be read in many instances as a return to ontological arguments we shall look at two crucial shifts in the position that materialists can hold for themselves that move us into different territory to that of ontological claims. These two shifts concern i) practice and ii) epistemology.

Firstly, in relation to practice, we can lean upon Marx in his 'Theses on Feuerbach':

> The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the thing (*Gegenstand*), reality, sensuousness is conceived only in the form of the *object* (*Objekt*) or of *contemplation* (*Anschauung*) but not as human sensuousness activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in contra-distinction to materialism, was developed by idealism- but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects really differentiated from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective (*gegenstandliche*) activity… Hence he does not grasp, the significance of "revolutionary," of "practical-critical" activity. (Marx 1971: 283)

What is being articulated here is that one can understand materialism in a reflective sense, as being about matter, about something fundamentally static, or one can focus on human sensuous activity and how that transforms the world. This focus on how activity is objective is an inheritance from, as Marx states, idealism. Since this thesis it has been possible to argue for a distinction within materialism between those who

reflect upon matter as an entity that is reality and those who see materialism as tied to process and practice.[12] The important point is that the discussion on matter has an active part - the part of what the human subject is doing that brings this or that aspect of matter into focus and consequently that in thinking matter we also have to reflect on a practical subject that engages materials. This introduction of a subject brings us to our second shift concerning epistemology.

Secondly, with regards to epistemology, and perhaps ironically, the grounds on which materialism was said to be overcome by its 19th Century chronicler Friedrich Albert Lange reveal new avenues for defining what materialism is. Lange's 1873 volume *The History of Materialism*, the first such philosophical survey of materialism, is a sympathetic critique of its object. In his view, despite playing a commendable role in defending science against religion, materialism is ultimately a self-defeating ontology once it is confronted with the findings of contemporary (to Lange's time) science. The key issue for Lange is that empirical research into the constitution of our sense organs gives an empirical basis to Kant's articulation of the transcendental subject and its constitutive role in the ordering and presentation of our perceptions. Empirical science has shown how the thing in itself, or the external stimuli, that we perceive are transformed by our own sense organs. In light of these discoveries Lange's position ends up being one of agnosticism or combination, materio-idealism being one term he used to describe his position. (Stack 1983: 97)

This is a new paradox to materialism though it is also a paradox to the critiques of materialism as well, in that they self-admittedly rely on holding onto materialist presumptions in their scientific pursuits in order to then use these findings to undermine materialism. The effect of such a kind of critique seems to be evident into the early twentieth century if we look to 1909 and Lenin's *Materialism and*

[12] One could say that while this distinction is articulated by Marx it is also a source of tension within Marxism itself. Thus for instance the question of whether Engels reverts, especially in his *Dialectics of Nature*, to such a reflective view on matter away from practice is unresolved. The early Georg Lukács for instance saw Engels' move as mechanical, and reflective materialism, one that took out of view the sensuous action of the human. (Lukács 1971: xix)

Empirio-Criticism. This problematic volume is illuminating in this context for the terrain it seeks to fight the battle for a defence of (marxist) materialism on. The innovation of this polemic is to staunchly try and argue that what defines materialism is taking a certain position with regard to epistemological issues, i.e. that instead of making the ontological claim that all that *is* is matter, the claim is that human thoughts are determined by an objective reality existing outside the mind. (Lenin 1927: 116) Lenin's theory is often considered crude and its terms seem to be implying a naïve realism or reflection theory of consciousness (i.e. that "I am capable of seeing the world outside me as it is in itself") and this is the problematic legacy of the book. This may be owing to Lenin's polemical mode of expressing himself which yields a tension when trying to articulate what is a more subtle notion derived from Engel's Hegel-inspired view that knowledge is a process. Knowledge as process would imply that a snapshot of our knowledge does not reflect the world as it is (absolutely) at any one moment, but that the process of knowledge production is always circling around the problem of coming-to-know the world as it is. It may never reach this (it cannot do so for constitutive reasons) but knowledge is never idle knowledge disconnected from a world, a set of problems and desires to know. Here the epistemological question loops around and encounters a practice-centred version of materialism.

We are engaging in this exegesis with an aim towards furnishing an understanding of materials, materiality and materialism that is adequate to the task of a non-trite examination of the concept as a material. In pursuing this end it would be remiss not to raise contemporary challenges to the above outlined features of materialism that can be found in the contemporary resurgence of materialism in the form of new materialisms. We shall find that some aspects of this new development concur with aspects of materialism we have outlined while others diverge. It is thus to these developments that we now turn.

The Materialist Turn - Innovations and Arguments of New Materialisms

All that has been said so far relates to what could be called varieties of 'old' materialism – metaphysical materialism, historical materialism, dialectical materialism. Historically materialism, from the Atomists to the French materialists to the Marxists, was seen as an important but minor or marginal position in the history of philosophy, idealism dominated. Today we can propose that that scenario has changed somewhat: since the mid-2010s a move towards a discussion of the importance of materialist positions within philosophy has been taking place in what has been dubbed 'the Material turn.' This turn to materialism in philosophy is also concomitant with a renewed sensitivity to materials in art history and art practice. (Berger 2019: 3) So much so that Diane Coole has noted that the influence of new materialists in the visual arts may correspond to "moves against Conceptualism in as much as its language- and text-based approach is renounced." (Coole 2015: 41) As a consequence of this we observe a return to matter in order to "explore immanent, elusive, and reclusive, properties of materials, working with chemical or biophysical qualities in response to degrading or emergent forms and their provocative invitations." (Coole 2015: 41) Christian Berger has proposed that the shared concern between the materialist turn in art history and that of the new materialists in philosophy is rooted in the common theme of foregrounding a resistant and productive materiality. (Berger 2019: 8)

Slavoj Žižek commenting upon the plethora of today's materialists identifies four materialist models of thought that are dominant today – "…1) reductivist "vulgar" materialism (cognitivism, Neo-Darwinism); 2) the new wave of atheism which aggressively denounces religion (Hitchens, Dawkins, et al.); 3) whatever remains of "discursive materialism" (Foucauldian analyses of discursive material practices); 4) Deleuzian "new materialism." (Žižek 2014: 5) Žižek's critique of all these contenders to be the 'true' materialism of the day need not concern us here; we need only note that materialism has become a dominant rubric of theoretical thought in our time.

The subject of new materialisms is vast and there are many attempts to try and grapple with its diversity, to try and put some categorizing framework in place to

understand the different schools and what unites and what divides them. Coole and Frost, in their influential volume, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (2010), for instance isolates the trend as compiled in their book as consisting of three aspects or themes – 1, an acknowledgement of the need to view matter and materials as something with their own agency; 2, an interest in the question of life prompted by an engagement with biology; and 3, a return to questions of political economy. (Coole and Frost 2010: 7) It is also the case that these are materialisms that come after post-structuralism, take on board the de-centring of the subject and build up ontological descriptions based around engagements with contemporary physics which offers an account of matter unavailable to prior materialists such as Marx, Nietzsche and Freud.

Gamble, Hanan and Nail, also commenting on where to place new materialism in the lineage of materialisms argue for a subdivision of the history of materialism into an Ancient, exemplified by the Greek Atomists tradition and the thinking of Atoms and the Void, a Modern, the age of Descartes and Hobbes where Force becomes an external cause to Matter, and then the Current New Materialist trend which in general sees matter as somehow vital (i.e. the theme of the agency of matter articulated in varying ways). (Gamble etal. 2019: 113-115) Their account is self-admittedly schematic and heuristic as they also supplement this division with what they term Failed Materialism, a materialism that looks to the constantly re-iterated failure of discourse to grasp the materiality of things or bodies, a tendency they characterize as exemplified in the work of Jacques Lacan and Judith Butler. (Gamble etal.: 2019: 116-118) Further in surveying the territory of contemporary materialism they propose a tripartite division of New Materialism into *Vitalist*, post-Deleuzian inspired materialism, *Negative*, encompassing Speculative Realism and OOO which respectively place contingency or withdrawnness as the key focus of the materialism, and the *Performative or Pedetic* Materialism of Karan Barad and Vicky Kirby (the materialism which they promote as most robust to carry the mantle of materialism today). (Gamble etal. 2019: 118-123) They also reveal

that each of these current strands relies on a subterranean materialist history of some sort. (Gamble etal. 2019: 118-123)

A common aim of the new materialists is what they view as a reified and static conception of matter in prior philosophical materialisms, Marxism included. Some commentators, such as Terry Eagleton, take a sceptical view of the developments happening in new materialism. His criticism, which unfortunately does not engage in a sustained manner with its subject, still hinges on two valid points – 1) the ideas underlying new materialism are not particularly new, and 2) their claim to being materialist claims in the first place are in doubt. (Eagleton 2016: 10-11) All Eagleton sees is on the one hand a re-packaging of Derridean post-structuralism, with matter taking the place of the text with very little difference in the substance of the thought, and one the other aspect a vitalism that moves close to mysticism. (Eagleton 2016: 10-11) Similar criticisms to these are also made by Keston Sutherland and Susanne Lettow who both highlight the reductive reading of Marxism employed in the work of some new materialists. (Sutherland 2020; Lettow 2017)

There may be some merit in this, especially if we follow Pheng Cheah's outlining of the distinctions between a dialectical materialism and a new materialism non-dialectical materialism influenced by Derrida and Deleuze. For Cheah Derrida too wished to do away with the substantive notion of matter. (Cheah 2010: 72-73) His main point being that Matter was itself an idealist notion. Here we can see that we are still in the territory that Aristotle first laid down except flipped. While Aristotle thought the notion of matter-in-general unthinkable, Derrida's problem is that it precisely makes us think that it is thinkable and already known. It excises the alterity that is at the heart of the notion of matter. The problem here is the conceptuality of any theory of matter.

To recapitulate, today the operative term of (metaphysical) materialism, the primacy of which it defends and defines its position, has found itself disappearing from under the materialists feet. Both scientists and phenomenologists have found it absent where it should be present, found more 'anti-matter' than matter. Those who today defend

matter, the four dominant modes Zizek highlights either reify it into something ideological or spiritual. The journal *Cosmos and History,* in an issue donated to contemporary materialisms, adds a further general and clarifying distinction when they identify within a multiplicity of tendencies two broad strands of research of contemporary pertinence. Namely, research aimed at investigating non-subjectivist ontology, and research interested in developing materialist theories of the subject. One way in which these materialist theories of the subject can be understood is as 'materialism without matter' and is also present in the works of Alberto Toscano and Frank Ruda (the phrase "materialism without materialism" in fact comes from Alain Badiou). In Toscano the argument will take the form of highlighting the 'real abstractions' which rule social life today and cannot be accounted for by a reductive conception of substantial matter. (Toscano 2014: 1221-2)[13]

New materialism thus seems to be pulling from and be in conversation with many strands in the history of materialism. More than even what Coole and Frost point out we can see a return to questions of ontology over epistemology and an absolutization of the materialist notion of practice, i.e. practice is not the sole resolve of a subject but that of a multiplicity of actors/actants/agents. On first approach we may recognise that there are clear benefits to this approach for studying conceptual art: 1) the flattening of ontology that happens means that we are more justified from the start in talking of the concept on the same level as other materials, and 2) we can view the artwork as something that is itself an agent, which is itself a composite of other agents (i.e. the complex of materials of which it is made up).

However, is there anything wrong with this picture? In what follows throughout the rest of the thesis I hope to utilise a framework that relies more heavily on a practice and epistemology based version of materialism. I do this because the Subject cannot be eliminated from the issue of the concept-as-material in conceptual art. When we began

[13] I raise this notion of real abstraction here just to foreshadow that we shall have recourse later in chapter three to employ a version of it in historically grounding aspects of the formal properties of concepts.

we talked about how the metaphysical notion of matter is paradoxical and actually opens up for us a number of subtleties concerning the constitutive unthinkability of materiality. By the end of this section the question of the subject thinking materiality (re-)emerges. The subject has to think of its own emergence out of the interactions of the material world. In this sense being materialist entails a necessity for self-critical and reflective philosophical work. Certainly, the degree of Zizek or Badiou's materialism may be interrogated and disputed. However, for the aim of this thesis we do not need to excavate further here. What is important is the programme of questions they raise (that we take as valid contributions to the debate on materialism today). These questions help us think of a kind of materialism at play in conceptual art, and from which we can approach the concept as material, just not yet.

For instance, questions of subjectivity and objectivity, of truth and materiality are clearly at play and interrogated in certain works of conceptual art. Take for example the series of works by Art & Language member Mel Ramsden's titled *Secret Painting* (1967-8). Along with showing "that visual perception alone is unable to fully access art and that language is bound up with it in fundamental ways," (Bailey 2016: 21) as Robert Bailey notes, we can argue that this work can be read as charting the genesis of specific subject positions within the experience of art. These works presented black canvases alongside which the artist had a typed statement that informs the viewer that these works block some content from the viewer, for instance 'this work contains a secret known only to the artist.'

On the one side we have the viewer who receives the work, which contains the secret, the viewer can think the secret. On the other the artist who created the work, and thus presumably knows the secret, or the sense in which the secret is meant, i.e. was it some personal secret painted over, or is it the mere positing of 'the secret' as an idea as such with no content, whichever the case the artist is in a different subject position with regard to the work of art. The 'truth', if we are permitted to use that word here, then of the work could only be open to the viewer of the work because they

experience it as the work with the possibility to have the secret within it, the secret the black paint on canvas acts to obscure. The blackness of the painting both obscures in a connotative fashion as a sign of 'nothing to see here.' We might also say that this has to do with a perceived materiality of the hue of blackness. The interesting point here is that any colour can be used to paint over, not just blackness, it is the consistency of the paint which is not necessarily related to colour that covers over.

So on one level there is an arbitrariness to blackness as the colour denoting the process of obscuring in painting. Materially at the level of paint it is arbitrary while at the level of signification it is not random, it is connected connotatively, metonymically, to a series of signifiers making black recognisable as obscurity. In a way the work comments upon the secret of all artworks, their enigmatic character, but with the addition of making us see the distinction between artist and viewer as more clearly. The point here is that while a conceptual art group such as Art & Language set themselves a task of inquiring into the ontology of art they did so at the level of understanding art as a practice and the subject positions given rise to by such a practice. It did not search for the answer at the level of the stuff that makes up an artwork - whether matter or idea.

The reading here of *Secret Painting* highlights one way in which the subject and materialism interact in conceptual art. This point shall be shown further in the final chapter of the thesis but for now I will just note that in talking about the moment of irreducible particular materiality that confronts the metaphysical notion of matter above, we are already speaking about a moment when materiality is revealed. This moment is one that necessarily implies a subject and practice. To better grasp this moment as it relates to art we shall now turn to discussions of materiality within art historical and theoretical discourses. Here we shall find a way to articulate our moment of materiality set against thought in terms of the resistance of materials to form and image.

Fig.2. Art & Language (Mel Ramsden), *Secret Painting* (1967-8), oil on canvas and photostat, painting: 79.0 x 79.0 cm; text: 65.5 x 65.5

II - Materiality in Art History

We have just been outlining in the first part of this chapter how the kind of materialism that can help us approach the concept as material takes its starting points from the tensions in the metaphysical notion of Matter and supplements this with the notions of practice and materialism as an epistemological position. This strain of materialism was argued to preserve the place of the Subject in speaking about the materials in a manner that is largely absent from the new materialist turn. Now we turn to general art historical approaches to the question of materiality, showing how certain approaches in this domain can be understood to make more explicit the productive philosophical tensions of the notion of Matter and the necessary theoretical prerequisites for approaching the concept as material.

Or, approaching the topic using the concerns of conceptual artists as an entry point: When a conceptual artist such as Laurence Weiner states, in his "Declaration of Intent" (1968), that what he works with is 'materials' he is taking a particular stance with regard to the nature of the phenomena present in his art – language, context, colour, etc. He recognises something in the nature of the phenomena he encounters and works with as an artist as 'material'. This coming to count as 'material' is something that can be analysed as stemming from the non-reducibility of the matter of materialism to any physicalist account of matter. How does this 'material' fit into the frames of analysis present in art historical scholarship?

Materiality is a key term in the discipline of art history. It is differently placed in terms of significance and definition given the model one uses. One may, for instance, approach an artworks' material from the perspective of connoisseurship (understood in an everyday sense) emphasising the fine quality or grain of the material used, take interest in the most refined high-quality material, etc.. This mode of we may connect up with the 'materialist-technicalist' school of art history, present in figures such as Gottfried Semper and his adherents who construct histories of art beginning from the

materials and techniques present in a given society, seeing these as the overriding determinant factors.[14] Or, we could look to Giovanni Morelli's connoisseurship with its focus on the irreducibly particular details in a painting that identifies an artist - how the feet or ears are rendered - in opposition to the 'easily' copied over-all design and style of a piece. This was Morelli's materialist method as articulated by Edgar Wind in *Art and Anarchy*. (Wind 1963: 40)

There is also the dominant mode of idealist or formalist art history present in figures such as Alois Reigl, Erwin Panofsky, Gottfried Jacobsthal and Ernst Gombrich which places the stress on form or style, seeing it as possible to write the history of art in terms of stylistic innovation proceeding through successive eras of creativity, each displaying new schematisations (Gombrich) of reality.[15] Meaning and cultural context are imprinted on the materials that happen to constitute art by one form or other of a *Kunstwollen*. The qualities of materials are all well and good, necessary in fact, but when it comes down to it what actually makes the work a work is the idea or form. The conceptual/ideal aspect is the significant aspect of the work. Didi-Huberman refers to this privileging as in fact a philosophical prejudice. (Didi-Huberman 2008: 155) Commentators on conceptual art can obviously see precedents for their views in such a prejudice. Is not the whole discourse on conceptual art seemingly based on the primacy of the idea over its actualization in materials?

These two approaches form the historically pre-dominant modes of thinking about art's history. Didi-Huberman has analysed how these approaches themselves can be problematized by an encounter with specific materials. Thus, in the context of discussing the art historiography surrounding wax as a material he unearths the

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[14] Now Semper's approach is not purely concerned with materials, his grander theory aimed to find a way in which to talk about how the motifs present in artistic styles have their origin in more basic motifs that refer back to a reification of life in rituals. Art is an imitation of rituals and concerns the life of man. (Hvattum 2004) His view is actually not materialist in this sense but humanist in the first instance. Historically however he becomes counter-posed to a later generation of formalist art historians.

[15] We shall speak about schemas and diagrams later in chapter 4 when discussing word, images and texts in conceptual art.

nuanced thinking of classical art historian Julius von Schlosser where he notes "…a cleavage found in the art historian's epistemic position vis-à-vis the material…" Here:

> On one hand, *technical facts* are the business of restorers, and more fundamentally, of the "science of materials," and no one doubts their legitimacy and interest. On the other, the *philosophical prejudice* in favor of the *idea* — invented within a Platonic context, then popularized by Giorgio Vasari just as the academic discourse known as art history was coming into being, and ultimately ushered into the twentieth century with the neo-Kantianism of Erwin Panofsky— makes an antivalue of the material in general, and particularly of the unstable material of wax, a "substance between two states. (Didi-Huberman 2008: 155)[16]

In this approach interest in the materials is valid when it concerns a technical practice, i.e. the work of conservationists (which we shall discuss below), however it is an anti-value when it comes to understanding the artwork from the point of view of its cultural meaning and signification. Didi-Huberman links this to the influence of a revived Platonic Idealism that we see emerge at the time of the Renaissance. On the one hand there is a cultural dismissal of a concern with materiality, it is coded as something lesser, degraded. We cannot help thinking here of the gendering of matter, matter as something feminine, passive or at best only potentially active, in need of its realization via the active masculine form. This is ridiculously present in the example of Michelangelo whose dismissals of oil painting and Flemish art were based on such gendered terms as well as the privileging of the idea over the detail (detail and particularity being seen as a medieval hang-over).[17] (Huizinga 1972: 254) On the other

[16] The quote continues in outlining that, "That situation may explain why a book on sculpture in wax published by the Musées de France, a book that aspires to be all-inclusive, can give its entire attention to the material from the standpoint of restoration—exciting results have been achieved—even while ignoring any anthropological value, any connection to aesthetics, or even any historicity. Not a single line is written on wax sculpture from ancient Egypt to the sixteenth century. Significantly, it is the museums of "applied arts" or "decorative arts," like the wonderful Victoria and Albert Museum in London,' that have learned not to censor the anthropological—but also aesthetic—value of wax." (Didi-Huberman 2008: 155)

[17] We could complicate this story somewhat, taking into account Michelangelo's own foray into the world of 'strange' materials with his commission to make a sculpture in snow. However, the general trend of this thought remained present in spite of this.

hand, materiality could also play a role in signifying social status and wealth. (Cole 2011: 4)

The academicism of early connoisseurship studies could also by this analogy be seen to engage the feminine but in a way that reifies it. The cataloguing of materials and their qualities accepts those materials just so long as they are not unruly, as wax is in Didi-Huberman's account. This scenario changes somewhat with the development of modern and contemporary art where traditional materials such as paint are forwarded against the image (their unruliness brought out) and a range of non-traditional materials enter the artists studio (via the innovations of the readymade and collage). In a sense the concept can be viewed as one of these new materials[18] entering the studio however its connection to what has been outlined of materiality so far seems opaque - it appears not to be appraisable in terms of the fineness of its grain, it seems to be marked by a generality and commonality in distinction to a uniqueness, it also seems to lack any unruliness and is perhaps even a model of order.

Here, James Elkins' views on materiality can serve as an important part of the exegesis on materiality in art and help us relate it to the concept as material. Elkins understands materiality as something that happens where thought stops, or rather is what brings a stop to thought. (Elkins 2008) This is that paradox of thinking materiality we have already traced back to Aristotle. The view of matter as resistant implies that it is the flow of thought, of plans, of *disegno*, that materiality stands firm against.

While recognizing the benefits and the necessity at a methodological level of material interaction, attribution and comparison we should for our concerns here argue alongside Elkins that if we are thinking materiality we are also thinking around this interruption of thought. Here the interruption marks that point where the materialist confronts the thought of the work with its structural dynamics. The materialist speaks on behalf of interrupting the smooth operation of the work in favour of its conflictual

[18] Interestingly, Sol LeWitt saw an obstacle to conceptual art in the introduction of new (physical) materials: "new materials are one of the great afflictions of contemporary art…the danger is, I think, in making the physicality of the materials so important that it becomes the idea of the work (another kind of expressionism)." (LeWitt as quoted in Shanken 2004: 244-5)

nature. This is perhaps where we can knot an art historical materialism to our prior philosophical materialism.

Elkins wider view on materiality in art places phenomenology to the forefront of the methodological tools art history relies on to develop a materialist approach to art history. Phenomenology because it allows for sense-transcriptions and signals the always embeddedness of the subject within the encounter with the work of art and its materiality. (Elkins 2008: 27) However phenomenology is limited by its philosophical vocabulary, a vocabulary which speaks of "sensation," "horizon," "body," "head," etc. but not of 'the annoying pulse of a repetitive video by Bruce Nauman," the type of specificity that is the substance of art historical description. Elkins calls this the limits of phenomenological detail.[19] (Ibid. 27) The generality of phenomenological terminology comes into conflict with the specificity necessary to the concrete description of an artwork.[20] However, this concreteness of description itself can stall the writing of art history itself because there is "…*no inner logic* that prevents it from paying closer and closer attention to a picture's materiality." (Ibid. 28) We can always plough on further into details, detail after detail. This is one of the reasons for what Elkins calls a 'fear of materiality.' (Ibid. 28-9) He also places the fast-paced environment of contemporary academia, with its injunction to new knowledge and results at an ever-quickening pace, against concerns of what he refers to as the 'slowness of the studio.' (Ibid .29) By the later term he means to signal those challenges with which the artist is faced on a daily basis by the materials they use – how to affix this to that, how to make things stand, etc.

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[19] In essence, Elkins point is more about any philosophical approach rather than limited to any phenomenology. Also the strain of phenomenology Elkins is talking about is not specified and so I take his point to be one aimed at the necessary generality of all philosophical methodologies owing precisely to their nature as conceptual enterprises.

[20] Elkins also notes that this problem is not new or unique to methodologies utilizing phenomenological tools of analysis: "This is an old issue in the relation between art history and aesthetics, where it has been said in several different ways: art history explores the particular, and aesthetics posits the particular…aesthetics depends on the particular as a counterpart to its central interest in the universal and the general, but art history depends on the general to create meaning for its investigations into the particular." (Elkins 2008: 27)

Elkins opens up for us a problem encountering the firm stop of a 'thisness' our discussion of materiality in Aristotle left us with. The notion of the never ending stream of detail that marks materiality means that the 'thisness' becomes a moment when the, in Elkins case, art writer or, for this thesis, any subject who encounters the work of art not only begins the encounter but puts a stop to it. This thesis will return at other times to the notion of a stop to the experience of materiality. At present we shall continue to bring other art historical voices and insights to bear on and expand upon our understanding of this moment of materiality.

Further approaches to materials and materiality in art history that have emerged recently are worth raising to add more clarity to what we mean by this moment of materiality, when thought is stopped by material. For instance, Material Cultures studies, an anthropological and ethnographic more than art historical approach, that places the stuff human cultures surround themselves with central in their analysis. However, its notion of material is quite undefined and perhaps relies too much on the material being something already processed by human culture, already formed. (Herrmann 2006: 953) So while initially being about 'stuff' over language, it is in fact stuff that has always already been cultured. The moment of inter-action with a material that is non-cultured, un-formed or formless does not take place.

One of the most recent and fertile branches of investigation into the materials and materiality of art can be found in the German school of Material Aesthetik/Material Aesthetic/MaterialIkonographie. Centred around research developments at the University of Hamburg figures within this approach stress the material's resistance.[21] They employ classical art historical and post-structuralist as well as Marxist methods (the school of production aesthetics seem to bear affinities with the school) in order to

[21]According to Hermann: "Material Aesthetik is the product of the better part of a ten-year research project at the University of Hamburg's Art History department. Here, the 'Archive for the Research of Material Iconography' has established a photo archive documenting the change in the usage of materials in the arts, a database with a plethora of information on sources and literature as well as a considerable library of monographic and thematic publications. The archive and its researchers have brought forward numerous research papers, MA and PhD theses, as well as various publications on the meaning of material in the arts" (Hermann 2006: 956)

bolster their discourse. Figures such as Monika Wagner, Petra Lange-Berndt, Dietmar Rubel and Didi-Huberman are prominent thinkers of this vein. For art history, Monika Wagner uses a definition that for Daniel Herrmann is more apt, namely that "…'material' does not designate products alone, but all natural and artificial substances which are intended to be used and manipulated. This important difference in concept acknowledges the general historicity of artistic practices far more accurately: whenever a certain material, be it bone, bronze or Brillo-Pads, is chosen for an art work, the history of its cultural usage has to be taken aboard in defining its meaning." (Hermann 2006: 953) For this school the historical moment of the 19th Century changes how materials are viewed because materials are de-linked from craftsmanship with the origin of industrial production. (Herrmann 2006: 954) This breaks free from technicalist-materialist renderings of art history. There is now a moment of meaning in materials that takes on importance for art. This moment of meaning is the moment of *choice* of a material, with this choice being something indicative of a set of historical determinations.

Ann-Sophie Lehmann also draws attention to three aspects of a new art historical approach to materials that differs from the technicist school. (Lehmann 2013: 12) She makes a note of saying they are not confined to these three but as a heuristic it suffices for our purposes here. These three aspects are material interaction, attribution and comparison. (Lehmann 2013:12-22) *Interaction* relates to viewing materials as working in collaboration with one another. This view aims to mitigate the tendency to formally isolate a material from the state of interaction with other materials that it will always be in. *Attribution* refers to analyzing the specific meanings that accrued to a material via both the materials embeddedness in a culture and its physical specifics. Materials come culturally coded. A striking example of this is the gendering of artistic materials as evident in Michelangelo's denunciation of the feminine nature of oil paint (he stated it was only fit for being viewed by effeminate men). (Lehmann 2013: 11) *Comparison* is the means by which a material can be differentiated from another or partake in

assimilating to another material, as in the mimetic use of the painting of stone in sculpture. The comparison between materials brings out more levels of meaning. Yet again this is a means of mitigating a purely formal separation of the material from a world of materials. Viewing materials under the aspects of their interaction, attributions and comparison can act as guidelines for keeping the materiality of the world in view.

Lehmann also confronts the metaphysical paradoxes of matter and materiality head on when she lightly sets Tim Ingold's version of materiality against that of Elkins. Noting that:

> Elkins has — somewhat provokingly — doubted if materials can be approached in such a manner, because their very materiality, he argues, literally stalls the flow of intellectual thought. Elkins's rhetoric is reminiscent of the classical opposition between matter and idea, which is responsible for the lack of art historical studies on materials and is addressed in more detail in the next paragraph. Other disciplines are less doubtful. The anthropologist Timothy Ingold, for instance, has made a fervent plea for studying materials — however, he argues, this can only be fruitful if we put our flow of thought second and let the materials take the lead, following them, like artists and artisans followed them in the making of their artifacts… (Lehmann 2013: 8)

For Ingold the aim of writing about material cultures, which a materials focus in art history could potentially and potently align with, is to allow the thought process to follow the flow of the materials. Thus Lehmann further, quoting from Ingold directly, comments:

> Materials are ineffable. They cannot be pinned down in terms of established concepts or categories. To describe any material is to pose a riddle, whose answer can be discovered only through observation and engagement with what is there. To know materials, we have to follow them (…) In the act of production, the artisan couples his own movements and gestures — indeed, his very life — with the becoming of his materials, joining with and following the forces and flows that bring his work to fruition. (Lehmann 2013: 9)

This means not allowing an artificial formal separation to override our view of what the materials a work is made of are doing within the piece as well as generally seeing matter as a vibrant field of doing with its own consistency that flows through culture. Rather than impediments to thinking, matter itself is active in a way that we could speculate is its own kind of thought. Ingold presents materials as vibrant intermediates between making and knowing. This would lead to a view where following materials are tied to the encounters the artist has in the act of production. The artist joins and follows the flows and forces of the encountered material. The type of production engaged in is not conceptual but rather an engagement with what is ineffable of materials in their materiality. Lehmann and Ingold are then perhaps less in contrast to Elkins and in fact help us articulate something about materiality from the moment of the interruption of thought that Elkins isolates.

This is certainly a practice based materialism, an implication we have claimed necessarily follows from the paradox of the concept of Matter. It is this in spite of what seems at first glance to be a purely new materialist vibrantist account of matter. The place of the subject in this account is to follow the flow of materiality. In the terms of this thesis we can further our argument that a practice based materialism will give us the best lens by which to encounter the concept-as-material. We are hoping for the view of the moment where a concept interrupts thought. We should understand the conceptual artist as having, in the first instance, a practice that works with concepts before we think of the conceptual artist as thinking concepts. Later chapters shall flesh this distinction out further. Now, however, we can and need to dig a little deeper into what the moment of materiality interrupts. Two interruptions are important here - that of images and of ideology. What is outlined below is a preliminary to a theme returned to again in chapter 4 but needs to be raised here to give us a greater sense of how the materiality of the artwork works with or against other layers of the artwork - namely, the image and the discourse or ideology it is embedded in.

Ontology of Image, Ontology of Ideology, Ontology of Material

Foreshadowing themes that emerge in chapter 4 on words, images and concepts, we can now delve deeper into the argument concerning materiality as the interruption of thought by looking at examples of this phenomena of interruption when connected to images and ideology in the context of art works. The notion of the image will emerge more fully as this thesis progresses as something conceptual art, in line with minimalism, sought to challenge and replace with the concept and theoretical considerations of art. The discussion below shows how the relation between image and material operates prior to conceptualism and thus lays the ground for the scenario conceptual art finds itself in.

In 2014 *Art Bulletin* donated an issue to discussions on the topic of materiality. Here, Robin Kelsey, in the context of discussing the photograph *At Work— Gould & Curry Mine* (January–February 1868, albumen print) by Timothy H. O'Sullivan), makes clear the distinction, important for this thesis, between discussing the work of art as image and discussing the materiality grounding the image. (Kelsey 2014: 21-23) We can speak of everything in the image, of its iconicity, how all the symbols and signs connect to other symbols and signs in art history and other contexts, yet in doing all this we can brush over the distinction between this specific incarnation of this image and another, such that his "description would apply to a glass negative in the National Archives, Washington, D.C., an albumen print in the collection of the George Eastman House, Rochester, New York, a duotone reproduction in a magazine, or a digital reproduction on a computer screen."(Kelsey 2014:21) Here Kelsey concretely hits on what Lee Jnr. points to as the fact of the thing's materiality being its individuating feature. Kelsey's point is that works/images must be brought back to speak about their material conditions of possibility…and in many cases actually already do. In this specific example Kelsey notes the link between mining and photography via the extraction of the necessary minerals and materials used in photography - in the 19th

and 20th century these were copper, coal, silver; in the digital era they are the rare earths and metals like coltan, cobalt, and europium. (Levin etal. 2022)

The interesting point is that this distinction would seem not to operate the same way in relation to a work of conceptual art. The material should be presented in the same way whether it is in the gallery, in the *Art-Language* journal, in a seminar or in this thesis. The work should be the same. However, this still only seems to operate for some works of conceptual and not others. Kosuth's billboard for instance is a different thing as a photograph than it is as a written description than it is on the New Mexico highway.

Art history, thought on art in general even, has a marked tendency to engage in this form of iconicity. When we discuss the image we discuss something immaterial. Following the pathways of meaning given by the iconicity of images leads us down this ethereal path where the concrete instantiation of the image does not matter. It is a concern of contemporary art historians to talk about materiality, to talk about when the image breaks down, when something breaks through. In this regard, an echo of Kelsey's remarks is evident in action in the opening pages of Didi-Huberman's *Confronting Images*. Here the art historian stands in front of the fresco *The Annunciation* (c. 1440–41) by Fra Angelico, at the Monastery of San Marco in Florence. (Didi-Huberman 2005: 11-15) He stands in front of *The Annunciation* yet when looks at one particular portion of the painting, the space of the wall at the back of the room the two figures (the angel Gabriel and Mary) are in, what he sees is the light hitting the wall. The 'actual' wall and the 'imaginary' wall coincide. He stands in front of a light covered wall with different pigments arranged on its surface. The passage flits between awareness of the wall and awareness of the image, as if asking can one see both at the same time.[22] The image works to idealise the material. It finishes off and provides smooth corners to what is a blunt assemblage of stuff.

[22] Possible shades of Wittgenstein's Rabbit-Duck drawing are going on here.

The above cases of art history encountering materiality rest on certain distinctions that allow materiality to come to the fore of an analysis. We may, I propose, in these two cases speak of a distinction between an ontology of the image and the ontology of the material. Material here interrupts the discourse of the image. The ideality of the image is momentarily interrupted by the boundedness of its materiality. The materialist performs an operation (itself an immaterial event) upon the idealist discourse.

Michael Ann Holly utilizing W.J.T. Mitchell, can be interpreted as offering a counter to this view when distinguishing Materiality as something more than Medium:

> Materiality is more than a medium. A medium is that which carries a visual message, and together—structure and image—they result in the thickness, the sensuous materiality of a work of art, a thing among other things. Yet in its physical vibrancy, its affect and effect, this special thing possesses a certain kind of agency. “Art historians may ‘know’ that the pictures they study are only material objects . . . but they frequently talk and act as if pictures had feeling, will, consciousness, agency, and desire. (W. J. T. Mitchell as quoted in Holly 2013: 16)

The medium is a kind of structure capable of transmitting a message. This is why one chooses a medium, it suits a message that one wishes to convey, even if no message is intended the medium still acts to garner the attention of an expectant viewer.[23] The message as realised through the medium is the image. The two together, structure and image, result in the medium's materiality. It has become another thing, materially identifiable as separate but at the same time among other things. However, in the quote from Mitchell that Holly utilizes, it is the materiality that enacts the forgetting that we previously noted was caught up with the image. The forgetting comes from the ensemble of matter that is the concrete form the work is forced to take. This seems to be a double move of materiality – at one moment to allow an image to be erected upon it, at another to also dismantle the transparency of that image. The

[23] Art & Language make a similar point in re-theorising their practice in light of the fact that a painting still garners attention to itself as art in a way that conceptual works of art do not always. See Art & Language (2004) “On Painting” *Tate Papers no.1 Spring 2004* Source: https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/01

power of the image to enact the forgetting of the art object as material object relies not on the image itself but on the material agency of the work itself. The materiality of a work works to have itself forgotten. In conceptual art perhaps this is even more so given the lack of recognition of a materiality to a concept.[24]

These issues concerning the image and materiality can be translated into more social terms and united with their wider 'material conditions' via a detour through social art history. Here the influence of Marxist materialism on art history is most strongly felt with the approach of Arnold Hauser, for one generation, and T.J. Clark, for another. This approach sought to embed the artwork into its socio-historical context. They paid specific attention to the changes and growth within the Marxist categories of forces and relations of production and/or the class struggle in order to account for the particular stylistic, or other, developments being expressed in a given work of art. These approaches also noted a similar problem as that found by Elkins in relation to accounting for the materials of the artwork. The bind Clark and Hauser found themselves in was that too great a focus on particularities could act to the detriment of the social whole and conversely too great a focus on the social whole could be to the detriment of the specificity of artworks. (Day 2011: 46-7) The issue revolves around the correct balance and correct procedure to ward off obscuring abstractions.

Further, it is worth noting, in Clark the terminology of the image is somewhat replaced with terminology concerning ideology. Here, ideology acts as the veil of wholeness that we experience as a work of art. Clark places the question of ideology in the artwork into a materialist frame. As Gail Day comments:

> Ideology, as Clark later reiterates, may be a process that generalizes repressions and imagines "contradictions solved," but it "takes as its material the real substance, the constraints and contradictions, of a given historical situation. (Day 2011: 47)

[24] This is also quite interesting given the anti-image tendency of conceptual art discussed in chapter 4.

Clark's point is that yes works of art display ideology but they are also working this ideology, formulating it in specific ways that are not as whole and non-contradictory as it seems. The artworks work the ideology of their time in a particular way that is important to pay note to. Ideology, yes, resolves contradictions in an ideal or imagined way, but the contradictions it is resolving are real and particular contradictions of an epoch or scenario.[25]

We have two options in thinking about ideology here. Either ideology veils over the materiality of the work, like the image, or ideology is itself a material and comes up against its own internal limits. The point is that when we reflect on the work of art we project onto it an ideal form if we take it to be a completed whole, something fully transparent in its meaning, something with no gaps, something identical to itself. Does an acknowledgement of materiality in this sense, materiality as that which all our thought constructions fall short against, suffice or does it try to put smooth edges on what makes one a materialist? Perhaps an acknowledgement of materiality does not necessarily make one yet a materialist but maybe it is a necessary preliminary act towards constructing materialist analysis and positions.

The notion that the moment we turn to a work's materiality, when we engage in a materialist act, can be captured in this comment by Holly on the relation between thought and materiality:

> Materiality (even virtual?) is something that gets in the way of certain kinds of thinking, sometimes even looking—if looking involves seeing through to something that lies before or behind or beyond. Materiality is that which halts transparency. (Holly 2013: 16)

What we are proposing from all this is that this 'materiality is' is also tied to the moment at which that materiality is brought into view. It halts transparency, it resists, but it does so only in the context of encounter with a subject – a subject who works with or against a material, who highlights it, is affected by it. Here we are registering the

[25] The idea here is similar to thought concerning the materiality of the artwork found among Althusserians such as Louis Althusser, Pierre Macherey and Warren Montag.

affect of materiality when it pushes as a counter-force. Thus we can bring to an end this section having been given three important nodal points – the subject, practice and materials - in thinking around a materialism fit for analysis of concepts as materials and having seen how this materiality emerges historically in artworks via a moment of halting what is image and ideology in a work of art. We can now turn to the final part of this chapter and see how these notions play out, are taken up or avoided in the existing discussions concerning conceptual art.

III - Materiality and Conceptual Art

In this concluding section we investigate approaches to materiality within conceptual art and the discourse upon it with specific attention paid to the debate concerning the dematerialization thesis. It contains the argument that we should take seriously how conceptual art itself works through the tension between matter, material and materialism that has been discussed so far in relation to the history of philosophy and the history of art. It also highlights that unfortunately there is a tendency to miss the issue of materiality of the concept, as outlined above, via a focus on other materialities at play in conceptual art.

Materialist Approaches to Conceptual Art

Recent scholarship has turned its gaze towards the sense in which conceptual art practice could be thought of as a material practice. The publication *Conceptualism and Materiality* (2019) edited by Christian Berger features papers which attempt to bring a focus on materiality to the scholarship on conceptual art and art movements associated with it. As this volume makes clear, the focus on materiality can consist of a variety of topics - a focus on communication technologies, the conceptualists engagement with science, especially physics, or on conceptualism's affective dimensions. What is worth noting in this collection are the theoretical resources art

historians employing in order to execute this kind of research. While the ‘new materialists’ as outlined above are mentioned, they are not as prominent among the collected authors' resources as other commentators coming from Hegelian traditions.

To take two interesting examples of this engagement and failure of an application of new materialists to conceptual art we can look to the work of Larisa Dyansky and Sabeth Buchmann as found in the 2019 volume *Conceptualism and Materiality.* Dryansky, investigating the engagement of Robert Smithson, Mel Bochner, Dan Graham and John Latham with the notion of anti-matter from particle physics, relies upon the work of Elisabeth Grosz and her presentation of the concept of the Incorporeal. This concept, arising first with the Stoics, is like what Deleuze states of events, that they are ‘neither a thing nor a property of things.’ Grosz is contemporaneous with the new materialists but what she calls for in philosophy is a new idealism based around the incorporeal. In terms of conceptual art scholarship this would help us get beyond a material-immaterial binary via focus on the incorporeal and the non-reducibility of ideas to materials even though entirely dependent upon them. (Dyansky 2019: 151)

Sabbath Buchmann’s contributions are especially relevant for us from the batch of scholars in this area of investigation because she explicitly engages the issue of the kind of philosophical approach up to the task of comprehending materials in conceptual art. Buchmann’s conference talk *Conceptual Realism*, in distinction from her published paper, which more explicitly engages with the new materialists and brings up what for her are their limitations, especially in being applied to conceptual art, makes a nod to the necessity of a kind of Hegelianism. (Buchmann 2019) Neither scholar approaches the work of the Ljubjana School and their associates, whose focus on Hegel is foundational to their materialism, in this context despite the fact that the problem of the Subject which Buchmann explicitly heralds as key to her objection to the new materialists. Taking Laurence Weiner’s statement with regard to the fabrication of his works as her battleground for this confrontation with the new materialists

Buchmann notes that we do not have an understanding of the work as such without understanding the place of the artist and the receiver within the work as subjects constituting it. (Buchmann 2019) Here, the subject position argument we have already raised above concerning *Secret Paintings* finds backing. Without the framework that constitutes subjects, notions such as property for instance, we do not get into the space in which conceptual art is operating. The benefits of Berger's collection is that it hints towards tackling the concept in conceptual art directly though this is never fully followed through.[26]

On the other hand, artworks can be viewed as thinking/doing within a new materialist frame. The way in which they disperse their elements takes on significance. However, as outlined above is not uniquely new to new materialism, we also see it at work in T.J. Clark. We can also view the different materials that make up an artwork as having their own agency and perhaps competing with the other materials of the work. An approach like this would promote looking at how all those other forgotten materials used in conceptual art come to the surface in their own way – how those cheap, ephemeral materials used to signify the conceptual nature of the piece come back to haunt the work. This strangely enough is where the dematerialization thesis of Lucy Lippard and John Chandler offers us food for thought.

Dematerialization Thesis

One of the foundational critical angles setting the discourse around conceptual art and materialism can be seen in the dematerialization thesis. In 1967-8 the critic and curator Lucy Lippard along with fellow critic John Chandler published the essay "The Dematerialization of Art" proposing the notion of a 'dematerialization of the art object' as a means to understand the new developments in art taking place with

[26] Similarly, Petra Lange-Berndt's reader *Materiality* for Whitechapel also marks a choice in theoretical foundations for being a materialist in art history today that side-steps new materialisms. For Berndt-Lange the new materialist phenomena is located in the Anglo-sphere and draws some of its steam from a non-engagement with methodologies of German and French authors not translated into English. Seminar given at CACSSS Seminar Room, University College Cork: Thursday 28th February, 2019.

Conceptual Art. The dematerialization thesis consists of the notion that there is a marked shift away from a concern with the art object to a focus on the concept of the work of art. Lippard and Chandler are synthesising the art writings of the time, from Kosuth to LeWitt, to put a critical shape on what is happening in art.

Many vociferously reject the dematerialization thesis, then and now, and any notion that conceptual art was somehow immaterial. Today Boris Groys, for instance, while seeing a shift towards questions of meaning and communication with conceptual art, rejects the idea that there was anything 'immaterial' about conceptual art:

> But this new orientation towards meaning and communication does not mean that art became somehow immaterial, that its materiality lost its relevance, or that its medium dissolved into message. The contrary is the case. Every art is material - and can only be material. The possibility of using concepts, projects, ideas and political messages in art was opened by the philosophers of 'linguistic turn' precisely because they asserted the linguistic character of thinking and the material character of language. These philosophers understood thinking as the practice of operating and manipulating language. (Groys 2018: 122)

Just as Groys critiques dematerialization for over-looking the material character of language, so too did others find issue with in what precise sense conceptual art was dematerializing anything. Interestingly, however, Lippard/Chandler's argument does make certain points precisely about the materiality of conceptual art that are worth investigating as we shall see. One of Lippard and Chandler's source references for their thought was the composer and music theorist (though only credited as a minor cubist painter in the essay) Joseph Schillinger who in 1943 had published a book entitled *The Mathematical Basis of the Arts*.[27] He framed his analysis of art in the book around a division of the history of art into five successive phases. The phases were, 'pre-aesthetic', corresponding to early art that engaged in mimicry, then ritualistic or

[27] Joseph Schillinger (1895-1943) was born in Ukraine (then part of Russian Empire) but moved to America where he taught his mathematical system for musical composition to among others George Gershwin and Benny Goodman.

religious art, then emotional art, then rational art and finally was to come a phase Schillinger labelled ‘post-aesthetic’. This ‘post-aesthetic’ culmination of art would see the disintegration of art and the liberation of the idea. (Lippard/Chandler: 258) This is one way of schematizing how we get to the moment of conceptualism.

For Lippard, further expanding upon the dematerialisation thesis, "Conceptual art… means work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or 'dematerialized.'" (Lippard 1997: vii) On the one hand this is problematic with Lippard splitting idea and material from one another in a dualist manner that insufficiently analyses the materiality of ideas at the same time as the ideal character of materials. However, on the other hand, the precise descriptions listed are very important – “secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or 'dematerialized.” A humble material, coming second, a material that forwards its own secondary nature. Lightweight is a physical description, ephemeral, not lasting long, not substantial enough to maintain itself. Cheap, an economic descriptor, perhaps a social descriptor too (not wanting to look cheap!); unpretentious – an historical and social descriptor; and/or dematerialized – this is the crux of the problem. What does it mean to be dematerialized? No longer physical but only in the framing? The prefix ‘de-‘ is also worth thinking about, does this ‘de-‘ as in ‘destruction’ or ‘deconstruction’ signify that there was something material prior to the relation. Put in this way, something thoroughly material is only capable of undergoing a de-materialization.

So what materials (other than the concept) do conceptualists use concretely – we have in Kosuth a billboard, dictionaries, photostats; in Adrian Piper, pencil and paper, her body, film; in Laurence Weiner, language, stencils and stencil paint, landscapes; with On Kawara, canvasses, postcards and books. Here we have a certain crux in the conceptualist thinking of material. These are not common materials for art (or rather a conception of fine arts), they are however common materials of everyday life but are they unruly materials? Do they somehow resist the image as we have outlined above in

our discussion of materiality in art history? We should note that in many instances they are materials that have already been gone over by the process of production and commercialization. And further, yes in certain aspects the precise materiality of these works relies on their ephemerality. Even, and more pointedly it could be argued, in terms of the body, as in Piper's work, we have a concern with ephemerality and commodification. Witness the work *Five Unrelated Time Pieces* (*Meat into Meat)* (1968) an early piece documenting the consumption of meat cooked by the artist, herself a vegetarian, by the artist's boyfriend of the time. One form of matter sustains another through consumption, a clear notion of matter as energy runs through this piece. This can be interestingly counter–posed to *Food for the Spirit* (1971) that documents the artist's study of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Her study was undertaken in tandem with a period of isolated living in her loft with the artist photographing herself in the mirror at particular moments when the text and isolation came together to create a sense of dissociation in the artist. The figure of the artist in the 14 such photographs included in this work show a figure barely legible within the darkness of her room.

In 1973, in her memoir/annotated chronology of the period of Conceptual Art entitled *Six Years…* (1997) Lippard writes how not everyone agreed with her characterisation of the developments of the period. She includes two correspondences she had that reveal the depth of and reasons for disagreement, the first from Coventry based Art & Language (A&L), the second from American artist Mel Bochner.

In their letter A&L dismiss the idea that art could ever be dematerialised and affirm that the art idea has always been an art object. To generously quote their problem with Lippard/Chandler's thesis:

> All the examples of art-works (ideas) you refer to in your article are, with few exceptions, art-objects. They may not be an art-object as we know it in its traditional matter-state, but they are nevertheless matter in one of its forms, either solid-state, gas-state, liquid-state. And it is on this question of matter-state that my caution with regard to the metaphorical usage of dematerialization is centred upon. Whether for example, one calls Carl Andre's "substance of

> forms" empty space or not does not point to any evidence of dematerialization because the term "empty space" can never, in reference to terrestrial situations, be anything more than a convention describing how space is filled rather than offering a description of a portion of space which is, in physical terms, empty. Andre's empty space is in no sense a void… Consequently, when you point, among many others, to an object made by Atkinson, "Map to not indicate etc.," that it has "almost entirely eliminated the visual-physical element." I am a little apprehensive of such a description. The map is just as much a solid-state object (i.e., paper with ink lines upon it) as is any Rubens (stretcher-canvas with paint upon it) and as such comes up for the count of being just as physically-visually perusable as the Rubens… (Lippard 1997: 43)

They continue their attack, defining what Matter is to them, focusing on a scientific sounding definition:

> Matter is a specialized form of energy; radiant energy is the only form in which energy can exist in the absence of matter. Thus when dematerialization takes place, it means, in terms of physical phenomena, the conversion (I use the word guardedly) of a state of matter into that of radiant energy; this follows that energy can never be created or destroyed. But further, if one were to speak of an art-form that used radiant energy, then one would be committed to the contradiction of speaking of a formless form, and one can imagine the verbal acrobatics that might take place when the romantic metaphor was put to work on questions concerning formless-forms (non-material) and material forms. (Lippard 1997: 43-44)

Then finally, they dispute the claim that artworks which leave materials behind as records of a work have acted to de-materialize our notion of artworks:

> The philosophy of what is called aesthetics relying finally, as it does, on what it has called the content of the art work is, at the most, only fitted with the philosophical tools to deal with problems of an art that absolutely counts upon the production of matter-state entities. The shortcomings of such philosophical tools are plain enough to see inside this limit of material objects; once this limit is broken these shortcomings hardly seem worth considering as the sophistry of the whole framework is dismissed as being not applicable to an art procedure that records its information in words, and the consequent material qualities of the entity produced (i.e. typewritten sheet, etc.) do not necessarily have anything to do with the idea. This is, the idea

> is “read about” rather than “looked at.” That some art should be directly material and the other art should produce a material entity only as necessary by-product of the need to record the idea is not at all to say that the latter is connected by any process of dematerialization to the former. (Lippard 1997: 44)[28]

A&L want to deny any connection of dematerialization. They see both types of artwork as operating on a similar level. The problem they isolate is the limited frameworks of aesthetics, and its focus on artworks being looked at. As Harrison comments this precisely fits into the larger A&L programme of coming to terms with and critiquing modernism. (Harrison 2008: 203) Important to note here is the awareness of some kind of materiality expressed by the conceptualists. They give a definition of Matter, stating that:” Matter is a specialized form of energy, a dematerialization would be from one state to this energy state.” (Lippard 1997: 43-44) This materiality is interesting set beside some of the details Lippard adds in *Six Years…* to how she thought of dematerialization and the material aspects of art: “But for lack of a better term I have continued to refer to a process of dematerialization, or a de-emphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness).’ (Lippard 1997: 5)

This set of equivalences of what counts as material aspects - uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness – mark the other side of the qualities of materials used in conceptual art as outlined above. Let us mediated briefly on these properties for a moment:

Uniqueness – we can return to the notion of matter as tied to individuation here. The singularity of a thing is in its matter. Its reproducibility is a matter of form or concept; *Permanence* – matter’s way of showing itself is to present a solidity or inertness. We can object that this can be thought of as contradictory in an ever changing world. It seems to break matter off from the force of change and frame it as underlying stuff.

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[28] Unpublished letter-essay from Art-Language group, Coventry, to Lucy Lippard and John Chandler “Concerning the article ‘The Dematerialization of Art.’” “March 23, 1968. An excerpt.

Again we are back in the problematic of Aristotle. *Decorative Attractiveness* – matter here forwards its materiality via seduction.

Both Berger and Lange-Berndt have concluded that it is more useful to think of Lippard proposing her thesis as not wanting to do away with materials but to re-think the category. (Berger 2019: 33) They point to the inclusion of earth art, process art, anti-form art and other forms of 'art as action' in the long subtitle to Lippard's *Six Years…* as her attempt at this re-think. However, as we have highlighted Lippard's thinking relies on two sets of materials – those that highlight themselves (and a rather tactile sense of materiality) and those that recede from the confrontation with the viewer.

With the turn to the questions raised by the new materialist turn in theoretical circles the validity of the dematerialization also comes under strain, should we not focus on the materiality underlying the ability for conceptual art to come about? Should we instead of reading the conceptualist statements such as LeWitt's 'the idea is the machine that makes the work' at face value, taking the artist and the work to be identical, should we not read the gaps where materiality punctures these artists self-understanding? My answer to these questions is a yes and a no. It really depends on the manner in which we bring these statements of artists into conflict with themselves. What if in speaking of the priority of the idea they are speaking of the priority of another material factor in a changed context?

We should also be aware that the prominence of the 'idea' is not necessarily set against the materiality of the work of art as it is taking part in a certain confrontation with the notion of the artwork as an image. The conceptualists are near contemporaries of Frank Stella, who brought the focus on tautology into view. (Buchloh 1990: 116) Ad Reinhardt did this before him and is an acknowledged influence on the conceptualists. (Zelevansky 1991: 28) The tautology, which we will encounter in chapter 2, is one means by which the image is resisted. The question of materiality in conceptual art is

caught up with the question of why this desire to suppress the image? Conceptual and linguistic materials were capable of being utilised in such a suppression of the image.

From what we have analysed so far we can begin to recognise that an account of the concept as material must speak of its materiality, and hence must point to the moments at which such materiality is shown. When does the concept resist or peak through? We must recognise that this materiality of the idea is never fully separable from other materials. The play between materials highlighting their own secondary quality and those promoting their presence that we have highlighted at play in Lippard's thinking, underpinning the possibility of thinking dematerialization, is inescapable in finding these moments of conceptual resistance.

Conclusion

The differences and similarities outlined above concern the need for both discourses, philosophical and art historical, to use materialism to engage in a flattening while at the same time allow a particularity to emerge. Since Aristotle, Matter has been understood to give rise to the particular differences between things while essential differences are the concern of forms. However, this model leads to a problem when we try to think 'Matter', there is no way to adequately think it away from any particular. From this starting point the chapter has charted a journey where the problem of Matter became the productive and problematic potentials of the concept of Matter. The problematic aspect led us to promote a more practice orientated approach to materialism. The productive aspect however granted us the notion of materiality as a moment resistant to thought. We further picked this criteria up from art historical discourses. This leaves us with the notion that the concept-as-material is discernable at the moment when a concept resists our thoughts upon it. Commentators on conceptual art fleshed out hints of where this moment may be found in conceptual artworks.

In the next chapter we shall approach the problem of the concept as material from its companion angle, the point of view of the ‘concept’, viewing its histories in philosophical and art historical discourse which paved the way for the articulation of the formulations of the concept’s priority in the conceptual art movement.

CHAPTER 2
What is A Concept?

“I will refer to the kind of art in which I am involved as conceptual art. In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art. This kind of art is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive, it is involved with all types of mental processes and it is purposeless.”
Sol LeWitt, Paragraphs on Conceptual Art, 1967

“9. The concept and idea are different. The former implies a general direction while the latter is the components. Ideas implement the concept.”
Sol LeWitt, Sentences on Conceptual Art, 1969

“Con-cept, s.: concetto, m.; formula, f. –ceptitible, ADJ.: comprehensible, f.; concepimento ;pensiero, m. –ceptive, ADJ.: atto a concepire”
from Joseph Kosuth’s The First Investigation, 1966-68

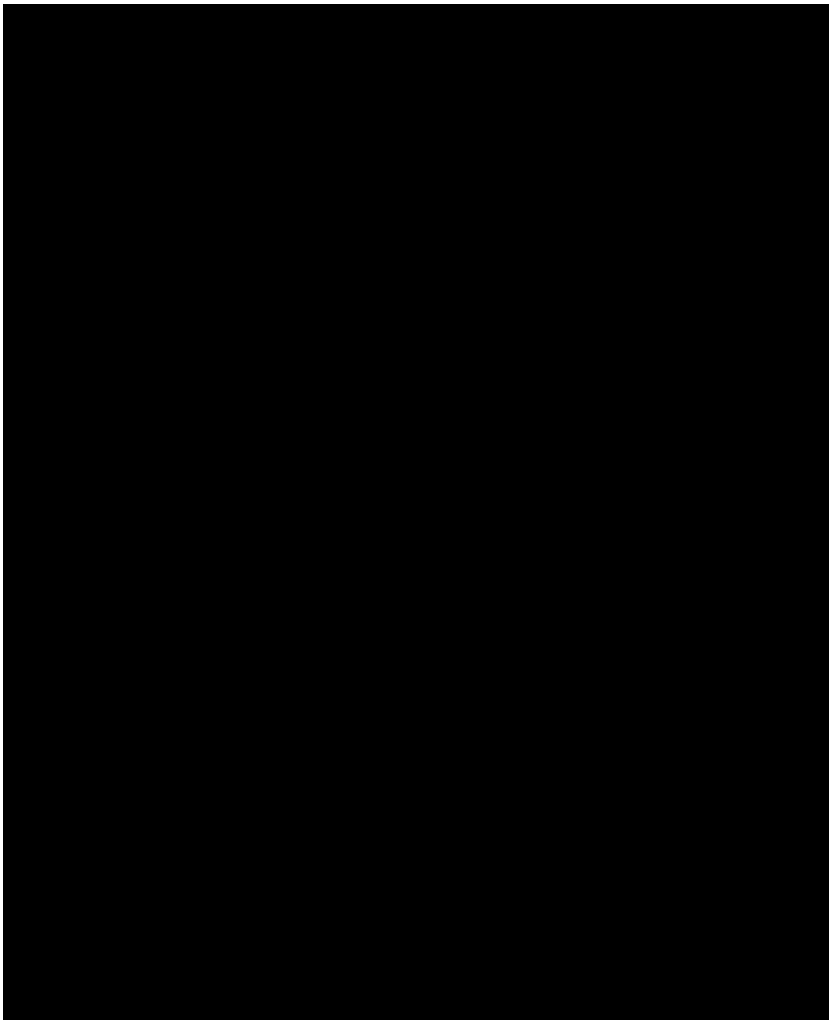

Fig. 3, Mel Ramsden and Ian Burn, (1968-1969), *Six Negatives* (detail)

Six Negatives

Again categories, again Matter-in-general. But this time the image is displayed on paper in a gallery, say at Pinotheca in Melbourne in 1969, or as a copy housed in an archive, of the Tate or the Gallery of New South Wales. Mel Ramsden and Ian Burn's *Six Negatives* (1968-9) crosses similar terrain to Kosuth's *Class 4. Matter 1. Matter in General (Art as Idea as Idea)* (1968) - most obviously both make use of *Roget's Thesaurus*. However, a key distinction between them, as Ann Stephen points out, is that in the case of the former there is an investigation of the *site* of an artwork (via use of the billboard placing), while the latter delves into the *internal* constituents of an

artwork. (Stephen 2013: 41) Roget himself had been influenced by Leibniz's rationalist thinking in order to make his Thesaurus, especially the table of categories. The categorization was a means, as Ian Burn's outlines in his companion piece to Ramsden's, entitled *Read Premiss* subtitled *(Holding system for Six Negatives)*, to get a hold on language (Burn 1969). In this way the categories help to make a material of language while being an encasement of concepts ready for use. (Burn 1969) The very subtitle of *Roget's Thesaurus*, "Thesaurus of English words and phrases, classified and arranged so as to facilitate the expression of ideas and assist in literary composition," underlines this notion that it is compiled in order to be of practical use in the deployment of language. The table of categories at the start acts as a tool to aid in the understanding of the book. Categorization always brings with it its own shadow image of a metaphysics. What Ramsden's negations do is flip this solid/positive metaphysics around and begin from the negative.

The work itself is based upon a process of negation in a number of senses - (i) the general negation of the sense in which the synopsis of categories can work as such (ii) the positive terms are crossed out (negated), (iii) the negative terms are left and thus forwarded, and (iv) the colour of the original pages are inverted into a photonegative. (Burn 1969) These negations, like the isolation procedure that Kosuth uses in *Art-as Idea: Matter-in-General,* create a thought that becomes strange to grapple with - a kind of impossible thought of a system of only negative terms.

In order to grapple with the work Burn also outlines that one must recognise the conceptual nature of the Thesaurus, as a system for dealing with language. (Burn 1969) Further, he states that "The work exists simply within a conceptual basis rather than a visual framework, and the conceptual basis requires that the language form be arrived at in one way or another." (Burn 1969) This implies that there is not one way of getting to the encounter with the work - perhaps we view it and 'get' it, or perhaps we read about it and are drawn into it, or perhaps Burn's theoretical work in this 'holding piece' gets us past the visual in front of us to the core of the work.

In the work Ramsden seems to be isolating one element of the project of the *Thesaurus*, the ordering of words that relies on categories and an implicit metaphysics. However, is not the other pole of the Thesaurus the notion that concepts are to some degree elastic (that there is a degree of substitution between them) and dependent on context, something that undermines to an extent the notion of stable categorization? Categorization and its limits were explored by conceptualists, Brian O'Doherty's witty proposal of the category of 'in-between categories' encapsulating one such means of putting categories as such in question. (Moore-McCann 2009: 10-11) The category can be another name or guise of the concept.[29] In this chapter we shall see how this categorization model is one among many types of concept conceptual art is given to use and encounter in its practice.

Introduction

Despite its name, the idea that conceptual art is an art that works primarily with concepts is often elided in favour of a focus on conceptual strategies or talk of the cognitive aspects of works. The idea of getting our hands on concepts, confronting them in order to work with them seems too wide - too many concepts, too slippery for our metaphorical hands. The last chapter discussed the tensions in the concept of matter, the sense of materiality we get in conceptual art practice and scholarship and came away with the importance of the moment of resistance where the materiality of a material can be recognised. Having done this we can now turn to that central point, the concept, which we endeavour to speak of in terms of being a material.

In conceptual art the concept itself is defined in multiple, sometimes even divergent, ways. The definition of the concept can be either explicitly stated in the writings of an artist or displayed in the specificities of an artist's practice. To give a few, in no way exhaustive, examples, the concept may take the form of an analytic proposition

[29] In the Classical model of how concepts operate, concepts are the mental representation of classes of things, these classes of things are then referred to as categories. In the thesis I am taking it that categories imply a model of concepts.

(Joseph Kosuth argues that artworks are analytic propositions but also that art itself is a concept thus artworks are analytic propositions about the concept 'art'), or as a recipe or instruction (Sol LeWitt and Yoko Ono both employ such a method). Lee Lozano had a merger of these two streams when she spoke of employing propositional instructions (Lee Lozano). Furthermore, terminological discrepancies and distinctions, such as that between concept and idea are a repeated occurrence in the discourse of conceptual art. For instance, Sol LeWitt sees a terminological difference between idea and concept. For him, the concept is overarching, the essence, while ideas put concepts into play. (LeWitt 1999: 106)

Before we get to these different guises of the concept in conceptual art (later in the thesis) we are proposing that the models of concepts they build upon are isolated and theoretically reflected upon in the first instance by philosophers. Thus, this chapter argues that changes in the way in which the concept is conceived of throughout the history of philosophy, a selective outline of which is presented below, give us 'pictures' of specific types of concepts. To name these concepts, as I find them, from the outset we have an empirical (also known as representational), an analytic and an event model of the concept.[30] These types of concepts are necessary to analyse in order to acquaint ourselves with the features they display. These, I argue, are also in evidence when the concept is used as a material in conceptual art. Thus this chapter necessarily pieces

[30] There can be variation within these concepts corresponding to the particular concerns the philosopher dealing with them wishes to foreground. However, in what follows I deal with them at a level of general difference from one another; Also, in philosophical works on the concept of the concept such as Gregory Murphy's *The Big Book of Concepts* (2002) or Andy Blunden's *Concepts: A Critical Approach* (2011), the models of different concepts, it should be noted, are different from mine. For them the five main models of concepts of concepts are the Classical model, the Exemplar model, the Theory-Types model, the Atomistic model and Neoclassical models. Murphy investigates the work of cognitive science in trying to theorize concepts and gain new empirical insights. Blunden's work discusses the models of concepts found in cognitive science from the point of view of a critique based on his reading of late Wittgenstein, Vygotsky and Hegel. Blunden's version of the concept is more akin to a pragmatist view and has certain aspects in common with the Deleuzian evental concept I outline later in this thesis. While I have found this work illuminating as background material, in writing the thesis I settled on approaching individual philosophers on concepts (Frege, Wittgenstein, Deleuze and Guattari) as a more direct means of encountering a philosopher also coming up against the 'materiality' of the concept and thus aiding the discussion of the concept as material in conceptual art. This is most directly expressed, I argue, in Wittgenstein who is thinking the analytic model of the concept at its limit.

together changes in the history of 'the concept' in philosophical and artistic discourse that produce for us a scenario whereby in 1965 an art movement can explicitly be termed conceptual art and the notion of working with concepts as an artistic practice can be formulated/articulated. Owing to space the chapter cannot of course be exhaustive. However, in order to get around this issue the chapter is structured as the coming together of what I deem three pivotal aspects to thinking the concept - a presentation of a means to think the history of the concept in the history of philosophy as found in the journal *Cahier pour L'Analyse* (making special reference to Frege's thoughts around *Begriffschrift*), that tracks a shift from representational to analytic concept; an analysis of Wittgenstein in relationship to concepts and conceptual art; and, finally an analysis of Deleuze and Guattari's view of concepts and its general contrast to their views on conceptual art. While the sections on *Cahier pour L'Analyse,* Wittgenstein and Deleuze bring out types of concepts and their features that it is argued here are models engaged with by conceptual art, the Wittgenstein section contains the consequential argument that it is via the saying/showing distinction that a materiality of the concept can be isolated.

To begin, however, it is necessary to sketch out what we shall call the standard model for understanding concepts - the model which the developments this chapter speaks of can be seen as set against. This model can be described as the empiricist model of the concept. This model is based on the understanding that concepts are mental representations of objects built up out of our experience as the abstraction of similar elements across a set of similar encounters yielding similar sense-data. The Lockean way of understanding this would be to say that we move from sense impression to concept to word (or the communication of the concept). (Hüllen 2004: 164-166) The claim in what follows is that this account comes under some stress as the only valid account of the concept from the way conceptual art intersects with the question of concepts.

I - A History of the Concept - Cahier pour l'Analyse and Gottlob Frege

As we understand it today the Concept has gone through a history of formation that has created it as an unique isolated theoretical object. The concept has itself been abstracted from the enmeshed layers of connotative meanings and higher terms to which it was once beholden. The journal *Cahier pour L'Analyse* can furnish us with a schematic model of this history that works well for our purposes of showing the Concept(s) conceptual art was given to encounter and work with. In 1966 students around Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan founded *Cahier pour l'Analyse* (1966-69) to investigate the possibility of a 'philosophy of the concept', a term borrowed from the French philosopher of mathematics Jean Cavailles. The framework offered by this journal allows us to sketch a history of how the concept itself becomes abstracted, taken as separate and sheds itself of its perceived qualities. The inside leaf of every issue of the journal bore a quote by Georges Canguilheim which acts as an elucidation of the meaning of this 'philosophy of the concept'. It stated:

> To work on a concept is to vary its extension and comprehension, to generalise it through the incorporation of exceptional traits, to export it beyond its region of origin, to take it as a model or inversely, to search for a model for it - in short, to progressively confer upon it, through regulated transformations, the function of a form. (Canguilheim quoted in Kingston University "Concept" 2019)

Towards this end the journal worked concepts from Marxism (mode of production, class struggle, etc.) and psycho-analysis (unconscious, drive, etc.) and attempted to extend their range. To arrive at such a mode of philosophising the concept, which is self-consciously aware of the nature of the concept it uses, a certain historical transformation in the understanding of concepts had to take place. The *Cahier pour l'Analyse* locates this mutation in the work of Gottlob Frege.[31] It is particularly useful for

[31] The range of thinkers engaged with by the journal also made it an intriguing attempt to work beyond a rigid analytic-continental split within philosophy.

our discussion here to understand this transformation and the specific lineage of thought on the concept that the journal traces. Its use lies in offering a model of the changes in the concept of concept that set up pre-conditions for a concept that can be utilised as material.[32]

Condensing and making explicit the history of the concept implied in the journal points to the succession of an Aristotlean, Fregean and then Modern phase of thinking the concept that is important in arguing for the concept as material. It shows that the concept of concept has developed and in so doing produced different types of concepts. In the Aristotelian mode a proposition, such as for example "Socrates is a philosopher", is analysed as containing two concepts, designated by the subject and predicate of the proposition respectively, joined together by a connective, i.e. "Socrates" as one concept, "philosopher" as another, "is a" as the connective. In the Fregean mode the same proposition is analysed as containing an object and a concept and that concept can be understood more precisely as a function of an object. Thus "Socrates" as object, "is a philosopher" as concept or function. Doing this allows Frege to distinguish between concepts and objects internally in a proposition without having recourse to matching against the world.[33]

Aristotle divides the proposition into subject and predicate, Frege into argument and function. (Glock 1996: 14) In Frege's understanding "concepts are themselves 'abstract objects' which perform functions and accomplish mental tasks." (Concept and Form 2012) In order to designate the truth of the proposition in the first mode the concepts must be matched to the things in the world to see if they correspond. It holds a

[32] The conceptual art group Art & Language explicitly cite Frege's thought on the concept as important for them. They stated in 1971 that, "The writings of Frege have provided us with interesting material with respect to the notion of the concept. Frege is one of the principle theoreticians from the beginning of the century who refuted psychologism, that is unjustified psychologism. It was he who showed that it was possible to consider "sense" as an objective concept, separate from its psychological aspect." (Millet 1999: 263) This theme of the objective aspects of the concept can be linked to the claim made later that conceptual artists approach the concept from a point of view where it has already been formalised. Martin Prinzhorn also cites Frege as important in accounting for how Joseph Kosuth approaches concepts. (Prinzhorn 2009: 15)

[33] Though, as we will discuss in looking at Wittgenstein's innovations on this position, Frege couldn't fully rid himself of unnecessary nods to empiricism.

representational theory of language. The representational status of words is guaranteed by the notion of *eidos* that is the 'form' that crosses between thought, language and being. (Staten 1985: 5-6)

The important thing developed from Frege is that not every 'word' or term must be understood as a concept. Propositions, discourse, the workings of language designate internally some elements as objects others as concepts. Language is the medium of concepts but it is also the medium of objects. It internally divides between the two. In his essay 'Concept and Object' Frege makes a few points which define his position. Responding to critiques of his book *Foundations of Arithmetic* which claimed that that there is no absolute distinction between concept and object as he had made out, he clarifies his position on the matter by stating that concepts are such a fundamental simple component part of his logic that he did not give a definition. It is impossible to give a definition of fundamental atomistic parts in this way. He states, "What is simple cannot be decomposed, and what is logically simple cannot have a proper definition." (Frege 1960: 43) A definition he argues only comes to light in the process of scientific work. (Frege 1960: 43) Intriguingly the oft deployed phrase Frege uses, asking the reader to forgive him for this, is that he has at least left 'hints' of a definition (Frege 1960: 42;45;55) However, he still argues there is a fundamental distinction between concepts and objects, one that maps onto, though not perfectly, the distinction in linguistics between the definite (objects) and indefinite (concepts) article. (Frege 1960: 45) Frege's point can, I argue, be translated from its context here, which concerns propositional calculus or *begriffsschrift* and can hold and be informative in other contexts such as conceptual art. For instance, not everything in a conceptual work of art is a concept, even if the work consists primarily of text - some aspects are concepts and others objects, the relation between the two is something an artist necessarily confronts.

Let us pick up *Six Negatives* again here. What is at work is the logical operative, not necessarily concept, of negation.[34] Via an act of negation working at multiple levels the 'original' categories of *Roget's Thesaurus* are transformed into new concepts. Interestingly, what at first glance would seem to be the major gulf between Fregean concepts and those at work in conceptual art - the fact that Frege is concerned with defining logical syntax for propositions which concern truth-values while conceptual art is aloof from the concern of truth-values - is, I argue, not a gulf. In order for Frege to work on his propositional logic he has to, in the first instance, abstract from the question of truth-values. The concepts he works with are worked with regardless of their truth-value, so too in conceptual art - the existence or non-existence (truth or falsity) of the conceptual content is secondary to the existence of the concept as concept in a work of art - thus, the impossible system of negative categories in *Six Negatives* is something an artwork can legitimately posit.

One further aspect of Frege's thinking that bears on the subsequent history of thinking around the concept is his distinction between the sense of an expression and its referent. His famous example being the two expressions for Venus – 'the morning star' and 'the evening star' – having the same referent but having different senses. (Frege 1960: 57) These concepts/functions are satisfied by the same object (Venus) but contain different meanings. This allows a certain amount of movement in a scenario that could become tautologous, i.e. even if we are saying a tautologous statement - 'venus is the morning star' or 'venus is the evening star' we are not strictly saying the same thing, the sense of the phrases matters. Frege's concepts show how concepts are split from their referent and can be analysed as acting regardless of referent.[35] His

[34] If we were to read 'negation' as a concept (and this issue could be philosophically debated) we would have the scenario where the overriding concept of 'Negation' operated upon each category within the section of *Roget's* along with working upon every other 'material' level, i.e. negation takes place in the inversion of colours on the photostat, etc. The concept again would be shown not to be isolated but always working upon something.

[35] The move made by Frege and the *Cahier pour L'Analyse* is similar to that which Eve Meltzer highlights in her *Systems We Have Loved* when she details the move from a humanist understanding and practice of art to an anti-humanist systems based approach. For Meltzer this shift is a product of new theories of the time, structuralism in particular. (Meltzer 2013) *Cahier pour L'Analyse* could be seen as a structuralist

analysis does not come to concepts from the point of view of their creation, as would be the case in an empiricist account of concepts origins, but from how they operate.[36] Having concepts present in this view also sets them up for use in a way the construction of an empiricist concept may not. For instance, there is a greater propensity to think of the Fregean model of the concept as belonging to a system of concepts and objects rather than the product of experience. This we can argue is operative when conceptual artists approach materials such as dictionaries and encyclopaedias (Kosuth's *Second Investigation* or Ramsden's *Six Negatives*). What they are working with are concepts as part of a system, not as something emerging out of an encounter with sense data.

Frege's thinking was to become an integral influence on Ludwig Wittgenstein whose thought aimed to purify the logical language Frege came up with even further. He was also a key influence on the thought of conceptual artists. In now turning to Wittgenstein we shall analyse how these analytic ideas about the concept weave into the conceptualist understanding of their material. And how Wittgenstein reveals aesthetic aspects to conceptuality that can help us speak about the artistic use of concepts as materials.

II - Ludwig Wittgenstein and Conceptual Art– Saying and Showing the Aesthetic of the (Analytic) Concept

In this section we now turn to describing aspects of what I am calling the analytic model of the concept - the most, on first glance, prevalent type of concept that conceptual art works with. Ludwig Wittgenstein will aid us in thinking this type of

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journal with its own idiosyncrasies. The way in which Frege is framed certainly has structuralist concerns, wishing to look for a systematic view away from one based on intentionality and subjectivity. That they chose to foreground an analytic philosopher in this regard however is important for constructing a bridge from Meltzer's arguments on this break that helps constitute conceptual art and the 'type' of concepts conceptual art was given to work with and that were integrated into its style.

[36] The standard empiricist view of which Aristotle provides a basis is that concepts are gained from experience and constructed via a generalisation from particulars.

concept at its limit while also providing us with a tool to view the materiality and aesthetics of the concept - the saying/showing distinction.

Ludwig Wittgenstein influenced many strands of 20th Century philosophy from positivists, analytical and ordinary language philosophers to pragmatists and deconstructionists. He is also a well-attested influence on the work of conceptual artists. Joseph Kosuth has claimed in interviews that he "took 'Investigations' from Wittgenstein… since already in my early 20's I felt philosophy could only survive through being art ('show me' as Wittgenstein said) and not being called philosophy." (Kosuth/Sauer 2018) He would also make works directly nodding to Wittgenstein such as in *L.W.'s Last Word* (1991), a more *pathos* laden work in red neon mimicking the script of the last word Wittgenstein wrote and then crossed out in his diary – *sprache*, the German word for language. Bruce Nauman's *A Rose Has No Teeth* (1965), which consists of a curved metal plaque with that phrasing embossed on it, is also another early reference to the work of Wittgenstein taken as it is from one the meditations in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

Much of the influence has had to do with his posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations* that ruminates on the complexities of ordinary language use. Some have seen in this book an affinity with a deconstructive method (Staten 1984: 1), while others have seen it as a pragmatist text for its focus on language in use (Diamond 2025: 2, 10, 18).[37] The influence of Wittgenstein in both these interpretations can be mapped onto or into Conceptual Art as the development of an interest in the functioning of signs, the complexities of speech and communication. However, what I wish to focus on here and add to these views of Wittgenstein is the importance of how he thinks through the limits of the model of the analytic concept and how connected to this he gives us an insight into the aesthetic aspect of concepts (via the saying-showing distinction).

The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the only work he published in his lifetime (and later renounced), is a book of a different sort. Ostensibly it is a book aimed at showing

[37] Cora Diamond highlights Rorty's repackaging of the later Wittgenstein as a pragmatist while noting how he eschews the *Tractatus* on the grounds that he sees it as a representationalist text.

the problems of philosophy to be mere nonsense, employing and furthering the developments in formal logic made by Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell in order to do this. Jean François Lyotard has commented that Wittgenstein's philosophical trajectory was defined by the insight that after philosophy there is before philosophy. (Lyotard 1991: xv) Wittgenstein attempted in the *Tractatus* to overcome the problems of philosophy through elucidating a clear language and ended up in the *Investigations* going back to the "plurality of tongues entangled in the world." (Lyotard 1991: xv) Lyotard makes this appraisal in the preface to Joseph Kosuth's collected writings, casting an eye to the similarity in Kosuth's investigations he characterises them as "a meditation on writing." (Lyotard 1991: xv)

However, it is in the *Tractatus*, the moment where, if we were to place them in the frame offered by Lyotard, philosophy is actually taking place, that ideas pertinent for discussing the concept, specifically the concept as material, are present.[38] This thesis' engagement with this text is at the level of explicating certain problematic features of the standard analytic concept which formal logic (of varying sorts) relies on. Thus what follows discusses the problem Wittgenstein finds with the statement of the law of identity, the pseudo-concept, and, utilising an analysis from Alain Badiou, illuminates how there is something aesthetic underlying Wittgenstein's thought. The point throughout is to make the case for how the analytic model of the concept has certain features that define its 'materiality' which Wittgenstein's saying/showing distinction aids in isolating, and that these features add to its aesthetic. Saying all this is to run counter to the thought that conceptual art was in its conceptual nature necessarily anti-aesthetic.

Three aspects of this book bear discussion in light of the practice of Conceptual Art – 1) its understanding of the distinction between saying, showing and manifestation; 2) The understanding of tautology and *Un-sinn* or nonsense; and 3) the definition of the

[38]Of course Lyotard does not mean to valorize the *Tractatus* as philosophy but to valorize this before/after philosophy as that which philosophy has been blind to by an untenable constitutive gesture that reduces complexity and particularity to formality.

pseudo-concept. Both the second and third points are derivative of the first distinction. Interpreters of the *Tractatus* are as varied as the later work. It can be taken as a work furthering formal logic, offering some pointers on notational innovation, or at another pole as a mystical and religious text. I read the ideas of the text in the context of what Alain Badiou describes as its anti-philosophical impulse – the impulse to renounce philosophy's search for truth and replace it with an act.[39] Badiou clarifies this act in the case of Wittgenstein as an archi-aesthetic act.

Saying/Showing and Aesthetics

The *Tractatus* offers a variety of resources that philosophers have picked over since first written. Among them are a theory of propositional meaning – the picture theory; the distinction between sense and non-sense and further between non-sense and the senseless; a distinction between saying and showing; and the categorisation of philosophical statements as nonsense and logical statements as senseless.

Wittgenstein introduces the picture theory of propositional meaning in points 2.1–2.1512 of *Tractatus:*

> 2.1 We make to ourselves pictures of facts.
>
> 2.11 The picture presents the facts in logical space, the existence and non-existence of atomic facts.
>
> 2.12 The picture is a model of reality.
>
> 2.13 To the objects correspond in the picture the elements of the picture.
>
> 2.131 The elements of the picture stand, in the picture, for the objects.
>
> 2.14 The picture consists in the fact that its elements are combined with one another in a definite way.
>
> 2.141 The picture is a fact.

[39]Alain Badiou's theory of the anti-philosopher , among whom he counts Pascal, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Lacan, identifies three key features -1. A deposing of the philosophical concept of truth; 2.An unveiling of the philosophical as a veil for something else, usually power; and 3. An anti-philosophical act that is heralded as a radical alternative to the philosophical act (Badiou 2011: 75-76)

2.15 That the elements of the picture are combined with one another in a definite way, represents that the things are so combined with one another. This connection of the elements of the picture is called its structure, and the possibility of this structure is called the form of representation of the picture.

2.151 The form of representation is the possibility that the things are combined with one another as are the elements of the picture.

2.1511 Thus the picture is linked with reality; it reaches up to it.

2.1512 It is like a scale applied to reality.

Propositions picture facts. The picture is laid against reality like a measure. Propositions picture states of affairs – an incorrect picture is incorrect because an element does not fit in the picture it has proposed. For Wittgenstein the proposition is a complex of names, picturing states of affairs between objects. Names themselves are the representatives of objects. This distinction between name and proposition also bears a distinction between sense and non-sense. Only the proposition can have sense, the name as such does not, it is representative of the object but is so not because of an act of thought (which would make it propositional and hence analysable in terms of its sense). (de Beistegui 2008: 34; Badiou 2011: 108)

However, Wittgenstein's theory of the proposition also risks his view of the Concept becoming a representational view of the concept. The picture theory of knowledge understands propositions to be pictures of reality, their truth dependent upon correspondence of signs with that reality or not.[40] Their sense is present in being a well-formed proposition that is already a possible picture of the world. To guarantee this something in common and what is in common there is, for Wittgenstein, logical form. (Wittgenstein 2010: 11 (2.18)) However, not all uttered or utterable propositions have sense i.e. the possibility of being either true or false.[41] Some proposed

[40] Bear in mind that Wittgenstein offered a retort to readers who understood his thinking to imply a picture theory of language - 'it's not a picture theory of language its a picture of language' - i.e. the emphasis is already on the 'showing' rather than the 'saying!

[41] Note that Wittgenstien's theory is one of *bipolarity* where every proposition must be capable of being true *and* capable of being false and not the weaker claim, of *bivalence*, of every proposition being capable of being either true or false. (Glock 1996: 63)

propositions are senseless or nonsense. There are three categories of such proposed propositions - metaphysical propositions, tautologies and contradictions. Both tautologies and contradictions do not picture any state of affairs, they do not perform this basic operation of a proposition and hence they have no referential state of affairs from which to be judged false. Thus both the necessarily true (tautologies) and the necessarily false (contradictions) propositions are hence neither true nor false but simply senseless (*sinnlos*). (Breitenbach 2008: 56) However, despite this Wittgenstein will claim that their structure *shows* something about the world. (Breitenbach 2008: 56) The very fact of their enunciation is revealing. In this way we can see Wittgenstein expanding on the sense of picturing present in his 'picture theory of language.'

Further, representation itself is problematized by Wittgenstein when he states:

> 2.172 The picture, however, cannot represent its form of representation; it shows it forth.
> 2.173 The picture represents its object from without (its standpoint is its form of representation), therefore the picture represents its object rightly or falsely.
> 2.174 But the picture cannot place itself outside of its form of representation.

It is important to note that while representational, Wittgenstein's picture theory is not empiricist precisely because it starts from language. It both gives language access to the world, by the non-thought of nomination, but also denigrates the knowledge that it can consequently access in the formulation of propositions.[42] His theory of the truth of propositions is empirical but truth has been placed lower than sense. (Badiou 2011: 113) He hints at something blocked or inaccessible by language and this is precisely where he supplants philosophy with a turn to the mystical. (Wittgenstein 2010: 88-89; sections 6.44, 6.45, 6.522)

Any 'straight up' interpretation of the *Tractatus* in terms of being a text-book of analytic philosophy, replete with arguments, theories and proofs, has to confront the fact that Wittgenstein undermines this whole perspective in the final section of the

[42] By 'non-thought' of nomination here I am taking it that certain forms of nomination happen outside of conscious directed thought.

book, where he writes lines such as ”6.522 – There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make *themselves manifes*t. They are what is mystical’ Angela Breitenbach comments that ‘we *cannot* rationally understand irrational insights. We cannot make sense of them because they *have* no sense’ (Breitenbach 2008: 76) The *Tractatus* is a deeply mystical book for Breitenbach, a book that asks us to ascribe some kind of ‘insight’ to the mystical but one that we can never ascribe a meaning that we can make sense of. (Breitenbach 2008: 77) There is perhaps something reminiscent of the aesthetic in this.

Here let us return to Badiou’s notion of the archi-aesthetic impulse to Wittgenstein’s thought. Interestingly, Badiou comes to this position despite Wittgenstein donating only one sentence to aesthetics in the *Tractatus*– “Ethics and Aesthetics are one” (6.421) For Badiou, Wittgenstein “is condemned to metaphor”, precisely metaphors of showing, in articulating the substantial philosophical points of the *Tractatus*:

> …because the (J.T. *non-philosophical*) act must install an active non-thought beyond all meaningful propositions, beyond all thought, which also means beyond all science. The one he chooses articulates an artistic provenance (visibility, showing) with a religious one (mysticism): “there are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical.” (6.522) (Badiou: 2010: 80)

The dangerous aspect here, as in other domains, is the mystical element. The mystical element is what will stop us from talking about art itself as something analysable, as something that can be discoursed about, if not (in-)itself discursive. What I want to propose is that we push the Wittgensteinian insight that unearths a non-reducible moment of showing present in formal logic to one into the arena of conceptual art where we can see these ‘analytic type’ of concepts operating in this way - not communicating but rather showing.’[43] We can thus build upon the Frege who

[43] Note that Art & Language when confronting the *October* group’s standard history of conceptual art emerging from the crisis of modernism point to how artworks by a variety of minimalists precisely *showed* their arguments against the modernist constitution of the art object via the art object rather than via discursive ripostes (Art & Language 2006: 124-5)

gave us the concept-object distinction where concepts (in propositions for Frege) act upon the objects which fall under it, to a point where this acting has a moment of showing that is aesthetic. In chapter 5 I will use this insight to describe the interaction between concept, instantiations of the concept and documentation in conceptual artists. For now it may suffice to propose something more with regard to *Six Negatives*, that not only does the work give us a set of impossible categories but in doing so, via the operation of negation it shows us something about a world.

To return to the present discussion, Badiou clarifies that:

> If Wittgenstein's anti-philosophical act can legitimately be declared archi-aesthetic, it is because this "letting-be" has the non-propositional form of pure showing, of clarity, and because such clarity befalls the unsayable only in the thoughtless form of an oeuvre… archi-aesthetic because it is not a question of substituting art for philosophy either. It is a question of bringing into scientific and propositional activity the principle of a kind of clarity whose (mystical) element is beyond this activity and the real paradigm of which is art. (Badiou 2010: 80)

Badiou following this further outlines Wittgenstein's act as being one of demarcation. Specifically it is a demarcation between the thinkable/sayable and the unthinkable/unsayable. The latter being that which is given only in the form of art. (Badiou 210: 80) We need to be cautious in how we apply Wittgenstein here, when he makes the sayable/unsayable distinction, how we take up his ideas in order to reveal something about the concept in art while not making conceptual art into something mystical itself.[44] Wittgenstein, I argue, is struggling with aesthetic dimensions related to the concepts formalisation here. What unsettles Wittgenstein is the inapparentness of logical notation. The aesthetic goal on the contrary is one of apparentness. These underlying aesthetic impulses are possibly best illustrated when Wittgenstein deals with tautology and the most fundamental tautology – the law of identity. In proposing

[44] Not without relevance, and arguably necessarily, references to mysticism are present right in the central texts defining conceptual art. Sol LeWitt's famous characterisation of the Conceptual Artist as a mystic who jumps to conclusions the logician cannot (Le Witt 1999: 106).

his own systematic means of writing symbolic logic Wittgenstein argues against the need for the explicit formulation of the law of identity. Thus among the innovations in terms of notation that Wittgenstein would wish to inaugurate in the *Tractatus* he expresses the wish to do away with the '=' sign for equivalence. (5.3) In the passages where he discusses this he will imply that A=A is already in excess of itself. (Wittgenstein 2010: 62-3 (5.5301, 5.5303)) He will claim that, 'Laws of inference' are superfluous because two propositions show their relation to one another (5.132). Fundamentally difference of identity should be presented by difference of sign, equivalence of identity by similarity of sign. That this is not the case is a problem for Wittgenstein.

This problem with tautology, the problem of tautology, is specifically framed by Wittgenstein's atomism, his belief that objects are simple (i.e. non-composite), which would imply that at some level one must accept difference of sign to signify difference of entity, equivalence of sign signifying equivalence of entity. He is getting to the problem, or rather complexity added to the system by the basic semiotic split between signifier and signified that constitutes a sign. This split is what allows signifying chains and the possibility for signs to mask other signs and signifiers, whether by the operation of mythology, as Barthes identified (Barthes 1973: 124), or via the operations of the unconscious, metonymy and metaphor, as Lacan investigated. (Lacan 1995: 83)

In the Wittgensteinian view everyday speech is itself filled with nonsense, with propositional utterances that *show* the structure of the world as well as vast reams of true or false propositions that *propose* a sense of the world.[45] The difficulty in Wittgenstein's endeavour is that because the picture theory of meaning rests on the notion of the state of affairs it resides on the notion/picture of a combination of objects,

[45] What is being said here about structure links to what Pears and others have identified as the Kantian tenor of Wittgenstein's early thought (Pears 1971). Wittgenstein himself, writing later in 1931 will explicitly reference his early philosophy as Kantian – writing that, 'the limit of language manifests itself in the impossibility of describing the fact that corresponds to (is the translation of) a sentence without simply repeating the sentence'. Here, Wittgenstein claims, 'we are involved … with the Kantian solution of the problem of philosophy'. (Appelqvist 2016: 697)

yet the very notion of ‘object’ is itself problematic and cannot as such be used in a sentence to say anything because it is a purely formal concept, hence a pseudo-concept and necessarily leads to a pseudo-proposition. Thus such propositions as the *Tractatus*’s (2.014) “Objects contain the possibility of all states of affairs” are illegitimate. The whole project itself risks becoming inarticulate.

We can now notice that Wittgenstein’s analytical concept at the limit gives us a way to talk about the resistance of materials we defined in chapter 1. Namely, that the moment of materiality interrupting thought happens via the means of the saying/showing distinction. Further we can now posit that the concept as material is present not in the content of some definition of a concept but in the way in which it shows the structure of itself - how it shows itself corralling a definition to itself. Let us have in mind here Joseph Kosuth’s *One and Three* mentioned in chapter 1 - now we can see that what is at stake here is not the everyday object/concept/picture presented to the viewer but the way in which the presentation shows the three aspects holding together. We shall have more to say on Kosuth later in the thesis but for now let us finish our discussion of the analytic concept in Wittgenstein. The final topics we discuss in this regard concerns the creation of concepts via abstraction and the tautologous form of abstract concepts.

Abstraction and Tautologous Form in Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein approaches concepts from an abstract point of view in the *Tractatus*. The book shows him working with no ordinary or particular concept, as the *PI* is filled with (for instance, the famous example of the concept of ‘game’), but rather with the Concept, or its double, the ‘pseudo-concept’. The signs that will act as concepts by being present in propositions are presented not by abstraction from an encounter or experience but by a nomination that is unclarified as an operation but distinctly not thinking. In Badiou’s commentary on the matter, for Wittgenstein we cannot think when we name or nominate for that would violate the principle of atomism in Wittgenstein’s

philosophy (an atomism relying on an acceptance of the law of identity despite its excessive nature).

However, despite common everyday concepts reduced to a ‘mystical’ form of nomination Wittgenstein does offer the possibility of a specific type of concept creation that of pseudo-concept creation. A pseudo- or formal concept is a concept that is composed of a variable. These concepts are directly constructed by the formal system of logic itself. (4.127- 4.128) (Wittgenstein 2010: 34-5) For Wittgenstein “object”, “complex”, “fact”, “function” and “number” are all pseudo-concepts. (Wittgenstein 2010: 34) They signify formal concepts i.e. concepts only present in formal logic, and not actual concepts, such as ‘shoe’ or ‘cat’ etc.. They are represented in conceptual notation by variables, not by functions or classes. But what makes one ‘pseudo-‘ and the other ‘actual’? Here the ‘pseudo-‘ is contrasted with the ‘actual’ by virtue of its variable which could be any concept what-so-ever, or any object-what-so-ever in opposition to the actual which contains some particular nomination. The formal system itself begets the pseudo- concept as its building blocks, designating ‘actual’ concepts as concepts capable of definition. Here we are back to the inability of a Fregean definition of the concept or the object but only a statement of their absolute distinction.

However Wittgenstein is also distinguishing himself from Frege and Russell. Wittgenstein proposes a new means of writing symbolic logic not because he is, as Russell commented in the introduction to the *Tractatus* searching for a logically perfect language (Wittgenstein was explicitly unhappy with Russell’s introduction to the *Tractatus* for this reason). (Russell in Wittgenstein 2010: ix-x) He wasn’t aiming at clearing up ‘our’ language but rather expressing clearly the language of logic itself. He wanted to rid it of the moments of excess and opacity, to make its form apparent and transparent. This is connected to his denigration of empricism, shown with regards to logic in his rejection of the ‘assertion mark’ present in both the *Begriffschrift* of Frege and the Symbolic logic of Russell and Whitehead. Logic escapes empiricism, it escapes the need to find out in time, to it nothing is hidden, it can be had all at once.

Logic and its sense exist necessarily and prior to the world. Sense is a necessary matter and truth contingent, thus inverting philosophy. (Badiou 2011:105-7)

Understanding logical abstraction as an act is to understand that there is a history to that act. To form an equivalence among objects in Frege-Russell's logic one needs to work by logical abstraction. (Ortiz Hill 2003: 67) As Ortiz Hill summarizes, "Logical abstraction is a technique by which one singles out what is common among the members of a given set of objects. Through it a property is isolated and the particular equivalence obtaining between objects possessing that property comes to be regarded as an identity (on paper)." (Ortiz Hill 2003: 68) This logical abstraction has a history as briefly outlined above in *Cahier pour l'Analyse* from Aristotle to Frege but if investigated in detail includes figures such as Avicenna, Aquinas, De Morgan, Boole and others. Having a history implies certain moments of contestation. For instance, formal logic was shunned by British empiricists in the 18th century for being an "art of thought" that thought did not require in order to study its object. (Passmore 1968: 120) Their objection was that formal logic was abstracted from the actual experience of the world and got in the way of empirically gaining knowledge from reality.

Having a history shows that the formalisation of logical abstraction had to happen in the world and consequently had effects upon the world. Wittgenstein can be seen as one avenue for culminating the history of this act of logical abstraction.[46] His culmination results in acknowledging the aesthetic aspect of logical laws – their *shown* nature. Wittgenstein is precisely important for conceptual art because his desire to make logic apparent in its writing is a desire to get away from one aesthetic of the concept and into another, moving from the opaque to the transparent. Perhaps Wittgenstein is not a major figure on courses on symbolic logic because he is precisely

[46]He is by no means the only one, thought arguably too problematic and eccentric. In the handbook of symbolic logic compiled by van Heijenoort (titled *From Frege to Gödel: A Source Book in Mathematical Logic 1879-1931*) for example, which spans from Frege to Gödel (including logicians and mathematicians – Hilbert, Russell, Reimann Cantor etc.) Wittgenstein is not included. This omission is important as it signals the irreducibly philosophical and non-scientific nature of Wittgenstein's thought. We may speculate that the problem with Wittgenstein's is that he does not want to keep symbolic logic as a separate discipline but see it as implying a mode of life.

useless to it as a discipline, excessive to its needs.[47] Symbolic logic is able to picture itself to itself (a=a etc.) and thus able to be worked upon.

Wittgenstein's logic could never become a discipline (*Tractatus* is not a textbook) in the scientific sense, it could only become a form of renunciation of philosophy, an anti-philosophical act. However, in his attempt to do this he did show that the form of the concept captured by symbolic logic is precisely a form and has consequent aesthetic aspects attached to it. The formalisation, the excess of showing, allows the concept to be given to use, to be worked upon.

An Aesthetics of Showing the Concept

To strengthen this discussion of Wittgenstein we can note how themes related to our discussion so far can be seen at work even prior to conceptual art. Barbara Rose in her 1965 essay 'ABC Art' speaks of artists working according to problems laid out in passages from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* that continue to play with this notion of showing, saying and tautology. She points to Donald Judd and Robert Morris as sculptors who,

> use elementary, geometrical forms which depend for their art quality on some sort of presence or concrete thereness, which in turn often seems no more than a literal and emphatic assertion of their existence. There is no wish to transcend the physical for either the metaphysical or the metaphoric. The thing, thus, is presumably not supposed to "mean" other than what it is; that is, it is not supposed to be suggestive of anything other than itself. (Rose 1988: 67)

The works outlined are meant to declare their literalness. This as Rose notes via the quotation marks over 'mean' suggests that their rejection of saying still speaks, or rather that they are showing simply what they are. Understanding showing in this sense brings our mind to the notion that the showing is a doing. Famously Michael Fried

[47] This is not entirely true as the issue of Wittgenstein's notation is still debated. Rogers and Wehmeier (2012) in their paper 'Tractarian First-Order Logic: Identity and the N-Operator' for instance have proposed that such a system of logical notation, which many commentators also doubt whether Wittgenstein really cared to develop (Floyd 2007: 195), is possible.

(Fried 1998: 157) argued that in fact Morris did not attain this type of literalness, or rather what Fried referred to as 'absorption,' but instead was making 'theatrical' work. For now we shall leave these thoughts here but shall return to them and questions of literalness in chapter 4 when we discuss the relation between concept, word and image in more detail.

Fluxus artists were also among the first to note an aesthetic aspect to (or use of) formal thought. Though what they utilised was more the failures of symbolic logic to complete itself. George Brecht and Patrick Hughes' *Vicious Circles and Infinity: An Ontology of Paradoxes* (1978) catalogues such failures in the form of self-references, paradoxes, infinite regresses and other such logical curios. One aesthetic aspect to these is quite apparent – their general sense of whimsy, the first sentence of the book 'There are no errors in this book, except this one' (Brecht and Hughes 1978: 1) signals how the text means to continue. What Conceptual art does 'beyond' or in addition to this amusing use is to deploy the form of the tautologous statement (the tautology) towards attaining an aesthetic resonance. This ability to show is deployed for instance in Victor Burgin's *Photopath* (1967-9), a work featured in the seminal 1969 exhibition of Conceptual Art (and other new art movements) *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* curated by Harald Szeemann. *Photopath*, which while present in documentation of the show was not featured in the show's catalogue, consists of a series of photographs of a segment of the gallery floor placed atop the exact segment that has been photographed. What do we see when we encounter *Photopath*? We see representation. The form of representation as such is on show. We see the concept of representation presented just as we use it in our everyday lives. A photograph is as close as possible and as far away as always from what it represents at the same time. The physical proximity is still a 'distance' conceptually. Representation cannot overcome this break. *Photopath* plays with proximity in order to enact this showing.[48]

[48] David Campany insightfully relays a case where another sense of the materiality of Burgin's path came to the fore - "Burgin has made the piece several times, notably as part of the exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form: Live in Your Head* at London's Institute of Contemporary Art in 1969, and in the rotunda of the Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 1971. In 2011 technicians made a colour version of Photopath

When Victor Burgin makes *Photopath* he also has to make aesthetic decisions once the move to photograph a section of floor is made. The decisions concern the length of section, there is no reason to choose one length over another though it must be long enough in length to constitute a path.[49] There is an imperative here that the concept fulfills its tautologous form, that the concept in conceptual art cannot lie, or provide a means to judge it in terms of truth or falsity. It isn't a question of getting anyone to think differently about what they are seeing, in the manner of "well this could be a path you just have to expand your mind" type way, no this is quite ordinarily a path.

The piece works on and with the form of ordinary/everyday conceptuality, a key aspect of which is its reliance on the tautologous law of identity that is itself, in being stated, always representational. It operates on showing the form of representation itself, it includes the picture itself by means of the formal concept. There is a danger in what has been outlined here that we get caught into a pure aestheticism of the concept, i.e., that concepts are unmoored from rationality and ethical concerns into a realm of aesthetics that may have interests counter to these. However, in order to avoid a pure aestheticism of concepts I am arguing that only specific 'types' of concepts have an aesthetic that is amenable to be taken as a material for art. The formalised concept has this precise aesthetic. This formalised aesthetic is at work in the presence of words such as 'all' and 'every' in the title of conceptual art works. We can note how the 'Every' grants a sense of completion or rigour even in Ed Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966). When not speaking of 'all' or 'every', works will often specifically note the number of iterations - again *Six Negatives,* Kosuth's *One and Three* and *One and Five*, etc. The 'all', 'every' or 'determinate number' titling works to make a piece both graspable and at the same time conjures a sense of the absurd.

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for a survey show of conceptual art at The Art Institute of Chicago. It was installed in the Institute's then-new glass-walled foyer. During the exhibition the new wooden floor was bleached by bright sunlight, and when *Photopath* came to be removed it left behind a dark patch, a perfectly congruent shadow of its former self." (Campany 2019)

[49] The full instruction for the piece reads: ""A path along the floor, of proportions 1×21 units, photographed Photographs printed to actual size of objects and prints attached to the floor so that images are perfectly congruent with their objects."

We have above investigated an analytic model of the concept - at its limit in Wittgenstein, we might add - as the most, on first glance, amenable account of the type of concept that conceptual art works with. However, at the beginning we noted that there are other types of concepts. We can now, after having argued that conceptual art shows one model of concept, turn to a model of the concept which is set up to critique the notion of concepts as representational. To do this we shall turn to the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari who offer both critiques and an alternative. Unlike Wittgenstein, Deleuze and Guattari are philosophising contemporaneous to the development of conceptual art and due to this are able to offer explicit comments upon it that are of interest to the investigation of this thesis.

III - The Deleuzian View of the Concept and Conceptual Art

If Wittgenstein has allowed us to see the 'what?' in terms of the type of concept Conceptual Art uses, then Deleuze and Guattari further that 'what?' via offering an alternative mode of conceiving the concept based off of an ontology of the primacy of difference instead of identity. Their co-authored *What is Philosophy?* (1991) aims to define the specificity of philosophy quickly launching their investigation with the statements that "…philosophy is the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts" (Deleuze and Guattari (from now on D/G) 1996: 2) and "more rigorously, philosophy is the discipline that involves creating concepts."(D/G 1996: 5) Further, their account abounds with definitional statements on what the concept is - defining the concept variously as a "multiplicity" (D/G 1996: 15), "a fragmented whole" (D/G 1996 :16), "a heterogenesis … an ordering of its components by zones of neighbourhood" (D/G 1996 : 20), "an act of thought" (D/G 1996 : 21). These multiple definitions are presented in a context that argues for each concept's unique consistency.

They point to the embededness of concepts in their context – the fact that they come together in response to a "problem" (D/G 1996: 27) A concept acts and is

enlivened by the context of the problem, which it does not so much answer as bring into greater focus. Deleuze named his philosophical approach as 'transcendental empiricism.' Beginning from the difference of this kind of empiricism from standard empiricist models is a useful way to enter into the Deleuzian model of the concept. Thus, while he heralded empiricism's focus on the particulars of experience (sensitive to difference) his is no standard empiricism. As Marc Rölli comments on the use Deleuze makes of empiricism:

> Deleuze's concern, in contrast to diverse romantic attempts at reviving empiricist ideas in the contexts of various philosophies of life, is to make full use of the constructive potential of conceptual thinking in the strict sense of an enlightened empiricism. In his theory of concepts he leaves behind the representational copy-principle which asserts that simple 'ideas' immediately reflect corresponding sense impressions. For him ideas and concepts have their very own 'sources', and although these sources of reason are neither pure nor original, at least they cannot be traced back to the continuous experience of immediate sensory-given life. (Rölli 2016: 15-6)

The 'romantic' notion described would correspond to a pure focus on the particulars of sense impression, on colour, touch, taste, feel etc. Instead the concept is not pushed aside but put into focus with a consistency all its own. Purposefully moving away from a model where concepts come about by abstraction from 'concrete' phenomena, for D/G "….in philosophy, concepts are only created as a function of problems which are thought to be badly understood or badly posed (pedagogy of the concept)." (Deleuze 1996: 16) Concepts relate to problems as their clearer articulation. Without a problem there is no need for the philosophical concept yet the problem is only visible via the concept. As de Beistegui comments in this regard "concepts are valuable only to the extent that they allow us to designate specific problems and not merely generalities, events and not universal rules or essences." (de Beistegui 2010: 5) In a way the problem of the standard model of empiricist concept construction, which the Deleuzian account rectifies, is that at a certain level the concept becomes

unimportant in its own consistency i.e. it is a stand-in for a set of sources of sense impressions 'out there.'

If the creation or construction of concepts comes out of the problem then this construction can be schematised as a process of problematisation. John Marks identifies it, following remarks Deleuze made upon Bergson, as a three step procedure –1), isolate an error committed in the writings on a specific subject; 2) bring to light a neglected aspect of the *oeuvre*, and 3) invent a concept from this situation. (Marks 1998: 23-24) Thus the practice of concept creation here goes from error, to neglected aspect to concept. The point is that concepts do not arise *ex nihilo* but in relation to a field open to problematisation. Deleuze's creation of concepts is "an effort to extract from the sensible the singular points at which the constitution of a phenomenon, whatever its nature, is being decided." (de Beistegui 2010: 6) Problematization opens to view these 'singular points'.

What comes together in the concept is its component parts. Deleuze and Guattari can name these as parts in each "theoretical" concept they present. One of the examples given is the Cartesian Cogito. This they split into three components – doubting, reflection and being. (D/G 1996: 24-5) Further than even naming these components they offer drawn maps and diagrams of concepts, such as they do for Kantian philosophy. (D/G 1996: 56-7)

Though concepts arise in response to problems, or a problematic, in being created they also pre-suppose a pre-philosophical plane which is laid out at the instance the concept is thought. The plane of immanence from which the concept emerges gives thought an idea of what it means to think. This point is also connected to the transcendental nature of Deleuze's empiricism which also works to cut across the abstraction model of concept creation. As an example and extension of this we could consider D/G's take on the notion of philosophical debate. They argue that it is a pointless endeavour because philosophy is an unfurling of the concept upon its own unique plane of immanence. Not taking place on the same plane as that of another

concept yields the notion of the debate a sham. (D/G 1996: 28) One cannot prove the other wrong from another plane but instead prove the worth of a mode of thought via its productive deployment.

What Deleuze and Guattari provide in their philosophy is an account of how the concept operates, an account of how they come into existence, continue in it and become. An account that while relying on experience does not have to claim the concept as a representation of this experience. Concepts are alive as long as their "problem" is. This is why the question is raised in *What is Philosophy?* about being a Platonist, a Cartesian, a Kantian etc. today. (D/G 1996: 28). Each can co-exist as disciplines as long as their problem remains visible or intuitable. From one angle their view could be seen to relativize philosophy, reducing it from being a universal discourse of reason into a variety of arts of the concept. And just as there is no one artwork or Absolute artwork, so there is no Absolute concept (that would be chaos) (D/G 1996: 15) though we do have a concept called Absolute.

Following this characterisation of philosophy Logic is not, for Deleuze and Guattari, philosophy. They contend that:

> By confusing concepts with functions, logic acts as though science were already dealing with concepts or forming concepts of the first zone. But it must itself double scientific with logical functions that are supposed to form a new class of purely logical, or second zone, concepts. A real hatred inspires logic's rivalry with, or its will to supplant, philosophy. It kills the concept twice over. However, the concept is reborn because it is not a scientific function and because it is not a logical proposition: it does not belong to a discursive system and it does not have a reference. The concept shows itself and does nothing but show itself. Concepts are really monsters that are reborn from their fragments. (D/G1996: 140)

Logic is not philosophy because concepts are not propositions and philosophy does not deal in propositions. (D/G 1996: 22) For them logic deals with a field of reference, the same form of thought as science. Science thinks by means of the function not the concept. However, the language of the concept 'showing' itself is

retained but with a different sense. Deleuze wants to keep the distinction between logic as a discipline dealing with function and proposition, while philosophy deals with the concept. Intensive qualities are what are present in the concepts reproducibility and inexhaustibility. Instead of the 'falling under' it is the continuation of the concept. By isolating the concepts intensive qualities, something non-reducible to a proposition, or its extension, Deleuze and Guattari give it a consistency other philosophies wish away in varying degrees, whether entirely in the analytic philosophers pseudo-concept or partially in a vulgar/mechanist Marxist rendering of the concept as ideological.

A radical point that Deleuze and Guattari make is that the concept itself is thought by, or posits into being, its own conceptual persona as the one who thinks it. The conceptual persona has the benefit of being infinite as opposed to the finiteness of the actual philosopher. There is a separation between the philosopher and the concept just as there is a separation between the artist and the artwork. From this separation arises the space for the conceptual persona to stand in and be the actual bearer of the concept. When we think the concept we are caught up in thinking according to these personas. Thinking does not proceed from a subject but puts in motion its own mechanisms of subjectivation.

The radicality of this point resides in showing the fundamental importance of concepts towards the creation of new modes of subjectivation without having a necessary tie between the thinker and the subjectivity enacted in their concepts.

The Plane of Immanence and the Dogmatic Image of Thought

To expand upon aspects of what we have said above we can note that Deleuze and Guattari have a specific notion of the philosophical concept and what it presupposes. For them all concepts pre-suppose an un-thought idea or image of what it means to think. They express their own philosophy as an exercise on a plane of immanence or as imageless thought. To give an impression of the plane of immanence we do well to take each term, 'plane' and 'immanence', separately and in turn.

Firstly, the plane of a thought is its pre-supposition that it does not think but that its concepts think upon. In Plato the plane is one of contemplation, in Kant of reflection, in someone like Habermas of communication. (de Beistegui 2010: 7) In the classic example given in *WiP?* for Descartes it is the pre-conceptual knowing of what it is to think. The plane, which can also be labelled the image of thought, is then essentially what it means for certain concepts to be thought. It is the presupposed meaning or orientation that gives a philosophy its distinctive arena of thought.[50] This plane is also sometimes referred to as an image of thought. Deleuze reflected upon and tried to formulate what his own mode or image of thought was within works such as *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense.* He wished it to be a thought without image.

Secondly, the term immanence refers in the first instance to being *within* as opposed to being *external*, or *transcendent to*, or even transcendental, if understood as a limit. When Kant employed the term transcendental he referred to, "to all knowledge which is not so much occupied with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects, so far as this mode of knowledge is possible a priori." (Kant 1993: 43 A11/B25) Deleuze transformed this use of the term transcendental into a means of "describing the virtual and not, in opposition to Kant, to defining the conditions of experience" (Barroso 2019: 137) with the Virtual representing "the necessary conditions under which real experience is actualized."(Barroso 2019: 137)

The notions outlined of problems and the encounter giving rise to thought places the concept and its origination in a specific circumstance. It is not given from outside this situation, or something at the edge of it but directly enmeshed and coming from within it. There is thus something pragmatic signalled in this immanence. There is a limit to how much one can propose to think immanence as at the end of the day the only thing that immanence itself is immanent to is immanence itself. (D/G 1996:45)

Thus, the plane of immanence is the acknowledgement of philosophy's existence as a vital activity in the world, and is tied to the concept as an act, not an abstract entity.

[50] The more formalised concept of problematic present in Althusserian structuralism is a good point of comparison.

However, this plane of immanence that the philosophical concept (and not just their concepts) always arises upon is always in danger from what they term the illusions of thought (D/G 1996: 49-50), also known as the dogmatic or representational image of thought. The 'dogmatic image of thought' is the home of common sense opinion or what is called *doxa*. As summarised from *Difference and Repetition* the characteristic hallmarks of this dogmatic or representational image of thought are identity in the concept, opposition in the predicate, resemblance in perception, and analogy in judgement. (Deleuze 1995: 137-8) Escaping *doxa* becomes one of the fundamental marks of the valorized modes of thought identified in *What is Philosophy?*– Philosophy, Art and Science.

Deleuze tries to think immanently, to have either a thought without image (project of *LofS* and *DandR*) or think upon a plane of immanence (articulated with Guattari in *WiP?*). However in order to do this he must keep in place a distinction, what Simon O'Sullivan refers to as the overarching theme of WiP? (O'Sullivan 2006: 112), between *doxa* and the concept. The *doxa*, signifying opinion, the unthought, representational 'common sense' and 'good sense', concept signifying an event from thought. The importance of the concept of the *doxa* in Deleuze can be found by reference to the arguments in *Logic of Sense* concerning the *paradoxical* nature of sense. The concept is *paradoxical* precisely because the *doxa* – good sense and common sense – is purely concerned with extensive qualities, the 'what can fall under a name', in opposition to the generative qualities of the concept (what the concept constructs). De Besitgeui refers to doxa in Deleuze's thought as the 'unthought of western thought.' (de Beistegui 2008: 41) While isolating the existence of the dogmatic image of thought and the shape of the doxical concept, Deleuze and Guattari do not specify the reasons for the existence of the dogmatic image of thought as something historical but instead as something situational to thought itself, they are thoughts illusions.

Here, we have an issue with which to return to conceptual art. This appearance of the concept as *doxa*, as something known but not thought, is a key component of the

Conceptualist aesthetic. In a certain manner the appearance of conceptual art is based on the assumption of both good sense, meaning goes in one direction (it is not bidirectional, inherently yielding multiple meanings) , and common sense, that it keeps this meaning stable as an identity. This can be noted for instance in the propensity for the use of everyday items in conceptual art, as in the presentation of items from a chair to a shoe to a plant to a coat in Kosuth's *One and Three* series. Much of this we could say has to do with what Lippard, as we saw in chapter one, defined as the need for jejune materials to be utilised to forward the ideational aspects of the work. Further, when we spoke of a practice based materialism we put the doing before thinking and thus doxical concepts, being unthought rather than thought, are materials of practice in this sense.

The fundamental 'metaphysical' position that acts as an inspiration for Deleuze when thinking philosophy and the concept is based on the Stoic distinction between incorporeal (immaterial) Events and (material) bodies (states of affairs). The Event, think for example of 'cutting', is what takes place between two bodies, in this case knife and butter, which while affecting each is not itself a body or reducible to either – the cutting is not in the sharpness of the blade or the smooth-softness of the butter, yet it must be seen as the cause of the change in bodies. (Grosz 2017: 28) DG will declare in *WiP* that 'Concepts are events' (D/G 1996: 36) and 'Events are the concepts consistency' (D/G 1996: 151). As event the concept is non-representational, it cuts through the dogmatic image of thought. It is also useful to think of the event as incorporeal as correlated in linguistics to the verb, as in the example of 'cutting' above. Thinking in terms of an artwork for a minute, we can conceive that by utilizing a concept we affect bodies, understood as other materials in the assemblage of the artwork - the concept acts upon these other materials.[51] We will return to how this conception fits with conceptual art's concepts as materials below.

[51] This characteristic will be seen from another view in chapter 4 where the diagram is proposed as a means of thinking about the relationship between concepts, words and images in conceptual art. Here the concept takes on a pre-eminence that both flattens and links words and images.

The concept is also a multiplicity and acts upon what it comes in contact with. In relation to the concept certain other aspects of a text become matters of facts or states of affairs not concepts in themselves. (D/G 1996: 21-3) The concept gives form and ordering to the other materials a philosophy encounters (the "things" philosophy thinks). The concept is also abstract for Deleuze but in a specific way. Brent Adkins has written a short article highlighting that we need to be attentive to Deleuze's particular use of the terms concrete and abstract. He draws attention to this remark of Deleuze's from a 1978 lecture on Kant:, "There is the concrete and the opposite of the concrete, the true opposite of the concrete is not the abstract, it's the discrete."(Deleuze 1978) Adkins clarifies that "Deleuze's point here is straightforward… follows directly from the etymology of concrete, which comes from the Latin for "grown together," and discrete, which comes from the Latin for "separated." (Adkins 2016: 352) The abstract is abstract because it is not separated into discrete moments, The abstract is abstract then rather because of a certain indeterminacy.[52] Deleuze thus retains a general notion of the concept as abstract but changes its specific sense by changing the axis of polarities the abstract is caught in.[53]

Deleuze and Guattari on Conceptual Art

Following from what we have outlined above our claim for the validity of the concept as a material may in the first instance be confronted by a problem in Deleuze and Guattari, namely that if the concept is an event, then it is not a body and thus not in the same category as other materials which make up an artwork. The concept will be incorporeal and precisely not material, a body or 'stuff-like.' However, we also churned up some insights into how a certain category of what may be more commonly understood as concepts, notions of the doxa, seem to be at play in conceptual art -

[52] The sense in which the abstract is spoken about here can be helpfully thought by thinking along with Galloway that Deleuze is an analogue as opposed to a digital thinker. If the digital is based on thinking according to separating off into discrete entities, splitting the 1 into 2, then the analogue operates by making the 2 into 1. (Galloway 2018)

[53] This is why Deleuze and Guattari can famously criticise Chomskian linguistics, which takes a formal approach to language, as both too abstract and not abstract enough. (D/G: 2012 156)

they are the readymade notions to hand which a conceptual artist can take hold of, something we witness in their grasping of *Roget's Thesaurus* as encapsulating a set of concepts and a mode of thought.

Before proposing any resolution to the problem of thinking the concept as material if we propose that the concepts utilised are evental, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, let us first encounter the rather curious dismissal of conceptual art by D/G themselves. This encounter can show us something of a limit and misrecognition operative in their thought.

Let us see what they say explicitly on the topic. *What is Philosophy?* contains one specific passage where Deleuze and Guattari make comments about Conceptual Art. (D/G 1996: 198) The relevant passage can also be tied to an earlier passage in the book if we follow Stephen Zepke in a strong reading of the former excerpt. (D/G 1996: 10) After these we shall proceed to look at an interview where Guattari proposes what can be seen as a revision of some of the views expressed in *WiP?*.

Here is the passage in question:

> Conceptual Art seeks… (a) dematerialisation through generalisation, by installing a sufficiently neutralised plane of composition (the catalogue that brings together works not displayed, the ground covered by its own map, disused spaces without architecture and the "flatbed" plane) so that everything takes on a value of sensation reproducible to infinity: things, images or clichés, propositions – a thing, its photograph at the same scale and in the same place, its dictionary definition. However, in the latter case it is not at all clear that this way leads to the sensation or the concept, because the plane of composition tends to become "informative", and sensation depends upon the simple "opinion" of a spectator who determines whether or not to "materialize" the sensation, that is to say, decides whether or not it is art. This is a lot of effort to find ordinary perceptions and affections in the infinite and to reduce the concept to a *doxa* of the social body or great American metropolis. (D/G 1996: 198)[54]

[54] The quote begins tying Abstract art and Conceptual Art together - "Abstract art and Conceptual art are two recent attempts to bring art and philosophy together, but they do not substitute the concept for sensations; rather they create sensations and not concepts…."

How should we read this? As praise, a positive value judgement, a neutral comment or a critique?[55] According to Stephen Zepke the case is clear, here Deleuze and Guattari launch a "scathing attack" on conceptual art. (Zepke 2010: 36; Zepke 2006: 157) A lot in the meaning of this passage would seem to hinge on the word 'generalisation' and whether generalisation is positively or negatively laden or, if possible, a neutral term. The point should also be noted that ' generalisation' is not the same as abstraction.' By and large the former is a less precise operation. Zepke certainly understands it to be a denigration. Zepke, for instance, will understand it to mean that conceptual art performs a 'banalisation' of sensation. Though we can still ask in this scenario whether Deleuze and Guattari value 'banalisation'? For it is true that banality and boredom play a huge role in the overall aesthetic of conceptual art. Robert C. Morgan will even ties the early Duchampian gestures of indifference to a kind of new existential condition of boredom besetting the artist - "The goal of "noncontemplation" seems borne out of a rejection of the industrial world; for the artist to accept his role in this world, it becomes necessary to confront boredom as the underlying condition." (Morgan 1994: 3)

There is also the admittance of an uncertainty with regard to conceptual art in this passage when Deleuze and Guattari write "it is unclear in the case of the latter whether they create concepts or sensations." This is not an "either or question" i.e. that D/G's opinion is that perhaps actually conceptual art creates concepts or perhaps it creates sensations, it is unsure by the practice. While such wording is unclear, it is I think clarified by the distinctions between Philosophy as an art of concept, Science as art of function and Art as art of sensation, that is a main argument of *WiP* as a whole, and is re-iterated just up from the passage on conceptual art – "The three routes are specific, each as direct as the others, and they are distinguished by the nature of the plane and what occupies it. Thinking is thought through concepts, or functions, or sensations and

[55] Though the author had not thought the following reading to be controversial events during the research for a paper on the topic of Deleuze and Conceptual Art led to the realisation that there may be a mismatch between what a community of Deleuzian scholars think and what Deleuze actually wrote and thought about conceptual art. Thus, the explication following above was deemed necessary.

no one of these thoughts is better than another, or more fully, completely, or synthetically "thought." (D/G 1998: 198) If the option were to be entertained that works of art actually create concepts then this would cut across the distinction already made in the book, blurring philosophy as an art of the concept. It would raise the question is art or can art be a form of philosophy or not? In fact it is precisely this possibility that a philosophy such as DG's would seem to open up but their relatively rigid distinctions would not seem to allow it despite acknowledging the (sometimes) inter-minglings and connections of the concept, the function and the sensation. (Smith 2012: 126-127)

Understood in context the meaning of what they are saying is that it is unclear whether conceptual art creates anything, whether concept or sensation, for it has reduced its elements to the level of the 'informative'. As Zepke understands it, Deleuze and Guattari are saying that conceptual art produces "neither" concepts nor sensations. (Zepke 2017: 140) This would lead onto an appraisal of Deleuze and Guatari's appraisal of information, which would lead us to a negative value judgement which would further imply that Deleuze and Guattari mean what they say in a derogatory rather than positive manner.

In saying all this the passage here on conceptual art and in other works on abstract art are filled with illuminating points of interest that raise productive ideas for thinking about art. The problem is precisely in the value judgement, which is a real aspect of Deleuze's work, and *What is Philosophy?* especially. He does not negatively judge any overarching pursuit but values them – art, science and philosophy – but in specific instances of such practices he indeed does offer critique – think of his hatred for Wittgensteinian Ordinary Language Philosophy (a philosophy which has both actual art historical links with conceptual art, as well as being associated in scholarship for reasons that can at times be problematic or narrowing).

Zepke has continued his strong reading of this section by linking it to an earlier passage in the book. In an earlier passage of *WiP?* Where Delueze and Guattari speak of the "ideas men" there is no explicit connection to the appraisal of "conceptual art".

However Zepke will proceed on the basis that they are inter-connected (Zepke 2006: 157). Let's look at what DG state in this passage:

> Finally, the most shameful moment came when computer science, marketing, design, and advertising, all the disciplines of communication, seized hold of the word concept itself and said: "This is our concern, we are the creative ones, we are the ideas men! We are the friends of the concept, we put it in our computers." Information and creativity, concept and enterprise: there is already an abundant bibliography. Marketing has preserved the idea of a certain relationship between the concept and the event. But here the concept has become the set of product displays (historical, scientific, artistic, sexual, pragmatic), and the event has become the exhibition that sets up various displays and the "exchange of ideas" it is supposed to promote. The only events are exhibitions, and the only concepts are products that can be sold. Philosophy has not remained unaffected by the general movement that replaced Critique with sales promotion. The simulacrum, the simulation of a packet of noodles, has become the true concept; and the one who packages the product, commodity, or work of art has become the philosopher, conceptual persona, or artist. (D/G 1996: 10)

Noting the specific references to "exhibition" and "displays", we should ask what is the specific type of art that D/G have in mind? It is not a stretch of the imagination, and certainly not if one follows the negative appraisal of the passage on conceptual art along with Zepke and Alliez, to place Conceptual Art in this category. Of course, it may be that the aforementioned "design" is what is referenced in the mention of "artistic." An acquaintance with the history of conceptual art would lead one to many instances, whether co-optations or not, where conceptual art functions as design – this is, perhaps, a danger inherent to it.

Returning to Zepke, in the most harsh reading of Deleuze's comments on conceptual art he proposes that Conceptual Art has reduced art to a form of information, which for Deleuze is exactly the "system of control" (Deleuze 2006: 320-321).[56] This we may classify as Zepke's strong reading of Deleuze's notion of

[56] In Stephen Zepke "A Work of Art Does Not Contain The Least Bit of Information": Deleuze and Guattari and Contemporary Art"– "Contemporary art therefore risks becoming the mere "propagation of

conceptual art, one a more generous descriptive reading of the passages in *WiP?* and Guattari's later comments help us to recuperate something else from. For the moment however let us follow through this line of thought and ask are Deleuze and Guattari right to be suspicious that CA is a form of communication and/or information? Is not one of the seminal shows of conceptual art, the summer show of 1970 at MoMA curated by Kynaston L. McShine, itself called *INFORMATION?* This exhibition featured works of major conceptualists as well as land artists and anti-form artists of the time and could thus perhaps be a key case in point for D/G. Hence, recourse to some of the works in this show now may help illuminate where D/G analysis can take us and where conceptual art can take D/G.

The exhibition catalogue for *INFORMATION* brought together not documentation of works in the show per se but contributions from the artists involved with the show, meaning that some submitted contributions independent of what occurred in the physical gallery space of the exhibition. This utilizing of catalogues as sites for work had already taken place in Seth Siegelaub's exhibition in a catalogue the *Xerox Book* two years previously. This utilization of catalogue as exhibition can be seen to work in tandem with the presentation of works on billboards or magazines or through other means of mass communication. McShine's brief catalogue essay places the work being presented in a context of social and political upheaval driven by youth and describes how young artists "attempts to be poetic and imaginative, without being either aloof or condescending has led them into the communications areas that *INFORMATION* reflects'" (McShine 1970: 139)[57] He links this explicitly to the conceptuality of the works noting that the rapid exchange of ideas is privileged over

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information" in an era when, Deleuze says, "information is exactly the system of control" (Deleuze 2006, 320-321). Deleuze could not be any more explicit in his condemnation of this development, declaring: "A work of art has nothing to do with communication. A work of art does not contain the least bit of information" (Deleuze 2006, 322)" (Zepke 2017:760)

[57] Interestingly, McShine later stated that the idea of 'information' came as the title for the show not because of a direct curatorial focus on information technology but from asking young artist had they 'any information' about new work so he could compile his survey of new art practices. The sign information in its social context corralled to itself a reading of the young artists in terms of a new information age. (McShine in Wiener eta.l 2020)

‘embalming the idea’ in an object. (McShine 1970: 139) Honing in on specific works that engage a concept of information let us look at *Service Area* (1970) presented by Vito Acconci as one example. Here is the transcript of the ‘concept’ of the piece:

> Service Area
> During the exhibition, my mail is forwarded by the post-office to the museum. My space in the show functions as my mailbox: an open plastic box is fixed to the top of a table – when my mail is delivered to the museum, the museum-staff deposits it in my box.
> Whenever I want my mail, whenever I need my mail, I go to the museum to get it. On a calendar attached to the wall, above the table, I mark off the dates and times of pick-up. (Acconci n.d.)

What is going on here? A communication or a showing of communication. The system of communication, of information itself is on display. The mail’s content is irrelevant, rather we have the materiality of there being letters, ‘mail piling up’, that matters. Is this not similar to how data counts? That what we are witnessing is the data of the mail Acconci gets with no access to the mail itself whether as postcards from friends, bills, government correspondence etc.

Comment however needs to be made on the additional remarks Acconci added to the piece in the *INFORMATION* catalogue. These additional remarks are ‘on and around some uses’ of the piece, and include two ideas for performance pieces:

> (A performance piece consisting of 1: a tape of a walk, specified number of steps, and 2: a live performer running in place, the same number of steps, trying to outrun the tape)
> (A performance piece in which a phrase of a song, on record, is played over and over again until I can sing it, fairly exactly, along with the original singer: going on to the phrase.) (Acconci 1970: 5)

These steer the piece into narrative territory and act as strange supplements. The first makes sense as derived from the piece – the walk to the gallery generating a piece - however, the second? How does the song connect? it just seems to be another idea.

Here maybe the Deleuzian concept of an assemblage helps us in accepting analytically the tacked together nature of the piece. A concept emerges not as something tightly analytic with clear edges but as something more roughly contingent. Acconci's piece marks a departure from the 'tighter' pieces so far discussed in the thesis (*Second Investigation, Six Negatives*, etc.). It expresses something apparent at the time that conceptual art could not be seen as simply one mode - the distinction between analytic and stylistic, or as Osborne has later termed it exclusive and inclusive conceptualisms was operative. For this thesis it raises the issue of whether we can argue for a different type of concept (as material) at work in either vein of conceptual art. Acconci's work/concept can be argued to operate more at the level of event where from the original instantiation multiple new lines of flight from it may be enacted corralling together gallery and artist in new ways unforeseen in the original presentation of the concept.

Guattari Interview

Now let us return after this brief riposte of an artwork to the strong reading of conceptual art as information to a more nuanced discussion in an interview between Guattari and Olivier Zahm. In this 1992 interview Guattari makes many interesting remarks. Essentially on the topic of contemporary art it also ranges over social topics such as capitalism in the 1990's and the place of narrative in the struggle for new subjectivities against capitalism. On these latter topics Guattari's view is rather bleak - Capitalism, for the time-being, is triumphant and we are mistaken to think that narrative and story-telling has anything to do with the project of fostering resistant modes of subjectivity. (Guattari and Zahm 2011: 47-49) He references how Deleuze and he have been misinterpreted around the question of narrative and subjectivity. (Guattari and Zahm 2011: 47) He underlines the point that him and Deleuze were precisely against narrativity with regard to the production of subjectivity:

> A story is by definition something discursive. There is a term, then another term, then a third that relates to the first two. There is more montage than composition, whereas in my way of seeing things the subjective mutation made by the aesthetic refrain is not discursive, it is the outbreak of the non-discursive at the heart of the discursive. That is why it always crosses a threshold of non-sense, a threshold that ruptures the coordinates of the world. (Guattari and Zahm 2011: 47)

The focus on discourse is the oppressive thing. Its breakdown, or rather perceived breakdown is the eruption of the new, of nonsense and something vital to life. The a-signifying rupture is all important for the creation of new subjectivities and aesthetic and other modes of creation. (Guattari and Zahm: 48) At first glance this would seem to counter some of Alliez's appraisal of the concept as descriptive/story-telling. (Alliez 2004) It also re-affirms the position of *WiP?* That thinking also consists of a renunciation of subjectivity, or its de-territorialization, in favour of the concept's conceptual persona.

In the core of the interview however Zahm confronts Guattari on his relationship to and thoughts on contemporary art:

> OZ: …But you don't, or barely, tackle the field of contemporary art, which is no longer defined by the pre-eminence granted to a material, or to a medium and its tradition, but by the multiplicity of languages [and thus] the use of conceptual materials. Can one speak of contemporary art as a conceptualization of sensation?
> F.G.: Because you think that conceptual art is not a being of sensation?
> O.Z.: I don't know if sensation plays as a decisive role [in contemporary art] as in painting, or even as in the cinema. I think Cassavetes's camera is as drunk as the people it films.
> F.G.: No, conceptual art produces the most deterritorialized sensations it is capable of creating. . . Instead of working with painting, with colours, with sounds, it works with a material that is the concept. But it's not a concept made for creating concepts, it's a concept that creates sensations. . . It paints with the concept, within an urban or natural spatial environment. It changes the material. It aims at a transgression, as you say, a deterritorialization – I don't know how to say it any other way – of sensation. . . In addition, it is all the more within sensation for deconstructing the dominant, redundant sensations. It grasps sensation all the more. . .
> O.Z.: Even when it is a question of abstract material, of conceptual material?

F.G.: Obviously, perhaps more so! Because there, the freedom of mutation no longer has any formal support. Yes, there are deterritorialized materials, and conceptual art looks for the most deterritorialized of materials. . . Even if it sometimes looks for them in a way that is sometimes very poor, because finally conceptual art isn't 'conceptual', most of the time..
OZ.: But that it might not be isn't a problem.
F.G.: Yes, absolutely not.

Guattari assents to Zahm's proposition that the conceptual artist 'is an inventor of sensations." (Guattari and Zahm 2011: 44):

O.Z.: The artist, even the conceptual artist, is therefore an inventor of sensations.
F.G.: Yes.
O.Z.: When art mobilizes totally conceptual materials (most often a language-object), how, in your opinion, does it effectuate these mutations of sensation?
F.G.: It is not so much a question of searching for materials, but rather for points of deterritorialization that traverse these materials. It will look for breaks, for leakages, for what allows it to slip in between, outside the dominant redundancies. The artist has, in effect, to search through all the rubbish bins – of society, of philosophy, of all of the domains of thought – to get out of here, to get out of this kind of stalled perception and affection, to produce mutant percepts and affects. . . to produce a type of feeling that engenders a mutation in the domain of the infinite. . . It is a new mode of finitude, one that produces a new relationship to incorporeal universes. . . (Guattari and Zahm 2011: 44)

Schematically Guattari outlines that the conceptual artist yes, uses concepts as their material, that this is one of the most de-territorialized materials but that we cannot characterize this art practice as in any way more relevant because of this. Its material does not give it any quick means to being a transversal work, mingling concept with sensation, or performing philosophy.

Guattari also downplays the search for materials in favour of a focus on 'points of deterritorialization that traverse these materials'. This focus is perhaps why D/G could offer more theoretical time to painters than conceptual artists in *WiP?*. In the Zahm interview the artistic examples Guattari utilizes are the painter Fromanger and

composer Debussy. The former is deployed in order to show how an artist brings a-signifying nucleus from their life together in an aesthetic composition. (Guattari and Zahm: 48) The latter in order to help communicate the idea of an aesthetic machine - of an artist opening up a world, or universe, that is more than or rather crystallised in their works. (Guattari and Zahm: 51)

Conclusion

In the concluding paragraphs of this chapter let us summarize what has been outlined that contributes to an understanding of the concept in conceptual art. The views of the concept outlined above conflict with one another and could be taken to represent the option of Wittgenstein vs Deleuze, inviting us to pick the better account. To underline the point this has not been the aim. Aspects of both thinkers are outlined as they highlight difficulties in thinking through what concepts are and how one can have different models of concepts. There are a diversity of types of concept and approaches to concept creation.

While both Wittgenstein and Deleuze's theories imply different meta-physical assumptions both models of the concept play a part in reality. Wittgenstein is analysing and working with, as Frege was before him, a specific model of concept that exists in the world and operates in a specific manner. The contention is that different works of conceptual art can be seen to operate with types of concepts that are (or are similar to) those outlined above.

The use of the Wittgensteinian type of concept is most obvious to see and has been placed in dialogue with *Six Negatives* for that reason. The Deleuzian is more obscure in relation to conceptual art, especially in light of Deleuze's rejection of conceptual art and his privileging of his model of the concept as applicable only to philosophy. Yet in examples such as Acconci's *Service Area* where the work does not rely on utilizing a representational or analytic mode of concept but could be argued to actively construct

a concept that functions as an event, acting upon the other elements in the show Acconci himself, the gallery, etc., we may begin to see a connection.

This chapter has churned up a number of types of concepts - the standard model (a representation derived from experience), the analytic model (representational and functional as part of a system), the concept as event (concept is composed of parts that shows itself in its effects) and varieties of possible non-concepts such as *pseudo-concepts* and *doxa*. As part of this we have also been given features of these concepts - the tautological form underlying the analytic model, the possibility of an aesthetic aspect to this form and the possibility for a concept to be affective. These aspects shall be deployed in discussing concepts as materials in the following chapters.

In the next chapter we shall see more how the notion of *doxa* Deleuze promotes has something to say about the kind of concepts many conceptualists will choose to pick up. Just as *Roget's Thesaurus* contains its own type of concept that similarly can be worked upon in different manners, as conceptual artists have done, whether via the mode of presentation (Joseph Kosuth) or the act of negation (Mel Ramsden and Ian Burn) or some other strategy for working with the concept.

We may offer the speculative idea that it comes about also in relation to a problem but then it would bear too much in common with the philosophical concept proper. It is here that we turn to some Marxist scholarship in an attempt to aid a materialist grounding for both the Wittgensteinian and Deleuzian conception of the concept. We shall delve into the theme of abstraction which we have encountered above as a fundamental component in the work of the concept and place it as a practice that exceeds the bounds of conceptuality and is in fact prior to it.

Chapter 3

Administration, Ideology and Abstraction: Situating the Concept in Conceptual Art from a Historical Materialist Perspective

"individuals are now ruled by abstractions, whereas earlier they depended on one another" Karl Marx, (*Grundrisse* 2005: 164)

Introduction

A major contention of this thesis is that in order for conceptual art to articulate itself as an art practice it is necessary that the artist can be conceived as coming face-to-face with 'the concept' as a challenge and possible material for art. In order for this situation to come about some kind of historical development must have taken place, not just in the role of the artist but also in the production of the new material to be - 'the concept.' Part of this development has been traced by offering an analysis from an intra-philosophical perspective in earlier chapters. This chapter bolsters the account of this development by utilizing a historical materialist framework and tool-bag of concepts related to this tradition, most importantly the concept of real abstraction. Here, the artistic and philosophical developments are tied with the social development that underlie their coming together. I argue that in order to identify further traits of concepts that bear upon their materiality and to historically specify them we need the concept of real abstraction.

In sketching out the link between social reality and conceptuality I consider a number of notions and what significance they bear for an understanding of conceptual art. Broadly these notions align with Marx and Engel's statement in *The German Ideology* that "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." (Marx and Engels 1970: 47) Thus the concepts of administrative society, ideology, practice along with the aforementioned real abstraction shall all be remarked upon in order to constellate them

into an order that clarifies the links between social reality, conceptuality and conceptual art I am proposing.

This chapter is structured into three sections - 1) a discussion of Benjamin Buchloh's 'Aesthetics of Administration' thesis with regard to conceptual art, as I regard this as the paradigmatic attempt to link the practice of conceptual art to its social context, I consider what has can be and has been added to such an analysis; 2) a discussion of the notion of ideology and how it links concepts to their social context in interesting ways; and finally 3) a presentation of Alfred Sohn-Rethel on the notion of real abstraction and how this helps elucidate some aspects integral to the concept in conceptual art. The presentation of the 'aesthetics of administration thesis' and the notion of ideology serve to give greater specificity to the final section of this chapter - real abstraction is seen to be a necessary concept to answer things left out in these discussions. I finish out this chapter by bringing the results of the three discussions to bear on our discussion of conceptual art so far.

The concept of real abstraction is central here as it isolates the origin of the form of conceptuality in practice (thus returning to a theme of materialism in chapter 1). It shall allow us to see the form of the concept in conceptual art which we have spoken of previously in relation to aspects of universality and 'falling-under' (in relation to Frege) as something embedded in social interactions as a presupposition of our society. Seeing the form of concepts as something already present in social reality allows us to see what is happening in conceptual art, in artists working with concepts, as a grappling with something material to society and hence allow us to see conceptual art as working at the limit point of these forms of conceptuality.

The necessity of proceeding from Buchloh's thesis to ideology and onto real abstraction lies in the fact that, as stated in the introduction, we are trying to build up to a quite general theory of concepts as materials. Buchloh offers a specificity as a starting point of specificity (though as we shall see, from Lovatt, he misses some concrete details in aligning conceptual art with a managerial type of administration). A

specificity whose limits lead us onto a broader discussion of ideology and from ideology onto real abstraction. Investigating concepts using the notion of ideology gives us a view into the content and function of specific concepts in a situation before real abstraction gives us an account of their general form.

I The Aesthetics of Administration and Global Socio-economic Changes of the 1960's

Tracing the development of conceptual art, as an art where the artist comes face-to-face with the concept as material, we cannot avoid engaging with Benjamin H.D. Buchloh's seminal essay which regards conceptual art as embodying an aesthetics of administration. This is an inevitable encounter because Buchloh tries to understand conceptual art practice by tying it to its socio-economic circumstances. In his essay, first published in 1989, Buchloh charts the rise of conceptual art in the 1960's both intra-artistically and in relation to larger social developments. More specifically, Buchloh traces how developments within minimalism that led towards tautologous works of art have in fact led to works of art that encapsulate the domineering logic of late stage capitalism or, as he borrows from Guy Debord, the Spectacle. (Buchloh 1990: 129-130)

For instance in speaking of Sol Le Witt's work Buchloh notes that:

> In contrast to Stella, his work now revealed that the modernist compulsion for empiricist self-reflexiveness not only originated in the scientific positivism which is the founding logic of capitalism (undergirding its industrial forms of production just as much as its science and theory), but that, for an artistic practice that internalized this positivism by insisting on a purely empiricist approach to vision, there would be a final destiny. This destiny would be to aspire to the condition of tautology. (Buchloh 1990: 115)

The empiricist self-reflexivity of modernism Buchloh speaks of here should be associated with Greenberg's thesis of medium specificity, the empirical aspect being that the medium was tied to a specific object giving rise to sense data. But why does a purely empiricist approach to vision lead to the aspiration of a condition of tautology? Presumably it is because both rely upon grasping what is as what is in isolation rather than as something whose being is determined relationally or contextually. Now LeWitt's works, such as the wall drawings, are tautological in a certain sense that the instantiation will always and can only ever match the instruction. However, that tautology is one that highlights variation - no instantiation of the prescription for the wall drawing will be equivalent to any other in the fine grain of its empirical particularity.

Positing scientific positivism as the founding logic of capitalism shows the influence of Lukács and the Frankfurt School upon Buchloh. For Lukács the process of value extraction, which takes place within the workplace and implies the regimenting of time, instills in society a positivist or narrow empiricist conception of reality. (Lukács 1971: 87-88) By positivism he meant a view of reality that thinks in terms of verifiable states of affairs utilising categories isolated from a view of totality or history. This would be contrasted to a more relational or dialectical vision of reality which Lukács was bringing to bear in his analysis - an analysis that was acutely aware of the centrality of dynamics of change over and above static states of affairs.

We should note that a number of things are going on in Buchloh's analysis: he is setting up a genealogy of conceptualism that stems from developments of and out of modernism (rather than a purely oppositional stance which Kosuth and others would on first encounter seem to embody); he reads many conceptual artists (Joseph Kosuth, especially) as having a rather limited reading of the significance of Duchamp, specifically he disagrees with the reading of the readymade as a statement to the effect that it is the artist's intention that creates the work of art; and, further he points to how institutional critique develops out of conceptualism owing to the focus on how context creates conditions of presentation and viewership for what we deem an artwork to be.

These are general arguments that this thesis, with some exceptions, would also subscribe to.[58] However, what is important to bring out is where Buchloh does not go far enough, and shows limitations. This happens precisely in its seductive phrase - 'the aesthetics of administration.'

Buchloh's thesis begins to make parallels between the ways of working of conceptualists and those of managerial administrators. Utilizing Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of the 'administered society' Buchloh sees conceptual art as embodying this perspective. (Buchloh 1990: 129) Later scholarship has, however, displayed that Buchloh's thesis does not penetrate deep enough into this issue. For one, we can see how Buchloh's thesis is capable of being expanded and deepened by looking at the work of Anne Lovatt, whose 'Paperwork: Conceptual Art and the Pink-Collar Worker' tracks the empirical cross-over between artists working in and around conceptual art and administrative labour practices. As Lovatt points out it was much more likely for women and women of color specifically to be employed in the growing sector of administrative labour than their male counterparts. (Lovatt 2022: 41) Thus, the focus of her article is Adrian Piper, Howardena Pindell and Rosmarie Castoro. Lovatt follows both Harry Braverman and Louise Kapp Howe by pointing to the concrete dimensions of the changing composition of the administrative labour force, grounding Buchloh's thesis and making its class dynamic more complex. In actuality administrative tasks had been so much proletarianized by being deskilled that the term 'factory office' is used by Braverman to name the phenomenon. (Lovatt 2022)

[58] With regard to the first point, it is certainly the case that in looking back, a group like Art & Language see's that really what they were trying to do was to inherit the space of the mainstream of modernism against what they have termed 'mad art' and 'high surrealism.' (Art & Language/Römer 2004) There is certainly a debate to be had about the legacy of Duchamp and what is a justified rather than surface reading of the stakes of his practice. While, yes, it seems to be that Kosuth's reading of Duchamp in the early 'Art after Philosophy' essay is blunt, the centrality of Duchamp to the narrative of conceptual art still needs to be supplemented by the many other streams of influence that play a role in conceptualism (chapter 4 to follow goes over some of this terrain). Finally the third argument concerning a certain necessity in the move from conceptualism to institutional critique owing to the focus on context holds water. The move from analytical conceptions of the concept to contextual ways of working is dealt with in relation to Kousth in chapter 5 of this thesis. It is read as having to do not just with the means of presentation of the work but with the nature of abstraction in concepts that Kosuth was already working with.

Highlighting these aspects shows how Buchloh's analysis takes place at a certain remove from concrete conditions of art production. Lovatt further illuminates her point via pointing to a work like Adrian Piper's *Hypothesis Situation #14* (1969) in which not only is the form of administrative labour on display in the piece but the administrative labourer takes centre stage as the content of the work.[59]

A further departure from Buchloh, which is closer to the level of analysis I am following, is John Roberts' thesis on the dialectic of deskilling and reskilling played out in twentieth century avant-garde art practices. For Roberts pre-conceptual art practices, such as Duchamp's, are heralded in part by the changes in the social structuring of labour practices. Roberts relies like Lovatt on aspects of the scholarship of Harry Braverman into these practices to make his point. In Roberts' analysis the problem of the labouring processes within capitalist society and the changes in technique flowing from this affect the way in which art itself is practiced and conceived. The rise of more and more machinery and automation and hence deskilling of the labour force is something which receives its parallel iteration in developments in the arts such as Duchamp's readymade. Roberts is at pains to point out how Duchamp's readymade inherently confronts the issue of a commodity economy - utilising what is to hand owing to industrial production and commodity exchange. As Roberts expresses his own line of questioning, "in what ways do artists labour, and how are these forms of labour indexed to art's relationship to the development of general social technique (the advanced level of technology and science as it expressed in the technical conditions of social reproducibility)?" (Roberts 2007)

Conceptual art is affected by all these changes - the administrative society, the concrete practices of secretarial and administrative labour and the linked changes in the landscape of labour technique. All these factors can be tied in various ways to the

[59] Piper herself had worked as the secretary for the seminal conceptual art exhibition "January 5–31, 1969" (known as *The January Show*) curated by Seth Siegelaub in 1969. Interestingly while the catalogue of the show was the primary manifestation of the exhibition this publication it also required a site from which it would be collected thus the show did take place physically in a rented office space in the McLendon Building on Fifty-Second Street, New York with Piper as the secretary..

needs of the main engine of capitalist society - the need for commodity production and surplus-labour extraction. Buchloh's thesis, apart from having certain empirical issues (as pointed to in Lovatt's work), is also insufficient to offer an account of the types and features of concepts that conceptual artists work with.[60] Conceptual art in his account becomes a mere mimicry of bureaucratic techniques rather than an encounter with materials.

The point of view this thesis takes is that the concept is a material for conceptual artists, that it is not something come across afterwards in reflection upon a work of art (which is itself a product of a material practice) nor is it confined to solely being the theoretical perspective underpinning an artists' work. The view put forward here is more *literal*. The concept is something the artists of the conceptual art movement actually grapple with. To do this they need to take a *grasp* of it in a number of manners - via dictionary definitions, philosophical tracts or technological devices and strategies. However they do it, they are working (with) concepts. The instantly recognisable material detritus with which conceptual art displays its works are the necessary encasement for the concept to be grasped.

Now, having engaged with the aesthetics of administration thesis and found that it does not cover all that can be said in relation to tying the concept to its socio-economic scenario it is necessary to proceed further and tackle the question of ideology as it arises in relation to conceptual art. Ideology and ideological concepts explicitly tie a mode of conceptuality to socio-economic circumstances.

II Ideological Concepts

The types of concepts conceptual art comes face-to-face with have a firm grounding in the society they are practicing in. We may wish to analyse this grounding

[60] This is leaving aside for the moment the notion of tautology, for us in this thesis tautological form, which Buchloh is perceptive in isolating as a form coming out of minimalism and post-minimalism, especially the work of Frank Stella.

of concepts in their society firstly under the term ideology. In chapter 1 we have already encountered ideology in relation to T.J. Clark and Gail Day and the notion that ideology acts like the image to veil the materiality at play in a work of art. Here, we are able to develop the notion that ideological concepts are a type of concept worked by conceptual artists.

Ideology is a concept often deployed in the analysis of some individual, group or society's concepts, sometimes in general and sometimes in more precise senses. Following Raymond Williams entry on 'Ideology' in his *Keywords* (1983), we can note that the concept of ideology has its origin in designating a study of ideas in the late 18th century but quickly shifts use becoming a term of abuse (used in particular by Napoleon) describing those driven by a set of abstract ideas rather than the pragmatics of reality or realpolitik.[61] (Williams 1983: 154) The opposition thus emerges between the ideologue and the realist, later to become between the ideologue and the scientist. Marx and Engels still used it as a term of critique in the manuscript that makes up *The German Ideology* but begin to develop a wider notion of ideology as an actually existing social phenomena, encompassing how ideas are linked together based upon a logic that is as much, or even more so, socially embedded as it is rationally derived. (Williams 1983: 155-6) In this light the use of ideology as a term of abuse - always what the others guys got that makes him blinded (as Žlžek notes) - is itself a highly ideological notion. Thus, today in a rather amusing way we often see the deployment of an ideological conception of ideology in everyday discourse or *doxa* (ideology counter-posed to 'common sense,' etc.).

Ideology gives us a notion by which to grasp not just a set of concepts but a means to see their inter-connection as deriving from a logic that has its origin not just intra-rationally but historically. By this we mean that while an ideology is a form of thinking, of grappling with problems and linking concepts together with it, the

[61] This change of attitude can be mapped onto a move from the Enlightenment era to Romanticism

contextual nature of these problems fundamentally anchor what the end result of that ideological mode of thought is.[62]

To provide a general framework for viewing what ideologies are, I borrow briefly from the inter-connections which Ian Mackenzie draws between idea, event and problem in his essay "Idea, Event, Ideology." In line with the materialist point we have already been making, what MacKenzie forwards is how ideology concerns not just ideas but also events (or actions). It is not as a private self-reflexive practice that ideology is important or capable of analysis but rather as a set of ideas that are intimately tied to events, actions and practices. This itself may be the legacy of Althusser's understanding of ideologies as material practices.[63]

MacKenzie's understanding is that ideology concerns both ideas and events (or actions), not just ideas in and of themselves. Further, and fundamentally, in his account ideologies arise in response to problems. This is so because ideas themselves come about in relation to problems.[64] (MacKenzie 2002: 13) The relationship between idea and problem lies at the basis of coming to terms with how ideologies arise. Mackenzie outlines how this relationship can be understood in five different ways:
1 - the problem is a poorly comprehended idea. (MacKenzie 2002: 14) In this understanding ideas serve to clarify problems. This is an understanding of an idealist variety on the nature of relation between problem and idea, what MacKenzie refers to as a Platonic drive. (MacKenzie 2002: 15)

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[62] Now, this is also said of science by post-structuralist critiques. We shall bracket from our discussion the science-ideology divide and its stability or instability for the sake of the present discussion which merely wishes to say that ideological concepts exist. We are not engaged in a claim as to whether all concepts are or are not ideological but merely stating that if an ideological concept exists it does so according to the above defined general structure.
[63] I have side-stepped a larger engagement with Althusser's thought here in order to more quickly pass to a discussion of Sohn-Rethal's notion of real abstraction. My aim in this discussion of ideology cannot do justice to the wealth of literature on the topic thus I am opting for a more schematic understanding of the notion. The analysis of works by Burgin and Meireles that end this section of the chapter make clearer some of the ways in which I take up the question of ideology in lieu of a full elaboration of differing theories of ideology.
[64] As the reader will note this notion is in line with what we have discussed concerning Deleuze and Guattari in chapter 2.

2 - the problem circumscribes the idea. Meaning that the problem itself is inherently incapable of full articulation. Yet this problem is what the ideas are in response to and as such sets bounds to what the idea aims to do. (Mackenzie 2002: 14)
3 - The problem is made problematic so as to pursue the logic of changing ideas. (MacKenzie 2002: 14)
4 - problem and idea are incommensurate, disconnected, never shall they meet.
5 - ideas and problems are co-extensive. (MacKenzie 2002: 16) This particular formulation allows for the problem itself to be an idea.

Of these MacKenzie sides with the latter response. This we could call the Spinozist or monist option, one which sees both ideas and problems as composed of bodies but on different, though co-extensive planes. What MacKenzie brings to the wider discussion of the thesis is the idea that ideological concepts do something with the problem they are set in relation to, in that sense they are events, just as we have seen Deleuze outline in our presentation of his ideas in chapter 1. MacKenzie's positioning with the latter of his 5 possibilities is also a positioning that leaves it open that the idea may relate to the problem at different moments in the rest of the above outlined ways. In a similar manner we might see that the types of concepts that conceptual art deals with can vary and arise from particular types of problems. We should also note that ideological concepts are themselves contested. This contestation is something that gets us our first glimpse into the understanding that ideas arise in response to problems.

Among the key conceptual artists to investigate ideology explicitly is Victor Burgin, whom we have already discussed in relation to the tautologous concept. Burgin like many others, not just conceptual artists, during the period developed a political critique of existing society which he wished to have play out in his artworks. Poster works like *Possession* (1975) are a famous examples of this. Here, Burgin is explicitly juxtaposing a marketing image which brings with it a host of pre-supposed ideological notions - concerning femininity , masculinity, wealth, possession, etc. - and a simple question

that is already implicitly answered in the image ‘what does possession mean to you?’ and explicitly answered via the text ‘7% of our population own 84% of the wealth’. It is the fact of the ideological image containing implicit meanings that allows the work to be formed by this simple transposition of a question onto the image. Burgin thus confronts ideological images with their implicit meanings. More sophisticated and layered pieces that also work off of image-text juxtapositions are found in Burgin’s *US 77* series. *Framed* (1979), for instance, combines a Marlboro campaign poster with a 82 word vignette about a middle-aged woman asking for a haircut exactly like that of a young blonde woman in a photograph she has brought to the hairdressers. The vignette ends with the woman contemplating in silence her image in the mirror after her hair has been cut leaving the viewer-reader doing the work of linking notions of ‘the image’ and mirroring to the Marlboro ad campaign depicted in the photograph. Thereby a link is drawn between the production of masculine and feminine images (and self-images) in a way that underlines aspects of a common process. This appropriated use of advertising makes us aware of it as a form of visual culture that carries and encapsulates ideas and desires.

Ideological concepts as materials can also be found in the work of Cildo Meireles whose *Inserções em circuitos ideológicos 1: Projeto Coca-Cola (Insertions in Ideological Circuits 1: Project Coca-Cola)* (1970) explicitly names the intention to work with, or rather against, ideology. In this work Merieles emblazons messages (such as “YANKEES GO HOME!”) onto Coca-Cola bottles which go through the cycle of being exchanged to be refilled after use and re-circulated. In one sense there is here a crudeness to this work as in Burgin’s *Possesion*. At one level they engage a late 60’s-early 70’s radicalism, a kind of mix of militancy and naïveté. However another level emerges from Meireles own self-theorisation of the lines of thought at play in the piece which opens up a very interesting vista of exploration. By his own account he began making these works as a means to engage with an audience outside the narrowed and

always framed art audience who previously would have engaged with his work in the gallery or media context.

To quote Meireles:

> As I see it, the important thing in the project was the introduction of the concept of 'circuit', isolating it and fixing it. It is this concept that determines the dialectical content of the work, while interfering with each and every effort contained within the very essence of the process (the medium). In other words, the container always carries with it an ideology. My initial idea was based on the recognition of a 'circuit' that naturally exists. An 'insertion' into this circuit is always a form of counter-information. (Meireles 2007: 182)

The point Meireles was attracted to was the decentralized way in which these commodities - Coca-Cola bottles- circulated. (Meireles 2007: 182) The second work in the *Insertions* series consisted of written messages on paper-money. What Meireles helps us think about is how the material instantiations of the commodity form circulate in a decentred manner while also embodying ideological concepts within themselves. Here idea and physicality are drawn close together via the mediation of the commodity form - in this bind there is no neutral material, they are always coded ideologically. Alberro interprets this in terms of Marshall MacLuhan as a moment where medium becomes message. (Alberro 1999: 150-1) The slogans such as "YANKEES GO HOME!", itself an anti-imperialist slogan, bring out this coded nature of the commodity and also works off a kind of short-circuiting of the work. Essentially the synonymity of Coca-Cola with consumer capitalism is tied to American capitalism in particular. This nationalizing or provincializing of our notion of commodity production sits in an interesting relation with the notion of decentralized system that attracted Meireles to work with the commodity in the first place.

In both Burgin and Meireles we have a making problematic of ideological notions (possession, gender, nation, etc.) but perhaps not, as our borrowing from MacKenzie outlines, a forwarding of how these notions arise in relation to problems. Burgin's

works show that simple juxtapositions between words and images destabilise the simple transparency of what we may want to call ideological concepts present in each. This act allows the space for thought concerning the conditions giving rise to such notions without explicitly outlining the 'problem' as such. Meireles' on the other hand casts commodities of possible bearers of contradictory ideological notions and brings to focus questions concerning political economy.

However, this look to ideology does little to reflect back upon the works of conceptual art we have encountered in chapter 1 and 2 (*Second Investigation*, *Six Negations*, *Secret Painting*, *Photopath*, etc.). This limitation is owing to the fact that ideology speaks about how a concept operates to fill the space in an ideological system, how each concept fills the gap in a system which is taken to be whole even though it is unscientifically grounded. In order to penetrate further into the question of such artworks we need to speak about the form of concepts and the best way in which to do so shall be to inquire into the origin of the form of the universal abstract concept via the notion of real abstraction.

III Real Abstraction

Turning to the thought of Karl Marx and the historical materialist tradition again in this thesis can help to locate the historical specificity of the concept that conceptual art works with. For Marx, writing in the *Grundrisse*, "individuals are now ruled by abstractions" (Marx 2005: 164) Of course Marx's today is different from our today in many ways but the broad historical periodization Marx gives is still useful in trying to specify our time and subject here i.e. to define our historical epoch by the rule of Capital, and further to underline that this bears immediately on the question of abstraction. Certainly, for a study of Conceptual Art's use of the concept it is worth noting that capitalism and especially the commodity featured as a key concern in the discussions of conceptual art among artists and critics. Thus, for instance, Australian

conceptualist Ian Burn defined the thinking of the era as an amalgam of “Wittgenstein and Marx.” (the term is also used by Charles Harrison see Harrison 1991: 58-59) These references further suggest it may be useful to see what Marx had to say not just about society but about concepts.

The unique Marxist epistemological category that, in a novel way, cuts across the empiricist model of concept creation is that of Real Abstraction (*Reale Abstraktion*). The term is not present in Karl Marx’s own work but is latent in his discussion of abstract labour. The term instead owes its origin to Alfred Sohn-Rethel and his work in materialist epistemology. He uses it to refer to an abstraction process that is itself part of *practical* reality i.e. not an epistemological act but a material (in this context meaning spatio-temporal) phenomena. (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 44-45)

In the history of philosophy Abstraction is a key topic in the creation of concepts. Abstraction can commonly be taken to define the non-spatio-temporal nature of concepts, the characteristic that in some accounts they inherit from their existence in the ‘ideal’ space of mental activity (psychologistic theories), or from their transcendent existence (Plato). In the empiricist telling concepts are created through a process of abstraction moving from the specific and concrete to the abstract. They are a move away from the ‘real’ particular thing. The framework for these empiricist theories can be either nominalist, reducing the concept to a place-holder, or ‘positivist’, understanding the abstraction to be an actual grasp of the concrete, a perfect mirroring.

To zoom out and add further description on the philosophical use and understanding of the concept of abstraction we can note how Alain deLibera has investigated the complexities and multifarious uses of the term. He stresses that we need to be aware in speaking of “abstraction” to “distinguish the problem of the generation of abstract ideas insofar as it involves that of universals,” from “that of the existence or nonexistence of general objects,” from “that of the practice of abstractive negation in the diverse fields—logical, epistemological, theological—where it occurs.” (DeLibera 2014: 1) Thus highlighting some of these distinctions he notes that:

> When Condillac denounces “the abuse of constructed abstract notions,” his aim is different from that of Aristotle when the latter mentions, under the rubric “abstract entities” or “things that exist in the abstract…” the forms that mathematical science deals with “by abstracting from their inherent matter” (Aristotle, De anima, 431b.13–17), and from that of Dionysius the Areopagite when he asks to be raised by thought to the superessential “through the aphaeresis… of all beings. (DeLibera 2014: 1)

Being aware of this difficulty, it is clarifying to begin with a few general pointers and distinctions that allow a concept of abstraction to do work and consequently to see what discussions the topic of real abstraction is implicitly offering engagements with. One area abstraction has played a key role in is the philosophical description of concept creation. The move from the thing to its conceptual representation in the mind can be characterised as a move from the concrete to the abstract via the process of abstraction. This is the historical process of concept creation inherited from Aristotle and present in the empiricist tradition.

This can be broken into either of two kinds of operation, present in the early Greek distinction between *epagoge* (or ‘abstractive induction”) and *aphairesis* (or ‘geometrical abstraction’). (DeLibera 2014: 1) This distinction can be filled out as a difference between– 1) abstraction as the separation of an element that is common or held in resemblance between a series of particulars, the universal present in the one and many problematic, and 2) abstraction as the stripping away of qualities of an entity until it is left as an abstraction – think of the existence of numbers or geometric forms as abstract entities separate from a concrete instance. (DeLibera 2014: 1) The former method could be said to have influenced the empiricist theory of concept creation present in Locke and Hume. Here the concept is thought of as a generality gained from empirical experience of similarities among objects in the world. Via the power of abstraction the mind is capable of mentally representing the world to humans. This abstraction is performed upon sensory data received in experience. The mental

representation of this generality is designated the concept and any innovation in thinking the concept can then be checked back against further empirical and perceptual facts.

It is important to note that in describing abstraction it emerges as a relational term – the 'abstract' exists in relation to a 'concrete' and is inconceivable without this other term (something we encountered in relation to Deleuze and Guattari in chapter 2). This split between abstract and concrete can be seen to give rise to the varying fortunes of abstraction in the history of philosophy. As Osborne notes, conceptual abstraction "from a variety of different standpoints… is accompanied by both a certain *melancholy* (loss of the real object) and a certain *shame* (complicity in the domination of the concept and hence repression of other, more vibrant, more creative aspects of existence)." (Osborne 2004: 21) Further, the question of abstraction can often also include a judgement upon the greater 'truth' or 'reality' of either the concrete or the abstract.

Returning back to Marx and the notion of real abstraction, Leigh Claire La Berge comments that Marx's "philosophy is both historical in its understanding of how abstraction has been theorized in previous philosophical discourse, and it is historical in its understanding of its own position in creating a new theory of abstraction as it relates to cumulative stages of human social development." (La Berge 2019: 243) It is in this new theory of abstraction that we can argue is Marx's unique importance for an understanding of conceptual art practices because it gives us a new model of thinking the concept as well as a reference point for thinking abstraction as material and real. The historicizing of abstraction can bring out from discussions of the concept why a specific mode of conceptuality, what we may refer to as *doxa* (recounting our discussion of Deleuze in chapter 2), is on display in conceptual art.

Thus, while traditionally reality is understood as concrete and outside the mind with the mind at its sharpest aiming towards the most precise abstractions to correlate to an outside reality the Marxist account offers something a bit different. What is striking

about Alfred Sohn-Rethel's approach is how he wishes to place abstraction on the other side of the inside (mind)/outside (concrete real) divide. He feels compelled to re-cast the divide in light of the nature of the commodity, a form of value that unites two aspects – an exchange-value (a goods value in relation to other goods, thus the pertinent value to the seller) and a use-value (a goods value in relation to a buyer).[65]

Here in Sohn-Rethel's own words is a summarization of the inversion of the abstract-concrete model and what he is aiming at:

> The essence of commodity abstraction… is that it is not thought-induced; it does not originate in men's minds but in their actions. And yet this does not give 'abstraction' a merely metaphorical meaning. It is abstraction in its precise, literal sense. The economic concept of value resulting from it is characterised by a complete absence of quality, a differentiation purely by quantity and by applicability to every kind of commodity and service which can occur on the market. These qualities of the economic value abstraction indeed display a striking similarity with fundamental categories of quantifying natural science without, admittedly, the slightest inner relationship between these heterogeneous spheres being as yet recognisable. While the concepts of natural science are thought abstractions, the economic concept of value is a real one. It exists nowhere other than in the human mind but it does not spring from it. Rather it is purely social in character, arising in the spatio-temporal sphere of human interrelations. It is not people who originate these abstractions but their actions. 'They do this without being aware of it.' (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 20)

Sohn-Rethel states a lot here. First, let us note that he shows what he means by taking abstraction literally. It means to see abstraction at work in our actions. We physically carry through and pre-suppose abstraction in the act of exchange. What we do is not like abstraction but precisely is abstraction. It is a way of describing actions but one that is not metaphorical. Here Sohn-Rethel can run into trouble under a number of frames, not least a structuralist one where literalness is always intertwined

[65] Note that it is important to bear in mind that we are referring to the Marxist understanding of a number of concepts that can be in dispute here. Thus when the concept commodity is used we are talking specifically about the Marxist version of that concept that sees the commodity as a value-form made up of exchange-value and use-value. Likewise with other concepts which may occur in other lexicons than the Marxist vocabulary it is to be assumed we are referring to the Marxist variant unless otherwise implied.

with the more fundamental metaphorical heart of language. Nevertheless, leaving this criticism aside, what does the use of the literal-metaphorical split that Sohn-Rethel deploys ask us to recognise? It stresses that the quality of a doing, of an action, is not to be ascribed to a metaphorical comment upon another action but falls under the purview of literalness.

It is important to state that Sohn-Rethel's use of the literal-metaphorical distinction would be of no utility if abstraction were a thing and not a process. It would break down if we said that a physical thing such as a chair or apple sold on the market was abstract. The wood we sit on, the skin we peel, are decidedly non-abstract and if we said they were our use of the term abstract could only be somehow metaphorical or a form of Platonism. The commodity however is not a thing but as Marx underlined a (social) relation. It shows a thingly aspect (in use-values) but to take that as the reality of the commodity is not to talk about the commodity as such but only one aspect. The commodity abstraction is literal because its thinglyness is only an aspect. This is why later in his analysis Sohn-Rethel can transform the physical properties of money in paper-notes or coins into a metaphor for the abstract nature of value. (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 63-4) Paper-notes and coins are physical things though they display a purposive reduction of characteristics to make them function as money.[66] Thus when we speak of physical notes as being abstract we are actually speaking metaphorically in Sohn-Rethel's sense.

While classically we could say that we use the term abstraction in the literal sense only when we refer to an act of the mind (in this instance the same structural criticism that could be levelled against Sohn-Rethel could be levelled at the empiricist). Sohn-Rethel highlights that the act of abstraction is not metaphorical in the sense of being a process that we can use to speak about something else that it is not but bears

[66] Notes and coins should in order to serve their purpose solely as a means of exchange lack any other use but acting as money. History is full of exceptions to this when the materiality of money comes into play. For instance, note the history of debasing of currencies or money becoming a thing again at moments of extreme inflation, etc.

a resemblance to. Rather when we speak of a process of abstraction we are defining its features literally or specifically.

Further, let us also note that he defines a plurality of acts of abstraction at play in the concept of value. Namely, in the above passage:

1. a complete absence of quality,
2. a differentiation purely by quantity
3. applicability to every kind of commodity and service which can occur on the market. (i.e. indifference to qualitative differentiation)

Sohn-Rethel has cut up the act of abstraction into a discrete set of movements/moments/actions. We have the removal of qualities that is common to both *epagoge* and *aphairesis* but also the reduction to quantity, the outright hallmark of *aphaeresis*.

When Sohn-Rethel sets out the stall of his analysis in *Intellectual and Manual Labour* (*IML*) he explicitly limits the area of his critique to just a critique of epistemology.[67] This limit to Sohn-Rethel's focus on the other hand leads to an extremely wide-ranging thesis (as he recounts when he told his associates of his thesis, the verdict was that 'Sohn-Rethel is crazy!'). (Sohn-Rethel 1968: xiii) Namely, that the mode of functioning of the cognitive faculties can be grounded in the exchange abstraction. This is to say that the exchange abstractions influence relates not just to the *content*, e.g. that we think about horses and carriages in the 19th century and cars in the 20th, but the *form*, i.e the fact that that we can think of them as somehow *equivalent* at some level of abstraction. For Sohn-Rethel epistemology rests on an assumption that thinks of the mind as a fundamentally different substance from the reality it describes. This he sees embodied in the split between first and second nature,

[67] He brackets off and leaves intact the aspects of Marx's critique that concern political economy and the part played by labour within that critique. Leaving this aspect to one side unfortunately leaves us without a discussion of the reality or not of one of Marx's most famous use of the term 'abstract' in his postulation of abstract labour as the substance whose magnitude lies at the base of value. This is arguably the type of real abstraction Marx donated most time to writing about.

or the human interaction with the environment and the intra-human social interaction. (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 60)

Essentially he tries to historicize the Intellect itself. So while of course any idealist will concur that a division of labour between intellectual and manual labour occurs in history, the point is the nature of the genesis of this division. An idealist may be teleological, seeing it as an out-pouring of the cognitive capacities of man, or agnostic about the causes (as too might a materialist). However, Sohn-Rethel's interjection is that the genesis of the division and the moulding of the form or shape of cognitive capacities are already accomplished at the very beginnings of the emergence of commodity exchange and money in Ancient Greece. (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 62) While consciousness predates this moment, conceptual rationality, reasoning in terms of universals irrespective of material or experiential limits of particulars dates from this period in the analysis presented in *IML.* The most important and inter-locked phenomena that commodity exchange itself is built upon are the division of labour and the notion of property which is defined as possession of the binary notion of 'mine/not mine'.

To keep focus on the main current of this chapter and thesis and not get bogged down in excess detail we shall not outline in full all the instances of abstraction tied to commodity exchange that are given an account of in *IML.* Nevertheless to briefly list these aspects, Sohn-Rethel touches on the notions of 'abstract quantity and the postulate of the exchange equation', 'abstract time and space', 'abstract movement', 'substance and accidents', and 'strict causality' as moments integral to the exchange. (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 35-54) However, it is worth taking one of the most striking - the presuppositions of abstract space and time embedded in commodity exchange - as an illustration. Pre-supposed shelter from change marks the existence of the commodity.[68] If the commodity we desired were open to the wear and tear of empirical existence,

[68] In the context of this thesis Lippard's definitions of matter that we have encountered in chapter 1 cannot help but come to mind here - '(uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness)' (Lippard 1997: 5) The permanence of matter might just be the permanence of the commodity.

liable to fall away in our act of exchange, rot at the moment of purchase etc. the whole institution of a market place would be an eccentric and risky endeavour not the institution of social synthesis it is. Here one of the perennial questions which gnaws at a reader of this text arises – what is to guarantee that this is not just a legal prohibition and not a logical one as is assumed? The status of law and regulations proceeding from a state are absent from the analysis and are points that in light of certain contemporary anthropological analysis of the origins of money would require further elaboration.[69]

Nevertheless, it is deduced that the possibility of thinking abstract space and time from this presupposed shelter within the inherent nature of the exchange itself. The hallmarks of this abstract space and time are its continuity and homogeneity:

> Time and space rendered abstract under the impact of commodity exchange are marked by homogeneity, continuity and emptiness of all natural and material content, visible and invisible (i.e. air). The exchange abstraction excludes everything that makes up history, human and even natural history. The entire empirical reality of facts, events and description by which one moment and locality of time and space is distinguished from another is wiped out. Time and space assume thereby the character of the absolute historical timelessness and universality which must mark the exchange abstraction as a whole and each of its features. (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 48-49)

An abstract time is devoid of events. To think of temporality in its phenomenality or as we experience it is to think for instance of 'our youth in spring time after school finishes' etc., of times always placed in the mesh of events and their affects on bodies.

Here we can see that conceptual artists also act under similar assumptions precisely because they work with concepts-as-material, which are the bearers of these hallmarks. For instance, we can witness some of these shared presumptions in the work of an artist like Daniel Buren whose trademark alternating coloured-uncolored (white) bands of 8.7cm thickness draw us into a work/project/system which seems to

[69] For an account that would jar with Sohn-Rethel's see for instance David Graeber's 2011 work *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Melville House)

have no material limit whether in terms of width or breadth or in the sites of its instantiation. Thus the bands can inhabit galleries or subway stations (*Diamonds and Circles* (2017) at Tottenham Court Station) or public space as in the sandwich men who carried the bands on their boards in 1968 (see fig.4). Many things are at work in Buren's work and it may be too crude to speak of it simply as an abstract work, not simply in the non-figurative sense but more precisely in the sense of abstraction we have been discussing here. For in many regards, as with perhaps much interesting art, the work is in tension with its surroundings. The works are site-specific with Buren referring to *in situ* as a major aspect of his work, claiming that they draw attention to their surroundings. (Buren 1975: 24-25) However, the tension is that they are so in virtue of their indifference as part of the larger project of his work - the basic element of striped bands - to their surroundings.

The point which the real abstraction thesis helps bring out of a work like Buren's is that the abstract features of the work - with regard to time and space - partake of a logic of abstraction pre-supposed in the practice of everyday life, one that is mirrored in the form of conceptuality. It is also interesting, and substantial to our purposes here, to note that the original impulse, or 'epiphany' as Han Ulrich Obrist wishes to frame it in conversation with Buren, for settling on the 8.7 cm coloured-uncoloured bands as the abiding rhythm of his work came from being in a market in Montemarte and wishing to buy some linen to work with for work he was doing in the Caribbean. (Obrist/Buren 2021) The standardized nature of the commodity being at the origin of the work helps us trace how these aspects are left embodied in the work.

Buren uses intriguing terms to speak about his alternating 8.7cm bands. Rather than motif he will deploy the word 'rhythm' or 'visual tool' and sometimes, though he cautions against it, 'material' (Obrist/Buren 2021) This naming brings Buren's bands closer to our concept as material. The presuppositions of the hallmarks of abstraction allow Buren's work to shift from different heterogeneous spaces - whether the magazine or the gallery or even, as one may get the impression from his text 'Beware!'

(1969-70), mental space. This we may argue in this context is a presumption of homogenous space which the work inherits from the presumptions of the commodity form and practice of exchange.

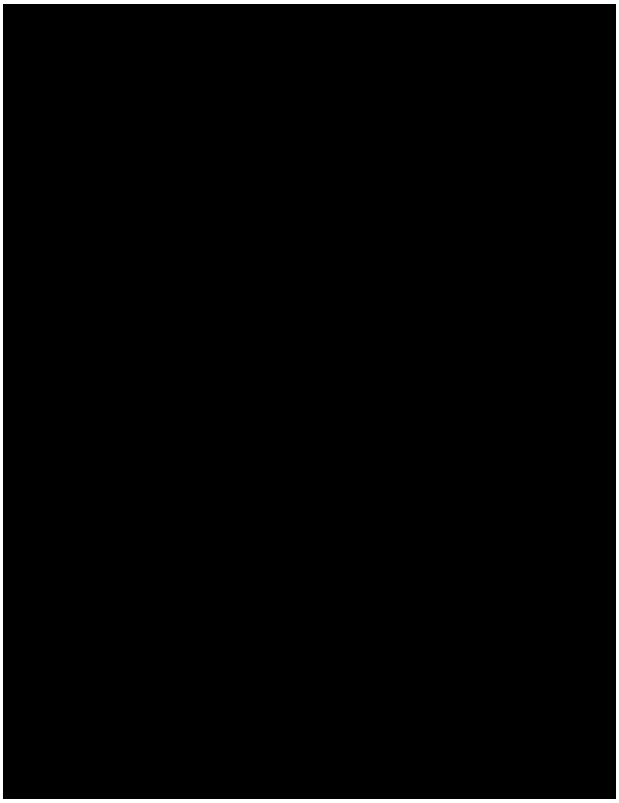

Fig.4 Daniel Buren, *Sandwichmen* (1968), Paris

The Art & Language collective too outwardly displays similar presumptions with regard to an abstract space and time in which art takes place. Scathingly referred to by Buren as a pretentious 'verbiage art' (Buren 1970: 100) Art & Language have utilised philosophical notions and texts to continue on a conversation into what art is that takes the forms of artworks, texts and conversations. For instance, in many of their early essays from the journal *Art-Language* Art & Langauge will speak about art in a very rigorous way utilising the tools of symbolic logic. This rigor is itself often undermined by a shift in tone that seems ironic. The conversation they put in place is only possible based upon being able to talk about art in the abstract using tools of analytic philosophy in order to do so.

Now, it is not original to apply Sohn-Rethel to thinking about art. A special emphasis has been given in recent years by scholars to doing so in relation to contemporary art, especially present in the volume *In The Mind But Not From There* edited by Gean Moreno. The links that artists and writers here have made encapsulates points which link processes of digitalization and financialization to manifest phenomena within the artworld such as artworks that track art world bubbles and speculation. In a sense the level of the analysis here is one before this step. We simply wish to highlight that the same characteristics which typify the act of real abstraction typify something going on in works of conceptual art. This 'going on' and be identified with utilizing the concept as material.

To return to something pointed to earlier in this chapter, yes, LeWitt's Wall Drawings take a tautologous form, however, like Buren's work it is one engaged in a tension - the work mediates between a move away from sensuous particularity - in the case of Le Witt, every drawing is equal to its 'concept' or instruction, in Buren the 8.7 cm band never changes - and an awareness of particularity - every instantiation of the wall drawing concept bears its own unique details differing it from instantiations previous and to come, every 8.7cm band exists *in situ* and in a certain sense because of this is for its *situ*). In this way the characteristics of abstract concepts that Sohn-Rethel traces back to material practices of exchange are capable of their dramatization in the form of works of conceptual art. More than even dramatization, we can say how these characteristics are part and parcel of the given conditions for a conceptual art as such to be possible. Concepts in the form of abstract universals that are taken to be atemporal and aspatial becomes the material that conceptual artists are given to work with.

Conclusion

The difference between ideology as we have outlined it and real abstraction as presented from Sohn-Rethel is that the former is built up as an architecture of thought

responding to a problem (or a larger social context in the Hegelian or Marxist sense, something more specific in each case in post-structuralist models) while the latter seems to elide the 'problem' of problems, matching the shape of thought to directly embodied practice. The former, as we have demonstrated with the examples of Burgin and Meireles, is certainly amenable to be worked with by conceptual artists, however, in what sense is the latter an addition to our discussion? My argument for this concepts' analytic relevance in this regard relied on showing that works such as Daniel Buren's and Art & Language's share similar fundamental presuppositions of the commodity form. While real abstraction names a process of abstraction that happens in material practice, what is of abiding analytical and critical significance is that it links the form of this practice to that of our thought forms or concepts. Abstract universality is in the paradigm of this mode of theorizing attained historically via innovations in human practices of exchange. While we can understand the content of ideological concepts as responses and correlates to problems of social relations, the form which these thoughts take is matched to the form of social practice in that society. This would imply that this theory is not specifically related to artistic practice but encompasses many fields of human endeavour.

So what are its presuppositions, the presuppositions of conceptual art practice? One which I view as homologous to an aspect of commodity exchange brought out by Sohn-Rethel is an indifference to time and space on the part of works of conceptual art. Peter Osborne has already drawn attention to how a distributed sense of temporal and spatial dynamics receive a forwarding and re-configuration in the work of contemporary artists, starting with conceptual art. (Osborne 2013) In his thesis in *Anywhere Or Not At All*, his investigation of the philosophy of contemporary art and conceptualism, he pays specific attention to art space and art time that the new transformation in the artwork inaugurates. Without having to delve into the fine detail, Osborne notes that the apprehension of time in contemporary art is changed (connected to aesthetico-temporal moods such as boredom, etc.) as is the space in

which it takes place - a kind of trans-national space. (Osborne 2013) These flesh out the consequences of the move to these kinds of artworks. Consequences which are in fact the crystallization of procedures in modernity that are themselves both extraneous and immanent to artworks.

A second pre-supposition is the existence of definitional statements of identity and the fact that these have a stability within the world in which conceptual art operates. This definitional notion of identity has been on display in the work of both Joseph Koauth and Art & Language in the use of dictionary definitions and the tables of contents of *Roget's Thesaurus'* as materials ready for deployment in works of art. The presuppositions of these works matched that of the process of exchange, *ala* real abstraction. It is here that we can get a glimmer of the notion that universality itself becomes something material.

To re-articulate something mentioned earlier, we are saying that conceptual artists work with concepts, that they are ready-to-hand, but they are ready-to-hand only in certain encased forms, i.e. of dictionary definitions, philosophical tracts, commodities, etc. This is maybe more apparent with Art & Language and their particular mode of engagement with analytic philosophy, at once an appropriation and trans-figuration. However, even when the artist in question is not so explicitly engaging philosophy we can still see a similar process at play based on the presuppositions of the work at play. So a work like Carl Andre's *Equivalent VIII* (1966) - a work categorizable as minimalist, post-minimalist and conceptual depending on what frame of discussion one encounters the work within - shares similar presuppositions to the real abstraction of the type of materials Art & Language utilize in their work. Andre's equivalent becomes a work by engaging with pre-existing manufactured bricks. Each brick's possible substitution for another points to how the conceptual nature of the work is already inter-penetrated by the materials that make up the work.

We can also now posit, picking up from discussions raised in chapter 2, that the practice conceptual artists engage in when working with concepts is in the first

instance an art practice that is not necessarily to be categorized as thought. They approach the concept from, as it were, an external point of view. Thus Art & Language use the work of philosophers without necessarily intending the work as philosophy. They use it as a tool in their investigations. Similarly Buren's 8.7cm bands are concepts as materials but not necessarily thoughts. Conceptual artists and critics may then theorize and create theoretical concepts which help clarify their initial works, as Buren does with his notions of *in situ* and *in vivo* or Art & Language with their 'emergency conditionals' yet the initial material utilised may be designated as conceptual in nature.[70] There is always a distance from the concept. A distance which implies that it is not grasped by the artist as thought but rather as material. The concept is something ready to hand, readymade even, and this is what the concept of real abstraction can help us elucidate. It is implicit in our actions which pre-suppose the conceptual nature and structure of artworks. Thus, when Art & Language engage with philosophy or a philosopher, such as for their *Index* work for instance, they are taking it on board as a frame for making work that stylistically communicates something over and above their ability to input it with new meaning. But perhaps this is the point, that Art & Language use these thinkers in a manner that is a working with, aware of the resistance of these forms of thought, and allowing them the space to set off affects in that regard. Thus, the aesthetics of administration thesis which placed emphasis on mimicry of the techniques of administration retains a validity for a focus on techniques though misses the concept itself as an object of such practice, while ideological notions can be seen to be approached from this perspective of distance after having analysed the contribution of real abstraction to thinking conceptually.

Following on from this discussion the final two chapters delve further into how the notion of abstraction figures in the writings of conceptual artists (chapter 5) and analyse how the concept is to be separated from its two most prominent containers and partners - the word and the image (chapter 4).

[70] A similar phenomena may be present in the type of concepts computer programmes use - these are not theoretical concepts but rather more like commands or events that set processes in motion.

CHAPTER 4

Word Image Concept

"Now the real, epoch-making achievement of conceptual art becomes clear: It demonstrated the equivalence, or at least a parallelism, between word and image. between the order of words and the order of things, the grammar of language and the grammar of visual space." (Groys 2018: 122)

Introduction

This project is about the notion of a concept as material, bringing out the concept's materiality as it were. In the previous chapter it was discussed how the concepts utilised in conceptual art can be tied to a specific socio-historical configuration, arguing that the using the notion of real abstraction brings this out in the most complete way. This chapter moves on to investigate some of the most noticeable changes in art concurrent with conceptual art - the increased foregrounding of language as a material of art and the changed status of images. I investigate these phenomena as specifically concerning a triadic relation between concept, word and image and see the 'materiality' of the concept as crucial to how words and images became configured in artworks following the 60's. As has been intimated in the previous chapters I see a pre-eminence of the concept at work in this relation. In investigating how this triad works in conceptual art I make use of three models of interaction - ideogram, calligram and diagram - and 20th century art practices which help elucidate these. Of these the diagram, I argue, best articulates the relation between concept, word and image at play within conceptual art.

One can read developments in art of the 60's as charting a move away from the image, challenging them (along with representation) and forwarding words and the linguistic aspects of art. Conceptual art is symptomatic of these twin processes. The chapter can be seen as a return to these two themes of the interaction of concepts with words and with images highlighted but not expanded upon in the preceding

chapters. In chapter one it was highlighted that a general concern with materiality across different art movements tends towards undermining the image generation capacity of artworks.[71] This desire to fight against the image bearing qualities of artworks is also present in conceptual art. It is an urge inherited in some vein from Frank Stella's early works, described by Michael Baldwin of Art & Language as being both an apotheosis and undermining of Greenbergian Modernism. (Art & Language 2001) The relationship of concepts to language was commented upon in chapter two but will get a more concrete expansion here in connection with concrete artworks. I place these topics - images, words and concepts - together here because I argue that there is an interweaving of these three factors at place in all and any work of conceptual art. This inter-weaving is one of the reasons why it is difficult to give an account of the concept in conceptual art - one literally views the image or the word as opposed to thinking the concept (again, Art & Language grappled continuously with this problem).[72]

The chapter begins by setting the scene of how central the use of language was to conceptualism and the way in which it could be used to fight against the image. It places these practices within a context of changed image-word relations brought about by technological development. The chapter then takes a detour through the pre-history of conceptual art in order to assess how images and words were correlated to one another at earlier moments in twentieth century art. Specifically, the artists Henri Michaux, Ezra Pound, Barnett Newmann and René Magritte are recalled to examine their interaction with the figures of the calligram and the ideogram. This detour to aid the setting up of a productive contrast between ideogram, calligram and diagram. The chapter investigates how these act as models for how we may think of the inter-relation between images and words at play in their respective works. From this detour it is possible to ask what kind of model of interaction between word and image is at play

[71] In the terms of chapter one - when we notice the materiality of a work the image itself has been interrupted.

[72] Note Charles Harriosn speaks about this in terms of viewers, like a dog, looking at the finger that points rather than what is being pointed at. (Harrison 1991: 69)

within conceptual art. It allows us to propose and interrogate the figure of the diagram as a possible model of word-image interaction within conceptual art.

Importance of Language to Conceptual Art

One of the most characteristic aspects of conceptual art is the explicit and integral presence of text in the works of its practitioners. This is witnessed when, for instance, Joseph Kosuth presents dictionary definitions in works such as *One and Three Chairs* (1965) or *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea) The Word "Definition"* (1966-68), when Dan Graham presents self-reflexive pieces of text as in *Poem (Schema)* (1966), when Laurence Weiner places text in unexpected places such as *Stretched as Tightly as is Possible (Satin) & Petroleum* (n.d/1996) or when Art & Language provide whole journals full of text-based works of art and discussions upon such pieces, etc. As Liz Kotz in her study of text in 1960's art has observed, language in a multiplicity of forms:

> as printed texts, painted signs, words on the wall, recorded speech, and more —has become a primary element of visual art. Under labels like Fluxus, Pop art, Conceptual art, and text and image, words have proliferated in art since the 1960s—in a complex relation with poetry, newly emerging activities of performance art, and the world of experimental music. So much so that for artists today, making works out of language has become almost routine. (Kotz 2007: 1)

The use of words was not unique to conceptual art, as the above quote outlines, but is part of a general development that spans from Pop Art to Fluxus, across poetry and experimental music. That today, words are accepted parts of an artwork is the legacy of the specific deployment of text in these movements. This familiarity can sometimes block our view of the innovations that had to take place in order for such a scenario to emerge. It can possibly also obscure the specificity of the use of words and text in this era and what work they do in the artwork. Do they for instance differ from the movements of modern art that preceded them (Cubism, Surrealism, etc.)?

Eve Kalyva has further listed the variety of uses of language present in conceptual art, summarizing them thus:

> Conceptual artists utilised language in various ways: identifications, statements, instructions, commands, observations, descriptions, propositions, citations, discussions and so on. These were often combined with photographs, objects, actions or locations, and were presented as captions, postcards, sketches or essays. Among other things, words appeared on the gallery wall, in the streets, in exhibition catalogues and artists' books, and were handed out to spectators or circulated in art magazines and bulletins. (Kalyva 2016: 1)

For Kalyva the use of language in and by conceptual art "contested the prioritisation of the visual and of aesthetic apprehension and negotiated the space of representation across art and language as a social space." (Kalyva 2016: 43) Language is here the tool used to contextualise the aesthetic qualities of art, to raise conceptual questions about it. This undermining of the aesthetic can also be seen as an undermining of the image. As Heather Diack has commented, conceptualism adds a layer of doubt to what is on view. (Diack 2019) For Diack the doubt and questioning of the image is inaugurated through a mixture of the use of photographic technology and language.

Returning to Henry Flynt's entry in the Fluxus *Anthology of Chance Operations*, it is clear that he already had a theory of the centrality of language to conceptual art - "Since "concepts" are closely bound up with language, concept art is a kind of art of which the material is language." (Flynt 1963) In essence concepts require language thus concept art will be an art that uses language as its primary means. It *is* an art of language. However, does this centrality of language risk getting in the way of a possible appreciation of the concept as material? Can we simply substitute language for concepts in the manner Henry Flynt seems to when he claims how 'closely bound up with language' they are. (Flynt 1963) Does this make an absolute equivalence between the operations of language and the operations of the concept? Can their operations ever be separated? The work of analysing word-image interactions undertaken by this chapter hopes to act as a means to analytically prise these layers

apart. The argument is that by employing the different models of word-image interactions presented in this chapter, that yes image and word can be seen as separate and that the concept in conceptual art acts to show this separation. It will be shown that in contrast to the ideogram - which strives for an organic unity of word, image and concept - or the calligram - which relies on the commonality of a figure - conceptual art puts in place a diagrammatic relation of word-image-concept not bound by a search for organic unity or by commonality of figure but instead determined by the primacy of the concept.

In order to analyse how artists approached words and images in relation to the work of art, we investigate what was unique about it and where the concept fits in in all of this. Firstly, I find it necessary to outline two important pieces of background to this investigation - first, the technological and social background or frame for the emerging change in word-image relations in the mid-twentieth century and secondly, the historiographical framing of conceptual art. I present these in order to give context to the analysis I proceed to give which focuses not on the causes but on the internal workings of pieces of conceptual art. While in other chapters conceptual artworks were by-and-large made to 'speak' to multiple philosophies and theories in this chapter their interlocutors are other art practices of the twentieth century.

Background Aspects

Background 1 : Technology - Contextualizing a shift in Word-Image-Concept Relations in the mid-Twentieth Century

A technological shift happened in society in the 60's such that by 1962 "there were fifty million television sets in the United States (more TVs than bathtubs) and 500-odd stations on the air twelve to eighteen hours a day." (Bán 1999:. 141) This context is one where a mass audience engages with audio-visual mass media on a more regular basis than previously. One which continues the trajectory of 'space-time compression' that David Harvey has used to describe an integral tendency of modernity. (Harvey 1990:

260-1) This specific technological context has great bearing on the way in which conceptual art approaches the sign, one also related to the socio-political context. Various scholars have written on the intermingling of a technological context and a socio-political context in relation to conceptual art – Heather Diack, Alexander Alberro, Edward Shanken, Christain Berger etc. - highlighting how these two factors change how artists approach making works of art. This socio-technological shift, the massification of audio-visual technology, also takes place within a wider shift in the relationship between objects, signs and images already present in the practice of modern art. How much of a change this makes causally can be debated. Whether it heralds a shift to a society of the Spectacle or whether it is merely the continuation of a predominantly written culture (all advertising is about messages) there is still a shift in the work of art and how it relates word and image that marks some change.

Zsófia Bán, for instance, highlights technological and industrial context of 60's America as key to the field of the sign that the conceptualists tried to negotiate:

> As a result of the superimposition of electronic over typographic culture, the late 1950s and early 1960s brought about a momentous paradigm shift in the epistemic order of American culture which led to an unrestricted extrapolation of sight and sound and a new synchronic order of binary oppositions. American culture had to come to terms with, indeed digest, the radically new kinds of images consumed in previously unthinkable quantities. The avid overconsumption of images contributed to a relative discrediting of the previously hallowed status of the image in poetry and art, inducing both poets and artists seriously to interrogate and reconsider the function and language of literature and art. Questions of iconicity, referentiality, representation, originality, difference and *différance*, presence and absence were highlighted with new urgency, paralleled by a radical change in the role of the art work as *sign*. (Bán 1999: 141)[73]

For Bán it is not only the Conceptualists who responded to this situation but the arts as such, as is witnessed by her attempt at a comparison of the practices of William

[73] While this quote focuses specifically on America I am assuming a general applicability to the regions of Europe and South America in line with this. See Alexander Alberro (1999) and Chritain Berger (2019) for accounts that cover Latin American centres of conceptualism, in particular Argentina.

Carlos Williams and Joseph Kosuth. Bán comments: “In their own media, both worked towards a deconstruction of the image and traditional iconic strategies through the domain of language. If Williams was trying to reach the pure idea or concept by travelling from the direction of language (poetry) towards the 'promised land' of art, Kosuth, in his own version of Concept Art which presented texts as images, was attempting to do the same along a reverse trajectory, moving from the domain of visual art towards that of language.” (Bán 1999: 141) A simple work by Kousth which comes to mind here is his series of colour definitions - “red,” “white,” “yellow,” “purple,” “blue,” and “green” - from *Art as Idea as Idea* which revolves around the disjunctiontion between linguistic description and visuality. With these definitions we imagine a specific shade of a colour despite the generality of the definition. Or further as Bruce Boice commented:

> The dictionary is rather helpless in the face of color words. It is almost comic to read the contortions the dictionary goes through to come up with something that looks like a definition but which relies on saying under what conditions the color might be observed. But those conditions cannot be said to constitute a set of definitions for the words, and, in fact, there are no definitions for those words; yet somehow, everyone knows what those words mean. (Boice 1973: 84)

Thus, while Kosuth transforms a definition into an image it still remains to be read and in being read it brings out its limits. Perhaps we might say that it is only when presented as image (as artwork) that this reading can come out of the literal reading of the dictionary definition? Plucked from the dictionary and placed in the gallery the definition takes on the role of image as artwork. Now, it must also be added that the Kosuth’s work relies on the notion that what is on display is also, in fact, the process for making the work over and above any concrete instantiation of the piece, i.e. the dictionary may vary as the years and cultural locale varies but what is presented as the work maintains itself as the same, the concept remains the same.

The technological shift may not be obviously present in such 'colour' works by Kosuth but the fact of his engagement with public television as a part of the *Second Investigation* (1969–72), as John C. Welchman stresses, is something to note. (Welchman 2015) The fact of an enlarged media-scape owing to technological developments opened an avenue of word-image-meaning interaction conceptual arts developed along with.

Background 2 - René Magritte and The Historical Narrative of Conceptual Art

The artists' practices that are brought into conversation with conceptual art in this chapter come from various movements in art and poetry, from surrealism to imagism to abstract expressionism. This diversity allows multiple aspects of comparison and contrast to emerge in relation to conceptual art thus illuminating multiple facets of that practice. However, one figure whom I donate more extensive focus to is René Magritte. He shall play the role of the major figure of contrasting illumination thus I wish to donate a few paragraphs here to the justificatory reason for selecting him as the figure of contrast over and above other pre-conceptual figures. This justification has its source in how the narratives of conceptual art emergence are usually written. It is also necessary given the risk of derision from conceptual artists, notably Art & Language who have scoffed that, "we shouldn't say this in public, but philosophers are bloody awful readers of art… philosophers like a Magritte, don't they? [laughs]" (Art & Language/Römer 2004), to make a point of what might be worthwhile in comparing Magritte and conceptual art.

There are multiple approaches to framing the emergence, aim and significance of Conceptual Art. Some emphasize politics (Shaked and Bryan-Wilson), some general socio-political and cultural shifts (Godfrey), some innovations in social technique and technology (Roberts, Buchloh and Skrebowski). Others, such as Joseph Kosuth, who plots himself as its origin (see dispute with Buchloh), point to an exacerbation with and exhaustion of modernist formalism. The final point could be designated a cultural or

intra-art reading of the phenomena's emergence. Peter Osborne and Benjamin Buchloh have attempted separately to highlight the first actual work of Conceptual Art – Osborne picks Yoko Ono's *Instructions for Paintings* (1962) while Buchloh can point to On Kawara's word paintings such as *Something* (1963) being documented before Kosuth's *Proto-Investigations* which is claimed (by the artist) as beginning in in 1965 though not documented til 1967 (Buchloh 1990: 122-3; also see dispute with Kosuth). Eve Meltzer, Lucy Lippard, Blake Stimson and Alexander Alberro meanwhile concur on the year 1966 as the emergence of a distinct and identifiable movement and discursive formation. (Meltzer 2013: 8)

However, for each narrative order to be complete they must mention Marcel Duchamp. This is even the case with trends, such as Art & Language, who argue that Duchamp' legacy is not important for the art they make.[74] (Art & Language 2004) There is the impression in many accounts that Duchamp is the true beginning, everything else is a second start or rebirth. However, is he really the beginning? Might it not be better to place him as the model, the prototype or the false start? For while there is Duchamp we know that Dada isn't Conceptual Art and neither is Surrealism, Lettrism or Situationism. Fluxus is nearly it but it has the minimal difference, in attitude perhaps, that preserves it as something distinct. From looking at the narratives of conceptual art there are four prime moments, or periods, for consideration within building the narrative of conceptual art:[75]

1- The Origin - Marcel Duchamp
2- The Gap – Dada, Surrealism, Lettrism, Situationism, Fluxus and neo-Avant-Garde (Rauschenberg and Johns)
3- The Moment – Conceptual art itself

[74] Note here Michael Baldwin's dismissal of the common narratives of conceptual art: "We have argued against the characterisation of Conceptual Art as essentially and irrevocably Duchampian, and gestural and appropriative – or as slavishly post-Minimal. It should be noted, though, that it is through just such a characterisation that the Institutional Theory finds its most obvious justification. Here there are objects a-plenty – it doesn't much matter what – and it does indeed seem to be through the agency of the art world that they are accorded the status of artworks." in (Art & Language 2004)
[75] For instance see (Godfrey 1998) or (Osborne 2002)

4- After – Conceptualism or contemporary art as post-conceptual art.

Or, in the words of Thierry de Duve, Duchamp's "message was put in the mail in 1917, reached its audience sometime in the mid-1960s, and is still provoking all sorts of responses today." (De Duve 2014: 242) Thus the major early figure, the first figure, in the narrative of conceptual art remains Marcel Duchamp.[76] The gap in time from Duchamp's first readymade *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) to the re-emergence of a Duchampian approach in Fluxus (taking George Maciunas' *Fluxus Manifesto* of 1963 as important here) that directly precedes Conceptual art is a period of roughly 50 years (1913-1963).

I raise this question of the historical narrative of conceptual art and Duchamp because it has direct bearing on the relationship between language and the artwork and hence on this chapter's focus - words, images and concepts. Is Duchamp's gesture not something that concerns explicitly the relation between words and what they refer to, and more than that an investigation into what the designation 'art' means -into what objects it can be applied to and which objects it cannot? However, I wish to raise this in order to justify a side-stepping of Duchamp in favour of an approach that focuses on other artistic formations that take place in that gap between Duchamp and the 60's. It is also in this gap I find the models of the ideogram and the calligram as expressions of the possibilities for the relations between words, images and concepts.

Thus to name the gap I focus on the figure of René Magritte as a point of contrast to the activities of Conceptual Artists of the 1960's. What Magritte offers here is a good expression of the way in which artists were thinking about the relationship between words and images in this intervening period because of the explicit attention he gives

[76] This is not to dismiss the notion that there were proto-conceptual or conceptual gestures made in art prior to Duchamp but that Duchamp is the figure consciously pointed to as raising pivotal questions that open up the space in which conceptual art operates. Also on complicating the notion of Duchamp's legacy or the "Duchamp effect" see David Hopkins (2006) "Re-thinking the 'Duchamp Effect'" in Amelia Jones' edited volume *A Companion to Contemporary Art Since 1945*. Here Hopkins takes aim at Kosuth's formulation that since Duchamp all art has been conceptual in nature by specifically cleaving Duchamp out of the 'art-as-idea' box and into a wider set of concerns. He shows that Duchamp's effect was in fact connected to much more than the readymade and much broader than conceptualism, encompassing an influence even on abstract expressionist figures like Wilhelm de Kooning.

to this question in his writing and art. They are apparently, even bluntly so, about the relationship between word and image. His mini-treatise 'Les Mots et Les Images' contributed to issue 12 of *La Revolution Surréaliste* in 1929, discussed in more detail below, serving as one important example of such thought and practice. Michel Foucault, for one, sees much importance in Magritte's word-image encounters, coming up with the formulation of an 'unravelled calligram' to name them. Also, this is crucially illuminating, Magritte donated the major weight of his practice to thinking through the image-word relation via the medium of painting, thus in a formulation where visuality takes primacy.

Thus, Duchamp's gesture, in my reading, opens a question but does not theorise a model and that is its strength in many regards. However, for my purposes here, following through on an investigation of the notion of concept as material, I require models where the relations and mediations between word, image and concept become more visible. These models are the ideogram and the calligram. Conceptual art will be seen in some respects to adopt aspects of these models and in others to offer another configuration - the diagram.

I Ideograms

The first model we shall look at - the ideogram - has one of its most eloquent exponents in the Belgian born French surrealist painter and poet Henri Michaux. For Michaux the characters of the Chinese language, which he understood to be rendered in ideographic form, held a connection to a past form of mark-making where sense was revealed through the mark itself. Reflecting on this in his *Ideograms in China* he remarks: "There was a time, however, when the signs still spoke, or nearly; when, already allusive, they revealed —rather than simple things or bodies or materials — groups, ensembles, situations." (Michaux 2002)[77] The signs spoke and 'revealed…

[77] It must be made explicit to the reader that the discourse that Michaux, Eisenstein and Pound engage in in relation to the Ideogram has an air of pseudo-linguistics. As J. Marshall Unger has noted, the idea of

groups, ensembles, situations" in contrast to a codified alphabet which speaks not directly (as I think we should take the word 'revealed' to mean here) but rather via the mediation of conventions for meaning-making encompassed in symbols. The ideogram signals a more direct image for Michaux, it is more like a moving or vital image. Or, as Michaux later puts it: "No longer imitate nature. Signify it. By marks ("traits"), by elans." (Sieburth 1987: 11) Michaux searches for inspiration in the original ideograms. Thus his practice: a form of mark-making that performatively re-enacts some imagined first writing, where image conveyed sense immediately, where the word-image distinction was not viewed as one of separation but mutual reinforcement.

Michaux was not alone in seeing something important for art in the ideogram, the Soviet film-maker Sergei Eisenstein also theorised their importance. Because ideograms, which represent ideas or concepts, are made by joining together pictograms (or hieroglyphs in Eisenstein's terminology), which represent things and consequently have a connection to their referent, Eisenstein theorized them as a kind of cinematographic writing. (Eisenstein 194: 30) The construction of an ideogram requires montage in order to operate. Eisenstein's inspiration from the ideogram lies in what he understands to be the conflict present on the surface of the ideogram. (Eisenstein 1949: 30) To be precise Eisenstein first discusses how early Chinese symbols are rendered in a naturalistic vein and only later become hieroglyphic and after ideograms. He refers to the 'copulation' or 'combination' that produces the signs. (Eisenstein 1949: 29) They become not a sum of the marks but their product. (Eisenstein 1949: 29-30) Each original 'symbol' refers to an object while their combination refers to a concept. (Eisenstein 1949: 30) The concept is thus the second degree, a historical product of this mode of symbolization if we read the implications and inferences of Eisenstein's view. The conflict is key to the dynamism.

Chinese as a purely ideogrammic form of language is a myth. (Unger 1990: 391-2) So to clarify this thesis is not claiming these statements as facts related to any language but is claiming that this is a real idea which influenced artists and had real effects upon their work. Thus, I will sometimes also refer in the main text to an ideogrammic desire.

While Eisenstein saw a foreshadowing and reinforcement of his views on cinema in the ideogram, Ezra Pound found inspiration for a new way to conceive poetry and writing. In his *ABC of Reading* Pound engages in some speculative ruminations on the relationship between the abstract and the concept inherent in the ideogram. (Pound 1991: 19-22) In Pound and Michaux the topic is linked to the theme of abstraction and concretion in a very explicit way. The following quote from Michaux is indicative of their mode of thinking on the topic of abstraction:

> In its innocence, it was a long time before mankind realized where it was being led... to the ultimate stage of abstraction, having at its disposal the power to eliminate the real and the concrete at a single stroke without so much as leaving a single trace of clutter, it makes full use of the greater convenience afforded by languages whose writing is consonantal or alphabetical over those whose characters are pictographic or ideographic. (Michaux 1987: 23)

The fear and dismissal of abstraction as a horror of civilisation's march forms a foil in Michaux's way of conceptualizing the potential of the picto- and ideogrammic models of linking the linguistic, the imagistic and the conceptual. Michaux conceives of a preservation of the 'clutter' of the concrete in such modes of mark-making. Despite being wary of abstraction in the first instance, Michaux will later see a way back through abstraction when he speaks of how calligraphy, a kind of writing/painting, is capable of expressing a world of pure speed, flight and mind. (Sieburth 2000: 214) Michaux could be said to theorize the link between languages based on a digital mode of writing, as the alphabet is, to societies of abstraction.[78]

Finally, as a further example of this mode, Abstract Expressionism also had recourse to think of itself as engaging in an ideographic project as the 1947 show *The Ideographic Picture* at The Betty Parsons Gallery and its accompanying short exhibition statement by Barnett Newman attest to. In this statement Newman outlines how the

[78] There is of course a degree of orientalism and wishful thinking in Michaux and Pound's theorization of the ideogram. Societies based on these types of script do not ward off the abstraction of the modern world any more than alphabetical societies do. However, this is not the place to discuss the differences and convergences between world philosophies.

Northwest Pacific tribe of KwakiuitI painted abstract shapes in order to achieve connection to metaphysical truths. (Newman 1982: 15) He then explicitly ties their understanding of art/mark-making to the way in which the abstract painters of this 1947 show present ideas through their art. (Ibid.) He states, to make it clear to those who try to label (and thus constrict) the art that the artist can do, that: "It is now time for the artist himself, by showing the dictionary, to make clear the community of intention that motivates him and his colleagues." (Ibid.) This phrase 'showing the dictionary' must strike us as pertinent in a discussion that concerns conceptual art. Again, Kosuth's *Art as Idea* and the definitional form of other artists' work comes to mind as an ironic riposte to this ideographic mode. Here artists will show aspects of the literal dictionary, making words into images into ideas.

The undertones of a politics of abstraction and concretion at play here connect with our focus on conceptual art. These separate artistic projects try to re-configure the word-image nexus in order to point towards a different way of being. How words and images relating to each other seem to reflect back into modes of life - more direct and immediate versus more intellectual and abstract. We should note this in our appraisal as it means that the stakes of how conceptual art figures this relation may be argued to act in favour of its own unique manner of being. What we may bring to mind here which connects all this back to conceptual art is the analysis of Robert Morris, and specifically a shift in the understanding of the Subject that is displayed in his work as outlined by Eve Meltzer in her *Systems We Have Loved* (2013). Highlighting works such as *I-Box* (1962) and *Blind Time* (1973) by Robert Morris Meltzer notes their connections to shifting paradigms from humanist to anti-humanist understandings of subjectivity. Morris' *I-Box* by date could be characterised as a work of proto-conceptualist work and in its form it exhibits that fascination and/or utilization of the tautological form that conceptual art is famous for. The naked Morris is the definition of this 'I'. It should also be noted that 'I' is what is characterised as a dietetic word (something we shall come across again below) and in need of some contextualizing reference to give it substance.

The definition of 'I' in a dictionary is not in any sense an *I* (a self self-referring to itself), but what this little box enacts seems to be closer to an actual *I*, self-reflexivity and all.[79] The work enacts a self-reflexivity through the meeting of image and word in sculptural form.[80] In this context Morris' smile can be seen as a cheeky taunting of the desire for an ideogrammic art utilizing the uniform alphabetic 'I' to do so.

What we have outlined above is how an ideogrammic desire gripped a variety of artists in the twentieth century when they tried to work through the relation of words to images. This desire comes up against a stumbling block in conceptualism where the meeting of the tautological form of the analytical concept with the ideogrammic desire, in artists such as Morris, produces a scepticism towards the original desire. This notion of a meeting of forms of word-image interaction with a tautological form will also happen in conceptual art's encounter with a second form of word-image interaction that was at play in early 20th century art practice - the calligram.

II ***Calligrams***

Determinacy and Indeterminacy

Let us now turn to our second model of word-image relations - the calligram. To analyse this, firstly, I make a few general remarks upon calligrams and show how artists associated with conceptual art engaged this form. I then focus on the nature of the word-image relation as displayed in René Magritte's 'Les Mots et Les Images' and how for Michel Foucault's analysis René Magritte exemplified a type of 'unravelled calligram'. I then investigate how conceptual art can be seen to act in light of this form. As in our discussion of the ideogram we bring conceptual art into dialogue with the form but also show how conceptual art points beyond it because of the importance of the concept as material. To start, we can borrow, as a guiding notion, Foucault' succinct definition of the calligram as a word-image relation where "The very thing that

[79] The *who* an *I* is is in its definition a *what*.
[80] Though we should note that 2 dimensional versions of this work exist as drawing/collage pieces/prints.

is both seen and read is hushed in the vision, hidden in the reading." (Foucault 1983: 25)

Calligrams are a long noted potential model for the encounter of words/texts and images, with early examples being the 9th century *Aratea* where the bodies of figures made by star constellations are made from the words of Hyginus' *Astronomica.* The seminal engagement with this form in the 20th century was Guillame Apollainaire's 1918 book of poetry C*alligrammes*. The calligrams of this text combined seeing with reading. In *Couer et Miroir*, for example, the same figures of each of the two verses are shared between the words and image - the heart and mirror.[81] This sharing of figure is what makes the calligram distinct from the ideogram, for, as we have seen, while the picto-gram operates off of (iconic) similarity to the 'thing' depicted, the ideogram wants to work directly on the sense of an idea or situation not a thing. This implies that the calligram is forever bound to a thing that can be figured, that can appear as an image as its anchor. This is even the case in a calligram like Apollinaire's *Il Pleut* where the focus is on a process and the movement of the rain, with the sense of falling expressed typographically by the words scrolling down the page, each letter a drop.[82] (fig 5.)

[81] *Coeur et Miroir* - "MY HEART, like a flame turned upside down/ In this mirror I am enclosed living and true as one imagines angels not as reflections are Guillaume Apollinaire" - (Apolinaire 1971: 167)
[82] *Il Pleut (It Rains)* translation: "it rains women's voices as if they were dead even in memory/it rains you too marvelous encounters of my life oh droplets/and those clouds rear and begin to whinny a universe of auricular cities/listen to it rain while regret and disdain weep an ancient music/listen to the the fetters falling that bind you high and low"

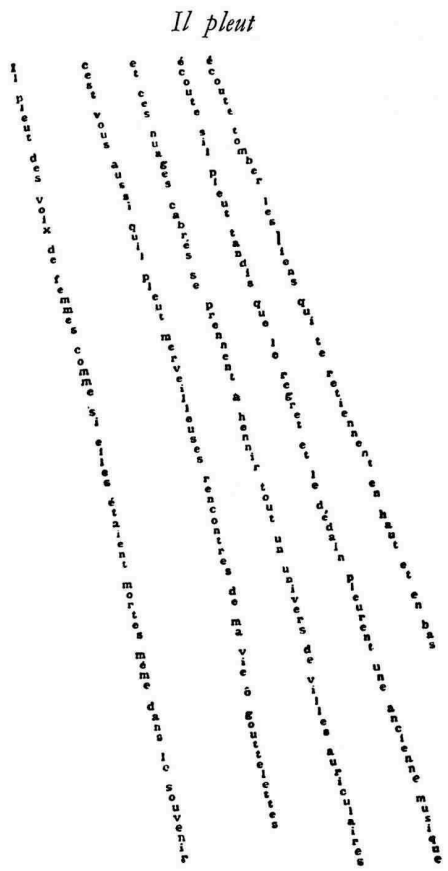

Fig. 5 Guillaume Apollinaire, *Il Pleut* (December 1916) (in the public domain)

Comparing the ideogram and the calligram we can note that, in one way, they engage in a similar work of reinforcing the message. In the ideogram this happens via the directness of the contours, in the calligram via the repetition of 'content' in text and image. The calligram still makes use of symbolic lettering while the ideogram is seen as supplanting symbolism. It does not stand-in for but rather partakes in or is analogous to what it signifies. The ideogram relies upon a prior ensemble of pictograms. The pictogram gives the ideogram its connection to things via either an iconic or indexical link between the pictogram and its referent.

The calligrammatic approach is present in the atmosphere of the 1960's and artists close to conceptualism and can for instance be seen at work in Robert Smithson's *'Heap of Words'* (1966). (Fig 6. below.) Featuring words reflexive upon the piece's title such as 'language', 'speech' and 'tongue' arranged on the page in a lop-sided lumpy pyramidal form they clearly gesture towards the physicality of words. They are literally

presented as a heap. The ‘heap’ is an interesting form in that it is determinate, recognisable as a heap, but at the same time ill-formed, or unformed, an assemblage of stuff thrown together with seeming disregard for Form. Among the artists who wrote on the relation between art and language, Robert Smithson offered reflections in both written pieces and works of art. Of the former, the 1967 press release “Language to be Looked At And/Or Words To Be Read” issued to coincide with a show at Dwan Gallery, is of interest. The title of his piece references the calligrammatic formulae for the relationship between vision and reading. However, what he has added is the linguistic expression of the Boolean logical relation ‘and/or’. Such a formulation puts the piece within that discourse of conceptualism that is borrowing discursive stylistics and phrases from analytical philosophy and logic. In that short text Smithson tries to underline the material nature of language.[83]

Fig 6. Robert Smithson, *A Heap of Language* (1966), Pencil on graph paper, 6 1/2 × 22" (16.5 × 55.9 cm)

The specific pseudonym it was written under – Eton Corrosable – prompts some pause for thought. The in-joke of this authorial name is that it references a brand of erasable typing paper – Eton’s Corrosable. Such a move underlines language’s materiality by the inverse thought of its erasure. The immaterial aspects of language do not fall into the matrix of operations to which erasure would apply. The corollary of this aspect in the mind may be the forgetting or repression of a word. Memory wipe may be

[83] Presumably Smithson did not think the piece achieved such an aim considering that he later added a note to it dated, ‘June 2, 1972’, and signed ‘R.S.’, which stated that “My sense of language is that it is matter and not ideas - i.e. “printed matter.” (Smithson 1996: 61)

a true erasure in this sense but for this to occur something drastic happens to the 'body' from which thought proceeds – neural networks in the brain being physically destroyed or altered etc. Resonant with this idea of erasure may be the notion of 'decaying sense' - Thomas Hobbes' phrasing for his understanding of the imagination and memory as sensation fading.[84] (Hobbes 1994: 8-9) In Hobbes materialist outlook all that exists are bodies and any discussion of the topics of the mind, of trains of thoughts or meanings, must thus proceed from the basis that thoughts are not causa sui but connected to a field of interaction among bodies.

To meditate for just a little longer on this theme of erasure, it is not by coincidence that Rauschenberg, another key figure in the pre-conceptual canon, makes visible the conceptual strategy in art via an act of erasure. His *Erased De Kooning Drawing* (1953) is a work becoming visible via the act of erasure. This act plays with the concept of iconoclasm. As Hans Belting has pointed out, it is a paradox of the image that though it is the target of the iconoclast's rage all they can destroy is the medium through which the image becomes visible. Belting relies on a notion of the image as not reducible to that said medium. (Belting ref.) Images remain intact because they exist inter-subjectively, socially or in the cultural fabric, for instance perhaps as memories. This is a furthering of our proposal in chapter one of the important contrast between an ontology of the image and one of the material if we are to isolate the moment of materiality.

Being attentive to Smithson's calligram we notice that it is actually involved in a work of visualization. To read it as a calligram proper we need to take it that the heap is the figure that 'accurately' visualizes language. Precisely because of this the kind of figure it is - a heap - demands more reflection. The indeterminacy of shape found in Smithson's 'heap' is reminiscent of René Magritte's broaching of the topic of

[84] "IMAGINATION therefore is nothing but *decaying sense*, and is found in men and many other living creatures, as well sleeping as walking…This *decaying sense*, when we would express the thing itself (I mean *fancy* itself), we call *imagination*, as I said before, but when we would express the *decay*, and signify that the sense is fading, old and past, it is called *memory*. So that *imagination* and *memory* are but one thing, which for diverse considerations hath diverse names," (Hobbes 1994: 8-9)

indeterminacy is *Les Mots et Les Images* (1929) where he discusses 'indefinite' shapes and things. (see fig 7. below) He comments: "Indefinite shapes have a significance that is as necessary, as perfect as precise ones." (Magritte 2016: 34)

Fig 7. Detail from René Magritte's *Les Mots et Les Choses* (trans. Kathleen Rooney)

This nod to the formless/enforme brings out the materiality of language via the root of that minimal determinacy which must be there to signify indeterminacy. Should we choose to look we would find many other heaps in other art movements of the time. Arte Povera and Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Venus of the Rags* (1967/74), for instance, is a work that utilizes a heap in order to bring out a contrast between (classical) form and indeterminacy that evokes complications in our concepts of women, their appearance and their labour. The heap is a figure that can unite form and figurability - necessary to the image - and a sense of materiality through its un-formedness. In Smithson it becomes the vector through which a figuring of language can thus take place. The image of language as material is a heap. One final observation that sums up how words and images are thought through in this version of calligrammatic form as it is found in conceptualism - the work produces the materiality of language via an equivalence of language and heap. To do this it actually means having a meeting place between the tautologous, or analytical form, of the concept (referred to in chapter 2)

and the calligram. Visually yes the work is a heap of language. However, the words in the heap refer to language itself and not to heaps or anything in general. Thus, the tautological nature of Smithson's title exists in productive relation to the 'content' the heap-figure acts calligrammatically with.

Calligrams and their unravelling

Zooming out and encountering Magritte and Foucault's commentary upon him can offer us a way to see how this productivity of the calligram can be viewed and the presuppositions and problems concerning the relations between words and images it contains. Looking a little longer over Magritte's fascinating piece entitled 'Les Mots et Les Images ' or 'Words and Images' contributed in 1929 to the central organ of Surrealism at the time *La revolution surrealiste* can be instructive here. This mini-treatise consists of 12 illustrative drawings demonstrating the way in which words and images and objects can be used together or instead of one another. (Fig 7. and Fig 8.) Above each drawing is a caption articulating what that drawing proposes to demonstrate. Thus, a drawing of a leaf has connected to one of its veins an indicating line with 'Le Canon' hand-written underneath it; overhead its caption in type reads "Un objet ne tient pas tellement à son nom qu'on ne puisse lui en trouver un autre qui lui convienne mieux:"[85] Each drawing and caption plays through a permutation of the ongoing encounters between words and images in such a fashion. In this way *Les mots et les images* unites two semiotic systems – those of images and words – illustrating their relations when combined together.

The encounters Magritte exhibits show an openness on both sides of the word-image divide - unexpected combinations can stick together just as well as more habitual ones seems to be the lesson here. However, two issues relevant to our concerns can be noted. One, the understanding of the image displayed here presupposes it to already, in some sense, be a system of signs. Two, the issue of

[85] "An object is not so tied to its name that there is not another which could be found to suit it" (my translation)

translating one system of signs into the other, whether they relate as a 'perfect' mirror or whether each either over-flows or is deficient in relation to the other. Interestingly, the ideogram is not a model that fits such a format because in a sense it is not a meeting of two systems but an expression of the oneness of image, word and meaning or concept. The calligram too, which engages in a unity of word and image but in a configuration where the separation is on show, is not precisely present in Magritte's lesson either. However, what is present is the underlying fact that, "In a picture, the words are of the same substance as images:" (fig.8 below)

Fig 8. Further Detail from René Magritte's *Les Mots et Les Choses* (trans. Kathleen Rooney)

Magritte's practice can be illuminating for thinking about conceptual art, placed as a figure of the gap between Duchamp and the 60's. Here is where this notion can be concretised, for what is striking about Magritte placed as our figure of the interregnum of Conceptual Art in the 20th century above other figures, such as Broodthaers for instance, is that he continued to paint, he continued to create images. Magritte's questioning of signifiers takes place in a definite medium – painting. Why is this the case? Duchamp had abandoned painting to engage in a project that seemed parallel, with the readymade inevitably raising the issue of nomination and titles. Duchamp with the readymade pushed out into an area that questioned what we recognize as art. Magritte remains tied to painting which (still) functions metonymically to signify art.[86] The motivating force for drawing Magritte into a discussion of calligrams is due to Michel Foucault's analysis of his works in such terms which we shall come to below

[86] We shall leave aside the question here of whether we are sure that Duchamp stopped painting and de Duve's claim to the contrary that in fact he never ceased to paint!!

but first let's consider what Magritte's relation to Surrealism means for the word-image encounter.

In order to clarify Magritte's place in art history we shall return to the topic of medium and materials touched on briefly in the introduction to this thesis. Paul Wood, while making the necessary qualifications as to the limits of models and generalisation (etc.) separates modernism, as refinement, purification and medium-specificity, from avant-garde, as experimentation, layering, addition and collage (we may say intermediality), in order to bring to light different lines and logics of art-historical development in the 20th Century. (Wood 2014: 185) In relation to this schema we can note that Surrealism was a movement with concerns wider than medium or materiality. That theory matters to art is a key insight of Surrealism. However, many surrealists, Magritte among them, seem to have a commitment to a specific medium (whether visual or textual). In this context we can re-route Debord here and note how Surrealism sought to realise art without transcending the mediums of art. (Debord 1994: 105-6) Blanchot further noted the heritage of Dada at work in Surrealism and the kinds of investigations this leads to:

> …surrealism is also the freedom of words: Dada's heritage, "words set free," sentences decomposed, rags of advertising texts set end to end? Perhaps, or especially, the succession of a long and immense poetic work whose causes are spread out over the course of centuries. The result is that these free words become centers of magical activity and, more than that, things as impenetrable and opaque as any human object withdrawn from utilitarian signification. We are far now from the category of the immediate. Language no longer has anything to do with the subject: it is an object that leads us and can lose us; it has a value beyond our value. We can be taken in a storm or in a swamp of words. It is rhetoric become matter. (Blanchot 2014: 217)

Words set free become words made strange, words dis-connected from a use or purpose. Magritte characterizes this effect as the 'Mystery'. (Magritte 2016) Glossing it, this mystery may be identified with what is not understood within the affective pull of the work, it may not even be isolatable as something specific in its obscurity to

comprehension. Much as perhaps Barthes has his punctum to identify that aspect of an image that gives a particular subject a puncture that draws them close to the work (Barthes1982: 43-47), the mystery differs from this by being unidentifiable but part of the affective pull. Following on from this mystery, when Magritte titled a work of art he believed he was engaging in 'poetry.' (Magritte 2016) This notion of poetry, in Magritte's mind, is set against that of information. (Magritte 2016) In interviews and written texts Magritte further comments on what Surrealism did to the relations between words and images.

> On the other hand, Surrealism eliminated symbols in favour of what the symbols symbolize. Surrealism has brought to culture the idea that life must not be in the service of art, nor of anything, but that nothing has any spiritual value if it leaves us indifferent. (Magritte 2016: 202)

The striking point here is the elimination of the symbol, i.e. the sign that stands in by convention for something else, in favour of that which symbolization symbolizes. What is meant by what 'symbolization symbolizes'? Is it things, concepts, ideas? How would such an elimination proceed? One of the ways in which this elimination of the symbol may be achieved is in the dream imagery that Surrealism employed. Perhaps it is the case that the symbol is effaced when we enter the space of the dream? Yet, is not the dream, if anything, only symbols? Is this not why Freud and later Lacan can engage in their interpretation? Is Magritte just fantasizing an artwork that can make the truth or reality or some fundamental transcendental signifier itself appear? We are not so far here from our ideogrammic desire, word and image and meaning coalescing, representation overcome in favour of direct affect.

Interestingly, Magritte also stated an aim for a relation of equality between title and image. On the title he comments that the:

> title is related to the painted figures in the same way that the figures are related to each other. The figures are brought together in an order that invokes mystery. The title is joined to the painted image according to the same order. (Magritte 2016: 201)

The order that evokes mystery governs the relations between the elements of a work for Magritte. He will give as an example of how he joins title and image to this effect by discussing *La Mémorie* (1948). He states:

> For instance, the picture *La Mémoire* shows a plaster face with a bloodstain on it. When I gave the picture the title, I felt they went well together. One can talk about a picture and its title… I must say that when I painted the picture *La Mémoire* I wasn't thinking about what I'm going to say now. I only thought about harmonizing the image and the title that names the image. Consequently, the picture is not the illustration of the following ideas: when we say the word "memory", we see that it corresponds to the image of a human head. If memory can take up space, it can only be inside the head. Then, the bloodstain may suggest to us that the person whose face we can see is the victim of a fatal accident. Lastly, it's a question of an event in the past that remains present in our mind thanks to memory. (Magritte 2016: 201)

There is a non-representational frame that Magritte sees his practice through displayed in his use of the terms 'invoke' and 'evoke' over and above the idea 'illustration of' when speaking of his work. (Magritte 2016: 201) He is explicitly stating that his reading of the work is precisely this, a 'reading' after the fact not an intention prior to the harmonization of title and image itself. Both stand in relation to one another, there is no pre-eminence to the text, or if there is it can quickly be reversed in favour of a pre-eminence of the image.

Image as sign?

In our discussion of materiality and materialism (chapter 1) we had recourse to speak of how the image exists out of and in tension to its materiality. This aspect of the image is one highlighted by, among others, Robin Kelsey in our discussion. We now recapitulate some of this terrain but this time in order to question to what degree the image is sign and consequently to make specific the move the introduction of concept as material makes in this matrix. Roland Barthes in the 'Rhetoric of the Image' tried to investigate how, if the image was a limit to meaning, in either the sense of generating

an excess of meaning or resisting through indeterminacy the ability of signs to structure it, it could still lead to an analysis of the ontology of the process of signification i.e. study how signs come to be and mean. In investigating this he took as one example advertising images that could be said to exist primarily in order to communicate a simple message. Looking at an advertisement for an Italian food brand Barthes notes that besides the linking of an image of tomatoes and pasta to the colours of the Italian tri-colour, giving rise to a sense of 'Italianicity', we have a level to the image where it signifies non-symbolically and rather iconically. This is the level of a 'non-coded iconic message'. (Barthes 1978: 36)

Similarly, Jean-Luc Nancy while explicitly using Magritte's *Treachery of Images* as a foil to his notions comments that:

> With his famous phrase ''This is not a pipe,'' Magritte merely enunciates—at least at first sight or at first reading—a banal paradox of representation as imitation. But the truth of the image is the inverse of this. This truth is, rather, something like the image of the pipe accompanied by ''This is a pipe,'' not in order to replay the same paradox in reverse, but, on the contrary, to affirm that a thing presents itself only inasmuch as it resembles itself and says (mutely) of itself: I am this thing. The image is the nonlinguistic saying or the showing of the thing in its sameness: but this sameness is not only not said, or ''said'' otherwise, it is an *other sameness* than that of language and the concept, a sameness that does not belong to identification or signification (that of ''a pipe,'' for example), but that is supported only by itself in the image and as an image. (Nancy 2005: 8-9)

Like Barthes' point, in order for an image to be image it must bear some iconicity that is not a message. The image can lead onto thoughts about the signs it does contain but its being an image is not reducible to being a symbolic sign. There is a muted saying of the phrase "I am this thing". What Nancy also outlines is that this saying does not happen because of the word or because of the concept. The image itself says. By approaching the image in this phenomenological way Nancy can avoid the reduction to a semiotic analysis.

It is also important to separate the visual from the image so that not everything seen has the density of the image. A line of thinking where everything perceived or given to be viewed is not an image is encapsulated in Jacques Rancière's contrast between a scene from *Balsthzar au Hazard* and a television game-show. (Rancière 2009: 2-3) Only the former truly contains images for, in Ranciere's reasoning, the image is something composed. Ranciere's way of commenting seems to run parallel to Nancy who discusses the image as always distant or sacred, held at a distance from everyday life. Nancy admits however that it can be hard to tell what is genuine image in an age of the spectacle:

> The distinct *distinguishes itself*: it sets itself apart and at a distance, it therefore marks this separation and thus causes it to be remarked—*it becomes remarkable*, noticeable and marked as such. It also, therefore, attracts attention: in its withdrawal and from out of this withdrawal, it is an *attraction* and a *drawing* toward itself. The image is desirable or it is not an image (but rather a *chromo*, an ornament, a vision or representation—although differentiating between the attraction of desire and the solicitation of the spectacle is not as easy as some would like to think . . .). (Nancy 2005: 6)

We are dealing with a qualified notion of the image in these two thinkers, one where an image stands out, declares itself, is not just any old visual phenomena. It is here that the status of images within conceptualism seems to be a continuation of anti-image processes in twentieth century art practice. For, without having to delve into the vast literature on conceptual photography, is there not a close alignment between the everyday visual, the mundane and the jejune and the kinds of images and general visual phenomena one finds in conceptual art?

Ranciere speaks of regimes of articulation between the visible and the sayable that can vary among epochs. I have used the figures of ideogram and calligram to name something similar to these regimes but see them as inspirational for specific art projects. Ranciere highlights that both the 'traditional' semiologist and the Barsthesian who studies the punctum "play on the inter-convertibility between two potentialities of

the image: the image as raw, material presence and the image as discourse encoding a history." (Rancière 2009: 11) The image is both affective and a cipher of historical meaning.

Unravelled

Having spoken of images in relation to signs let us finish our discussion of Magritte with Foucualt's reading that proposes the notion of the unravelled calligram. In the commentary upon Magritte's work Foucault's analysis of the pipe image is useful and important. It is also in part an enigmatic and idiosyncratic reading. For instance, when analyzing the work *Les Deux Mystere* (1966) he focuses upon an imagined scene, reading the interior space the painting depicts as a classroom and situating the action of the painting as that of the school-master attempting a lesson on how words name things. The speculative character of Foucault's narrating of the painting has prompted attempts to explain why Foucault takes this approach. Scott Durham attempts to summarize and justify the relationship of this reading to the 'original' Magritte's thus:

> Foucault does not so much betray Magritte's painting as carry out, from this side of language, an operation analogous to that carried out by Magritte from its far side. The scene "repeated" within Foucault's narrative bears no resemblance to that painted by Magritte, but insofar as it both copies Magritte's painting and lays claim to showing its origin, its relation to the "first" is one of similitude: it is the simulacrum of a simulacrum. (Durham 1993: 23)

Utilizing a distinction Foucault himself makes (one later assented to by Magritte in letters to him)[87]between resemblance and similitude Durham argues that Foucault creates his words in a similar fashion to how Magritte's pictures operate. Resemblance, in Foucault's understanding, "has a 'pattern,' an original element that orders and hierarchizes the increasingly weaker copies that can be struck from it" (Foucault quoted in Tanke 2009: 101), it in a phrase, is mimetic. This resemblance carries for Foucault the

[87] Tanke notes that they do not have the same understanding of the distinction. (Tanke 2009: 99-102)

hidden affirmation of that which is depicted (Tanke 2009: 97), not unlike that which Barthes and Nancy spoke about. Similitude meanwhile “silences” the voice of “external affirmation growing within resemblance.” (Tanke 2009: 101) This similitude works against resemblance by blurring the distinction between model and copy itself. (Tanke 2009: 101)

In Magritte, for Foucault, through the act of painting, and specifically painting words along with figures, a simulacrum is created where we can forget about models outside what is happening within the painting. In the course of his analysis thus Foucault proposes the notion of the ‘unravelled calligram’ to explain how Magritte’s work also undermines a number of functions of the calligram. Foucault’s essential point is that while an ordinary calligram has a model or referent - “the very thing that is both seen and read” - the unravelled, or as Tanke translates it ‘defeated’, calligram lacks any such model, it is all simulation. (Tanke 2009: 120) Foucault’s argument for reading Magritte’s works this way relies partially on seeing the text as Foucault sees it as image-like, the text is rendered in a type of handwriting that takes on the function of an image which we may or may not assent to. (Foucault 1983) However, Foucault is certainly onto something in noting how Magritte’s word-text ‘calligrams’ short-circuit and undermine the notion of some model behind, instead they forward the ability of words and images to conjure and create.

Where Foucault’s analysis may run into trouble is in relation to the question of medium in Magritte, as we raised earlier - why paint? Now, we have put it that painting words is important for Foucault’s reading, to render their visual qualities more apparent. To offer an answer in the context of this discussion however it seems that Magritte’s continuing to paint allowed him to show an image that contradicted itself but yet could be thought as doing such. Now, many images contradict themselves in subtle ways, the mistaken perspective of certain Renaissance pictures, etc. However, in Magritte it seems a conscious strategy. By being a conscious strategy we are meant to follow a thought and come up against that thought’s obstacle. There is something conceptual

in having to maintain these two clashing notions, perhaps because we have to renounce the notion of straight up conceptual clarity in order to appreciate the image. It confronts and confounds thought.

Magritte had a wide array of influences, as many surrealists had, and this can be found present in his art. It is, for instance, documented that he had some knowledge of and interest in Hegel. (Magritte 2006) By employing two semiotic systems he could be said to exhibit a form of unity of opposites, a kind of saying both things at the same time or, as Frederic Jameson once characterized the dialectical method, 'saying everything all at once'. (Tally 2014: 15.) Foucault directly wants to combat the notion that there is a Hegelian contradiction at work in the relation between words and images.[88] We may wish to agree with Foucault on this point for the ways it opens up talking about word-image relations but what Foucault does not tackle is the possibility of contradiction within the painted image itself. He dismisses the notion of a contradiction operating within the work, "what lends the figure its strangeness is not the "contradiction" between the image and the text. For a good reason: Contradiction could exist only between two statements, or within one and the same statement." (Foucault 1983: 19) Instead he offers other ways of thinking about their relation in Magritte. The way in which the image of the pipe encounters the proposition 'this is not a pipe' in *The Treachery of Images* (1929) undermines the contradictory nature, they don't meet on the same level thus the contradiction cannot emerge. Foucault highlights three possible and co-present interpretations for the relation between the picture of the pipe and the statement 'this is not a pipe'. 1) the statement comments upon the pipe, 2) the statement comments upon itself, 3) the statement comments upon itself and the pipe together. (Foucault 1983: 26-28) This layering of alternatives atop one another is another aspect that keeps the work from contradiction. Note that for Foucault

[88] As a larger philosophical point that cannot be investigated here but is worthy of future analysis, this disagreement over the categorization of the relation between words and images as one of contradiction is something that is crucial in the structuralist and post-structuralist critique of what they take to be Hegelianism. Delezue's critique of Hegel's use of the deictics 'here' and 'now' to name concepts at the start of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* could also be seen to engage in this manner of critique.

contradiction only takes place among things of the same substance – a statement contradicts another statement, one image contradicts another. The relation between image and word is never one of contradiction but of juxtaposition. Kalyva takes a similar approach in seeing the relation between image and text in conceptual art as one of juxtaposition. (Kalyva 2016: 19, 43)

Returning to the concept for a moment we could say that the text and the image take part in the same concept and that is what gives the calligram its form. In semiotic terms we may want to say either the same referent or signified, for our purpose here we will say the same concept. With Magritte, in Foucault's reading then, the concept does not add stability because it is undermined by the imagistic and textual elements themselves. However, something may already have been foreclosed here - the view of the image as generative of an entire discourse that is resistant to signs. This is not, or not only, because of the indeterminacy of the signs the image is made of but the forgetting of materiality that the image itself relies on/engages in. To focus on the image is to push a certain selection of signs to the front, the signs on the skin of things. However, in the workings of the image, its support is made to disappear and when it re-emerges it interrupts the discourse on the image. It marks a distinction that is immaterial to the image but that matters to thought. This is the point at which the (typically) material and the conceptual are linked, precisely in how the image is undermined. For instance, when Magritte painted clouds he varied their application in different works from rough thickness to smooth flatness. To see these things, the 'things' that Greenbergians saw in abstract expressionism, is to see something that is not in the image as such but which colours the shades of meaning it can dispense. What particular meaning does it give? Perhaps it is more like the 'non-meaning' that Didi-Huberman speaks about. (Didi-Huberman 2016: 4) We can also view this process from the level of the image, where the image itself has a non-representational meaning.

If we see the concept at work in the place of material the reading of the image is blocked precisely by the conceptual determinacy that is part and parcel of the work. It

appears to be contradictory. It should make no difference and it doesn't to the image but it does to thought. This thought is itself already abstract or ideological but that it can register these distinctions in some form matters. The difference does not matter to the image but it does matter to thought. Is my question: do you see texture when you see an image? Now Lyotard speaks of the 'thickness' of the image - the fact that the visual image, of visual art, is always of something that we are in a relation of embodied distance to. (Lyotard 2011: 28) This thickness of images cannot be subsumed into language. Now, my take on conceptual art is that it engages, like I am doing here, in a side-stepping of this issue. The concept leads images and words to be flattened and works through a model of the diagram. The diagram brings the uniting factor between the text and image fragments/exhibits into focus - the concept. The way the image confounds thought with contradictory images in Magritte, in conceptual art becomes the holding of contradiction in the work by the concept.

In the interregnum from Duchamp to the 60's we get a play with ideogrammatic and calligrammatic form where words and images have their separate opacity. This showed us how the image is seen as excessive to words. With Magritte we moved through the calligram and its stability to a place where the stability of the common reference is in question. In conceptual art, as already hinted with the not-quite ideogram of Morris, and the not-quite calligram of Smithson, conceptual art approaches the relation between words and images differently. Thus, in the final section of this chapter what may be the most fruitful model for seeing what the concept does to the word-image relation - the diagram - is examined.

III Diagrams

Having investigated the two models of ideogram and calligram and seen how they at moments overlap with but also hold concerns counter to conceptual art, we can raise a number of questions to get us to our third model - the diagram. Namely, how does

conceptual art, and specifically the use of the concept as material affect the dynamics between words and images in the artwork? How does this align or contrast with the dynamic models of the ideogram and the calligram that were in some instances explicit models for earlier twentieth century artists?

In the first instance, Boris Groys highlights something of key importance in approaching these questions. Namely, he notes that the relationship between art and language witnessed in conceptual art was not so much that of artists using language (this predates conceptualism) but rather art itself being used as language. (Groys 2018: 122) Further Groys argues that:

> ...this new orientation towards meaning and communication does not mean that art became immaterial, that its materiality lost its relevance, or that its medium dissolved into message. The contrary is the case. Every art is material - and can only be material. The possibility of using concepts, projects, ideas and political messages in art was opened by the philosophers of the 'linguistic turn' precisely because they asserted the linguistic character of thinking and the material character of language. These philosophers understood thinking as the practice of operating and manipulating language. And language was understood by them as being material through and through: a combination of sounds and visual signs. Now the real, epoch-making achievement of conceptual art becomes clear: It demonstrated the equivalence, or at least a parallelism,between word and image. between the order of words and the order of things, the grammar of language and the grammar of visual space. (Groys 2018: 122)

In essence here word and image are flattened. In the terms of this thesis I try to find the source of this flattening in the concept. We can conceive of the scenario where the concept is primary in configuring the relation between word and image but this relation in turn puts them both on an equivalent plane. We have thus in our previous section built up the image and its irreducibility in order to show how it is again suppressed in conceptual art. However, does this suppression of the image not do more than just transform works of conceptual art into information as Deleuze critiqued it for, and as Groys also assumes at the start of this quote?

Groys' argument is linked to the view that conceptual art was concerned not with aesthetics but with rhetoric when it reflected on the forms art should take. (Groys 2018: 123) Thus the choice of sober, clear minimalist means of presentation helped in the communication of ideas, whereas a more traditionally aestheticized form of presentation would have made the ideas come across clumsily. (Groys 2018: 123). The distinction he relies upon is that between the beautiful and elegant formulation of an idea, which conveys the idea well and forcefully, versus the beauty of the formulation, which obscures the idea in its own brilliance - the former relates to the idea itself, the latter to the language used. (Groys 2018: 123) Groys' argument is, as always, both provocative and persuasive and here I would put stress on his notion of communication. We remember (from chapter 2) that Deleuze's argument against conceptual art is based on it simply being a matter of communicating information. We dismissed this notion because in speaking of Wittgenstein and Frege's model of the concept we noticed an aesthetic dimension at work. The use of concepts in conceptual art serves more purposes than the conveying of information, and if they do wish to convey information it is of a second order - information about the conveying of information itself (where communication falters or is blocked, etc.).[89] Groys' flattening thesis also lets us turn from the interruption of the image by material in the sense of the paper, canvas, ink or paint it is printed on or with to its interruption by the concept.

Again, to refer to a work we have already mentioned above - Kosuth's colours from *Art as Idea as Idea* - we can see the limits to thinking of conceptual art as the transfer of information pure and simple. Here, does not the sober style act precisely to obscure, to make thinking come up against a certain limit, its inherent difficulties and impossibilities? What I would like to retain here by making this point is to say that yes there is a flattening of the relation between word and image but that such flattening

[89] While speaking of art and information here I would like to just mention a fourth strand of word-image encounter models not investigated here, due to space and other like considerations, namely, the ISOTYPE. This model which exists as the product of the encounter between a Vienna Circle philosopher, Otto Neurath, and a German anarchist graphic artist, Gerd Arnzt deserves greater research and attention in lineages of word-image interactions that prefigure contemporary approaches. They open up perhaps the most explicit conversation about art as information in art history.

should not be restrictively understood as information for the work takes the definition at face value which had pre-supposes some capture of language over the image.[90]

Further to this flattening, we have again a recourse to talk about abstraction, taking the scholarship of Jaleeh Mansoor and Anna Lovatt as instructional here. Both have investigated the use of drawing in conceptual and pre-conceptual practices arguing for a unique approach engendered by conceptuality to the line. For Mansoor the line moves away from functioning as contour and outline but takes on increasingly the role of the diagrammatic line. It is this which brings 'context' into the work of art. (Mansoor 2019: 178) This is so because the line as diagram correlates to its use exterior to the arts in the domain of economy and society.[91] She proposes that we think of the diagram as central to the conceptual approach to the line from the mid-twentieth century on, though it has precedents in Duchamp and Picabia. (Mansoor 2019: 178)

Mansoor sets her eye over the work of Francis Picabia in order to raise the problem of the diagram. She asks:

> Might this wager take the form and operational mode of a diagram? My claim here is that Picabia, before even Duchamp – although I am not interested in origin myths or property claims to originality – displaces both icon and symbol, both picture and word (the cornerstones of mimesis in pictorial representation and poetics respectively), for the movement of the diagram as it charts relations of desire and inscribes a social dynamic. (Mansoor 2020: 145)

The thesis here is that icon and the symbol, sign types that in ideogrammatic thinking and calligrammatic writing mark a constituent part of the work and contribute directly to the effect of the finished work, were already side-stepped by their contemporaries, those we see as foreshadowing conceptual art. This is then Duchamp's (and others) innovation as seen from another angle. Picabia's diagrams have also been seen as leading to a loss of the notion of a thought-without-language

[90] There are again signals that this flattening happens prior to conceptualism also - think of Pop and Ilya Kabakov's 60's Soviet Pop works.

[91] Though she does not reference him in this context, this would align quite closely with Benjamin H.D Buchloh's analysis of diagrams in Duchamp and Eva Hesse. (Buchloh 2006)

(Welchman 1997: 238) i.e. one based off of images or other non-linguistic sensory phenomena.

The diagram itself has emerged as a feature of growing prominence in debates within contemporary art history, theory and philosophy. As Kamini Vellodi summarizes these debates encompass thinkers as diverse as C.S. Peirce, E.H. Gombrich, Gilles Deleuze, Margaret Iversen and Frederik Stjernfelt. Even given this diversity of thinkers Vellodi notes that discussion of the diagram can be broadly broken down into two strands - the representational and the non-representational. (Vellodi 2018) Perhaps one weakness of Vellodi's analysis is that only one figure truly resides in the non-representational stream - Gilles Deleuze. What I am attempting to do here is synthesise elements from both these strands into a mode that articulates important aspects of the word-image interaction in conceptual art.

Now, we must also note from these debates that the diagram is not introduced as a model of image-word encounter but rather as a spatial model of visual organisation, as schematization or as a map. What I want to bring out of these debates however is how they bear on word-image relations as found in conceptual art. Aside from works which explicitly utilize diagrams[92] (or maps) - Art & Language's *Map Not To Indicate* (1967) or the later post-conceptualist Mark Lomabardi's *oeuvre* - I contend that there is something diagrammatic in how conceptual artists corral together word, image and concept in their works, and that in fact the diagram is the model of encounter between words and texts that will take place when the concept is utilized as a material.

What the diagram does is offer a means of orientation, an offer of the way a thing works. A key aspect of the diagram is that if it represents it represents relations rather

[92] Diagrams can also be seen in use at a concrete 'behind the scenes' level as recounted by Sanneke Stigter describing the installation practices for one of Kosuth's *One And Three* pieces: "For *Glass (one and three)* a 'diagram' was provided with instructions to execute the artwork. The question is how to interpret these instructions; because not much is specified and different approaches have been taken over time. During the search for a good installation practice, various sources were studied meticulously." (Stigter 2011: 70)

than objects.[93] This means the diagram charts a space different to the ideogram - situations, senses and ideas - and the calligram - things that can be figured. However, as Vellodi points out, there is an issue that most scholarship on the diagram, as applicable to art, tends to still think of the diagram as in some sense representational. (Vellodi 2018) Thus Mansoor's analysis, like Benjamin H.D. Buchloh's of Duchamp and Eva Hesse (which she references), relies on the diagram understood as that which represents the social context in which art is produced. It is the linkage point, by fact of being a means of representation utilized within modern society itself, of the relation between art and society. Vellodi sees an alternative in Deleuze's idiosyncratic use of the notion of diagram to highlight all that is not captured in representation. In this interpretation the Deleuzian diagram is about the potential for linkages, for making relations between sensations in an artwork, rather than a picture of relations that are pre-existing and in the end refer back to society. This is why Vellodi stresses a certain ahistorical moment to Deleuze's aesthetic thought here. (Vellodi 2018) The diagrammatic is precisely that moment where the work gives itself up to new meanings, where it maps not from representation but from sensation. As Jessica Law notes, for Deleuze, the diagram allows an alternative model to the code. (Law 2018) We do not decode but rather follow the potentials for connection given by the diagrammatic structure of the work.[94] (Law 2018)

A final, and crucial aspect of this theoretical discussion of diagrams is to conceptualize them as a form of thought. This path of thinking may be a means to combine aspects from both representational and non-representational accounts of the

[93] Here is Jakub Zdebik's useful definition of the diagram: "A diagram is commonly understood as a drawing conveying information about something incorporeal. From the Greek *diagramma*, it means to mark out by lines, to draw – where dia is through, across, apart and graphein is to write. The diagram is defined as a geometrical figure used to illustrate theorems. It can also be a sketch, a drawing or a plan that explains a thing by outlining its parts and their relationships – basically, delineating its inner workings. Finally, a diagram can be defined as a chart or a graph explain- ing or illustrating ideas and displaying statistics." (Zdebik 2012 :1)

[94] It is intriguing here that Deleuze chooses the diagram as the means for talking about what artworks do, however the diagram as commonly understood would be read as a reduction to information and hence, it might be expected, dismissed by Deleuze.

diagram. Here the work of Joanna Drucker can point us to how diagrams are a form of thinking. (Drucker 2016) Drucker is alive to the materiality of diagrammatic forms. This awareness proceeds from her own work on the history and materialities of texts - something she sees as righting a mis-conception concerning the relation between theory and practice in the academy.[95]

Describing diagrams as a form of thinking she firstly follows Walter Crane and George Spencer Brown when she notes 'that we cannot make an indication without drawing a distinction'. (Drucker 2012: 88) She further, provocatively for our consideration here, notes that, "Diagrammatic reasoning is an applied realm of metaphysics, not merely an abstraction." (Drucker 2012: 88) Further, "the parallel between a metaphysical approach to diagrams, with the emphasis on the structuring principles of representation, knowledge, and form, and the practical application of diagrammatic activity, should be understood as a resonant rhyme, not a relation of identity. The particularity of material instantiation is not a debasement of idea, but an enactment. From these particulars theoretical principles can arise, but the categories of metaphysics will always be unsettled by its actualities, and therein a whole host of cultural conflicts and politics resides." (Drucker 2012: 88) As she notes, in common usage 'diagram' can refer to a quite diverse arrange of phenomena - graphs, charts, anatomical images, wiring drawings etc. (Drucker 2012: 88) Her more precise definition

[95] "Derridean *écriture* rarely addressed the mundane matters of the history of letters and fonts, or design precepts such as layout and composition. These physical materialities and the involvement with production appeared largely outside consideration, and almost irrelevant to the higher matters of a metaphysics of différance. The philosophical and practical realms appeared to remain separate from each other. Indeed, practical work is often still treated differently from theoretical work in the academy, as if the knowledge of hand and eye, embodied intelligence, and applied skills were somehow not theoretical. When questions of materiality and ontology bring theoretical and practical issues into dialogue, troubling the abstractions that sustain philosophical discourse, the craft-based knowledge of production is generally disenfranchised, as if the higher order of thought necessarily trumps the lower orders of material engagement. But practice is neither banal nor reductive, and no more literal and unthinking than metaphysical reflections are purely ethereal - the two domains have much to say to each other… The coming into being of the grounds of meaning-production - through representational relations, formal structures, graphical expressions of logical and rhetorical principles - is deeply engaged with the intuitions that serve a single inquiry - how do structural relations participate in the production of meaning?" (Drucker 2013: 86-7)

refers to: “those graphical expressions that take advantage of spatial organisation to structure semantic relations.” (Drucker 2012: 88) Further:

> These graphical expressions are themselves meaningful as forms - they are a kind of poetics, or poiesis, a bringing into being of meaning through making. The specific properties of graphic forms, their tractable, perceptible materiality, makes it possible to analyze formats and features - to get at, to grasp, to read, see, describe, elaborate the particulars of diagrammatic expressions. Even the abstract principles of Peirce’s existential graphs are worked out in graphical terms whose visual specifics create logical relations. The columns in a spreadsheet, or the graphic conventions of doing arithmetic sums or long division, are dependent on diagrammatic scaffolding that underpins their meaning-production. The spatial arrangement of values on a surface is integral to the values produced in ways that seem self-evident because they are so fully naturalised by convention. The principles that seem commonsensical in describing these spreadsheets or math operations are less intuitive and familiar in the domain of written language. But the graphical organisation of texts also depends on diagrammatic workings. Across the full range of analogue and digital media, format features of layout, composition, and graphic design are integral to the production of semantic value. The words of a chapter header or title read with a different inflection and value than when the same words are embedded in a linear sequence or tucked into a footnote. We read according to these visual cues… (Drucker 2012: 88)

In a way the ground that diagrams build from have been in operation for a long time - the presupposition of the spatiality of seen or read surfaces and the line’s productive role in ordering this space. Diagrams then, building up from this, are images that work:

> If a diagram is an image that works, that does something, as writers across the logical, historical, and philosophical spectrum suggest, then it provokes a reader’s engagement through its structures and the relations they express. A diagram is a graphic expression whose specific spatial and visual features constitute the semantic values. Diagrams are performative, as is clear from the cuneiform tablet and railway schedule examples, rather than representational. They use graphical means to express relations that might be expressed through other means - mathematical formulae, textual description, logical propositions. (Drucker 2012: 90)

Here, Drucker sees the diagram as a form for expressing relations that work over similar terrain as “mathematical formulae, textual description, logical propositions” - a series of forms and terrain played with and upon by conceptual artists. Here we can take Druckers analysis further and along similar lines to Deleuze, seeing diagramming happen according to a line that is not tied purely to the surface of the page or tablet, etc. The diagram, operating as Drucker remarks, as ‘a resonant rhyme, not a relation of identity’ further allows us to side-step the problem of flattening as information - the danger Deleuze and Guattari warned us of in chapter two. Diagrams and conceptual artworks understood as diagrammatic are non-representational because they can utilize a concept as material. Thus in Kosuth colour descriptions mentioned above the concept of ‘red’, ‘green’, etc. is the material that is worked and presented and in presentation it leads us to the limits, material limits, of such forms of concepts as such.

Now, returning back to the place of concepts among words and images, the ubiquity of diagrams, maps and grids, spatial-relational forms of using the line in conceptual art should be interpreted as having much to bear on the relationship between words and images and concepts. The way in which the concept relates images and texts is firstly, following Groys, to flatten, secondly it does this via diagrammatic form. Take for instance Laurence Weiner’s “Statements” where the text of the statement is the work, it adequately stands in for the realisation - *One Quart Exterior Green Industrial Enamel Thrown on a Brick Wall* (1968). Here the tautological relation is possible because of a flattening, the image in the words is taken by the work as equivalent to the statement. Thus, in contrast to Kosuth’s tautological neons which work via a display of their form, Weiner takes it as a pre-supposition - the articulation in text equates to an actualization *tout court*.

A rather elaborate version of the diagramming, Art & Language’s *Index 01* (1972) places the act of diagramming down to the participant/spectator/reader who engages with the works texts. This work, described at the time as a ‘Stalinist Reading Room” (Art & language 2001) consisted of a number of filing cabinets housing texts created by

Art & Language in the previous years of their activity. The notion of index was what guided the creation of the work, yet the arguments over how such a realisation was to be achieved led to a split in Art & Language roughly splitting the New York group off from the British. Ruth Blackswell outlines how the works set-up sets multiple possibilities for connection:

> Indeed, by using this context to force a particular kind of cross-referencing reading strategy, what this exhibit conveyed was how the content of the individual journal texts could be extended in any number of ways through their endless potential for reference to other similar texts. This cross-referencing was used to demonstrate how "the kinds of decisions we make about the relations between one text and another can have implications for our picture of [how one might conceive of] an entire conversational, or ideological world." (Ruth Blacksell 2016: 137 includes quote from Art & Language at the end)

The concept guiding the work is the notion of an Index, the work simply is the realisation in one format of a specific index, that of Art & Language writings. However, as the quote above outlines what is at play is a system of connections, the diagram is in formation, kept together by the overarching concept of index, stating that all these texts and textual fragments are related in a complex network. The separation into various filing cabinets takes on the function of lines of separation that create the distinctions allowing for specific diagrammatic connections. And what of the image in this context? Here we have two aspects - 1) the textual aspect in its visuality as image and 2) those filing cabinets which led to the 'Stalinist reading room' designation. The latter were in fact always seen as problematic by some members of Art & Language. They felt that the cabinets, chosen by Harrison, were aestheticizing elements that in fact turned away from the concept. (Art & Language 2001)

Turning to further utilization of diagrams, what can we say is the status of the diagram, and how does it operate, in works like Sol LeWitt's Wall Drawings (see fig.9)? For instance, *Wall Drawing No.70* (1971): "Straight lines about six inches (15cm) long, touching and crossing, drawn at random using four colors, uniformly dispersed with

maximum density, covering the entire surface of the wall. Red, yellow, blue, black pencil…" What can we do to analyse this work by LeWitt? We can note the language in the description - the vague quantification of 'about 6 inches' is intriguing. Not exact but yet precise. This is the turn of phrase that marks a lot of LeWitt's work. The 'DIAGRAM' heading also speaks to us. What is the status of the drawing which is entitled diagram here? LeWitt tells us it is a diagram and not a certificate or a drawing. Not being a certificate is straight forward but not being a drawing may be a little less so. The distinction being drawn between drawing and diagram can be proposed to revolve around how diagramming configures relations for a potential materialisation in LeWitt's work and a drawing is an actualization or instantiation of the diagram. Here the diagram gives an outline of the virtual of the piece while each wall drawing is an actual drawing. In a more banal fashion the wall could also be said to be the distinction, the medium substrate upon which the actualised wall drawing is made to manifest on. On paper it is a diagram, on the wall a drawing. The structure of the work is what forms this distinction. Returning to the language of the formula for the piece, we can note that LeWitt is an interesting case because the 'concept' operative in his work is analogous to a recipe - a list of elements and commands. The entire string of text is the concept he has concocted. Picking up from previous chapters it shows us the concept in conceptual art as something beyond truth or falsity and necessarily tautologous (but in this case via the constant equivalence of command and instantiation). The moment of materiality of the concept becomes embedded in the moment of aesthetic apprehension of the work which enacts a move between the thought of the concept/recipe and the perception of its actuality - a moment mimicking the play between understanding and imagination in the Kantian schemas from aesthetic apprehension. The spectators' understanding of the instruction is faced with the plenitude of the instantiation which puts the reach and limits of the understanding into focus, we become aware of cognition itself in the moment of aesthetic experience. The diagrammatic image on the certificate affixes a general limit to the instantiation by

giving us a picture of a quasi-actuality, the diagram thus functions as discussed above to draw a parallel between words and images within a work of conceptual art.

Thus, to answer the question we began at the start of this section, the concept as material takes on a pre-eminence over words and images which entails the flattening between words and images, their equivalence is held in check by the nature of the concept. In contrast to the ideogram the relation between these elements is not aimed at a 'natural' unity or transparency between the graphic sign (or set of images) and the 'idea' but a forced one. Similarly, it differs from the calligram in the lack of a natural self-referentiality based on a common referent for the graphical elements, rather the self-referentiality operates closer to the space of the unravelled calligram which proceeds without that pre-existing model referent. The notion of the diagram best suits the relation between words and images and concept in conceptual art because it can account for the flattening and also give the concept a guiding role making linguistic statements equivalent to images.

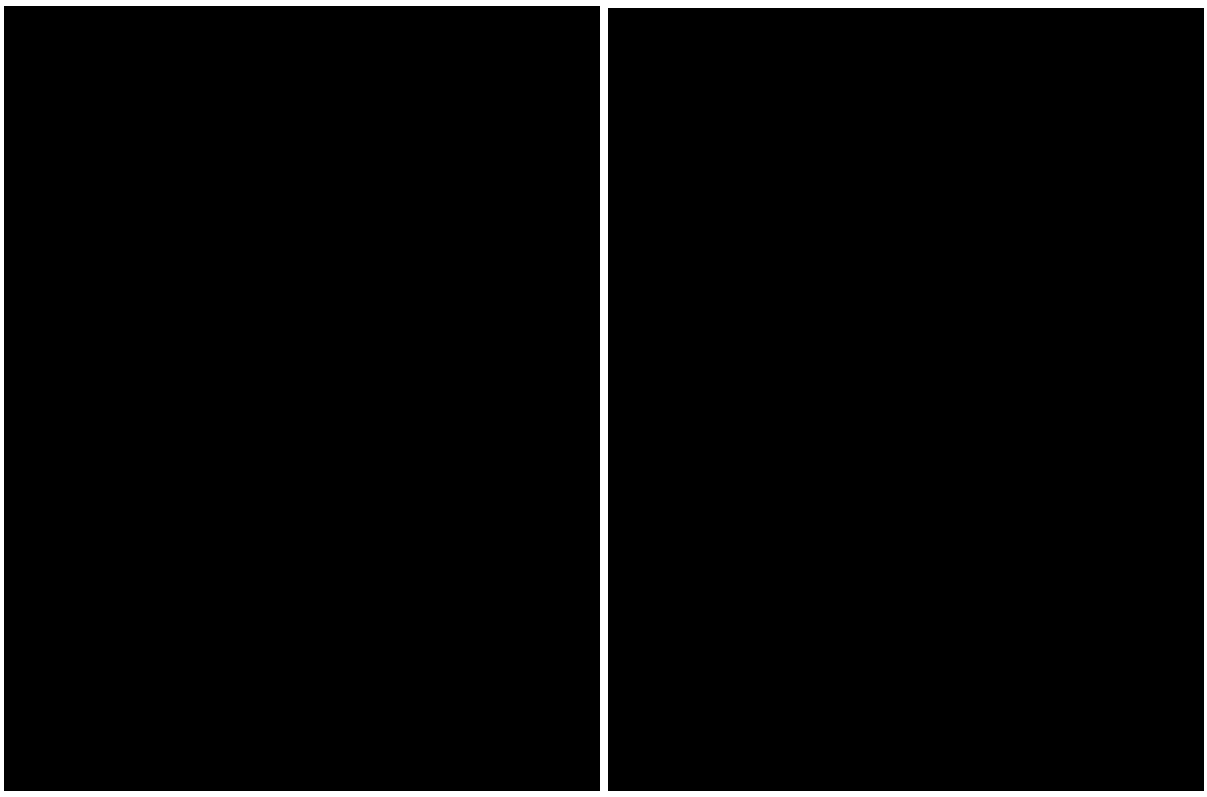

Fig 9.. Sol Le Witt, *Diagram and Certificate for Wall Drawing No. 70* (1971)

Conclusion

Let us finish on the question of images again. Though they are in need of words, as outlined above, they also silently affirm the existence of what they iconically represent. Foucault's Magritte defined a space where text and image together conjured and then undermined the possibility of affirming a model outside the picture as its stable reference. In conceptual art the relations are different again. The concept, in a sense, speaks for, or rather before, the image. This differentiates the concept from the notion of a theme or the ideas at work in a piece. These may be a secondary aspect to a work - a by-product of the work interfacing with social content. In conceptual art the concept is the primary material that orientates the work, it sets the other parts in relation to one another, this is what I call its diagramming function. The concept is made necessary, as we indicated when raising the question of technology and conceptual art, by changes in the social belief in images. They are now, as Heather Diack argues, documents of doubt. (Diack 2020: 17) Added to this the changing function of the line becomes another factor which makes the diagrammatic form possible. The line, in its diagrammatic function, becomes the contour of the concept - it delineates what is within and what outside the given concept the artist is working with.

In conclusion we can summarise that twentieth century art saw many attempts at (re-)configuring the relation between words, images and concepts. These all contained their own presuppositions and 'philosophies'. The ideogram sought a direct link between the plane of words and images and meanings, in many cases this was seen as enacting a fantasy return to the origin of mark-making. The calligram offered a more self-reflexive mode of allowing words and images to come together and mutually reflect each other and their shared model. Conceptual art had aspects of these two but also added its own model into this mix - that of the diagram - which operated by flattening words and images and foregrounding the concept.

In the ideogram the mark is foregrounded, in the calligram the text and the image co-exist as equals while conceptual art, in general, enforces an equality via flattening of words and images in order to foreground the concept. This foregrounding happens, I argue, not because of a transformation of art into information, re-calling D/G's critique of conceptual art from chapter 2 above, but rather because images and texts have lost the ability to 'speak' for themselves. As Heather Diack notes, there is always a sense of doubt in the conceptualists' use of photography - we cannot say whether the image is true or not. (Diack 2020) This doubt brings the concept into view for, as we outlined in previous chapters, the concept (as material) of conceptual art is posited outside of truth or falsity. It is not posited as an empirical concept or truth-claim proposition. The changing function of line from contouring to marking distinctions and relations (Mansoor 2019: 180-181) also informs this shift becoming in a sense the contouring of the concept.

CHAPTER 5

Concept as Material in Conceptual Art: The Ecstasy of Abstraction

"Conceptual Art is boring" – Lee Lozano, January 1972

Introduction

This final chapter of this PhD brings the research of previous chapters to a concluding point. I do this by investigating how conceptual artists have utilised and understood the notion of abstraction in their work. Abstraction, as we previously noted, is common to all accounts of concepts, how they are given rise to and how they function. Having specified aspects of the concept, isolating the importance of abstraction to its actuality I now turn to approach the theme of abstraction in conceptual artists, in their works and writings. I argue that in working with the concept as material, i.e. the concept as raw material to be laboured upon, the quality of abstraction that is its hallmark becomes an important issue to be grappled with. I offer sections on each of the four artists I am dealing with here – Joseph Kosuth, Lee Lozano, Douglas Huebler and Adrian Piper– in order to unfold more fully a reading of their practice in general and to engage with the wider scholarship on their work. The argument in this chapter is that in grappling with abstraction in conceptual art artists are grappling with the concept as material.

While I claim the centrality of abstraction to conceptual art there are real divergences in how conceptual artists have thought about abstraction, to quote Ursula Meyer, for a preliminary distinction:

> Although many Conceptual artists consider abstraction in the traditional terms of material reduction, the more radical Analytical Conceptual artists reject material aspects, proposing the functional change of art, i.e., the abstraction of art itself, rather than of any of its particular properties. (Meyer 1972: xx)

Here Meyer is utilizing a distinction that Kosuth makes between Analytic and Stylistic Conceptual art. As Kosuth categorises it, he and Art & Language are the Analytics, Sol Le Witt etal. are the Stylistic bunch.[96] (Kosuth 1993) Meyer's comment with regard to 'abstraction in the traditional terms of material reduction' seems to be linking these conceptualists with the heritage of minimalism. What I am arguing is that these divergences precisely show us artists working with concepts as materials, by thinking through what abstraction is and what it is doing in their practice.

By no means am I saying that the sole concern of these artists is abstraction but rather that by the nature of their practice they necessarily deal with the topic of conceptual abstraction. This is displayed not only in their works but in their writings about art. There is no concept without abstraction. The degree of abstraction, however, varies. Now, there is a danger that in speaking of abstraction we are taken to pre-suppose a certain metaphysics between the thinker and the world outside, one where the thinker always subtracts from a pre-existing plenitude and concreteness. This is thinking of abstraction in a mimetic or representational manner which we have been in conflict with earlier in this thesis. However, the sense in which we are speaking of abstraction here is a practical process. One must isolate in order to think. There is a foregrounding and backgrounding, a separation and consequent unifying of what is separate. The 'problem' with thought only emerges when we take certain features of abstraction (separation, eternity, and unity) to be aspects of things in reality rather than means by which thought engages reality, i.e. concepts are tools rather than pictures. Conceptual analysis can help us come to terms with the impossibility of the abstractions we immediately make and lead us to new and more concrete abstractions. This is essentially the process which Hegel follows in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, when the immediate concrete is discovered to be in fact the first abstractions of the

[96] This etal. would include those artists associated with Kousth through being exhibited together by Seth Siegelaub - Douglas Huebler, Robert Barry, and Lawrence Weiner (Bailey 2016: 17-18)

'here' and 'now.' (Hegel) Marx too follows this method in *The Introduction to The Critique of Political Economy* as outlined in chapter 3.

One problem I wish to highlight here, before we proceed, is the distinction between speaking of abstractness (a quality) and abstraction (a process). This issue also concerned us in chapter 3. My use in this chapter focuses predominantly on the abstract qualities of concepts that mark the manner in which a conceptual artist must approach them. This may at times imply the use of a further process of abstraction, as we shall see below, however the quality of being abstract is the main focus in this chapter. In our analysis thus far Frege gave us the concept as both a container and a function. Deleuze gave us the concept as event. We have also seen that the standard model is to understand the concept as representation. We shall utilise that typology of concepts again in what follows. What I am doing here is looking to specific moments of change/development in an artist's work that can be pin-pointed as having to do with the task of dealing with concepts as materials.

Joseph Kosuth - *An Abstraction of an Abstraction*

We have engaged with Joseph Kosuth earlier in this thesis, in relation to Wittgenstein's influence on the understanding of concepts by conceptual artists and in relation to the use of Thesaurus' notion of conceptuality and the relation between words and images. Here, we shall engage him again in a more head on manner in order to see how in encountering the concept as material his practice developed in certain directions. While some readers of Kosuth's work have sought to highlight the Platonist undertones-overtones in his art (Wilde 2007: 120-1), we should bear in mind that he understands the concept in a more empirical sense than Plato ever did. This is the great divide between us and the Greeks – the degree to which they understood the concept as simply a mental phenomena, as we highlighted in chapter 1, is in dispute,

rather there is in Plato a sense that the mental is a means to access the true idea underneath reality.

Kosuth's pivotal series the *Investigations* (1965-75) allows us to see a conceptual artist work with concepts and confront abstraction. The *Investigations* utilised dictionary definitions, the thesaurus and reading rooms filled with philosophical texts in order to convey an art that was about ideas. The *Investigations* as works took place across a number of different instantiations, from billboards, to newspaper ads to gallery exhibits. In a manner similar to how Buren's work exists between instantiation and the larger notion of the continuous series of coloured bands, Kosuth's *Investigations* existed in person and across the array of works in the series.[97] The placement of the contents page of *Roget's Thesaurus* in multiple venues also had the added factor of separating the artist from the juxtapositions and comparisons at work when the piece was instantiated - this was achieved by the "paste-up" artist and printer.[98] (Morgan 1994: 101-102) We have already encountered part of the *Second Investigation* in talking about how conceptual art conceived of matter and materials in chapter one. We can now speak more about the moves Kosuth felt compelled to make in the journey to the *Second Investigation*. The use of the term 'Investigations' to frame Kosuth's early work needs to be unpacked here. Investigation names a procedure, something with a goal or outcome posited as an end goal, it refers to a "formal or systematic examination or research." Kosuth himself tied the idea to Wittgenstein's, as in the posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations*. (Kosuth 1993) Investigation can be read, in the context of what is being argued in this thesis, as Kosuth's necessary mode of coming to work with the concept.

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[97] Kosuth's *Investigations* comprise 10 Investigations proper and then the work from 1965-67 categorised as proto-investigations. The1973 text *Joseph Kosuth : Art Investigations & 'Problematics' Since 1965* brings together the proto-investigations and the first 9 investigations proper and includes essays on Kosuth s practice by Joseph Kosuth, Terry Smith, Mel Ramsden, Michael Baldwin, Terry Atkinson, Philip Pilkington and David Rushton.# The last (10th) investigation was completed in 1975.

[98] Robert C. Morgan sees this as continuing on a previous Fluxus derived interest in "chance operations." (Morgan 1994: 102)

The process of development in Kosuth's practice can tell a lot, especially in the move from the proto-investigations to the first and after the second investigations. Here he recounts the move from the first to the second investigations:

> With my dictionary definition works it became evident to me that the form of presentation (photo-stats) were [sic] often being considered "paintings" even though I continually attempted to make it clear that the photostats and the art was [sic] the idea. After that series I began to use obvious media (newspapers, magazines, billboards, bus and train advertising, television) as the form of presentation. I felt this made it clear that the art is conceptual and not experiential. I use the synopsis of categories (developed by Roget in reference work) to enable me in my capacity as an artist to keep my choices on a general level. The synopsis of categories series, which I refer to as "investigation 2", was conceptually completed last year when I began the presentation phase of the work. All my work exists when it is conceived because the execution is irrelevant to the art. (Quoted in Alberro 2003: 51)

In explaining the reason why he moves from dictionary definitions of everyday objects on photostats to dictionary definitions of categories such as Being, Existence etc. Kosuth highlights that the early terms he used (chair, hat, etc.) were not abstract enough to get the viewer to focus on the concept. He turns his art in the direction of abstract concepts. The move from photostat to magazine pages, that is parallel to this, was in order to get away from what was seen as a nod to painting, the size of the photostat being reminiscent of canvas' like those of Ad Reinhardt. (Alberro 2003) Kosuth is moving from concepts that are abstractions of concrete things to concepts that are of abstract things, or to abstractions of abstractions as he says. In an early review of these definition works Jane Livingston notes that the most "moving definition is from the Oxford Dictionary: NO' THING (nu-), n. & adv. 1. No thing (with adj. following, as ~ great is easy)." (Livingston 1968: 66) Thus, an affective reading was also one option available in early readings of these works.

Alberro interprets Kosuth's moves thus:

> Kosuth's stated problem with the *First Investigation* (i.e., the first *Art as Idea as Idea* series) was that it was too static and that its narrative and temporal dimensions were too limited. Its framework, metaphorically speaking, was too narrow. By contrast, the *Second Investigation* "neutralized" that iconic quality and greatly expanded the parameters of art. By its very nature, the work came together in various different public sites over an undetermined sequence of time. (Alberro 2003: 51)

The result for Alberro is that:

> Hence by late 1968 Kosuth had arrived at a method of artistic production and distribution that in its very expansiveness made the work virtually impossible to grasp in any form other than ideational. (Alberro 2003: 51-2)

Thus the two moves that Kosuth makes after the first investigations – 1; to change the form of presentation, and 2; to focus on more abstract or general notions are the process of working with abstraction taking two forms. Kosuth himself tracks the moves of his development as also originating in working with what he calls simple low information materials:

> The first *Art as Idea as Idea* series—the blow-ups of dictionary definitions—began to disturb me in their iconic nature, not in a visual sense because I had successfully resolved that, but in the sense of a single, isolated iconic 'idea', with amplified boundaries, and a beginning and an ending. At first this was a positive aspect of the work for me—I liked the idea of taking a concept which everyone has and re-presenting it to them in an art context. Believe it or not that, in one sense anyway, came out of my earlier use of materials like glass, water, air—materials with a neutral, low information excitation yield. (Kosuth 1993: 87)

An irony perhaps of the development of Kosuth's practice is that this move from empirical concepts to more abstract general notions which both came out of his understanding of conceptual art as tautological, in the form of the analytic proposition,

gave way by the mid 70's to a focus on context. (Guercio 1993: xxviii-xxix) It would however be true to say that Kosuth's first focus on context was the art context as such.

This move to a more abstract way of conceiving of the concept is given further twists and turns by Kosuth's subsequent turn to social questions surrounding the recognition of art and creation of knowledge. Lyotard's estimation of Kosuth is important again here, the notion that his work is immersed in the infinite play of language. Kosuth's utilisation of text in his work expands from the dictionary definitions to site-specific texts connected to the history of ideas and literature. In a sense this later utilisation of text is an outgrowth of his writing style which utilised lists of stand-alone quotations to convey a point. This is also in keeping with what Nizan Shaked has analysed as a move from the analytic to the synthetic proposition in conceptual art. (Shaked 2017) Kosuth's focus on context can be traced as coming out of his reading in anthropology. From this he began to view how meaning in contemporary society is no longer stable and given by some religious centre but dispersed among a number of scientific endeavors - we go to the doctor or economist for advice rather than the priest. (Kosuth/Römer 2004) The artist' role in this is to be a source of meaning (something Kosuth sees as connecting the post-modern and pre-modern artist) (Kosuth/Römer 2004)

Following Meyer's comment above we can see how the Analytic project becomes itself a project of abstraction – "the abstraction of art itself."[99] There is a certain sense in which the declaration of an analytical approach to art when contrasted with a stylistic one serves to elide the question of the style of analytical conceptualism itself. So we shall ask here, what is already stylistic in Kosuth's use of Analytic concepts? The answer I believe can be aided by drawing from our previous discussion of the aesthetic dimension underlying the extreme analyticity of Wittgenstein. Clarity becomes a style,

[99] This is seen in the ongoing activities of Art & Language whose central concern has always been investigating what art is. Kosuth, while being a member of Art & Language in New York for a period, retained his own literary style, one based off of quotation and polemic.

or rather the striving for clarity becomes style, the inevitable mediation blocks a full appraisal.

What Guercio suggests in analysing Kosuth's writing is how the question of the artist and their knowledge of what their practice is becomes a central theme of Kosuth's work. (Guercio 1993: xvii) He notes how this ties to concerns of Ad Reinhardt and the notion of the artist in the modern era becoming conscious of their practice and controlling its interpretation away from the market and the media, something that for Reinhardt many modern artist of his era were actually dis-avowing.[100] (Guercio 1993: xvii) This theme concerns the topic of concept as material very much. It adds something to the conditions of possibility for the concept as material that we have not yet considered, namely the role of the artist's consciousness. This thesis has largely defended the notion of the objectivity of the concept. In a sense the artist has been present as the figure who works with the concept as material as if unconscious of the task. Now, delving into Kosuth shows us how the concern of being conscious of their practice was something the conceptual artist also faced as a part of the historico-philosophical nexus their work was engaging in.

Now to put Kosuth into dialogue with our interlocutors on the concept earlier in this thesis we can note that while Deleuze critiques Kosuth for reducing art to information, Kosuth believed that reducing to information in the sense he was working towards saved the artists' work from a far worse reduction and co-optation, that of the market. (Kosuth/Römer 2004) Now, as much as the market is a figure that the conceptualists set themselves up against, it has been born out from the start that the commodity status of art works is their condition in the bourgeois era. Artworks are so in a

[100] Despite the definite influence of Reinhardt upon Kosuth's thinking there are key divergences as Guercio notes: "Whereas Reinhardt had hoped to preserve the integrity of art, contemplating a future mission for the academy and the museum, Kosuth's different but equally utopian impulse revealed itself in the attempt of "Art after Philosophy" to found a sort of community of communication that, abolishing any superfluous form of mediation, aimed to link artists and non-artists directly. As he would point out in his "Introductory Note" (1970), this questioning of the nature of art renders conceptual art an activity as informative and serious as philosophy, the audience for which, since it cannot take a position outside the discipline, consists of participants who are more or less informed." (Guercio 1993: xvii)

double-edged way. The commodification of art is in fact its massification, the artist becoming a participant in mass society striving to achieve a use-value through their art. On the other hand, the artist feels their work dictated to by purely commodity concerns and thus subservient not to society but capital (the commercial artist). They feel their work to be only the domain of a cultured elite or big money speculators on the art market and thus work at a remove form mass society itself. Kosuth was certainly aware of the problems of information and the market, as Deleuze was, however, Kosuth displayed a willingness to work with information as a model to preserve the role of the artist in a changing contemporary society. The path of greater and greater abstractions based upon representational models of the concept and its limits led to an eventual end point where Kosuth's work since the 70's could be argued to repeat in a 'tasteful' manner his thesis of meaning embedded in context that while interesting as art leaves the challenge of working with concepts as such behind.[101]

While Kosuth felt compelled to move in the direction of abstractions of abstractions and a greater comprehension of the contextual nature of meaning and information relay during the period of 1965-75 a co-conceptualist, also core to Siegelaub's 'big four,' Douglas Huebler investigated forms of abstraction in his work that came off as more concrete and 'human' in art critics commentaries. This was in fact in contrast to that artist' own appraisal of his work.

Douglas Huebler - Emptying Out

Douglas Huebler, who has been characterised as the 'smiling conceptualist', (Buchmann) is a conceptualist whose strategies seem to have gained somewhat of a metonymic status in popular culture for a 'meaningful' conceptualism.[102] Note for

[101] This may be one interpretation of what Alexander Alberro refers to as Kosuth's failure to achieve his potential in an interview from 2004 with Stefan Römer. (Alberro/Römer 2004)

[102] This is perhaps odd as an *ArtForum* review of a 2002 retrospective of Huebler's work by Mark Godrey and Jenni Lomax notes Huebler's status as "his current status as perhaps the most important overlooked figure in Conceptual art." (Sundell 2002) Sundell is very aware in this short review of the framing of Huebler as a humane/humanist conceptualist as Godfrey and Lomax attempted. This is

instance Paolo Sorrentino's 2013 film *The Great Beauty* which features a scene where the protagonist, world-weary journalist Jep, played by Toni Servillo, visits an art installation. The work he views, installed in the courtyard of a Renaissance-style Italian building, depicts what is framed, rather heavily, by the soundtrack, as a work of awe-inspiring humanity. The work is an attempt at documenting the growth of a single individual through portraits from when they were young through their maturity until their old age. The film itself takes many pop-shots at contemporary art in its critique of what we take to be a post-68 cultural malaise. However, this scene, along with later scenes such as the encounter with a giraffe or later an aged nun, are musically framed in a manner that asks us to get serious for a minute. Such works that document the consistent ageing of subjects also exist in many forms from the sociological British t.v. programme *Up* (1964-2019) to Richard Linklater's *Boyhood*, filmed over a 12 year period.[103] However, the reaching for the impossible inherent in the piece featured in Sorrentino's film, that underlines the attempt at pathos, can trace its genealogy back to 1960's conceptualism itself and the work of Douglas Huebler in particular. While not documenting the ageing of a single individual, Huebler did, famously, attempt the documentation of all those existing in his *Variable Piece #70* (1971).

Huebler as the smiling conceptualist may however be a mis-nomer when one tracks his comments upon his practice. His work has a tendency to be read as an homage to the human and the particularity of individuals, owing to the inherent impossibility of the task. However, an alternative reading of the work is available through an encounter with

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something I think Heather Diack gives some tools to rectify when she argues that a sense of doubt pervading the relation between words and images in the society of the time sees an expression in the use of photography in conceptualism. However, her actual appraisal of Huebler is still within the humanist framework: "Repetition and resemblance, literally and figuratively, formed the building blocks of minimalism. Such systematic organizing principles carried over into conceptual art. Yet, as opposed to Donald Judd's "one-thing-after-another," Huebler's move from objects to photographs, from blank form to portraiture, signals his deep investment in the irrepressible humanity of human systems. (Diack 2020: 123)

[103] Roman Opalka's work could also be raised in this regard. Not only was Opalka's practice an iterative one of continuing writing an infinite series of numbers each day but he also photographed himself each day and during exhibitions would select photos from the period of number painting that were displayed to go with the exhibition. (Morgan 1994)

Huebler's own comments in a 1977 interview on another of his Variable pieces, *No.4* (1970), a work that collected over 1,800 secrets written anonymously by visitors to the 1970 *Software* exhibition at the Jewish Museum. Here Huebler stresses the logic of the piece as:

> an effort to empty the work of what appears to be the content. It is not to fill the work with content. It is to empty it, to empty it of history, to empty it of mythology, to empty it of literature and to allow it to speak by being empty. (quoted in Kotz 2007: 254)

Hubeler also states what it is he is trying to counter with his method:

> there is an enormous amount of irresponsible filling of content into the events of the world and into the appearance of the world . . . in other words, I'm speaking against the irresponsibility of language. (quoted in Kotz 2007: 254)

Huebler launches his work as a counter to the irresponsibility of language that has led events and images to be filled with content extraneous to what is there in appearance. This view is an inversion of the later Kosuth's openness to contextual meaning.

The use of photography in Huebler work takes part in this work of emptying out. On this use of photography he has stated that:

> I use the camera as a 'dumb' copying device that only serves to document whatever phenomena appears before it through the conditions set by a system. No 'aesthetic' choices are possible. (quoted in Kotz 2007: 216)

For Huebler, this 'dumb' tool of abstraction acts to cut across aesthetic intentions being made on the part of the artist. Now, we may want to dismiss the impossibility of the notion of no aesthetic choices being made but the desire underlying the declaration is important to recognise. This anti-aesthetic desire is also present in Huebler's

comment from a 1969 interview that “I don’t want the works to be clever, romantic, sentimental, you know, or nice or anything like that.” (Huebler 2001: 140) In a sense, Huebler is trying to get the look of the concept by expelling anything human or subject oriented from the work. The contradiction is however that all these anti-aesthetic decisions can just as easily be interpreted as aesthetic decisions. It is the ineliminable aspect of showing vs saying (the content Huebler so dismisses here) that we have discussed in chapter 2 that I propose is actually in operation here.

Sarah Charlesworth (who was a student of Huebler’s) is worth-quoting in relation to the notion of abstraction that may be taking place here: “I abstract objects that socially carry a strong emotional charge or symbolic significance. I’ve abstracted them from the context in which we normally confront them.” (Wolfe 2018) Her most famous series of people falling from buildings confronts how freed from the noise of the pages of tabloids these images still contain a rather eerie charge that makes them difficult to comprehend together. The abstraction fails in its emptying out and that failure is one avenue down which its affective potential lies.

Huebler practice was not confined to photography (in fact mapping and diagrams formed a possibly greater concern of his early work). In an example from *Variable Piece 70,* entitled *Variable Piece 70: Global 81* (1973) he photographed a group of soldiers marching, then isolated the head of each soldier in order to render a painting of them as what they would look like without their helmets on. He also added the line "AT LEAST ONE PERSON WHO HAS EVERYTHING TO GAIN AND NOTHING TO LOSE" to the sheet of paper featuring the above documentation that became one of the official presentations of the larger piece. Thus Huebler interprets the impetus behind his work, the ‘emptying out’, as a multi-stage process, from the original photograph as an act isolating a selection ‘of every living person’, to the further isolation of each individual in the group scene, to the further individualization of the soldier by a painting.

The work explicitly makes a judgement on the type of abstraction that takes place in reality in the organization of an army. The loss of individualization, the tension between

the concept of the army and the soldier with the concept of 'a living person.' I argue that the work requires the further layers of a process of individualization in order to achieve its goal of documenting every living person. Here then Huebler does open up the space for 'humanist' concepts.[104] What are we to make of the inscription "'"AT LEAST ONE PERSON WHO HAS EVERYTHING TO GAIN AND NOTHING TO LOSE"? Is this not precisely playing with the irresponsibility of language Huebler rails against in the interview quotes above? In a sense maybe but in a greater sense what is being used here is a precise language borrowed from logic (existential quantifier -"At least one…") in order to de-limit an indefinitely large category but one precisely defined nonetheless. The nature of the language deployed outlines the contour of the concept in a specific way - "At least one.." and the polarities of 'everything' and 'nothing' - plugging into a discourse of logical analysis and statement. These statements may be characterised as pseudo-logical by virtue of how they operate at the level of stylistics of logical analysis. However, throughout this thesis I argue that we should also take them seriously as doing some work with regard to the form of concept the artwork is grappling with. They allow the work to inhabit the form of the tautologous concept, existing, as Wittgenstein noted, outside senses of true and false, yet preserving its own specificity encapsulated as a unique assemblage of words, images, drawings, etc. The concept plays the role here of the leading material, the material analogous to the stone, bronze or ivory of a Greek sculpture upon which an assemblage of pigments and fabrics act. In the context of discussing the context as material it is important to focus also on a key notion in Huebler's work, that of the 'variable.' Mary Haviland views Huebler's work under three aspects: duration, location and variables. (Haviland 2015: 3) The variable, from our previous analysis in chapter one, is also something belonging to the nature of concepts as it compliments the notion of a degree of abstraction where

[104] Art & Language's *22 Sentences: The French Army* (1968) may also be nodded to in Huebler's work here, dealing as it does with the army as a collective body capable of being codified into a kind of quasi-propositional calculus.

the concept is not tied to one image or instance. This is the final aspect of the stylistics of logic that Huebler utilises.

Huebler's use of the instructional form also needs to be commented upon but we shall do this via comparison with the next artist whose grappling with the concept we encounter. Huebler's identification of the 'emptying out' in his method is of value in thinking about further works of conceptual art, but set as the standard for what all works achieve it isn't enough. It is the process that opens up the space for subjective interpretation. It is here that we can turn to the work of Lee Lozano whose work followed a process of abstracting and 'emptying out' in arguably the most striking manner of all her contemporaries.

Lee Lozano - A Life Ruled By Abstractions

In recent years Lee Lozano has become a late 60's/early 70's conceptualist who has amassed a growing degree of art historical interest. Scholarly work (Applin, Lehrer-Graiwer) has re-embedded her into the central place she once had - as Lucy Lippard noted she was the major female artist of the 60's in New York. (Lippard 1997: xii) However, a discussion of her work in relation to the wider field of conceptualism in particular has not been specified as such.[105] Here we look at how her work with the concept over-lapped with and differed from other conceptualists. Lozano can be placed in the first instance among the broad new generation of artists in the 60's who combined mediums, experimented with new materials, drugs, sex, politics and performance in order to dissolve the boundary between art and life. She fits into this schema as one of the most complete Life-Art synthesisers of American, or any other,

[105] In the context of the four artists I discuss in this chapter Lozano is the only one who could not be considered in anyway canonical to the conceptual art project having not passed the test of inclusion in Camiel van Winkel's rather useful chart of artists included in conceptual art retrospectives in Leverkusen in 1969, Paris in 1989 and Los Angelos in 1995 - Kosuth, Huebler and Piper were featured in all three, Lozano in none. (van Winkel 2012: 68-69)

art in the 20th Century.[106] Her brief art career can easily be tracked from the period of 1961-71. In condensed form it expresses important tides of development crucial to the time via jumps through media from drawing to painting to conceptual pieces to her final *Dropout Piece* (begun c.1970). The trajectory of her work can be understood to proceed, in terms of method, from a form of drawing based on a primarily metaphoric or symbolic substitution, allowing investigation through a series of simple inversions, to isomorphic work, where title matches content without the level of metaphoric substitution, to conceptual work in which the artist uses the proposition as her key medium. There is an immanent development of the latter from the earlier work bound to the substitution of the proposition as material for the symbolic substitution itself.

Jo Applin in her research on Lee Lozano has found that the project of Fredrick Ted Castle in his novel *Anticipation* and *Gilbert Green* played an important part in Lozano's thinking. Applin comments that "…Castle's writing sought to explore in its experimental narrative nothing less than what he called 'The possibility of abstraction from life.'" (Applin 2018: 107-8) Marx's comment, already encountered, that - 'individuals are now ruled by abstractions whereas earlier they had depended on one another' (Marx 2005: 164) may also aid as a key to how Lozano's work operates. Lozano's later conceptual works originate in her notebooks as one-liner rules to follow: "*No-Info Piece* ("Live in solitary confinement for as long as I could stand it. No telephone, radio, records, reading, drugs, visitors, mail, window view, clock")... *Stop Smoking Cigarettes Piece* ("Just do it when the current carton runs out. Do it abruptly, like the No-Grass Piece") …*Throwing Up Piece* ("Throw the last 12 issues of Artforum up in the air")." (Weisburg 2018) Now the way in which these operate is precisely a 'literal' ruling of life by abstractions. While not commonly done, maybe we should note that the notion of living according to instructions is not so far from a religious life ruled by commandments and/or prohibitions - "Thou shalt not x' and 'Do not x' etc. Keeping with the Marxist line

[106] Note the theme of the relationship between art and life in the modern era is a crucial theme for the early avant-garde. Lozano, pinning her colours to the flag of this concern, invented the term 'Life-Art' for her form of practice.

we have brought into dialogue the point that comes from Lozano's commandments is that they come from the Subject not from a text transcendent to the Subject. The resonant point being that the origin of these works were in Lozano's (now mostly published in facsimile editions) personal notebooks - titled on the front 'Private' notebook.

Are these rules concepts? In light of the Kantian theory perhaps; they are after all rules that link together certain representations in pathways of commands. The point is that Lozano enacts a rule by concepts, stepping into the breech when concepts become autonomous, when the rule precedes the representations, when the rule governs the mode of encounter with representations. The concept as rule is a command, a way of doing, a prescription of what is to be done and how to do it. In the inner architecture of the concept this command structure is important as it comes readymade with the compulsion to follow through the idea. Later we shall see that Piper's 'ecstasy of abstraction' is another means to think this submission to the compulsion of concepts.

Camiel van Winkel has read the instructional form as deployed in many examples of conceptual art (he is specifically talking about Laurence Weiner bucking of this trend in the passage which follows) as bound up with the division between mental and physical labour:

> Although the political context of conceptual art was permeated by anti-authoritarian notions, Weiner stood relatively alone in his rejection of the instructional form. At various levels, that form was often employed in 1960s conceptual art. At the time, the instruction must have seemed the ideal means to separate physical "labour" from mental effort. Although this was already the case when Moholy-Nagy telephoned a sign factory in 1922, the conceptual artists of the 1960s emancipated the instruction and took it to the extreme. In certain cases, the instruction took the place of the realised work of art. This made the division of labour between inventor and implementor the most important thing. (Van Winkel 2012: 98)

What I want to highlight here in relation to Lee Lozano is a use of the instructional form not so much to undermine this division of labour but to forward the notion of authoritativeness in the abstract rule itself. In the uses van Winkel speaks about, the instruction isolates the work of the author. In Lozano the work isolates the authoritative function of the rule, which is, I argue, ironically tied to the notion of the rule being separate from the author or intentionality as such. This also seems to be generally in line with how Huebler conceived of his variables laying the parameters for the work. Further, Hubeler conceived of many of his pieces as proposals that if bought by collectors conferred the 'responsibility' for realising the work upon the buyer (see *Location Piece #14 Global Proposal* (1969)).With Lozano, though pieces such as *Dialogue Piece* (1969) are collaborative, responsibility lies with her alone to carry through the piece.

In general Lozano titled her instruction works 'pieces' though some were given the designation 'investigations'. Leher-Grawier notes the differing aspects to this 'piece' work:

> … an idea, action, behaviour or experiment became a piece when Lozano gave it a title, a name – really the moment she appended the word 'piece' (though there are a couple of other lexical triggers) and under-lined it….Language reframed everyday, embattled circumstance as something fundamentally empowered and full of intention, enacting a colossal perceptual shift. 'Life-Art' affirmed, even invented, agency where there was none before…Turning everything into a piece was effectively a way of redeeming or repurposing bouts of depression, disappointment, frustration, loneliness, anxiety, rage and (self-)destruction. (Lehrer-Graiwer 2014: 13)

Lehrer-Grawier's reading is one that thus forwards the notion of intentionality and agency being core to the work. This however would work only after the fact or as a pre-emptive framing of things one could not change.

One work which was designated an investigation *Masturbation Investigation* (a three-day comparative study of masturbating to fantasies versus pictures, using various objects and observing her genitalia in a small mirror (Lehrer-Graiwer 2014: 32))

may by its title be cast as a humorous comment upon the Kosuthian paradigm of conceptual art. It could possibly be held together with Lozano's comment of January 1972 that "Conceptual Art is boring." Lozano's idiosyncratic conceptualism was outwardly in contrast to the analytical view of conceptualism but in many senses not that far from the self-understanding of some other conceptual artists - Bruce McLean, for instance, has spoken about his context for creating conceptual art as coming out of engagement with rock concerts and the culture of the 60's. (Dodd/McLean/Kent 2016) McLean saw his conceptual practice as a move to an action sculpture that comes from a lineage: Johnnie Ray - action music, Jackson Pollock - action painting. (Dodd/McLean/Kent 2016)

As a further part of this matrix of abstraction that Lozano's work engages in we should look to a distinction in Lozano's self-conception between an art worker and an art dreamer. Despite the growing movement around the former term in the 1960's Lozano chose to make a speech at the Art Worker's Coalition Open Hearing declaring herself to be the latter.[107] Appraisals of the art dreamer announcement have varied from seeing it as apolitical, to seeing it as a critique of the separation of art from the rest of social struggle, to seeing it as showing an affinity of Lozano's politics with that of groups like *Black Mask* and *The Motherfuckers*. (Olivas 2020) However, I want to bring out how it relates to the way we conceive of the artist working with concepts. Work is our productive activity, dreams are also products but untethered from the *need* to be productive. Dreams are thus abstract in that sense of separateness from the concerns of everyday life. Dreams however have a concreteness tied to their trading in images that the concepts deployed in conscious rational thought lack.

The intriguing point here again is that the origin of the concepts/rules that Lozano is working with is actually the artist herself. Her's is thus a life lived by abstractions but

[107] The authoritative analysis of the Art Workers Coalition Open Hearing is to be found in Julia Bryan-Wilson' *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (2011). Lozano was not alone in offering interventions to the Art Worker's Open Hearing that were critical of the stakes of the term.

abstractions chosen by the artist herself.[108] This I would argue is what underlies the disturbing aspect of some of Lozano's work, the fact that she enacts a life ruled by abstractions, which we are taking to be a general condition of modern existence, but that the abstractions which press upon her everyday more than any other are abstractions of the artist's own creation, articulations that are purely her own. If we take her to be an art dreamer rather than art worker perhaps we can get past the difficulty and see a common thread of the unconscious tying the works together. This thesis does not go down this line of inquiry but it is worth keeping in mind in appraisals of Lozano's work when there is a tendency, as noted by Yvonne Olivas, in commentators on Lozano (she includes Applin and Lippard in this) to view Lozano's later conceptualism as "a failed act to engage rationally with the world" and a sign of subjective troubles: "And because it is deemed irrational, Lozano's conceptual practice will never be seen as truly critical or political, but rather as diagnostic material for a breakdown from which Lozano never recovered." (Olivas 2020: 81)

Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer can be seen to add one last angle on abstraction in Lozano, noting over the duration of Lozano's career a gradual reduction of herself to pure energy, summed up by her last means of designating herself as 'E'.[109] (Lehrer-Graiwer 2014:) In this process the notion of an isolatable self transforms into self as energy. This kind of move from the notion of individual as object to individual as action is strangely akin with a Romantic theme from a figure like Fichte. (Berlin 2013: 95) Lozano even took to referring to herself as a 'verb'- 'Once and for all, the sum of myself to date is in terms of the verb, not the noun; the act, not the word' with Lehrer-Graiwer commenting that this raises the question what does the verb 'to Lozano' mean? (Lehrer-Graiwer 2014: 102)

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[108] As a point of contrast, in terms of the affective dimension of the practice, would be the work of On Kawara. Here is another artist whose life was ruled by self-imposed abstractions though this time embodied as a meeting of the abstract system of marking time and daily ritual. Consequently his art has a meditative quality not present in Lozano. This is one of the things at stake in what Morgan refers to as the strand of serialisation practices in Conceptual Art. (Morgan 1994: 122)

[109] What she was called by went from Leonora Knaster to Lee Lozano to Lee Free to Leefer to Eefer and finally E. (Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer 2014: 48, 77)

In speaking about working with concepts in this thesis I have raised the notion of the material determining a certain way of working with it. With the culmination of Lozano's work in *Dropout Piece* (begun c.1970) (where Lozano followed a path of just that, withdrawing from the art world and her current circle at that time) we have a further insight into this. Lehrer-Graiwer has noted this culmination seemed to Lozano herself to be compelled by the logic of how she was thinking about art. (Lehrer-Graiwer 2004: 24)

Lozano gives us an example of the artist's subjectivity being something caught in relation to the abstraction of the concept. This differs from the sense of abstraction happening in relation to the subject of the artists' work as in Huebler. Lozano is not alone in this concern, the final artist we will look at in this chapter is profoundly engaged in a questioning of the notion of self, on both the terrain of art practice and philosophy - Adrian Piper.

Adrian Piper - The Ecstacy of Abstraction

Finally we shall turn to a conceptual artist who also maintains the title of philosopher in a professional sense and is thus an artist of whom we can say works with concepts in two terrains. That artist is Adrian Piper. We shall analyse here what the qualities are of concepts she highlights that prompt her desire to work with them.

What is perhaps most striking in Piper's writings that concern the nature of thought, concepts and philosophizing is the affective picture she paints of the process of abstraction. To begin with a quote from a 1987 essay from Piper entitled 'Flying" (used also by Robert Storr in his foreword to her collected writings) helps us enter into her thinking about thinking:

> Abstraction is flying. Abstracting is ascending to higher and higher levels of conceptual generalization; soaring back to forth, reflectively circling around above the specificity and immediacy of things and events in space and time… Abstraction is also flight. It is freedom from

> the immediate spatiotemporal constraints of the moment; freedom to plan the future, recall the past, comprehend the present from a perspective that incorporates all three; freedom from the immediate boundaries of concrete subjectivity, freedom to imagine the possible and transport oneself into it; freedom to survey the real as a source for embodying the possible; freedom to detach the realized object from oneself more and more fully as a self-contained entity… Abstraction is a solitary journey through the conceptual universe, with no anchors, no cues, no sign-posts, no maps, no foundations to cling to.
> (Storr 1996: xxv)

This is what Storr refers to as Piper's 'ecstasy of abstraction.' It conveys the affective dimensions of thought, what it can be like to think and how thinking is a doing, in an almost hyperbolic way. Note that the underlying theme of the quote is freedom – 'freedom to imagine', 'freedom to survey', freedom to detach.' The rule by abstraction Lozano submitted to is flipped on its head into something soaring above. Abstraction is a freedom and an ecstasy but also a compulsion. Again, in a more recent piece, Piper reflects upon her trajectory as a philosopher noting the excitement of philosophical engagement already within her family home and during her time at high school where she 'loved the level of abstraction' at which debates took place.[110] (Piper 2019: 106) This affective attachment to abstraction can be read as a not often spoken of desire at work underneath the activity of conceptual artists, and philosophers, to do work with concepts.

When Eve Meltzer has dealt with affectivity in conceptual and systems art she has stressed how affectivity comes out in spite of the system, how the system cannot but be enmeshed in affectivity. (Meltzer 2013) In what we are saying about Piper the affectivity is not hidden but on the surface and something given owing to the on-the-face-of-things qualities of concepts - their abstraction, detachment and ideality.

[110] Further on beginning her time at City College New York (CCNY) she again deploys affective language of desire and hunger: "CCNY was free and open to those students who passed its entrance exam. Bertrand Russell had taught there and my mother worked there. At my request, she sent me the catalogue of course offerings—the menu of a feast for the hungry mind. I feverishly drew up a four-year course of study that included four simultaneous majors: philosophy, physics, history,and musicology. In time I pared them down to a philosophy major and a musicology minor." (Piper 2019: 108)

What Robert Storr refers to as Piper's 'delight in clarity' Bruce Altshuler refers to as a 'mania for clarity.' (Altshuler 2018) This shifting between the poles of delight to mania underlines the point that a concept is by no means a method of cool detachment. Between the ecstasy of abstraction and the mania for clarity we have the affective procedures underlying a practice where the concept becomes material. How much more material could a concept get than to elicit such affects? Perhaps we should say that this is the incorporeal nature of the concept, what marks it as event (to recall Deleuze in chapter 2). It happens and forces a set of responses.

This mania for clarity it could also be argued is a common hallmark of analytic philosophy. Recount Bertrand Russell at the beginning of his account of his philosophical development where he seeks something he has real knowledge of, cannot doubt, replaying Descartes 400 years later. (Russell 1985: 12) This mania is the mania of the Subject. One Continental critique of such an approach that comes to mind is in Hegel, whose style Adorno noted contains "a sort of suspended quality associated with his philosophy, in accordance with the idea that truth cannot be grasped in any individual thesis or any delimited positive statement. Form in Hegel follows this intention. Nothing can be understood in isolation, everything is to be understood only in the context of the whole, with the awkward qualification that the whole in turn lives only in the individual moments." (Adorno 1993: 91) Hegel undermines clarity in his writing because it has not been philosophically justified *why* clarity should be a presupposition of our thinking - though it may be the aim of the final project it can not be given in advance. Deleuze's recognition of analysis beginning in the middle plays a similar role perhaps. Piper however, keeps with a mania for clarity as an impetus underlying her art.

Symptomatic of Piper's early work is the audio piece *Seriation #2: Now* (1968). The work consists of Piper reciting the word 'now' for 20 minutes, shortening the interval between each utterance until they come in quick succession. This was the period of her work concerned with grasping the indexical present. The work will be recognisable

to us here in the context of this study as concerned with the deictic and its status as an empty concept constantly anchoring itself to the context surrounding it. While the work serves to highlight the ambiguity of referential content in the deictic utterance - is 'now' always too late to capture its moment?; does the designation of 'now' last longer the longer we keep silent after saying it?; when precisely does the recognition of the reference of 'now' come about? - it also comes up against some further unintended consequences. As Piper specifically warns us on her website cataloguing the works availability for rental - "Some listeners have commented that this piece has sexual overtones. This has nothing to do with my intentions in doing the work." (Piper 2024) This concern is within the Kosuthian rubric of staunch commitment to the artist's role in creating meaning away from external forces such as the art critic or the market. There is an impossibility to this which in a sense I would argue Kosuth's later contextual work recognised in practice even if he still clings to it at the level of a stated idea in his writings on art.[111]

Piper's 'ecstasy of abstraction' thus reveals an affective compulsion to concepts. By light of their very abstractness (quality) they open up the possibility for new connections. To be concrete now and speak of a work that displays this contention let us look to *The Mythic Being* (1972/3-75). In this work Piper enacts the character of the Mythic Being, a male figure who lives and encounters life in a rather confrontational performatively *machismo* manner - she dons male clothes, an afro, sunglasses and fake moustache to this end. A tension is at play in the work between the external encounters the Mythic Being has, where they are taken as male, and the internal mantra they recite which transforms lines from Piper's diaries, such as encounters with her mother (determined in a sense by her being female, her mother's daughter) into objectified notions.[112] The concept being worked in this piece is the Mythic Being. The

[111] A more recent work by Adrian Piper, *The Probable Truth Registry*, interestingly engages in a play upon this by having the audience of the work sign documents committing to the truth.

[112] Among the selection criteria for the diary entry that would act as the mantra Piper lists: "Criteria for selecting mantras from my journal: 1. They must be short—no longer than a short paragraph.; 2. They must contain the term and be "about" "*I*"—no objective description.; 3. They must deal with important

Mythic Being is a character, yes, but one I argue is directly in conversation with the nature of the concept and the tautological form and analyticity we have already encountered in previous chapters. Perhaps to clarify, we should say that the concept being worked with is in fact that of the Self, which gets its concrete instantiation in that of the Mythic Being. The work engages the creation of a self - how the internal and external are both non-identical but yet brought into a matching whole by the work of performance.[113] The piece traverses performance, video, collage with written and drawn on photographs and writings describing how the process of performing as the Mythic Being felt. It is because the work issues a model of self that would be equal to itself that it can operate. Piper has argued "that art is how she attends to those phenomena that resist synthesis, those materials not immediately (if ever) available to comprehension." (Velasco 2018) The work brings in that outside synthesis on the basis of a form of concept that holds it inadequately but in holding it nonetheless offers it up for productive engagement with the viewer of the artwork.

Piper in a short piece of writing entitled "A Defense of the "Conceptual" Process in Art" written in 1967 but unpublished until 1996 states that: "the new terminology —"cool," "rational," "reductive" art —simply corroborates my opinion that the necessity for this transcendence of subjectivity has been recognized, and that attempts are being made to facilitate the process." (Piper 1996: 3) For Piper in this piece ideas are necessarily something requiring instantiation and physical form, this gives them their socially shared aspect. (Piper 1996: 3) She is:

> convinced that the final, concretized form of an idea is its true existence, in that it is then subject only to the physical laws of the deterioration of material form and no longer to the inevitable inconsistencies and fluctuations of the only-human artistic mind; second, if there exists any ultimately objective reality of an idea at all (and I can't give any opinion as to whether there does

events in my life, or important relationships.; 4. It would be good if they could all involve women—! don't know if that's possible. There haven't BEEN that many." (Piper Vol.1 1996: 103)

[113] With regard to Piper and the question of the self there are ways not to approach it. See for instance Piper's heated exchange with the art critic Donald Kuspit's rather ham-fisted psycho-analytic take on Piper's relation to her self - "An Open Letter to Donald Kuspit (1987)" (Adrian Piper 1996)

> or not), I'm sure it can exist only as a total additive vision in which everyone participates, and toward this end there must necessarily be a physical form that everyone can perceive and formulate a vision *of.* (Piper 1996: 3-4)

Here, Piper very early in her conceptual practice is grappling with the nature of the idea and its materiality. The conclusion she rests on at this stage is that the idea, owing to its nature as a shared social product (my interpretation of her line "it can exist only as a total additive vision in which everyone participates"), must have a physical form in order to truly exist. In my interpretation this is a recognition of the socially objective nature of the concept - note for instance her warning with regard to the "only-human artistic mind." My point here would be to take it that the 'physicality' of the concept is the proof of its existence as such.

Piper's explication of her practice of thinking can bring us back to Lippard and Chandler's early diagnosis of the power of the concept in their "Dematerialization of Art" essay:

> Idea art has been seen as art about criticism rather than art-as-art or even art about art. On the contrary, the dematerialization of the object might eventually lead to the disintegration of criticism as it is known today. The pedantic or didactic or dogmatic basis insisted on by many of these artists is incorporated in the art. It bypasses criticism as such. Judgment of ideas is less interesting than following the ideas through. In the process, one might discover that something is either a good idea, that is, fertile and open enough to suggest infinite possibilities, or a mediocre idea, that is, exhaustible, or a bad idea, that is, already exhausted or with so little substance that it can be taken no further. (The same can be applied to style in the formal sense, and style except as an individual trademark tends to disappear in the path of novelty.) If the object becomes obsolete, objective distance becomes obsolete. Sometime in the near future it may be necessary for the writer to be an artist as well as for the artist to be a writer. There will still be scholars and historians of art, but the contemporary critic may have to choose between a creative originality and explanatory historicism. (Lippard and Chandler 1968: 35)

Piper's dual identity as an artist and a philosopher serves as a form of this distinction between art and art criticism collapsing.[114] The split between artist and philosopher was a hard one for Piper to maintain though she sought to. (Piper 2019: 112) For practical career orientated reasons Piper sought to have her art and philosophy separated - if considered an artist employing philosophy her thought wouldn't be taken with the same seriousness in the context of philosophy departments and a reversed problem may have crept into appreciation of her art practice in the art field. Piper failed in this endeavour with suspicions cast upon her in academia for also having an art career. (Piper 2019: 116)

In her philosophical work which takes place after the period we are mostly concerned with here but is of interest in terms of its substance Piper further outlines her views on the power of thinking when she critiques the notion of pseudo-rationality in her philosophical work.(Piper) Piper's main focus in her philosophical research is into the theory of self and consequent arguments in meta-ethics that are related to it – does one and if so when does one have free choice, how are ethical actions even possible etc. In the course of defending a view of the self as a potentially rational agent not simply driven by desires, which she identifies as the Humean conception of the self, Piper analyses when the argument of rationality itself is used as a smoke-screen to inhibit rational moral acting.

Conclusion

Having looked at the practice of four conceptual artists, we have seen that they each take a specific line on abstraction, each describing aspects of it in their own unique way. By doing this I argue they have been forced to take a stance of working with-against the concept. This process has brought in notions that both expand and undermine the notion of tautological form we have identified as a key characteristic of

[114] As a side-note the breaking of this distinction led to the phenomena, which Allberro bemoans a certain loss of, of artists being writers who wrote about their own work and others whose work they admired. Thus we can witness today the shelves of collected writings of many of the major artists of the 60's and 70's. (Alberro/Römer 2004)

the conceptual material the conceptual artist works with and the artworks they make. The degree of abstraction of the concepts one works can also vary. All concepts are abstract but there is a variation in the degree of abstraction nonetheless with pseudo-concepts or variables at the highest degree and empirical concepts such as chair, table, etc. at a lower degree.[115]

By trying to trace the encounter between the artist and the concept we saw the difficult and slippery, yet enticing, figure of abstraction challenging them in their praxis. This led to a confrontation between the concept with a notion of the self within the work of Lozano and Piper. With Kosuth, Huebler and Piper we have seen the difficulties the artist had in asserting a meaning for the work dictated by the artist themselves. In dealing with the abstract nature of the concept they were also dealing with the impossibility of absolute abstraction and thus these failures compelled artists into some kind of relation which we may designate as either policing or curation of their work in order for this difficulty to be resolved. The assumption of the possibility of definition and identity of the concept is consistently undermined but also re-stated by the form of the work itself. This is the productive capacity of the concept, the reason why as a historical product it works. Lozano in her *Droupout Piece* can be read against these three as one means of finally resolving the issue, alternative to Kosuth's opening up to contextual meaning and tastefully curated public quotations. This resolution however saw the abstraction in terms of separation of the artist from the condition of existence within the art world in order to be faithful to the abstraction of the concept as material in an artwork.

[115] This however is only upon the representational line of concepts. Among concepts as Fregean functions, which help us clarify the highest degree of abstraction in pseudo-concepts, we also have the notions of a concept's extensional range (what objects they can apply to and range over) and intensional content (what different senses the designated concept contains). In this sense the more abstract concepts would be the most general concepts, they would refer to that with greater extensional and intensional reach. In the final typology of concepts, that of evental concepts ala Deleuze, how would we define a greater or lesser degree of abstraction?

CONCLUSION

Summarizing of the conclusions of this thesis

This thesis has outlined a theoretical argument for viewing the concept as material and, in the process, applied it to the study of conceptual art. The argument took the form of first isolating the productive and the problematic in the (metaphysical) concept of matter (it's inherently empty designation as that which is not-thought) in order to argue for the necessity of a practice based materialism in approaching theoretical problems. We retained the productive aspect of the metaphysical conception of matter as it contains a moment tied to practice - namely, the moment when materiality resists (or comes before) thought. This 'resistance to thought' or 'thought breaking down in confrontation with materiality' was shown to be a moment common to philosophical and art theoretical discourses upon materiality. Having isolated this concept we were able to proceed, in chapter two, to analyse the question 'what is a concept?'. Our argument in this chapter was that there are in fact multiple models of the concept - the representational/empirical, the analytic and the evental - we got an insight into these concepts and some of their limits through Frege, Wittgenstein and Deleuze. The deep penetration into the limitations of the analytic concept via Wittgenstein was also shown to contain an archi-aesthetic moment which spoke to our earlier notion of a 'moment where thought breaks down.' Our argument then proceeded to show that returning to a practice based model of materialism we could isolate certain traits of the analytic concept via the concept of real abstraction. The thesis then inquired into the relationship between words, images and concepts in conceptual art to argue for a certain specificity to this relation here not necessarily at play at other moments in twentieth century art. Our final chapter argued that we can see artists confronting the problem of the concept as material when they confront the problem of the abstract

nature of concepts - their separation from that which they designate, their often atemporal and aspatial characteristics, etc.

The concluding point bringing this all together is that in talking of the concept as material we are bringing in the realm of the aesthetic in conceptual art. This area of aesthetic appreciation differs from the attempt to see the aesthetics of conceptual art in terms of a common style found via the use of a mixture of cheap, ephemeral (Lippard) and administrative materials (Buchloh). It states that there is a moment of something like showing, in the Wittgensteinian sense, in works of conceptual art that takes place at the level of the encounter with the concept a work either presents - as in the dictionary definitions of Kosuth - or enacts - the abstract rules followed by Lee Lozano. At either pole - of either presentation or enactment - artist's exploit the imposed tautological form, in the former of the definition and the latter the rule. This imposed form displays its own movement, its own difference while at the same time always assimilating such difference to itself.

Making explicit

There is also something important that must be made utterly explicit at this final point - namely that in affirming the existence of types of concepts the thesis affirms that in this specific regard typifying leads onto existence but it is existence purely in the realm of theory and conceptuality. Thus, in a sense, Borges mad encyclopedia has a ring of truth to it but only as referring to the actuality of types themselves. If one can think a thought a certain way then you can think it that way. There is more to this than a dumb and maddening tautology. What it implies is that thought does not have to reach outside itself for its limits - it is not externality that comments upon the existence of a thought, it only comments upon the existence of its external reference should that concept be a representational concept of an object.

But surely the question is how this relates to material reality. It has been part and parcel of the argument of this thesis to propose that conceptual art shows artists

working with actual models of concepts and that these actual models show their materiality, how they are of a specific type, in their being the fundamental (diagrammatic force) at work in an assemblage of materials that make up an artwork. The concept of real abstraction grounds the notion that these models of concepts, in their materiality, bear the traces of the social practice which underlies them.

A definition

We introduced this thesis with the promise of a definition of a concept, a proposal for an addition to an artist's handbook of materials.[116] This proposal is itself meant to engage a necessary type of reification of the concept implied in such an endeavour.

Beware! Maybe trite!

Concept: an artists' material, utilised most prominently since the 1960's. Comes in a variety of models - representational, analytic, event. These concepts have form - definitional, tautological, expansive. Of fine grain and also porous qualities. Warning: Viscosity - like paint a concept can get places you don't want it to. It runs ahead of the hand. Don't think just use. Thought comes after the concept. There is an eternal atemporal dimension in tension with a historical dimension in concepts. They are also aspatial though their abstract commands can rule your life. The reach of a concept is specified by logical operators and quantifiers - negation, conjunction, disjunction, implication (if and only if', 'just in case'), 'for every' and 'there is at least one.' Within conceptual art the empirical model of the concept where there is a move from sensory data to induced general notions is elided in favour of starting from the concept (a readymade or constructed concept) rather than experience. Art criticism on the other hand retains an empiricist dimension, experiencing works of conceptual art and coming to judgements based on concepts extracted from those experiences.

[116] Something akin to what might be found in a book like Ralph Meyer's *The Artist's Handbook of Materials & Techniques* most recent edition has been its fifth, published in 1991.

The presence of a concept in an artwork does not serve to make an artwork ‘better’ but may if handled correctly make it more interesting.

Problems for future study

By the nature of its object - the concept as material - this thesis pulls in two directions - one is the concrete study of conceptual art as the manner of working with this material and the other is a more general study of the pre-conditions both historical and philosophical for such a way of working in general (not tied to any specific domain) to come about. In terms of the former one could consider looking at Art & Language as undertaking this labour at the same time as theorising upon conceptual art. In terms of the latter one could consider how the concept as material discussed above is similar to the code or programs at the heart of the digital age and analyse these along similar lines of searching for their materiality. These are the future directions for expansion given this thesis as an initial starting point.

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